

VIRTUE AND SITUATION:
EFFECTS OF SITUATIONAL FACTORS ON ATTENTION AND EMOTION

by

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

The Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

(Philosophy)

The University of British Columbia
(Vancouver)

August 2013

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Abstract

Many psychological studies have results that are difficult to explain in terms of the neo-Aristotelian model of virtue, vice and moral education. This thesis asks whether neo-Aristotelian moral psychology can account for empirical data on the effects that situational factors have on behaviour, specifically studies where situations affect attention and emotion.

Some neo-Aristotelians argue that studies of behaviour are irrelevant to virtue theory; I disagree. John Doris' situationist critique of virtue ethics has significant flaws, but its central point stands: neo-Aristotelian states of character as usually conceived imply predictions about behaviour that are empirically unreliable, leading to the conclusion that neo-Aristotelian moral psychology is problematic as a model of what human beings are really like. Talk of virtues and vices does not explain or predict the disproportionate effects seen in these studies. Doris argues that only local traits such as "office-party-sociability" are reliable predictors of behaviour. I respond to the situationist critique by looking for ways of supplementing neo-Aristotelian moral psychology to account for the effects of situational factors on behaviour.

The main contribution of my dissertation is to show that there are interpersonal differences in behaviour which are best explained in terms of dispositions that modulate the degree to which situational factors affect attention and emotion. Contrary to situationism, the influence of these dispositions is not restricted to specific situations like office parties.

These dispositions behave like neo-Aristotelian states of character. They are teachable, and they are responsive to reason. I argue that these dispositions are constituents of virtue; each virtue consists of a set of dispositions, and each virtue's set consists in part of dispositions to pay attention in an appropriately selective manner. Dispositions to pay appropriately selective attention can account for many of the effects of situations on behaviour in a way that most neo-Aristotelians would find unobjectionable.

However, I have one conclusion which may disturb some neo-Aristotelians: it may be impossible for one person to become virtuous in every respect. I suggest that virtue might require not personal perfection but appropriate interpersonal trust.

Preface

Ian Brooks is the sole author of this thesis. He was responsible for the design of the research program, the research itself and the composition of the thesis. This thesis is original, unpublished work.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Preface	iii
Table of Contents	iv
1 Introduction	1
2 New Ways of Falling Short of Virtue	7
2.1 Situations and Behaviour	7
2.1.1 Doris' Data on Changes in Situation	7
2.1.2 Being in a Rush and Being a Good Samaritan.....	7
2.1.3 Finding a Dime and Being Helpful.....	8
2.1.4 Two Studies on Group Effects	9
2.1.5 Situation-Specificity in the Milgram Experiments	10
2.1.6 Intrapersonal Inconsistency Seen Across Methods of Cheating.....	12
2.1.7 Social Roles in the Stanford Prison Experiment.....	12
2.1.8 More Cases Where Situations Determine Behaviour	13
2.1.9 There Are Different Mechanisms by Which Situations Affect Behaviour.....	14
2.1.10 A Family Resemblance: Disproportionate Effects and Normative Irrelevance.....	16
2.1.11 Normative Implications	18
2.2 Eudaimonist Virtue Ethics	19
2.2.1 Anscombe and the Birth of Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics	19
2.2.2 Eudaimonism	21
2.2.3 Eudaimonia, Emotion and Reason.....	24
2.2.4 Eudaimonist Virtues of Character.....	26
2.2.5 Eudaimonism and Practical Wisdom	28
2.2.6 Demarcating Eudaimonism.....	30
2.3 How not to be Virtuous.....	31
2.3.1 Cataloguing Non-Virtuous States of Character	31
2.3.2 Virtue, Vice and Self-Control.....	32
2.3.3 Gods, Brutes and Children.....	33
2.3.4 What Are Most People Like?.....	36
2.3.5 Inertia	37
2.3.6 Pseudovirtue.....	39

2.3.7	Akratic States of Character	40
2.3.8	Weakness-Akrasia.....	41
2.3.9	Impulsive Akrasia	42
2.3.10	Go-with-the-flow Akrasia.....	42
2.3.11	An Aside: Do All Akratic Phenomena Have the Same Cause?	43
2.3.12	Unbalanced Akrasia: Attraction to the Lesser Good	44
2.3.13	Sticktuitiveness, Indecisiveness and Inverse Akrasia.....	46
2.3.14	“Genuine Akrasia”	49
2.3.15	Diagnosing Akrasia.....	50
2.4	Diagnosing New Ways of Falling Short of Virtue.....	50
2.4.1	A Procedure for Identifying a Previously Unnamed State of Character.....	50
2.4.2	Uncatalogued Ways of Falling Short of Virtue Seen in Some Studies on Situations.....	52
2.4.3	Three Possible Ways of Responding to These Anomalous Results	54
3	Can Behavioural Evidence Count Against Eudaimonism?	56
3.1	The Metaphysical Defence of Eudaimonism: Virtues Do Not Reduce to Behaviour	56
3.2	Trait Ontology in Personality Psychology	57
3.2.1	Personality Psychologists Use Thin Descriptive Concepts	57
3.2.2	The Raw Data of Personality Psychology	58
3.2.3	Traits Are Explanations for Covariant Data	59
3.2.4	Trait Ascriptions Entail Predictive Validity	61
3.2.5	Standards for Trait Ascription	63
3.2.6	The Five-Factor Model of Personality Traits.....	64
3.2.7	Trait Consistency and Stability	67
3.2.8	Trait Ontology versus Trait Epistemology	68
3.3	The Situationist Critique of Personality Psychology	70
3.3.1	Evidence for Situationism.....	70
3.3.2	Do Questionnaires Provide Evidence for Personality Traits?	71
3.3.3	The Empirical Argument for Personality Psychology Against Situationism	72
3.3.4	Status of the Situationist Critique of Personality Psychology	73
3.4	The Situationist Critique of Eudaimonism	74
3.4.1	Stringent Consistency, Stability and Integration Requirements for Eudaimonists	74
3.4.2	The Argument That Virtues are Bad Explanations for Human Behaviour.....	75

3.4.3	Extreme and Moderate Situationism.....	77
3.4.4	The Normative Payoff of Situationism.....	79
3.4.5	Two Strategies for Eudaimonists Responding to the Critique.....	80
3.5	Can Pro-Situationist Empirical Evidence Threaten Eudaimonism?	81
3.5.1	Empirical Objections to Pro-Situationist Studies	81
3.5.2	Are Theory-Neutral Observations of Behaviour Possible?	82
3.6	Summary.....	85
4	Eudaimonist Responses to Situationism	86
4.1	Lines of Argument	86
4.2	Problems Defining the Term Situation	86
4.2.1	What is a Situation?	86
4.2.2	Subjective Construal of Situations.....	87
4.2.3	Sociological and Cultural Factors are Neither Situational nor Characterological.....	89
4.3	The Anti-Behaviouristic Objection.....	91
4.3.1	Difficulties Interpreting Behavioural Evidence	91
4.3.2	The Minimally Decent Behaviour Test.....	93
4.4	Is Virtue Statistically Undetectable?	94
4.4.1	Virtues are Unrealizable Ideals.....	94
4.4.2	Virtue is Rare	95
4.5	Conscious Adaptation to Situations	98
4.5.1	Can Reflection Eliminate the Effect of Situations?	98
4.5.2	Who Watches the Watchmen?	99
4.5.3	The Regress Problem	100
4.6	Summary.....	101
5	On the Attentiveness of Virtuous People	104
5.1	Situationism, Attention and Virtue	104
5.1.1	Situationism and Attention	104
5.1.2	Virtue and Attention	105
5.1.3	Attention and the Unity of Virtue	107

5.2	Inattentive Blindness as Evidence for Situationism	108
5.2.1	A Case of Inattentive Blindness.....	108
5.2.2	Observed Effects of Inattentive Blindness on Perception and Memory	109
5.2.3	Inattentive Blindness as Evidence for Situationism	112
5.3	On the Relationship Between Attention and Virtue	114
5.3.1	Being Disposed to Attend to Relevant Particulars is Necessary for Virtue.....	114
5.3.2	Is Attending to Relevant Particulars Sufficient for Virtue?	117
5.4	Normative Implications of Two Accounts of Attention	119
5.4.1	Two Accounts of Attention.....	119
5.4.2	The Channel Capacity Account of Attention.....	120
5.4.3	The Channel Capacity Account Implies that Focus is a Virtue	124
5.4.4	An Alternate Account of Attention: Attention is Cognitive Unison.....	127
5.4.5	Implications for Virtue if Attention is Cognitive Unison	129
5.4.6	Implications for Moral Education.....	132
5.5	Inattentive Blindness and Situationism.....	133
5.5.1	Inattentive Blindness Explains Some Situational Effects.....	133
5.5.2	Is Everyone Equally Blind?	134
5.6	Becoming Resistant to Situational Factors	135
5.6.1	Distraction, Preoccupation and Expertise	135
5.6.2	Task-Specific Training versus Local Virtues	136
5.7	Summary.....	137
6	Virtue, Ignorance and Inattention.....	139
6.1	Are Dispositions that Promote Ignorance Ever Praiseworthy?	139
6.2	Ignorance of Virtuous People due to Perceptual Inattention	140
6.2.1	Appropriately Selective Attention Results in Ignorance	140
6.2.2	Do Limits on Attention Mean that No Human Can Be Virtuous?.....	142
6.2.3	Selective Inattention is not Praiseworthy in Itself	144
6.3	How Ignorance Might Be Praiseworthy	144
6.3.1	Driver's Virtues of Ignorance	144
6.3.2	Consequentialist Virtue Ethics and Virtues of Ignorance.....	147
6.3.3	Eudaimonists Need to Explain the Ignorance of Modest People.....	149
6.4	Virtue and Inattention	152

6.4.1	Inattentional Modesty	152
6.4.2	Ignorance of One’s Merits is not Virtuous	154
6.4.3	Against Slote’s Virtues of Potential Ignorance.....	156
6.5	Virtue, Vice and Dispositions to Pay Attention Appropriately	158
6.5.1	Inattention in Aristotle	158
6.5.2	Inattention as a Symptom of Vice, of Akrasia, and of Other States of Character	159
6.5.3	Courage and Ignorance	162
7	Situations and Emotion	163
7.1	Situational Factors Affect Emotion and Practical Reasoning.....	163
7.1.1	Chapter Introduction	163
7.1.2	Definitions of Terms	164
7.1.3	Emotion and Intentionality	166
7.1.4	Pro-Situationist Studies Concerning Emotion	167
7.1.5	Doris on the Need to Eliminate Negative Emotions.....	168
7.1.6	Practical Reasoning is Vulnerable to Situational Factors Affecting Emotion	170
7.2	Training Can Mitigate the Influence of Situational Factors	171
7.2.1	Personality Traits Affect Emotion in Many Situations.....	171
7.2.2	Personality Traits Associated with Professions	172
7.2.3	Professionalism and Second-Order Emotional Dispositions	175
7.2.4	Professionalism and the Bystander Effect	176
7.2.5	What Remains to be Explained.....	177
7.3	How Inappropriate Emotion Leads to Misattribution.....	179
7.3.1	The James-Lange Theory of Emotions	179
7.3.2	Information Processing and Representation	180
7.3.3	Emotion as Information	182
7.3.4	Neo-Jamesian Non-Cognitivism and Aristotle	184
7.3.5	Misattribution of Emotion.....	185
7.3.6	Persistence and Misattribution.....	186
7.4	Emotion’s Role in Practical Reasoning	188
7.4.1	Emotions as Somatic Markers	188
7.4.2	Deliberation as One Task Among Others	190
7.4.3	The Puzzle of Fear, Confidence and Boldness	192
7.4.4	Impulsive Courage	194

7.5	Summary	199
8	On Virtue Specialization	
8.1	Thesis Conclusions	202
8.1.1	Conclusions Regarding the Situationist Critique of Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics	202
8.1.2	Conclusions Regarding Attention	204
8.1.3	Conclusions Regarding Emotion as Information	205
8.1.4	Overall Conclusions: Situational Factors and Moral Psychology	206
8.2	Aristotelian Virtue Ethics without Individual Perfection	209
8.2.1	Virtue Generalism versus Virtue Specialization.....	209
8.2.2	The Virtue of Testimonial Justice.....	210
8.2.3	Trusting Experts in Emergencies	213
8.2.4	The Problem of Identifying Experts	215
8.2.5	Trusting Experts in Ordinary Circumstances.....	217
8.2.6	Can There Be an Aristotelian Virtue Ethics without Individual Perfection?.....	221
	Notes	225
	Bibliography	254

1 Introduction

This thesis is about what it means to be a good person, and it looks at that question through a neo-Aristotelian lens. Apart from its own merits there are historical reasons for adopting a neo-Aristotelian approach. Modern virtue ethics initially grew out of interpretations of Aristotle, and neo-Aristotelianism is still very much at the center of virtue ethics today. Non-Aristotelian varieties of virtue ethics are at least to some extent commensurable with neo-Aristotelianism, and critics of virtue ethics usually take some variety of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics to be their primary target. So, it is not likely to be considered strange that I will be discussing what it means to be a good person in Aristotelian language, in terms of practical reasoning and virtues of character.

What's driving my project is that there is a large and growing body of empirical evidence that people do not in fact behave in the way we would expect them to behave if neo-Aristotelian moral psychology was correct. I have in mind studies like those cited by John Doris in his book *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior*. These are studies where psychologists have shown that seemingly trivial and normatively inconsequential changes to a person's circumstances can change the way that person behaves to a startling degree. The psychological literature provides us with cases that are charmingly bizarre. It is not immediately clear what sense we should make of the strange discovery that joggers can be rendered oblivious to nearby fistfights by trivial distractions, or that the mercifulness of a judge should be heavily dependant on whether a case is being decided before or after lunch.¹ These are very strange ways of falling

short of what virtue demands, and I believe neo-Aristotelians need to be able to explain what is happening in these cases.

Chapter two reviews some of this psychological data. The studies that are of interest to Doris are concerned with a wide range of different psychological phenomena. Studies on the effects that being in haste can have on behaviour do not obviously belong in the same category as studies on the effects that mood can have on behaviour. I argue that the studies Doris cites belong together not because they deal with closely related psychological phenomena but because they are similar with regards to the challenge they pose to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Throughout the rest of my thesis I will be referring to these as the pro-situationist family of studies.

Chapter two also reviews the literature on neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, presenting an argument that current neo-Aristotelian accounts do not have the resources to explain the strange behaviour seen in the situationist family of studies. One of the strengths of Aristotle's account of virtue is that he gives us a rich and nuanced account of the many different ways in which it is possible to fall short of virtue. What is in question is whether that account can be stretched to cover what is happening in these studies. I argue that it cannot. To use a medical metaphor, if Aristotle's list of ways of falling short of virtue was exhaustive it could serve as a kind of diagnostic manual, for on the basis of the ways in which a person's thoughts, feelings and actions fall short of those of a virtuous person we could infer what it is about her character that makes her different from a virtuous person. The anomalous data coming out of contemporary psychology puts us in something like the position of a doctor confronted with patients who are

displaying a never before seen set of signs and symptoms of ill-health. Seeing this new syndrome might lead a doctor to infer the existence of a previously undiscovered cause of ill-health, perhaps a previously unknown pathogen. Likewise, if the subjects of a psychological experiment are displaying a pattern of thoughts, feelings and actions that does not match anything in the neo-Aristotelian catalogue of ways of falling short of virtue then we have reason to infer that there is something missing from the neo-Aristotelian account of the virtues of character.

Chapter three discusses Doris' view that the pro-situationist family of studies calls the whole project of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics into question. Doris takes a statistical approach to the data, using tools borrowed from the debate within psychology between personality psychologists and situationists. Doris argues that in these studies it seems as though knowing what situation a person is in is a better predictor of how that person will behave than anything we might say about virtues and vices. If it is the case that knowing whether or not a person is in a rush is a better predictor of how she will behave than knowing whether or not that person has a virtue, then it would seem not to be worth our time to continue investigating virtues of character. Some neo-Aristotelians argue that behavioural evidence is irrelevant to their work; I argue that this is not the case. The situationist critique of virtue ethics cannot be ignored.

Many neo-Aristotelians have denied that the pro-situationist family of studies is problematic for virtue ethics. They have tried to dismiss the importance of these studies in various ways. Some argue that there are conceptual problems with Doris' work. Some claim that a genuinely virtuous person can resist the effects that situational factors can have on a

person's behaviour. Other neo-Aristotelians bite the bullet, conceding that these effects are proof that no one can be fully virtuous but insisting that we should nevertheless hold up in our imaginations the ideal of a person who always does the right thing at the right time for the right reasons, taking this fictitious person to be our moral exemplar. I argue in chapter four that these tactics have failed; while there are significant problems with Doris' situationist critique of virtue ethics the fact that the results of these studies do not fit well with orthodox neo-Aristotelian moral psychology cannot be ignored.

The way that the debate between neo-Aristotelians and situationists has been framed as an existential crisis for virtue ethics has not been constructive. It has made new results coming out of psychology look like a threat that neo-Aristotelians need to resist rather than as opportunities for incremental improvement in our account of the virtues of character. Accounting for these newly discovered ways of falling short of virtue would give us a richer understanding of what it means to be virtuous. My project is to develop an account of some of the effects that situations have on behaviour in a way that is compatible with neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics.

In chapters five and six I offer an account of effects that situations can have on attention. These chapters focus on studies where subjects were rendered oblivious to seemingly obvious features of their circumstances by seemingly trivial situational factors. I give particularly close attention to cases of inattentional blindness. I make an empirical argument that there are interpersonal differences in the degree to which people are resistant to inattentional blindness, and that these differences are best explained by positing the existence of character traits

consisting of dispositions to pay appropriately selective attention despite distractions and preoccupations. Unlike Doris' local traits, these dispositions affect the way a person will behave in many different situations.

In chapters five and six I'm threading my way between the view that a virtuous person would be aware of everything that is normatively significant about her circumstances and the view that some virtues consist of dispositions to be ignorant. I argue that being disposed to pay appropriately selective attention is part of what it means to have a virtue. It is impossible for human beings to attend simultaneously to all of the potentially perceptible particulars of our circumstances, therefore paying attention appropriately must involve focussing attention on whatever is most important. I argue that ignorance is not necessary for any virtue and that ignorance is never praiseworthy, though overlooking some facts is often a side effect of attending to whatever is most important. Virtuous people may sometimes make mistakes about trivial matters due to being focussed on something more that is more important, but the mistakes they make are not the reason we praise them.

In chapter seven I offer an account of some effects that situations can have on emotion. It has been shown that seemingly insignificant situational cues can affect a person's emotions in such a way as to dramatically affect their behaviour. I focus on cases of misattribution, cases where people are mistaken about the reason why they feel the way they do. A person who is feeling glum because it is a cloudy day but who mistakenly believes that the cause of his feeling that way is the way a co-worker is treating him is likely to treat that co-worker unfairly. This is a way of falling short of virtue, and the more vulnerable a person is to misattribution the further

they are from virtue. I argue that the set of dispositions that constitutes virtue must include dispositions to enter into and remain in the emotional state that is most appropriate in one's current circumstances.

The standard by which this thesis should be judged is whether or not the claims made about dispositions to attend and emote appropriately really do supplement conventional neo-Aristotelian moral psychology in a way that helps neo-Aristotelians resist the situationist critique of virtue ethics. The test for whether or not the thesis should be considered successful should be two pronged. First, it must be shown that introducing dispositions that modulate the degree to which situational factors affect attention and emotion provides reliable predictions of future behaviour, meeting the situationist demand. Second, it must be shown that these dispositions can be made to fit well within a neo-Aristotelian system. The claims I am making about virtue are revisionary, but if they were so radically revisionary that grafting them into neo-Aristotelian moral psychology rendered the virtues of character unrecognisable then the project should be considered a failure. The goal of the thesis is to show that there is a neo-Aristotelian way of interpreting the pro-situationist family of studies which is both empirically defensible and faithful to the Aristotelian tradition.

2 New Ways of Falling Short of Virtue

2.1 Situations and Behaviour

2.1.1 Doris' Data on Changes in Situation

John Doris calls our attention to a series of experiments in behavioural psychology where “seemingly insubstantial situational factors have extraordinary effects on behaviour.”² As I will argue in chapter four Doris has some difficulty defining exactly what he means by a situation, but the general thrust of what he’s getting at is straightforward. He’s drawing a distinction between facts about a person and facts about the situation in which that person finds herself. Doris is interested in studies which suggest that the same person would have behaved very differently if circumstances in the world around her had been slightly different. I will examine the theoretical framework Doris builds on this body of data in chapter three. Here in 2.1 I am interested in something more fundamental. Here I am looking at the data itself to get a sense of what kind of cases are catching his eye. Sections 2.1.2 to 2.1.8 give examples of the kind of studies cited by Doris. My goal here is to make it clear why we should think of these as being a set of cases that belong together. I want to do that because I agree with Doris and his commentators that there is this body of data which ought to be of interest to anyone curious about what it means to be a good person.

2.1.2 Being in a Rush and Being a Good Samaritan

It is unsettling to find that there are circumstances in which ordinary people might walk right past an injured person lying by the side of the road without stopping or doing anything to help. Perhaps that is self-flattery; people who live in major cities walk past homeless people in

need on a daily basis. However, one might at least hope that the likelihood of a person's stopping to help would be determined by the fact that some people are more helpful than others, or that helpful behaviour is proportionate to the apparent degree of need of the person they see. However, it turns out that a very small change in circumstances can have a major effect on the likelihood that a passer-by will do something to help.

In 1973, John Darley and Daniel Batson conducted a study on a group of seminarians which showed that whether or not a person will stop to help an apparently injured stranger is heavily influenced by whether or not that person is in a rush.³ The seminarians were asked to walk to a nearby building to deliver a talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan, a story that praises a person who stopped to help someone he saw lying injured by the side of the road. Some were told that they were a few minutes late, some were told that they were right on time, and others were told that they were a few minutes early. Along their walk they passed by an experimenter's confederate who was lying slumped in a doorway, coughing and groaning. 63% of seminarians who believed they were a few minutes early stopped to help, but only 10% of those who were told they were a few minutes late did so.⁴ Being in haste to even a small degree seems capable of rendering a person oblivious of or indifferent to the suffering of others.⁵

2.1.3 Finding a Dime and Being Helpful

While it is not surprising that people who are in a good mood may be more helpful than those who are not, it is surprising how little priming is necessary to change a person's behaviour. In 1972, Alice Isen and Paula Levin ran an experiment where some subjects found a dime in the coin slot of a phone booth while a control group did not. Upon leaving the phone booth they saw

a person drop a stack of papers. 93% of subjects who had found a dime stopped to help the person who had dropped the papers; only 8% of those who did not find a dime did so.⁶ Doris agrees with Isen and Levin's interpretation of this result, saying that "the determinative impact of finding a dime proceeds by influencing affective states."⁷ People who feel good are helpful, and a change in a person's circumstances as insignificant as finding a dime can change mood enough that finding a dime was the determining factor in whether these subjects were helpful or unhelpful.

2.1.4 Two Studies on Group Effects

When we have a duty to help others, one would think that our being alone or being in the company of others ought to be irrelevant to whether or not we provide the help that is needed, but it turns out to be the case that being in the presence of bystanders has a significant negative influence on helpfulness. In a 1969 study by Bibb Latané and Judith Rodin, some subjects were placed in a room alone while others were placed together in pairs. While filling out a questionnaire, the subject or pair of subjects heard a loud crash and cries of pain from outside the room. 70% of subjects who were alone ran outside to intervene. When subjects were together, it was usually the case that both of them did nothing; in only 40% of trials did either subject offer help. The subjects who were grouped together often reported that they had not thought that the person who had cried out had really needed their help.⁸ There is no principled reason why people in groups ought to be so much less likely to acknowledge the needs of others than people who are alone, yet the effect on behaviour of this change in situation is dramatic.

Doris recognizes that “the group effect involves more than one sort of effect”⁹ and references a second way in which being among others can affect behaviour. A 1970 study by Latané and Darley placed subjects in cubicles, and whether or not the subjects took action to help a person who was simulating having a seizure depended heavily on whether or not the subject believed that there were others present in the cubicles nearby. 100% of the subjects who were alone helped, but only 62% of those who believed they were among others helped. In contrast to Latané and Rodin’s study, the inactive subjects generally felt conflicted; they believed that someone ought to be offering help but did not take individual responsibility for doing so.¹⁰ The reason why subjects remained inactive in this study was different from the reason given by subjects in Latané and Rodin’s study, indicating that there is more than one way in which being in the company of others can affect helping behaviour.

2.1.5 Situation-Specificity in the Milgram Experiments

What is most confounding about the above results is not just that behaviour is dependant on tiny changes in situation but that the exact details of the situation can be important. Consider the many versions of Stanley Milgram’s experiments concerned with obedience to authority. Small changes in the set up of the experiment sometimes significantly affected the willingness of subjects to obey reprehensible orders.

The Milgram experiments provide evidence that ordinary people can be made to inflict harm on others by placing them in situations where they have received orders to do so. The classic version of the experiment involves a subject and two confederates. The subject would be told that they would be administering a test of memory by inflicting electric shocks to a learner.

Over the course of the test, the confederate playing the role of a lab-coated experimenter would order the subject to incrementally increase the voltage of the electric shocks. The setup was a ruse. No shocks were actually being administered, but the confederate playing the role of the learner would act as though he was being shocked, becoming increasingly agitated as the test continued. Once the dial had been turned past a certain threshold the learner would grunt, and later cry out in pain. As the test progressed further it was scripted that the learner would repeatedly demand to be released from the experiment. If the subject continued to throw the switch for higher and higher voltages, the learner would scream. At the highest voltages the subject would no longer hear anything at all from the learner. Milgram found that most subjects (62.5%) would comply with the experimenter's orders until the bitter end, even though many of them thought they were administering potentially lethal electric shocks.¹¹

Small changes in the setup of the Milgram experiments greatly changed the rate at which subjects complied with instructions. If the experimenter was absent from the room and giving orders by telephone the rate of compliance went down.¹² Likewise, if subjects were able to see that the victim was in distress as well as hear his complaints they were more likely to resist their orders.¹³ When the experimenter did not have the status of an expert in a lab coat not a single subject continued to administer shocks once the learner protested, but it made little difference whether or not the *learner* was an expert in a lab coat, for his objections would usually be ignored in any case.¹⁴ The outcome of each variation of the experiment depended on the details of the experimental setup, and there was no *a priori* way to say what effect tweaking the situation would have.

2.1.6 Intrapersonal Inconsistency Seen Across Methods of Cheating

It is striking that the behaviour of a person in one situation may be a poor predictor of that same person's behaviour in another, seemingly similar situation. One finding in Hugh Hartshorne and Mark May's study on deceptive behaviour in schoolchildren was that that a student's willingness to cheat on a test by looking at the answer key was only very weakly correlated to the same student's willingness to cheat by taking extra time on the test.¹⁵ The students could not be categorized as being honest in general or dishonest in general, for the fact that a student had cheated by one method gave little basis for making predictions about whether he would be dishonest if given the chance to cheat using another method.

2.1.7 Social Roles in the Stanford Prison Experiment

In 1971, Phillip Zimbardo constructed a mock prison environment in the basement of Stanford University. Subjects were randomly assigned a role to play in the mock prison, becoming either guards who would serve eight hour shifts or prisoners who would remain in the prison environment throughout the experiment. The guards were instructed to maintain order in the facility, but other than being prohibited from using physical violence, guards were given little guidance as to how they should go about doing so. The guards quickly became aggressive, treating prisoners in hostile and dehumanizing ways. The prisoners became passive and despondent. Half of the prisoners were released early due to severe depression and anxiety, and the study as a whole was prematurely terminated after only six days. There was nothing different about the personalities of the guards and prisoners prior to the experiment, for each subject was dropped into one of those two roles randomly, but subjects playing the role of a guard felt and behaved very differently from those playing the role of prisoners.¹⁶ Doris is

interested in the apparent unimportance of personality traits to the way in which subjects felt and acted in the experiment; nothing about who they were before the experiment started mattered as much to the way they behaved as the role to which they were assigned.¹⁷

It is strange that Doris included the Stanford Prison Experiment among his other examples because this experiment is not concerned with the effect of seemingly insignificant situational factors. Being in the role of a prisoner rather than that of a guard is not a small, subtle change in a person's situation. I argue in chapter four that Doris gets into trouble here because he is drawing a false dichotomy between personality and situation. Culture and social roles affect behaviour in a different way than either personality traits or situational factors. One theme to which I will return over the course of this thesis is that such things as professional training can make a person more resistant to the effect of situational factors. For the moment, all that needs to be said in this section is that the Stanford Prison Experiment does not closely resemble the other studies Doris cites.

2.1.8 More Cases Where Situations Determine Behaviour

Setting the Stanford Prison Experiment aside, the other studies cited by Doris are cases where seemingly insignificant situational factors have major effects on behaviour. The studies listed in 1.2.2-1.2.6 are by no means a comprehensive list of the studies cited by Doris, just a representative sample of the range of data that is of interest to him. Doris is quick to point out that his views are “motivated by a pattern of results, not by any particular study.”¹⁸ One does not need to look very hard to find studies where a seemingly insignificant prime dramatically influences behaviour. For example, Doris sees this as a theme that runs through the whole

literature on altruism and helping behaviour, a body of over a thousand studies in the 1960's and 1970's alone.¹⁹ Subsequent philosophers examining Doris' work have had no difficulty finding examples of their own of studies where tiny changes in circumstances produce major changes in behaviour. The question to be asked next is why we should group such diverse data together, and whether these cases concerned with changes in situations can all be dealt with in the same way.

2.1.9 There Are Different Mechanisms by Which Situations Affect Behaviour

The problem with grouping these studies together is that these studies are clearly not addressing the same psychological phenomena. We are told that finding a dime in a phone booth and being in haste both affect behaviour, but there is no reason to think that the same psychological mechanism is responsible for both.²⁰ We need to be suspicious of generalizations about the influence of situational factors until we have determined what the underlying psychological mechanisms are. We can identify some of these psychological mechanisms by staying close to the experimental evidence Doris cites.

Some situational factors alter behaviour by directing attention. The effect that being in haste has on helpfulness as seen in the seminarians study is complex, but one aspect of what is going on in that study is that features of a person's situation which cause her to pay attention to some things rather than others will influence her behaviour. Being in a rush caused some of the seminarians not to notice the presence of an injured person who needed their help.²¹ Chapter five of this thesis looks at inattention blindness, one of the mechanisms by which priming can affect behaviour by directing attention.²² Several other phenomena may admit of a similar

analysis, most importantly the effect of visual distractions. The theme that links cases of this kind is that the reason why people behave the way they do is sometimes determined by whether they notice or fail to notice that action needs to be taken, and that there are specific ways in which a person's circumstances and mindset affect the likelihood of her noticing that action needs to be taken.

Other situational factors can alter behaviour by changing the way a person feels. Being in a mood or feeling an emotion can change the way that people behave. As it turns out, something as small as finding a dime in a coin slot can suffice. Chapter seven of this thesis examines in detail some of the effects that being in an affective state can have.

The fact that there are different psychological mechanisms at work in Doris' data suggests that we should not try to develop a grand unified theory of all of the ways in which insubstantial situational factors can affect a person's behaviour. We can approach these studies piecemeal, explaining the effect of each relevant psychological mechanism separately rather than trying offer one account of all of them. For example, the set of cognitive structures which ultimately explains why people in white lab coats are more likely to be obeyed is not the same as the set of cognitive structures which explains why people who have found a dime would tend to be helpful. Therefore we do not need an account of the situational factors that cued subjects to obey orders in the Milgram experiments in order to explain the effect of being in a cheerful mood. That is why I feel comfortable keeping this thesis focussed on problems associated with attention and affect rather than trying to deal with every study concerned with the effects of seemingly insignificant situational factors. This is helpful as a way of limiting the scope of my

thesis, but it leaves open the question of what studies concerned with attention and studies concerned with affect have in common.

2.1.10 A Family Resemblance: Disproportionate Effects and Normative Irrelevance

What the studies discussed in sections 2.2.2-2.2.6 have in common is a family resemblance. They are cases where a feature of a person's situation has an effect that is not in proportion to the seeming triviality of the cause. They are also odd when seen from a normative perspective, for they are cases of changes in situation that do not constitute a reason justifying the observed change in behaviour. These effects are strange from a commonsense perspective, and as we will see in the remainder of this chapter they are also not in keeping with what mainstream virtue theory would predict.

One feature that these studies have in common is that they are studies where situational factors have a disproportionately large effect on behaviour. It is commonsense to think that the magnitude of an effect should be proportional to the magnitude of the cause. For example, extremely dangerous circumstances make people very afraid, and it is not surprising that a person who is very frightened will behave very differently than they ordinarily behave. We do not expect to see people reacting in an extreme way to a very minor threat. Aristotle gave the example of a person who jumps at the sight of a mouse.²³ The disproportionality of that response indicates that there is something wrong with the person who jumped. That phobic response is pathological. Likewise, we would expect that a person who was thirty minutes late for her thesis defence would be in an extreme panic, and it is not surprising that a person in that situation might not notice a stranger in need of assistance. It is surprising that a person who is a few

minutes late for an unimportant meeting should do the same thing, but that is what we see in the seminarians study. In that study, the effect is out proportion to the cause. Stranger still, we cannot say that this disproportionate response was pathological, for a majority of the seminarians seem to have been affected by this feature of their situation. If it is pathological, it is a pathology which affects most human beings.

A second way in which these studies resemble one another is that these situational factors are not good reasons to change one's behaviour. Being a few minutes late for an unimportant meeting is not a good reason to ignore a person in distress. Normatively, the very mild pressure they were under does not justify failing to stop, nor is it a very good excuse.

A third feature that the members of this family of studies have in common is that they are counterintuitive.²⁴ Their results are not what we would pretheoretically expect. The empirical literature on folk psychology demonstrates that there is a yawning gap between what most people believe about human behaviour and what is actually observed in studies of human behaviour. For example, there have been many surveys that have asked about how people could be expected to behave if they were put through the Milgram experiments. Overwhelmingly, the vast majority of respondents predicted that the vast majority of subjects of the experiments would resist the experimenter and refuse to administer anything more than a mild shock.²⁵ The experimental result that polite requests from an authority figure are enough to induce most people to torture strangers into unconsciousness runs completely contrary to the commonsense expectation expressed in these surveys. The result is unexpectedly disproportionate to the mild pressure exerted by the experimenter in that situation.

This family of studies needs a name. Doris calls himself a situationist and cites this family of studies as evidence for his views, so let us call this the pro-situationist family of studies. As we will see in the next section, it is not just the expectations of ordinary people that are being violated by this family of studies. These studies also call into question the theoretically justified expectations that philosophers have about what people are like.

2.1.11 Normative Implications

Most forms of virtue ethics are grounded in claims about moral psychology. My focus in this thesis is on neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, but the family of studies concerned with the disproportionate effects of situational factors is also threatening to many other forms of virtue ethics as well.²⁶ To whatever extent a normative theory depends on an underlying account of moral psychology, that theory is vulnerable to empirical data that calls its psychological foundation into question.

Most virtue ethicists want their claims about what a normatively ideal human being would look like to come with a story about the program of moral education that would bring a psychologically normal human being closer to that ideal. Cases where insignificant situational factors change behaviour are problematic for many philosophical theories about ordinary human psychology. If a theoretical picture of what ordinary human beings are like is mistaken, the corresponding account of moral education that ordinary people need will also be mistaken.

Some virtue ethicists are concerned with identifying the good life for a human being. There are different ways of fleshing that out. Some consider a trait praiseworthy only if it is psychologically possible for a person to inculcate that trait. Some go further and make it a rule that a trait is praiseworthy only if it coheres with some set of other traits and facts about human nature in such a way as to contribute to a good life overall. All theories which assign normative significance to the good life for a human being depend on an account of moral psychology which explains how human beings differ from idealized moral agents. We do not know what would constitute the good life for a human being if we do not know what human beings are like.

Neo-Aristotelians are among those who assign normative significance to the good life for a human being and have an interest in moral education. In the remainder of this chapter I will show how the family of studies on the disproportionate effects of situational factors is problematic for neo-Aristotelian moral psychology.

2.2 Eudaimonist Virtue Ethics

2.2.1 Anscombe and the Birth of Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics

In the mid-20th century, Elizabeth Anscombe both carved out space for a revival of Aristotelian ethics and pointed out a vulnerability that neo-Aristotelians would have to face. Her essay “Modern Moral Philosophy”²⁷ argued that Aristotelian notions of virtue and vice were well suited to addressing some questions which the ethical theories of the first half of the 20th century were ill equipped to contend with. However, Anscombe was highly suspicious of Aristotle’s talk of human nature and human flourishing, demanding that those concepts be better grounded in philosophy of psychology.

A place to begin is looking at the way Anscombe thought about oughts. Many philosophers, including Kantians, utilitarians and contractarians, think that some of the things a person ought to do are “moral oughts” while others are things that we ought to do only because they are a means to some arbitrary end we have set for ourselves.²⁸ One example of a non-moral ought is that plumbers ought to drain all water from a pipe before soldering. Failing to do what a plumber ought to do (drain the water) is a mistake, but it would not seem to be a *moral* failing. Anscombe disagreed. Following Aristotle, she was interested in the whole system of ends that a person has. Soldering is good for joining pipes, but soldering pipes is a good thing to do only because a plumbing system is good for human health. The means to an end can be criticised not only in terms of the end they seek to achieve but also in light of a person’s other ends.²⁹ Lead-based solder may be good for making a leak-proof seal between pipes but using it is not a good thing to do if avoiding contaminating the environment is one of one’s goals.³⁰ Deliberating about what means are good for reaching our ends cannot be done without considering how our whole system of ends fits together. Therefore we cannot draw a line between the oughts of means-end reasoning and the so called “moral oughts.” Following Aristotle, Anscombe believed that there is one supreme goal in light of which we can evaluate all of our other ends. This goal aims at a kind of life that everyone ought to pursue, the flourishing life, the best possible life for a human being.³¹ Pursuing the good life subsumes all of our oughts.

For a virtue ethicist, understanding what makes someone a good person must come prior to determining which actions are good, because the goodness of an action is defined with reference to the goodness of a life. For Aristotle, living well included reasoning well and feeling

appropriately; people living good lives have a whole suite of dispositions that keep them living good lives.³² Because neo-Aristotelian ethics needs to identify which states of character are necessary for the good life, neo-Aristotelian ethics is a form of virtue ethics.

Despite the advantages of a neo-Aristotelian approach, Anscombe worried that it would flounder for lack of a realistic picture of human psychology. “Philosophically there is a huge gap, at present unfillable as far as we are concerned, which needs to be filled by an account of human nature, human action, the type of characteristic a virtue is, and above all of human ‘flourishing.’”³³ Without knowing what the best possible life for a human being would be, and without even knowing what ways of living and acting are possible for a human being, a neo-Aristotelian ethics of virtue cannot get off the ground. Anscombe told us that “it is not profitable for us at present to do moral philosophy...that should be laid aside at any rate until we have an adequate philosophy of psychology.”³⁴ Anscombe’s simultaneously revived interest in virtue ethics and criticized the psychological concepts underlying it.

2.2.2 Eudaimonism

Of the many different accounts of virtue held by contemporary virtue ethicists, there is a family of theories which has come to be the orthodox version of virtue ethics, orthodox in the sense that they are the basis for what we teach our first year undergraduates about virtue ethics.³⁵ I’m going to apply the label *eudaimonism* to neo-Aristotelian theories which bear a family resemblance to the work of Philippa Foot and Rosalind Hursthouse.³⁶ In this section I would like to go over some of the points of resemblance that led me to group such theories together.

Because eudaimonism is currently considered orthodox, it is this family of theories that opponents of virtue ethics usually have in mind when they criticize virtue ethics.

Any brief introduction to eudaimonist virtue ethics is necessarily going to be a caricature. By way of comparison, the most subtle work done by utilitarians ultimately can be derived from a couple of principles which could be written on a postcard: we should maximize overall utility, giving equal weight to every person's utility. Eudaimonists do not believe we can lay down simple principles such as those. They think the life of a virtuous person is our normative standard, and it might well be impossible to explain the way a virtuous person thinks, feels and acts without writing a novel about her.

The virtue ethicists who I will be calling eudaimonists draw many of their core concepts and arguments from a distinctive way of interpreting Aristotle's work on virtue.³⁷ Not all eudaimonists see themselves as interpreters of Aristotle, but the positions they hold are historically connected to Aristotelian thought through pioneering eudaimonists such as Foot. Following Aristotle, eudaimonists believe that virtue is not just a matter of performing the right actions. Aristotle tells us that virtuous people feel the right feelings at the right time to the right extent and in the right way.³⁸ These virtuous people are motivated by the right ends and act for the right reasons. In whatever circumstances they may find themselves, they think, feel and act in the way that best contributes to the best possible way of living.³⁹ *Eudaimonia* is Aristotle's name for this best possible way of living. Eudaimonists do not take themselves to be offering only a description of the kind of life that would be the most pleasant for a person. They are

making the normative claim that human beings *ought* to live the best possible life for a human being.

This notion of the best possible life for a human being can be approached from either of two directions: from the top down, by asking about the best life for a citizen of a good society, or from the bottom up, by asking about the best life for a member of the species *Homo sapiens*.⁴⁰ Aristotle is not concerned with abstract rational agents, for to the extent that *Homo sapiens* has different faculties from other species, the good life for a human being is different from that of other species. For example, humans are capable of reason and emotion in addition to the activities like digestion that a well-functioning human body performs to keep itself going. In contrast, green plants are incapable of feeling joy. We would not say that a houseplant's joylessness demonstrates that it is not thriving.⁴¹ Eudaimonia is a way of living such that human potential is fully actualized, with all of a person's faculties being exercised to the fullest extent.⁴² That approach gives us an account of eudaimonia built up from claims about human nature. Aristotle offers us an alternate approach as well; if we live in a good society we can simply look to the best people in our society as proof by ostension about what the best possible life for a human being is like. One begins to become virtuous by participating in the life of the city.⁴³ In the end these approaches converge, for *homo sapiens* is by nature a social animal.⁴⁴ Human potential cannot be fully actualized apart from other people, or in a bad society, or as a marginal member of a good society.⁴⁵ Aristotle's account of eudaimonia as being the life of fully actualized human potential is not an abstraction, for he thinks we can see it exemplified in the lives of the best people in our society.

2.2.3 Eudaimonia, Emotion and Reason

Eudaimonists believe there is more to eudaimonia than performing well-regarded actions. Even if living well was just a matter of performing the good actions it would be difficult to determine which course of action was best, because there are many ways in which an action can fail to contribute to the good life. First, there are clearly suboptimal ways of performing the activities that make up a good human life. For example, eating is one of the things human beings need to do to live well but chronic overeating does not make for an optimally happy life. Second, different activities can potentially come into conflict due to limited resources. Beyond a certain point, fine dining and charitable giving cannot simultaneously be pursued to the fullest. Third, a way of behaving might be good from the perspective of the proper exercise of one faculty but bad from the perspective of another.⁴⁶ Suppose that a person could calm his fears only by compulsively snacking. For him, eating in such a way as to thrive emotionally would also be eating in such a way as to harm his health. Fourth, it might be difficult to identify the right way of living when the same activity contributes to the good life in more than one way. For example, eating is good for a human being both because eating is pleasurable and also because eating is necessary for everything else that human beings do, but the way of eating that would maximize a person's pleasure might not be the same as the way of eating that would maximize health. Fifth and most importantly, the degree to which an option is attractive to a person is itself a matter of character. Aristotle would deny that we can evaluate the goodness of an action by tallying up the pleasures and pains that would result without taking into account the fact that good people and bad people will not take pleasure in the same experiences.

Aristotle thought that a person cannot live the best possible life without having the right emotions and appetites. There are several reasons why feeling appropriate emotion is important. First, Aristotle thinks that feeling the right emotions can be good in itself. Feeling pride is something that psychologically healthy human beings do – it is an activity which is one constituent of a good life.⁴⁷ Second, having the right feelings can be a means to obtaining other goods. Pride can be a source of pleasure, and a person who does not feel the right amount of pride might lack the confidence needed to engage in a whole range of activities that make life good. Third, the person who has the most appropriate emotions is the person who least needs to compromise between different sorts of goods. People do not feel pleasure in the same way about the same things. Some people really do get the most pleasure from the healthiest way of eating, and only a person like that is capable of living the best possible life when it comes to food. Unlike people who do not feel pleasure appropriately, she does not need to compromise at all between healthiest eating and happiest eating. For her, they are the same. A person who does not feel pleasure in the right way cannot do what is right by copying the eating habits of a healthy food enthusiast, because the copycat will not feel the same pleasure and therefore will not be thriving to the same degree.⁴⁸

What is more, a person is not thriving if she is not reasoning correctly about what she does. Partly this is a practical matter. Suppose a person happened by chance into a life that was good in many respects. Her happiness will not be secure, for if circumstances change she will not be able to adjust so as to continue living as well as possible. A person who is aware of the reasons which should guide her decision-making will be more secure, for she will be aware that changing circumstances give her reasons to act differently. On a deeper level, people are

thriving only if they act for the right reasons because reasoning is part of a good human life. Consider someone who unthinkingly drifts through life, acting on impulse or following the advice of others. It might so happen that she lives a long and pleasant life, but it is not a good human life. It is a way of living life appropriate for a child, not for an adult. Humans are capable of reasoning, so a human who does not live in accordance with her own practical reasoning is not thriving.

Aristotle thinks that very few people are thriving. As seen above, his definition of what it means for a person to thrive is quite exacting. This eudaimonistic way of living is the way of living that is best suited to human nature, but actually living that way does not come naturally to us.⁴⁹ What makes the problem particularly difficult is that there can be no rulebook listing which actions are consistent with eudaimonia. No action is the right thing to do except within the complete life of the virtuous person. Any good action would be less good if performed by a person who did not have the right feelings about it.⁵⁰ Only the person who thinks and feels correctly can act correctly; only such a person can thrive. Furthermore, Aristotelian eudaimonia is not a matter of thinking, feeling and acting correctly on occasion. “One swallow does not make a spring,”⁵¹ and one hour of fully actualizing human potential does not make for a thriving life. Aristotle thinks that a few people are consistent in thinking and feeling correctly, and that what makes them consistent in that regard is virtue.

2.2.4 Eudaimonist Virtues of Character

Part of the reason why so few people feel the same feelings that a virtuous person would is that human beings are vulnerable to excess and deficiency with regards to many different

appetites and emotions. It is a rare person who can feel just the right feelings at the right time and in the right way with regards to each of these emotions.⁵² The eudaimonist interpretation of Aristotle is that being virtuous includes having a set of individual “virtues of character,”⁵³ each one of which can regulate one of our emotions.⁵⁴ For example, anger is one of the emotions that needs to be regulated if a person is going to live well. Some people mistreat their friends and neighbours because they tend to get angry too easily while others get pushed around and exploited because they tend not to get angry enough. People who have the virtue of mildness are disposed to feel the right amount of anger at the right time in the right way.⁵⁵ Similarly, people who are courageous feel afraid only to the degree which is appropriate to their circumstances. On the mainstream interpretation of Aristotle, living the best possible life requires having a set of virtues of character which dispose a person to feel and act the right way at the right time.

These virtues of character are each a kind of habit. Aristotle thought that people do not become virtuous without external guidance.⁵⁶ Becoming fully virtuous requires training from childhood onward, with the children seeing and imitating what is done by their virtuous elders.⁵⁷ “We become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions.”⁵⁸ Aristotle drew an analogy between virtues of character and skills, and this is helpful as a first-order model of virtue acquisition. When playing a chord on a stringed instrument for the first time a student needs to force her fingers into unfamiliar positions, mimicking her teacher, but once she has played the chord a thousand times it will be second nature for her to place her fingers correctly.⁵⁹ Through practice, a musician learns to play excellently; by analogy, it is through practice that a child learns to live excellently. We leave this analogy between skills and virtues behind when we recall that virtues involve the emotions

in a way that skills do not, for we would say that a carpenter is skilled if she makes good chairs regardless of how she feels about her work. The value of the analogy is that it tells us that these habits are acquired through training and repetition.

Once a person has inculcated a virtuous habit she is unlikely to lose it.⁶⁰ Aristotle says that “in no aspect of what human beings do is there such stability as there is in activities in accordance with excellence.”⁶¹ He means that a virtuous state of character will prove to be unchanging both across the years of one’s life and across all of the different life circumstances in which a person might find herself. Aristotle believes that extremely unfortunate circumstances can prevent a person from thriving, but claims that even in such bad circumstances a virtuous person will be better than anyone at living the best life still possible under those circumstances.⁶²

2.2.5 Eudaimonism and Practical Wisdom

What knits a virtuous person’s life together as a whole is practical wisdom, *phronesis*.⁶³ Aristotle does not think that practical reason supplies any person with goals or values.⁶⁴ Appetites and emotions supply a person with goals. Since virtues of character regulate appetites and emotions, people with virtues of character have the right goals. A person who has virtues of character knows that eating the right amount of food, giving the right amount of money to those who need it and feeling the right amount of pride are all worth doing.⁶⁵ Practical reasoning is what enables a person to see how all of the activities which are worth doing can fit together in one good life.⁶⁶ Practical reason makes a person “able to deliberate finely about what is beneficial to himself, not just about some restricted area...but about what promotes living well in

general.”⁶⁷ A person cannot live the best possible life overall without being a *phronimos*, a person of practical wisdom.

Virtues of character do not reduce to practical reasoning, but practical reasoning does give guidance to each virtue of character.⁶⁸ Although practical reason cannot and should not be in direct control of how we feel and act at all times, practical reasoning is necessary to calibrate virtues of character.⁶⁹ It determines what counts as feeling an emotion to the right degree at the right time in the right way. For example, a person who is in danger cannot be disposed to feel the right amount of fear without knowing what is at stake, the true value of her own life and the value of things that might be worth dying for. Aristotle says that a person with a virtue of character acts “for the end one should” and “following the correct prescription,”⁷⁰ and this is possible to the highest degree only with the guidance provided by practical reasoning.

Practical wisdom gives some degree of unity to the virtues of character. As Foot tells us, the virtuous person knows “how much particular ends are worth.”⁷¹ Practical wisdom makes prioritization possible. For example, the amount of money that a generous person would give to others is dictated in part by the amount of money she will need to pursue other goals, such as having the food and drink necessary for her to live the best possible life. In other words, she cannot know what the right amount to give would be unless she also knows that right amount to eat and drink; she cannot be in full possession of the virtue of generosity unless she also has the virtue of temperance and practical wisdom to reconcile her goals. Eudaimonists deny that there is any master virtue that is sufficient for living well, but they affirm that each of the many virtues

of character can only contribute to the best life overall if each is “persuaded by reason”⁷² such that practical wisdom harmonizes the goals which the various virtues of character promote.

2.2.6 Demarcating Eudaimonism

To recap, I would like to point out three claims as being the distinctive features of eudaimonist virtue ethics. Eudaimonists claim that people ought to try to live the best possible life. They claim that living well requires having unchanging virtues of character which regulate emotions and appetites. They claim that correct practical reasoning is necessary to arrange one’s life as a whole in accordance with “what things conduce to a good life in general.”⁷³ I am placing virtue ethicists who would assent to those three claims in the eudaimonist camp. Eudaimonists disagree on many of the details of the account of virtue I’ve given in this section, but these three points bring them together. This is the virtue ethics we teach to our first-year undergraduates, and this is the target that most critics of virtue ethics have in mind.

The eudaimonist camp is a very big tent, for agreement on a few key principles does not rule out hot debate on other issues. Controversies abound: among them, disputes over the degree to which virtue theory should appeal to nature,⁷⁴ the degree to which practical wisdom unites the virtues,⁷⁵ whether virtues are skills or in some sense resemble skills,⁷⁶ whether or not there is only one eudaimonistic life,⁷⁷ what role political theory should have within virtue ethics,⁷⁸ whether or not the virtues always benefit their possessor,⁷⁹ what practical reason is and why it matters,⁸⁰ whether virtues are the ultimate moral standard or whether they borrow their normativity from something else⁸¹ and the question of what role the emotions play in the life of the virtuous person.⁸² I do not want to create the impression that there is a self-identified group

of philosophers with a common agenda who call themselves eudaimonists. Rather, I am saying that many virtue ethicists agree on a few key points, regardless of the many other points on which they disagree.

What I am doing in the rest of this chapter is asking whether or not eudaimonist virtue ethics can account for the pro-situationist family of psychological studies described in 1.2. I argue that it cannot.

2.3 How Not to Be Virtuous

2.3.1 Cataloguing Non-Virtuous States of Character

It is clear that the subjects of psychological studies where insignificant changes in situation produce dramatic changes in behaviour are not behaving the way a virtuous person would behave. A person who passes by an injured person by the side of the road because she is a few minutes late for an inconsequential meeting does not seem to be feeling the right amount of empathy, nor does she seem to have the right priorities, nor is she acting for the right reasons. It might just be the case that many people behave badly in these experiments because virtuous people are rare, a claim I will examine in detail in chapter four. What I am getting at here in 2.3 is that the many subjects of these experiments who fall short of what virtue demands are falling short of virtue in a strange and unexpected way. It is not surprising that there are many non-virtuous people in the world, but the ways of falling short of virtue seen in these experiments are very odd indeed.

Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics has a lot to say about non-virtuous states of character. By working out the details of neo-Aristotelian moral psychology we can derive a very nuanced account of the many ways in which it is possible to fall short of virtue. If neo-Aristotelian moral psychology mapped well onto our modern, scientific understanding of human psychology we would expect that the neo-Aristotelian catalogue of non-virtuous states of character would be more or less comprehensive. If the ways of falling short of virtue on display in those experiments are not explained by neo-Aristotelian moral psychology then something is missing from eudaimonist moralpsychology.

2.3.2 Virtue, Vice and Self-Control

Very few people are moral exemplars in Aristotle's sense, always doing the right thing in the right way at the right time and for the right reason. The virtuous person not only does the right thing, but sincerely wants to do the right thing.⁸³ Being generous makes a genuinely generous person happy. As Aristotle puts it, "the sort of person who does not delight in fine actions does not even qualify as a person of excellence."⁸⁴

To give a sense of how high Aristotle's standard for virtue is, we can look to what he has to say about people who are self-controlled (*enkratic*).⁸⁵ As J. O. Urmson points out, "we cannot distinguish the good man, the man with an excellent character, from the self-controlled man either by his actions or by his beliefs and reasoning."⁸⁶ The only difference between a virtuous and an enkratic person is that an enkratic person does not feel the right pleasures. She does not feel the pleasure proper to right activity; she has to grit her teeth and carry on in doing what she knows is right.⁸⁷ Since being enkratic requires perfection in action and deliberation, the number

of enkratic people among us will be almost as small as the number of virtuous people. Perfect self control is a rare thing; Aristotelian virtue even rarer.

The Aristotelian standard for being truly vicious is itself rather strict. Moral monsters who are utterly unmoved by the fine and the good are quite rare.⁸⁸ In a sense, the vicious person is the mirror image of the virtuous person. The virtuous person reasons correctly about what she ought to do but the vicious person reasons incorrectly. It is not easy to persuade a vicious person to change her mind because her reasoning starts from the wrong premises about what is of value.⁸⁹ Where the virtuous person's desires are perfectly attuned to living a virtuous life, the vicious person is drawn toward excess or deficiency. She does wrong gleefully; she "has no regrets, and so is incurable."⁹⁰ Though it may be contentious to do so, I'd like to express some optimism about the moral state of humanity: few among us are so far gone that we are *entirely* blind to our faults.⁹¹

Aristotelian self control is easy to define, but there are many ways in which it is possible to lack self control. Notably, the neo-Aristotelian literature identifies a half-dozen distinct varieties of *akrasia*. However, we might do well to look first at the sets of people who Aristotle believes are incapable of either having or lacking self-control.

2.3.3 Gods, Brutes and Children

Aristotle thinks that some people are so different from the rest of us that we cannot morally evaluate them.⁹² He calls some of these people brutish. He has in mind people who have bizarre and otherwise inexplicable dispositions such that we cannot reconstruct what might

motivate someone to live such a life.⁹³ His examples of brutality include irrational phobias, self harm, pica, cannibalistic appetites, and the case of a tyrant with a fondness for torture.⁹⁴

Aristotle thinks that some people are naturally this way, and that others became brutish because they were “mindless because of disease (e.g. those involving seizures) or madness.”⁹⁵ Aristotle thinks that a third group of brutish people developed their bizarre and unnatural desires through habituation.⁹⁶ Despite the fact that the behaviour which results from brutish dispositions is often more disturbing than vice a genuinely brutish person is not an unjust human being, precisely because a brutish person is incapable of living a human life.

There is a short passage in the Nicomachean Ethics which may indicate that Aristotle thought about immature people in a somewhat similar way. He speaks of people who are “young in years or immature in character.”⁹⁷ They have little life-experience, and are led by emotion. Aristotle thinks that “having knowledge turns out not to be of benefit to such people.”⁹⁸ M. F. Burnyeat’s interpretation of the brief references we have to such people is that being immature means endorsing appetites unreflectively. Immature people do whatever seems most pleasant at the moment without any further thought. At most, they can calculate the means to their ends.⁹⁹ A virtuous person reasons correctly about the good life for a human being while a vicious person has a corrupt conception of the good, but an immature person simply has “no steady conception of the good to reason from.”¹⁰⁰ Brutish people are apparently incurable, but the cure for immaturity is simple. Once they get more life experience, they will become capable of practical reasoning, capable of virtue or vice. An immature person is incapable of participating in moral discourse,¹⁰¹ but this is an incapacity a person can be expected to grow out of.

Aristotle also tells us that some people are “godlike” with a state of character “more to be honoured than excellence.”¹⁰² Aristotle is vague on this point,¹⁰³ leading Urmson to believe that godlikeness is mentioned just to round out Aristotle’s conceptual scheme; Aristotle needed to identify some state of character which he could call the opposite of brutishness. Aristotle gives that opposed state the name godlikeness, but, if he does not give a clear definition this notion of godlikeness is little more than an empty placeholder, something that “can be safely ignored.”¹⁰⁴ Such is Urmson’s view.

Unlike Urmson, I think we can uncover at least one good clue as to what Aristotle meant by godlikeness. In the *Politics*, Aristotle tells us that an individual person, “when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole.”¹⁰⁵ As we learn in *Metaphysics Z*, a part “cannot even exist if severed from the whole.”¹⁰⁶ For example, the function of the pancreas is blood sugar regulation.¹⁰⁷ A person who has diabetes has a bad pancreas, a pancreas that is bad at doing what a pancreas is supposed to do. Now consider a pancreas that has been surgically removed; on Aristotle’s account, it is not even a bad pancreas – it is no longer a pancreas at all. Not being connected to a circulatory system, it no longer has the *telos* of a pancreas, blood sugar regulation. Analogously, the Aristotelian polis is definitionally prior to the human individuals who are its citizens, for if those individuals could not be citizens they would not be human. Here then is our clue: Aristotle tells us that a person who by nature¹⁰⁸ has no need of society is inhuman – either a brute or a god.¹⁰⁹ A brutish person lacks the capacity for normal human relations while a god lacks the need for them, for unlike a human being a god need not be thought to be a social animal by nature. A god could live a good life without having a city. Similarly, if gods cannot be harmed, are never hungry and have limitless

resources then they can never exercise courage, temperance or generosity.¹¹⁰ On my interpretation, godlikeness is a state of such perfect self-sufficiency that vice is impossible.

Aristotle's discussion of reflective activity suggests that godlikeness is an achievable state of character for a human being. "Self sufficiency will be a feature of the reflective life most of all,"¹¹¹ because contemplation requires fewer external resources than active participation in the life of the city.¹¹² Insofar as it is possible for human beings, this life would be "the complete happiness of man."¹¹³ However, this is "a life higher than the human plane;"¹¹⁴ Aristotle is not a stoic, and is well aware that our ability to pursue the highest things is limited by our basic physical needs and by the mere fact that we are not immortal.¹¹⁵ Perfect godlikeness may be beyond human reach, but Aristotle calls us to "assimilate to the immortals, living in accordance with what is highest of the things in us."¹¹⁶ While people who approach godlikeness must be vanishingly rare – it is difficult to think of an uncontroversial example in all of human history¹¹⁷ – it is not an empty category for Aristotle.

2.3.4 What Are Most People Like?

So then, few people are truly virtuous, and people of perfect self-control are not likely to be much more common. Aristotle tells us explicitly that brutishness is rare,¹¹⁸ and godlikeness must be even more unusual. Vice untouched by conscience seems to be much more commonplace, but even this is an extreme state of character. It is not typical for human beings to live lives that are perfectly consistent in any respect; even consistently being vicious is beyond us. Speaking in general, it is common for the same person to live in accordance with a virtue in some situations while consistently falling short of what that virtue demands in different sets of

circumstances. A virtue ethicist who intends to address her work to human beings needs ways of accounting for our consistent inconsistencies.

Most people are mediocre. By mediocre I mean that most people are capable of virtue, being neither brutish nor godlike, but fall short of it; we would evaluate them as being worse than a perfectly self-controlled person but better than a vicious person. I do not intend to try to offer an all-inclusive list – that would be impossible. My goal here is to be comprehensive enough in enumerating different kinds of mediocre states of character to give a sense of what moves are available to a eudaemonist in talking about people who are less than virtuous.

Before proceeding, I should offer a word of caution. I've just offered a number of generalizations about the rarity of several states of character, generalizations I take to be commonsensical. I am well aware that commonsense folk psychology is often mistaken, and I do not consider it to be adequate in itself. I will be discussing empirical evidence as to how many people are virtuous in chapter four; there is evidence that consistent virtue really is rare. Perhaps this is beside the point; even if it were to turn out that few people live inconsistent lives, ethics would need a way of thinking about those few. If there are many such people, the argument I'm making is all the more important.

2.3.5 Inertia

Mere inertia can maintain a pattern of behaviour. Consider Stan, who routinely pulls out of his driveway in the morning at 8:15 sharp. He started doing this because he used to meet a friend for coffee each morning. That friend has long since moved to another city, but the 8:15

AM routine persisted. As a result of that routine he is reliably just a bit early for work; he is doing what a punctual person would do. Now suppose that Stan decides to switch to commuting by bus. Leaving at 8:15 now gets him to work five minutes late, but he shrugs and does it anyway. His being on time was never a matter of careful planning or of sincerely wanting to avoid inconveniencing his co-workers; at no point did he think and feel as the punctual person would.

Aristotelian virtues are not rigid. If a generous person were to lose her job she would not blindly go on giving as she had before, for she would bankrupt herself. She will find a new way of living that is compatible with virtue, perhaps focussing more on being generous with her time. The rigidity of Stan's 8:15 routine means that he will only sometimes do what a genuinely punctual person would do. He consistently behaves well when he drives to work, and consistently behaves poorly when he takes the bus. Stan does less harm to others overall than a vicious person would do, but it would be very wrong to call his routine a virtue.¹¹⁹

There is a second problem: Stan's routine will persist only as long as it is unexamined and unchallenged. Since his friend moved away, his reason for waking up at 8:15 is gone. Should it ever occur to him that he might enjoy a bit of extra sleep in the morning, he might begin to change his routine. If he does not genuinely care about inconveniencing his co-workers, he would have no reason to resist the temptation. Stan's 8:15 routine may persist for years, but it would take very little to nudge him out of it. A chance remark from a colleague or a passing daydream of his might be enough to start him questioning why he does it, a question for which

he has no answer. His continuing to be a bit better than a vicious person is just a matter of moral luck.

2.3.6 Pseudovirtue

Aristotle says that the name “courage” is sometimes applied to people who are not genuinely courageous at all. To give one of his examples, a cowardly mercenary might appear to be more courageous than an ordinary citizen-soldier just because the mercenary has the advantage of battlefield experience. The mercenary can discern in the heat of battle that the enemy troops are few and poorly trained, and because he knows that the situation is not as dangerous as it might seem to the untrained eye he will stand firm where an average citizen-soldier would flee. However, the mercenary’s lack of genuine courage will become apparent when the situation really is dangerous. Unlike a cowardly mercenary, a genuinely brave person is capable of thinking that facing death is sometimes preferable to safety at any price.¹²⁰

To give another example, Aristotle also mentions berserkers, fighters who go into battle so utterly enraged as to be oblivious to danger. Their actions sometimes resemble those of a brave person in that they do not run away from small dangers, but sometimes they will pointlessly take suicidal risks where a genuinely brave person would be prudent. The berserker’s unreasoning state of mind is entirely unlike that of a virtuous person. The mercenary’s thought process is better, for being able to accurately estimate how much danger he is facing is one aspect of the courageous person’s practical reasoning. What both the cowardly mercenary and the berserker lack is a sense of what their own lives are worth,

The mercenary and the berserker are exemplars of pseudovirtue. A person who has one of these pseudovirtues will sometimes do what a genuinely courageous person would do and will sometimes fall short. They are partially successful at mimicking what a good person would do, though they are quite different from the virtuous person in what they feel and how they think.

2.3.7 Akratic States of Character

The single most powerful tool virtue ethicists have for understanding the space between idealized virtue and extreme vice is the concept of akrasia. Akrasia means a lack of self control. Unlike people with inertial routines and pseudovirtues, akratic people are defined as being capable of practical reasoning in a way that is similar to that of a virtuous person.¹²¹ They know what they ought to do; what is odd about them is that they do not do what they know they ought to do.

It's important to emphasize how strange this is. An akratic person might eat an entire tub of ice cream even though he knows that doing this will nauseate him in the short run and harm his health in the long run. It's hard to explain why he might do this to himself. It seems that either he doesn't know that it will harm him, which is false, or he is deliberately making life worse for himself, which is bizarre. This sort of dilemma led Socrates to think that akrasia is simply impossible, because "no one goes willingly toward the bad or what he believes to be bad."¹²² Aristotle's solution to this problem was to introduce a distinction between having knowledge and using knowledge.¹²³ There is a sense in which the ice cream eater is not ignorant of the fact that he will soon feel quite nauseated, but he is not thinking about that while he gorges himself. In this way, Aristotle can say that the akratic ice cream eater can reason his way to the

same conclusion that a temperate person would reach (that eating the whole tub is prudentially irrational) but he has feelings quite unlike those of a virtuous person (obsessive desire, pleasure in overeating) and fails to do what a virtuous person would do (he gorges himself).

Akrasia is often translated as “weakness of the will,” but this impoverishes the concept of akrasia. Being weak in the face of temptation is not the only way a person can lack self control. In fact, many different ways in which a person can lack self control travel under the name akrasia. In the following sections I will discuss a wide range of theories that purport to be about akrasia. They are all concerned with people who resemble a virtuous person in their thinking but not in emotion or action. However, the phenomena they are describing are significantly different; there are different patterns of thought, feelings and action that are homonymously called akrasia. Each of these species of akrasia is a distinct way of falling short of perfect virtue.

The varieties of akrasia identified below are distinctly different states of character, but they can travel under the same name because they do have some common features.¹²⁴ Akratics fail only episodically, feel conflicted even while they are living wrong, and feel regret after the fact. Aristotle thinks they are less blameworthy than vicious people, for we can see in their regret some hope for reform. That is what the different kinds of akrasia have in common.

2.3.8 Weakness-Akrasia

The most commonly discussed species of akrasia is weakness. Weak-willed people usually live just the way a virtuous person would, but crumble when temptation becomes more than they can bear. For example, a person who normally keeps his appetite strictly in check

might find himself unable to resist a second helping of pecan pie. He might later feel bad about doing so, but that guilt will not prevent him from doing the same thing the next chance he gets.

2.3.9 Impulsive Akrasia

Aristotle mentions a second way of lacking self control, which might best be called impulsive akrasia.¹²⁵ This is the state of character of someone who lives in accordance with virtue except when forced to make a snap decision, under which circumstances she cannot be relied upon to think and act the way a virtuous person would. A person might seem to be very mild mannered until we see what she is like when she is cut off in traffic; her showing reflexive anger and regretting it later indicates impulsive akrasia.

2.3.10 Go-with-the-flow Akrasia

Amelie Rorty identified a third pattern of akratic failure, one which is non-Aristotelian. This pattern might best be called go-with-the-flow akrasia. Rorty believed that this occurs when a person drops into “lower gear, to relatively automatic psychological functioning.”¹²⁶ She denied that the root causes of akrasia are pathological, to be found only in weak people, and thought that everyone can be vulnerable to this variety of akrasia. Everyone has some set of perceptual, motivational, imaginative, intellectual and behavioral habits,¹²⁷ and these must play a central role in explaining how people think and act the way we do.¹²⁸ Because we are often unaware of these habits, and because some of them affect our very capacity to deliberate,¹²⁹ any person can find herself running on autopilot along a course of action which she would not have chosen by deliberation.

Rorty pointed out several subspecies of go-with-the-flow akrasia.¹³⁰ The first is force of habit. Given two possible courses of action, the akratic alternative can be attractive just by virtue of being easy. Habits of rote repetition, tunnel vision and unimaginative cognition can prove difficult to escape in familiar situations, they might prove difficult to escape.¹³¹ Rorty also suggested that social streaming can produce akrasia. People are prone to obeying a leader and following the crowd.¹³² People conform to the social roles in which they find themselves, and can easily lose themselves in the expectations of others.¹³³ Many patterns of akratic failure can be best described as subspecies of go-with-the-flow akrasia.

2.3.11 An Aside: Do All Akratic Phenomena Have the Same Cause?

Myles Burnyeat claimed that a some people fail to do what they know would be best because something left over from the way their character was in the past can continue to affect them in the present. The thought is that we can explain an akratic person's "present conflict in terms of stages in the development of his character which he has not yet completely left behind."¹³⁴

Aristotelian character development is not instantaneous; a person cannot one day decide to be virtuous. Even someone who is sincerely trying to improve and who is benefiting from the teaching and example of virtuous people will only have knowledge of the fine and the good. Aristotle tells us that "those who have learned a subject for the first time connect together the propositions in an orderly way, but do not yet know them; for the propositions need to become second nature to them, and that takes time."¹³⁵ On Burnyeat's account, becoming virtuous is like developing a taste for fine wine; at first the learner is told that white wine goes with chicken, but

only through repeated experience does she become capable of tasting for herself what makes white a better match than red. It is one thing to be told that something contributes to eudaimonia, quite another to become capable of experiencing the pleasure proper to virtuous activity in the way that a virtuous person would.¹³⁶ Burnyeat thinks that Aristotelian moral development moves the student from a state of immaturity, where a person has the wrong desires and no fixed conception of the good (see section 1.3), to akrasia, where they have a correct conception of the good but still have some of the wrong desires, to virtue, where their desires have come into accord with a correct conception of the good.

Burnyeat did not intend to identify and give an account of one specific akratic phenomenon; his account is an attempt to explain akrasia in general. If he is correct, we could say that weakness and impulsivity are two different patterns of thought, feeling and behaviour that ultimately have the same cause, incomplete training in a virtue. Despite the success of this theory at accounting for several akratic phenomena, not all forms of akrasia can be explained in this way. In particular, Burnyeat's account is not optimal for talking about why someone might when faced with a choice choose the lesser good.

2.3.12 Unbalanced Akrasia: Attraction to the Lesser Good

Donald Davidson tried to offer a non-Aristotelian account of why someone might act akratically. On his view, saying that one thing is better than another is always a matter of making a prima facie judgment relative to some set of considerations. Walking the dog is better as exercise than sitting at home; if getting exercise were the only thing we took into consideration, walking the dog would be what the dog owner should do. However, other

considerations are also relevant, such as getting rest, and being kind to the dog. Let's say that after taking all things into consideration, looking at the matter from the perspective given by reflection, the owner would conclude that the thing to do is to walk the dog. However, if he is focussed on his desire for rest he would stay home, because staying home is better from that perspective. Thus the akratic person has a reason for staying home, even if it is irrational of him to disregard his better reasons for walking the dog.¹³⁷ This shows that the akratic person has a reason for what she does, but, as Sergio Tenenbaum objects, it does not explain "why the agent chose this particular action as opposed to any other that can be rationalized by her beliefs and desire since the action is not determined by the agent's overall assessment of the reasons."¹³⁸ Further, Davidson's account cannot explain why a person might ignore or overlook her all-things-considered judgments at some times and not others. From a utility maximizing perspective, it is difficult to see what might motivate someone to be akratic in Davidson's sense.

Dropping back into an Aristotelian framework can make Davidson's approach more plausible. In the *De Anima*, Aristotle says that a rational animal "pursues the greater good," where goodness is measured "by a single standard." This single standard gives the rational animal "the power to arbitrate between diverse appearances of what is good and integrate the findings into a unitary practical conception."¹³⁹ However, David Wiggins argued that the fact that an Aristotelian rational agent can identify the greater good does not imply that all goods are fungible.¹⁴⁰ This is implied by Aristotle's account of pleasure, for each virtuous activity has its own proper pleasure which cannot be experienced without the exercise of that virtue.¹⁴¹ For example, it might be the case that a person is in a position where she could only fund the extravagant wedding she had planned for her son if she were to cut back on her charitable giving.

Perhaps it would be best on the whole to focus on the wedding, this being a unique opportunity to exercise munificence, but making that decision will not silence her desire to be generous. There is room for “regret about that which is to be deemed the lesser good.”¹⁴² As Davidson had hoped to say, it is possible for an akrates to choose the lesser good “for a reason that is a real reason, for all that it is a bad reason.”¹⁴³

Wiggins’ account of choosing the lesser good brings to light a new pattern of failure. Consider a person who is very generous but only tenuously munificent. She might know in an abstract way that prioritizing her son’s wedding is the best course of action, but if she is capable of experiencing the pleasure proper to munificence only in an attenuated way then she might be drawn to focus on charitable giving instead. To give this mode of failure a name, let us say that she is unbalanced akratic. Someone who is more virtuous in one respect than she is in another might find more pleasure in the lesser good than in the greater good, and so fail to do what careful deliberation would tell her is right.

2.3.13 Sticktuitiveness, Indecisiveness and Inverse Akrasia

Elsewhere, Wiggins argues that sticktuitiveness is what makes a person continent. His view is that when making a decision, a person should try to determine which course of action is best all things considered. Even if it is impossible to tell which course of action is best, the person should make a decision, by flipping a coin perhaps. Once that decision has been made, the person should stick with it and act in accordance with it. Wiggins is not advocating obstinacy; if new facts arise, the continent person will change her mind. However, in general, he thinks that a person who fails to “stick by the decision when the moment comes” is suffering

from “weakness of the will.”¹⁴⁴ The sticktuitive person resists the pull of the emotions she feels in the moment and sticks with her original judgment.

Aristotle denies that sticktuitiveness is the same thing as continence. The continent person knows which of her appetites are not to be trusted and resists their call,¹⁴⁵ but the sticktuitive person simply acts as though all of her appetites were corrupt, suppressing them all. In computer science terminology, sticktuitiveness is a kludge; it is a crude technique for approximating the life of a continent person.

For that matter, Aristotle denies that sticktuitiveness is always a good thing, for he thinks that people who change their minds because of how they feel at the moment of decision are sometimes right to do so.¹⁴⁶ He gives the example of Neoptolemus as depicted in Sophocles' play *Philoctetes*. Philocetes is a man with a wound that will not heal. He was marooned on a desert island by the Greeks because they found his crying out in pain disturbing. Odysseus wants Philocetes' legendary bow and arrows, and persuades young Neoptolemus to deceive Philocetes and steal them. However, after having done so Neoptolemus repents and returns the bow to Philocetes. He does not do this because he has new information about Philocetes' situation, for he knew the facts beforehand. He repents because of how he feels in the moment. Aristotle says that he does this because he is pained at having lied and feels pleasure in telling the truth.¹⁴⁷ Neoptolemus has the feelings that a virtuous person would have in that situation, and having those feelings enables him to correct his initial error in judgment. Neoptolemus would have been a worse person if he had steadfastly held to his initial decision.¹⁴⁸

To give a more extreme example, Huckleberry Finn believed that helping his friend Jim escape from the slave catchers would constitute aiding and abetting an act of theft, for Jim is legally the property of his master. However, he failed to turn Jim in when he has the opportunity to do so. Unlike Neoptolemus, Huck did not do this because he changed his mind. Huck continued to believe that he deserves to go to hell for helping Jim and reproached himself for lacking the courage to follow through on his convictions.¹⁴⁹ Nomy Arpaly thought that Huck held back because of an inarticulate awareness of Jim's humanity, which renders Huck "emotionally incapable of turning Jim in."¹⁵⁰ Arpaly called Huck inverse akratic.¹⁵¹ Huck is the mirror image of an akrates; his moral judgment is disturbingly warped, but in other respects he is a person of good character, and these other aspects of his character prevent him from acting on his incorrect beliefs about what he ought to do. Arpaly's account of what is going on in Huck's case is that people can "act for moral reasons without knowing that we act for moral reasons."¹⁵² This is a theme which requires considerable unpacking, and I will return to it in chapter seven. For the moment, it is enough to say that inverse akrasia has been proposed as yet another mediocre state of character: the inverse akrates is "imperfect, and one who would be better if some of his moral convictions were changed, but as he is, he is better than many, including his counterpart who is liberal in conviction but not in deed."¹⁵³

Aristotle and Arpaly are pointing out that both sticktuitiveness and indecisiveness are compatible with the decision making process of a vicious person. For this reason neither can be correctly called a species of akrasia. Nomy Arpaly held that "to the extent that there is a property called 'self control' that is independent of the content of the desires to be controlled, it is hard to see it as anything but morally neutral."¹⁵⁴ If a person tends to make the right

judgments but has the wrong sentiments, a blind, robotic determination to stick with prior decisions unless new information arises might on average improve her behaviour. However, a person who is disposed to make wrong moral judgments would behave better on average if she were indecisive, and would behave worse if she were sticktuitive. Sticktuitiveness and indecisiveness are mediocre states of character, though they are not species of akrasia.

2.3.14 “Genuine Akrasia”

Most varieties of akrasia involve diverting the akratic person away from her better judgment. There may exist a more extreme form of akrasia where nothing distracts the akrates from the prudential irrationality of what she is doing. There have been a number of attempts to explain how this might happen. Devin Henry used the term “genuine akrasia” to describe “cases of acting against full knowledge.”¹⁵⁵ Alfred Mele was interested in “strict akratic action,” where “the decisive better judgment acted against is *consciously* held at the time of action.”¹⁵⁶ Sergio Tenenbaum tried to examine cases of “clear-eyed akrasia,” where the agent denies that what she believes to be the best option from a reflective point of view is in fact the best thing for her to do.¹⁵⁷ Here I will focus on Henry’s account of genuine akrasia, since he claimed to be able to find an account of this third species of akrasia in Aristotle’s own work.

Henry claimed that “the genuinely akratic man *thinks* like the self-controlled person, but then for some reason *acts* like the self-indulgent person,”¹⁵⁸ and hoped to find an explanation of how this could be possible in Aristotle’s account of pleasure. Virtuous people take pleasure in acting virtuously, and people who have the virtue of temperance take pleasure in acting temperately. According to the *Eudemian Ethics*, whatever pain the temperate person feels in

resisting temptation is counterbalanced by the “pleasure of hope”¹⁵⁹ that healthy living will have its reward. On Henry’s reconstruction of Aristotle, the genuinely akratic person feels pain when he thinks of the future consequences of giving in to temptation, and yet gives in anyway “because he does not experience an emotional pull towards the activity of temperance.”¹⁶⁰ Akratic people of this kind fail because they are unattracted to the pleasures of virtue. If this was in fact Aristotle’s view, Aristotle’s account of akrasia was much richer than has generally been thought.

2.3.15 Diagnosing Akrasia

When akratic people fall short of what a virtuous person would do, they fail in predictable ways. Weak people fail to live as a virtuous person would, only when that temptation is more intense than they can bear. Impulsive people are erratic but only when rushed, but otherwise live virtuously. People who go with the flow go wrong only when virtue demands something other than business as usual. Unattracted people give in easily to mild temptation, for despite the fact that they know what they should do on an intellectual level they do not feel motivated to do it. Each species of akrasia has its own signature pattern of failure; an outside observer should be able to diagnose what is wrong with their character by watching how their character expresses itself in action.

2.4 Diagnosing New Ways of Falling Short of Virtue

2.4.1 A Procedure for Identifying a Previously Unnamed State of Character

We turn to virtue ethics so that we can normatively assess a person’s life as a whole. Talking about a person’s character is supposed to help us describe what a person is like, explain

why she does what she does, predict what she will do in the future, say something about her moral status as a person, and give us the understanding we need to offer her advice. To make use of virtue ethics, we need to be able to diagnose what state of character a person has.

Aristotle provided us with a rich and nuanced list of states of character, further enriched by and the neo-Aristotelian tradition. Subtle distinctions between states of character make diagnosis more difficult but also more rewarding.

Each of the patterns of thought, emotion and action identified in 2.3 has a syndrome associated with it, a set of signs and symptoms that makes it possible for us to diagnose someone as having that state of character. For example, we can conclude that a person is impulsive-akratic when we see that she always acts and thinks as a virtuous person would except when she makes snap decisions. Her pattern of failure is consistent, and it is what marks her as being impulsive.

We now have enough information to discuss how the items on our list differ from one another in a structured way. Cases of akrasia differ from other cases of mediocrity in that the practical reasoning of akratics resembles that of virtuous people. Most cases of akrasia (weakness, impulsiveness, go-with-the-flow, unbalanced¹⁶¹) involve a lapse of attention from what the akrates knows to be best, though so-called genuine akrasia does not. Where a person is not disposed to correct practical reasoning, we must then ask whether her emotions match those of a virtuous person. If yes, she is inverse akratic; if not, she has only a behavioural disposition to sometimes do what a virtuous person would do. Some such dispositions allow for a flexible response to different circumstances, such as the pseudovirtue of a professional mercenary. Other

behavioural dispositions are inflexible, simply a matter of stimulus and response; these include inertial routines, berserker pseudovirtue, sticktuitiveness and indecisiveness. Staying within a neo-Aristotelian framework, we could add new items to our list by asking of an unusual case of mediocrity whether the fault lies with her practical reasoning, emotions or behavioural patterns.

Now suppose a person presents with a set of symptoms which do not match any of the syndromes we have identified. A new set of symptoms would call for a new diagnosis. Moreover, a sufficiently unusual syndrome might not fit the existing system of classification at all. In the next section I will argue that there is a state of character which causes people to sometimes fall short of what the virtuous person would do, but with a pattern of failure that is quite unlike anything we have seen so far.

2.4.2 Uncatalogued Ways of Falling Short of Virtue Seen in Some Studies on Situations

In the seminarians experiment, Darley and Batson report that subjects who were slightly late for an inconsequential meeting were more likely than others to leave injured strangers by the side of the road, and this looks somewhat like a case of impulsive akrasia. However, the behaviour displayed by most of the seminarians is strangely disproportionate to their situation. The cardinal cases of impulsive akrasia are cases where people ignore risks when the need is urgent and extreme, such as running into a burning building to rescue a child. One would think that even an impulsive person is unlikely to behave impulsively when the situation is clearly not urgent and when there is little at stake. The risk of being six minutes late for a meeting instead of five is a low-stakes low-urgency situation. On a neo-Aristotelian model, people who are

impulsive akratic act impulsively because they are overcome by emotion in the heat of the moment, and it is hard to believe that this is what caused the seminarians to behave so poorly.

Alternatively, we might try to describe the hasty seminarians as being sticktuitive. On this interpretation, they had decided to dash off to deliver their talk and stuck with that decision in spite of discovering a good reason to stop, the need of the seemingly injured person. However, many of the seminarians who did not stop reported not having noticed the person lying groaning by the side of the road. This subset of the seminarians was not sticking with their decision to prioritize moving quickly; their failure to stop was not a matter of prioritization but of ignorance of what would have been a reason to stop.

Now consider the dime in the phone booth study. The results there do not come close to fitting anything in the neo-Aristotelian catalogue because the effect is out of all proportion to the cause. We might try to see this as a case of go-with-the-flow akrasia, but we would not expect that something as insignificant as a dime would be enough to jar a person out of their routine. We can't explain what is happening here unless we identify the mechanism by which such a small change in situation could have such a large effect.

In Hartshorne and May's studies on schoolchildren it was found that using one method of cheating was not a good predictor of willingness to engage in other methods of cheating. That is a very strange result, because it is just a matter of choosing different means to the same end. That is not how any form of akrasia works. It might be the case that dishonest people prefer some methods of cheating over others out of inertia, saying that the students were in a

behavioural habit of using one style of cheating and overlook opportunities to cheat in different ways. However, that is a hypothesis that needs to be put to the test. When we see people behaving very differently in two seemingly similar situations we cannot assume that their feelings and practical reasoning are the same in both cases; if anything, we have reason to assume that they are not the same.

2.4.3 Three Possible Ways of Responding to These Anomalous Results

The goal in this section was to show that there is a set of psychological studies on the impact of seemingly insignificant features of situations causes problems for neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Subjects who are behaving badly in these experiments are not failing in ways that neo-Aristotelian moral psychology would have predicted. Their behaviour, feelings and practical reasoning of these subjects are being disproportionately affected by cues which do not provide good reasons for action and which seem too minor to provoke an emotional response.

Doris responds to these results by proposing that the whole field of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is fundamentally flawed. Many eudaimonists have answered Doris' challenge by trying to show that these anomalous results are irrelevant to virtue ethics to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics or otherwise easily explained away. This debate will be discussed at length in chapter two. The goal here in chapter two was to show that this debate to some extent presents us with a false dichotomy. It can be successfully argued that there are serious problems with Doris' argument, but even if we set Doris aside entirely eudaimonists are not off the hook for explaining the strangeness of this empirical data.

A third approach to this set of studies is to take this data as a reason to think that neo-Aristotelian moral psychology is in need of some revision. There are states of character on display here that have not previously been accounted for, but I will be arguing over the remainder of my thesis that the neo-Aristotelian system is flexible enough that it can be stretched to account for this data. What we have here is not a reason to abandon reading Aristotle but impetus to read him in a different way.

3 Can Behavioural Evidence Count Against Eudaimonism?

3.1 The Metaphysical Defence of Eudaimonism: Virtues Do Not Reduce to Behaviour

Among psychologists, the pro-situationist family of studies discussed in chapter two raises an empirical question about the extent to which human beings actually have traits. Personality psychologists claim to be able to determine what traits a person has and use that information to predict that person's future behaviour while their situationist critics within psychology deny that personality psychologists have sufficient evidence to support their claims. The debate within psychology between personality psychologists and situationists is important for my purposes in this thesis because philosophers such as John Doris both borrow their trait ontology from personality psychology and repurpose situationist arguments against personality psychology as arguments against eudaimonism.

Situationist philosophers such as Doris put the difficulties posed by the pro-situationist family of studies in their starkest possible form. In chapter two I argued that the standard eudaimonist toolkit is not equipped to deal with such studies. Situationist philosophers go much further, saying that the problems with eudaimonism are not confined to these cases. Rather, they take these studies to be evidence that there is something seriously wrong with the whole eudaimonist project. They argue that neo-Aristotelian moral psychology offers empirically implausible explanations for human behaviour and unreliable predictions.

Many eudaimonists try to deflect empirical criticism by arguing that the pro-situationist family of studies is irrelevant to their discussion of virtue. Eudaimonist virtues are not just a

matter of how people behave. Neo-Aristotelian virtues are dispositions, and these studies do not directly observe what dispositions their subjects have. Furthermore, these dispositions that constitute virtues include dispositions to feel appropriate emotions and to act for the right reasons, not just dispositions to behave in a certain way. It might seem that the neo-Aristotelian concept of a virtue and the concept of a trait used by psychologists have such different definitions that the former cannot be meaningfully criticized in terms of the latter.

This chapter introduces the situationist critique of virtue ethics. The emphasis is on trait ontology. The full panoply of eudaimonist replies against situationism will need to be left until the next chapter. The goal here is just to show that situationists cannot be written off on the grounds that they are speaking about the wrong sort of entities.

3.2 Trait Ontology in Personality Psychology

3.2.1 Personality Psychologists Use Thin Descriptive Concepts

Eudaimonists begin with the concept of a virtuous person and define all other characterological concepts in terms of how they relate to the life of that person. They introduce talk of dispositions to explain why virtuous people are steadfast in living well. They discuss situations in terms of the way a good person would see them. Talk of value-neutral dispositions is tertiary for them. It's true that Aristotle has a notion of a settled state of character, a *hexis*, and that both virtues and vices are settled states of character. However, thinking about virtues and vices only insofar as they are *hexeis* would mean abstracting away all the moral psychology and normative claims that make Aristotle's ethics interesting.^{162 163}

In contrast, personality psychologists want to begin discussing interpersonal differences using only thin descriptive concepts.¹⁶⁴ For example, they take an interest in the fact that people differ in the frequency with which they smile when saying hello; perhaps one person smiles 75% of the time when they greet someone while another smiles only 65% of the time. Observed smiling frequency implies no normative claims about whether smiling is good or whether it plays any role in a good human life, nor any claims about what causes a person to smile.

3.2.2 The Raw Data of Personality Psychology

Personality psychologists sometimes use direct observations of behaviour, but their most important source of data is standardized questionnaires. The NEO-PI-3 questionnaires developed by Paul Costa and Robert McCrae are widely used, and are currently the gold standard for personality assessment in personality psychology.¹⁶⁵ The self-administered version (Form S) asks subjects 240 questions, rating themselves on a scale from zero to four as to whether or not they agree with statements about themselves such as “I seldom feel nervous,” “I’m always in control of myself,” “I like loud music,” “I don’t worry about the homeless,” etc. One might well wonder what such seemingly unrelated questions have in common, and why these questions are being asked rather than others. It needs to be explained why they think listening to loud music is relevant to discussions of character.

The problem with beginning with thin descriptive concepts is that there is no *a priori* reason to think that some interpersonal differences are more important than others. To get a sense of the severity of the problem, consider the incredible variety of ordinary language adjectives used to describe interpersonal differences. Allport and Odbert found almost 18 000 such English-

language adjectives just by skimming through a dictionary.¹⁶⁶ To give a brief sample, their list includes the following items: friendly, frigid, frisky, frivolous, frolicsome, frownful, frugal, frustrable, etc. *ad infinitum*. They denied that we can easily whittle down the list by crossing out synonyms, for nearly-synonymous adjectives often convey subtle shades of meaning. Looking at our examples, frisky and frolicsome are nearly synonymous but they are not exactly interchangeable.¹⁶⁷ Obviously no survey could measure interpersonal differences along 18 000 axes. Personality psychology cannot get off the ground without a principled way of identifying which interpersonal differences are important enough to be worth studying.

3.2.3 Traits Are Explanations for Covariant Data

It would be absurd to try to offer different explanations for every fine-grained interpersonal difference, so personality psychologists look for correlations between interpersonal differences. For example, there is an observed correlation between reporting frequent cheerful feelings, maintaining an unusually large number of friendships and frequently engaging in friendship-maintaining behaviours such as organizing parties and writing emails.¹⁶⁸ A person who scores high in any of these respects likely scores high in the others as well; they are covariant. Trying to offer a separate account of each of the 18 000 respects in which people are said to differ would be a fool's errand, but if it is the case that many of these interpersonal differences are correlated with one another then we can set a much more manageable task for ourselves. A factor analysis can identify clusters of covariant interpersonal differences.¹⁶⁹ Studying a small number of such clusters is a much more manageable problem than studying an unorganised heap of 18 000 sorts of interpersonal differences.

We can explain observed correlations between interpersonal differences by hypothesizing that there is one disposition which explains all of the covariant data. This is the work that traits are supposed to do. Personality psychologists define a trait as a “generalized disposition” which explains a pattern of observed or in-principle observable interpersonal differences in “emotional, interpersonal, experiential, attitudinal, and motivational styles.”¹⁷⁰ For example, the trait extraversion is supposed to explain why cheerfulness and party-organizing so often go together; extraversion is a disposition which promotes both feeling cheerful and social-organizing behaviour.¹⁷¹ The point of saying that a person has a set of traits is to explain a very wide range of interpersonal differences in terms of a short list of dispositions.

A trait is something of a black box. For example, saying that a person is extroverted means saying that they are in some way (we-know-not-what) disposed to both feel cheerful and to act in ways that sustain friendships. It does not imply that we know why cheerfulness and social-organizing often go together. Often we do not know why two kinds of interpersonal differences covary, only that they covary. This is not a problem. It might be the case that there is some neurophysiological mechanism that is responsible for all of the covariant interpersonal differences seen between introverts and extroverts, but we do not need to know that there is such a mechanism to assert that a person is extroverted.¹⁷² By analogy, one does not need to know anything about Maxwell’s equations to be justified in asserting that lodestones attract iron. Observed covariance is enough to infer that there must be some underlying system of dispositions explaining why a set of interpersonal differences would covary without speculating as to what the connections within that system might be.¹⁷³

3.2.4 Trait Ascriptions Entail Predictive Validity

John Doris has an argument that some traits are not explanations of interpersonal differences. He asks us to imagine a situation which provides incentives to lie. To our surprise everyone placed in that situation behaves honestly. He suggests that this might be “evidence for attributing a robust trait of honesty to each member of the population” on the grounds that every member of the population evidently has dispositions that promote honest behaviour in those circumstances.¹⁷⁴ The question is whether we should say that any dispositions which everyone has should be called traits.

We should not call universally attributable dispositions traits because claims about such traits would be unfalsifiable. Suppose it was the case that all people everywhere were disposed to smile when looking at puppies and that all people were disposed to smile when looking at kittens. Based on observed behaviour alone, there would be no way to judge between the hypothesis that these are two separate traits and the hypothesis that a single smiling-at-cute-animals trait is responsible. It is only when there is some degree of covariance to be explained that trait ascriptions become meaningful as hypotheses.

Trait ascriptions are falsifiable only if there are some covariant interpersonal differences to be explained. Consider the following example. If 90% of people smile at puppies and 90% at kittens we can learn something about what dispositions are involved by looking at the degree to which the two groups overlap, the degree to which the two groups covary. If only 81% of the population smiles at both then we have strong evidence that two mutually independent traits are involved, for there is no correlation between puppy-smiling and kitten-smiling. Call this case 1.

The odds that a puppy-smiler is also a kitten-smiler are exactly the same as the odds that any member of the population is a kitten-smiler. We would certainly not be justified in speculating that a single smiling-at-animals trait explains both puppy-smiling and kitten-smiling, despite the fact that ascribing smiles-at-animals to a puppy-smiler would give an 81% reliable prediction that they are also a kitten-smiler. Now consider a different case, case 2. If 90% of subjects smile at both puppies and kittens then everyone who is a puppy-smiler is also a kitten-smiler. In the 90% case it is clear that a single smiling-at-cute-animals trait explains both behaviours.¹⁷⁵ When there are observed covariant interpersonal differences the question of how many traits a person can sometimes be answered empirically.

What I am saying here actually offers some support to Doris' main claims. Assuming that a behaviour pattern shared by all humans is caused by one disposition is overgeneralization at its most extreme. I'm arguing for something like a bottom up approach; unless there are observed correlations between lower level traits we do not have grounds to assert that those low level traits can be subsumed under one high level trait. Predictive power alone is not sufficient for trait attribution.

However, predictive power is entailed by defining traits as hypothetical dispositions which explain interpersonal covariance. Doris is right to say that "if a person possesses a trait, that person will engage in trait-relevant behaviours in trait-relevant eliciting conditions with markedly above chance probability p."¹⁷⁶ This should be seen as an analytic truth about traits; it follows from the definition of traits as being probabilistic hypotheses about dispositions. Some but not all traits consist of dispositions that promote behaviours.¹⁷⁷ If it is found that a person

does not display the behaviours that are supposed to be promoted by a trait then we infer that the person does not have that trait.

3.2.5 Standards for Trait Ascription

Any personality psychologist will need to be sure that she has drawn *correct* inferences about her data. As pioneering psychologists Gordon Allport and Henry Odbert said,

whatever method [a personality psychologist] employs...he is forced to ask himself whether the terms he is using in describing qualities and attributes of personality do actually denote psychic dispositions, or whether these terms are mischievous verbal snares tempting him into the pitfalls of hypostatization.¹⁷⁸

This is not a matter of trait ontology. There is nothing ill formed about inventing a trait of “antisocial-extraversion” and defining it as a disposition which promotes both enjoying the company of other people and avoiding other people. However, as an empirical matter of fact enjoying the company of others is inversely correlated with self-isolating behaviour, making it very unlikely that there is a single psychological mechanism which promotes both the enjoying and the avoiding. The standards for determining whether or not it is justified to say that a person has a trait are explanation and prediction.

The test for whether a trait ascription is a good explanation of interpersonal differences is statistical. Suppose that a group of people is displaying a pattern of covariant interpersonal differences. We are justified in saying that interpersonal differences among members of this group are explained by the degree to which the members have trait X only if X is the name of one of the variables that would be revealed by a factor analysis of their differences.¹⁷⁹

Prediction is a further test of whether or not it is justified to say that a person has a trait. Traits are dispositions, and as such they support claims about how a person will think, feel and behave in the future. For example, because talkativeness is part of the pattern of individual differences that defines extraversion we are licensed to predict that a person we have identified as being very extraverted will frequently be talkative in the future. If in future we observe that they are frequently sullen and withdrawn we would have reason to doubt that we were correct to call them extraverted.¹⁸⁰ Future behaviour can confirm or disconfirm our current trait ascriptions.

Section 3.2.3 gave an account of what probability psychologists mean by the word trait. This section gave an account of the rules of evidence they use to decide the empirical question of whether or not a person has a trait. The next section discusses some of their conclusions regarding what trait ascriptions meet the standards of explanation and prediction.

3.2.6 The Five-Factor Model of Personality Traits

In the 21st century, situationists have paid special attention to the Five-Factor Model of character traits as a rival to their own views.¹⁸¹ This model, developed by Robert McCrae and Paul Costa, serves as a capstone to decades of convergent work by many different personality psychologists. It has come to be the orthodox account of trait taxonomy in contemporary personality psychology.¹⁸² Costa and McCrae claim that it is an empirical matter of fact that five independent variables, five mutually independent “dimensions of individual differences,”¹⁸³ are enough to explain many interpersonal differences observed in the present and to predict future differences.

Part of the appeal of the Five-Factor model is that its factor-analysis allows us to compare data collected by researchers who were not looking for the same list of traits. Historically, researchers could not directly compare their data against each other's work because each had their own idiosyncratic list of postulated character traits. For example, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) measures only four traits (extraversion, intuition, feeling and judgment) while Douglas Jackson's Personality Research Form (PRF) purports to measure twenty different traits.¹⁸⁴ Joint factor analysis makes it possible to make comparisons between systems. For example, it reveals that the interpersonal differences explained by the PRF's twenty factors can be explained more parsimoniously by McCrae and Costa's big-five.¹⁸⁵ Joint factor analysis also provides evidence that the MBTI is not comprehensive, on the grounds that some interpersonal differences which cannot be explained using only the MBTI's traits can be explained by a system of five traits. Joint factor analysis makes it possible to compare data gathered through different data collection procedures, and what we see when we do that is that the results converge on the Five-Factor Model. This high degree of convergent validity strongly suggests that the correlations McCrae and Costa have identified are not just an artefact of their own NEO-PI questionnaires.

Work on how people use adjectives in ordinary language also supports the Five-Factor Model. Louis Thurstone asked a group of experimental subjects to describe a friend by picking adjectives from a list of 60 adjectives, examining how often pairs of adjectives were used to describe the same person. For example, few people would be described as being both friendly and frownful, therefore these traits are negatively correlated with one another. Performing a

factor analysis, Thurstone found that five independent variables were sufficient to account for most of the variance.¹⁸⁶

The Five-Factor Model is a vertically categorized trait taxonomy.¹⁸⁷ Costa and McCrae claim that there are five top-level traits.¹⁸⁸ The names they have given these traits are extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism and openness to experience. They claim that all other trait language reduces to these five traits. For example, agreeableness is said to be responsible for a pattern of covariant interpersonal differences which includes frequent empathetic feelings, frequent acts of kindness and frequent acts of generosity.

In ordinary language we say that generosity is a trait but Costa and McCrae argue that the degree to which a person is agreeable adequately explains and predicts interpersonal variance in generous behaviour. That does not mean we were mistaken about calling generosity a trait, not if ascribing generosity to someone adequately explains and predicts frequent generous behaviour. However, for reasons of parsimony we should no longer infer that there is a disposition which specifically promotes generous behaviour, not if agreeableness adequately explains generous behaviour and a wide range of other interpersonal differences as well. To put it another way, generosity can be subsumed under agreeableness.¹⁸⁹ Their claim is that it has been empirically demonstrated that five factors are sufficient to subsume all other empirically defensible trait discourse – sufficient to explain the whole “structure of personality.”¹⁹⁰

3.2.7 Trait Consistency and Stability

We can explain interpersonal differences in terms of traits only if those interpersonal differences are *consistent* from one situation to the next. It is expected that agreeable people will prove to be more likely than other people to display behaviour associated with agreeableness in every situation in which they find themselves. To be sure, different situations call for different behaviour; agreeableness might manifest itself as kindness in one situation and as generosity in another. The expectation is that agreeable people will display some subset of the pattern of covariant interpersonal differences associated with agreeableness more often and to a greater degree than people who do not have the trait. To the extent that this is not true, some variable other than the top-level trait of agreeableness would have to be part of the best explanation of their behaviour. In brief, if interpersonal differences are not consistent from one situation to the next then we cannot explain those differences in terms of traits.

We can reliably predict what interpersonal differences we will see in the future by means of traits only if traits are *stable* over time. Suppose that it was often the case that people who have the trait of agreeableness often change and become disagreeable on a week-to-week basis. If that was true, knowing that a person is agreeable now would not licence any predictions about how she will think, feel and behave a week from now. If traits changed frequently they would not licence any predictions at all.

So then, personality traits provide plausible explanations and reliable predictions of interpersonal differences only if traits are at least semi-permanent features of a person's life.

That follows from the definition of what a trait is and from the standards for trait ascription described above.

3.2.8 Trait Ontology versus Trait Epistemology

So, as defined by personality psychologists a trait is a hypothetical semi-permanent general disposition offered as an explanation for covariance among observed interpersonal differences. A trait is a hypothesis about why people are different from one another and about how they will differ in the future. Here we need to draw a distinction between a well-formed hypothesis and a justified hypothesis. Some well-formed hypotheses offered as explanations of interpersonal differences are implausible explanations. Whether or not a particular trait has been defined in a well-formed way as an explanation of interpersonal differences is an *a priori* question; whether the hypothesis that some but not all people have that particular trait is a *good* explanation of interpersonal differences is an *a posteriori* question.

To reiterate what was said in 2.2.5, nothing prevents us from forming the hypothesis that there is a disposition which promotes both talkativeness and shyness. That would be a hypothesis that there is a single disposition which some people have which explains why those people are both talkative and shy. “Talkative-shyness” is a well-formed trait.

However, hypothesizing that some people have the trait of talkative-shyness is a very poor explanation of interpersonal differences. As an empirical matter of fact, talkativeness and shyness are inversely correlated; talkativeness is correlated with assertiveness. This makes the hypothesis that some people have a trait of talkative-shyness a very poor explanation of the

pattern of interpersonal differences we see in the population as a whole. Talkative-shyness is a well-formed trait, but hypothesizing that talkativeness and assertiveness are both explained by the degree to which a person has the trait of talkative-shyness is a poor explanation of observed interpersonal differences.

On an individual level, it is true that there are some individuals who frequently avoid conversations yet frequently talk more than others when they are in a conversation. However, based on the fact that these two dispositions are relatively rarely found together we have at least *prima facie* reason to doubt that there is a single higher-level disposition responsible for a person's having these two dispositions. We have an alternate hypothesis available. We could explain a person's talkativeness in terms of the top-level trait agreeableness and his shyness in terms of the top-level trait neuroticism. We would need to know more about this individual to judge whether that is a good explanation, but if ascribing neuroticism and agreeableness to this person also explains a wide range of other ways in which this person differs from others then talkative-shyness would be unparsimonious.

We're now in a position to see where the battle lines are drawn between personality psychologists and their situationist critics. Both sides should agree that traits are hypothetical dispositions offered as explanations for covariant interpersonal differences. To the extent that Doris defines traits only in terms of predictions he would do well to change his view. Doing so would not undermine the rest of his argument. Both sides agree that the standards by which we can be justified in ascribing a trait to someone are explanation and prediction. What personality psychologists and situationists disagree about it is whether the data supports the claim that any

trait like extraversion can explain very much of the variance seen in the ways people behave. Also in dispute is whether a person's future behaviour can be accurately predicted by ascribing traits to that person.

Situationists do not deny that the big-five personality traits have been defined in a well-formed way. They have no reason to object to defining traits as semi-permanent general dispositions offered as explanations for covariance among observed interpersonal differences. Their claim is that they are not *good* explanations of interpersonal differences.

3.3 The Situationist Critique of Personality Psychology

3.3.1 Evidence for Situationism

Some situationist psychologists such as Walter Mischel have argued that there are *no* traits which offer good explanations and reliable predictions of interpersonal differences.¹⁹¹ Their primary body of evidence is the family of pro-situationist studies described in chapter two. They argue that studies such as Hartshorne and May's honesty study (described in section 2.1.6) are evidence that people do not have consistent traits. When the way subjects behave in one situation is only very weakly correlated with the way they behave in another situation it is hard to see how one global set of traits could explain all of their behaviour.¹⁹²

For the most part, situationists do not argue that they have evidence that human beings have no traits. Rather, situationists take the idea that there are no traits to be a null hypothesis. They put the burden of proof on anyone who claims that there are personality traits, demanding statistical evidence that ascribing traits does indeed provide reliable predictions of behaviour. As

we will see in the next section, situationists are sceptical of the evidence personality psychologists cite.

3.3.2 Do Questionnaires Provide Evidence for Personality Traits?

Situationists argue that personality psychologists are making a methodological mistake in relying on data from sources such as personality questionnaires. Self-reported data is prone to self-deception or confabulation, and to some extent this can be a problem for peer-reported data as well.¹⁹³ In some studies such as Hartshorne and May's the correlations between traits as identified by questionnaires and observed behaviour were quite weak. Situationists insist that if questionnaire-based data and data based on behavioural observations come into conflict we should give priority to observations of behaviour.

McCrae and Costa recognize that behavioural data has its advantages.¹⁹⁴ Factor-analysis only tells us that two items are correlated in such a way that that some disposition must be the cause of both, but behavioural experiments can provide evidence of functional relationships between stimuli and responses.

Despite this, McCrae and Costa suggest four reasons for relying on other sources of data. First, observed behaviour is an imperfect guide to the thoughts and feelings of the experimental subject; a person may feel cheerful without outwardly smiling, or be thinking of others without taking overt action at that moment.¹⁹⁵ Second, behavioural studies do not escape the problem of confabulation, for people often "put on a front...play a role...seem instead of being. A simple question asked in a candid way may give a far truer picture of real dispositions."¹⁹⁶ Third,

drawing reliable inferences about a subject's traits on the basis of her behaviour requires observing the same subject repeatedly over time, and longitudinal studies of this kind are expensive to the point that they are rarely conducted.¹⁹⁷ Fourth, McCrae and Costa claim that they do not need much behavioural data because the results of what behavioural studies have been conducted correspond well to the data drawn from self-reports and observer ratings.¹⁹⁸ Personality psychologists are justified in using sources of data other than laboratory observations of behaviour, although as we shall see in the next section there is some behavioural data which should give them pause.

3.3.3 The Empirical Argument for Personality Psychology Against Situationism

Doris claims to have a knock-down case against personality psychology in that he has evidence that claims about character traits are often poor predictors of how a person will behave in a particular situation. Personality psychologists are well aware of the strong effect that situations can have on a person's behaviour. McCrae and Costa acknowledge that the personality traits they have identified are not strong predictors of what a person will do on any given occasion. For example, they say that "the correlation between warmth and smiling is only 0.41, meaning that only about 16% of smiling behaviour can be predicted from knowing the subject's [warmth] trait level."¹⁹⁹ In other words, knowing that someone has a warm personality is not sufficient to predict with confidence that she will smile when she sees me tomorrow.

McCrae and Costa defend themselves by saying that they can make accurate, precise predictions about the frequency with which a person will perform a kind of behaviour. They say that "if we average behaviours across many instances, we can predict the average with greater

and greater precision.”²⁰⁰ A person’s situation may be a better predictor of what she will do if observed once, but over the long run we can be confident that a warm person will smile more frequently than a person who lacks the trait of warmth.²⁰¹

McCrae and Costa claim that it is possible to make reliable predictions about what a person’s behaviour will be like many years in the future, and they have an extensive body of data to back this up.²⁰² McCrae and Costa take it that this power of trait ascriptions to predict long term behaviour patterns constitutes predictive validity. William Fleeson goes further than this, providing evidence that traits can reliably predict average behaviour on a week-to-week basis. While an individual’s behaviour on any given occasion cannot be reliably predicted based on traits, traits strongly predict interpersonal differences in average behaviour.²⁰³ Fleeson states that “both sides of the person-situation debate are correct...momentary behaviours can indeed vary wildly...[but] when trying to predict how an individual acts on average, researchers should use traits.”²⁰⁴ Walter Mischel, the primary defender of situationism in the psychological literature, has now acknowledged that interpersonal differences in average behaviour are real.²⁰⁵ Talk of traits is empirically justifiable because traits are good predictors of average behaviour.²⁰⁶

3.3.4 Status of the Situationist Critique of Personality Psychology

So, there is evidence that trait ascriptions are reliable predictors of the frequency with which a person will display behaviour associated with that trait. It is at least sometimes true that traits can provide good explanations of interpersonal differences and reliable predictions of future interpersonal differences. This includes the big-five traits at the top of Costa and McCrae’s trait taxonomy. So, contrary to the most extreme way of framing situationism, we do

not need to abandon talking about character traits. Personality psychology can survive the situationist critique.

However, it remains surprising that traits turn out to be such poor predictors of behaviour in one-shot experiments. The family of studies described in chapter one is evidence that traits explain less of the variance in interpersonal behaviour than we might have expected. For a personality psychologist those conclusions are cause for some degree of modesty. For a eudaimonist, those conclusions should be deeply disturbing.

3.4 The Situationist Critique of Eudaimonism

3.4.1 Stringent Consistency, Stability and Integration Requirements for Eudaimonists

Situationism evolved into an argument against virtue ethics through the realization that situationism was even more dangerous to eudaimonist moral psychology than it was to personality psychology. Personality psychologists say that someone has a trait if she is more likely to behave in a manner consistent with that trait than a statistically average person. Eudaimonists demand more than high odds of behaving a certain way; they think there is no reason why a person who deliberates correctly and is correctly motivated should *ever* fall short of doing what virtue demands.²⁰⁷ At first glance, it might seem that a behavioural test for whether or not someone has a virtue would need to be much more stringent than a test to determine whether someone has a trait. The idea that virtues would produce experimentally detectable patterns of behaviour is heavily disputed, a debate that will be discussed in the next chapter, but for the moment, for the sake of argument, let us allow that this is so.

John Doris claimed that if a person had a eudaimonist virtue of character then that virtue would manifest itself in a specific pattern of behaviour, a claim that breaks down into a three part test. First, there is a strict stability requirement. If nothing is relevantly different between a virtuous person's circumstances now and her circumstances on some occasion in the past, then we can expect a virtuous person to act the same way now as she did in the past.²⁰⁸ Second, a virtuous person's behaviour should be highly consistent across different situations. For example, we expect a courageous person to display courage whether she is at home or at the office, and whether the threat to her is physical injury or mere embarrassment.²⁰⁹ Doris' third test is evaluative integration. When we see that a person has one virtue of character, we have some reason to assume that they have other related virtues as well.²¹⁰ When we see someone display generosity we have some reason to assume that they are also kind, and if it we later discover that she is not a kind person we might doubt that we were correct in thinking that she is really generous.²¹¹ Due to those three tests, saying that someone has a virtue would seem to imply some very exacting predictions about that person's future behaviour.

3.4.2 The Argument That Virtues are Bad Explanations for Human Behaviour

Situationists claim that eudaimonist moral psychology implies predictions about human behaviour, and that they have empirical evidence that falsifies these predictions. Their evidence is the family of studies described in chapter two, studies where "seemingly insubstantial situational factors have extraordinary effects on behaviour."²¹² These seem to be cases where eudaimonist moral psychology produces false predictions about what people will do from some situation to the next, which situationists think gives us reason to doubt that the eudaimonist story about dispositions is a good explanation of why people live the way they do.

The foundation of this attack is statistical. Situationists argue that situational factors are better predictors of future behaviour than anything we might say about the dispositions that a virtuous person has. Consider Darley and Batson's study on haste. Intersituational differences explain most of the variance in observed behaviour; subjects were far less likely to stop and help a stranger if they were told they were a few minutes late. Interpersonal differences explain only a very small percentage of the variance in behaviour. A record of a subject's past behaviour across her life as a whole would seem to be less useful as a predictor than simply knowing that she's in a rush, since the correlation between *any* person's being rushed and *any* person's being oblivious to the needs of others has been shown to be quite strong.²¹³

Personality psychologists can roll with this punch by looking at behaviour over a person's whole life probabilistically, something eudaimonists cannot do. Personality psychologists can allow that there are some cases where interpersonal differences in traits do not significantly affect behaviour so long as they can plausibly claim that there are many other cases in which interpersonal differences are good predictors; traits can be reliable predictors overall even if there are some cases in which they fail completely. All they need to show is that ascribed traits are correlated with the whole-life frequency of behaviours. They do not need to speculate about why these correlations are strong in some cases but not others so long as the correlations are fairly strong on average. So, because personality trait ascriptions are agnostic about the underlying causes that produce the observed covariant interpersonal differences, occasional cases where those differences are not covariant do not necessarily disprove that a person has a personality trait.

Unlike personality traits, virtues are most certainly not black boxes in which behaviour is caused by some unknown system of dispositions. As seen in 2.3, eudaimonists make elaborate claims about the specific dispositions that constitute virtue. For example, it is supposed to be true that people with the virtue of generosity are disposed to give the right amount at the right time in the right way and for the right reason. That is an extremely high standard for intersituational consistency. The claim being made is that they have one top-level disposition which explains why they give appropriately no matter what situation they are in. Situations where interpersonal differences are not reliable predictors disconfirm this hypothesis that virtuous people have a global, always-on disposition to give appropriately. If there are *any* situations where global dispositions are implausible explanations for a person's behaviour then we have reason to doubt that we are ever justified in explaining that person's behaviour by attributing a single, global disposition of generosity to them. Situationists interpret specific cases where eudaimonist explanations of behaviour in terms of global traits are implausible as evidence that eudaimonist theorizing about global dispositions needs to be abandoned entirely.

3.4.3 Extreme and Moderate Situationism

The most extreme version of situationism is the view that talking about character traits is useless for explaining and predicting the behaviour of human beings. Gilbert Harman has gone to this extreme, insisting that we “abandon all talk of virtue and character.”²¹⁴ He argues that “our ordinary convictions about differences in character traits can be explained away as due to a “fundamental attribution error.”²¹⁵ His thought is that we ought to have the same expectations of any two people who are in the exact same circumstances. This position is implausibly extreme;

the psychological evidence for situationism is not nearly strong enough to support the claim that people are interchangeable.

Doris' position is quite a bit more plausible than Harman's for reason that it is considerably less extreme. Doris does not claim to have decisive proof that traits are never a good explanation of behaviour. Rather, the claim is that "the Aristotelian conception of traits...is radically empirically undersupported."²¹⁶ There may be traits that ground reliable predictions, he thinks, but there is a lack of evidence for traits that are anything like Aristotelian virtues. He is not asserting that there are no traits. Rather, he is taking this as his null hypothesis and insisting that any claims that there are traits need to be supported with evidence that traits as so defined produce reliable behavioural predictions.

Doris is open to the possibility that people have traits which can explain and predict a person's behaviour, but that they can explain and predict behaviour only in a very narrow range of circumstances. To give an example, if we were to see someone being friendly at an office party we can conclude that she has the virtue of being "office party sociability."²¹⁷ If we've often seen her be friendly at office parties we can expect that she will likely be friendly at this year's upcoming Christmas party. We should not conclude that she is easy to get along with in general, or that she is friendly when speaking to just anyone.²¹⁸ Perhaps she is standoffish toward her neighbours, or quarrelsome with her in-laws – we have no way of knowing if we have only seen what she is like at the office. Doris thinks that we are far too quick to overgeneralize by saying that people have character traits such as being sociable-in-general,²¹⁹ and that we should instead speak only in terms of "local traits"²²⁰ such as office-party-sociability.

3.4.4 The Normative Payoff of Situationism

Doris believes that being too quick to attribute traits such as sociable-in-general to people does real harm in everyday life. Because overgeneralizing about traits gives us a false impression of what people are like, it gives us bad advice about how we ought to behave toward them. To give one example, our expectations of others can become self-fulfilling prophecies.²²¹ Concluding that someone is shy-in-general affects the way we interact with them, possibly creating social awkwardness in situations where they would not otherwise be shy. To give another example, failing to take account of situations can cause us to overlook moral luck.²²² He thought we should not blame people for doing wrong in horrible situations if it was merely bad luck which landed them in a situation where anyone would be likely to do wrong. We can criticize what they did in that situation, but we should be very careful before imagining that we who have not been tested by that situation are better people.

Doris' ultimate target is not virtue ethics as a theory in academic philosophy but the folk virtue theory which has influence in broader society. Doris has allies in this project. Malcolm Gladwell's bestselling book *The Tipping Point* did much to popularize situationism.²²³ Their target is the bias that people in our culture have toward overgeneralization.²²⁴ Studies show that this bias is quite real. A vast majority of experimental subjects who have no stake in the theoretical dispute about virtue ethics believe that others have very consistent character traits.²²⁵ These beliefs are recalcitrant; even immediately after they have seen cases of inconsistency in others, they continue to expect to see others display the same traits from one situation to the next.²²⁶ In society at large, people tend to see global traits where none exist.

Situationists believe that we can and should resist this tendency toward overgeneralized trait attribution, and that the way to resist it is to adopt practices which constrain us from acting on this bias.²²⁷ Deliberately placing ourselves in situations where our biases do not have room to operate is one way of doing this. For example, thinking of our students who speak enthusiastically in class as being good students in general might make us subconsciously unfair to quiet students who are excellent writers. To be sure, aptitudes for oral and written argument are correlated, but not as strongly as we as graders might be inclined to think. The practice of blind grading can produce fairer grades, for if we are not looking at the name of the student whose paper we are grading then nothing other than the quality of the work in front of us can influence our assessment of it.²²⁸

The point of the academic argument against virtue theory is not to directly change people's behaviour, but to discredit the idea that habitually thinking in terms of global traits is justified and reflective of what people are really like. Getting beyond our ordinary cognitive biases is the ultimate goal of situationism. The hope is that people could live better lives if we focused our efforts not on futile character building exercises but on engineering our society such that people find themselves in bad situations less frequently.

3.4.5 Two Strategies for Eudaimonists Responding to the Critique

One way for eudaimonists to reply to the situationist critique is to argue that situationists have misinterpreted their data. This strategy acknowledges that the peculiar family of studies discussed in chapter two are cases that need to be explained but that threat they pose can be defused. Defences that adopt this strategy of arguing that situationists have misinterpreted this

data will be discussed in chapter four. A different strategy for deflecting the situationist critique is to argue that the data provided by this family of studies is simply irrelevant to eudaimonism. I will be examining defences of this second kind for the rest of this chapter.

3.5 Can Pro-Situationist Empirical Evidence Threaten Eudaimonism?

3.5.1 Empirical Objections to Pro-Situationist Studies

One way to reply to the pro-situationist family of studies is to question whether each of those studies meets the standards of evidence we should expect from a psychological study. Isen and Levin's dime in the phone booth study has come under attack on these grounds, with critics pointing out that the study had an extremely small sample size, having only forty one subjects.²²⁹ However, the dime study is unusual in that respect, and most of the studies Doris cites are not nearly as open to this sort of critique; for example, Kristjan Kristjansson mentions Darley and Batson's Seminars study as one that has attracted no methodological objections.²³⁰ Furthermore, there are very many studies not mentioned by Doris that bear a family resemblance to the ones he does cite. If we were to reject the dime study entirely we could shift our attention to studies showing that a change in the weather or a pleasant smell can affect behaviour through unobtrusive mood manipulation.²³¹ The fact that unobtrusive primes which affect mood can have a disproportionate effect on behaviour does not rest on any one study, so criticizing the experimental methods of any one study will not remove the threat.

Eudaimonists might do better to launch an attack at a pervasive problem affecting most research in psychology. Joe Henrich has expressed concern about the fact that the subjects of most psychological studies are WEIRD people – Western, Educated, Rich and living in

Industrialized, Democratic societies. A survey of papers published in top psychology journals in the past decade found that 96% of these studies drew their subjects from countries with only 12% of the world's population.²³² We cannot assume that studies on Western university students will provide results that are true of human beings in general. That assumption has been proven false in some cases, even with regards to such low-level cognitive processes as visual processing. For example, the famous Mueller-Lyer Two-Arrow illusion which consistently fools American undergraduates has virtually no effect on members of the San culture of the Kalahari.²³³ The fact that Western seminarians tend to overlook injured strangers when in a rush does not warrant assuming that members of hunter-gatherer societies would do the same.

The WEIRD sampling problem should not cause us to abandon the data we do have. It is surprising that *any* population of humans is as vulnerable to the effects of situations as WEIRD people have proven to be. The body of evidence we have may not be sufficient to draw conclusions about what human beings in general are like, but the studies we have are sufficient to establish that peculiar situational factors have a disproportionate effect on some human beings. Given that some human beings have proven to be vulnerable, there cannot be universal features of human nature that immunize humans against the effect of situations.

3.5.2 Are Theory-Neutral Observations of Behaviour Possible?

Some virtue ethicists allow that the chapter one family of studies provides evidence about human behaviour patterns but deny that they are evidence against eudaimonism, on the grounds that eudaimonist virtues do not reduce to patterns of behaviour. Julia Annas and Rachana Kamtekar have both used versions of this argument as a way of deflecting the situationists'

empirical attack on eudaimonism. Annas pointed out that in the Aristotelian tradition being virtuous involves being disposed to act for the right reasons.²³⁴ Experimental data on a subject's behaviour "may fail to track what is important for virtue, namely the kind of reasons acted on."²³⁵ It will not be clear whether an action is virtuous if the experimenter does not know what type of intentional action was performed. "The observer and the agent may not be in agreement as to what counts, in this situation, as an action of the virtue in question... the observer does not understand what the agent is actually doing until, and to the extent that, the observer has access to the agent's reasons."²³⁶ Similarly, Kamtekar tells us that behaviour alone is not a good indicator of a person's character traits on the grounds that "we are thinking, goal-oriented creatures." Because that is what we are "it is possible to ask people not only what they consider to be behaviour relevant to or consistent with the trait under examination but also what they hope to accomplish by their action."²³⁷ In short, behavioural data does not reveal a subject's reasons for acting, meaning that the data cannot show what type of intentional action was performed, making it impossible to say whether the subject performed an intentional action that was in keeping with a character trait. If behavioural data is not a good guide to the traits a subject has, then Annas and Kamtekar are right to think that the situationists failed at proving that people do not have consistent character traits.

If we do not know someone's reasons for acting we may not even know what action they are performing. There is something philosophically naïve about the idea that it is possible to make theory-neutral observations of a person's behaviour.²³⁸ Anscombe pointed out that there are indefinitely many true commonsensical descriptions of a person's observable bodily movements. Anscombe gave the example of a man who could accurately be said to be moving

his arm up and down, operating a pump, filling a cistern, contaminating the water supply, poisoning Nazi generals, winning the war, and securing a good life for all people.²³⁹ All seven of those descriptions can be simultaneously true of the same set of observable muscle contractions. We might draw different conclusions about his traits depending on which description we use. His observable muscle contractions do not reveal whether he is a merciless killer or a self-sacrificing hero.

Doris replied to this objection by framing his position in negative terms. It might be impossible to determine what action a subject is performing on the basis of her behaviour, but Doris thinks it is possible to draw some conclusions about what that person is *not* doing. Take the example of one of Darley and Batson's seminarians walking past an apparently injured person. There are many ways of describing what the seminarian is doing, but we can say with certainty that the seminarian was not performing an action aimed at helping. As we will see in the next chapter there are eudaimonists who argue that there are circumstances in which a perfectly virtuous person would refuse to stop and help a person in need, but that is not what is at issue in this section. The point here is that Darley and Batson's study does provide evidence about the infrequency of helping behaviour when subjects are in a rush. It might be possible for eudaimonists to explain why being in a rush so drastically affects behaviour, but they do not have grounds to deny that this pattern of behaviour has been observed. If there are reasons justifying a lack of behaviour intended to be helpful then eudaimonists should explain what those reasons are. We will see how some eudaimonists have tried to do that in the next chapter.

3.6 Summary

Situationists argue that there is empirical evidence that eudaimonist moral psychology makes poor predictions about human behaviour. The next chapter will look more closely at whether this is true. Many eudaimonists claim to be able to adequately explain the results of the pro-situationist family of studies. The goal in this chapter was merely to show that eudaimonists need to offer an explanation of that data.

One result in this chapter that should be welcomed by eudaimonists is that it provides an empirical argument that situationists should be more moderate in their claims. Whatever conclusions we might reach about eudaimonism in the next chapter, we have evidence here that there are interpersonal differences which are best explained in terms of character. Personality psychologists have evidence that personality traits are reliable predictors of the frequency with which a person will display behaviour associated with that trait. That is enough to empirically falsify Harman's extreme situationism. The idea that all talk of character rests on a fundamental attribution error is mistaken.

4 Eudaimonist Responses to Situationism

4.1 Lines of Argument

The previous chapter made an argument that the pro-situationist family of studies discussed in chapter two might potentially pose a threat to eudaimonism. This chapter deals with eudaimonist responses to that data. These are arguments which take that data seriously but argue that it can be interpreted in a manner consistent with eudaimonism.

One strategy is to argue that situationists have not given a precise definition for the concept of a situation. Another is to argue that situationists are mistaken to think that there is any such thing as trait-relevant behaviour for virtues. A third is to argue that virtuous people are not detectable by statistical means, either because virtues are ideal states of character that no person can attain or because virtuous people are so rare as to be statistically undetectable. A fourth is to argue that virtuous people can consciously adapt to their situation and thereby resist the influence of situational factors. I will argue that some of these strategies partially succeed in deflecting the situationist critique. However, I will also argue that these defences do not fully eliminate the threat to eudaimonism posed by this strange body of empirical evidence.

4.2 Problems Defining the Term Situation

4.2.1 What is a Situation?

Doris tells us that his “interest is not in doing conceptual analysis but in the evidential standards governing trait attribution.”²⁴⁰ In other words, his focus is on the level of empirical evidence required to show that someone is behaving in a manner inconsistent with a trait

(however defined) that has been attributed to her, not in giving an *a priori* analysis of traits and dispositions. Doris believes his empirical argument against global traits is a threat to the notion of global traits on any plausible definition of terms like disposition.

However, there is one *a priori* question to which situationists ought to have given more attention, the question of how we ought to define the word situation. Despite its centrality to their whole project, situationists seem to be guilty of having smuggled in a key term without offering a clear definition for it. Situationists need to be able to specify what a situation is and why some changes in situation matter while others do not. This is not as easy as it might seem.

4.2.2 Subjective Construal of Situations

It is possible to define the word situation either objectively or subjectively. Coarsely, an objective definition of the word situation might be expressed in terms of states of matter in motion in immediate spatiotemporal proximity to the agent; a subjective definition of the word situation is a matter of the way the agent construes her immediate surroundings.²⁴¹ On Diana Fleming's account, behaviour is in large part a response to how a person interprets a situation.²⁴² What seems like behavioural inconsistency from the perspective of an outside observer might in fact be consistent from the perspective of the experimental subject.

Gopal Sreenivasan offers a variant of this objection as a way of questioning the experimental methodology of some of the situationists' favourite studies. For example, in the study described in section 2.2.6, Hartshorne and May claimed to have observed that the correlation between lying behaviours and cheating behaviours was quite weak. However, it

would be more precise to say that what was observed was a weak correlation between behaviours deemed to be cases of lying *by the experimenters* and behaviours deemed to be cheating *by the experimenters*. If some of the subjects had normative standards which differed from those of the experimenters then their actions might have been consistent by their own standards but inconsistent from the perspective of the experimenters. For example, Hartshorne and May consider snatching up loose change to be an instance of stealing but one of their subjects might believe herself to be fully justified in taking the loose change in accordance with a “finder’s keepers” rule.²⁴³ It may seem to experimenters that subjects are behaving inconsistently when in fact subjects are consistently applying their own moral standards.

It is clear that some pro-situationist studies cannot be explained in terms of construal. Many of the most interesting pro-situationist experiments purport to show that subjects are unaware of the variables which are secretly influencing their decisions. Someone whose mood has been subtly primed by feeling warm sunshine may behave differently, but not because their construal of the situation gives them a good reason to behave differently.

Sreenivasan tries to answer the question of why agents behave inconsistently by talking about the way they construe their situation, but this raises the question of why subjects construe their situations so arbitrarily. For example, if the seminarians in Darley and Batson’s study construe their situation to be one such that their haste justifies leaving an injured person unaided by the side of the road then they are making a moral mistake. Likewise, if the subjects in the Milgram experiments were construing their situation as one such that a duty to obey trumped any lack of consent or squeals of pain from the person they had reason to believe they were torturing,

then their construal of the situation was incorrect and disturbing. Having the ability to correctly identify what kind of situation one is in is either necessary for practical reasoning or part of what constitutes correct practical reasoning. Situationists are right to insist that consistent behaviour in subjectively construed situations is not sufficient to justify saying that a person behaves consistently.²⁴⁴

4.2.3 Sociological and Cultural Factors are Neither Situational nor Characterological

A second objection to the way situationists use the word situation is that they seem to be drawing a false dichotomy between situations and character traits when in fact there are a wide range of other factors which can also influence an experimental subject's behaviour. Julia Annas interprets the situationists as saying that "when we explain an action, we have two factors to work with: the character the agent brings to the situation, and the effect on the agent of the particular situation."²⁴⁵ She points out that the distinction between characterological and situational factors is not always crisp, particularly when we talk about culture, interpersonal relationships, professional status and social status.²⁴⁶

The role of culture on a person's behaviour does not seem to be exhausted either by talking about personality traits or by talking about situations, not straightforwardly at least. Cultural factors play too large a role in the frequency of helping behaviour for them to be safely ignored. One cross-cultural study of helping behaviour by Levine et. al. found that citizens of Rio de Janeiro helped in 93% of trials while citizens of Kuala Lumpur displayed a helping rate of 40%.²⁴⁷ Effects of having been raised in a certain culture can persist even after having moved elsewhere. This is a place where social psychologist Richard Nisbett ran into trouble. He called

the effect of having been raised in rural Irish culture a situational influence, but it is highly implausible to say that who one's neighbours were twenty years ago is part of one's current situation.²⁴⁸

Similarly, social status has an impact on helping behaviour. For example, being wealthy is correlated with reduced prosocial behaviour.²⁴⁹ Social status is neither a matter of immediate situation nor a matter of personality traits.

So then, situationists should not use the word situation as a broad, catchall term for every factor other than character traits which predicts and explains behaviour. Doing so inappropriately conflates the influence of sociocultural factors with influences due to immediate circumstances. However, situationists can admit that culture and social status sometimes affect behaviour while still denying that personality traits reliably predict behaviour.

Evidence about cultural influences does not explain away the evidence that situational factors sometimes have a disproportionate effect on behaviour. Situationists would be conceding little by admitting that cultural factors sometimes explain behaviour better than situational factors. What is threatening for eudaimonists about pro-situationist studies is not the vain hope that situational factors could explain all human behaviour but the fact that seemingly insignificant changes in circumstances are predictors of behaviour at all.

4.3 The Anti-Behaviouristic Objection²⁵⁰

4.3.1 Difficulties Interpreting Behavioural Evidence

Behavioural evidence can tell us something about what actions a person is performing, though not unproblematically. As explained in section 3.5.2, Anscombe tells us that it is always the case that there is more than one true description of a person's observable bodily movements. For example, rapid foot movement might be described as an act of running away, or as abandoning friends, or as deserting from the army. All of those descriptions could be simultaneously true of the same set of bodily movements, as in the case of a person who abandons his friends by running away and deserting the army. Behavioural evidence is not sufficient to tell us what a person's intentions were in behaving a certain way. However, behavioural evidence is sufficient to make claims about what intentional actions a person is *not* performing. There may be many reasons why a person would run from danger, but we can say that a person who is moving her feet toward danger is not acting for any of those reasons.²⁵¹

Eudaimonists can allow that the above is true and yet deny that we can interpret data about behaviour in a way that lets us draw conclusions about virtue. Running from danger does not necessarily indicate that a person is cowardly, nor does running toward danger necessarily indicate that a person is brave. We can say that a person who is moving her feet toward danger is not acting with the intention of running away, but that is not enough to say that this person is behaving virtuously because a person who is virtuous by neo-Aristotelian standards will sometimes run away.

It may be extremely difficult to predict what action a virtuous person would perform in certain circumstances. John McDowell goes so far as to say that even if a virtuous person were to explain the process of reasoning behind her actions step by step to a nonvirtuous person, the nonvirtuous person would not be able to fully grasp the explanation.²⁵² Analogously, a vintner could describe the flavour of a wine by saying “blackberry, a hint of vanilla, a suggestion of nutmeg,”²⁵³ but unless I have developed a refined palate I will not be able to understand what her description means. On this view, an experimenter would not know what counts as virtuous behaviour if she were not virtuous herself.

On these grounds, eudaimonists can argue that the limited amount of information that observed behaviour gives us about intentions is not enough to tell us whether or not a person is acting virtuously. This is the problem posed by Annas and Kamtekar (3.5.2) returned with greater force; if we do not know exactly what the subjects in situationist studies were intending to do we cannot interpret their observed behaviour as being virtuous or non-virtuous. Take for example the seminarians in Darley and Batson’s study. (2.1.2) Most subjects who were a few minutes late did not stop to help a person in apparent distress, and we can say of these subjects that they did not intend to offer help. However, there are circumstances in which a perfectly helpful person would not stop to offer help. We cannot jump from having observed that a person did not offer help to concluding that the person lacks a virtue of helpfulness. The argument is that observed behaviour does not provide us with unambiguous evidence about whether or not a person has a virtue because virtues do not produce an experimentally detectable pattern of behaviour.

4.3.2 The Minimally Decent Behaviour Test

Doris argued that we can identify some things a virtuous person would never do. Even if the way virtuous people behave is so complex as to be inexplicable to anyone who is not virtuous themselves, there should be some easy cases. For example, a temperate person would not eat an entire pie at a sitting. There might be rare and extraordinary counterexamples, but any exceptions would seem contrived. In sufficiently easy cases it is possible to rule out some options as being inconsistent with virtue. We might never be able to predict what action a virtuous person would perform, but we can say that a person who is not living up to the standard of “minimally decent” is not virtuous.²⁵⁴

Doris applies the minimally decent behaviour test to argue that the behaviour of Darley and Batson’s seminarians indicates that most of them were not virtuous. Stopping even for a moment to ask an apparently injured person if they need an ambulance is a very low bar to clear. There might be more or less appropriate ways of evaluating the person’s need, and intervening in the most appropriate way might require a virtuous person’s subtle judgment, but ignoring the injured person entirely seems indecent. We can construct circumstances in which a virtuous person would have good reason not to stop, such as a case of triage where some even greater emergency calls for immediate attention. However, that is not the situation set up by Darley and Batson. It should be very easy to determine that a ten second delay in reaching an inconsequential meeting should not be given priority over offering even the most minimal help to a person in apparent distress. Pausing even if just for a moment to ask if an apparently injured person needs help is needed is minimally decent behaviour; we may not know what a virtuous person would do but we know that she would not just walk on by.

The minimally decent behaviour test provides an argument that experimentally observed behaviour can sometimes be evidence that a person lacks virtue. Observed behaviour is not sufficient to demonstrate that a person has a virtue, but there are easy cases in which we can say that someone is not virtuous based on having observed them doing things a virtuous person would never do. That is all situationists need for their critique of eudaimonism.

4.4 Is Virtue Statistically Undetectable?

4.4.1 Virtues are Unrealizable Ideals

Another way of denying that empirical evidence can be used to refute virtue ethics is to say that the concept of virtue would be useful to us even if we knew of no virtuous people whom we could take as examples to follow. Rachena Kamtekar has suggested that the language of virtue might be useful even if it were impossible for anyone to have virtuous character traits.²⁵⁵ The thought is that virtue might be purely aspirational, I argue that aspiring to unrealizable ideals is ethically dangerous.

Unrealizable ideals are harmful as often as they are helpful. This is nowhere so clear as it is in the case of the way depictions of idealized bodies in the media can inspire poor body image in teens. When the ideal is an airbrushed model, attempts to imitate the ideal can be actively harmful; “more thin” or “more muscular” do not, at the extreme, equate to a healthier body. Likewise, an ideal of virtue that is perfect in some abstract sense may actually lead an imitator away from humanly achievable excellence. This is a theme to which I will return in the conclusions of this thesis.

Someone who could correctly imagine the best life for a human being could benefit from pursuing that life as an ideal, but only virtuous people have that correct conception of the good. Being virtuous means being attuned to what is really morally salient, or being able to align one's priorities in light of one overarching conception of how life should be. People who are to any degree vicious are vicious just because their conception of the good is imperfect. Imperfect people will choose imperfect role models and may become worse by following after them. A virtuous person might be able to point out role models for the rest of us to aid in our moral education, but if no one were virtuous then no one would be qualified to certify our ideals and role models as being consistent with Aristotelian virtue.²⁵⁶ So, Kamtekar's argument does not repel Doris' objection. If as an empirical matter of fact there are no virtuous people then we cannot know which ideals will lead us toward becoming virtuous human beings.

4.4.2 Virtue is Rare

Neo-Aristotelians believe that becoming virtuous is difficult, a feat few people attain, and some virtue ethicists have tried to use this idea that virtuous people are rare as a way of explaining away the empirical evidence for situationism. This is not a dodge to get out of Doris' trap, but rather an expectation that's been with virtue ethics since Aristotle.²⁵⁷ In fact, one of the standard objections to virtue ethics is that it is too elitist.

Among those who adopt this approach is Nafsika Athanassoulis. She tells us that "people tend to be over-optimistic in attributing positive character traits to others and even to their own selves. Most people are not compassionate ... what the Milgram experiments challenge is not the

assumption that people can have character traits, but rather the assumption that most people will act compassionately under pressure.”²⁵⁸ Kamtekar agrees. “Perhaps there was no virtuous person among the subjects of these experiments: if virtue requires practical wisdom, one would expect virtuous persons to be rare.”²⁵⁹ To put the point in more statistical language, if less than one person in a thousand is virtuous, that virtuous person’s consistency in thought and action will have only a negligible effect on aggregate data for the whole population. This is true. If virtuous people are exceedingly rare, statistical methods are too blunt an instrument to tell us much about virtue.

This line of argument takes us to a place neo-Aristotelians would not want to go. The problem follows from the details of Doris’ statistical argument as to why we should believe that character is fragmented. The technical details matter a great deal. Taking a close look at where Doris’ numbers are coming from gives reason to think that virtue ethics cannot be defended against situationism by arguing that virtuous people are rare.

The problem is that statistical methods ought to be able to detect cases of akrasia. Akratics are people who know how a person ought to live but do not always use that knowledge when they make decisions. Let’s focus on people who suffer from weakness-akrasia as described in chapter two. Weakness-akratics often think and act the way a virtuous person would but sometimes fail to do so when they are strongly tempted. I am not aware of any virtue ethicists who contend that even akrasia is rare.

The only situational variable that should matter in predicting a weakness-akratic person's behaviour is the degree to which they are tempted. Weakness-akratics think, feel and act as the virtuous person would except when the level of temptation rises above a certain threshold. As defined by neo-Aristotelians, the weakness-akratic state of character should express itself in a pattern of behaviour that is consistent despite changes in situational factors other than intensity of temptation.

Imagine a person who occasionally cheats on tests but only when strongly tempted, for example when the test is so important as to affect her odds of getting into the university of her choice. She knows that she should not cheat but when the stakes are high enough she is overcome by her fear of failure. When the stakes are not that high she acts in accordance with her belief that cheating is wrong. This is a case of weakness-akrasia.

Different situations offer different opportunities for cheating. One situation might offer the chance to sneak a glance at the instructor's answer key. A different situation might offer the chance to take extra time on the test while the instructor's back is turned. Which opportunities to cheat are available is a situational factor, but it is not a variable that should affect the behaviour of either a virtuous person or a weakness-akratic person. Weakness-akrasia cannot be the correct diagnosis of why a person behaves the way they do if a significant percentage of the variance in that person's behaviour is best explained by the kind of technique of cheating that was available to them.

The results of Hartshorne and May's study on honesty (introduced in section 2.1.6) showed that available cheating techniques were the most significant variable explaining the frequency with which their subjects cheated. Virtuous people and weakness-akratic people should consistently display both answer-key honest behaviour (ASH) and score-adding honest behaviour (SAH) when the level of temptation is unchanged; those two kinds of behaviour should be strongly correlated.²⁶⁰ However, the observed correlation between ASH and SAH was extremely weak. "The mean intercorrelation between different pairs of situations presenting opportunities for deception or honesty" was only 0.23.²⁶¹ A correlation of 0.23 indicates that the value of one variable accounts for only 5% of the variance in the other variable. In other words, only 5% of the variance seen in Hartshorne and May's data could possibly be explained in terms of traits like virtue or weakness-akrasia. If a significant percentage of the population had a weakness-akratic state of character the observed correlation would have been much higher.

So, very few of the subjects in Hartshorne and May's study were weakness-akratic. For that matter, none of the neo-Aristotelian states of character described in 2.3 would produce the pattern of behaviour observed by Hartshorne and May. Appealing to the rarity of virtue is not an adequate reply to the threat posed by situationism because this data suggests that non-virtuous neo-Aristotelian states of character are rare as well.

4.5 Conscious Adaptation to Situations

4.5.1 Can Reflection Eliminate the Effect of Situations?

Kamtekar argues that virtuous actions are the product of deliberation and practical wisdom, not the product of simple behavioural dispositions. Virtuous people do not interact with

the world in a crude stimulus-response sort of way. Kamtekar believes that people can and should consciously prepare themselves for difficult situations such as the Milgram experiments. Knowing that orders from authority figures can skew behaviour, virtuous people will be on the lookout for situations where someone is ordering them around. They can factor what they know about their current situation into their deliberations, counteracting the effect that the situation might otherwise have on them. In this way, “thinking through... various possible responses to the situation and their consequences”²⁶² makes it possible for a person of practical wisdom to remain consistently virtuous. If this is correct, nothing needs to be added to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics to defend it against situationism, for the idea of practical wisdom already plays a central role in neo-Aristotelian theory. However, there is good reason to think that practical wisdom is itself vulnerable to the effect of situations.

4.5.2 Who Watches the Watchmen?

Kamtekar’s argument assumes that we are able to reliably monitor what is going on around us. To do what she recommends, an agent must be aware of her situation and able to assess the normative significance of each of the different aspects of the situation. To some extent this is a counsel of perfection; even virtuous people are sometimes fatigued, stressed or distracted. However, it seems to be in keeping with eudaimonism to stipulate that truly virtuous people are able to adjust under circumstances which would impair the judgment of an ordinary person. A mild mannered person will not be harsh with others even when she is overtired; she knows that she is drowsy and that she should be even more careful than usual in how she responds to others until she can get some sleep. Maria Merritt sides with Kamtekar on this point, agreeing that consistent character traits might be developed by being aware that your mental state

has changed, allowing you to compensate for an impaired state of mind. As Merritt puts it, “possession of virtue requires an understanding of these kinds of factors, an awareness of our susceptibility to them, and the development of capabilities to resist their influence.”²⁶³

The difficulty Merritt sees with the conscious adaptation defense is that it assumes that a virtuous person’s ability to monitor her own states of mind will be unchanged even in a bad situation. There is reason to doubt that this is true, for

the very cognitive and motivational capacities needed to adjust our ethical sensibilities and reactions to these recently discovered situational factors are, in their own operation, subject to unanticipated situational factors.²⁶⁴

In an altered state of consciousness an agent may lose the willpower to compensate for her behavioral changes, or even lose the ability to perceive that her thought processes are irregular. There is no mental-state-independent self that can monitor mental states, so a consistent character cannot be obtained in this way. Chapter seven will discuss empirical evidence that humans really do have the vulnerability Merritt fears, for as it turns out emotional states have a significant influence on practical reasoning.

4.5.3 The Regress Problem

The previous section presented an argument that we are sometimes unable to monitor the way we are deliberating; this subsection aims to show that, in principle it is impossible to make a fully conscious decision regarding what we ought to be deliberating about. As Nomy Arpaly points out, “deliberation is an action, and this action is rarely the result of deliberation.”²⁶⁵ It is possible to make an empirical case that human deliberation depends on nonrational processes,²⁶⁶

but that empirical case is not needed here. The problem for Kamtekar's argument is conceptual – a regress problem.

Kamtekar seems to be saying that an action cannot be guaranteed to be consistent with practical wisdom unless it is the product of rational deliberation.²⁶⁷ However, if deliberating is an activity, then an act of deliberation is rational only if the agent chose to begin deliberating on the basis of some prior act of deliberation. If this were to continue *ad infinitum* (deliberating about deliberating about deliberating) then deliberation would be impossible. Thus actions cannot explained by deliberation alone. The infinite regress can be avoided only if something other than deliberation is guiding our process of deliberation.

If so, then the deliberative process of the person of practical wisdom is not sufficient to guarantee that she will not be influenced by her situation. Something must tell her when she should monitor her own thought processes, and ultimately that something is not a process of conscious deliberation. I will attempt to articulate what that something is in chapter seven. We have enough so far to conclude that if by practical wisdom we mean conscious deliberation, practical wisdom is not enough to ensure that a virtuous person's character traits will be consistent.

4.6 Summary

The standard arguments against situationism are not strong enough to put it out of play. We have seen that there are at least three points on which situationists must retreat. First, as argued in chapter three, there is strong empirical evidence that traits are good predictors of long

term behaviour patterns. Situationists should confine themselves to arguing that traits cannot be used to predict how a person will behave on a given occasion, a claim for which they do have evidence and which is problematic for eudaimonist virtue ethics. Second, it is impossible to give an operational definition of trait-appropriate behaviour for an Aristotelian virtue. Virtuous people do not live in accordance with codifiable rules, and the only way an experimenter could know that a pattern of thought, motivation and action is virtuous is if the experimenter herself were virtuous. The best situationists can do is to identify actions that a virtuous person would not perform through the minimally decent behaviour test. Third, situationists have used the word situation as a sort of catch-all name for any of the heterogeneous set of ways in which circumstances can affect behaviour, grouping together phenomena that need to be examined separately. Sociocultural factors must be distinguished from situational factors. However, situationists can accommodate these three concessions. The situationist critique of eudaimonism does not require showing that situational factors always provide better explanations of behaviour than sociocultural factors and personality traits. All situationists need to show is that the patterns of behaviour seen in pro-situationist experiments do not map well onto Aristotelian states of character such as virtue, vice and akrasia. That is enough to indict eudaimonism as being psychologically unrealistic.

A defence of eudaimonism against situationism should begin by being precise about which situational factors are under examination. Failing to do this was one of situationism's most serious mistakes and there is no reason to repeat that mistake. In the next three chapters I draw a distinction between situational factors that affect attention and situational factors that affect emotion. I account for these two kinds of situational factors separately. Inconsistent

behaviour due to changes in affect is not caused by the same psychological mechanism as inconsistent behaviour due to cues that prime attention. Affect priming and attention priming are importantly different in the effects they have on behaviour. We cannot give the same normative account of affect priming and of attention priming. Eudaimonists need to acknowledge that these psychological phenomena are real and that they are not explained by standard neo-Aristotelian states of character. That admission is the only place from which to begin finding resources in the Aristotelian tradition that can account for the strange behaviour seen in pro-situationist experiments.

5 On the Attentiveness of Virtuous People

5.1 Situationism, Attention and Virtue

5.1.1 Situationism and Attention

As argued in chapter two, there is no single psychological mechanism responsible for all cases where situations have a disproportionate effect on behaviour. There is no reason to assume that one cognitive process can explain why haste, mood and orders from authority figures can each affect behaviour. The effects of different kinds of situational factors require different explanations. The focus of this chapter is on situational factors which change behaviour by affecting attention.

Situationists interpret psychological studies on preoccupation and distraction as evidence that character is more or less irrelevant to explaining and predicting human behaviour. The situationists are right to call attention to, for example, the empirical evidence that being in haste can have a strange and disproportionate effect on a person's behaviour, because that is a phenomenon that should be of interest to anyone doing virtue ethics. However, I argue that people are not equally vulnerable to situational factors. Training can help a person pay attention appropriately despite problematic situational factors, therefore situations are not all that matters for explaining behaviour.

That argument against extreme situationism may not provide eudaimonists with the support they need. Eudaimonists need to show not just that character explains behaviour but also that recognisably Aristotelian states of character explain why people think, feel and act the way

they do. This chapter will explore what it means to say that a virtuous person would pay attention appropriately. One concern for eudaimonists should be that training which makes one resistant to some situational factors may increase one's vulnerability to other situational factors, a result that bears little resemblance to traditional Aristotelian conceptions of moral education.

5.1.2 Virtue and Attention

Being disposed to attend to whatever would factor into the practical reasoning of the virtuous person is at least a necessary condition for virtue. This will be argued at length in section 5.3.1 but a preliminary defence of that claim is necessary here. Consider the way a temperate person deliberates about food. For example, a temperate person who has been offered a second helping of dessert would think about how rich the dessert is and how much he has eaten that day before asking for a second serving. However, it would not be possible for him to deliberate in this way if he was not disposed to notice the sweetness of what he eats and to call to mind memories of what he has eaten. To be sure, being disposed to attend to particulars is not the whole of virtue. Virtuous people know which facts might matter to the choice at hand, know how to interrelate those facts through practical reasoning so as to decide which course of action will best further their goals, know which goals are worth pursuing, and feel the right way about the course of action they decide upon. Dispositions to attend to matters of fact about one's circumstances are only a small subset of the dispositions that a person must have in order to be virtuous, but they are an important enough subset to be worth examining closely. Understanding what it means to say that the virtuous person is disposed to pay attention appropriately is an important step toward understanding what it means to be virtuous.

Paying attention appropriately must mean paying attention selectively. It is obvious that human beings are limited in our ability to pay attention. To give one example, we cannot simultaneously visually perceive all of the potentially perceptible particulars of our circumstances; we can only attend to a small percentage of all of the things we could potentially see, leaving us ignorant of the rest.²⁶⁸ To give another, we cannot simultaneously call to mind everything we know; we can only attend to a very small percentage of our memories at any one time.²⁶⁹ What is not obvious is that the limits of human attention are far narrower than folk psychology would lead us to believe. Studies have shown that seemingly trivial primes and distractions can cause people to overlook important features of their circumstances. It is disturbing that being distracted by an inconsequential task is capable of causing subjects to pass right by apparently injured strangers. Situationists appeal to such studies as one source of evidence that the situation a person finds herself in is the most important factor determining how she will behave.

We cannot ask about what virtuous people would be disposed to notice unless we first define what attention is. This chapter examines two accounts of attention. On the single-channel account, attention is a process by which scarce cognitive resources are allocated to tasks in order of priority. This would give us reason to think that some people are in general better at paying attention than others, having one disposition that inclines them to always pay attention appropriately. In opposition to this view, Chris Mole's cognitive unison account of attention tells us that there is no single mental process which allows us to perform a task attentively. It is an empirical question as to which of these two definitions of attention best maps onto observed data about what human beings notice and what they fail to notice. Once we have an empirically

responsible account of what attention is and how it works we can give a better account of how a virtuous person would pay attention.

5.1.3 Attention and the Unity of Virtue

Quite apart from the situationism-eudaimonism debate, accounts of attention have implications within neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics for the debate about the unity of virtue. One major figure in that debate is John McDowell, who argued for the unity of virtue in a very strong sense, claiming that there is in fact only one virtue. His claim is that virtues such as courage, temperance and generosity are just aspects of that one virtue. Responding to the situationist critique of virtue ethics is one goal in this chapter; responding to McDowell's account of the unity of virtue is another.

In this chapter I argue that the best account we can give of attention gives us reason to deny that there is one single disposition that is solely responsible for directing attention. The evidence suggests that human beings do not have one single mental process that is responsible for determining which features of our circumstances we attend to and which we overlook. It follows that it is possible for a person to be disposed to be attentive to particulars relevant to deliberations about courage but not disposed to be attentive to particulars relevant to deliberations about temperance. In other words, it is possible to be disposed to pay attention the way a courageous person would without being disposed to pay attention the way a temperate person would. While there are ways of arguing that all virtue is one even if it is possible for a non-virtuous person to have some but not all of the attention-directing dispositions prerequisite for virtue, evidence that there is no supreme attention-directing disposition removes one reason

to believe in the unity of virtue. In this way, examining the metaphysics and psychology of attention leads directly to an important normative conclusion within neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics.

5.2 Inattentional Blindness as Evidence for Situationism

5.2.1 A Case of Inattentional Blindness

I argued in chapter two that the word situation is something of a catch-all. We have reached a point where we can and should stop talking about situations in vague, general terms and focus on specific psychological mechanisms by which situational factors can affect behaviour. I would like to put inattentional blindness forward as an important example. Inattentional blindness is an empirically observed phenomenon whereby something is overlooked because an agent was actively searching for other information. It has proven to be possible for a person to be quite ignorant of significant events that are happening right in front of her. Even seemingly trivial distractions can impair perception and recall to a startling degree.

Inattentional blindness can even render a person oblivious to nearby acts of violence. In a recent study by Christopher Chabris titled “You do not talk about Fight Club if you do not notice Fight Club,” subjects were asked to jog alongside a confederate and count the number of times the confederate wiped sweat from his brow. The jogging route led them past a staged fight, staged such that two men appeared to be assaulting a third. Only 42% of subjects were able to recall after the fact that they had seen a fight taking place only eight meters away, as compared to 72% of subjects who ran past without having been asked to count.²⁷⁰ The concerns raised by this result are not abstract. The study was intended to replicate what happened to

Officer Kenny Conley, who ran right past a group of other police officers who were beating an innocent man but later testified that he had seen nothing. Because this was considered implausible he was convicted of perjury and obstruction of justice.²⁷¹ Chabris' study is disturbing because it indicates that a seemingly insignificant prime such as being busy counting can make a person blind to circumstances which would obviously call for immediate action if one attended to them.

5.2.2 Observed Effects of Inattentional Blindness on Perception and Memory

Psychologists study perception and memory by asking their experimental subjects to perform tasks that will demonstrate what the subjects have perceived and/or what they can recall. Perceptual tasks include such things as repeating a list of words that is being read to them, or counting the number of objects they can see. Asking subjects after the fact about the list of words that was read to them or about how many objects they saw tests recall. Psychologists want to know what changes in experimental conditions will impair performance of such tasks. Impairment can be defined in different ways. Two common measures of impairment are the amount of time it takes a subject to perform a task and the number of errors the subject makes while performing the task. Inattentional blindness is most certainly not the only phenomenon which can impair perception and recall; simple distraction can have that effect.²⁷² I am focussing on cases of inattentional blindness because they offer a very clear illustration of the general principle that task performance is impaired if attention is not directed toward that task.

Research on inattentional blindness usually relies on a bit of trickery on the part of the experimenter. The usual procedure is that experimenters ask subjects to perform one task as a

decoy while they measure the subjects' performance on some other unrelated task. In one famous experiment establishing the existence of inattention blindness, subjects were asked to watch video of a team of black shirted basketball players passing a ball overlaid over video of white shirted basketball players doing the same. Some subjects were asked to count the number of passes made by the black shirts, while others counted the passes made by white-shirts. Being asked to count was a red herring. Thirty seconds into the experiment, a third film of a woman carrying an umbrella was overlaid onto the other two. Despite the fact that she was visible for four seconds, walking from one side of the screen to the other, only 21% of subjects reported seeing the umbrella woman.²⁷³ This experiment was later replicated with more extreme distractor; instead of a woman with an umbrella, a person in a gorilla suit was superimposed over the basketball players. Only 27% of subjects were able to report that they had seen this rather startling distraction.²⁷⁴ More alarmingly, experienced pilots landing planes in flight simulators have, while focused on their instruments, failed to notice a plane blocking the runway directly in front of them.²⁷⁵ When we approach the world with one task in mind, it is easy for us to be surprisingly oblivious to whatever else is going on around us.

In the gorilla basketball experiment subjects failed to see the confederate in the gorilla suit despite her being in the center of their visual field as they tried to observe the basketball players. We are even more blind to our surroundings when an object which we are not actively looking for is not right before our eyes. Most, Scholl and Clifford have demonstrated that an unexpected stimulus is far less likely to be noticed if it appears outside of the area the subject has been instructed to monitor.²⁷⁶ Summing up the results of many studies, they conclude that in general

“it seems that when observers adopt a specific *attentional set* – whereby they ready themselves to receive a specific type of information – this top-down constraint overrides the capturing power of other, irrelevant, information.”²⁷⁷

If our attention is tightly focused on one goal, we not only overlook data not relevant to that goal but also are also less likely to shift our attention to a new goal. Most *et al.* hold that “when engaged in an attention demanding task, a person’s attentional set is one of the important factors determining whether a transient attentional shift leads to the sustained deployment of attention and ultimately awareness.”²⁷⁸ Perception is governed by attentional goals, but whatever attentional goal we pursue will blind us to other data.

Attentional sets affect not just perception but also memory. People find it easier to remember information under conditions of “free and serial recall,”²⁷⁹ where each thought connects smoothly to the one before. The probability of accurate recall decreases when we shift our attention rapidly from one context to another. Howard and Kahana observed that “this is troubling in that we sometimes require the context state to drift and at other times to jump back in time.”²⁸⁰ So, once we have focused on any one train of thought, we are more likely to make mistakes in remembering unrelated information. It is particularly interesting that this effect can impair recall of autobiographical information.²⁸¹

It is very dangerous to use words such as knowledge and ignorance to describe the results of a study concerned with inattentional blindness. When we discover that a subject cannot recall having seen a person in a gorilla suit wander in front of her we might be inclined to say that she was ignorant of the fact that a gorilla had been there or that she had no knowledge that a gorilla

had been there. However, it turns out that subjects can be primed by cues they cannot recall having seen. Inattention blindness prevents them from consciously recalling that they saw the cue, but nevertheless their task performance was influenced by it. Adrian Mack points out that “priming can occur only if there is some memory of the stimulus, even if that memory is inaccessible.”²⁸² Mack concludes that

under conditions of inattention, basic perceptual processes, such as those responsible for the grouping of elements in the visual field into objects, are carried out and influence task responses even though observers are unable to report seeing the percepts that result from those processes.²⁸³

If a subject cannot recall having seen something due to inattention blindness, she does not know that she saw it (in the sense of conscious recall) but may have been aware of its presence on a non-conscious level.

5.2.3 Inattention Blindness as Evidence for Situationism

As described in chapter four, it is difficult to explain exactly what situationists mean by the word situation. This is evident when Doris cites Darley and Batson’s seminarians experiment. Seminarians in the high-hurry condition were told that they were late, believed themselves to be late and walked hastily to their destination. It would seem strange to say that currently believing oneself to be late is part of one’s situation, for we usually take the word situation to refer to circumstances in the world around a person, but it seems equally strange to say that what one was told in the past is part of one’s current situation. It is not clear what Doris intends. Let us accept for the sake of argument that being preoccupied with a task and/or the circumstances that prompt a person to be preoccupied with a task are aspects of the person’s situation.

If being preoccupied with a task is part of a person's situation, inattention blindness would seem to be evidence for situationism. Indeed, Darley and Batson's seminarians study is one of Doris' most prominent pieces of evidence for his theory. We expect virtuous people to act at the right times for the right reasons. Being mildly in haste because of being a few minutes late is not a good reason to leave an apparently injured stranger by the side of the road. Likewise, in the Chabris study, having been asked to perform a counting task is not a good reason to ignore a person who is being beaten. These studies suggest that human beings in general are vulnerable to the effects of preoccupation. If it is the case that being preoccupied explains more of the interpersonal variance in helping behaviour than character traits then traits are of comparatively little value as explanations of behaviour; this would be evidence that the situationists are right. The data on inattention blindness makes it possible to hypothesize that if we really want to know whether a person will help a stranger, it does little good to ask whether she is a helpful person, for we would do better to ask whether or not she is in a rush.

One way to respond to that situationist argument would be to find evidence that some people are more resistant to inattention blindness than others.²⁸⁴ If it is the case that there are some people who are less vulnerable to being blinded to nearby fistfights by trivial counting tasks, we would be right to praise them for whichever of their character traits keeps them from inadvertent callousness. There would seem to be something virtuous about their steadfastness, though it is not immediately clear what that something consists of. It will require a great deal of elaboration to make something plausible out of this intuition. Furthermore, we should not assume that such steadfast people exist without empirical evidence that they exist. We will not

be able to adequately respond to the situationists until we have an account of attention that can explain what is going on psychologically in cases of inattention blindness, and an account of what kind of dispositions a person would need to have to be attentive in the way that a virtuous person is attentive.

5.3 On the Relationship Between Attention and Virtue

5.3.1 Being Disposed to Attend to Relevant Particulars is Necessary for Virtue

It is not obvious that attention is of normative concern. Being unaware of an relevant fact is not always evidence that a person is not virtuous. Suppose a person builds a house for Habitat for Humanity without knowing that it will be destroyed by an earthquake the day after it is finished. Her ignorance that an earthquake was coming does not make her any less of a generous person. We should not accept without argument the claim that being disposed to attend to the particulars that would figure into the practical reasoning of a virtuous person is necessary for virtue.

Certainly, knowledge of particulars is necessary for correct practical reasoning. Theoretical knowledge alone cannot see us through life, at least not on an Aristotelian account; to engage in practical reasoning, we must know the particulars of our circumstances as well. On an Aristotelian account of practical reasoning, the major premise of a practical syllogism is a universal judgment while the minor premise has to do with particulars.²⁸⁵ For example, the belief that I should eat sweet foods when I encounter them will not in itself prompt me to eat a piece of cake that's put in front of me – not unless I also have the belief that *this* piece of cake in particular is sweet.²⁸⁶

Because knowledge of particulars is necessary for practical reasoning, it is also necessary for virtuous action. Aristotle believed that a person's actions are virtuous only on these conditions: "first, if he does them knowingly, secondly if he decides to do them, and decides to do them for themselves, and thirdly if he does them from a firm and unchanging disposition."²⁸⁷ The second condition follows from the first, for a person cannot deliberate correctly about that which she does not know. A person who does not know the relevant particulars cannot engage in practical reasoning the way the virtuous person would, and therefore cannot be considered virtuous.²⁸⁸

Knowledge of particulars is not sufficient for deliberation, for that knowledge will be fruitless if the knower does not attend to what she knows. If I know that this piece of cake is sweet but I am not attending to that knowledge I will not be motivated to eat the cake. So, deliberating correctly requires actively attending to the relevant particulars, not just having them in memory or in one's visual field. If virtue involves being disposed toward correct practical reasoning, and if correct practical reasoning requires attending to relevant particulars, then virtuous people must be disposed to attend to relevant particulars.

We would be wise to develop an account of attention before discussing dispositions to pay attention. All we can say at this point is that virtuous people must *in some sense* be disposed to attend to whatever particulars would factor into correct practical reasoning. Conversely, being disposed to overlook particulars that would factor into the deliberations of a virtuous person is incompatible with virtue.

A person who is virtuous in all respects except being disposed to attend to relevant particulars is not virtuous. Suppose that a person intends to drop two quarters in the tip jar at the coffee shop, reaches into her pocket and pulls out two coins. However, some of the coins in her pocket are nickels, and she does not check the denomination of the coins. By chance, she does pull out two quarters, though she could easily have given a stingy ten cent tip by mistake. Let's stipulate that giving two quarters is what a generous person would have done in her shoes. Even if our coffee drinker gave the right amount on the basis of correct practical reasoning with the right ends in mind and did so gladly, all as a result of having dispositions that a truly generous person would have, we still would not say that she is generous. If she is disposed to be unaware of whether or not what she is actually giving matches what she intended to give then she is not generous. The problem is not just that her behaviour is unreliable; even if she is statistically likely to give the right amount because most of the coins in her pocket are quarters few virtue ethicists would call her generous because what she actually does is not connected to what she intends in the way that it is for a virtuous person.²⁸⁹ There is a long list of other facts about the coffee drinker's circumstances that she would need to attend to in order to perform a generous action, including how much disposable income she has, how much her server might need the money, how good the service was and what the cultural norms for tipping are. If she is disposed to overlook these features of her circumstances, she cannot be a generous person.²⁹⁰

I want to stress that it is not my view that being disposed to attend to relevant particulars is the whole of virtue, for I take it that akrasia, vice and virtue are all compatible with full knowledge of relevant particulars. A weak-willed person can know that a double-fudge cake is

unhealthy and yet feel an overwhelming desire to eat it. A vicious person can know that the cake is unhealthy but falsely believe that the pleasant taste would be worth dying for. I deny that being disposed to attend to relevant particulars is sufficient for virtue, but there are particularist virtue ethicists who might endorse something like this, most prominently John McDowell.²⁹¹

5.3.2 Is Attending to Relevant Particulars Sufficient for Virtue?

There is a line of argument dating back to Socrates which tells us that knowledge is sufficient for virtue. The thought is that all wrongdoing must stem from ignorance because no one would knowingly harm themselves by living badly.²⁹² In light of 5.3.1 we might do well to consider a revised version of that Socratic argument, for a person who is not attending to what she knows will not deliberate any differently from a person who is ignorant. Now, if a single disposition to attend to relevant particulars was indeed sufficient for virtue it would be wrong to say that virtuous people have one disposition to regulate fear, another to regulate anger, a third to regulate appetite, and so forth, for the attentiveness sufficient for having any one virtue of character would be sufficient for having all of them. In broad strokes, this is the kind of argument McDowell makes in his interpretation of Aristotle, an argument which implies that it is a mistake to read the first few books of the *Nicomachean ethics* as saying that it is possible to have any one virtue of character without having them all.

McDowell claimed that virtue consists of “a sort of perceptual capacity,” and that this capacity is sufficient for virtue.²⁹³ McDowell wanted to show that virtue is more than crude behavioural dispositions. Generosity cannot mean mechanically giving money to those who ask; it must involve something more like “proper attentiveness to others’ feelings.”²⁹⁴ He told us that

virtuous people have “a reliable sensitivity to a certain sort of requirement which situations impose on behaviour.”²⁹⁵ This was not supposed to be just a matter of noticing facts but also a matter of being aware of which facts are salient and what it is about them taken together that constitutes a requirement. To put that in Jonathan Dancy’s words, the virtuous person can “grasp the shape of the circumstances.”²⁹⁶ McDowell takes this perceptual capacity to be a source of knowledge, and claims that having this knowledge is what makes the virtuous person able to do the right thing at the right time for the right reasons.²⁹⁷ The thought is that what makes the virtuous person special is that she, unlike most people, is disposed to attend to what is *really* important in the world around her.

This implies that there is one and only one virtuous character trait, “a single sensitivity” to ethical salience which manifests itself in every aspect of the life of the virtuous person.²⁹⁸ This is the strongest possible form of the unity of virtues hypothesis, and this denial that there are multiple virtues of character marks particularists as being different from the eudaimonists discussed in section 2.2.²⁹⁹ McDowell supports his view with an argument that it would be impossible to have any one virtue in isolation. For example, it would be impossible for a person to be completely generous without also being completely just, because a quasi-generous person who does not understand distributive justice will give the wrong amount of money to the wrong people at the wrong time. No behavioural disposition or book of rules would always be enough to tell the quasi-generous person when considerations of generosity should be silenced by considerations of justice.³⁰⁰ Only the virtuous person who perceives the salience of all aspects of the situation correctly knows how much to give and to whom.^{301 302} Therefore, “no one virtue can be fully possessed except by a possessor of all of them.”³⁰³ On this view, courage,

generosity, temperance, and all of the other canonical virtues are just ways of talking about aspects of the character of a person who can rightly see what she ought to do in any situation.³⁰⁴

It would be psychologically impossible for a human being to be fully cognisant of her circumstances, for we are not and cannot be omniscient, but if we were to follow McDowell we might treat perfect all-around attentiveness as being a goal toward which we all should aspire. In this chapter I argue that this would be a mistake. There cannot be a single sensitivity which constitutes all virtue because paying attention is not a single process governed by one trait.

At this point we have gotten as far as we can go without giving a more rigorous account of attention. It is no use to say that virtuous people are disposed to pay attention appropriately without giving a philosophical account of what attention is and what it means to perform a task attentively.

5.4 Normative Implications of Two Accounts of Attention

5.4.1 Two Accounts of Attention

In the next two sections (5.4.2-5.4.3) I will discuss the channel capacity account of attention. That account tells us that human minds have a finite information processing capacity, and that paying attention means allocating that capacity in the most appropriate way possible. This implies that the one mental process (or related group of processes) responsible for allocating that capacity determines whether or not we pay attention appropriately. This would be evidence for the unity of virtue, for a person who does not have a properly tuned attention-allocating process would be lacking a necessary condition for having any virtue.

The subsequent sections (5.4.4-5.4.5) are concerned with Christopher Mole's cognitive unison account of attention. Mole denies that there is any single attention-paying process in the mind, saying instead that performing a task attentively requires that the full set of cognitive resources that might potentially be needed to perform that task could currently be brought to bear on performance of that task if needed.³⁰⁵ This richer account of attention gives us a somewhat different account of what it would mean to say that the virtuous person would be disposed to pay attention appropriately.

5.4.2 The Channel Capacity Account of Attention

The channel capacity account of attention explains phenomena such as inattentive blindness by appealing to the fact that human minds have limited information processing capacity. The idea is that any mental task we might try to perform requires a certain amount of information processing. If we try to perform too many tasks at once we will not have enough capacity to go around, making us slower and more error prone at some or all of these tasks. On the channel capacity account, paying attention means abandoning low-priority tasks in order to reserve our limited information processing capacity for high-priority tasks. This account of attention is commonplace enough in cognitive science that it might be considered the received view, and it lines up well with our pretheoretical expectations about what attention is and how it works.³⁰⁶

For example, the channel capacity account of attention tells us that if an engineering student is serious about solving a differential equation she should focus on that task single-

mindedly, for any mental energy spent glancing out the window at the sunset or planning what she will cook for dinner is energy diverted away from her homework. Her mind does not have enough information processing capacity to perform all three of these tasks at once, and so she will be impaired in performing them if she tries to perform them all at once. Perhaps she might make only sluggish progress through her homework, or forget that she needs to buy parmesan cheese to prepare the meal she has in mind. If she wants to get her homework done quickly and well she needs to stop doing anything other than her homework. On the channel capacity account, that is what paying attention means.

Three steps need to be taken to make the channel capacity account of attention plausible. First, we need a definition of information that will let us explain how information can be quantified and what is meant by the claim that all mental tasks involve processing information. Second, it would help if we could diagnose what it is in the mind that is overtaxed when we spread our attention too thin. That is not necessary to get the theory off the ground, but it lends credibility to the claim that there is an information processing bottleneck in the mind if we could point out exactly which mental resources are being overtaxed when we are distracted. Third, we need to empirically confirm that distraction works the way we pretheoretically think it does. The expectation is that performing any task could interfere with simultaneously performing any other, unless both tasks are as simple as walking and chewing bubblegum. If the sum of the information processing requirements for a set of simultaneously performed tasks exceeds the mind's information processing capacity, performance at one or more of those tasks will be impaired. That is the empirical hypothesis on which the channel capacity account stands or falls.

To begin with the first step, if we are going to say that attention has something to do with information processing the concept of information needs a formal definition. The idea is supposed to be that all of the different kinds of signals in the brain can be described in terms of the amount of information they convey. For example, the optic nerve conveys one kind of signal from the eyes to the brain and the spinal cord conveys another kind of signal from the brain to the legs, but we say that both kinds of signal convey information. A move like that needs to be made to explain how such different tasks as solving differential equations and gazing out the window might interfere with each other.

There are many definitions of information,³⁰⁷ but the definition that makes the fewest ontological commitments was the one proposed by Claude Shannon.³⁰⁸ Shannon's definition is purely syntactic; it allows us to measure a quantity of information without asking about the meaning of the message sent. He proposed that there is a set of possible messages that a sender could try to convey to a receiver, and that information is that which informs the receiver about which message was actually sent. For example, if the sender could have sent any of 64 different messages, then a minimum of eight bits must be conveyed to the receiver to get the message across.³⁰⁹ Ultimately, the amount of information sent through a communications channel is a function of the length of the message sent and the error rate.³¹⁰ Information in Shannon's sense is a quantifiable measure of the complexity of any message, a measure which takes no account of the semantics of that message. From the perspective of a digital computer, information is fungible; a text file and a photograph may be very different in terms of what they mean to the user viewing them, but we can compare them quantitatively in terms of how many bits of data are required to encode each one. The human mind does not encode information in binary, but

there are psychologists who claim to be able to calculate the quantity of information a human brain is capable of processing.

George Miller's hypothesis is that working memory is the bottleneck which restricts the amount of information that a human being can process simultaneously. Working memory allows us to hold a very small number of things in mind so that they are immediately available as we perform a task. It turns out that human minds have very little working memory. Most people can glance at a seven digit phone number and remember it well enough to repeat it immediately afterward, but not a number longer than that. Miller claimed that the number of chunks (numerals, words, mental images, etc.) of information that we can hold in working memory seems to be limited to "seven, plus or minus two,"³¹¹ with frequent errors and omissions if trying to recall a larger number of chunks. The channel capacity account of attention tells us that any task must funnel some information through the very narrow channel that is working memory. If every task requires that some information be held in working memory then our ability to perform tasks simultaneously will be impaired if the sum of the information processing demands made by each task exceeds our ability to process all of the necessary information through working memory. Attending to one task means abandoning others in order to have enough working memory available to perform the prioritized task.

There is empirical data which has been interpreted as providing support for the hypothesis that attention is a matter of prioritized allocation of working memory capacity. Anderson, Reder and LeBierre have confirmed that it is difficult to keep something in mind while we perform unrelated tasks, and also that it is difficult to perform one complex task

consisting of many subtasks, apparently because thinking about one simple subtask impairs our ability to perform a second subtask.³¹² If we care about performing tasks successfully, we need to respect the capacity limits of working memory by restricting the number of tasks and subtasks we are trying to perform at once. It should be noted that distracters can tie up working memory even if we are not conscious of them. Whether by consciously taking on too many tasks or by unconsciously being affected by distracters, exceeding the capacity of working memory will impair our ability to perform tasks.

5.4.3 The Channel Capacity Account Implies that Focus is a Virtue

When talking about the case of the police officer who overlooked a nearby beating, I said that if there are people who are consistently better than others at attending to whatever around them is most normatively significant then these attentive people are in a sense morally superior to other people. They will be less likely than other people to make errors in practical reasoning due to overlooking important information. If the channel capacity account of attention is true, it teaches us something about what the character of these virtuously attentive people must be like.

If the channel capacity account of attention is true, then there are two things that we would want to know about the character of a person who would be disposed to pay attention to the right objects at the right time in the right way for the right reason. First, directing attention is sometimes a matter of practical reasoning, deciding what to attend to, so we need to know what correct practical reason would look like when it comes to directing attention. Second, to the extent that directing attention is not always a conscious process, we would want to know to whether there is a virtue of character responsible for disposing a person to pay appropriately

selective attention, or whether this is one aspect of several virtues of character or whether any such disposition would be morally neutral. I will argue that the channel capacity account implies that there must be a single virtue associated with non-conscious direction of attention, a conclusion which does not follow if the channel capacity account is false.

The channel capacity account implies that there must be some single process in the mind responsible for allocating working memory to one task or another, an attention-directing system.³¹³ If feeling the right amount of fear is regulated by the virtue of courage and feeling the right degree of anger is regulated by the virtue of mildness then we might think that paying the right degree of attention is regulated by a virtue of some kind. We would need to add a new virtue to the traditional list of virtues of character, a virtue of *focus* which disposes a person to pay appropriately selective attention.

This virtue of focus would have much in common with the traditionally Aristotelian virtues. Focus is associated with pains and pleasures. A person who lacks the virtue of focus might feel the pains of boredom when concentration is called for or, in the other direction, feel aggravation if called away from a task on which she is excessively fixated. With those two kinds of pain in mind, we can imagine focus as being a virtue between two vices: the vice of being disposed to pay too little attention to the task at hand and the vice of being disposed to devote too much attention to the task at hand and not enough to everything else around them. Furthermore, an attention-directing system would have to direct attention toward the objects that a virtuous person would deem to be the most important but it would have to do this without taking time for rational deliberation.³¹⁴ In this regard it would be like the other virtues of character, which

Aristotle tells us are not rational but are capable of listening to reason.³¹⁵ In other words, we would expect that it would be possible to educate children in such a way as to inculcate focus in them, bringing their instinctive habits of paying attention into accord with reason.³¹⁶

Overall, this proposed virtue of focus sounds very much like a virtue of character. This line of thought was picked up in contemporary virtue ethics by Amelie Rorty, who claimed that “habits of salient focusing” are virtues we need to be good people.³¹⁷

However, there is one respect in which a virtue of focus would be very different from other virtues of character. It would be impossible to possess any other virtue without having focus, for paying appropriately selective attention is at least a necessary condition for any virtue of character.³¹⁸ For example, a person who lacked focus would not be disposed to notice the particulars relevant to deliberating about danger, and therefore could not deliberate the way a courageous person would. Therefore, if focus is a virtue in its own right it would seem to be a sort of master virtue which is expressed in every aspect of a person’s life.

It is not a great leap from there to the view that focus is sufficient for virtue, for a person who has this virtue of focus to the highest degree would seem to be responsive to all kinds of normative salience. It is hard to see how a person who pays attention to danger in the right way at the right time for the right reason could fail to feel appropriately fearful or bold.³¹⁹ The normative claim that all virtue is one seems to follow straightforwardly. In this way, the channel capacity account of attention lends considerable support to McDowell’s claims about the unity of virtue.

Everything in this section has been premised on the channel capacity account of attention's being true. If, contrary to that account, it could be shown that there is no one part of the mind responsible for directing attention then we would have lost our reason to posit that there is a virtue of focus. In the next section I take up Christopher Mole's argument that the channel capacity account of attention is incorrect, on the grounds that paying attention is not a mental process at all.

5.4.4 An Alternate Account of Attention: Attention is Cognitive Unison

One source of empirical evidence against the channel capacity account is studies showing that some pairs of cognitively demanding tasks can be performed simultaneously without either impairing the other. In one study by Alan Allport, Barbara Antonis and Patricia Reynolds, subjects were asked to perform a speech shadowing task.³²⁰ While they did this, they also sight-read unfamiliar musical scores and played them on the piano. The surprising result was that the subjects were able to perform these two complex tasks simultaneously "with little or no loss of efficiency in either task."³²¹ This is empirical evidence that the channel capacity account cannot explain, for it predicts that two complex tasks such as these would interfere with each other due to having exceeded the upper limit of the mind's information processing capacity. To give another example, a study by Carsten and Brookhuis showed that visual distraction and preoccupation with a task such as listening to a phone call impaired drivers in different ways; visual distractions lead to poorer steering (lateral control) while preoccupation with an auditory task led to tailgating and poorer car-following (longitudinal control).³²²

Allport and his collaborators responded to their findings by developing a “multi-channel hypothesis.”³²³ This account of attention makes the brain out to be something like a computer with many specialized subsystems running in parallel, with no single central processor. For example, the cognitive resources needed to process visual and auditory information are not identical. To the extent that visual and auditory processing call on different cognitive resources, they do not interfere with each other when they happen simultaneously. A seemingly inconsequential visual distraction can interfere with visual processing but it turns out that a visual task does not necessarily interfere with an auditory task any more than the flow of pedestrians on the sidewalk interferes with the flow of cars on the street.

The multi-channel hypothesis does not deny that making excessive demands on working memory can cause a person to make mistakes in perception and recall. The point is that working memory is not the only cognitive resource that could be overtaxed. Demands made on working memory are not always the most important variable to watch when we ask why a person is making mistakes due to distraction or divided attention. If there is no overlap between the set of mental processes that constitute the act of speech shadowing and the set of processes that constitute sight reading, then there is no single process of paying attention that is common to both tasks. This is strong evidence against the claim that paying attention means directing one single mental process to one task rather than another. This is empirical evidence against the channel capacity account of attention.

Christopher Mole argues that it was a mistake from the beginning to be asking which cognitive process is responsible for attention because there is no single cognitive process whose

operation constitutes paying attention.³²⁴ His claim is that our first question when we come to think about attention should be asking what it means to perform a task *attentively*.³²⁵ Ultimately, his answer is that attention is cognitive unison; loosely, a task is being performed attentively if all of the cognitive resources that could be brought to bear on that task are not occupied with other activity that does not serve that task.³²⁶ On this account, paying attention just means performing a task attentively.³²⁷ Attention is constituted by the harmony between the whole set of all of the cognitive processes relevant to performing a task, not by the activity of one special process whose activity constitutes paying attention.

5.4.5 Implications for Virtue if Attention is Cognitive Unison

The cognitive unison account of attention does not resolve the normative question of whether all virtue is one, but it gives us reason to deny the psychological claim that all human cognition is regulated by one mental process. If the channel-capacity account had been true, it would be a psychological matter of fact that having any virtue of character would depend on having a healthy attention-paying process. The cognitive unison account gives us a way of seeing the various virtues of character as being more mutually independent than that.

In light of the cognitive unison account of attention, we should be cautious in saying that a virtuous person has a disposition to pay appropriately selective attention to whatever features of her circumstances are salient to her living virtuously. It would be a category mistake to think that being disposed to pay attention appropriately is some extra disposition in addition to all of the other dispositions that constitute having a virtue, as the single channel account of attention implies.³²⁸ Analogously, if we walk around the campus of a university, we will not see a library,

offices, lecture halls *and* a campus. Rather, if we have seen the library, the offices and the lecture halls then we have seen the campus, for those buildings taken together constitute the campus. Likewise, a person who has the complete set of dispositions which constitute courage will be disposed to attend to all of the particulars relevant to fear and boldness, and does not require some additional attention-paying virtue on top of them.

Virtues are independent of one another to the extent that they do not all depend on the same set of cognitive resources.³²⁹ Temperance requires being disposed to be aware of one's own health and of the nutritional value of food. The temperate person is able to take this information into account in practical reasoning about what to eat. Her feelings are reality-based; when she notices that what had looked like tofu is actually fatty pork belly she may stop feeling anticipation and start feeling disgust. When we say that temperance requires attentiveness, we are not just talking about that first stage of observing facts but about the whole process by which information from the senses influences judgments and feelings about eating; in this context, attentiveness just means that all of the dispositions which constitute temperance are working together harmoniously such that judgments are being made based on those facts about the world which really are the most salient. The attentiveness required for temperance is not the same as the attentiveness required for courage, because the set of dispositions which constitute courage is very different from the set of dispositions which constitute temperance. Courage requires attentiveness to whatever facts are salient to judgments about fear and boldness, but being disposed to be aware of the nutritiousness of food is not at all salient to the degree of fear and boldness a person ought to feel. Thus, being chronically oblivious about nutritiousness is perfectly compatible with the kind of attentiveness that is necessary for courage.³³⁰

However, the virtues are not completely independent because some dispositions are necessary for more than one virtue. Being disposed to accurately estimate one's own worth is one such disposition. It is necessary for courage, because the brave person needs to weigh risk of harm to one such as herself against the benefits of bold action. Self-estimation is also of central importance to the virtues of *megalopsuchia* and appropriate ambition for without reliable self-worth assessments a person could not know how she really deserves to be treated by others or how she ought to present herself to them. A person who lacks the ability to reliably assess her own worth cannot have these virtues. More subtly, the exercise of any of these virtues could in principle detract from the exercise of the other virtues which require self-evaluation, for even a person who can reliably evaluate her own worth cannot simultaneously evaluate every fact that is true about herself.³³¹

It is impossible to be courageous without also being at least to some extent appropriately ambitious, for those two virtues both depend on optimally allocating the same limited resource, one's ability to accurately assess one's own worth. However, if attention is cognitive unison, it is quite possible for a person to be both courageous and gluttonous, for as argued above there are few common cognitive resources on which courage and temperance both depend. A friend of McDowell who wants to defend the idea that virtue consists of a single sensitivity will need to spell out exactly what facts about the world this sensitivity detects and why possession of these facts is sufficient for every virtue of character. As it stands, the cognitive unison account of attention suggests that the sensitivities required to attend to facts relevant to courage and to

attend to facts relevant to temperance are not identical. Contra McDowell, the virtues of character are to some extent mutually independent, not just expressions of a single sensitivity.

5.4.6 Implications for Moral Education

Part of the payoff of replacing the single-channel account of attention with the cognitive unison account is that it changes our picture of what kind of character development might be possible and what moral education might hope to achieve. If we were to adopt the channel capacity account of attention, then we would have reason to think that being good at paying attention is one aptitude which is relevant to the performance of any task. Imagine that there were such a trait as single-channel-attentiveness, defined as being disposed to dedicate the optimal amount of working memory to each of whatever tasks are at hand. Suppose that two people who have the same conception of the good but possess single-channel-attentiveness to a different degree. Both people know what facts might be salient to practical reasoning about danger, and what facts might be salient to practical reasoning about hunger, but the person who is more single-channel-attentive is better disposed to notice those facts, and is therefore less likely in general to make errors in practical reasoning. The person who is less single-channel-attentive would in every area of her life fall short of the way the virtuous person deliberates. So, if the single-channel account of attention had been true, we would think that one program of education aimed at developing attentiveness in general would bring the student closer to virtue in every area of her life. However, since the single-channel account is not true, we have no one-size-fits-all educational program to recommend when it comes to attention.

5.5 Inattentional Blindness and Situationism

5.5.1 Inattentional Blindness Explains Some Situational Effects

The results observed in Chabris' *Fight Club* study can be best explained in terms of inattentional blindness. Subjects often overlooked endangered strangers when they were focussed on a counting task. Inattentional blindness due to being preoccupied on a counting task explains why these subjects did nothing to help, and we can reliably predict that subjects who are preoccupied will be far less likely to help than subjects who are not preoccupied. The situational factor of being in the middle of a counting task explains and predicts their strange behaviour.

Inattentional blindness can also explain part of what is going on in Darley and Batson's "Jerusalem to Jericho" study, though postexperimental interviews with subjects suggest that inattention is not the whole of the story.³³² Recall that in that experiment, the likelihood that a subject would bustle past an apparently injured stranger without stopping to help him went up dramatically if subjects had been told that they were running a few minutes late for an appointment on the far side of campus. In postexperimental interviews many subjects reported that they had not noticed the presence of an injured person. Their failure to stop can be explained in terms of inattentional blindness. They had adopted an attentional set that was optimal for navigating across campus as quickly as possible. Being primed to avoid obstacles on their way explains why they would not notice a prone stranger, or notice them only as an obstacle to be walked around. The account of inattentional blindness given in this chapter is well suited to explaining why the subset of the seminarians who failed to notice the imperilled stranger did not stop to help.

Inattentional blindness cannot explain the behaviour of all of the subjects in the seminarians study. Darley and Batson report that in postexperimental interviews most of the subjects who did nothing to help *were* able to recall having seen a person lying prone across their path when asked after the fact. Some of these subjects did not consider the possibility that this prone person might have needed help until they were specifically asked about that possibility after the fact.³³³ They saw the person but were apparently blind to his distress. However, some of the subjects were not blind in any sense. Some of the seminarians who did not stop said that they *had* noticed a person lying on the ground and that they were aware of that person's distress but walked past them anyway.³³⁴ Their behaviour cannot be explained in terms of inattentional blindness. It is not clear whether we should diagnose their failure to stop as a failure to display empathy for the injured person or as a failure of practical reasoning due to skewed priorities. The behaviour of the subset of subjects who saw the imperilled person and did not help needs to be explained in terms of some other psychological phenomenon, and this will be attempted in chapter seven.

5.5.2 Is Everyone Equally Blind?

We often explain why people behave the way they do by pointing to the fact that they were distracted or preoccupied. It is easy to predict that a person who is distracted or preoccupied will be more likely to overlook things than someone who is not. That is not in dispute. The question is whether anything other than situational factors like distractors and attention-directing primes matters when we are trying to explain and predict behaviour.

If there were no interpersonal differences in the way people respond to distraction and preoccupation to be explained, situationism would be our best account of why people behave the way they do when they are in a rush or when they are distracted. Nothing we might say about character traits would explain or predict why the subjects in these studies behaved the way they did.

I have argued that being blind to the needs of others is a way of falling short of virtue, one that is not well explained by neo-Aristotelian moral psychology. Virtuous people are supposed to be disposed to do the right thing at the right time for the right reason. People who are disposed to overlook others in need will fail to do what a person who is virtuous by eudaimonist standards would do. It is a way of falling short of virtue that is neither vicious nor akratic, for a person can be blind to facts about her situation despite being correctly motivated and otherwise disposed to correct practical reasoning. If everyone was equally vulnerable to phenomena such as inattention blindness it would seem that everyone is equally falling short of virtue in that respect, for everyone equally would be making significant errors in practical reasoning due to misdirected attention.

5.6 Becoming Resistant to Situational Factors

5.6.1 Distraction, Preoccupation and Expertise

Training and expertise can make a person better at attending to relevant particulars. Surprisingly, some experts such as athletes actually perform better in a distracting environment, perhaps because someone who has attained mastery does not benefit from thinking about their own technique.³³⁵ A neo-Aristotelian might see this as a welcome result, for it shows that a kind

of education can inculcate dispositions that make a person resistant to situational factors such as distractions and preoccupations.

However, it turns out that experts are more vulnerable to distractions than other people if those distractions fall within their area of expertise. In one study, musicians and nonmusicians were instructed to perform a task involving reading text. An irrelevant distracter, a picture of a musical instrument appeared beside the text. Musicians were impaired at the reading task to a greater degree than nonmusicians. It seems that the nonmusicians were inattentionally blind to the distracting picture and thus were able to remain focussed on the task they were trying to perform, but musicians were not.³³⁶ Musicians notice musical instruments even when they are trying to focus on other tasks. In short, their aptitude for resisting inattentional blindness to particulars relevant to their area of expertise comes at the expense of being more vulnerable to being distracted away from any other task by those particulars. This implies that programs of task-specific training are sometimes mutually incompatible.

5.6.2 Task-specific Training Versus Local Virtues

Training effects demonstrate that facts about a person are sometimes more important for explaining and predicting her behaviour than facts about situations. It is possible to develop dispositions which modulate the degree to which specific situational factors affect attention. However, these conclusions seem to support Doris' version of situationism.

Recall that Doris was open to the idea that there are what he called local traits (3.4.3). He thought his empirical evidence was reason to believe that no one is sociable in general, getting

along well with people in any situation. However, he acknowledged that there might be traits such as office-party-sociability. On the basis of having seen Alice be friendly at office parties in the past we can predict with some confidence that she will be sociable at the next office party as well, though we have no basis for guessing what she is like among other friends.

One reason to doubt that task-specific training results in a local trait is that the training will affect behaviour in inappropriate contexts. Speaking just in terms of visual response times, musicians tend to notice musical instruments regardless of their situation. If they are trying to focus on musical matters they are better at avoiding distraction than others, but in situations where the presence of an instrument is a distraction irrelevant to the task at hand they will be worse than others at avoiding distraction. For better or for worse, their training affects them in many different situations, therefore their training has produced something more than a local trait. Doris is mistaken in thinking that character consists at most of local traits.

5.7 Summary

Some studies in which seemingly trivial features of situations have a disproportionate effect on behaviour can be explained in terms of distraction and inattention blindness. A seemingly insignificant cue can affect a person's response time or cause her to overlook a seemingly obvious feature of her situation, even something as difficult to miss as a nearby fistfight. There is no virtue that would make a person more resistant to the effects of inattention blindness in every situation. However, task-specific training can increase a person's sensitivity to task-relevant stimuli, making her more resistant than other people to being inattention blind to those stimuli.

Attending to whatever is most important in one's situation is necessary for correct practical reasoning, which makes effects such as inattentional blindness a problem for ethicists. All things being equal, a person who has task-specific training that enhances her ability to focus on the most normatively significant features of a type of situation will be better at practical reasoning about what should be done in that type of situation than another person would have been in that type of situation. The dispositions that result from this training are therefore an achievable human excellence, but no person can undergo task-specific training for every imaginable task, therefore all people will fall short of attainable human excellence in some respects. That result is not one that would be welcome to most eudaimonists. As we will see in chapter seven, something similar is true of dispositions that regulate emotion.

6 Virtue, Ignorance and Inattention

6.1 Are Dispositions that Promote Ignorance Ever Praiseworthy?

The previous chapter dealt with the relationship between virtue and attention to particulars, focussing on McDowell's claim that virtue is a single sensitivity to the salience of particulars. I pointed out that as an empirical matter of fact human beings cannot equally and simultaneously attend to everything around us. On the grounds that ought implies can, being virtuous must not require a human being to be disposed to succeed at being omnisciently situationally aware. Virtuous people are disposed to pay attention in an appropriately selective manner. Being disposed to adopt the right attentional set at the right time is necessary for virtue, for if a person is ignorant of important facts about her circumstances she will be unable to act for the right reasons. In looking at McDowell I explored the question of what a virtuous person would direct her attention toward; in this chapter I turn to the work of Julia Driver to inquire about what a virtuous person would direct her attention away from.

Selective attention means attending to some particulars at the expense of attending to others. Attending to those particulars that are most important implies not attending to particulars that are less relevant. This implies that virtuous people are disposed to be ignorant of some particulars. Virtue is usually associated with knowledge or even identified with knowledge; the idea that virtuous people would be disposed to be ignorant of anything is unsettling.

This chapter is a meta-ethical investigation of the relationship between virtue, ignorance and inattention. For the most part, the work done in this chapter does not involve empirical data, although it will aid in interpreting the studies discussed in chapters five and seven. The approach I take in this chapter is to shift the debate as much as possible from the question of when virtuous people will be ignorant to the question of when virtuous people will be inattentive. One goal of this chapter is to show that virtues like modesty, which on some accounts consist of dispositions to be ignorant, do not in fact require their bearer to be ignorant. A second goal is to build a neo-Aristotelian argument that falling short of virtue due to having dispositions which promote ignorance is not necessarily a matter of having a vice.

6.2 Ignorance of Virtuous People due to Perceptual Inattention

6.2.1 Appropriately Selective Attention Results in Ignorance

As argued in chapter five, the empirical data on inattentional blindness teaches us that a surprisingly small distraction can produce serious errors of perception and recall. If a person has adopted an attentional set oriented toward some task other than the most pressing task at hand, it is likely that her performance of the highest priority task will be impaired. Conversely, performing a high priority task attentively will impair performance of any other tasks which require any of the cognitive resources that have been set aside for performing the high priority task. A godlike being with infinite cognitive resources could perform any number of tasks simultaneously and attentively, but because human beings have finite cognitive resources inattention to some particulars is usually unavoidable. Even the most virtuous people cannot avoid being inattentive to many features of their circumstances, for even appropriately selective attention implies inattention to some particulars.

This is problematic because every situation includes a vast range of features which are at least potentially morally salient. Many of those features can usually be safely ignored. For example, a worker in a large office does not normally need to attend to the posture of an acquaintance, almost a stranger, who sits six desks away. Nine hundred and ninety nine days out of a thousand the acquaintance's posture is not worth noticing, for it has no role to play in the practical reasoning of the office worker as he plans his day. On those days no harm is done by inattention to the acquaintance's posture. However, it might be the case one day in a thousand that the acquaintance has an unspoken need to be comforted, indicated in his posture by subtle signs of distress. A being with infinite cognitive resources would attend to every potentially salient feature of her surroundings at all times, taking every one of which is relevant at this moment into account in her practical reasoning. Given limited cognitive resources, a human being can only attend to a small subset of the potentially morally relevant features of her circumstances. Because the posture of a near-stranger can usually be safely overlooked it should usually be overlooked, for as a rule the cognitive resources that might be used to monitor their posture are better spent on higher priority tasks. Even a considerate person would habitually pay little attention to that near-stranger's posture. In short, we should expect that information which is sometimes of nonzero salience will often need to be overlooked by a virtuous person.³³⁷

It is important to note that there are cases where avoiding distraction and preoccupation with other tasks is not enough to make a person capable of attending to all relevant particulars. A sufficiently complex task can overwhelm available cognitive resources even if it is being done attentively. For example, a juggler who is juggling attentively can keep three balls in the air, but

to date no one has proven capable of keeping fourteen balls in the air simultaneously, in part because of the extreme difficulty of mentally keeping track of that many moving objects. Beyond a certain threshold of task complexity even the most virtuous people will be inattentive to some facts that are relevant to the task she is currently performing.

The best a human being can do in the face of complex tasks, distractions and possible preoccupation with other tasks is to adopt an attentional set that reduces the likelihood of overlooking those particulars which would feature most prominently in the practical reasoning of a godlike being who could attend to every particular. For example, in a situation which calls for courage, the virtuous person will selectively attend to whatever particulars might be salient to judgments about danger. According to the cognitive unison theory of attention, what it means to respond to danger attentively is that every cognitive resource that might be necessary to assess risks and possible courses of action can be called upon without distraction. Dedicating cognitive resources to the task of attending to danger comes at a price, for that leaves those resources unavailable for other tasks. For example, an attentional set that is optimal for noticing dangers would be suboptimal for noticing opportunities to be generous. Even virtuous people may overlook some particulars that would play a role in the idealized practical reasoning of a godlike being, and the best we can say about them is that they are better than anyone else at avoiding mistakes that one might make if one focuses on trivial particulars and neglects important ones.

6.2.2 Do Limits on Attention Mean that No Human Can Be Virtuous?

Selective attention implies inattention to some particulars. As argued above, even the most virtuous person is bound to overlook some situational factors that would factor into the

practical reasoning of a godlike being with infinite cognitive resources. There are limits to how much information any of a person's cognitive systems can process, and these limits are often quite low.³³⁸ McDowell tells us that virtue requires being fully aware of all normatively salient facts about one's circumstances, but this is impossible for human beings.³³⁹ This would seem to imply that no human being could ever be perfectly virtuous, for it is impossible for a human being to take into account every feature of her circumstances in the way that an idealized deliberator would.³⁴⁰

I deny that limitations on attention demonstrate that no human being could be perfectly virtuous. Ought implies can; the inability of human beings to attend to everything at all times should not be considered a moral failing. I would like to follow Hursthouse in saying that being virtuous means being a good member of one's species.³⁴¹ Virtue for a human can involve dispositions to pay appropriately selective attention even if a being with infinite cognitive resources would not be disposed to be selective in paying attention. As discussed in section 2.3.3, Aristotle's remarks on godlikeness suggest that gods have no need of some human virtues. Temperance is a virtue only for beings that can eat, need to eat, and can harm themselves by overeating. I would like to suggest that something similar is true with regards to attention. Being disposed to pay appropriately selective attention would not be a virtue for omniscient beings who can attend to every particular at once, but it could nevertheless be the case that being so disposed is virtuous for human beings.

6.2.3 Selective Inattention is not Praiseworthy in Itself

Virtuous people are disposed to pay attention selectively and selective attention implies ignorance but the ignorance of virtuous people is not praiseworthy in itself. By analogy, we praise someone as being a good juggler if they can juggle five balls at once. We do not praise them more if we see them attempt to juggle six balls and drop one. We praise appropriately selective attention qua disposition to notice important things, not qua disposition to ignorance of unimportant particulars.

I expect the claim that ignorance due to selective attention is not praiseworthy in itself will not be controversial, but this is not the only respect in which virtuous people are sometimes said to be ignorant. Julia Driver suggests two others. She believes that some virtues consist of dispositions to stop evaluating a situation and act precipitously before one has all of the facts. She claims that “impulsive courage” is a disposition that inclines its bearer to charge into danger without thinking about the degree of danger she will be in and claims this disposition is a virtue.³⁴² The question of when a virtuous person will stop deliberating will be addressed in the next chapter. She also suggests that ignorance itself is sometimes praiseworthy, a very strange claim to be addressed over the next several sections.

6.3 How Ignorance Might Be Praiseworthy

6.3.1 Driver’s Virtues of Ignorance

Driver argues that in some cases being disposed to be ignorant of some facts is praiseworthy. She believes that some virtues consist of dispositions to lack knowledge of some morally significant particulars. These are not cases where appropriately selective attention

causes a person to overlook low-priority particulars; these are cases where overlooking is desirable and praiseworthy in itself. She claims there are cases where the virtuous person would be overall more ignorant than a less virtuous person.

Driver's prototypical case is the virtue of modesty. Driver claims that "a modest person underestimates self worth."³⁴³ Indeed, "for a person to be modest, she must be ignorant with regard to her self-worth. She must think herself less deserving, or less worthy, than she actually is."³⁴⁴ On her account a modest person is disposed to lack self-awareness.³⁴⁵ One quirk of this account is that it implies that a person who is perfectly modest cannot be aware of her own modesty, for one of the things she is disposed to underestimate is the degree to which she possesses that virtue. Modesty in Driver's sense is a virtue which consists of a disposition to be ignorant about oneself. She calls modesty a "virtue of ignorance."³⁴⁶

Driver claims that there are many virtues of ignorance, virtues which consist of dispositions to be ignorant of relevant particulars. Her list of virtues of ignorance includes such things as blind charity, a disposition not to see the flaws of others, trust, defined as a disposition to stand by a friend by overlooking the preponderance of evidence which suggests that she has done wrong, and a "forgive and forget" disposition, a tendency to be ignorant of wrongs that others have done to us.³⁴⁷

Notice that each of these purported virtues of ignorance is incompatible with one or more Aristotelian virtues. For example, being disposed to know about the dangers one faces is necessary for Aristotelian courage but being disposed to be ignorant of those dangers is

necessary for Driver's impulsive courage. If there are virtues of ignorance it is impossible for one person to be virtuous in every respect, for becoming more courageous in Driver's sense would require becoming less courageous in Aristotle's sense.³⁴⁸

Driver is not alone in thinking that some virtues consist of a disposition to be ignorant. Michael Slote responded to Driver by proposing that "there might be some virtues which require a disposition to ignorance in certain circumstances," terming these "virtues of potential ignorance."³⁴⁹ He takes tragic dilemmas as his example. Suppose that in horrific circumstances a mother of two children sacrifices one, that being the only way to avoid the death of both. A perfectly rational agent would recognize that she made the best possible choice and sleep soundly, he thinks, but it would be disturbing to find a parent sleeping soundly after such an ordeal.³⁵⁰ Having the ability to coolly assess her degree of culpability in her child's death might indicate that her love for her lost child was disturbingly weak. Slote proposed that a person might in general be aware that choosing the least-bad option is praiseworthy but be disposed to be ignorant of that fact in specific cases where she herself is the person who chose the least-bad option. On this view, the virtuous parent would blame herself for the death of her child despite having made the optimal consequentialist choice, for a virtuous person would lack the belief that she had done the best she could have done.

I want to discuss virtues of ignorance because thinking about the degree to which virtue is compatible with ignorance and inattention is an excellent way to find out more about what virtue is and what virtue demands. Driver has picked up on something important. It is true that virtuous people are often unaware of some things that other people obsess over. My goal is to

see if eudaimonists can address the intuitions motivating Driver's account without adopting her consequentialism and without conceding that being disposed to be ignorant is ever praiseworthy in itself.

6.3.2 Consequentialist Virtue Ethics and Virtues of Ignorance

Julia Driver is a consequentialist virtue ethicist. Her claim that being disposed to be ignorant is sometimes praiseworthy is much less counterintuitive within a consequentialist framework than it is within a eudaimonist framework. Consequentialist virtue ethics is a way of normatively assessing states of character that is so different from eudaimonism that some explanation of how it works is in order.

On Driver's account, a virtue is a character trait that tends to produce good consequences.³⁵¹ Driver begins with a utilitarian axiology whereby an action is good to the extent that it increases overall utility.³⁵² Driver claims that a disposition is virtuous if and only if the actual consequences that follow from a person's having that disposition are better than the consequences of her being otherwise disposed.³⁵³ Driver's account of virtue is very different from eudaimonism in many respects.³⁵⁴ What might seem strangest about it is that on her account it doesn't matter at all what's going on inside the head of the person with the disposition except insofar as it is expressed in the consequences of her actions.

Driver claims that desires and feelings are relevant to virtue only through the consequences they produce. Even malice could be compatible with virtue. Driver gives the example of an alien species of sentient crustaceans, the Mutors, who live in an extremely harsh

environment.³⁵⁵ In order to become tough enough to survive into adulthood, Mutor hatchlings must be violently pummelled at a specific age. If nothing short of malice toward hatchlings of that age will motivate giving the hatchlings the painful beatings they need to survive then being disposed to feel malice toward them at that time is virtuous on Driver's account. If feelings of kindness and goodwill toward hatchlings tend to result in insufficiently severe beatings and poor long term hatchling health then in that context Driver would call a disposition to feel kindness a vice.

Driver's account also renders beliefs, intentions and practical reasoning strategies irrelevant to virtue except through the consequences they produce. It is often true that true beliefs and valid arguments will lead to good consequences, but this is not necessarily the case. Horoscope interpretation is as good as sober deliberation if both are equally statistically likely to bring about good consequences. Because Driver thinks that actual consequences are all that matters, Driver has reason to deny the premise of section 5.3.1 that virtue requires correct practical reasoning. Therefore Driver has reason to reject the conclusion of section 5.3.1 that knowledge of particulars is necessary for virtue.

So, the idea that a disposition that promotes ignorance might be necessary for some virtues was not counterintuitive for her because of the consequentialist underpinnings of her virtue ethics. However, as we shall see in the next section, eudaimonists should not reject her notion of virtues of ignorance just because it is counterintuitive for them. As we will see, Driver's virtues of ignorance track an important intuition about virtue that standard eudaimonist accounts of virtue overlook.

6.3.3 Eudaimonists Need to Explain the Ignorance of Modest People

Many people in our society think modesty is a virtue, but modesty is not a virtue Aristotle recognises.³⁵⁶ Nevertheless, it seems to me that virtue ethicists ought to follow Aristotle's example and take what "the many" say about virtue into account when constructing their theories.³⁵⁷ Aristotle does have quite a lot to say about self-regard, particularly in his discussion of the virtue of megalopsuchia. It might be possible to reconcile some of Aristotle's intuitions about megalopsuchia with 21st century intuitions about modesty; I will return to the question of Aristotle's own views in section 6.5.1. The fact that modesty is not listed in *Nicomachean Ethics* books three and four is not reason to summarily exclude it from a discussion of the virtues of character.

In this section I look at two accounts of modesty that are compatible with eudaimonism: Owen Flanagan's and G.F. Schueler's. I argue that these two accounts do not explain all of the intuitions about modesty that are in play in ordinary language.

Owen Flanagan claimed that modesty should be defined as nonoverestimation of oneself. Like Driver, he held that modesty is concerned with "the way a person sees herself and experiences her worth and accomplishments."³⁵⁸ On Flanagan's account, the modest person does not boast because she never claims to be greater than she really is. She makes accurate self-assessments and speaks accordingly.³⁵⁹ Flanagan believed that someone who is modest in Driver's sense lacks self respect because in her self-underestimation she does not give herself sufficient credit. Also, he claimed that "the modest person can know that she is modest"³⁶⁰

because she can accurately estimate the degree to which she possesses the virtue. I will refer to this trait as *nonoverestimation modesty*.

Flanagan's nonoverestimation modesty is indeed called modesty in ordinary language, but it is not the only character trait to carry that name. G. F. Schueler has claimed that Driver's underestimation thesis is wrong because someone might brag even about underestimated merits. By way of example, the world's third best physicist might think herself to be the fifth best, and brag about being fifth best. Schueler prefers to think that the mark of the modest person is that she "does not care whether people are impressed with her."³⁶¹ There is no obstacle to self-awareness of the virtue here. Let's call this species of modesty *autarkic modesty*, in virtue of the fact that the self esteem of a person who is modest in this respect does not excessively rely on the praise of others coming in from the outside.

I see Flanagan's nonoverestimation modesty and Schueler's autarkic modesty not as competing accounts of the same phenomenon but as accounts of two different states of character which travel under the same name in ordinary language. This should not be overly surprising, seeing as the word modesty has a wide range of definitions in ordinary use.³⁶² Flanagan is telling us that the virtuous person is not disposed to be small-minded, thinking herself less worthy of praise than she really is; Schueler's account should remind us that a virtuous person is not disposed to be needy, vainly seeking after flattery to pump up her own ego.³⁶³ I do not intend to endorse or oppose the definitions of modesty put forward by Flanagan and Schuler. Rather, I would like to call attention to a third state of character which would also be called modesty in ordinary language.

Suppose that a person is perpetually happy because she is perpetually thinking about her accurate self-assessment of her own impressive achievements. It is a frequent theme of her conversation, not because she cares what others think but simply because it is on her mind. She talks about her own accomplishments not with an intent to impress others but simply because she finds her own achievements to be as wonderful as a sunrise. She has avoided two kinds of immodesty, since her self-assessment is accurate and since she does not care what others think of her, but her self-centered way of thinking and talking presents itself as immodesty of a third kind, self-obsession.

I'm calling attention to cases of self-obsession because it seems to me that intuitions about this third kind of immodesty are what is motivating Driver's account. Flanagan and Schueler address some of the intuitions people commonly have about modesty but their accounts do not address self-obsessed immodesty. Because they did not address self-obsession they have not proven that Driver's account of self-obsessed immodesty is mistaken.

I will attempt to give an account of my own of this third kind of modesty. I agree with Driver that people who are not self-obsessed may make mistakes when assessing their own worth precisely because they are not self-obsessed. However, I argue that the cause of those mistakes is not ignorance, but inattention. Being virtuous does not require one to forget past achievements, but even though virtuous people have accurate memories of their achievements they often have good reason not to be attending to those memories.

6.4 Virtue and Inattention

6.4.1 Inattentional Modesty

Driver claimed that modest people understate their achievements and abilities because they are ignorant of the true magnitude of their merits, but ignorance is not necessary for understatement. Inattention and distraction can blur our self-assessments, our memories of our achievements and our memories of those events by which we gauge our abilities.

In cases where inattentional blindness impairs perception the perceiver will be ignorant of overlooked particulars, but this is not true in cases where inattention impairs recall. A jogger who fails to perceive a nearby fistfight really is ignorant of the fact that a fistfight took place as she was jogging past. The jogger formed no memory of the event and will never recall it. In contrast, a person who has a memory of an event may be inattentive to that memory now yet recall the event later.³⁶⁴ In Aristotle's phrasing, such a person has a memory but is not using it. A person who fails to recall something due to inattention is not ignorant.

There is empirical evidence that ruminating about oneself is a task that can impair recalling other memories, including autobiographical memory.³⁶⁵ Because thinking about oneself can distract a person from more important tasks, the virtuous person will often have good reason not to be thinking about her own merits. It is true that not thinking about oneself may result in making errors in self-assessment, but because such errors are usually comparatively inconsequential a virtuous person will usually give higher priority to tasks other than ruminating about herself.

We now have the resources we need to respond to Driver with an alternate account of modesty. It is possible for an agent to be temporarily unaware of her own merits due to inattention. If this agent stopped and thought about her achievements she would remember the true extent of her abilities and achievements, but she has a kind of modesty which consists of not focussing her attention on her own merits unless she has good reason to do so. She might underestimate her abilities not through ignorance, but through inattention. I'd like to call this species of modesty *inattentional modesty*. Inattentional modesty is a matter of appropriately selective attention. It is usually appropriate to overlook facts about one's own achievements because those facts are not usually worth thinking about, not when keeping one's attention elsewhere is necessary to bring about the good and the fine. Inattentively modest people are disposed to think about their own merits only in those rare cases when their own merits actually are salient.

It should be noted that inattentional modesty does not reduce to Flanagan's nonoverestimation modesty or to Schueler's autarkic modesty. It is true that the boss in the example above does not overstate her virtues does not overstate her merits or care too much about what the flunky thinks of her, but meeting those two criteria for modesty does not fully explain what is praiseworthy about her character. The error she makes in assessing herself is a symptom of the fact that she is not disposed to spend too much time thinking about herself, and that disposition is praiseworthy. Inattentional modesty is virtuous because being disposed to think infrequently about oneself allows one's attention to be directed elsewhere as appropriate.

6.4.2 When Would a Virtuous Person Think About Her Own Merits?

There is a great difference between thinking about one's own merits infrequently and actually being ignorant of them or having false beliefs about them, for having harsh false beliefs about oneself can make a person's life less good overall. It is normal and necessary for a person to think about her strengths once in a while to maintain her self-esteem. Similarly, someone who has been unjustly criticized ought to call to mind her own merits to reassure herself. Self-absorption, like gluttony, is a hypertrophy of a desire for something which people really do need. However, it might be objected that this argument about self-esteem would justify Pollyanna optimism, boosting one's ego by with encouraging false beliefs about oneself. The need for appropriately positive self-esteem is a reason to think that self-underestimation would not be part of the best possible human life, but this line of argumentation does not make it clear why having *true* beliefs about oneself is necessary for virtue.

Samantha Vice adds two other reasons why ignorance of one's merits would be problematic. Accurate knowledge of one's own merits may be important for decision making because accurate knowledge of the degree to which one is error prone is sometimes important for reliable practical reasoning. Also, accurate knowledge of one's own character is necessary for self-improvement, for a plan of moral education formed in ignorance of oneself is likely to be flawed.³⁶⁶

The most important reason why ignorance about oneself is incompatible with virtue is that attending to one's own merits is sometimes necessary to exercise the virtues. Think about the way a person ought to live if he is not virtuous and knows that he is not virtuous. When it is

time to act, such a person will hesitate and rely on others for guidance. It is right that he should do so, for as Plato says a person who cannot rule himself should at least learn to follow good advice.³⁶⁷ Similarly, a person who knows that he is not virtuous should be modest in his goals, knowing that he cannot achieve the great results that a virtuous person could. For example, a would-be philanthropist who knows that he is not munificent knows that he would be foolish to lean on his own judgment in funding the construction of a new wing of a library, for he is well aware that if he drew up a plan of his own the result would probably be risibly tasteless.

Knowing that he has bad taste, either he should hire an architect and blindly trust what she says or he should give up on the idea of funding a large scale project. The most serious problem with ignorance about oneself is that a virtuous person who has the false belief that she is less than virtuous will be unnecessarily prone to those kinds of self-suspicion. A virtuous person who believes she is not virtuous might live out her life under the guidance of people who are less intelligent, wise and passionate than she is. Similarly, a virtuous person who does not know her own strengths may fail to set bold enough goals for herself. For example, a person might avoid a rewarding career in science for which she is exceptionally well suited because of her catastrophically mistaken belief that she and women in general are bad at math. This is why Aristotle thought of self-underestimation as being a vice, the vice of petty-mindedness.³⁶⁸ While a virtuous person should not be constantly thinking about how great she is, she must have true beliefs about her own greatness that she can turn to on those rare occasions when attending to beliefs about oneself is necessary for virtue.

There are even occasions on which a modest person will need to be aware that she is modest in order to be virtuous. For example, suppose that a modest person was considering

going into politics. Her modesty sets her apart from other candidates and, despite the fact that self-absorption is depressingly common among politicians, her having this virtue is a reason to think that she is more fit for high office than her rivals. Attending to the needs of thousands of constituents is difficult, and it is praiseworthy that she is not disposed to being distracted from that task by navel-gazing. However, there are rare occasions on which she could not be virtuous unless she is aware of her own modesty, and making the decision to run for office is one such occasion, for appropriate ambition requires introspection.³⁶⁹ If she is modest but falsely believes that she is not, she will develop an inaccurately low evaluation of herself as a candidate. Perhaps she might drop out of the race, thinking of herself as being a poor candidate when in fact she is the best qualified candidate. Given her ignorance we would not praise her even if she does stay in the race, for she would be fighting to win despite believing herself to be a bad candidate. So, once in a very rare while, a virtuous person will need to attend to the fact that she is modest in order to live virtuously. My account preserves both Flanagan's intuition that appropriate occasions for awareness of one's own modesty are vanishingly rare and Driver's belief that some such occasions do exist.

6.4.3 Against Slote's Virtues of Potential Ignorance

Slote had an intuition that virtuous people would feel regret at having taken the least-bad course of action in a tragic dilemma, being ignorant of the fact that they had no better options. Having lived through a situation in which a parent's children were both in danger such that it was impossible to rescue both children, a parent who allowed one of her children to die in order to save the other will feel grief at having allowed her first child to die despite the fact that attempting to save both children would have caused both of them to die. I am hesitant to make

any abstract moral judgments regarding survivors of tragic dilemmas.³⁷⁰ Having said that I respect the intuition that virtuous survivors of tragic dilemmas may feel regret.

It is certainly true that survivors of tragic dilemmas may not be capable of evaluating their actions in terms of cold utilitarian calculus. I agree that rational self-assessment in the aftermath might indicate a disturbing lack of attachment. It might even be the case that virtuous people would be more overwhelmed than anyone else, for virtuous people are more capable than anyone of forming strong interpersonal relationships, meaning that they have more to lose than anyone from the loss of the ones they love.³⁷¹ Nevertheless, Slote is wrong in thinking that ignorance that one could not have done better is virtuous.

A virtuous person might be overwhelmed by grief due to a tragic dilemma but it does not follow that being overwhelmed is part of a virtuous life, for a person who is overwhelmed is not flourishing.³⁷² The overwhelmed person's life has been disrupted to the point where she has stopped living the life of a virtuous person. Getting out of that state of being overwhelmed might require eliminating false beliefs that produce self-destructive guilt. Grief counselling exists because it can be hard for one overwhelmed person to dispel her false beliefs on her own. Counselling provides a context in which a person can be assisted to see tragic circumstances through the eyes of a detached observer so that she can come to recognize that her guilt is excessive and overcome it. Continuing in the false belief that she behaved badly would be a recipe for ensuring that she never returns to a virtuous way of living.

People who are living virtuously are not ignorant of the reasons why their actions are morally justified, though a virtuous person might call those self-justifications to mind only infrequently. There is something unseemly about ruminating excessively about the reasons justifying one's own actions. One's attention is usually better directed elsewhere.³⁷³ A virtuous person might make unimportant mistakes about the moral status of her past actions in order to focus on more important tasks. To put Slote's disturbing example to rest, sometimes the act of grieving the death of a child should not be interrupted by thinking about excuses.

6.5 Virtue, Vice and Dispositions to Pay Attention Appropriately

6.5.1 Inattention in Aristotle

The foregoing discussion of modesty in sections 6.4.1-6.4.3 may seem a bit foreign to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicists, but I doubt it would be overly strange to Aristotle himself. This section is exegetical, looking at what Aristotle has to say about inattention, virtue and vice. I argue that Aristotle's position on attention is quite compatible with the cognitive unison theory of attention. I am not invoking Aristotle's name as an argument from authority for my view. My purpose in raising this is to show that my position is compatible with Aristotle, for if I can show that it is compatible with Aristotle I will have shown that it is compatible with the views held by a wide range of eudaimonist virtue ethicists.

Aristotle's megalopsuchia is not identical to 21st century modesty, but the account of modesty given in 6.4 can inform our reading of Aristotle. Megalopsuchia means having a well-justified high opinion of oneself. Modesty is a necessary condition for megalopsuchia; megalopsuchia is modesty plus having very little to be modest about.

The account of inattentional modesty given in 6.4 can help us explain some otherwise perplexing things Aristotle says about mistakes a great-souled person will be disposed to make. Aristotle explicitly states that virtuous people are sometimes inattentive. When he discusses *megalopsuchia*, Aristotle tells us that the great-souled person will “remember any benefit they bestowed, but not those they have received” because it is unpleasant for the virtuous person to think of herself as being dependant on others.³⁷⁴ Aristotle is not advocating for ingratitude in this passage. I take his idea to be that there is a time in one’s life to feel the unpleasantness of dependency just as there is a time in one’s life to feel shame, but that time is in childhood.³⁷⁵ Aristotle thinks that adults of mature character should not do things that make them feel ashamed, nor should they be content to be an inferior partner in a relationship. Equality and friendship require the mutual exchange of good things.³⁷⁶ The great-souled person will sometimes think about what others have done for her, for otherwise she would not remember that it is her turn to pick up the check at lunch, but we should interpret Aristotle as saying that she will not dwell on what others have done for her, for if she did think too much about those things she would not feel like an equal partner in friendship even if she is in fact a good friend. Notice that Aristotle is not saying that appropriate inattention to good things done by other people is a virtue in itself. Rather, he is saying that neurotically thinking of oneself as being in debt to other people is one of the many ways of falling short of having a virtuous self-image.

6.5.2 Inattention as a Symptom of Vice, of Akrasia, and of Other States of Character

As was discussed in chapter one, not every way of falling short of virtue is a vice. According to Aristotle there are dozens of ways of failing to be a great-souled person, some of

which are vices and some of which are not.³⁷⁷ Each different way of falling short of virtue produces a symptomatic pattern of inattention. Some ways of failing to pay appropriately selective attention are vicious, while other ways are akratic. Some ways of falling short of virtue are neither vicious nor akratic.

Consider the range of ways we use the word arrogant. We apply that word to people who have an overly high opinion of themselves and who believe they are right in having that high opinion. Some people are arrogant in the sense that they believe their flaws are praiseworthy, which is vice in the most classically Aristotelian sense. Some people are arrogant in the sense that they are ignorant of their flaws and therefore think too highly of themselves. I have given reason to think that there is a third group of people who are arrogant not because they are ignorant of their flaws but in that they attend to their faults too infrequently. The second and third groups have consciously or unconsciously judged that their flaws are not worth learning about or not worth attending to. Like the first group of people, the second and third groups do not weigh their flaws correctly. Each of these three subspecies of arrogance is a vice.

Now consider someone who has accurate beliefs about himself but who is vain, vain in the sense that he spends too much time thinking about himself because he enjoys thinking about himself excessively. This is a way of falling short of virtue, for he does not feel the way a virtuous person would. His inordinate fondness for himself is likely to manifest itself in his behaviour, for paying too much attention to himself can impair his ability to perform other, more important tasks. However, suppose it is the case that he regrets his own vanity. He knows it is bad to spend so much time thinking about himself. Sometimes he catches himself obsessing

about himself and redirects his attention elsewhere, but his self-control is far from perfect. His vanity is a case of weakness-akrasia.

Now consider the case of someone who is vulnerable to flattery in the following way. He usually thinks about himself the way a virtuous person would and as infrequently as a virtuous person would. He does not take an unseemly amount of pleasure in self-reflection. He will not believe what flatterers say about him, for his beliefs about himself are accurate. However, if a flatterer primes him to think about himself he is unusually bad at breaking out of that attentional set and back into the attentional set that a virtuous person would be in in his situation. He runs what the flatterer said over in his mind, comparing it to what he knows to be the truth about himself. His beliefs about himself remain accurate, but there is some degree of neuroticism in the way he keeps comparing flattery or slander he hears about himself against the truth whenever he is primed to do this. His attention is stickier than it should be, to coin a phrase. This way of falling short of virtue is not vice, nor is it weakness-akrasia, nor is it any of the other ways of falling short of virtue in the neo-Aristotelian catalogue described in chapter two. However, the tools developed in this thesis in chapters five and six make it possible for us to understand what is going on in this case within a neo-Aristotelian framework. We can say that having an over-sticky attentional set with regards to rumination is a way of falling short of virtue because we have stated the difference between being so disposed and virtue: virtuous people are disposed to pay appropriate attention to their own merits but ruminators pay too much attention to themselves if they have been prompted to do so.

In summary, being disposed to pay attention appropriately is not a virtue, and being disposed to fail to pay attention appropriately is not a vice. Being disposed to attend to relevant particulars is a constituent part of many virtues. For example, being disposed to see the world the way a courageous person would see it is a constituent part of courage, not some separate disposition to be evaluated on its own. Any person who fails to attend to relevant particulars in the way a virtuous person would has fallen short of virtue, but there are many ways of falling short of virtue and not all of them are vices.

6.5.3 Courage and Ignorance

I have shown that modesty does not involve ignorance, for the inattentionally modest person has accurate memories of her own accomplishments and makes mistakes only because she is not attending to those memories, but that move does not work in cases of perception. People who fail to attend to particulars in the world around them really will be ignorant of those particulars. People have no thoughts or memories about objects they fail to perceive.³⁷⁸

This chapter has not offered a reply to Driver's claim that impulsive courage is a virtue of ignorance. Chapter five discussed perceptual errors due to such phenomena as inattentional blindness. This chapter discussed errors in recall due to inattention. Driver's impulsive courage is not a matter of inattention in either of these ways. Driver's impulsive person charges into danger because she fails to notice how dangerous the situation is. This is ignorance, but on Driver's account it is not ignorance due to attending to something else. Rather, impulsive people charge blindly into danger because they spend too little time observing her surroundings. This is a new problem, to be discussed in the next chapter.

7 Situations and Emotion

7.1 Situational Factors Affect Emotion and Practical Reasoning

7.1.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter is concerned with a class of pro-situationist studies in which situational factors affect behaviour by affecting emotion. If everyone was equally affected by those situational factors then situationists would be right in thinking that situations are often a much better predictor of behaviour than anything that might be said about character. However, as I argue in 7.2, there is evidence that not everyone is equally affected. Notably, the emotions of professionals are relatively consistent in varied situations. This appears at least to some extent to be true of their lives in general, not just of their emotions on the job. So, there are teachable dispositions which make a person resistant to situational factors which affect emotion. Pro-situationist studies concerned with emotion do not support the conclusion that character is often largely irrelevant to explaining and predicting human behaviour.

However, arguing against situationism is not sufficient to defend eudaimonism. To defend eudaimonism we would need to explain why the subjects of these studies behaved so strangely, and to do so in recognisably Aristotelian terms. I attempt this in 7.3. A neo-Jamesian account of emotion can explain what happened in these studies in a way that is surprisingly compatible with neo-Aristotelian moral psychology. A defence of eudaimonism would also need to explain what role emotion plays in the life of the virtuous person. In 7.4 I argue that feeling the right emotions at the right time and for the right reason is even more important than Aristotle thought, for it turns out that emotion plays an important role in directing practical reason.

The conclusions I draw about practical reasoning allow me to respond to Driver's claims about impulsive courage that were raised in chapter six. She said that impulsive courage and Aristotelian courage are incompatible, but I say that it is the appropriate emotions of a person of a person of Aristotelian courage that enable her to act in an appropriately impulsive way in an emergency. The emotions evoked by situational factors are not necessarily disruptive; the appropriate emotions of the virtuous person make correct practical reasoning possible for her.

7.1.2 Definitions of Terms

There are some empty terminological differences in the ways words like emotion and feeling are used in the philosophical and psychological literatures that need to be cleared away before we can begin. In ordinary language, words such as emotion, mood and feeling are often used more or less interchangeably. The philosophical and psychological literatures assign technical meanings to these words, but they do not do so in a consistent way. The duelling definitions we see in the literatures have a way of obscuring the underlying substantive issues, as seen in the unhelpfully contrasting definitions of the words feeling and emotion that were proposed by Martha Nussbaum and the philosophically engaged psychologist Antonio Damasio.

Damasio draws a distinction between "preorganised emotions" and feelings.³⁷⁹ On his definition, a preorganised emotion is a pattern of physiological changes in response to a stimulus: autonomic nervous system activity, endocrine levels in the bloodstream, muscle reactions including a characteristic facial response, etc.³⁸⁰ This physiological pattern constitutes having an emotion, and on his definition emotions do not involve concepts or require conscious

awareness. Damasio contrasts these preorganised emotions with feelings, defining a feeling as self-awareness of one's own emotional state.³⁸¹ On his view, I *feel* fear when I notice my heart racing, my hands shaking, and cold sweat on my forehead. For Damasio, feelings are a matter of being consciously aware of our emotions, whereas our emotions consist of patterns of physiological changes.

Nussbaum defines feelings and emotions in exactly the opposite way. For her, bodily sensations like “the feeling of agitation,” “a boiling feeling,” “a chilled and queasy feeling,” trembling or fatigue do not deserve to be called emotions.³⁸² Feelings are phenomenologically distinct from one another, but they are only ambiguously related to emotions. For example, agitation is something we may feel when we are afraid, but we also feel it if we are feeling grief or pity.³⁸³ Furthermore, she thinks it is possible to feel fear without being agitated, as in the case of the cold fear that evaluates danger with cool, collected calculation. Furthermore, emotions have cognitive content and feelings do not. When we say we are afraid we can specify what it is that we are afraid of.³⁸⁴ In contrast, a trembling feeling might not be about anything at all, as in the case of a person who is trembling because she has the flu. Therefore, Nussbaum concludes that having a feeling (defined as a pattern of bodily symptoms) is neither necessary nor sufficient for having an emotion.

I see no crisp distinction in ordinary language between feelings and emotions; the words seem to be used more or less synonymously. Nussbaum acknowledges that ordinary language is ambiguous, pointing out that when people talk about “feelings of the emptiness of one's life

without another person” they are using the word feeling in a way that is synonymous with the way she defines the word emotion.³⁸⁵

We might do better to treat words like emotion and feeling as referring to a prototype concept.³⁸⁶ No one disputes that happiness, sadness, fear and anger are emotions.³⁸⁷ In uncontroversial cases these emotions involve both thoughts about the reason why one is feeling the emotion and physiological patterns that are characteristic of the emotion. By stipulation, I will be defining the word emotion as a state which resembles uncontroversial cases of happiness, sadness, fear and anger.

7.1.3 Emotion and Intentionality

There is an important substantive issue hidden in that dispute over definitions. Nussbaum claims that anyone defining emotion in terms of physiological changes will be unable to explain two important features of emotion.³⁸⁸ First, emotions have intentionality. To put it another way, every emotion is about something. Consider the case of a boy who is afraid that the boogeyman is under his bed. He is hiding under the covers trembling, but his fear consists of something more than an elevated level of adrenaline. He is afraid *of* something; his fear has an imagined object, the boogeyman.³⁸⁹ Nussbaum tells us that having an object is necessary for having an emotion. If the boy was not afraid *of* something we would not say that he was afraid; we would look to some other explanation for his elevated level of adrenaline. Second, emotions can be rational or irrational. The boy’s fear of the boogeyman is irrational because there is no such thing as a boogeyman. Fear is *about* threats, and it is irrational to feel fear when there is no threat. Nussbaum is using a cognitivist definition of emotion; cognitivists tell us that having

intentionality is part of the definition of every emotion and that only mental states with cognitive content can have intentionality, therefore physiological changes which lack cognitive content cannot be emotions.³⁹⁰

What's really at stake between cognitivists like Nussbaum and non-cognitivists like Damasio is whether it is possible for emotions to have intentionality without having cognitive content. Noncognitivists such as Damasio claim that some of the canonical emotions such as fear and anger can sometimes have intentionality without having cognitive content. In other words, they think it is possible for our emotions to be about something without us actually thinking about that thing. This is a substantive dispute that we need to resolve to understand how emotions are related to practical reasoning. This will turn out to be important in explaining why subjects behave so strangely in pro-situationist studies concerned with emotion.

7.1.4 Pro-Situationist Studies Concerning Emotion

No one should be surprised that people who are in a positive mood tend to be more friendly, open, communicative and helpful than people who are in a negative mood. We expect that people who have recently gone through a major life event such as the death of a loved one will behave very differently than they otherwise would. What might be more surprising is that many experiments have shown that even seemingly trivial features of a person's circumstances can have a large enough effect on their mood to drastically change the way they interact with others. Doris' favourite example, Isen and Levin's study where most subjects who found a dime in a phone booth were helpful to a stranger while most subjects who did not find a dime were not helpful, is unremarkable in this respect.³⁹¹ Various studies have shown that the ways subjects

interacted with other people could be significantly influenced by such seemingly insignificant primes as seeing a pleasant picture, having watched a happy video, having been prompted to think about an unrelated happy event in their lives, having received positive feedback about an unrelated task, smelling something pleasant, being in a brightly lit room, experiencing a comfortable ambient temperature, or having peace and quiet rather than being in a noisy environment.³⁹² None of these situational factors are relevant to how other people ought to be treated, and some of them are so insignificant that subjects might not even have been consciously aware of them. Doris is right in thinking that aspects of situations can have a disproportionate effect of human behaviour by influencing our emotions.

7.1.5 Doris on the Need to Eliminate Negative Emotions

Doris has an interest in “self-condemnatory emotions,” primarily guilt and shame.³⁹³ On his account guilt and shame are at least in part constituted by judgments; he tells us that guilt’s “characteristic thought” is “I’ve behaved badly” and that shame’s characteristic thought is “I’m bad (weak, small).”³⁹⁴ However, Doris believes that the thoughts that constitute shame are not always easily altered by evidence that would normally cause us to change our judgments. He cites his own experience that knowing the statistics on the safety of air travel has not eliminated his fear of flying.³⁹⁵

Doris is interested in shame because he believes it is “the dominant moral emotion in an ethic of character” in that the unpleasantness of feeling shame spurs people to improve their character.³⁹⁶ Aristotle would strongly disagree; Aristotle held that a virtuous person would never feel shame because he would never do anything which would cause him to feel shame.³⁹⁷ Let’s

set that point of disagreement aside and focus on the role that cognitivism about self-condemnatory emotions plays in Doris' positive project.

Doris wrote *Lack of Character* not just with the aim of overthrowing virtue ethics but also with the hope that situationism could improve human lives. One aspect of that positive project was the claim that situationism is supposed to improve human lives is by eliminating needless shame. Guilt at having performed bad actions can be helpful in that it incentivizes us not to perform those bad actions in the future, but shame is far more destructive. On Doris' account, people who feel shame are not just upset that they have performed a bad action, but because they think of themselves as the sort of person who performs bad actions. Shame globalizes; feeling shame involves the judgment that having performed a bad action is evidence of having a bad character trait. Shame "spreads to the whole person."³⁹⁸ If situationism is correct, the judgment underlying shame is usually mistaken, for if there are no global character traits then it is never appropriate to feel ashamed of having globally bad character traits. This mistake has consequences, for a person suffering under a heavy burden of shame will likely be miserable and unable to live up to her full potential. Situationism can correct a person's belief that she has globally bad character traits, and eliminating the false belief will eliminate the unnecessary shame.³⁹⁹ Doris believes we often need to eliminate emotions to live well. Studies showing that emotion can have a pronounced effect on practical reasoning give this belief of his added heft.

7.1.6 Practical Reasoning is Vulnerable to Situational Factors Affecting Emotion

Situational factors can affect practical reasoning in an insidious way. People who believe they are making cold rational decisions may in fact be heavily influenced by irrelevant features of their situation. A recent study by Danziger, Levav and Avnaim-Pesso identified a disturbing trend in a large set of actual rulings by Israeli parole boards. They found that approximately 60% of prisoners were granted parole at the beginning of the day, but that this percentage dropped exponentially to almost zero as the day wore on. Following lunch, the odds of a prisoner being parole briefly went back up to 60%, tapering off rapidly back down to 10%. After a second break the odds of being granted parole again spiked to 60%, before again falling back to near-zero by the end of the day. It is clear that a non-rational factor, proximity to lunchtime, was having a major impact on the decisions made by the judges.⁴⁰⁰ The judges presumably believed they were deciding each case fairly, rationally and on the merits, but this seems not to be the case. This would seem to be strong evidence that legal realists are right in thinking that justice is “what the judge had for breakfast.”⁴⁰¹

Similar results were obtained in a series of experiments performed by Jonathan Haidt where subjects were asked to evaluate cases of harmless offences. Haidt’s examples were designed to provoke a strong emotional response, cases such as flag desecration and violating sexual taboos.⁴⁰² Subjects who experienced a strong feeling of disgust tended to immediately condemn the transgressive act even when they had difficulty giving reasons why they thought it was wrong. If forced to admit that their reasoning was implausible, they rarely changed their minds. Instead they invented new justifications for their condemnation or insisted on condemning the transgressive behaviour without a reason, saying such things as “I don’t know, I

can't explain it, I just know it's wrong."⁴⁰³ Haidt argued that his subjects were clearly engaged in post-facto moral reasoning. The feeling of disgust they felt was sufficient for them to condemn the transgressive act, while the reasons they gave were epiphenomenal. The subjects thought they were reaching conclusions based on practical reasoning but in fact their emotions fully explained their moral judgments. Irrelevant features of situations which prime emotions can sometimes have a disproportionate effect on a person's moral judgments.

There are two ways we could interpret what a study like Danziger's means for ethics. First, we should acknowledge that the way these Israeli parole boards were configured resulted in unjust decisions. The situationists would tell us that the situation should be changed so as to reduce this effect, perhaps by granting the judges more frequent breaks, and this is unquestionably correct. What is in question is whether a second remedy, training judges to resist this effect, is likely to be efficacious. Practical reason alone is clearly not enough to ensure that justice is done, but it might be the case that there are virtues of character which can enable a person to feel the right feelings despite situational factors that would cause most people to fail to act for the right reasons. Empirical evidence is needed to determine whether this second remedy might prove efficacious.

7.2 Training Can Mitigate the Influence of Situational Factors

7.2.1 Personality Traits Affect Emotion in Many Situations

We have already seen some evidence that there are interpersonal differences in the way people respond to situational factors. Chapter three provided an argument that the big-five character traits of the Five Factor Model are statistically reliable predictors of behaviour patterns.

Having established that, we can make use of the empirical evidence that big-five character traits provide information about individual differences in emotional regulation.

People who have a personality trait are more likely to enter into and remain in emotional states associated with that trait than people who do not have the trait. Studies have shown that subjects who have a trait are likely to interpret life events in a manner consistent with those traits. For example, people who have the trait of neuroticism tend to interpret adverse life events as a threat rather than as a challenge.⁴⁰⁴ Subjects have also proven to react more strongly to stimuli that match their traits.⁴⁰⁵ Due to such effects as these, the traits that a person has sometimes offer a better explanation of her current emotional state than either features of her current situation or facts about her current emotional state as primed by some past situation.⁴⁰⁶

The fact that people tend to enter into and remain in trait-congruent emotional states does not in itself offer any support to eudaimonists. Personality traits bear little resemblance to Aristotelian virtues of character. However, there is evidence that having personality traits that mitigate the influence of situational factors is not just an accident of birth. These personality traits can be inculcated through education.

7.2.2 Personality Traits Associated with Professions

Many professionals believe that peak performance in their profession requires being in a certain state of mind.⁴⁰⁷ Petra Gelhaus believes that a doctor who is disposed to feel appropriate emotions will outperform a robotic, emotionless doctor.⁴⁰⁸ Nadine Kaslow and her many

collaborators claim that habits of mind involving emotion are part of the definition of competence in any profession.⁴⁰⁹

Situationism calls these beliefs into question in two ways. First, it demands proof that a professional's competence extends beyond narrowly defined situations; we cannot assume *a priori* that a doctor who feels appropriate emotions when treating head trauma will also feel appropriate emotions when treating chronic pain. Second, we cannot assume that minor situational factors will not affect a professional's emotions. It would be disturbing if factors on the scale of finding a dime in a phone booth affected emotion to such an extent that they could affect clinical performance. The notion that professionals are unusually good at remaining in the emotional state they need to be in to excel at their work is a notion that needs to be supported with empirical evidence.

There is evidence that there are characteristic personality traits associated with some professions, traits which keep professionals in appropriate emotional states. Consider surgeons. Surgeons have a reputation for being unusually confident, to the point where there is a stereotype that they are arrogant. This "surgical personality" is not a myth. One study by James McGreevy and Deborah Weibe found that surgeons as a class have personality traits that are significantly different from the general population. Notably, they tend toward assertiveness, low "vulnerability" to stress and low "compliance." They are "more likely to be aggressive, more likely to prefer competition to cooperation, and they have no reluctance to express anger when necessary."⁴¹⁰ Joan Cassell performed a qualitative study asking surgeons to describe themselves. She found that they think of themselves as being arrogant ("we all believe we can

do anything better than anyone else”), confident, aggressive, hierarchical and hungry for praise. It is perhaps fortunate that this pattern of traits is not commonplace in the general population. However, it is not without reason that surgeons have these dispositions.

Surgeons often compare themselves to test pilots or astronauts,⁴¹¹ and this is not entirely megalomaniacal. All three jobs require snap decisions with life or death consequences. As Joan Cassell put it,

Surgeons are rarely allowed the luxury of second thoughts; they cannot try a treatment, see if it works, augment or alter it, and then, if their first attempt is unsuccessful, try another approach. At the operating table, the surgeon must manifest decisiveness, certitude, control⁴¹²

Most people would hesitate due to fear and self-doubt at performing surgery, and not just because they lack technical skill. Fear and self-doubt are reasonable when a person’s life is at stake, but we do not want our surgeons to always have this at the forefront of their minds. Fear promotes hesitation and second thoughts, and in emergency surgery that hesitation could increase the risk of failure. Assuming that a surgeon has technical skill, it is to the patient’s advantage if the surgeon is disposed to act with impulsive boldness. Surgeons need to be less sensitive than other people to elicitors of fear and self-doubt.

Surgeons are unusually insensitive to situational features which in most people would elicit self-doubt. This is a first-order disposition to feel certain sorts of emotion more frequently than non-surgeons. Due to their personality traits, surgeons are more likely to feel bold and less likely to feel fearful than most people. As argued in chapter three, personality traits support statistically reliable predictions about future behaviour, and do so in a way that is not restricted to specific situations.

The traits we see in professionals are not entirely the result of education. Self-selection is a factor. People are more likely to enter medical school if they already have a measure of the temperament typically seen in surgeons.⁴¹³ However, it is clear that professional education affects the character of people who receive it. Costa and McCrae claim that personality traits are relatively fixed in adults, but one exception is that one's university education can have a marked effect on one's personality traits.⁴¹⁴ To the extent that the "surgical personality" results from a surgical education, the dispositions that make surgeons insensitive to elicitors of fear are teachable.

Doris acknowledges that military training can shape a person's character, but claims that military training is efficacious only because it takes place in a "total environment" – boot camp – where the recruit can be cut off from her normal social connections and aggressively remoulded.⁴¹⁵ However, as has already been shown, soldiers are not the only professionals who, as a class, behave differently from nonprofessionals. A nurse's education is rigorous, but it takes place in the context of an open university experience. Situationists cannot justifiably ignore the effect of professional status on behaviour.

7.2.3 Professionalism and Second-Order Emotional Dispositions

Inculcating big-five personality traits is not the only means by which professional training can affect the emotions of those who receive that training. Some professions instil a different kind of trait: second-order dispositions to feel a certain way when one detects a certain emotional state in oneself.

There is empirical evidence that paramedics have a sort of grim callousness which results from dispositions which suppress unhelpful emotions. It turns out that one mechanism by which paramedics regulate their own emotions is through meta-emotions directed at their own emotional state.⁴¹⁶ A study by Horst Mitmansgruber, Thomas Beck and Gerhard Schüßler found that being a paramedic is strongly correlated with self-directed feelings of anger and contempt at times when feeling first-order emotions that are situationally inappropriate.⁴¹⁷ These results emerge not from questions about on-the-job performance but from questions about their lives in general.⁴¹⁸ While self-directed anger and contempt may sound very disturbing, it turns out that being so disposed improves a paramedic's performance on the job and increases their overall satisfaction with life.⁴¹⁹ Regardless of elicitors of emotion in their current situation, paramedics are disposed to monitor their own emotional states and emotionally respond to their own emotions in a way that tends to render their emotional states intersituationally consistent.

7.2.4 Professionalism and the Bystander Effect

My focus in this chapter is on situational factors that affect emotion, but it is worth noting that professional training can dispose a person to be resistant to other sorts of situational factors as well. Studies on the bystander effect have shown that people are more likely to offer help if they are alone than if they are among other people any of whom could offer assistance, but Cramer *et al* have shown that the bystander effect is very weak for trained health care professionals.⁴²⁰ When registered nurses have reason to believe that someone has been injured they usually take action, and do so whether they are alone or among others.⁴²¹

7.2.5 What Remains to be Explained

In 7.1 we saw evidence that situational factors which prime emotions can affect behaviour. Here in 7.2 we have seen evidence that professional training can make a person less vulnerable to the disruptive influence of some situational factors. That gives us sufficient reason to reject the sort of extreme situationism promulgated by Harman. Facts about persons, such as whether or not the person has had professional training, sometimes support predictions about future behaviour that are significantly more reliable than predictions based on situational factors alone.

However, eudaimonists do not simply tell us that some people behave more consistently than others; they tell us that the consistency seen in a virtuous life results from practical reasoning and virtues of character. The lack of consistency seen in the rulings made by Danziger's Israeli parole board – leniency in the morning and harshness before lunch – indicates that their decisions were not responsive to the facts in each case in the way that virtue demands.⁴²² However, the way in which the parole board fell short of virtue cannot be explained with reference to the standard eudaimonist catalogue of non-virtuous states of character. The parole board was not vicious. We see no reason to think they did not value reaching just verdicts, ruling out true vice. They cannot have been akratic. Proximity to lunchtime is irrelevant to correct practical reasoning about the merits of each case, therefore the influence that proximity to lunchtime had on them indicates that they were not reasoning about the situation as a virtuous person would, and akratics do reason as a virtuous person would. They do not seem to have been inverse akratic, for this is not a case where appropriate emotions were able to rein in incorrect practical reasoning. We have no reason to think that the parole board members were

psychologically abnormal, ruling out brutality. Their rulings were unjust, but eudaimonist states of character seem unable to explain why they made these unjust rulings.

I argue that we can explain why the parole board's emotions affected their practical reasoning with a neo-Jamesian account of emotion, and that a neo-Jamesian account is surprisingly compatible with what eudaimonists have to say about the relationship between emotion and practical reasoning. I work this through in 7.3. My claim is that emotions can convey information, and that appropriate emotions convey that information which is most salient. I argue that the parole board's unjust decisions prior to lunchtime can be explained by misattribution of emotion; they were in a bad mood due to low blood sugar and decision fatigue and they mistakenly believed that their bad mood was conveying information about the bad character of the parolees before them. This will need to be explained in detail.

In 7.4 I argue that it is not aberrant for emotion to influence practical reasoning. We see emotion influencing practical reason in the most virtuous people, and indeed that influence is necessary for them to be virtuous. The relative immunity that professionals have to situational factors seen here in 7.2 does not result from their reasoning being divorced from emotion; rather, professionals succeed where others fail because they continue to feel appropriate emotions where others would feel less appropriate emotions. Whether or not this aptitude of professionals is virtuous is something that will need to be discussed in 7.5 and in the conclusions of this thesis.

7.3 How Inappropriate Emotion Leads to Misattribution

7.3.1 The James-Lange Theory of Emotions

Even cognitivists acknowledge that, phenomenologically, emotions are typically accompanied by physiological symptoms.⁴²³ For example, when people feel afraid they feel their hearts race, they turn pale, their breathing becomes shallow and they tremble.⁴²⁴ Paul Ekman pointed out that our most basic emotions have characteristic facial expressions that are correlated with autonomic nervous system activity.⁴²⁵ The pattern of bodily changes that takes place when we feel an emotion can be extraordinarily complex.⁴²⁶

William James argued that these bodily symptoms of emotion are not just symptoms; they constitute the emotion.⁴²⁷ He claimed that if we try to imagine “some strong emotion and then try to abstract from our consciousness of it all the feelings of its bodily symptoms, we find we have nothing left behind.”⁴²⁸ James is telling us that states of the body are necessary for emotion and constitutive of emotion. Imagine a person who is evaluating a threat with a calm facial expression, a steady hand and a slow and steady pulse. Such a person is thinking about danger, but in a cold, rational way; it would be mistaken to say that this person is afraid. In the same vein, Jesse Prinz argues that it is possible to acknowledge the fact that one has been insulted without becoming angry.⁴²⁹ Thoughts of danger are not sufficient for fear, for we deny that someone is afraid if they do not have something like trembling and a pounding heart.

Cognitivists deny that bodily states are sufficient for emotion on the ground that bodily symptoms lack intentionality.⁴³⁰ Nussbaum claims that non-cognitivists such as James believe that “emotions are just unthinking forces that have no connection with our thoughts, evaluations

or plans.”⁴³¹ Without aboutness these “non-thinking movements” could play no role in the way a person sees the world.⁴³²

Nussbaum would be right to reject noncognitivism if noncognitivism meant that emotions have no intentionality, but that turns out to be something of a strawman. Many noncognitivists claim that emotions do have intentionality and deny that emotions are divorced from practical reasoning. Neo-Jamesian versions of noncognitivism can account for the intentionality of emotion and are a serious rival to Nussbaum’s cognitivism. For my purposes in this chapter, it is significant that noncognitivist theories about emotion are not undermined by cases such as the dime study. On the contrary, they offer a plausible account of why it is that finding a dime can so radically alter a person’s behaviour.

7.3.2 Information Processing and Representation

Jesse Prinz has a plausible account of how emotions can have intentionality without cognitive content, one which uses Fred Dretske’s semantic account of information as a foundation. There is general agreement on the idea that information involves a correlation between a signal sent from a source and detected at a receiver; Shannon’s work on this theme was discussed in chapter five. Dretske goes beyond Shannon, claiming that information conveys *meaning* from source to receiver when there is a correlation between the message sent and the message received due to a law-like connection between the state of the information source and the state of the receiver.⁴³³ The upshot for epistemology is that a receiver of information is justified in saying that she has knowledge about the source.⁴³⁴ For example, there are law-like connections between the frequencies of light reflected by the surface of an object, the sensitivity

of the human retina to light, the signal transmitted along the optic nerve and activity in the visual cortex. At every stage, the information being conveyed represents the colour of the object that is being seen.⁴³⁵

The move Prinz makes is to point out that Dretske imposes no requirement that an information-processor must be a mind. Prinz mentions smoke alarms as an example of “representation outside of the mind.”⁴³⁶ By design, fire alarms ring if and only if smoke is present. We can examine the way a smoke alarm is constructed to confirm that there is a law-like connection between ringing and the presence of smoke. A person can rightly say that she knows there is a fire when she hears the alarm ring because it is true that a ringing fire alarm represents smoke and smoke represents fire. To put it another way, the ringing is about smoke. In this way, the ringing has intentionality despite the fact that the fire alarm is a simple mechanism which is incapable of forming concepts.

However, the ringing of a fire alarm is type-ambiguous.⁴³⁷ A grease fire on the stove would cause it to ring, but an electrical fire in the microwave could also cause it to ring. The alarm conveys some information, in that it indicates that there is some kind of fire, but it does not tell us everything we might like to know about that fire. In general, type-ambiguous signals convey the information that one member of the set of possible sources of that signal is transmitting, but they are ambiguous in the sense that they do not provide information as to *which* member of the set of possible sources of that signal is transmitting. The next section applies this notion of type-ambiguous signals to emotions, arguing that feeling an emotion

conveys the information that one of the many possible elicitors of that emotion is present without conveying which of the many possible elicitors is responsible.

7.3.3 Emotion as Information

Prinz denies that an emotion is a “pure feeling...whose identity is exhausted by its felt aspect or phenomenal character”⁴³⁸ on the grounds that emotions can represent states of affairs in the world by conveying information about them. To explain how this can be the case, it is necessary to slow down and explain the route by which emotions can convey information about states of the world. The model offered by Damasio can be boiled down to a four step process. First, “sensory cortices detect and categorize the key feature or features of an entity.”⁴³⁹ Second, structures in the brain including the amygdale detect a pattern among those stimuli which calls for a response.⁴⁴⁰ Third, the amygdale responds by directly or indirectly triggering the whole suite of physiological responses in the body that constitutes feeling an emotion. The fourth step is feedback: various centers in the brain monitor the current state of the body.⁴⁴¹ Each of these steps is connected to the next in a reliable way, and these connections evolved this way because reliable connections between stimuli and states of the body were adaptive.⁴⁴² Therefore, emotions can convey information about states of affairs in the world. That is why Damasio feels confident in calling emotions automated alarm signals about states of affairs in the world.⁴⁴³

Recall that emotions are type-ambiguous.⁴⁴⁴ It is true that hearing a rustle in the bushes at night reliably produces a pounding heart and tight feeling in the stomach, states of affairs in the body that constitute feeling fear. However, just as many kinds of fire could trigger a smoke alarm, many different stimuli can trigger fear. As Prinz describes it, each of a person’s emotions

has a “calibration file”⁴⁴⁵ of triggers that can elicit it, some that are innate and many that have conditioned or otherwise learned. Feeling fear only conveys the information that one of many kinds of danger is present.

However, that is enough to establish that neo-Jamesian emotions can have intentionality. Feeling fear is a reliable indicator that some kind of threat is present. The pounding heart and tight feeling in the stomach are *about* that threat. Likewise, Prinz calls sadness a loss detector.⁴⁴⁶ The sadness is not a contentless push. It has intentionality; feeling sad indicates that a loss has taken place. That feeling is about that loss.

Likewise, neo-Jamesians are able to say that emotions are warranted or unwarranted, correct or incorrect, reasonable or unreasonable.⁴⁴⁷ A person who feels sadness when she has suffered no loss is not warranted in feeling that sadness. Sadness is the wrong emotion to feel when there is no loss, just as a fire alarm should not ring when there is no smoke. Sadness when there is no loss is unreasonable, for it is not being felt for the right reason. Similarly, “fear caused by a caged snake [which cannot reach me] is unreasonable, even if no ideas precede or follow the emotion.”⁴⁴⁸ If a person is disposed to feel sadness when they have suffered no loss they are disposed to feel the wrong emotion at the wrong time for the wrong reason.

External stimuli are not the only elicitors of emotion; emotions can also be elicited by thoughts. Thoughts can trigger emotions in the absence of any sensory stimulus. For example, it is perfectly possible to feel sad because one is thinking about having lost a loved one. What neo-Jamesians are saying is that thoughts are not the *only* cause of emotions.⁴⁴⁹ All they need to

demonstrate is that consciously thinking about a threat is not necessary for fear. By showing that emotions are sometimes elicited by sensory stimuli they have shown that cognitive content is neither necessary nor sufficient for emotion.

7.3.4 Neo-Jamesian Non-Cognitivism and Aristotle

The non-cognitivist view I have defended preserves Aristotelian intuitions about intentionality. Aristotle tells us that the virtuous person feels the right emotion at the right time and for the right reason. Aristotelian emotions are not content-free pushes; an emotion that is felt for the right reason represents the right reason. For example, when a virtuous person feels fear her fear is about a real threat and proportional to that threat.

Aristotle tells us that virtues of character are not rational but are responsive to reason.⁴⁵⁰ He says that “in speaking about a man’s character we do not say that he is wise or has understanding but that he is good-tempered or temperate.”⁴⁵¹ Feeling the right emotions at the right time for the right reason is not a matter of correct practical reasoning. However, the dispositions that incline a person to feel the right emotion at the right time are responsive to reason in two senses. First, feeling an emotion for the right reason implies that a person of practical wisdom given an unlimited amount of time to deliberate would conclude that a person with a virtue of character was correct to feel the emotion she did; In Aristotle’s phrase, virtues of character “speak with the same voice as the rational.”⁴⁵² Second, a person of practical reason would know what dispositions are virtues of character and what system of habituation would inculcate them. Those are some of Aristotle’s claims about emotion. A neo-Jamesian account of emotional calibration confirms those claims, and therefore it is compatible with a neo-

Aristotelian account. The advantage of supplementing eudaimonism with a neo-Jamesian account of emotion is that it allows us to account for psychological phenomena which would otherwise be mysterious.

7.3.5 Misattribution of Emotion

Cognitivists cannot easily explain a noteworthy feature of the way we experience emotion: misattribution of emotion. Many of us have had the experience of being angry at someone but later feeling the need to apologize, saying that “it wasn’t you I was angry at.” In such cases, although it may have been rational to feel angry it was irrational to feel angry at *that* person. In such cases, the thought about the object of the emotion seems to be an after the fact hypothesis about the cause of the emotion rather than a constitutive part of the emotion.

Experimental evidence confirms that mistattribution is a real phenomenon. In one classic experiment by Schachter and Singer, subjects who had been told they were participating in a study on vitamins were injected with either adrenaline or a placebo. In some conditions, subjects were not informed about the effects of the shot they received or were deliberately misinformed. They were then placed in a room with an experimenter’s confederate who acted as though he was intensely angry in some trials and as though he was euphoric in others. Subjects who had received the adrenaline injection but were not told what effect the drug might have were likely to report that they felt anger or euphoria themselves and to attribute their elevated heart rate and tremor to their emotional state, unlike subjects who received the same injection but were warned that it could cause an elevated heart rate. The conclusion was that “given a state of physiological arousal for which an individual has no immediate explanation, he will ‘label’ this state and

describe his feelings in terms of the cognitions available to him.”⁴⁵³ ⁴⁵⁴ Introspection is not always a reliable guide to the causes of our emotions. On my argument, introspection about the elicitors of our emotions is sometimes unreliable because emotions are type-ambiguous; feeling an emotion does not reveal *which* elicitor is responsible for feeling the emotion.

In cases where the thoughts we have about our emotions are mistaken, the thoughts we have about our emotions are epiphenomenal. To be sure, an emotional state can be produced by a person’s thoughts. Subjects in the adrenalin experiment who were primed to interpret their elevated heart rate as a symptom of anger and began looking at the world through that frame would have been more likely to notice elicitors of anger and respond to them as elicitors of anger, further elevating their heart rate.⁴⁵⁵ Thinking of themselves as angry made them more likely to become angrier. However, the initial belief that their elevated heart rate represented the presence of an elicitor of emotion was false. That initial thought was an interpretation of a body state, and an inaccurate one at that.

7.3.6 Persistence and Misattribution

Emotions elicited in one situation can persist even after a person has moved on to a different situation. They can persist even after their elicitors have been removed. There is empirical evidence that a person who is in an emotional state is likely to remain in it.⁴⁵⁶ Studies have shown that subjects selectively focus attention on mood-congruent details of their surroundings.⁴⁵⁷ Subjects display selective recall of facts such that it is easier to remember mood consistent information.⁴⁵⁸ Furthermore, subjects interpret ambiguous details in a manner consistent with the mood they are already in.⁴⁵⁹ By these mechanisms, emotional states can be

self-perpetuating.⁴⁶⁰ Therefore a person's current situation is often unrelated to her current emotions, for it would be strange to say that a now absent elicitor is part of her current situation.

To give an example, suppose that Sanjeev begins his day wiping his infant daughter's carrot puree off the floor, and that this feature of his situation is (for him) an elicitor of sadness. His feeling a bit sad is warranted because it accurately represents a concern, not having time to read the paper before he leaves for work. Now suppose he arrives at work after a short commute. It would not be surprising if he continued feeling glum during the first part of his workday, even if nothing in his work environment is an elicitor of sadness for him.

Misattribution can cause a person to incorrectly assess features of his current situation in light of emotions elicited in some previous situation. Recall that on a neo-Jamesian account emotions are type-ambiguous; each emotion has many possible elicitors, so feeling an emotion does not provide information about which of its many possible elicitors is responsible for the feeling. If Sanjeev interprets his sadness at work as a cue that one of his employees has let him down, misattribution may cause him to be excessively harsh with that employee. Sanjeev's feeling sad at home was warranted because he had lost something good, but his continuing sadness at work is not warranted, because that sadness does not represent anything in his current situation at work.

I do not want to press the point here, but persistence of emotion is a problem for situationists. As discussed in chapter four, the difficulty situationists have in defining the term situation is a serious problem for them. If emotions persist despite changes in situation then

current circumstances are often poor explanations of current behaviour. Perhaps situationists could change their definition to include a person's current mental state at the time of the experiment, but if that is what they intend to say they should say it explicitly.

We now have a diagnosis of why most people are unduly affected by situational factors that prime emotions. One mechanism responsible is misattribution. People who feel an emotion due to an irrelevant feature of their situation may incorrectly attribute that feeling to some other object. This can cause them to form false beliefs about that object. This can explain why people fare so poorly in cases such as the Israeli parole board in a way that a neo-Aristotelian should be able to accept.

We have shown that emotion can cause errors in practical reason, which might lead us to think of emotion as a disruptive influence on our lives. In 7.4 I argue that this is not the case. Emotion plays an important role in the practical reason of a virtuous person. In fact, being virtuous requires being disposed to feel appropriate emotions.

7.4 Emotion's Role in Practical Reasoning

7.4.1 Emotions as Somatic Markers

There is empirical evidence that emotion may be necessary for practical reasoning. People who have suffered brain damage that impairs their ability to feel emotions also display impaired practical reasoning. I have in mind Damasio's work on patients with damaged prefrontal ventromedial cortices. One symptom these patients display is flattened affect. They display little emotion in their everyday lives, looking at their own lives from the perspective of a

detached observer.⁴⁶¹ When shown emotionally charged pictures these patients reported that they were intellectually aware that the images are disturbing and that they would have been disturbed prior to their brain injuries but that they felt no emotion in reaction to what they saw.⁴⁶² The second cluster of symptoms they show is concerned with practical reasoning. They have difficulty prioritizing, difficulty scheduling their time and difficulty switching from one task to another.⁴⁶³ They seem to have difficulty evaluating risk.⁴⁶⁴ What is interesting about such patients is that their capacity for theoretical reasoning is unaffected by their injuries. Their perceptual ability, memory, attention, learning abilities, language skills and ability to do mathematics are unimpaired.⁴⁶⁵ These patients are quite capable of passing intelligence tests in the lab but have severe difficulty making sensible decisions about the course of their lives.

Damasio hypothesized that emotion plays an important role in the practical reasoning of ordinary people. On his account, emotions quickly and automatically narrow the set of options we have. Options that would lead to bad outcomes produce an “unpleasant gut feeling” that leads us to reject those options immediately, without reflection.⁴⁶⁶ Options that produce a positive emotional response are marked by that feeling as being more worthy of further study than other options. In these ways, information conveyed by the emotions can direct practical reasoning by allowing us to choose from among fewer options.⁴⁶⁷

Studies by Arne Ohman have experimentally confirmed that emotion can play this sort of a role in practical reasoning. Ohman found that “nonconscious processes constantly monitor the surrounding world for stimuli of emotional significance” and that “the nonconscious level directs attention towards important stimuli, partly because the automatically activated emotional

response is fed back to conscious awareness.”⁴⁶⁸ Furthermore, Ohman found that subjects who were conditioned to feel appropriate emotions were better at consciously predicting stimuli than those who were not.⁴⁶⁹ This is evidence both that emotion plays a role in practical reasoning and that it plays a *beneficial* role. In his studies, subjects whose level of fear is reliably connected to cues that a threat is present proved to be better at reasoning about that threat than subjects who are not.

I should add a cautionary note that this neo-Jamesian non-cognitivist view departs from Aristotle’s understanding of practical reason, at least to some extent. A neo-Aristotelian does not need to slavishly adhere to Aristotle’s conclusions, but this might be considered a point where the two accounts are in tension. Aristotle draws a sharp line between reason and the emotion-directing virtues of character which are responsive to reason but not rational. When Aristotle describes the virtue of justice it would appear to be purely a matter of mathematical calculation. Aristotle spells out what it means to give the right amount to each party in terms of ratios derived from geometry.⁴⁷⁰ If Damasio is right, practical wisdom is in part constituted by being disposed to have the right emotions. In particular, emotions govern the act of beginning to deliberate.

7.4.2 Deliberation as One Task Among Others

Emotion plays a role not only in highlighting objects as being worthy of deliberation but also in disposing us to deliberate at all. We might think that a person of practical wisdom would be constantly deliberating about her options, but Nomy Arpaly reminds us that the act of deliberation is neither instantaneous nor effortless.⁴⁷¹ Evaluating the weightiness of different considerations takes time and cognitive resources. Therefore, the act of deliberation can

interfere with higher priority tasks that a person ought to be performing.⁴⁷² It follows that there will be times when an outside observer with perfect information would counsel a person not to engage in deliberation.

Once we begin to think of deliberation as an activity which requires time, we can ask ourselves on what occasions the virtuous person would not deliberate. We would hope that the virtuous person does not need the help of an outside observer to tell her that now is not a good time for deliberation, but it is not immediately obvious how she could come to that conclusion on her own. Arpaly pointed out that the problem here is recursive.⁴⁷³ Times when deliberation would be inappropriate would likely also be times when deliberating about whether deliberation would be inappropriate is inappropriate, etc. *ad infinitum*. Ceaselessly deliberating would come at the expense of taking any action at all. At some point, the decision about whether or not to engage in practical reasoning must be based on something other than practical reasoning.

Emotions can signal the need to begin deliberating, and properly calibrated emotions can do so in a way that is responsive to reasons. Consider seeing a snake in one's path. Appropriate fear can dispose a person to reflexively recoil, but reflexes are not the only way fear can influence behaviour. Suppose a person is running away from an advancing brush fire. Despite that danger, seeing a snake ought to incline that person to pause for a moment's reflection about questions such as the following: Is the snake poisonous? Should I detour around it? How much berth should I give it? Knee-jerk emotion-based reflexes are not sufficient for acting in a way that will get that person to safety; the situation is too complex for reflexes to do the job. The role

of emotion in anything but the simplest or most routine cases is to cue a person to begin deliberating and to flag some of the concerns which ought to be taken into account.

Conversely, emotions can signal that deliberation is ill-advised. A person with the virtue of courage will feel fear and boldness to the right degree. Courageous people do not feel fear unnecessarily, so when they do feel fear they will usually be disposed to hesitate and deliberate about their options before rushing in. However, I will argue that there are rare circumstances in which a courageous person would be disposed to act without deliberation.

7.4.3 The Puzzle of Fear, Confidence and Boldness

Over the next two sections I would like to apply my account of the role that emotion plays in deliberation to the virtue of courage. Aristotle's definition of courage is strangely unlike the definitions he offers for other virtues of character. Most virtues of character govern one emotion or appetite. For example, temperance governs appetite and mildness governs anger. Aristotle describes courage as governing both fear and confidence/boldness. There is disagreement among neo-Aristotelians about whether Aristotle is right to think that one virtue governs both fear and confidence.

In the *Rhetoric* and the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle seems to be saying that fear and boldness are both concerned with the same emotion; extreme fear and extreme boldness are the two endpoints of the same continuum.⁴⁷⁴ However, as Howard Curzer argues, these are phenomenologically different emotional states which take different objects. Fear of a bad outcome is not identical to a lack of confidence that one can avoid an outcome.⁴⁷⁵ Also, it is not

clear how we ought to translate boldness; some translators prefer to use the word confidence, which is not identical in meaning to boldness. Aristotle may have thought that there is only one emotion involved in courage but we have some reason to think that there are two (fear and confidence) or possibly three (fear, confidence and boldness). We also have reason to wonder how many independent dispositions are involved, for one might think that fear, confidence and boldness are regulated by different dispositions. I believe it can be shown that one virtue, Aristotelian courage, governs fear, confidence and boldness. However, I believe we need to distinguish between confidence and boldness, for I do not believe they are synonymous.

When we say that someone is not afraid because they are *confident*, we seem to mean that their self-assessment of their own abilities is high. Aristotle seems to be saying that appropriate fear and appropriate confidence are defined relative to one another, both resulting from the same weighing of threats against self-assessed abilities. When the odds of failure become higher and the stakes become greater the courageous person feels more fear and less confidence, and for the same reason. That weighing is governed by one virtue, Aristotelian courage.

When we say that someone is not afraid because they are *bold* we seem to mean that they are somewhat oblivious to danger. McDowell talks about courage in this way. He says that once a courageous person has made a decision to act fear is silenced.⁴⁷⁶ The weighing of risks and rewards only needs to be done once, and once done the virtuous person stops taking threats into account. Unless the situation changes such that the decision needs to be revisited, the bold person acts as though the threats are irrelevant to her. Boldness in this sense is quite different

from confidence. It is not obvious that boldness and confidence result from the same set of dispositions. Julia Driver argues that they do not.

In the last chapter we saw that Driver believes that the so-called courage of an impulsive person is incompatible with Aristotelian courage. A person who has Driver's impulsive courage is bold because she is unaware of danger. If she had Aristotelian courage she would have the knowledge needed to weigh dangers against her own abilities, but having more knowledge of danger would make her less bold. I would like to argue that Aristotelian courage can explain both confidence and boldness. I would like to do that by looking at the most extreme cases of boldness, cases of impulsive courage where a person rushes into danger without deliberating about the danger at all.

7.4.4 Impulsive Courage

Consider the case of William Thomas. On November 25, 2003, a person's car swerved off the road and fell into the freezing Rahway river in New Jersey. Seeing that the driver was drowning, Thomas dove into the river and pulled the drowning driver to safety. Interviewed after the fact, Thomas reported that "I just knew that she needed help, and I just dove in without thinking a second chance (sic). I couldn't believe that it happened, and I'm in shock myself. I'm just glad everything turned out the way it did."⁴⁷⁷ Let us assume that Thomas is an excellent swimmer, and that if he had taken time to reflect on how difficult the rescue would be he would still have dived in. However, Thomas did not pause to reflect, and it seems that he was right not to hesitate, for had he taken even just a few seconds to think it is quite possible that the driver of the car would have drowned.

On Driver's account, Thomas was ignorant of the danger, and being disposed to be ignorant is what makes him virtuous.⁴⁷⁸ From the perspective of maximizing utility we have reason to be glad that Thomas did what he did, but Driver needs to show not just that the act was good but also that his being disposed to jump in without thinking is a praiseworthy disposition. Driver evaluates dispositions by looking at them statistically in terms of expected value. It would be possible in principle to calculate the expected value of different courses of action. Crudely, assume a successful rescue means +1 life (the victim's) and a failed rescue means -1 life (Thomas'). Being disposed to attempt a rescue without thinking is a virtue if and only if the expected value of an attempted rescue is positive. On those assumptions, being disposed to attempt river rescues without deliberation is a virtuous disposition if the odds of success are on average greater than 50%.⁴⁷⁹

One of several unattractive features of Driver's account is that it makes a person's status as a virtuous person highly dependent on conditions outside herself. Suppose it is the case that rivers in British Columbia are on average faster flowing than rivers in Thomas' home state of New Jersey such that an impulsive rescuer in a BC river is more likely to die in the attempt. If so, a behavioural disposition to impulsive rescuing could be a virtue in New Jersey and a vice in British Columbia. Driver explicitly acknowledges this and considers it to be a strength of her account. She gives the example of Oscar Schindler, whose inclinations toward swindling and fraud made him contemptible in peacetime but also made him a heroic protector of the innocent during the Nazi occupation of Poland.⁴⁸⁰ For the duration of the war, his vices were virtues, she thinks.

I would like to defend the intuition that the virtuous person could recognize what sort of circumstances she is in and respond accordingly. It is strange to say that going on vacation to British Columbia could turn Thomas from a morally good man into a morally bad man for the duration of his visit. What I'd like to offer here is an account of how it could be possible for Thomas to be disposed to throw himself into a river without deliberating but only when the odds of performing a successful rescue in *this* river are high. In other words, I hope to explain how Thomas can be responsive to salient features of his situation despite not actually deliberating.

I argue that Thomas' diving into the river can be seen as being symptomatic of the virtue of courage if being disposed to feel fear and boldness appropriately is both the reason why he did not deliberate and the reason why he jumped in. Assume it is the case that he is disposed such that his emotions are reliably responsive to facts about his circumstances. His feeling bold was appropriate only given the fact that his feeling that way was proportionate to his swimming skill and the state of the river. If the river had been rougher he would have felt more afraid. That fear would have inclined him to pause and ask himself whether the odds of success really justified the risk to himself. However, because he felt bold and because time was of the essence he was not inclined to pause for deliberation, and therefore dove in immediately. Thomas does not have an inflexible disposition to throw himself into rivers; he is disposed to feel fear and boldness at the right time, in the right way and for the right reason, which is the definition of Aristotelian courage.

To be sure, a person might dive into a river because he feels inappropriately bold. Inappropriate emotions fail to convey the most important information about one's circumstances. At best inappropriate emotions convey information that is of secondary importance; at worst they convey false information, as for example the fearlessness of a foolhardy poor swimmer at the riverbank conveys the false message that a rescue attempt would be low-risk for that person. It is possible that Thomas is a terrible swimmer who was astonishingly lucky, but his success gives us some reason to presume in the absence of other evidence that his odds of a successful rescue were reasonably high, and that his boldness was appropriate.

After the fact, Thomas' alarmed bafflement at his own actions can be explained by the fact that when he was being interviewed he was weighing the risks of the rescue for the first time. Skilled as he may be, his life was in real danger. Being a virtuous person he values his own life.⁴⁸¹ We should expect that it may take him considerable time to reach the correct conclusion that he was right to risk his life. That is the point: the time required to confirm the information conveyed by his emotions with a rational assessment of all available facts would have been time enough for the crash victim to drown.

As a rule, acting without deliberation in a dangerous situation is foolhardy. If there is time to deliberate one should deliberate. Also, a person who knows she is not virtuous to a very high degree should know better than to blindly act on her gut feelings in a crisis.⁴⁸² Only a genuinely courageous person would be justified in making a snap decision with momentous consequences based on an unexamined gut feeling, and even she would do so only when there really is absolutely no time to think twice.

In conclusion, we should reject Driver's claim that Aristotelian courage and impulsive courage are incompatible. The person of Aristotelian courage feels emotions in a way that is appropriately responsive to those particulars which provide good reasons for action, and her being so disposed is the reason why she might sometimes impulsively act without deliberation. Having Aristotelian courage is necessary for having impulsive courage. A person with Driver's behavioural disposition to dive into rivers while ignorant of the risks cannot adapt her behaviour to current circumstances, unlike a person whose Aristotelian courage disposes her to dive only if her appropriately calibrated emotions convey the information that it is worth the risk.

Cases of impulsive courage are rare but important. It is possible to go through one's whole life without experiencing an occasion which calls for impulsive action, but on those rare occasions on which someone displays impulsive courage we hold them up for the highest praise. We give them medals and point to them as exemplars of courage. We are right to do so. Impulsive courage is not some inferior substitute for courage that depends on ignorance and good luck. Rather, acts of impulsive courage are reason to think that a person possesses Aristotelian courage to the highest degree.⁴⁸³ When faced with a situation where real threats elicit reasonable fear that would dispose almost anyone to hesitate and think twice, impulsive heroes feel appropriately bold in a way that silences their fear. Only the most courageous people both feel appropriate emotions in extreme circumstances and appropriately trust the information conveyed by their emotions so much that they can justifiably act on it without hesitation.

7.5 Summary

Situational factors can change behaviour by affecting emotion as seen in the studies referenced in 7.1. A neo-Jamesian account of emotion can explain why situational factors can have these effects, and can do so in a way which is compatible with neo-Aristotelian moral psychology. There is tension here regarding the degree to which emotion can be trusted. 7.3 argued that emotions can be misleading because the information they convey is type-ambiguous. 7.4 argued that the most virtuous people will sometimes act on the information conveyed by their emotions without deliberation, which sounds dangerous given that emotions can be misleading. My position is that precisely because emotions can be misleading only the most virtuous people would be justified in acting on them without deliberation.

I have provided evidence in 7.2 that people with professional training have dispositions which make them unusually good at feeling appropriate emotions on the job. That evidence is enough to show that Doris has drawn more extreme conclusions than those studies support.

Professional status explains and predicts emotional states in a way that is not dependent on current situation. Some professionals have first order dispositions that make them more sensitive or less sensitive to certain classes of elicitors of emotions, as in the case of surgeons, who are relatively insensitive to elicitors of self-doubt. Some professionals are disposed to be sensitive to their own emotional states in a way that helps them maintain an even keel despite whatever elicitors of emotion might feature in their current situation. What we are seeing here is evidence of something much broader in scope than Doris' local traits. There are big-five traits associated with professions, and these influence the likelihood that a person will be in an

appropriate emotional state in a very wide range of situations. Sadness is a loss detector, and people who score high in neuroticism are highly receptive to any features of any situation that indicate a loss.

The traits professionals have can make them less likely to make mistakes due to misattribution. People who have the trait of neuroticism are unusually good at noticing adverse features of their current circumstances. They are less likely than others to remain in a positive mood when it is no longer appropriate, a sort of depressive realism. On the other hand, they are also more likely to remain in a negative emotional state even when their circumstances improve. Remaining in a negative emotional state which is no longer appropriate to one's current situation increases the likelihood of misattribution, for it may lead one to mistakenly conclude that the cause of their current emotional state is being caused by features of their current situation when this is not the case.

The virtuous person is supposed to always get it right, but global dispositions favouring specific elicitors of emotion would dispose a person to feel inappropriate emotions in some situations. The virtuous person is said to always feel emotions to the right degree, at the right time for the right reason. In contrast, the confidence of a surgeon is a personality trait that makes sure their emotions convey the information most relevant to success in the operating room, but that same first-order disposition may produce inappropriate overconfidence outside the operating room. A hardened paramedic's self-monitoring meta-emotions provide armour against the extreme elicitors of emotion they encounter on the job but paramedics may also be inappropriately self-critical when off the clock. It might be the case that professionals can

compartmentalize, at least to some extent, or at least we would hope so, but the data presented here is evidence that their emotion-governing dispositions are at least to some extent global.

Worse, the dispositions of professionals are not dispositions that we would want everyone to have. Paramedics keep their sanity with feelings of self-directed contempt that arise when they feel empathy. It is good for their overall well-being that they should be so disposed, but it is most certainly not a disposition we would want to see in a kindergarten teacher.

This chapter has provided evidence that situationism is false, but it has not shown that neo-Aristotelianism is defensible. States of character associated with professionalism are quite unlike the sort of virtues eudaimonists discuss. In the next and final chapter I discuss what implications we ought to draw from these findings and whether any version of neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics is empirically defensible.

8 On Virtue Specialization

8.1 Thesis Conclusions

8.1.1 Conclusions Regarding the Situationist Critique of Neo-Aristotelian Virtue Ethics

There is a family of pro-situationist studies in psychology, studies which suggest that features of situations often explain behaviour better than character traits, better in the sense that behaviour is more strongly correlated with situational factors than with character trait ascriptions. These studies also show that situational factors are sometimes better predictors of future behaviour than character trait ascriptions. There is no single psychological mechanism responsible for the wide range of effects seen in these studies, meaning that situational factors which redirect attention and situational factors that affect emotion can and should each be accounted for separately.

It is not surprising to them that situational factors are correlated with behaviour. For example, a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist would expect that the more dangerous a situation is the more people will run away, and would explain this correlation in terms of the degree to which these people are cowardly, foolhardy or brave. What is surprising is that the strange ways of falling short of virtue on display in the pro-situationist family of studies do not fit in the neo-Aristotelian catalogue of possible states of character. Neo-Aristotelian moral psychology does not predict that anyone would overlook injured strangers due to being in a slight hurry, or that finding a dime in a phone booth would make a person far more likely to help others.

Neo-Aristotelians cannot explain away the pro-situationist family of studies. It is true that Aristotelian virtues are not just patterns of behaviour, and that the behaviour of a virtuous

person would not follow simple, predictable rules, but Doris is right that we ought to be able to expect minimally decent behaviour from virtuous people. Some virtue ethicists have proposed that virtue is so rare as to be statistically undetectable, but the data implies that contrary to all expectation neo-Aristotelian akrasia is also rare. The idea that virtue might be an unattainable ideal is also unsatisfactory because we cannot expect people who are not virtuous to identify which ideals are really worthy of being pursued. Reflection on one's circumstances is not sufficient to immunize oneself against the influence of situational factors because cognition and motivation are themselves vulnerable to situational factors. In short, many of the standard ways of explaining away pro-situationist data are unsuccessful.

Situationists have argued that the pro-situationist family of studies serves as evidence against there being neo-Aristotelian character traits. Doris' position is that claims about character should be limited to talk of local traits like office-party-sociability, arguing this on the grounds that talk of global traits does not lead to statistically reliable predictions, but I have shown that Doris has overstated his case. Personality psychologists have evidence that character traits can be good predictors of the frequency with which a person will behave a certain way. Furthermore, Doris seems to have overlooked the role played by cultural factors, for membership in a culture and social status both provide reliable predictions about future behaviour as Doris demands and support an account of virtue that is much closer to Aristotle's than talk of office-party-sociability. Nevertheless, these objections against Doris offer little help to eudaimonists, for personality traits and cultural factors have little in common with Aristotelian virtues.

8.1.2 Conclusions Regarding Attention

Some situational factors affect behaviour by affecting attention. Distraction and preoccupation can interfere with performing tasks attentively. In particular, cases of inattention blindness are clear examples of the way being preoccupied with one task can interfere with attentively performing another.

Since human cognitive resources are limited, being virtuous must involve being disposed to pay attention in an appropriately selective manner. More precisely, the set of dispositions which constitutes having a virtue must include dispositions to pay appropriately selective attention. The problem posed by pro-situationist studies concerning attention is that they make it seem as though human beings in general are not disposed to pay attention appropriately, all of us being vulnerable to distraction and preoccupation.

I replied that there is empirical evidence that training can make a person resistant to distraction and preoccupation. In particular, trained professionals are unusually likely to notice things that are relevant to their areas of expertise in spite of distractions and preoccupation. A person's having been trained is a good explanation of why they behave differently than others and it is a good basis on which to make predictions about future behaviour. Unlike Doris' local traits, training can affect behaviour in a wide range of situations.

Attention should be understood in terms of cognitive unison; a person is performing a task attentively if all of the cognitive resources that might assist in performing that task have been set aside to assist in performing that task if needed. This implies that, contrary to

McDowell, virtue cannot be a single sensitivity. The set of cognitive resources needed to attend to particulars relevant to deliberating about danger is not identical to the set of resources needed to attend to particulars relevant to deliberating about provocation; a person might see the world the way a courageous person does without seeing the world the way a mild-mannered person does. This does not constitute proof of the plurality of virtues, but it does show that the psychology of attention does not provide a reason to believe the unity of virtue hypothesis.

8.1.3 Conclusions Regarding Emotion as Information

Some situational factors in pro-situationist experiments change behaviour by affecting emotion. One mechanism by which this can happen is misattribution. It is possible to have false beliefs about which states of affairs in the world are causing one to feel an emotion, leading to errors in practical reasoning. For example, someone who is in a bad mood due to unobtrusive situational factors but who believes she is in a bad mood because of the way another person has treated her is likely to treat that person unfairly. If everyone were equally vulnerable to this effect we would have reason to conclude that situation provides a better explanation of behaviour than character – the situationists would be right.

I laid the foundation for my reply by discussing the way emotions can convey information. On a neo-Jamesian account of emotion, emotions can represent states of affairs in the world without having cognitive content. For example, feeling fear can convey the information that something dangerous is present. This shows that there is such a thing as an appropriate emotional state, that being the emotional state that conveys the most important information about states of affairs in the world. I pointed out that this is analogous to adopting

the most appropriate attentional set, for both appropriate emotion and appropriate attention involve being disposed to overlook important particulars as infrequently as possible.

Emotion plays a role in regulating practical reasoning. It marks options as being worthy of deliberation. Acts of impulsive courage result from the appropriate emotions of a person of Aristotelian courage, for the courageous person perceives when there is no time to deliberate.

I replied to Doris by providing evidence that there are interpersonal differences in the degree to which people are affected by emotional primes, and that some of these differences are best explained by training. For example, we can explain why professionals deliberate better in their areas of expertise than other people do by pointing to the dispositions to feel appropriate emotions that professionals have. This allows us to make testable predictions about their future behaviour. Unlike Doris' local traits, being disposed to be unusually sensitive to a class of elicitors of emotion can affect behaviour in a wide range of situations.

8.1.4 Overall Conclusions: Situational Factors and Moral Psychology

Situationists claim that character explains very little of the interpersonal variance in behaviour seen in pro-situationist studies, but I have shown that there are dispositions which explain more of the variance than can be explained just in terms of situations. I have provided empirical evidence that there are interpersonal differences in behaviour which are best explained in terms of dispositions that modulate the degree to which situational factors affect attention and emotion. Training can make a person more sensitive to specific elicitors of emotion and more attentive to specific features of situations. The degree to which a person has relevant training is a

very good predictor of the degree to which situational factors will affect her behaviour. In the case of dispositions acquired through professional training there is evidence that these dispositions are not local traits; contrary to situationist expectations, they modulate the degree to which situational factors affect behaviour across a wide range of situations. Therefore we have grounds to reject situationism, for by its own standards situationism's explanations of the behaviour seen in pro-situationist studies are inferior to explanations which include reference to interpersonal differences in education.

Many of the conclusions about dispositions which modulate the degree to which situational factors affect attention and emotion are favourable to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Dispositions to feel the right emotion at the right time and for the right reason already feature prominently in neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Aristotle himself discusses the fact that virtuous people are relatively unaffected by chance events, which meshes well with my claim that virtuous people are disposed to be resistant to situational factors that incline non-virtuous people to behave inappropriately.⁴⁸⁴ I have said that these dispositions are in part constitutive of virtues, a claim that would be implausible if these dispositions were radically different from virtues of character, but in fact these dispositions do have many characteristics in common with neo-Aristotelian virtues. They can be taught. They are plural, it being possible to have some of these dispositions without having others. In Aristotle's phrasing, these dispositions are not rational (not governed by moment-to-moment conscious deliberation) but they are responsive to reason (both educable and sensitive to those features of the world that really are salient to deliberation). My conclusion is that these dispositions can account for many of the effects of situations on

behaviour in a way that many neo-Aristotelians could endorse. Dispositions of this kind can be incorporated into neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics without great difficulty.

However, there are several respects in which my dispositions that modulate the degree to which situations affect behaviour are in tension with conventional neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Some of these points of tension are only mildly heterodox. To give one example, if Damasio is right about emotions being somatic markers which direct deliberation then the connection between emotion and practical reasoning is quite a bit closer than Aristotle seems to have thought. To give a second example, the *paideia* of an Athenian child was quite different from the university education that nurses now receive; it might be asked whether these very different processes of habituation result in the same kinds of character traits. Clearly they are importantly different in that a nursing education involves some degree of specialization to fit its students for a specific social role. That leads into a larger and more serious problem: I have concluded that the dispositions which make a person resistant to situational factors necessarily involve specialization. Perceptual stimuli are in competition with one another, and a situation may include elicitors of incompatible emotions. Increased sensitivity to one class of elicitors means decreased sensitivity to others. Therefore the very training that improves practical reasoning in some situations may impair it in others. I conclude that it is impossible for any one person to pay attention appropriately and feel emotion appropriately in all situations. Since dispositions to resist the effects of situational factors are constituents of virtue, it is impossible for one human being to fully develop all of the virtues.

There are three ways we could take that unpalatable conclusion that one person cannot be virtuous in every respect. The first would be to bite the bullet and give up on calling my account neo-Aristotelian. The second would be to say that there is such a thing as perfect virtue with respect to distractions, preoccupations and emotional priming, perfect virtue being the state of character of an omniscient being who is disposed to never overlook anything in any situation. This second option tells us that no human being is virtuous, but that every individual should aspire to approach the ideal of all-around awareness as closely as possible.⁴⁸⁵ In the next and final section I would like to offer a sketch of an argument that we should endorse a third option. I hold that becoming as virtuous as possible requires a combination of personal specialization and interpersonal trust.

8.2 Aristotelian Virtue Ethics Without Individual Perfection

8.2.1 Virtue Generalism versus Virtue Specialization

Particularists such as John McDowell argue that what makes the virtuous person virtuous is her ability to see the world as it really is, including the ability to see what makes possible objects of attention normatively salient. Over the course of this thesis I have developed an argument that no individual human being can become perfect at noticing all of the particulars that would factor into the practical reasoning of an omniscient being. In humans no amount of education can solve this problem, for maximum sensitivity to one class of particulars requires reduced sensitivity to other classes of particulars. I gave the example of the different sensitivities of paramedics and bodyguards. In the event of an emergency the paramedic's attention will be drawn to the ground, looking for injured people in need of assistance, while the bodyguard will be scanning the rooftops for threats.⁴⁸⁶ If becoming as virtuous as possible means trying as far as

is possible to be sensitive to all potentially important particulars, we would find ourselves saying that the most virtuous person would fall somewhere between the paramedic and the bodyguard, less sensitive to needs than a paramedic and less sensitive to threats than a bodyguard but disposed in such a way as to be somewhat more sensitive overall than the average person. My view is that this is falling between two stools. I argue that for a human being becoming as virtuous as possible does not mean becoming a jack of all trades and master of none.

The idea that the most virtuous person might be in a sense a specialist seems to lead to three very strange implications. I have argued that being disposed to notice salient particulars and to be appropriately sensitive to emotional elicitors is praiseworthy and in part constitutive of virtue. If only firefighters excel at noticing the dangers posed by a fire then only firefighters have the virtue of courage with respect to fires. This implies a second peculiarity, for if only a firefighter is fully courageous in the face of a fire and only a soldier is fully courageous on the battlefield then no one has a global virtue of courage which applies in every situation. Worse still, becoming virtuous in any one respect would imply becoming less virtuous in other respects. Taken together, these three implications make specialists look like savants, not people who are living excellent lives. I believe I can overcome these objections by arguing that appropriate interpersonal trust is virtuous.

8.2.2 The Virtue of Testimonial Justice

One guide to how we ought to proceed is Plato's remark that "it is better for everyone to be ruled by divine reason, preferably within himself and his own, otherwise imposed from without."⁴⁸⁷ No person can be disposed to attend and emote appropriately in every situation, but

perhaps it is possible for a person to know her own weaknesses, to identify people who are better attuned to a situation, and to follow their guidance. A group of people who can in some way make use of each others expertise could each approach closer than the best generalist to the idealized practical reasoning of an omniscient agent.

Here I appeal to what Miranda Fricker calls the virtue of *testimonial justice*, an epistemic disposition to trust others appropriately. Fricker tells us that human beings in general have prejudices, and that to the extent that it is impossible to fully eliminate these prejudices we need a corrective virtue which disposes us to accept the testimony of people we are prejudicially inclined to ignore.⁴⁸⁸ I would like to add that one prejudice most humans have is an affective investment in our own way of seeing the world.⁴⁸⁹ For the most part we are biased in favour of ourselves. Our beliefs are more recalcitrant than they ought to be in the face of evidence that we are misguided. Worse, due to the fact that no one is disposed to attend and emotive appropriately in all situations, we are all prone to overlook important information. A corrective disposition is needed that will dispose us to trust experts even when the expert's worldview feels alien and wrongheaded to us.⁴⁹⁰ A person with the virtue of testimonial justice is disposed to recognise the expertise of others such that he is willing to accept the testimony of experts even when the expert's judgment conflicts with what he notices and how he feels is virtuous. I would like to propose an account of testimonial justice such that testimonial justice is an Aristotelian virtue of character.⁴⁹¹

If there is a virtue of testimonial justice which resembles other Aristotelian virtues of character it would consist of a disposition or set of dispositions which regulate an emotion or

drive. I propose that testimonial justice regulates feelings of self-doubt that arise when one's own way of seeing the world conflicts with that of others. We could position this virtue between two vices: on the one hand, the overconfidence of someone who never feels a sneaking suspicion that someone else might be seeing the world more clearly than he does, and who consequently never accepts the testimony of others; on the other, the timidity of someone who feels overwhelmed by self-doubt even on matters about which he is an expert, and who consequently is disposed to accept testimony from others when he should stand on his own opinion.

When I say that one ought to be disposed to trust experts I am not just talking about people with professional certifications. To be sure, professional training can confer some kinds of expertise, as in the case of a paramedic's ability to notice whatever is most salient at the scene of a car accident. However, life experience can also confer expertise. Suppose that our paramedic thinks of himself as a feminist ally. One does not become a feminist ally just by trying to raise one's own awareness of ways in which our society can be patriarchal; one has to listen to people who have lived experience of injustice.⁴⁹² Women in his life may sometimes notice things he overlooks, and they may be appropriately angered by features of situations that do not move him.⁴⁹³ Given the diversity of lives lived by the members of a community it is likely that every member of the community will have at least some expertise which others ought to accept. In a healthy community, appropriate trust is appropriately mutual.

I would like to suggest that the most excellent life for a human being can be achieved only in community. A person can live the best possible life by serving as an example to others in areas where she is an expert and accepting an appropriate degree of guidance from others in

situations where she has a marked lack of expertise. In this way, every member of a community of trust can be more responsive to important particulars in every situation than the best possible human individualist particularist could be. A quixotic attempt to become virtuous as an individual can lead a person to make mistakes which could have been avoided by trusting others. Pursuing the particularist ideal is a moral mistake.

8.2.3 Trusting Experts in Emergencies

Consider what it would be most virtuous for a person to do if they found themselves on a city street during an earthquake. Imagine the chaos: damaged buildings, crashed vehicles, pedestrians injured by fallen debris. As it happens an ambulance is on the scene, but the paramedic at the wheel sees immediately that there are far too many injured people for he and his partner to meet the need. As it happens, two friends, Olivia and Penny, were walking through the neighbourhood when the earthquake struck, and luckily they were uninjured. Olivia and Penny are similar in many respects, and both of them have taken a two week course in first aid. As soon as the tremors subside Particularist Penny surveys the scene around her and correctly determines which of the people around her is most seriously injured, a prone man who has stopped breathing. Penny begins CPR. Obedient Olivia runs to the ambulance and asks for instructions. A paramedic brusquely orders her to apply a pressure bandage to a man who is conscious but bleeding. The paramedic is following the cold logic of triage, for in a disaster of this magnitude a worst-first strategy that prioritizes treating the most seriously injured will not save as many lives as a strategy which prioritizes treating casualties who are less seriously injured but whose condition will deteriorate without care.⁴⁹⁴ Having too few resources to treat everyone, the paramedic intends to allow some of the worst injured casualties to die. The

paramedic does not take time to explain his reasons to Olivia, and even if he did she would feel horrified at the seeming callousness of his choice. She does not understand why she is being told to do this. Olivia made exactly the same assessment of the scene as Polly and agrees with Polly that Polly's patient ought to be given higher priority than anyone. Olivia believes it is morally wrong to help anyone other than the most injured person. Nevertheless, contrary to her feelings and her judgment, Olivia obeys instructions and helps the less-injured man. What Olivia did was best by objective-consequentialist standards, but that is no guarantee that Olivia is more virtuous than Polly.

Let us posit that the paramedic was thinking, feeling and acting as the virtuous person would. He attended to the severity of the injuries of the victims as well as any human could. This is not a case of pseudo-courage as described in chapter two; the paramedic does a remarkable job of caregiving not just because he has technical skill but also because he has the right values, and this is reflected in the way he prioritizes. He might have seemed callous to Olivia, but in fact he was feeling the appropriate amount of empathy for the injured in that horrible situation. It was a situation where his appropriately blunted empathy was praiseworthy, for it was better for him to be feeling determined urgency than sorrow or grief. He was attending to all of the same particulars that would feature in the practical reasoning of an omniscient being in his circumstances; as it happens, the actions he took through conditioned instinct, gut feelings and rushed practical reasoning are the same actions an ideal particularist virtuous agent would have taken given perfect information and infinite time to deliberate. He displayed the excellence proper to a human specialist; whether or not the excellence of a human specialist could be considered virtuous is a question that remains to be answered below.

I contend that Olivia's willingness to follow expert instructions that went against her own feelings and judgment is praiseworthy, and not just because it was optimal by consequentialist standards. Olivia proved to be better at practical reasoning in the sense of being more responsive to the features of the disaster scene that really were the most important. Olivia's conduct resulted from a virtuous state of character which she had and Polly lacked, testimonial justice, consisting of a disposition to feel an appropriate lack of confidence in the rightness of the way she saw the situation when she was confronted with expert testimony.⁴⁹⁵

8.2.4 The Problem of Identifying Experts

There is a problem with the picture I have presented so far, something that I see as being a problem for most neo-Aristotelians: it is not clear how non-virtuous people can identify experts. Non-virtuous people have imperfect practical reasoning and/or inappropriate values and emotions. The same failings that make them incapable of living a virtuous life would also make them imperfect at recognizing virtue in others. Since the Aristotelian picture of moral education includes imitating virtuous people until their ways become habitual, an inability to identify which people ought to be imitated is a serious problem for the project.⁴⁹⁶

It is unsurprising that every society will include some purported experts who are not what they claim to be. Some people are deliberate frauds. Credentials can be falsified; as cartoonist Randall Munroe observed, anyone can buy a lab coat.⁴⁹⁷ Other people have received expert training but are incompetent. Most commonly, false claims of expertise result from the

overconfidence of a person who lacks testimonial justice, for such a person would be disposed to boldly sound off their ill-informed opinion on any topic as though their opinion was fact.

The standard Aristotelian response is to express the hope that genuine experts would be easier to identify in the context of a good society. In such a society virtuous people could be identified by pointing to those people who are evidently flourishing and respected by all. There is no reason to think that this would be possible in a corrupt society that rewards vice and punishes virtue.⁴⁹⁸ In a corrupt society the individuals who are most highly praised and most widely respected might in fact be profoundly vicious. However, in a good society the collective consensus about which citizens are virtuous and trustworthy as experts would be correct.

The above response is vulnerable to a regress problem. A person who has difficulty identifying experts can also be expected to have difficulty determining whether or not they live in a good society. Non-virtuous people will not be able to confirm that they live in the sort of society where societal consensus is a good guide to identifying virtuous people.

In light of this, the question I need to answer is whether or not testimonial justice is really a virtue. False experts occur in every society, and in corrupt society most purported experts are untrustworthy. The standard problem for neo-Aristotelians is that imitating bad examples would worsen one's character, but the idea of testimonial justice raises an additional problem. In a corrupt society where there are many false experts a disposition to accept testimony from others would not improve practical reasoning – it would worsen it. In a good society trust would lead to improved practical reasoning, but it does not seem that this success results from virtue.

Success would look like moral luck, for whether the trusting person fares well or badly depends not on her character but on the sort of society in which she happens to live.⁴⁹⁹

8.2.5 Trusting Experts in Ordinary Circumstances

The case of trusting an expert in an emergency given in 8.2.3 is an extreme case. Obedient Olivia accepted the paramedic's assessment of what was worth noticing despite the fact that it ran contrary to her own feelings and her own sense of what was salient. As described this is blind trust, and blind trust is clearly vulnerable to exploitation by pseudo-experts. However, in ordinary circumstances where the trusting person has time to deliberate about the testimony she receives, a person who has testimonial justice will not blindly trust testimony she receives.

In non-emergency situations, the role of an expert is not to give commands but to point out considerations that an ordinary person might not have taken into account. As discussed in chapter five, Aristotelian practical reasoning should be understood as a process by which the set of particulars to which a person is attending is combined with the set of desires that person has, resulting in action. One effect that accepting testimony from experts can have is expanding the set of particulars to which the individual attends by means of pointing out things the individual may have overlooked. Expert testimony can also change the set of things that an individual desires. For example, condemnation can motivate a person to act differently to escape guilt, but only if the individual accepts that condemnation as coming from a trustworthy source. On my account, skill at practical reasoning, the art of correctly combining beliefs and desires to produce action, is still a skill that belongs solely to the individual.⁵⁰⁰ All that experts can provide is extra premises from which practical reasoning can begin.

If the locus of practical wisdom is the individual person, the person of practical wisdom will be able to judge for herself which purported experts are genuine experts, and will be able to do so even if she lives in a bad society. Imagine a person who possesses practical wisdom to the highest degree but who has suboptimal attention/emotions in a specific situation. If a genuine expert pointed out relevant particulars that she had overlooked, the person of practical wisdom would correctly reach different conclusions about how to act on the basis of those new premises. In other words, the person of practical wisdom may make mistakes about how to act when she has overlooked important particulars or if she does not have the right feelings in that situation, but if she accepts the testimony of genuine experts she can avoid making these mistakes. It is in this way that a person of practical wisdom who appropriately accepts testimony will be closer to idealized practical reasoning than a particularist person of practical wisdom who relies solely on her own sense of what is salient. However, deliberating about the premises put forward by a pseudo-expert would not change the conclusions reached by a person of practical wisdom because adding irrelevant premises to a correct process of practical reasoning would not change the conclusions.

On the basis of the above account it might seem as though there is no need to designate some people as being experts, for the person of practical wisdom can determine for herself whether testimony is helpful or unhelpful. If that was the end of the story, it would sound as though the person of practical wisdom could sort through the testimony of every person in her society on every occasion, factoring only genuinely important considerations into her deliberations. However, this is impossible for the same reason that it is impossible for an individual to perceive every potentially relevant detail of her circumstances. There are limits on

human information processing capabilities, and these limits are rather low. The person of practical wisdom simply cannot listen to all available advice, so she will need some sort of heuristic that will indicate which advice she should listen to and which advice she should ignore.

This is why I am proposing that being disposed to feel an appropriate degree of self-doubt about one's own worldview is virtuous. I am making the same sort of emotion-as-information move I made when discussing impulsive courage in chapter seven. To recap, the courageous person feels appropriate levels of fear when faced with danger. Sometimes fear prompts her to deliberate about the danger, and sometimes her emotions prompt her to boldly take action without deliberating. Likewise, the virtue of testimonial justice prompts a person to doubt that she has taken all relevant considerations into account at appropriate times, such as occasions when she receives testimony to the contrary from a reliable source.⁵⁰¹ When she feels no self-doubt she will act boldly without seeking or accepting testimony. As with other virtues, this feeling of self-doubt will need to be calibrated through long experience beginning in childhood. The experience of taking seriously the testimony of pseudo-experts and discovering for herself that the considerations they put forward are irrelevant will in time teach her that such people are not to be trusted; through habituation, she will feel less and less self-doubt when they speak, and consequently she will be disposed to ignore the testimony of these pseudo-experts.

Moral luck is still a factor, as it is on almost any neo-Aristotelian account.⁵⁰² It might be more difficult to acquire the virtue of testimonial justice in a corrupt society where one is surrounded by many pseudo-experts. For example, it may be more difficult to learn to reflexively ignore the testimony of racist propagandists if one had grown up in a racist society.

However, on my account, developing the virtue of testimonial justice is not entirely a matter of moral luck. The process by which one develops the virtue (evaluating the relevance of testimony through practical reasoning and calibrating feelings of self-doubt based on whether a source of testimony is typically providing genuinely salient information) is the same process in a good society or a corrupt society. In the most extreme case where a person is born into an entirely corrupt society it would still be possible for a person of practical reason to develop the virtue of testimonial justice, although in that extreme case testimonial justice would dictate that she should never feel self-doubt and should reflexively reject the unhelpful testimony she is receiving from all sides.⁵⁰³

In short, a superhuman being with practical wisdom would not need the virtue of testimonial justice, for she could poll every person in her society and evaluate the relevance of every consideration they put forward, but human beings with our limited information processing capabilities must be selective in what advice we accept. Feelings of self-doubt about whether or not one has taken all relevant considerations into account can serve as a heuristic as to whether or not a person should accept testimony. Feelings of self-doubt can be regulated by the virtue of testimonial justice. A person who has this virtue will feel self-doubt at times when expert testimony would help her make better decisions, and therefore she will be disposed to seek out and accept testimony. If by chance she accepts bad testimony, practical wisdom will allow her to recognize that the considerations being put forward are irrelevant. The virtuous person will feel no self-doubt when receiving advice from pseudo-experts and will be disposed to reflexively reject their advice. There is the danger that she may sometimes reject good advice when it comes from a typically unreliable source. Here testimonial justice might be analogous to

modesty. The modest person usually pays no attention to her own merits but does attend to them on the rare occasions where they are relevant. Analogously, on those rare occasions when a usually unreliable source is speaking from genuine expertise a person of testimonial justice will feel that it is important to listen.

8.2.6 Can There Be an Aristotelian Virtue Ethics without Individual Perfection?

I stated in my introduction that I was trying to provide a neo-Aristotelian response to situationism, and it is time to see whether I have accomplished that goal. My account is somewhat unusual in that it places heavy emphasis on the importance for practical reasoning of correctly determining what features of one's circumstances are salient. However, I am not an outlier in this respect; particularists such as McDowell have adopted a much more extreme interpretation of Aristotle such that virtue consists entirely of seeing one's situation appropriately. Unlike the particularists, I have retained Foot's conception of the relationship between the virtues of character and practical reasoning: the virtues regulate drives and emotions while practical reasoning determines how to fit those drives into one coherent life-plan. My new virtue of testimonial justice fits within Foot's model. Courage regulates fear, mildness regulates anger, and testimonial justice regulates feelings of self-doubt about whether one has taken all relevant considerations into account. I have argued that testimonial justice influences practical reasoning in the same way that courage does, for just as fear can be a somatic marker that prompts deliberation about elicitors of fear, self-doubt can be a somatic marker that prompts deliberation about considerations provided by testimony. If my account of Aristotelian courage is correct, testimonial justice would be an Aristotelian virtue as well.⁵⁰⁴

However, my account of testimonial justice leads to the heterodox conclusion that virtue might be very commonplace. Recall from sections 4.4.1 and 4.4.2 that many neo-Aristotelians believe that virtuous people are very rare or that virtue is unachievable for human beings. On my account it is possible in principle for every person in a society to be virtuous, even though some people may be more exemplary than others. By more exemplary I mean that some people may be trustworthy experts in many areas while other people can only offer trustworthy advice in very few situations. Life experience, education and talent are not evenly distributed. However, in a good society even the least exemplary citizen could outperform a particularist at practical reasoning, for if that least exemplary citizen is a person of testimonial justice he will know that he tends to overlook important considerations in many situations and he will be quick to seek advice. Since individual perfection is impossible there will be situations where the most exemplary particularist will overlook important considerations. So, even a particularist who has expertise in many areas will make mistakes in practical reasoning more frequently than an appropriately trusting citizen who has expertise in very few areas.

I should stress that I do not intend this idea of trust within a community to be an abstract ideal. I believe it to be possible to form a community of trust in the real world, and that such communities do actually exist, at least in a limited way. Take for example my neighbourhood, the West End of Vancouver in 2013. Here is how it works as a community of trust in my experience. I am aware that as a straight, middle-class, white cis-male I have spent large portions of my life overlooking important considerations. The best hope I have of getting past my privilege-blindness is to rely on the testimony I receive from my friends, family and neighbours. Because I live in a community where people are free to speak about their life

experiences (or at least more free than most people in human history) I have access to the stories other people have to tell about their lives. There is no reason to hope that I will come to be disposed to notice all salient considerations beyond my own life experience, but if I am disposed to feel an appropriately high degree of self-doubt in many situations I will be disposed to keep listening, and by leaning hard on what I hear I will be much less likely to make privilege-blind mistakes. At least on some issues, the West End is a community where the testimony I need is easily available, and where I am pointed in the right direction by a broad societal consensus that the testimony people give about their own lives should be respected.⁵⁰⁵ The West End promotes the sort of appropriate trust that makes many of its citizens better than they would be if they relied only on the way the world seemed to them as individuals.

It might be objected that I have given up the ideal of the virtuous person as being the person who always gets it right in every situation. I have not. I have argued that getting it right in every situation would require giving due consideration to all matters of fact about one's situation, and that this would only be possible for an omniscient being with infinite time to deliberate. That is, I have retained the notion that the perfectly virtuous person would be perfect in thought, feeling and action, but I have argued that this ideal is humanly unachievable. In that respect, my account is no different from Kantekar's.⁵⁰⁶ Where I diverge from Kantekar and eudaimonists like her is that we disagree about how human beings ought to try to approach this ideal as closely as possible. I have argued that a person who becomes part of a trusting community will approach idealized omniscient practical reasoning more closely than any isolated individual human ever could.

I do not at this time want to put forward the claim that what I'm suggesting about trusting communities is Aristotle's own view, but there is significant textual support in Aristotle's *Politics* for the claim that excellence in practical reasoning is not a matter of individual perfection. This is most prominent in Aristotle's discussion of the advantages of democracy in *Politics* book III:

For the many, of whom each individual is not a good man, when they meet together may be better than the few good, if regarded not individually but collectively, just as a feast to which many contribute is better than a dinner provided out of a single purse. For each individual among the many has a share of excellence and practical wisdom, and when they meet together...they become in a manner one man...some understand one part, and some another, and among them they understand the whole.⁵⁰⁷

My claim that a member of an appropriately trusting community can become virtuous to a higher degree than any individualist particularist is at least plausibly neo-Aristotelian.

These final sections were written because it might have seemed that the work on moral psychology done throughout the body of this thesis was leading to an anti-Aristotelian result. This is not the case. These last six sections have presented an argument that dispositions which modulate the degree to which situations affect behaviour are not alien to virtue ethics in the Aristotelian tradition. Neo-Aristotelians can and should build an account of such dispositions into their moral psychology. Their work would be richer for it.

Notes

Chapter One

¹ These are the results of two psychological studies, discussed in chapters five and seven respectively.

Chapter Two

² Doris, *Lack of Character*, 36.

³ Darley and Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho," 100-108.

⁴ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 34.

⁵ Darley and Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho," 107. Note that these are different ways of understanding why subjects who were in haste did not stop. Based on exit interviews it seems that different subjects had different reasons for not stopping. This is discussed at length in chapter five.

⁶ Isen and Levin, "Effect of Feeling Good on Helping," 384-8.

⁷ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 30.

⁸ Latané and Rodin, "A Lady in Distress," 189-202.

See Doris, *Lack of Character*, 32-33.

⁹ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 33.

¹⁰ Latané and Darley termed this "diffusion of responsibility." Latané and Darley, *The Unresponsive Bystander*, 101, 111 See also Doris, *Lack of Character*, 33.

¹¹ 62.5% was the result in the "Voice-Feedback" setup of Milgram's "Experiment 2." Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 35.

¹² Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 59.

¹³ Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 35.

¹⁴ Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 110.

¹⁵ Hartshorne and May, *Studies in the Nature of Character*, 382-3. See also See Doris, *Lack of Character*, 63-65.

¹⁶ Haney, Banks and Zimbardo, "Study of Prisoners and Guards in a Simulated Prison." 1-17.

¹⁷ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 51-52.

¹⁸ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 35.

¹⁹ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 34. Citing Dovidio, "Helping Behaviour and Altruism," 361-427.

²⁰ Analogously, respiration in animals and internal combustion engines both produce carbon dioxide but there is no carbon dioxide producing process that is common to both.

²¹ Darley and Batson found that those subjects who did not stop failed to stop for different reasons. One group of subjects, the group I am making reference to here, did not stop because they did not notice the person apparently in need. A second group of subjects arrived at their destination in some distress at having seen the person in need yet refusing to stop. This study will be discussed in greater depth in chapter five.

²² I say "one of the mechanisms by which priming can affect behaviour by directing attention" because I believe there is more than one. In chapter five I also discuss phenomena such as change blindness and visual distraction.

²³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1149a7.

²⁴ The pro-situationist family of studies is demarcated in part by the degree to which the results of these studies are surprising. No one is surprised that fleeing behaviour is correlated with the degree of danger but people are surprised that ambient noise is correlated with helping behaviour. The more surprising the result, the more prominent a role the study plays in the situationist literature.

Surprisingness is an empirical matter of fact and should be studied as such. Many ethicists suffer from what might be called philosopher's disease, the assumption that whatever is intuitive to oneself will be intuitive to everyone else as well. Experimental philosophers such as Shawn Nichols, Jonathan Haidt, Stephen Stich and Joshua Knobe have found that many intuitions about ethics are not universal.²⁴ It would be interesting to discover whether the results of studies such as Darley and Batson's seminarians study are as surprising to members of different societies as they are to university educated westerners.

For that matter, it would be interesting to discover if it is even possible to replicate pro-situationist studies in different cultures. It was mentioned in chapter five that members of the San culture are relatively immune to the Müller-Lyer two arrows perceptual illusion. It would be interesting to discover whether the effects of haste seen in Darley and Batson's seminarians experiment are more or less pronounced depending on cultural expectations about punctuality.

²⁵ Milgram describes conducting a series of surveys on psychologists, university students and ordinary working citizens, asking them both when they would stop administering shocks and when they would expect other people to stop administering shocks. See Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*, 27-31.

²⁶ The various forms of utilitarian virtue ethics are one set of exceptions. Unlike most virtue ethicists, utilitarians are free to discuss which dispositions would most effectively produce utility without reference to whether those dispositions are part of the good life for a human being or whether it is psychologically possible to develop those dispositions.

²⁷ Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 1-19.

²⁸ Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 1.

²⁹ Anscombe, "Practical inference," 32.

³⁰ For Anscombe's distinction between "good for what" ("A will promote an end E") and "good to pursue" see Anscombe, "Practical inference," 34.

³¹ Anscombe, "Practical inference," 34.

³² Anscombe acknowledges the existence of multiple virtues, all of which are necessary for the best possible life. "...that is "illicit" which, whether it is a thought or a consented-to passion or an action or an omission in thought or action, is something contrary to one of the virtues the lack of which shows a man to be bad qua man." Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 6.

³³ Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 15.

³⁴ Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 1.

³⁵ See, for example, Pojman, *Philosophy*, 407.

³⁶ I am not pointing to a group of philosophers who self-identify as eudaimonists, nor do I intend to provide a list of necessary or sufficient conditions for being deemed a eudaimonist. Rather, I'm taking Foot and Hursthouse as prototypical eudaimonists and saying that those authors whose work shares many common features with theirs should be grouped together with them. For more on the notion of a prototype concept, see Prinz, *Furnishing the Mind*, 52.

³⁷ What Aristotle actually meant in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the *Eudemian Ethics*, the *Politics* and elsewhere will always remain a bone of contention. There are some neo-Aristotelians whose interpretations of Aristotle are different enough to place them outside the eudaemonist camp, notably particularists such as John McDowell. McDowell will be discussed at length in chapter five. Here I'm offering a quick sketch of what the mainstream interpretation looks like.

³⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115b18-20, 1109a28

³⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115b20

⁴⁰ *Homo sapiens* is not Aristotle's name for our species, but the idea of placing our species among the other animals in a taxonomic hierarchy is not at all foreign to him. It is a project he undertakes in his *History of Animals*.

⁴¹ Because flourishing includes every activity that contributes to the good life for a human being, what it means for a human being to flourish might be different from what flourishing would mean for sentient extraterrestrials.

⁴² See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1141b7.

⁴³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a3, 1095b5.

⁴⁴ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a3

⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1252b32

⁴⁶ Internal conflict may be taken as evidence that one has fallen short of virtue. Michael Stocker argues that "one mark of a good life is a harmony between one's motives and one's reasons, values and justifications." Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," 453. To be sure, absence of internal conflict is not sufficient for virtue; a person might be unconflictedly cowardly, gluttonous and stingy. However, the received view is that there could be no completely virtuous life if the virtues were not mutually coherent.

⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV section 3.

⁴⁸ Foot paired her argument that the idea of virtue is more than just action-evaluation with an anti-Kantian argument that virtue is more than just intention-evaluation. A well-intentioned person who is disposed to wear down the spirits of everyone around her is morally bad in that even if she is sincere in wanting to be helpful, her pattern of

failure is blameworthy. However, Foot denies that actual behaviour is all that matters in evaluating a person's moral status. It's bad to forget the birthdays of loved ones, but the forgetfulness associated with Alzheimer's disease is surely not *morally* bad. This is the route by which Foot reaches the eudaimonist conclusion that virtue is neither just in the head nor just in the action taken. Foot, "Virtues and Vices," 4.

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a19.

⁵⁰ It might even be the case that doing something other than what a fully thriving person would do might be the best possible course of action for a person who reasons and feels inappropriately. Healthy people do not limp, but limping might be the best means of locomotion for someone with a twisted ankle. Aristotle's remarks on shame are suggestive here. It is not a virtue, for virtuous people do nothing shameful, but it is better than shamelessness.

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV, section 9.

⁵¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a19.

⁵² Getting things exactly right is a rare achievement because nuances matter. Speaking for the tradition, Philippa Foot told us that "small reactions of pleasure and displeasure [are] often the surest signs of a man's moral disposition." Foot, "Virtues and Vices," 5.

⁵³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a19

⁵⁴ Foot's account of virtues of character, see Foot, "Virtues and Vices," 8-10. It should be noted that Aristotelian justice is not a virtue of character. Quite unlike a virtue such as courage, it involves the intellect in that it involves conscious calculation of what is proportionate to determine what is owed to a person. As Foot puts it, "justice was concerned with operations and courage and temperance with passions" Foot, "Virtues and Vices," 8.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1125b27-1126b10.

⁵⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a20.

⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103b24. There is considerable pessimism here about who can be virtuous.

Aristotle thought that growing up in the wrong environment can preclude a person from ever becoming virtuous.

⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a35.

⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1103a34. Aristotle's example is learning to play the cithara.

⁶⁰ In Aristotle's view, the virtues are *hexeis* (1984: 1106a10-12), and a *hexis* is a disposition that is 'permanent and hard to change' (1984:8b25-9a9). This feature of Aristotle's account is emphasized by commentators: Sherman (1989:1) says that for Aristotle (as well as for us) character traits explain why 'someone can be *counted on* to act in certain ways' (cf. Woods 1984:149; Annas 1993; 51 Audi 1995:451; Cooper 1999:238).

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b12-13.

⁶² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1100b30-1101a20.

⁶³ Practical wisdom, *phronesis*, is at the centre of Foot's virtue ethics. She sees practical wisdom as having two parts: "in the first place the wise man knows the means to certain ends; and secondly he knows how much particular ends are worth." (Foot, "Virtues and Vices," 5). Only those things which really are important will be important to the *phronimos*. (Foot, "Virtues and Vices," 7). Contrast this with the case of "a man who lacks wisdom has 'false values'"⁶³ in the sense that he has the wrong priorities. (Foot, "Virtues and Vices," 7). On Foot's account, the good person knows what is worth desiring, and the virtues are those character traits which help her calibrate her passions accordingly.

⁶⁴ "Thought by itself sets nothing in motion." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1139a36.

⁶⁵ In fact, a person can't develop practical reason without having gone through the process of habituation. Knowing what list of ends contributes to a good life is prior to knowing what weight each of those goals ought to have. (1144a30)

⁶⁶ Aristotle defines practical wisdom as "a true disposition accompanied by a rational prescription." (NE 1140b6) Virtues of character (true dispositions) tell us which goals are worth pursuing. These goals are the premises about which we deliberate.

⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a26.

⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book I, section 13.

⁶⁹ One sense in which practical reason calibrates virtues of character: it "preserves the sort of belief in question." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b13. This theme is discussed at length in chapter seven.

⁷⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1115b18-20.

⁷¹ Foot, "Virtues and Vices," 5.

⁷² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1102b33

⁷³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a29 Note: this is one way of tying together the virtues of character we see in *Nicomachean Ethics* books I-IV and the account of practical reason we get thereafter.

⁷⁴ For a summary of the debate, see Annas, “Naturalism in Greek Ethics” and Annas, “Virtue Ethics: What kind of Naturalism.” Annas defends the traditional view that “ethical development [is] the fulfilment of our natural human tendencies” against the is/ought distinction, and Williams’ claim that our pluralistic society makes it implausible that there is any one way of life that is the fulfilment of human nature. (Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 52). See Doris, *Lack of Character*, p. 172 n. 9. for his views on naturalism. Ngfn

⁷⁵ On Bernard Williams’ interpretation of the eudaimonist tradition, “if any disposition was to count as a virtue, it had to be as part of a rational structure that included all the virtues.” In a sense this is no stronger than what Foot is saying, for it would seem to be a claim about what dispositions count as virtues, not a claim about the set of the interrelation of dispositions in an individual life. However, this could be interpreted as saying that a person can have any one virtuous disposition without having the whole structure of virtuous dispositions any more than one could call a set of stones constituent parts of an arch if one of the stones needed to complete the structure is missing. By this reasoning, the virtues would be as closely united by practical reason as John McDowell tells us they are united by a single perceptual sensitivity (see chapter two). Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 36.

⁷⁶ One of Foot’s opponents on this point is Julia Annas, who sees no reason not to say that the “development of ethical knowledge proceeds like the acquisition of a practical skill or expertise.” (Annas, “Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology,” 26) On this point, Alasdair MacIntyre’s work on functional concepts and social roles meshes well with my remarks in the conclusions of this thesis. His view is that it is only when man is thought of as an individual prior to and apart from all roles that ‘man’ ceases to be a functional concept.” (MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 58)

⁷⁷ Again, see Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 52.

⁷⁸ Oddly, Aristotle himself is a bit of an outlier on this point. He is somewhat unusual in thinking that ethics is subordinate to politics, and therefore that the goals of ethics (including eudaimonia) are subordinate to political goals (the health of the polis). See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.1 and X.9. Aristotle is not alone in this way of thinking. Notably, MacIntyre tells us that virtues depend on practices; in a sense, the social structure exists prior to the ways of living that sustain that social structure. However, most virtue ethicists tend to discuss the virtues of individuals without wondering about the relationship between virtuousness and the good society, either because focusing on a narrow ethical question and bracketing out larger questions or because they believe that virtues are society-independent. (I take this to be Plato’s view in *Republic*, that ethics is prior to politics in that discovering that the best life for an individual is the life of reason leads to the conclusion that the best society would be one that facilitates the life of reason and governs itself in a manner analogous to the way a virtuous person governs herself).

⁷⁹ The orthodox view is best expressed by Rosalind Hursthouse. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 163-191.

⁸⁰ Hursthouse argues that “*phronesis*... is not just a matter of adverting to facts available from a neutral point of view.” (Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 191)

⁸¹ For a dissenting view, see Lovibond, “Virtue, Nature and Providence.”

⁸² Ludvig Siep reminds us of the Kantian view that argues that “knowledge depending on, or influenced by, emotions cannot count as objective.” On the contrary, it is possible to see virtue ethics as objective by means of “appeal to “general traits of the virtues... permanent features of the human constitution.” Siep, “Virtues, Values and Moral Objectivity,” 85, 89.

⁸³ There is not general agreement that this state of character is particularly appealing. Christine Korsgaard calls this the Good Dog model of virtue, where the virtuous person is depicted as “inclinations have been so perfectly trained that he always does what he ought to spontaneously and with tail-wagging cheerfulness and enthusiasm.” Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*.

⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a17.

⁸⁵ Strictly speaking, Aristotle distinguishes between the person who does not give into pleasures as self-controlled, and the person who does not give in to pains as resistant. (their antonyms being un-self-controlled and soft respectively) This minor distinction is not relevant to the point I’m making here.

⁸⁶ Urmson, “Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Mean,” 158.

⁸⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1151b35.

⁸⁸ It is worth mentioning that vice is not the only way to become a moral monster: Aristotle distinguishes between vice and brutishness. More on this below.

⁸⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1151a13-14.

⁹⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1150a22.

⁹¹ This is not Aristotle’s view. See chapter four for discussion of the extent to which virtue is rare or even unattainable.

⁹² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1145a25-30 I should note that Aristotle describes at length some cases where his intuitions diverge from those of his modern readers. When Aristotle thinks of brutishness, he is often thinking of “savage behavior from semi-imaginary remote tribes.” Worse, he thinks that some homosexuals are brutish, specifically “the passive male homosexual partner.” (Thorp, “Aristotle on Brutishness,” 667) This is not Aristotle at his best.

⁹³ See Aristotle’s discussion of unnatural desires throughout *Nicomachean Ethics*, book VII.

⁹⁴ Cases of phobias: fearing the squeak of a mouse, fearing a weasel. Cases of self harm: plucking out one’s own hair, gnawing one’s fingernails. Cases of pica: eating coal or earth. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.5.

⁹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1149a12

⁹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1148b27.

⁹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a7 It may be that lacking the necessary life experience is an extremely common condition. Aristotle at 1179b11 says that “most people” live by emotion, this in the context of a discussion on the environment in which the young need to be raised in order to become virtuous. Given that this notion of immaturity is relatively obscure in Aristotle, receiving relatively little attention as compared to vice or akrasia, thinking that Aristotle means that most people are psychologically incapable even of vice would seem to be overstating the matter.

⁹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a9. Note that Aristotle says that immaturity is similar to self control, evidence that he does not think that the two states are identical.

⁹⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1179b13-14.

¹⁰⁰ Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to be Good,” 84.

¹⁰¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a2, 1095a9,

¹⁰² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.1 1145a26-27. Urmson refers to godlikeness as “heroic excellence.” (Urmson, “Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Mean,” 158)

¹⁰³ The remark “if, as they say, men become like gods because of an excess of excellence” admits of no obvious interpretation. Worse, it is a view that Aristotle is reporting; that he seems to endorse it would not be enough to allow us to think that the most straightforward interpretation of the passage is exactly his own view. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII.1 1145a24.

¹⁰⁴ (Urmson, “Aristotle’s Doctrine of the Mean,” 158).

¹⁰⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, book I section 2.

¹⁰⁶ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1035b22

¹⁰⁷ This is not quite true. As Aristotle would say, the pancreas is like a Delphic knife; it has multiple functions. It produces several hormones and digestive enzymes.

¹⁰⁸ Note that he is not referring to people who are cut off by circumstances. Robinson Crusoe is cut off from all human contact, but this does not make him less than human; note that he makes friends and rejoins society as soon as he gets the opportunity.

¹⁰⁹ Aristotle, *Politics* 1253a3-6

¹¹⁰ “...the moderate man will need the opportunity of indulging himself – how else will it be clear that this type, or any of the others, is the type he is?” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a33

¹¹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a27

¹¹² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178a24. See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177a33, where it is pointed out that the contemplative person has less need of company, since contemplation can be practiced even while alone.

¹¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b25

¹¹⁴ Health and food, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b27. Mortality, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b26.

¹¹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178b34

¹¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b35-1178a1

¹¹⁷ The best candidates would include some of the stoics, but I doubt that perfect apatheia has ever been achieved. Consider Gandhi, who is credited with near total indifference to many human needs, but who was heartbroken when some of his supporters rioted in violation of his policy of nonviolence.

¹¹⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII 1145a30

¹¹⁹ Some consequentialist virtue ethicists disagree. See chapter six.

¹²⁰ On the other hand, a mercenary might run due to having decided that it is not worth risking his life for the sake of victory because he is not fighting for his own city. That might be a rational conclusion, one even a genuinely courageous person might draw

- ¹²¹ Similar but not identical. “A man has practical wisdom not by knowing alone but by being able to act.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book VII section 10.
- ¹²² Plato, *Protagoras*, 358c-d.
- ¹²³ See Aristotle, *De Anima*, 412a22, 416b22-417b1. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle tells us that “it is possible for the disposition to be present and yet to produce nothing good, as for example in the case of the person who is asleep...but the same will not hold of the activity.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a1-3. See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1046b31–5. To give an important example, Aristotle tells us that a person who is “asleep, raving or drunk”¹²³ knows what city they live in only in the potential sense. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, NE 1147a15.
- ¹²⁴ This is drawn from John Thorp’s analysis of akrasia as a cluster concept. Thorp, “Aristotle on Brutishness,” 686.
- ¹²⁵ “As for lack of self control, part of it is impulsiveness, part weakness.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1150b19-20.
- ¹²⁶ Rorty, “Akrasia and conflict,” 211. For more on the conflict between the thoughts and habits of thought required to form a decision and “the habits required to actualize it,” see Rorty, “Akrasia and conflict,” 206.
- ¹²⁷ We would do well to spell out in psychologically realistic detail what she means by a habit, Indeed, Rorty herself has an interest in achieving psychological realism.
- ¹²⁸ These habits do not necessarily work in harmony with each other. “Any agent sufficiently complex to be capable of reflective, self-corrective voluntary action is susceptible to contradiction and conflict.”¹²⁸ (Rorty, “Akrasia and conflict,” 194.) Rorty thinks akratic people are more conflicted than most of us, drifting with the flow in various directions without a hand at the rudder. Rorty, “Akrasia and conflict,” 205.
- ¹²⁹ Damasio - constitutive
- ¹³⁰ See Rorty, “Akrasia and conflict,” 210-211 for Rorty’s discussion of the attractions of akrasia
- ¹³¹ It might seem that go-with-the-flow akrasia subsumes cases of inertial routines. I would argue that this is not the case. It take Rorty to be discussing cases where the agent is presented with two options and drifts lazily into the easier of the two, the habitual option. As I was describing Stan’s 8:15 habit in section 2.1, Stan considers no alternatives. He leaves the house at 8:15 simply because it does not occur to him to do otherwise. Stan is not in the position of knowing about other alternatives but not using that knowledge, so I would not be inclined to call his habit akratic in any sense of the word akrasia.
- ¹³² Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*.
- ¹³³ Haney et. al. “Study of Prisoners and Guards in a Simulated Prison.” 1–17.
The Milgram and Stanford Prison experiments might be explicable in terms of go-with-the-flow akrasia, but not other pro-situationist experiments.
- ¹³⁴ Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to be Good,” 85.
- ¹³⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1147a21-22.
- ¹³⁶ See Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to be Good,” 78.
- ¹³⁷ “Of course he has a reason for doing *a*; what he lacks is a reason for not letting his better reason for not doing *a* prevail.” Davidson, “How is Weakness of the Will Possible?” 88n25.
- ¹³⁸ Tenenbaum, “The Judgment of a Weak Will,” 880.
- ¹³⁹ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 434a6-10.
- ¹⁴⁰ Wiggins describes this as a “heterogeneity of the psychic sources of desire satisfaction”(Wiggins, “Weakness of Will,” 262)
- ¹⁴¹ See Annas, “Aristotle on Pleasure and Goodness,” 295-297. She reminds us that virtuous and vicious people take pleasure in different things. A utilitarian calculus which treats pleasures as fungible misses Aristotle’s view that whether something ought to be felt as pleasurable is a question with an objective answer. “Why should we take seriously someone’s claims about pleasure when we reject his claims about the good?” 297
- ¹⁴² Wiggins, “Weakness of Will,” 256
- ¹⁴³ Wiggins, “Weakness of Will,” 257 See also T. H. Irwin’s remarks in essays on ari ethics – ““a rational desire must be formed by some special kind of deliberationthat does not depend on some single nonrational desire for some single end.” Irwin, “Reason and Responsibility in Aristotle,” 128.
- ¹⁴⁴ Wiggins “Weakness of the Will,” 243.
- ¹⁴⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book VII section 1.
- ¹⁴⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, bookVII section9.
- ¹⁴⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book VII sections 2 and 9 respectively. Note that compassion also seems to figure into Neoptolemus’s change of heart.

¹⁴⁸ On Arpaly's account, Neoptolemus may not be indecisive. It might be that his desire to tell the truth is so strong that "it does not need the aid of an unusual lapse of self-control or lapse of consciousness (produced by alcohol, stress, etc.) to win in his own inner struggle." Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 100.

¹⁴⁹ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 9-10, 75-79.

¹⁵⁰ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 10.

¹⁵¹ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 9.

¹⁵² Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 78.

¹⁵³ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 77-78.

¹⁵⁴ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 99.

¹⁵⁵ Henry, "Aristotle on Pleasure and the Worst Form of Akrasia," 257. "To put this another way, the entire time he is engaged with the object of his desire, the genuinely akratic man is thinking to himself, "I know what I am doing here is wrong, and I really should not be doing this", and he truly believes it (see *EE* 1224b16-17 and below)."

Henry, "Aristotle on Pleasure and the Worst Form of Akrasia," 261.

¹⁵⁶ Mele, "Akratic Feelings," 279.

¹⁵⁷ Tenenbaum, "The Judgment of a Weak Will," 905.

¹⁵⁸ Henry, "Aristotle on Pleasure and the Worst Form of Akrasia," 262.

¹⁵⁹ Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1224b15.

¹⁶⁰ Henry, "Aristotle on Pleasure and the Worst Form of Akrasia," 266.

¹⁶¹ The unbalanced akratic and the person of flawed practical reasoning can be differentiated as follows: the unbalanced person does not think (all things considered, as a matter of settled judgment) that it is better to pursue the lesser good.

Chapter Three

¹⁶² See Aristotle, *Categories*, 2b11 for Aristotle's discussion of how a species more informative than its genus.

¹⁶³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, NE 1105b19-1106a12. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, the groundwork for talk of dispositions is laid in book II sections 5-6. More broadly, Aristotle's most illuminating work on the concepts of hexis and diathesis (disposition) are found in *Metaphysics*, 1022a-b and *Categories* book II section 8. One clarificatory note is that hexeis are more stable and permanent. See also Urmson, *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, 157-158.

¹⁶⁴ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 140-141.

¹⁶⁵ The NEO-PI-3 is the latest version of their NEO family of questionnaires, released in 2005, replacing the previously standard NEO-PI-R. McCrae and Costa, "The NEO-PI-3," 261-270. For an example of its widespread use, see this recent study comparing data on personality traits in 24 cultures. De Fruyt et. al. "Assessing the Universal Structure of Personality in Early Adolescence," 301-311. See also McCrae and Costa, "NEO PI-R: Bibliography for the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R) and NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI)." Published 2003. Accessed May 22, 2013.

http://www4.parinc.com/webuploads/productinfo/NEO_bib.pdf

¹⁶⁶ Allport and Odbert, "Trait Names," 80. Note that they made no attempt to eliminate synonyms, doubting as they did that that trait names have exact synonyms. For example, the traits dignified, majestic and imposing are roughly synonymous, but they carry different shades of meaning. Allport and Odbert, "Trait Names," 31. Allport and Odbert's snapshot of trait use in the 1930's is an understatement of the problem. Other languages each have their own lists of traits in addition to what is available in English, and furthermore new adjectives are continually appearing as languages develop over time.

¹⁶⁷ Allport and Odbert, p. 31.

¹⁶⁸ McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 38.

More things McCrae and Costa see as being part of the pattern associated with extraversion: people who are frequently cheerful toward others also tend to maintain an unusually large number of friendships, frequently take leadership roles, tend to be active and energetic, and tend to crave excitement.

¹⁶⁹ As discussed below, this approach was developed by Louis Thurstone. It was later popularized by Raymond Cattell and has been a standard approach to this kind of data ever since. Cattell, *The description and measurement of personality*.

¹⁷⁰ See McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 37, 29.

As an aside, I should note that by this very broad definition not all traits are personality traits. In the broadest sense, any adjective that might be used to explain why some people tend to live differently than other people is a trait. (See McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 29.) McCrae and Costa acknowledge that there are “physical traits (tall, healthy), ability traits (intelligent, musical), and social traits (rich, famous).” (McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, p29) McCrae and Costa take the subject matter of personality psychology to be “*personality traits*, which describe emotional, interpersonal, experiential, attitudinal, and motivational styles.” (McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 29, emphasis mine.) They consider physical traits, ability traits and social traits to be rival explanatory hypotheses that might in some cases explain a person’s thoughts, feelings and behaviours. For example, it might be the case that a person frequently organizes parties because she is extraverted and enjoys parties, or it might be the case that she does so because she is wealthy and can afford the cost of a party more easily than others. One way we might determine whether extraversion or wealth is the better explanation for her party-organizing behaviour by looking for other elements of the pattern associated with extraversion, for if it turns out that she is very rarely cheerful then we have reason to think that she is not extraverted. This has to be a matter of inference; we can recognize strength when we see a person’s musculature or wealth when we see her bank balance, but at present we have no way of directly observing that a person has a character trait.

One objection I would like to raise in passing is that it is not immediately clear that there is a natural kind which includes these different kinds of psychological phenomena. Notably, it is not clear why ability traits have been excluded from the set of personality traits, or why experiential traits have been included. It would be a worthwhile exercise to make it clear exactly which psychological phenomena should count as being governed by personality traits.

¹⁷¹ The idea that claims about dispositions license claims about causation is disputed. “Addis (1981), Hampshire (1953), O’Shaughnessy (1970), Squires (1968, 1970), and others argue that a dispositional statement does not offer a causal explanation of its manifestations.” Buss and Craik, “The Act Frequency approach to personality,” P. 107 However, Costa and McCrae to be saying that traits are causal, for they claim that having a trait can explain and predict individual actions, such as “whether a person average in warmth will smile,” (McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 27)

¹⁷² There is no reason to think that it is impossible in principle to discover what it is about a person’s brain that causes her to behave differently from other people. There is a research program now underway aiming to offer neurophysiological explanations of traits. For example, there are studies correlating the trait extraversion identified by means of questionnaires with the degree of amygdala activation elicited by seeing happy faces. For example, Turhan *et al.* found that people generally display significant amygdala activation when they see an image of a fearful face, but that “amygdala activation for happy expressions correlated positively and significantly with the degree of extraversion.” The Locus Coeruleus has also been implicated in extraversion, leading Inna Fishman *et al.* to speculate that the psychological mechanism behind extroversion has something to do with the tendency of extraverted people to selectively attend to faces.

Turhan *et al.* “Amygdala Response to Happy Faces as a Function of Extraversion,”

Fishman *et al.*, “Do extraverts process social stimuli differently from introverts?”

For a recent review of LC-NE function, see Aston-Jones and Cohen, “An Integrative Theory of Locus Coeruleus-Norepinephrine Function,” 403-450.

I should add a cautionary note that neurophysiological research of this kind is at an early stage, and at the moment claims about the neurophysiological foundations of traits need to be treated with considerable caution. See Vul *et al.*, “Voodoo Correlations in Social Neuroscience,” 274-290. See also the semi-satirical Bennett *et al.*, “Neural correlates of interspecies perspective taking in the post-mortem Atlantic Salmon,”

<http://prefrontal.org/files/posters/Bennett-Salmon-2009.pdf>

¹⁷³ It might be worth taking note that some forms of trait psychology do not involve dispositions.

The sociologist Erving Goffman had a theory of traits which makes no reference to dispositions. On his account, traits are a matter of the ways we present ourselves to others in the context of mutually recognized social situations. (Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, 1959) On this view a trait is just the name of the history that person has of presenting herself to others in a certain way. Gilbert Harman found Goffman interesting because he thought that Goffman was “leaving it open whether there is any ‘real’ or ‘true’ self beyond various presentations of self.” (Harman, “Skepticism about Character Traits,” 236) Goffman would say that a person is generous if she has a past pattern of giving liberally to others, without drawing any conclusions at all about whether some inward force is pushing her to give.

This idea that traits can be defined without reference to dispositions also appears in the work of Jean-Paul Sartre. Sartre thought that character traits can only be ascribed to people retrospectively on the basis of their past behaviour

patterns, and that these ascriptions are always in bad faith. He denied that human ways of thinking, feeling and acting are governed by dispositions. As a radical indeterminist, he thought that talk of inner drives falsely postulates causal determinism, and that these purported drives actually get their efficacy from “a perpetually renewed decision concerning their value.” Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 106. We may be able to spot patterns in a person’s past behaviour, but those patterns neither indicate what she will do in the future nor define her identity. For example, if a certain pattern of conduct is defined as being the actions of a generous person, and if a person has displayed that pattern in the past, then we say that she has the trait of generosity.¹⁷³ However, saying that this person is generous is speaking in bad faith “to the extent that human reality [being free and conscious] can not finally be defined by patterns of conduct.” (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 108) To wrap that up, Sartre thought that the definition of a character trait is that it is the name of a pattern of past behaviour. Let’s call this the retrospective definition of the term character trait. Retrospective traits do not explain past behaviour, for they do not tell us what disposed a person to act the way she did. Likewise, a person’s retrospective traits cannot be used to predict her future behaviour, for they do not tell us what she will be disposed to do.

What should be immediately clear is that neither Goffman nor Sartre are in any position to make predictions about how a person will behave in the future. Given that personality psychologists do have this goal in mind, they must have something more than past history in mind when making trait attributions.

¹⁷⁴ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 177n23.

¹⁷⁵ The case given in this paragraph is extreme. Cases 3 and 4 below offer examples of what the correlations look like when the correlation is between zero and one.

For purposes of the examples, assume a population of 1000. (N=1000) In case 3, 820 subjects smile at both puppies and kittens. In case 4, 890 subjects smile at both puppies and kittens. In both cases, 900 subjects smile at puppies and 900 subjects smile at kittens.

In both cases:

$\mu_p=0.9$ =Percentage of the population that smiles at puppies.

$\mu_k=0.9$ =Percentage of the population that smiles at puppies.

$$\begin{aligned}\sigma_p = \sigma_k &= \sqrt{((1/(N-1))(\sum(x_i-\mu_p)^2))} \\ &= \sqrt{((1/(1000-1))(900*((1-0.9)^2)+100*(0-0.9)^2))} \\ &= \sqrt{((1/(1000-1))(900*0.01+100*0.81))} \\ &= \sqrt{(\sim 0.09)}\end{aligned}$$

$$\sigma_p = \sigma_k = \sim 0.3$$

Paired variables x (this person is a puppy-smiler) and y (this person is a kitten-smiler)

Case 3

Subjects:820 both kitten and puppy smiling, 80 only kittens, 80 only puppies, 20 neither.

r_3 = Correlation of puppy-smiling and kitten smiling in case 1.

$$\begin{aligned}r_3 &= (1/(N-1))*(\sum((x_i-\mu_p)/\sigma_p)*((y_i-\mu_k)/\sigma_k)) \\ &= (1/(N-1))*(820*(0.1/0.3)*(0.1/0.3)+80*(-.9/.3)(.1/.3)+80*(.1/.3)(-.9/.3)+20*(-.9/.3)(-.9/.3)) \\ &= (1/(1000-1))*(91.11 - 80 - 80 + 180)\end{aligned}$$

$$r_3 = 0.111$$

Case 4

Subjects:890 both kitten and puppy smiling, 10 only kittens, 10 only puppies, 90 neither.

r_4 = Correlation of puppy-smiling and kitten smiling in case 2.

$$\begin{aligned}r_4 &= (1/(N-1))*(\sum((x_i-\mu_p)/\sigma_p)*((y_i-\mu_k)/\sigma_k)) \\ &= (1/(N-1))*(890*(0.1/0.3)*(0.1/0.3)+10*(-.9/.3)(.1/.3)+10*(.1/.3)(-.9/.3)+90*(-.9/.3)(-.9/.3)) \\ &= (1/(1000-1))*(98.89 - 10 - 10 + 810)\end{aligned}$$

$$r_4 = 0.890$$

Analysis

r_3 is quite weak, barely above the threshold for statistical significance. In case 3, knowing that someone is a puppy-smiler indicates that this person is very slightly more likely than a randomly selected person to also be a kitten smiler. r_2 is an extremely strong correlation. In case 4, knowing that someone is a puppy-smiler is a very strong indicator that this person is also a kitten-smiler.

¹⁷⁶ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 19.

¹⁷⁷ This is not true of all personality traits. McCrae and Costa have an interest in tracking the frequency with which subjects report feeling a certain way. They are interested in hypothesizing about dispositions that result in reported feelings.

¹⁷⁸ Allport and Odbert, "Trait Names."

¹⁷⁹ In personality psychology traits are probabilistic. We do not ask whether or not a person has a trait, we ask to what degree they have the trait. People who have "more" of a trait display the thoughts, feelings and behaviours that constitute the pattern more frequently than people who have less of the trait. McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 22-24.

¹⁸⁰ Alternatively we could say that they used to be extraverted but changed and became introverted. That is a reasonable hypothesis, but McCrae and Costa have evidence that the personality traits of adults are highly stable. Therefore, when our predictions turn out false we have reason to conclude that our original trait ascriptions were mistaken.

¹⁸¹ Doris begins his attack on Costa and McCrae at *Lack of Character*, 67.

Robert McCrae and Paul Costa are best known for having developed the widely used NEO family of psychometric instruments. Their original inventory, the NEO-I, was a questionnaire which predated the Five-Factor Model, measuring only three of what later came to be known as the Big Five (hence the name, Neuroticism-Extroversion-Openness Inventory). When McCrae and Costa became advocates of the Five-Factor Model they came up with revised versions to measure all five (the NEO-PI, and subsequently the NEO-PI-R). They also produced simplified versions of these instruments (NEO-FFI and TIPI) which were somewhat less reliable but much quicker to administer. Costa and McCrae released the latest versions of these instruments in 2010 (NEO-PI-3 and NEO-FFI-3). As the developers of the standard tools for personality assessment, it seems reasonable to consider their account of traits to be the current orthodoxy in personality psychology. Throughout this section I have supplemented McCrae and Costa's account of traits with David Buss and Kenneth Craik's Act Frequency approach to personality, which I take to be compatible with McCrae and Costa and allows us to discuss in greater detail how traits are related to behavioural frequencies.

McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood: a Five-Factor Theory Perspective*.

Buss and Craik, "The Act frequency approach to personality," 105-126.

For a full history of how the Five-Factor Model was developed, see Digman, "personality structure: emergence of the five factor model," 417-440.

¹⁸² Unsurprisingly, there are dissenters from this consensus. The most common complaint is that McCrae and Costa's factor-analysis is imperfect. Becker claimed both that there is a sixth factor (hedonism/spontaneity) and that the six factors are not perfectly orthogonal (claiming that the "Big-2," "mental health" and "behavior control"). This dissent is ongoing, See Block, "A contrarian view of the five-factor approach to personality description."

¹⁸³ McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 25.

¹⁸⁴ McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 52-57.

¹⁸⁵ In addition to the MBTI and PRF, similar work was done on the Guilford-Zimmerman Temperment Survey (GZTS), the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPT) and the California Psychological Inventory. (CPI) See McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 55.

¹⁸⁶ Thurstone, "Vectors of the Mind," 41, 1-32 It should be mentioned that Thurstone's list of five does not line up with Costa and McCrae's. Early studies on the number of factors underlying personality traits varied wildly in the number of factors they identified. For example, Cattell claimed there were sixteen personality factors. Cattell, *The description and measurement of personality*.

¹⁸⁷ Buss and Craik, "The Act frequency approach to personality," 108

¹⁸⁸ They have also identified a second tier of traits directly under the big five. Each of the big five subsumes six second-level traits ("30 facets"). For example, Costa and McCrae claim that agreeableness is a top-level trait which subsumes a set of second-level traits (trust, straightforwardness, altruism, compliance, modesty, tender-mindedness). They hope to subsume all other trait language that is correlated with agreeableness under these six facets.

¹⁸⁹ Generosity can be subsumed under agreeableness in a vertically organized trait taxonomy, though only if the empirical evidence supports doing so. Two clarifying examples of vertically hierarchical taxonomy.

A note of caution is called for at this point. We should not expect this trait taxonomy to produce a neat tree structure. There may be some lower-level traits which cannot be accounted for in terms of one and only one member of the big-5. For example, being eager-to-please could be explained by having some degree of neuroticism combined with some degree of agreeableness. All the five-factor model guarantees is that any empirically

defensible trait can be defined in terms of five variables. That is, it tells us that trait-space is defined by five axes, five mutually independent “dimensions of individual differences.” McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 25.

¹⁹⁰ McCrae and Costa “The NEO-PI-3,” 261–270.

¹⁹¹ See Mischel, *Personality and Assessment*. For Doris’ reading of Mischel, see Doris, *Lack of Character*, 24.

¹⁹² It should be noted that the intrapersonal behavioral correlations observed by Hartshorne and May were statistically significant. As Ted Slingerland points out, a “weak” correlation of 0.3-0.4 is strong enough to predict dichotomous outcomes 65%-75% of the time, certainly much more reliable than the 50% accuracy of trying to guess a coin toss. Slingerland, “The Situationist Critique and Early Confucian Virtue Ethics,” 398.

¹⁹³ McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 39.

¹⁹⁴ McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 38.

¹⁹⁵ McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 38-39.

¹⁹⁶ McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 39.

¹⁹⁷ McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 38-39.

¹⁹⁸ McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 39-40.

Personality psychologists have also done some work on developing an error theory, explaining why self- and peer-reports do not always line up with results from direct behavioural observation. D.S. Moskowitz reports that peer reports may not correlate well with behavioural observations unless the peer is close to the subject. (Moskowitz, “Cross-Situational Generality in the Laboratory,” 829-839.) Friends provide more accurate trait ascriptions than strangers. Jack Wright and Walter Mischel claim that ordinary language assessments of traits are not actually perfectly general. (Wright and Mischel, “Conditional hedges and the Intuitive Psychology of Traits,” 454-469.)

¹⁹⁹ McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 26-27.

²⁰⁰ McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 27. This serves as a reply to Doris’s concerns about aggregation in *Lack of Character*, 72-75

²⁰¹ They say that “on any given occasion, whether a person average in warmth will smile or not is a coin toss.

But...we know with great precision that, in the long run, that person will smile about half the time.” McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 26-27

²⁰² This assumes both that their research methods have retest-reliability, an assumption they believe they have empirically confirmed. For more on retest reliability see McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 38 McCrae and Costa are confident that traits are stable over long periods of time, confident enough to adopt William James’s dictum that character is “set in plaster” by age thirty. McCrae and Costa, *Personality in Adulthood*, 3.

²⁰³ Fleeson, “Toward a Structure- and Process- Integrated View of Personality” 1018. Fleeson’s experimental method was to issue Palm Pilots to each of his subjects, asking them to make a report on their own behaviour once an hour every hour for a period of two weeks how talkative they had been over the past hour. (Fleeson, “Toward a Structure- and Process- Integrated View of Personality” 1016) The fact that this measurement of behaviour was based on self-reports may be deemed suspicious by situationists, but the results are in full agreement with pro-situationist studies. Reported intra-individual behaviour was highly inconsistent, changing wildly from one situation to the next. Intra-individual variation was actually larger than interpersonal variation. (Fleeson, “Toward a Structure- and Process- Integrated View of Personality” 1015)

It is only in average behaviour over the course of a day that interpersonal differences in average reported behaviour emerge. These differences are consistent and stable.

²⁰⁴ Fleeson, “Moving Personality Beyond the Person-Situation Debate,” 20. See also Fleeson and Nofle, “The End of the Person-Situation Debate.”

²⁰⁵ Mischel, *et al.* “Situation-Behaviour Profiles as a Locus of Consistency in Personality,” 2005. Mischel has moved on to what he calls the cognitive-affective personality system (CAPS). (See Mischel and Shoda, “A Cognitive-Affective System of Personality.”) Mischel claims that CAPS can explain interpersonal differences in average behaviour in terms of mental representations specific to construals of situations. With Nancy Snow’s book *Virtue as Social Intelligence* CAPS has entered the philosophical literature. CAPS merits further study, but the point being made here that traits predict average behaviour is no longer in dispute within the psychological literature. I note in passing that CAPS may be vulnerable to the objection I level at Sreenivasan in section 4.2.2.

²⁰⁶ Trait ascriptions reliably predict average behaviour, but Mischel’s current view is that traits are not the *best* explanation for average behaviour, preferring his own CAPS model.

²⁰⁷ Howard Curzer argues that this is mistaken and that “sometimes virtuous people reliably act wrongly because of their virtues.” (Curzer, “How Good People Do Bad Things,” 242) One thing he points to is Aristotle’s cryptic remark that “it is highly characteristic of a liberal man to go to excess in giving, so that he leaves too little for himself; for it is the nature of a liberal man not to look to himself.” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1120b4-6) In

chapter six I argue at length that this sort of mistake is not acting wrongly; the generous person sometimes makes inconsequential mistakes precisely because he pays an appropriately small amount of attention to his own wants. Curzer aside, I take it that the view that the virtuous person always acts for the right reasons is typical among eudaimonists (see Annas, *The Morality of Happiness*) and worthy of being the focus of this section.

²⁰⁸ In more technical language, “traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behaviors over iterated trials of similar trait-relevant eliciting conditions.” Doris, *Lack of Character*, 22.

²⁰⁹ To put this another way, because virtuous people always feel and act appropriately, and because there is more than one possible reason for feeling an emotion, therefore being virtuous requires being appropriately responsive to all of the possible elicitors of each emotion. For example, people feel afraid for many different reasons. Among other things, people fear death, injury, embarrassment, disapproval, failure, loss of status and harm to loved ones. If a person is going to feel the right amount of fear at all times, then she must be able to handle all of the many different possible elicitors of fear equally well. A person who is consistently brave will do what a brave person would do regardless of what kind of threat she is facing. In general, people with eudaimonist virtues of character are supposed to be perfectly consistent in their behaviour no matter what elicitors of emotion are present.

²¹⁰ Doris is endorsing the unity of virtue, at least to some extent. We will return to the question of the unity of virtue in chapter five.

²¹¹ In Doris’ words, “the occurrence of a trait with a particular evaluative valence is probabilistically related to the occurrence of other traits with similar evaluative valences.” Doris, *Lack of Character*, 22).

²¹² Doris, *Lack of Character*, 36.

²¹³ This is Darley and Batson’s study. See Doris, *Lack of Character*, 33-34.

²¹⁴ Harman, “The Nonexistence of Character Traits,” 223-226.

²¹⁵ Harman, “Virtue Ethics without Character Traits,” 122.

²¹⁶ Stich and Doris, “As a Matter of Fact,” 119.

²¹⁷ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 66.

²¹⁸ This is in direct conflict with Aristotle. “Whether the people involved are unknown or known to him, acquaintances or not, he will do it in a similar way – except that he will do as is fitting in each sort of case.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1126b25-27.

²¹⁹ Doris’ preferred term is overattribution. Doris, *Lack of Character*, 93.

²²⁰ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 62-66.

²²¹ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 103.

²²² Doris, *Lack of Character*, 117.

²²³ Gladwell discusses a wide range of pro-situationist studies. Gladwell, *The Tipping Point*.

²²⁴ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 101.

²²⁵ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 95.

²²⁶ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 99, 102. Some might speculate that this overgeneralizing bias is typical of human beings as a species, something we would expect to find in human beings from any society. Doris explicitly refuses to advance this claim. Doris, *Lack of Character*, 122.

²²⁷ See Doris, *Lack of Character*, 120.

²²⁸ For the impact of the introduction of blind auditioning on the hiring practices of orchestras, see Gladwell, *Blink*, 245-254.

²²⁹ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 30.

²³⁰ Kristjansson, “An Aristotelian Critique of Situationism,” 63.

²³¹ On changes in the weather, see Petty et. al., “The Role of Affect in Attitude Change,” 212-233. Many additional examples are provided in chapter seven.

²³² Henrich, “The Weirdest People in the World,” 66.

²³³ Henrich, “The Weirdest People in the World,” 68-70.

²³⁴ Annas, “Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology,” 8, 13.

²³⁵ Annas, “Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology,” 13.

²³⁶ Annas, “Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology,” 14.

²³⁷ Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character,” 485

²³⁸ My focus here is on the objection as it shows up in the philosophical literature, but I should note that there is a parallel debate in the psychological literature as well in the form of critiques of behaviourism. For one early example, see John B. Watson, on the difficulty of observing that someone is “doing certain things.” Watson, “Psychology as the Behaviourist Sees It,” 167.

²³⁹ Anscombe, *Intention*, 37.

Chapter Four

²⁴⁰ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 16.

²⁴¹ See Annas, "Comments on Doris' *Lack of Character*," 640. In addressing this objection, Doris uses slightly different terminology for the same concepts. Doris's term "nominal situation" corresponds to Annas' "objective situation." Doris uses "psychological situation" instead of "subjective situation." Doris, *Lack of Character*, 78, 81-82.

²⁴² Fleming, "The Character of Virtue," 39.

²⁴³ Sreenivasan, "Errors about errors," 58.

²⁴⁴ See Doris, *Lack of Character*, 80.

²⁴⁵ Annas, "Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology," 21.

²⁴⁶ Annas, "Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology," 21.

²⁴⁷ Levine et. al. "Cross-cultural Differences in Helping Strangers," 543-560

²⁴⁸ Annas, "Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology," 20-21.

²⁴⁹ Piff et. al. "Having Less, Giving More," 771-784

²⁵⁰ Kristjan Kristjansson's term. Kristjansson, "An Aristotelian Critique of Situationism," 67.

²⁵¹ One possible exception: a person who has the intention of running from danger might be seen moving her feet toward danger if she is not aware that the danger exists. This is a real possibility, and I discuss cases of this kind at length in chapter five.

²⁵² McDowell, "Virtue and Reason."

²⁵³ "White Wines," Kalala Organic Estate Winery, last modified May 11, 2013, accessed May 16, 2013, http://www.kalalawines.ca/wines_k.php

²⁵⁴ Doris, *Lack of Virtue*, 31.

²⁵⁵ It would be a matter of adopting "a personal role model as one's ideal." Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character," 487.

²⁵⁶ The question of how we are to recognize virtuous people is a problem not only for Kamtekar but for all neo-Aristotelians. However, I believe the problem is considerably less serious for neo-Aristotelians who believe that virtue is achievable and that some people are actually virtuous.

Moral education is much easier if there are virtuous people in the world, because it is then possible to inculcate virtue by imitation. A person who does not understand why the virtuous person lives the way she does can nonetheless imitate her way of life. As this new way of life becomes habitual, the learner should come to appreciate the internal goods associated with the virtuous person's practices. In contrast, a person who is trying to become virtuous by imitating an abstract ideal person cannot develop new values through habituation. Goods she does not currently value will not be built into her model of the ideal life, so she will not be motivated to live in such a way that she will come to value those important but currently alien goods.

This argument does not fully resolve the problem faced by neo-Aristotelians, for it must be explained how it is possible to identify virtuous people. I will address this in section 8.5.

Consequentialist virtue ethics should be able to evade this point entirely. A fully virtuous person would not be needed to certify an ideal if the consequences of following one ideal rather than another could be unambiguously observed by a non-virtuous observer. (e.g. what increase in helpful behaviour do we see in students who have been taught to take Albert Schweitzer as an ideal?) Consequentialist virtue ethics will be discussed in chapter six.

²⁵⁷ Aristotle thinks a person must be a male citizen of a good polis, one who has wealth, friends, political power, reputable parents, good looks and children. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a32-b6.

²⁵⁸ Athanassoulis, "A Response to Harman," 217.

²⁵⁹ Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character," 485.

²⁶⁰ I'm going to assume that there is nothing inherently tempting about cheating by looking at an answer key as opposed to another way of cheating. A person who is akratic with regard to global honesty should, when tempted, be equally likely to cheat by any methods that have an equal chance of success.

²⁶¹ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 63-64.

²⁶² Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character," 488.

Kamtekar acknowledges that if it were the case that humans were incapable of practical wisdom her argument would lead to the conclusion that humans have nothing but situationist dispositions. Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character," 483.

²⁶³ Merritt, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology," 372.

²⁶⁴ Merritt, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology," 372.

²⁶⁵ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 57. Arpaly's argument will assume greater importance in chapter seven of this thesis.

²⁶⁶ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 58.

²⁶⁷ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 38

Chapter Five

²⁶⁸ This will be qualified in chapter six. There is a sense of the word memory in which we have memories that are not accessible to conscious recall.

²⁶⁹ This is a very old observation. In Aristotle, the phrase is "having but not using," (NE VII.3)

²⁷⁰ Chabris, "You Do Not Talk About Fight Club if You Do Not Notice Fight Club." 150-3.

²⁷¹ As it turned out, the innocent man was himself a plainclothes police officer. This conviction was later overturned on appeal, not on grounds of inattention blindness but because the prosecution had concealed documents relevant to the defense. "186 F.3d 7: United States, Appellee, v. Kenneth M. Conley, Defendant, Appellant," Justia, published August 26, 1999, accessed May 18, 2013, <http://law.justia.com/cases/federal/appellate-courts/F3/186/7/569286/>. See also <http://www.npr.org/2011/06/20/137086464/why-seeing-the-unexpected-is-often-not-believing>

²⁷² By distraction I mean the presence of some sort of sensory stimulus that is irrelevant to the assigned task. See, for example, Vitkovitch and Tyrrell. "The Effects of Distractor Words on Naming Pictures at the Subordinate Level," 905-926. This paper experimentally confirms the obvious fact that distraction interferes with recall. Identifying a photograph by giving the name of the thing photographed requires being able to remember the association between the name and the appearance of such objects, and this is more difficult to do when distracted. Placing an unrelated distractor word alongside a picture has been found to make experimental subjects slower at identifying the picture. (913) If the word "yacht" appears along with a picture of a sword, subjects will be slower to identify the sword as a sword. Seeing "basic-level" words does not compete with the identification of "subordinate" words; (916) seeing the word "plane" does not delay the identification of a Concorde, (908) though seeing a subordinate word such as "Concorde" can delay identifying a picture of a glider as such. (918)

²⁷³ Neisser and Dube, "The Control of Information Pickup in Selective Looking," 201-219.

²⁷⁴ Simons and Chabris. "Gorillas in our Midst," 1059-1074.

²⁷⁵ Haines, "A Breakdown in Simultaneous Information Processing," 171-175.

²⁷⁶ Most et. al., "What You See Is What You Get," 220.

²⁷⁷ Most et. al., "What You See Is What You Get," 220.

²⁷⁸ Most et. al., "What You See Is What You Get," 224.

²⁷⁹ Howard and Kahana, "A Distributed Representation of Temporal Context," 269.

²⁸⁰ Howard and Kahana, "A Distributed Representation of Temporal Context," 273.

²⁸¹ See Watkins et. al., "Decentering and Distraction Reduce Overgeneral Autobiographical Memory in Depression," 911-920. Watkins, Teasdale and Williams examined depressed patients who had formed "overgeneral" assessments of their own lives. For example, a patient's memories of having been late on several occasions might coalesce into overgeneral beliefs about herself, believing that she is always late for everything and that it is impossible for her to be on time. These subjects were asked to perform various combinations of the following activities. The rumination task instructed subjects to ponder self-focused questions such as "think about what your feelings might mean." In contrast, "think about the shape of a large black umbrella" was a question used in the distraction task. The decentering task offered questions such as "what fraction of me is how I feel now?" which invited the subjects to question their current self-image. A control task with questions along the lines of "how long does this weather last?" was also used. (913-914) It was found that distraction and decentering reduced overgeneral memories as compared against the rumination and control tasks. (918)

²⁸² Mack notes that priming cannot take place if a person is completely ignorant of the prime, saying that "priming can occur only if there is some memory of the stimulus, even if that memory is inaccessible." His conclusion is that "basic perceptual processes...are carried out and influence task responses even though observers are unable to report seeing the percepts that result from those processes. Mack, "Inattention Blindness: Looking Without Seeing," 181-182.

²⁸³ Mack, "Inattention Blindness: Looking Without Seeing," 182.

²⁸⁴ Aristotle recognizes that there are upper limits to what human beings can reasonably be expected to bear beyond which we should not expect even the most virtuous person to hold out. This is clear in his discussion of Priam, who can no longer live well after having lost his city and family. Something similar might hold for preoccupation. We might expect that a virtuous person would not overlook a distressed stranger if she is five minutes late to a meeting, but we would not be surprised that anyone might overlook a distressed stranger if thirty minutes late to her own thesis defense. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book I section 10.

²⁸⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1147a26.

²⁸⁶ Aristotle's example. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1147a29.

²⁸⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105a31-1105b1.

²⁸⁸ In Aristotle's technical language, a person who is ignorant of the particulars of her circumstances can only act counter-voluntarily. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1111a2-3.

²⁸⁹ As we will see in the next chapter, one exception is Julia Driver, who does think that statistically reliable behaviour that increases utility is sufficient for virtue.

²⁹⁰ There is a complication here. Some people are unaware of relevant facts but not because of poor character traits. For example, a person who is deaf may be unavoidably oblivious to the harsh criticism that her server is receiving from the kitchen staff, and may conclude that her server is apathetic when in fact she is just harried. Does being deaf render her incapable of being fully virtuous? The thought is distasteful, but Aristotle might be interpreted as thinking so, just as he thinks that being born in a barbarian village would make it impossible to be perfectly virtuous. I have contrary intuitions, though I do not intend to argue for them in this note.

by the possibility that a deaf being a good seems to think that it might

²⁹¹ The particularist reading of Aristotle does not originate with McDowell. Wiggins identified "the man of highest practical wisdom" as "the man who brings to bear upon a situation the greatest number of genuinely pertinent concerns and genuinely relevant considerations commensurate with the deliberative context." He also introduces the perceptual metaphor ("the kind of perception or insight one needs to see that a triangle" is a simple geometric form.) Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," 235.

²⁹² This thought arises in several of Plato's early dialogues. See for example *Protagoras* 355b.

²⁹³ McDowell, "Virtues and Reason," 331. See also McDowell, "Are Moral Requirements Hypothetical Imperatives?" 27. There are problems with this perceptual analogy. One objector is Jonathan Dancy. See Dancy, *Moral Reasons*, 158-162.

²⁹⁴ This is McDowell's phrase explaining what kindness entails. (McDowell, "Virtues and Reason," 333.) Note that this is not just a matter of noticing facts but also a matter of assembling the facts together in the most appropriate order. To put that in Jonathan Dancy's words, the virtuous person can "grasp the shape of the circumstances." Dancy, Jonathan. *Moral Reasons*. I should stress that Dancy is not himself a virtue ethicist, though I believe Dancy's account of particularism sheds some light on what McDowell was doing.

²⁹⁵ McDowell, "Virtues and Reason," p. 331-332.

²⁹⁶ Dancy, Jonathan. *Moral Reasons*. I should stress that Dancy is not himself a virtue ethicist, though I believe Dancy's account of particularism sheds some light on what McDowell was doing.

²⁹⁷ See McDowell, "Virtues and Reason," 331 for the role of knowledge in the virtuous person's behaviour. Part of the argument that having that single sensitivity which delivers this knowledge is sufficient for virtue is that anything other than what the virtuous person knows through her perception of her circumstances should be extraneous to her decision making process. A generous person should be motivated by seeing that a suffering person is in need. What else could motivate her? McDowell suggests that being motivated by something other than what she sees, such as a desire for a good reputation, would demonstrate that she is not virtuous. (McDowell, "Virtues and Reason," 332)

²⁹⁸ McDowell, "Virtues and Reason," p. 333.

²⁹⁹ McDowell intends his argument to be an interpretation of Aristotle, but there are places where Aristotle appears to explicitly deny the unity of the virtues, notably the following: "For those who say generally that excellence consists in a good disposition of the soul, or in doing rightly, or the like, deceive themselves. Far better than such definitions is the mode of speaking of those who, like Gorgias, enumerate the excellences." Aristotle, *Politics*, 1260a25-28.

³⁰⁰ McDowell, "Virtues and Reason," 335. For more on McDowell's account of silencing, see McDowell, "The Role of Eudaimonia in Aristotle's Ethics," 370. Contrast this with Dancy's account of silencing (esp. Dancy, *Moral Reasons*, 47-59)

³⁰¹ McDowell, "Virtues and Reason," 335. See also McDowell's account of *akrasia*, his claim being that akratic people perceive the same things that the virtuous person perceives, but in a way which is "clouded, or unfocussed, by the impact of a desire to do otherwise." McDowell, "Virtues and Reason," 334)

³⁰² In opposition to the eudaimonism seen in mainstream virtue ethics, McDowell denies that virtuous people pursue *eudaimonia* in the sense of “an externally intelligible over-arching desire.” (McDowell, “Virtues and Reason,” 346.) It cannot be that each virtue has its proximate end, with *eudaimonia* as its ultimate end, not if “the concerns which motivate virtuous actions” are not “intelligible, one by one.” McDowell, “Virtues and Reason,” 346. We can only apprehend what the good life for a human being is “from within,” from the perspective of a virtuous person’s “conception of how to live.”

McDowell, “Virtues and Reason,” 346.

³⁰³ McDowell, “Virtues and Reason,” 333.

³⁰⁴ “We use the concepts of the particular virtues to mark similarities and dissimilarities among the manifestations of a *single* sensitivity which is what virtue, in general, is.” McDowell, “Virtues and Reason,” 333. Note a surprising consequence: if this is correct, then there are no morally neutral character traits.

³⁰⁵ Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, 87, 60.

³⁰⁶ For example, right at the roots of psychology as a discipline William James claimed that “everyone knows what attention is. It is the taking possession by the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought. Focalization, concentration, of consciousness are of its essence. It implies withdrawal from some things in order to deal effectively with others.” (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 381) James continues, arguing that he can identify “two physiological processes” which together constitute attention. (James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 411) Chris Mole points to the way James continues to be cited as evidence that the idea that attention is constituted by a process or group of processes continues to be assumed and taken for granted even in contemporary psychological research. “The best tactic yet devised for postponing [philosophical] controversies [about attention], and so allowing psychologists to get on with the kind of work their methods are equipped for, is to quote James’ bold remark and to leave things at that.” (Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, 3) James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*, Reprint. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1890/1981. P. 381.

³⁰⁷ Lombardi, “What is Information?” 105.

³⁰⁸ Shannon, “A Mathematical Theory of Communication,” 379-423 and 623-656.

³⁰⁹ This is somewhat oversimplified. Shannon’s definition takes into account the fact that the communications channel may be lossy, introducing errors between sender and receiver. In light of that, he defines information more precisely as being that which increases the correlation between what the sender intended to convey and what the receiver receives. Let me give a concrete example. Suppose that last night’s weather was either rainy, snowy or clear. If in the morning I step outside to find puddles of water on the ground, seeing those puddles conveys to me the information that the skies were not clear. I do not yet know what the weather was last night, but the information I have received has narrowed down the options and brought me closer to the correct answer.

³¹⁰ This is a bit imprecise. What I mean by error rate is the degree to which the transmitted and received signal are correlated. To be even more precise, channel capacity is formally defined for electronic communications systems by the Shannon-Hartley theorem: $C = B \log_2 (1+S/N)$ where B is the channel bandwidth in bits per second and S/N is the signal to noise ratio of the communications channel. This equation cannot be applied to the human mind because the notion of a signal to noise ratio is not applicable in that context. However, we can measure the error rate experimental subjects display when performing tasks. Because we can substitute that experimental result for $\log_2 (1+S/N)$, we can use Shannon’s definition of channel capacity as a measure of the information processing capacity of the brain. This is not an analogy – Shannon’s formal definition can be used unchanged.

³¹¹ Note that the brain is using a set of extremely efficient compression algorithms by storing information as chunks. A string of seven words carries orders of magnitude more information than a seven bit group of binary numerals. See Miller, “The Magical Number Seven,” 343-352

³¹² Anderson et. al., “Working Memory: Activation Limits on Retrieval,” 222, 248.

³¹³ In at least one place Aristotle comes close to associating the virtues not just with parts of the minds but also with specific parts of the body. For example, temperance is supposed to regulate the parts of the body associated with specific sense organs. “For the touch-related pleasure of the self-indulgent person has not to do with the whole of the body but only with certain parts of it.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1118b7. If there is an attention-directing system, we might expect Aristotle to say that there is a virtue associated with the health and good functioning of that system.

³¹⁴ Caution is needed on this point, because attention is sometimes something that we do direct on the basis of conscious deliberation. For example, a person who was raised in a sexist culture but has just been reading the work of Catharine MacKinnon might be consciously on the lookout for signs that his workplace is a hostile environment despite having no instinctive disposition to sense trouble. Indeed, he might be extra vigilant precisely because he

knows that he lacks that instinctive disposition. Such a person might be disposed to attend to relevant particulars despite having an improperly calibrated virtue of focus, and we do not need to imagine some new virtue to explain his ability to do so. The Aristotelian virtue of justice explains the ability that some people have to distribute scarce resources proportionately on the basis of deliberation. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book V section 3) Our MacKinnon reader might best be described as having the virtue of justice despite lacking a fully developed virtue of focus that would direct his attention instinctively to problem areas. However, it follows from the channel capacity account of intention that there must be a virtue of character not mentioned by Aristotle which regulates unconsciously directed attention. For reference, see MacKinnon, *Sexual Harassment of Working Women*.

³¹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book I section 13. This is evidenced by the fact that we cannot from moment to moment choose to ignore distractions.

³¹⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1102b34.

³¹⁷ Rorty, "Akrasia and Conflict," 206, 210-211.

³¹⁸ This is pervasive in Aristotle's account of the virtues of character, but, to give one example, one aspect of the virtue of *megalopsuchia* is that great-souled people are disposed to overlook having been wronged. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV section 3. *Megalopsuchia* is discussed at length in chaptersixof this thesis.

³¹⁹ McDowell's view is that a virtuous person would attend to what is important and simultaneously see why it is important, but these are not necessarily connected. It might be possible to program a computer to evaluate the fat, salt and nutrient content of food, attending to the variables that are important for health despite not having any built in knowledge of human biology that would indicate that high salt intake is unhealthy because it is bad for the heart. So, it is possible in principle to selectively monitor what is salient without feeling the salience of it or having a theory about what makes it salient. However, this would seem to be a brute behavioral habit, not the sort of trait an Aristotelian would likely be interested in.

³²⁰ In their speech shadowing task, subjects heard a list of words from a complex text, and were asked to repeat the words they were hearing as they heard them.

³²¹ Allport et. al., "On the division of attention," 232. See also Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, p. 44.

³²² Carston and Brookhuis, "Issues arising from the HASTE Experiments," 191-196.

³²³ Allport et. al., "On the division of attention," 233.

³²⁴ It is not really enough to say that attention is not a process. Mole tells us that attention is not "any disjunctive set, or family, or genus, of attentive processes." (Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, 87) What he's rejecting is the whole process-first approach. The general point is that attention does not have the metaphysics of a process." (Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, 31) The empirical data alone cannot tell us what attention is on a conceptual level because "starting with the wrong view of attention's metaphysics will lead us to look for the wrong sort of explanations." (Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, 25) Only after we have done the metaphysics explaining what the adverbial view is and under what conditions it provides a useful taxonomy of phenomena can we turn to the empirical evidence to see whether the process-first approach or adverbialism offers a better account of our observations. See Mole, , *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, 35.

³²⁵ Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, 24. Mole argues that there is more than one useful way to taxonomize a set of objects or events. (Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, 27) This is clear in the case of categorizing objects. We often categorize physical objects in terms of their composition; a solid object might be made of stone, wood or metal. Alternatively, we could categorize objects in terms of their function: there is a set of things that are chairs, a set of things that are tables and a set of things that are paperweights. The substance-based taxonomy of objects is useful if the question we would like to answer is "Is this object flammable?" for all wooden objects are flammable. The function-based taxonomy is less helpful for answering that question because the question cuts across the categories that compose a function-based taxonomy. Knowing that something is a chair does not help answer the question because some chairs (wooden ones) are flammable and some (metal ones) are not. On the other hand, if the question we would like to ask is "is this object comfortable?" then we must rely on the function-based taxonomy, which will tell us to what categories the comfortable / uncomfortable distinction applies: some chairs are comfortable, but the concept of comfortability does not apply to any antenna.* Substance-based and function-based taxonomies are both valid ways of categorizing objects, but each is better suited to answering some questions than others.

* Note that the set of attributes that make a chair comfortable are not the same as the set of attributes that make a bed comfortable. Flammability is a matter of the fire's effect on the object, but comfortability is a matter of the object's effect on a person. This different direction of fit is part of the reason why we need two different taxonomies.

³²⁶ Mole's definition of cognitive unison: "let α be an agent, let τ be some task that the agent is performing, and call the set of cognitive resources that α can, with understanding, bring to bear in the service of τ , τ 's 'background set.' A's performance of τ displays cognitive unison only if the resources in τ 's background set are not occupied with activity that does not serve τ ." Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, 51. For Mole's analogy of the orchestra, see Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, 132.

³²⁷ Mole, *Attention is Cognitive Unison*, 24.

³²⁸ For more on Ryle on category mistakes, see Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*.

³²⁹ The discussion is shifting from talking about simple cases of visual perception to virtues. It is not likely to be controversial to say that there is a set of dispositions which are necessary conditions for having a virtue. Candace Upton called these mental features that support virtue. Upton, Candace. (2005) "A Contextual Account of Character Traits," *Philosophical Studies*. Vol 122, pp. 133-151. p. 141.

³³⁰ It should be noted that having half of the mental features necessary for a virtue does not make a person half-virtuous. To borrow Christine Korsgaard's analogy, if a house is in an extreme case of disrepair, if two walls have collapsed and the roof has caved in, it is not merely a poorly constructed house – it's no longer a house at all. Korsgaard, *Self-Constitution*, 27-28.

³³¹ An example: consider Admiral Nelson sitting down to breakfast on the morning of the battle of Trafalgar. He must have concluded that he deserved the honour of leading from the front, and so he placed his ship at the head of the column. He seems to have given little thought to the value of his life to his country; as Britain's greatest admiral he was more responsible than anyone for the safety of his country. Nelson was warned that the medals on his coat were making him a target for enemy sharpshooters and was asked by his fellow officers to take cover, but he continued to casually walk the deck of his ship. He was right in thinking of himself as being worthy of high honours, but foolhardy in placing his life in unnecessary danger. Concern with honour seems to have been the cause of placing his life in excessive risk.

³³² Darley and Batson, "Jerusalem to Jericho," 107-108.

³³³ We should not rule out the possibility that their claims to have remembered seeing a person lying prone might be confabulated. It would help to know what questions Darley and Batson asked of their subjects, and whether those questions were in any way leading questions, but what Darley and Batson tell us about their postexperimental interviews is frustratingly vague. For more on inattention blindness and confabulation, see De Sousa, KaraD., *Inattention blindness and the false memory effect for cued-recall words*.

³³⁴ In addition to what these subjects said, Darley and Batson report that these subjects seemed anxious when they arrived at the destination, which Darley and Batson interpreted as being evidence of inner conflict. Darley and Batson, "Jerusalem to Jericho," 108.

³³⁵ Beilock et. al., "Haste does not always make waste," 373-379

³³⁶ There are at least two possible interpretations of this result. Ro et. al. claim that "this result suggests that prioritization of objects of expertise may provide a mechanism for the efficient processing of objects of expertise so that these can be tagged and processed in an automatized manner that does not depend on attentional capacity." They believe this processing is analogous to automatized processing of images of faces. Alternatively, it would seem to be consistent with the data that the performance of the musicians is impaired because their attention is divided; resources needed to categorize the names of musical instruments appearing in the text were being unintentionally diverted to categorizing the depicted instrument, leading to a delay in information processing. Ro et. al., "Musical Experience Modulates the Effects of Visual Perceptual Load," 673.

Chapter Six

³³⁷ In saying this, I'm following Driver's proposal that virtue might "depend as much on what an agent fails to see as on what the agent sees," for I am arguing that attention to one task requires neglect of others. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, p. 39.

³³⁸ I say "cognitive systems" plural because, as discussed in chapter five, there is no single bottleneck regulating the amount of information a person can deliberate about. For example, the limited capacity of visual short-term memory and the lag introduced by psychological refractory period phenomena both throttle the rate at which a human being can receive information visually, but not in the same way. See Marois and Ivanoff, "Capacity limits of information processing in the brain," 296-305.

³³⁹ This is discussed at length in chapter five.

³⁴⁰ A particularist might abandon the ideal standard set by the idea of a godlike being, but saying that developing the highest degree of sensitivity possible for a human being would not save their theory. I return to this theme in the

conclusions of this thesis. There I argue that a generalist will be outperformed by a specialist in that specialist's area of expertise. A McDowellian generalist does not achieve maximum human excellence in any area.

³⁴¹ Hursthouse. *On Virtue Ethics*, 198.

Aristotle's discussion of what it means to be an excellent member of one's species in the *De Anima* is helpful here. As a matter of poetic metaphor we could say that a Douglas fir is courageous, standing firm in the face of danger, but speaking plainly plants are incapable of feeling fear or boldness, which it makes it meaningless to say that the fir feels the right amount of fear and boldness. Trees are neither courageous nor cowardly for courage is not a word that can be applied to trees.

³⁴² Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 33.

³⁴³ Driver, J. *Uneasy Virtue*, 16. See also Driver, "The Virtues of Ignorance," 373-384.

³⁴⁴ Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, p. 19.

³⁴⁵ Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, p. 21. Note that Driver believes that the disposition toward ignorance of self-worth is praiseworthy in itself, regardless of whether good consequences follow in this particular person's case, which is what makes her account a form of virtue ethics. For her, the trait of modesty is a praiseworthy trait if being disposed to ignorance of self-worth leads to good consequences nine times out of ten, so long as the bad consequences which result one time in ten from having this trait are outweighed. Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, p. 27-28.

³⁴⁶ Driver, "The Virtues of Ignorance," 373.

³⁴⁷ For blind charity, see Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 28. For trust, see Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 30. For "forgive and forget," see Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 31.

³⁴⁸ Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 39.

³⁴⁹ Slote, M. "Driver's Virtues," 26.

³⁵⁰ See also Dancy, who thinks that concerns which get overridden in a tragic dilemma are not silenced. They persist "shouting loudly." That is what makes a tragic dilemma tragic, he thinks, and this seems plausible. See Dancy, *Moral Reasons*, 125.

³⁵¹ Thomas Hurka's distinction between dispositional and occurrent-state conceptions of virtue may shed some light on what Driver is doing here. Eudaimonists tell us that ethics should begin by asking what a virtuous person is like. Their concept of a virtuous action is derived from the concept of a virtuous state of character. For example, a courageous action is defined as being an act that a courageous person would perform. A non-virtuous person cannot perform a virtuous action, for even if she goes through the motions she will not be acting for the right reasons and in the right way. Thomas Hurka called this the dispositional view, for it evaluates persons on the basis of the dispositions they have. (Hurka, "Virtuous Act, Virtuous Dispositions," 69, 71-2). Hurka identified an alternate approach, which he called the occurrent-state view. On that approach, one should begin by identifying which actions are good. Having done that, we can ask what states of character will dispose a person to perform good actions. On this approach the concept of a virtuous state of character is derived from the concept of a virtuous action. Some versions of consequentialist virtue ethics adopt the occurrent state approach, and Driver's version of consequentialist virtue ethics is among them.

It should be noted that some consequentialist virtue ethicists do not adopt the occurrent state approach. Robert Adams' motive utilitarianism is one important exception. Adams tells us that from the perspective of the lawgiver we determine which motives it is best for a person to have on the basis of how likely a set of motives is to produce actions which produce utility maximizing acts. However, when it comes to evaluating whether or not a particular action is good or bad we do not ask about the consequences of that specific act. Rather, Adams tells us that we should evaluate actions on the basis of whether or not the motives that resulted in the act were good. On rare occasions where having the best motives results in actions that detract from overall utility, performing those actions on those occasions is praiseworthy despite detracting from overall utility. This is far closer to eudaimonism than Driver's view. Adams, "Motive Utilitarianism," 467-81.

³⁵² Note that Driver's account can cover non-utilitarian forms of consequentialism.

³⁵³ Driver tells us that "a virtue is a character trait that produces more good (in the actual world) than not systematically." Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 68, 82. In Peter Railton's terminology, Driver's focus on actual consequences makes her an objective consequentialist, as opposed to subjective consequentialists who believe that we ought to judge agents on the basis of the effects they were *trying* to produce. Railton, "Alienation, Consequentialism, and the demands of Morality 134-71.

³⁵⁴ Consequentialist virtue ethics differs from more conventional species of virtue ethics in more ways than I've named. Among other surprises, it removes any necessary connection between virtue and the highest good of the person who has the virtue. It does not consider any trait to be of value for its own sake. It makes it a matter of indifference whether or not the person knows that her traits are good. Also, a trait which is a virtue in one social

context might be a vice in another social context, if the consequences of having that trait are different in one society than in the other. For example, on her account, softhearted kindness is a virtue in our society because the presence of kind people increases overall utility. However, she tells us that softhearted kindness would be a vice in a society where resistance to a dictatorship is obligatory.

³⁵⁵ Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 55-56)

³⁵⁶ Part of the problem is that standards of virtue have changed over time, both in pop culture and in the philosophical literature. As we look from era to era and from culture to culture we find different lists of virtues and vices, different systems for organizing those lists, different social significances being attached to the virtues, and, where two cultures have a virtue of the same name, different definitions of what it means to have that virtue.

MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 182-183.

³⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098b10-1098b30.

³⁵⁸ Flanagan, "Virtue and Ignorance," 424.

³⁵⁹ Flanagan acknowledges that there is some degree of observer relativity in saying that something has been overestimated. A spectator might be amazed at the Olympic performance of a champion sprinter, but the sprinter herself might recognize the role of luck, or of having the right trainer, or simply believe that sprinting is not the most important human activity, and so assess her accomplishment as being less great than it is in the spectator's eyes.

³⁶⁰ Flanagan, p. 424.

³⁶¹ Schueler, "Why Modesty is a Virtue," 838.

³⁶² Driver mentions several other definitions of modesty each of which might require a separate account, notably Victorian sexual modesty and modesty in displays of wealth. There may be other senses of the word as well.

³⁶³ Note that this makes nonoverestimation modesty and autarkic modesty out to be descriptions we would apply to people who do not have the two opposed vices associated with the Aristotelian virtue of *megalopsuchia*, small-mindedness and excessive pride respectively. For Aristotle's account of *megalopsuchia* as a virtue between the vices of small-mindedness and vanity, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV section 3.

³⁶⁴ This is something of an oversimplification. As discussed in chapter five, it is possible for a person to be primed without consciously noticing or remembering the object which primed them. Knowledge and ignorance are my focus in this section, but we should not forget that the knowledge/ignorance dichotomy does not give us a complete picture of how perception works.

³⁶⁵ See Watkins et. al., "Decentering and Distraction Reduce Overgeneral Autobiographical Memory in Depression," 911-920. Ruminating on questions like "What do my feelings mean?" can lead a person to make overly general assertions about her own character, such as thinking that she is always late because she was late two or three times in the past month. This has been discussed in chapter five.

³⁶⁶ Vice, "The Ethics of Self-Concern" 70.

³⁶⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 590d.

³⁶⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV section 3. Petty-mindedness is an ugly term, but vices deserve ugly names. I do not think that the best way to approach a friend in this condition is to call her petty-minded, particularly because people tend to develop this vice when they have been systematically belittled by the people they love. Instead, I would recommend the therapy devised by Mr. Rogers: if you want someone to believe that she is special, tell her that she is, and point out the things that make her unique. As a practical matter of moral education, people who have fallen into petty-mindedness tend to need carrots more than they need sticks.

³⁶⁹ For more on appropriate ambition as a virtue, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV section 4.

³⁷⁰ It is dangerous to think about tragic dilemmas in the abstract, Monday-morning quarterbacking heartrending decisions made under unbearable pressure. Nussbaum is right that tragic dilemmas call for "sympathetic understanding" and "gentleness to both self and other." Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, 482.

³⁷¹ See the whole of *Nicomachean Ethics* book VIII, on friendship.

³⁷² Aristotle seems to have thought this. No one but a Stoic would expect that a virtuous person would continue living well if she was in Priam's shoes, having lost her friends, family and city at a stroke. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book I section 10.

³⁷³ There are occasions on which calling to mind true beliefs about self-justification is vital. Imagine that the grieving parent who survived the tragic dilemma was tried for murder in the death of her child. It might be natural for a mother who is overcome by grief to think that she is inexcusably guilty and say so to the judge, but would be strange to say that this is what virtue demands.

³⁷⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1124b13

³⁷⁵ For Aristotle on shame, see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV section 9.

³⁷⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book VIII section 3.

³⁷⁷ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV section 3. I'm continuing to use megalopsuchia as my example because Aristotle thinks it is the easiest virtue to fall short of. Being great-souled requires having all of the other virtues and being appropriately aware that one has all of the other virtues.

³⁷⁸ Keep in mind that a person can be primed by something which she does not consciously perceive and cannot recall. The next chapter has much to say about non-conscious information processing.

Chapter Seven

³⁷⁹ Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 133.

³⁸⁰ What's in the background here is psychologist Paul Ekman's work on facial expressions and basic emotions. He claims that there are six basic emotions: happiness, anger, sadness, fear, disgust/contempt and surprise. This is based on his having identified six distinctive facial expressions which are strongly correlated with patterns of activity in the autonomic nervous system and self-reported phenomenology. Ekman interprets his data as being evidence that these emotions are "affect programs," automatic patterns of physiological changes. (Griffiths, 77) I have confined myself to discussing the first four listed by Ekman because those four are absolutely uncontroversial. Ekman, "Are there Basic Emotions?" 550.

This is not the place to discuss whether the emotions on this list are basic in the sense that all other emotions, but I should acknowledge that debate exists. Ortony and Turner argue that there is no reason to believe that any of our emotions are basic and universal, and even doubt that we can draw crisp lines between one emotion and another. In their survey of the psychological literature, they found that fourteen research teams produced fourteen different lists of primary emotions, using eleven different criteria for inclusion. (Ortony and Turner, "What's Basic about Basic Emotions?" 316) They argue that the inability to take this apparent lack of unanimity to be evidence that our apparent unanimity that we all have a few emotions in common is an illusion. Ortony and Turner propose counterexamples against purported evidence for the existence of basic emotions; for example, there is a universal facial expression associated with *effort*, which is not an emotion. Their view is that "it is more profitable to analyze emotional expressions and components in terms of dissociable components and subcomponents rather than in terms of emotions." (Ortony and Turner, "What's Basic about Basic Emotions?" 322). To put the objection another way, imagine that steel ingots are melted down to make girders, girders which are then used to build a building. It would make sense to say that the frame of the building is made of girders, or to say that it is made of steel, but it would be quite wrong to say that it is made of ingots. They say that when we talk about fear, we are merely talking about a weakly correlated cluster of symptoms: a subjective experience, physiological changes, and the urge to escape. In reply I would argue that there is no longer widespread disagreement among lists of basic emotions. Ekman's list has become the consensus view. Part of the reason why is that Ekman was not just looking at facial expressions but also at correlated autonomic nervous system activity.

³⁸¹ Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 133.

³⁸² Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 29, 60.

³⁸³ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 29.

³⁸⁴ For an exhaustive study of the possible objects of emotions, see de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*, 107-137.

³⁸⁵ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 60. What Nussbaum says is that the word feeling is used two ways in ordinary language. Some feelings like agitation are objectless, but other so called feelings such as "feelings of the emptiness of one's life without another person" have intentional content (it's a feeling about another person). A feeling of this second type "does not contrast with our cognitive words 'perception' and 'judgment,' it is merely a terminological variant of them." Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 60. See also *Upheavals of Thought*, 29. In the psychological literature we see the word affect being used in a manner similar to the way I am using the word emotion, as a catchall for moods, feelings and emotions. (see Petty et al, "The Role of Affect in Attitude Change", 214). To be more precise, I take it that affect is being defined in something like the way that Damasio defines emotion. It seems to be a given that something like the physiological patterns identified by researchers in the tradition of Ekman are something that anything that might be called an emotion, a feeling or a mood have in common. Moods are sometimes defined as objectless emotions, with clinical depression as a cardinal example. See Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 71, 132-134. I take issue with this definition of mood due to the argument I put forward over the remainder of the chapter, but debating what if any distinction we should make between moods and emotions would be a tangent away from the issues I'm discussing in this chapter.

Note on Nussbaum's view: "Emotions always have an object; they always invest the object with value, and involve the acceptance of beliefs about the object...Moods such as irritation, gloom, elation and equanimity lack these characteristics."³⁸⁵ *Upheavals of Thought*, 133.

³⁸⁶ See Prinz, *Furnishing the Mind*, 52.

³⁸⁷ That list is not arbitrary. It's based on Ekman's list of basic emotions, a list he generated by looking at which physiological symptoms of emotion are correlated. His list consisted of six basic emotions: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, disgust and surprise. (Ekman, "Are there Basic Emotions?" 550.) The status of surprise and disgust as being emotions is disputed, but it would be very unusual to dispute that the other four are feelings/emotions.

Nussbaum takes a similar approach to the one I have adopted, defining emotion in terms of a family resemblance.

"the explananda will be the genus of which some species are grief, fear, love, joy, hope, anger, gratitude, hatred, envy, jealousy, pity, guilt." She describes these as a family. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 23-24.

: happiness, sadness

³⁸⁸ Nussbaum is speaking for a whole tradition of cognitivist critics of non-cognitivist theories of emotion. For that context, see Deigh, "Cognitivism in the Theory of Emotions."

³⁸⁹ Again, see de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion*, 107-137.

³⁹⁰ Nussbaum herself adopts an extreme form of cognitivism. ("Emotions are judgments." Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 22.) She believes that having the right cognitive content is *sufficient* for having an emotion.

³⁹¹ Referenced in chapter one.

³⁹²³⁹² Respectively, the studies being cited here as examples of irrelevant primes are as follows:

Seeing a pleasant picture: Forgas, J. P. "Asking nicely?" 747-765.

Seeing a happy video vs. seeing a sad video: Forgas and Gunawardene. "Mood effects on interpersonal behavior."

Recalling a happy autobiographical memory: Forgas, "On feeling good and being rude," 928-939.

Feedback on an unrelated task: Forgas, "On feeling good and getting your way," 565-577.

Odour: Chebat and Michon, "Impact of ambient odors on mall shoppers' emotions, cognition and spending," 529-539.

Brightness of ambient light, ambient temperature, ambient noise: Mehrabian and Russell, *An Approach to Environmental Psychology*. The effects of light, heat and noise on "pleasure" are discussed on pages 63, 61 and 64 respectively. Mehrabian and Russell provide evidence that feeling pleasure affects approach-avoidance behaviour (ibid., 96-99) and interpersonal affiliative behaviour (ibid., 125).

I should add a note of caution on using Mehrabian and Russell's work here, because their seminal work on environment, emotion and behaviour uses somewhat different terminology than the other studies cited in this note. They do not frame their studies in terms of positive and negative affect. Rather, they focus on the impact that situational stimuli have on "pleasure-displeasure." (ibid., 18) However, their definition of pleasure is derived from a factor analysis of self-reported vocabulary about emotional states. They identify a strong correlation between the way subjects use words such as "happy," "pleased," "satisfied," "contented," "hopeful," etc., and they define the word pleasure as being the common factor explaining that correlation. (ibid., 23) This is something of an idiosyncratic definition of the word pleasure. What they mean by the word pleasure is indistinguishable from what most social psychologists mean by "positive mood" or "positive affect." Thus I feel comfortable including their work among the other studies here.

³⁹³ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 155.

³⁹⁴ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 155. In that respect he sounds like a cognitivist, but Doris also seems to think that physical symptoms such as a characteristic facial expression are part of what constitutes some emotions, citing Ekman. Doris, *Lack of Character*, 158 However, Doris seems to believe that shame is entirely constituted by

³⁹⁵ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 157. Doris goes so far as to say that some emotions might be "impossible to expunge from the emotional repertoire of biologically normal human beings without severe psychological distortion." (Doris, *Lack of Character*, 157). This is as close as Doris comes to noncognitivism. Based on the rest of his remarks about emotion I take it that he is a cognitivist. I reconcile what he says here with the rest of what he says by parsing it as follows: it may be impossible for biologically normal humans to entirely stop believing themselves to be bad people when they do bad things.

³⁹⁶ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 156.

³⁹⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book IV section 9.

³⁹⁸ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 155.

³⁹⁹ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 165.

⁴⁰⁰ Danziger et al, "Extraneous factors in judicial decisions." Danziger et. al. believe that this effect is caused by decision fatigue, on the grounds that the likelihood of parole was more strongly correlated with the number of cases reviewed than the amount of time elapsed. The reason why a lunchbreak had such a dramatic effect is not entirely clear. Rest, increased blood sugar and improved mood are all cited as possible reasons for the increased leniency

seen after snack breaks. All of these possible reasons can be interpreted as misattribution; judges misinterpret their state of mind before lunch as having been caused by the defendant.

⁴⁰¹Dworkin, *Law's Empire*, 469–70.

⁴⁰²Haidt, et. al. "Affect, Culture and Morality, or Is it wrong to eat your dog?" 613-628. See also Haidt, "The emotional dog and its rationalist tail," 814-834.

⁴⁰³Haidt et. al., *Moral dumbfounding*.

⁴⁰⁴Suls, "Affect, Stress and Personality," 393.

⁴⁰⁵Suls, "Affect, Stress and Personality," 399.

⁴⁰⁶See Rusting, "Personality as a Moderator of Affective Influences on Cognition," 377, 379.

⁴⁰⁷If called on to develop a richer normative account of states of mind necessary for professional success, I would do so in terms of Alasdair MacIntyre's idea of internal virtues. In this chapter and the next I am arguing that appropriate attention and emotion makes a person less likely to miss important information. MacIntyre's work would allow me to argue that developing the ability to adopt a game face is virtuous for its own sake. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.

⁴⁰⁸Gelhaus, "Robot decisions," 883–887.

⁴⁰⁹Kaslow et al, "Recognizing, Assessing, and Intervening With Problems of Professional Competence," 480.

⁴¹⁰McGreevy and Weibe, "A preliminary measurement of the surgical personality," 122-123.

⁴¹¹Cassell, "On Control, Certitude and the 'Paranoia' of Surgeons." 232. It should be noted that the unvarnished sexism of the "macho" surgical culture of the 1980s has diminished somewhat. See Page, "Are Surgeons Capable of Introspection?" 433.

⁴¹²Cassell, "On Control, Certitude and the 'Paranoia' of Surgeons." 230.

⁴¹³Cassell, "On Control, Certitude and the 'Paranoia' of Surgeons." 230.

⁴¹⁴Doris had thought that it would take a "total environment" like a military boot camp to inculcate personality traits. (Doris, *Lack of Character*, 124-125) This is not the case. One's university education or lack thereof can have a significant effect on personality traits. Ludke et al, "A Random Walk Down University Avenue," 3. More generally, Roberts and Mroczek claim to have evidence that Costa and McCrae are simply mistaken regarding trait plasticity in adults ("most mean-level personality-trait change occurs between the ages of 20 and 40.") Roberts and Mroczek, *Personality Trait Change in Adulthood*, 33.

⁴¹⁵Doris, *Lack of Character*, 124-125)

⁴¹⁶Mitmansgruber et al, "Mindful helpers," 1358–1363

⁴¹⁷Sample survey question: "Time and again I get angry about how I react emotionally." (Mitmansgruber et al, "Mindful helpers," 1359). Note that paramedics who have worked for more than ten years feel both less of a direct response to stressful situations and less regulatory meta-emotions. At high levels of experience "experts become generally calmer with themselves." (ibid., 1360)

⁴¹⁸Mitmansgruber et al, "Mindful helpers," 1359-1360.

⁴¹⁹Mitmansgruber et al, "Mindful helpers," 1360-1362.

⁴²⁰Cramer et. al. "Subject Competence and Minimization of the Bystander Effect," 1133-1148.

⁴²¹Cramer et al's study strongly suggests that nurses on average differ in character from non-nurses due to their education, but additional research would be required out competing explanations that may explain part of the observed effect. Cramer *et al* speculate that nurses are immune to the bystander effect because they are aware of their own competence to help. The fact that nurses can be subject to legal penalties if they do not offer help in emergencies might be a factor.

⁴²²Note that we should not assume *a priori* which of their decisions were unjust. It may have been that they were excessively harsh before lunch, or excessively lenient at the start of the day, or both. However, given that their rate of paroling prisoners dropped to close to zero percent just prior to lunch it is reasonable to assume that their excessive strictness at that time was unjust.

⁴²³Doris has an interest in "self-condemnatory emotions," primarily guilt and shame. (Doris, *Lack of Character*, 155) On his account guilt and shame are at least in part constituted by judgments; he tells us that guilt's "characteristic thought" is "I've behaved badly" and that shame's characteristic thought is "I'm bad (weak, small)." (Doris, *Lack of Character*, 155) However, Doris is not a neo-Stoic. He seems to think that physical symptoms such as a characteristic facial expression are part of what constitutes some emotions. (Doris, *Lack of Character*, 157) Also, he thinks that emotions are not always easily altered by evidence that would normally cause us to change our judgments, citing his own experience that knowing the statistics on the safety of air travel has not eliminated his fear of flying. (Doris, *Lack of Character*, 156) Nevertheless, he seems confident that judgments are necessary for

emotions, in that he thinks there is no guilt or shame without a judgment of self-condemnation. This places Doris in the moderate cognitivist camp.

Nussbaum acknowledges that there are states of the body that are associated with emotions, but she denies that those states of the body are constitutive parts of emotions. Her view is that “emotions cause physiological effects.” (Nussbaum, 58.) For example, believing that something of value has been lost is sufficient for feeling grief, but feeling grief might subsequently bring tears to my eyes and cause my heart to start pounding. One important move in her argument is that she denies that there is any state of the body without which we would deny that a person is feeling an emotion. (Nussbaum, 58.) If it is possible for a person to feel fear without an elevated heart rate then having an elevated heart rate must not be part of the definition of fear. Likewise, fear makes some people at some times feel chilled, but not always; sometimes fear makes people sweat. (Nussbaum, 57-58.) If states of the body do not even consistently co-occur with emotions, states of the body cannot constitute part of the definition of emotions. However, it is a mistake to look at the many physiological responses associated with each emotion as though they were independent of one another. There are causal connections between some physiological symptoms. For example, elevated levels of adrenaline cause elevated heart rates. This is not true of all physiological symptoms. Elevated heart rates are strongly correlated with the distinctive facial expression associated with fear, though it is not entirely clear what is happening in the brain that causes them to co-occur. For that reason, a Jamesian would do well to define each emotion as a prototype concept where prototypical cases of each emotion consist of the whole suite of physiological responses seen in those most stereotypical cases. This would allow a Jamesian to affirm that a person is feeling that emotion even in cases where some of those physiological responses are absent so long as the set of physiological responses that person is displaying bear a close resemblance to the physiological symptoms displayed in prototypical cases. For example, quadriplegics do not display an elevated heart rate when they are afraid, but even if this is true they do display the characteristic facial expression and patterns of brain activity that are associated with fear in non-quadruplegics. (Mack, H. et. al., “Motion and Emotion”). Jamesians define emotions not on the basis of a single observed physiological response but in terms of a whole cluster of physiological responses that are usually seen together; this account is consistent with the way James himself talks about physiological responses.

If Jamesian emotions are defined as being prototype concepts, Nussbaum’s argument is not valid. For the sake of argument let’s allow her the assumption that there is no single fear-associated body state that appears on every occasion when anyone feels afraid. In general, there is no emotion-associated body state that appears on every occasion when anyone feels that emotion. It does not follow that there are instances of emotion where none of the body states associated with that emotion are present. Quadriplegics do not have an elevated heart rate when they are afraid and people who are experiencing facial paralysis do not display the facial expression associated with fear, but we do not need to deny that these people feel fear because they display many of the other physiological responses which constitute feeling afraid on a Jamesian account. What James was arguing was that a person who is displaying *none* of the set physiological responses associated with fear is not afraid. Nussbaum’s argument does not give us reason to deny that physiological responses are necessary for emotion.

⁴²⁴ Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 129.

⁴²⁵ Ekman, P. (1992) “Are there Basic Emotions?” *Psychological Review*, Vol. 99, No. 3. 550-553. 550.

⁴²⁶ For a list of other symptoms, including effects on the viscera, skeletal muscles, vasoconstriction, glands and immune system, see Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 135. See also Prinz’s review, Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 65.

⁴²⁷ This account of emotion is known as the James-Lange theory because another version of it was developed independently by Carl Lange shortly after James published. Lange’s main contribution was his focus on vasoconstriction.

⁴²⁸ Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 129.

⁴²⁹ Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 56-57.

⁴³⁰ I follow Damasio in defining a “state” as an instantaneous snapshot of the processes that are continuously underway in the body and brain. Of course, it should go without saying that the brain is part of the body, and any line drawn between brain and body is somewhat arbitrary. Damasio seems to be counting the brain stem as being part of the body. On his account the limbic system, amygdale and anterior cingulate are parts of the brain that are implicated in primary emotions, with emphasis on the role of the amygdale. He makes the amygdalae out to be the parts of the brain that monitor states of the body and parse that information as emotion. As evidence, patients with damage to the amygdale display affective indifference. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 87, 134, 138. In one place, Damasio distinguishes between brain and body by drawing a crisp line between the neocortex and everything else as being the mind/brain. *Descartes’ Error*, 127-128

⁴³¹ Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 26-27.

⁴³² Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 24-25. See also 22-35, 37, 71.

⁴³³ Dretske's view that law-like connections are necessary for the transfer of information needs to be defended against other interpretations of Shannon. Let me contrast Dretske's position with two rival interpretations of information theory.

Peter Kosso thinks that "information is a *physical* entity." On Kosso's "interaction-information account of scientific observation," information must be conveyed directly from the source of information to a receiver. (Lombardi, "What is Information?" 120-121) Dretske denies this, and replies with a counterexample: if both A and B have received information about C, examining A can give me information about B without any interaction between A and B. (Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*, 74-75)

Another rival definition of information is the view developed by Thomas Cover and Joy Thomas that it is possible to talk about the mutual information of two "sequences of completely independent events" whenever there are "*de facto* correlations" between them (Lombardi, "What is Information?" 127). This strictly syntactic interpretation makes information theory abstract enough to have an extremely broad range of application,⁴³³ but it leads to startlingly counterintuitive results. For example, "if the last month results of the lottery of Sydney partially coincide with the results obtained in the lottery of Mexico during the same period, there is a positive mutual information between both sequences of completely independent events." (Lombardi, "What is Information?" 127) If Australian and Mexican television stations both report that 12-32-45-16 is the national lottery's winning number today, the Cover and Thomas would say that those stations are reporting the *same* information despite the fact that the results of the two lotteries are completely independent of each other. Olimpia Lombardi finds these results counterintuitive enough that it is "necessary to find a new name [other than information] that expresses the purely mathematical nature of the [syntactic] theory, avoiding confusions between the formal concepts and their interpretations." (Lombardi, "What is Information?" 132) Dretske's semantic interpretation is concrete enough to be applicable to the sort of issues I am examining in this thesis, as well as being, in my mind, more plausible than the physicalist approach. Lombardi, "What is Information?" 105.

⁴³⁴ Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*, 1981, p. 47.

⁴³⁵ Part of what makes this account interesting is that it allows us to say that information which represents the state of affairs at the source is being conveyed despite the fact that the information is being converted from one form to another and the fact that information is being lost at each step. For example, there are far more receptor cells in the retina than there are ganglion cells in the optic nerve. The information received by the retina must be compressed for transmission along the optic nerve, and compression entails a loss of information. However, the signal travelling along the optic nerve has a strong, law-like correlation with activity in the retina. Information has been lost, but the signal on the optic nerve still represents the object seen.

⁴³⁶ "A beep represents smoke because it is reliably caused by smoke and it was engineered so as to be caused by smoke." Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 61.

⁴³⁷ Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 66

⁴³⁸ Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 51.

⁴³⁹ Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 131.

⁴⁴⁰ "...structures such as the amygdala receive signals [from the sensory cortices] concerning their conjunctive presence"⁴⁴⁰ (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 132). One way the amygdala has an indirect affect on body states is that it can cue the hypothalamus to produce a response in the endocrine system. Notably, this is how adrenaline is released.

A subset of the patterns of sensory stimuli that matter are ones that are relevant to basic drives and instincts, and there may be some specific combinations of stimuli that are hardwired to elicit emotion. Seeing a shadow of a certain size moving at a certain speed might elicit fear in a chick because it was adaptive for chicks of that species to feel fear when hawks are overhead. See Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 114-117, 131.

⁴⁴¹ Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 138, 143-144. For evidence of the connection between steps three and four see Damasio 148. To give one example, if an experimenter pushes a subject's face into a smile the subject's mood will be elevated. Pushing their face into an angry expression elicits feelings of anger.

Damasio calls the third and fourth steps "the body loop." One way in which the account I have given here is somewhat oversimplified is that Damasio also discusses an "as-if loop" as an alternative to the body loop. In the as-if loop, activity in the amygdala triggers a mental model of a body state, an alternative to step three. This mental model can trigger some of the centers of the brain whose primary function is to monitor states of the body, an alternative to step four. Damasio claims that as-if loops are learned over time as a model of what happens in the body loop. (Damasio, *Descartes' Error*, 156-158)

⁴⁴² There is a “systematic connection between body states and stimuli.” (Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 134)

⁴⁴³ Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 173

⁴⁴⁴ See Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 67 on how basic emotions are re-used.

⁴⁴⁵ Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 68 – what the calibration file contains. Some elicitors of fear are clearly not innate, for example fear of a Geiger counter’s ticking.

⁴⁴⁶ Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 62 Prinz has something similar to say about pain, that “pain represents physical maladies because it is reliably caused by them, and was evolved for that purpose.” Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 61.

⁴⁴⁷ Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 64.

⁴⁴⁸ Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 64.

⁴⁴⁹ “Non-cognitivists do not deny that judgments can trigger emotions; they simply deny that such judgments are the only possible triggers.” Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals*, 63.

⁴⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book I section 13.

⁴⁵¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book I section 13.

⁴⁵² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book I section 13.

⁴⁵³ Schachter and Singer. ‘Cognitive, social and physiological determinants of emotional state,’ 379-99.

⁴⁵⁴ While it is true that there is a lag time between changes in situation and having appropriately elevated or depressed levels of neurotransmitters, it should be noted that neurotransmitters generally have short elimination half-lives. A neurotransmitter with a half-life of two minutes will drop from an elevated level to approximately baseline in well under ten minutes (five half-lives). Except in cases where a person’s situation changes quite abruptly, pre-existing levels of neurotransmitters due to one’s prior situation are not likely to be the primary explanation of why a person’s emotions are not appropriate to her current situation. Several psychologists have suggested that situational factors should be considered the chief differentiators of the emotions. Hunt, Cole, and Reis (“Situational cues distinguishing anger, fear, and sorrow”) probably make this point most explicitly in their study distinguishing among fear, anger, and sorrow in terms of situational characteristics.

⁴⁵⁵ Schachter and Singer believed their results showed that cognition is a necessary and constituent part of emotion, for subjects were less likely to describe themselves as angry or euphoric if they had a warning about the drug’s effects as an alternate explanation of their physical symptoms. I dispute that conclusion. If Damasio is right, body states like elevated heart rate are part of a feedback loop where emotions both influence and are receptive to body states. (Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 155-158) The brain monitors its own emotional state partly by monitoring the condition of the body. An adrenaline injection breaks the reliable connection that normally makes states of the body reliable indicators of a person’s own emotional state, for it causes an elevated heart rate that is unconnected to either states of affairs in the world or states of the brain. If a person interprets her elevated heart rate as a symptom of anger and begins looking at the world through that frame she will be more likely to notice elicitors of anger and respond to them as elicitors of anger, further elevating her heart rate. This experiment shows that being primed to think about an emotion can incline a person to enter that emotional state, especially when the subject has also been put in an ambiguous body state. It is not proof that thoughts are the only possible cause of emotion.

⁴⁵⁶ Suls, “Affect, Stress and Personality,” 402 for neuroticism, 403-404 for agreeableness.

⁴⁵⁷ Suls, “Affect, Stress and Personality,” 402. See also Forgas, Bower and Moylan, “Praise or blame?”

⁴⁵⁸ Bower and Forgas, “Mood and social memory.”

⁴⁵⁹ Suls, “Affect, Stress and Personality,” 402.

⁴⁶⁰ Suls, “Affect, Stress and Personality,” 403.

⁴⁶¹ Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 44.

⁴⁶² Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 45.

⁴⁶³ Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 36.

⁴⁶⁴ Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 37.

⁴⁶⁵ Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 41. Note that working memory, short-term memory and past memory are all intact.

⁴⁶⁶ Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 173. Damasio calls this his somatic marker hypothesis. (*ibid.*, 171)

⁴⁶⁷ Damasio tells us that reasoning assisted by somatic markers has several advantages over cold reasoning. It is faster due to the fact that we are choosing from among fewer options. It better respects the limits of working memory, for if the decision space is very large then information about the many options will be lost as it passes through the bottleneck of working memory. Further, the connection between the optimality of various options and emotions may often be more reliable than the connections between optimality of options and the conclusions we reach about them. For example, people are ordinarily quite poor at probabilistic reasoning. See Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*, 172.

⁴⁶⁸ Ohman, A. and Wiens, S., “To think and feel,” 363, 380.

⁴⁶⁹ Ohman and Soares, “Emotional conditioning to masked stimuli.” See also Ohman and Weins, “To think and feel,” 378-379.

⁴⁷⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book V section 3.

⁴⁷¹ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 57.

⁴⁷² Deliberation might even get in the way of feeling the right feelings. Recall that the cognitive unison account of attention tells us that performing a task attentively means that all potentially useful cognitive resources have been set aside to perform that task. In that sense, feeling the right way about the river requires feeling attentively; perception, memory and affect must all have been engaged for Thomas to feel the right degree of fear about the river. Visual distractions could have caused him to overlook some of the dangers of the river, making his level of fear inappropriately low. Likewise, deliberating about the risk relative to the value of his own life could be a distraction. Perhaps thinking about the good things in his life would tie up his memory which properly should be focused on taking information about his swimming skills into account in the amount of fear he feels. This is highly speculative, and ultimately it is an empirical question whether the act of deliberation can make a person’s feelings less reliably connected to the world, but it should be clear that it is possible in principle for this to happen.

⁴⁷³ Arpaly, *Unprincipled Virtue*, 57.

⁴⁷⁴ In the Rhetoric Aristotle straightforwardly tells us that fear is the opposite of confidence. In the Eudemian Ethics he tells us that the coward has too much fear and too little confidence, while the foolhardy man has too little fear and too much confidence. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1383a15-20. Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1228a29.

⁴⁷⁵ Curzer, H. *Aristotle and the Virtues*, 31-32.

⁴⁷⁶ McDowell, “Virtue and Reason,” 334-335.

⁴⁷⁷ “Hero Dives in to Freezing N.J. River to Rescue Trapped Woman” Rahway-WABC. Published November 25, 2003. Accessed May 22, 2013. <http://www.lifesaving.com/general-interest/spotlight-rescues/hero-dives-freezing-nj-river-rescue-trapped-woman>.

⁴⁷⁸ Note that there are two different kinds of ignorance might be in play here. The impulsive rescuer must be ignorant of the fact that *this* river is dangerous. Driver goes further, suggesting that impulsive rescuers are inattentive to the fact that *any* river is dangerous. She draws a distinction between occurrent and dispositional knowledge. (Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*, 33-34) Dispositional knowledge in her sense is of propositions such as “burning buildings in general are dangerous to enter.” An impulsive rescuer “fails to attend to this knowledge... [and] for this reason, it doesn’t figure into his deliberations at all. One way to think of this is that no reference to the danger to himself figures in the practical syllogism that leads him to act.” (ibid., 34) A person disposed toward impulsive rescue might know the odds of success, and might deliberately have cultivated the disposition because she knows the odds, but in the moment of decision she does not take time to attend to this memory, and for purposes of her decision she might as well not have this memory.

⁴⁷⁹ This will be further explained in subsequent paragraphs. Note that the odds of success in a randomly chosen NJ river may differ from the odds in a BC river.

⁴⁸⁰ Driver, *Uneasy Virtue*.

⁴⁸¹ “To such a person, most of all, living is worthwhile.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1117b12.

⁴⁸² Someone disposed to do this may be impulsive-akratic.

⁴⁸³ Aristotle considers battlefield courage the truest form of courage on the grounds that it is concerned with a noble object, honour. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, book III section 8) I would argue that a second reason to give unusual weight to battlefield courage is that a battlefield is more likely than any other environment to call for impulsive courage. Soldiers have more opportunities than anyone to demonstrate that their courage is extreme though impulsive action, therefore battlefields are an easy place to find exemplars. In less desperate environments, exemplars are more difficult to detect.

Chapter Eight

⁴⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book I section 10.

⁴⁸⁵ I have in mind the kind of idealism proposed by Kamtekar as discussed in chapter four. (“The virtuous character that virtue ethics holds up as an ideal” may not be achievable due to “cognitive and motivational obstacles.” Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character,” 460)

⁴⁸⁶ Note that Foot is open to the possibility that “being particularly well endowed with respect to some virtues inevitably means being not very well endowed in others.” The possibility is not alarming to her. She gives the example of someone who lacks the virtues necessary to be a good parent but who has no children and suggests that a

sort of “division of labour” might be possible, telling us that “it might be that there are other role-dependent virtues, such as being the sort of person who is a good leader or a good thinker or even a good artist. Possession of such a virtue would count towards an overall assessment of an individual human being as a good one, but the lack of it in a different individual would not necessarily count against their being good.” Foot, *Virtues and Vices*, 213, 214.

⁴⁸⁷ Plato, *Republic*, 590d There is a parallel passage in the *Nicomachean Ethics*: “Best out of everyone he who himself sees all that concerns him; excellent too is that man who listens to others’ good council.” Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095b10.

⁴⁸⁸ “The virtuous hearer neutralizes the impact of prejudice in her credibility judgments.” Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 92-93. On the degree to which prejudicial stereotypes may be ineliminable and in some cases are beneficial see Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 32-41.

⁴⁸⁹ This is Fricker’s terminology. Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 35.

⁴⁹⁰ I leave it as an open question whether testimony gives the person of testimonial justice knowledge. On an account such as that of C. A. J. Coady testimony allows us to learn from another’s report; if so, the person of testimonial justice receives information she had overlooked and is able to reason the way a fully informed expert would. Alternatively, it might be the case that testimony does not convey knowledge in these cases. This is how I have construed the case of Obedient Olivia. My account of the virtues of character allows that the virtuous person will not always engage in deliberation, as in the case of William Thomas discussed in chapter seven. As in the case of impulsive courage, *feeling* that one should follow the instructions of an expert despite not knowing the underlying reasons can be a reason to cut short the process of deliberation.

Coady, C. A. J. 1992. *Testimony: A Philosophical Study*, Clarendon Press, Oxford. p. 25.

⁴⁹¹ Here I take it that I am departing from Fricker. From this point on my account of testimonial justice diverges from hers.

⁴⁹² One quirk of Fricker’s account is her account of situated hermeneutic inequality. Sufficiently advanced societal prejudice can make it difficult for victims of prejudice to intelligibly articulate the obstacles they face. Think of how difficult it would have been to protest against workplace sexual harassment in a time before the discourse of sexual harassment had entered popular culture. Appropriate trust sometimes requires trusting people who cannot fully articulate their reasons more than one trusts one’s own judgment.

Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 162, 169.

⁴⁹³ A cautionary note: “the complexity of social identity means that hermeneutical marginalization affects individual speakers in a differentiated manner.” Race, gender, class, sexual orientation and other factors interact in ways that cannot be accounted for *a priori*. “Context-sensitive judgment” is necessary to judge when someone is having difficulty articulating what they see due to situated hermeneutic inequality and when they are inarticulate because they do not really know what is going on. (“If she seems nuts, well, maybe she is.”) Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 171.

⁴⁹⁴ Sacco et. al., “Precise Formulation and Evidence-based Application of Resource-constrained Triage,” 760.

⁴⁹⁵ Indeed, Fricker might add that Particularist Polly is committing an act of testimonial injustice by ignoring the paramedic. One of the many reasons why it is morally wrong to attempt first aid while ignoring the instructions of a paramedic is that it shows a lack of appropriate respect for the paramedic. She is wronging the paramedic, not just the people she is failing to help.

⁴⁹⁶ This is the more general version of the problem discussed in the endnotes to section 4.1.1.

⁴⁹⁷ Munroe, <http://xkcd.com/699/>

⁴⁹⁸ As Plato said, in such a society philosophy would provide no more shelter than a broken wall in the ruins. See Republic VI.

⁴⁹⁹ I owe this moral luck objection to Paul Russell. (Private communication)

⁵⁰⁰ One worry for my account is that expert advice might be considered a sort of external cognition. Relying on experts could be seen as a sort of cognitive offloading. Consider the way some mathematical problems are easier to understand if the results are displayed in graphical form rather than as sentences or equations. Experts could be seen as a sort of pre-processor that boils a complex data set down to a low enough level of complexity that non-experts can understand it easily. If that is the model, some of the cognitive process by which the individual is making decisions is taking place outside the head of the individual, namely the pre-processing done by the experts. (See Scaife and Rogers, “External cognition,” 188-189) If this is the case, then the practical reasoning process of an individual is not independent of the society in which she lives, meaning that individuals are far more dependent on their community than they are in my account in this section.

⁵⁰¹ An additional wrinkle: a person of testimonial justice will seek out testimony from reliable sources when appropriate. Knowing that she is not an expert in a certain situation and knowing that someone else is, she will feel self-doubt prompting her to seek that expert's advice.

⁵⁰² Aristotle himself acknowledges moral luck as a factor. To give one example, a person cannot live the best possible life without a polis, for it is only there that all human needs can be satisfied. Barbarians live in tribal villages. Therefore, someone born into a barbarous society cannot live a flourishing life. See Aristotle's *Politics* I.ii.

⁵⁰³ It might be worth noting why living in a society where all testimony was unreliable would prevent a person from living a good life. A person in those circumstances would have the virtue of testimonial justice but would be no better off than an arrogant particularist living in a good society; each would be living entirely by their own judgment, making mistakes that might be corrected by good advice.

⁵⁰⁴ I received a question from Scott Anderson as to the role that akrasia plays in my account of testimonial justice. If my account as given above is correct, akrasia plays the same role here that it does in the case of the other virtues. A person who is akratic with respect to testimonial justice knows in the abstract who is to be trusted but does not have the right feelings of self-doubt. Consequently, there will be times when she trusts the wrong people or fails to trust the right people. At such times she has knowledge of who is to be trusted but does not use it – the standard Aristotelian story about akrasia.

⁵⁰⁵ The West End functions more or less perfectly as a trusting community when it comes to matters of gender and sexual diversity, to the point where it would take active effort to ignore the testimony of my neighbors. However, Downtown Vancouver is noteworthy for its extreme economic inequality, and one form of injustice experienced by the homeless is testimonial injustice. I take it to be quite possible for a community to be functioning well as a community of trust in some respects and functioning poorly in others.

⁵⁰⁶ See section 4.4.1.

⁵⁰⁷ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1281a42-1281b10 Nussbaum claims that the whole of the Nicomachean Ethics takes this approach, “for he is evidently searching not for the vision of a single expert but for a reflective consensus of the ‘many’ and the ‘wise.’” Nussbaum, “Shame, Separateness and Political Unity,” 422.

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