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IDENTIFYING AND DEFENDING THE HARD CORE OF VIRTUE ETHICS

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ABSTRACT: Virtue ethics has been challenged on empirical grounds by philosophical interpreters of situationist social psychology. Challenges are necessarily challenges *to* something or other, so it's only possible to understand the situationist challenge to virtue ethics if we have an antecedent grasp on virtue ethics itself. To this end, I first identify the non-negotiable "hard core" of virtue ethics with the conjunction of nine claims, arguing that virtue ethics does make substantive empirical assumptions about human conduct. Next, I rearticulate the situationist challenge in light of these nine claims. I then turn to a discussion of specifications of several responses typically made by defenders of virtue ethics against the situationist challenge, arguing that most of them either are unsound or give up one of the elements in the hard core. A few, however, survive this criticism, and so I conclude by suggesting ways in which the situationist challenge might be not so much resisted as co-opted. Situational influences can be used to help people simulate virtue, a phenomenon I call *factitious virtue*.

I. INTRODUCTION

In *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Bernard Williams complains that the word 'virtue' has "acquired comic or otherwise undesirable associations" (1985, 9). Yet even the twenty-first century is rife with talk of virtues and vices.

On January 2, 2007, Cameron Hollopeter suffered a seizure and stumbled off the platform of the 137th-Street subway station in Manhattan. One bystander, Wesley Autrey, noticed the emergency and dove onto the tracks to save him from an oncoming train. Lacking time to lift the victim back onto the platform, he pinned Hollopeter in the drainage trench between the rails while the train straddled them; it came so close to crushing Autrey that it left grease on his cap. News of his deed spread quickly: two

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days later he was awarded the Bronze Medallion—New York City's highest award for exceptional citizenship and outstanding achievement—by Mayor Michael Bloomberg; on January 23, he appeared at the State of the Union address, where President George W. Bush praised him as a "brave and humble" man.

On March 3, 2011, Karl-Theodore zu Guttenberg resigned from the Bundestag after a month-long public outcry over the plagiarism of his doctoral dissertation. He had cribbed whole passages from newspapers, editorials, speeches, undergraduate term papers, and even his own supervisor's research, filling about half of his dissertation with unattributed material. The University of Bayreuth revoked his degree. Over fifty thousand doctoral students and professors signed an open letter to Chancellor Angela Merkel to protest her dilatory handling of the controversy. The German author Peter Schneider went so far as to draw a parallel with the impeachment of American President Bill Clinton over sexual improprieties, claiming that both cases involved "the same question of honesty."

Why did Guttenberg plagiarize his dissertation? Why did Autrey risk his life to help a stranger?

One way to answer these questions and others like them is by appeal to character traits. Guttenberg lacked honesty; he preferred to violate German law, academic standards, and perhaps even his own conscience to save himself time and effort. By contrast, Autrey exhibited courage by intervening even at high potential cost to himself. Traits like callousness, courage, greed, dishonesty, generosity, and tact are dispositions to react in characteristic ways to trait-eliciting circumstances. The callous person sniffs at the suffering of others; the courageous person braves dangers to secure something valuable. Such dispositions have counterfactual heft: the generous person, for instance, gives when presented with the opportunity, and she *would* give *were* she presented with a similar opportunity. It is therefore a presupposition of theories of virtue that moral agents have—or at least could have—counterfactual-supporting dispositions.

At first blush this presupposition is uncontentious. How could one deny that people are, or at least could be, just, sincere, compassionate, chaste, considerate, trustworthy, courteous, diligent, faithful, tactful, valorous, and humble? We seem to understand ourselves and one another in terms of such character traits. Williams (1985, 10n7) goes so far as to say that objecting to the notion of character amounts to "an objection to ethical thought itself rather than to one way of conducting it." Yet skeptics such as John Doris (1998, 2002) and Gilbert Harman (1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2006) argue that situational influences swamp dispositional ones, rendering them predictively and explanatorily impotent.

Are individual dispositions really so frail? In this paper, I identify the non-negotiable "hard core" of virtue ethics with the conjunction of nine claims, arguing that virtue ethics does make substantive empirical assumptions about human motivation and action. Next, I rearticulate the situationist challenge in light of these nine claims. I then turn to a discussion of specifications of several responses typically made by defenders of virtue ethics against the situationist challenge, arguing that most of them either are unsound or give up one of the elements in the hard core. A few, however, survive this criticism, and so I conclude by suggesting

ways in which the situationist challenge might be not so much resisted as co-opted. Situational influences can be used to help people simulate virtue, a phenomenon I call *factitious virtue*.

II. THE VIRTUES OF VIRTUES

The clarion call of the revival of virtue ethics was Elizabeth Anscombe's feisty "Modern Moral Philosophy" (1958). Since 1958, a sizeable contingent of moral philosophers has paid close attention to such notions as *eudaimonia* (translated variously as 'happiness,' 'flourishing,' and 'well-being'), character, and virtue, in addition to the more common modern focal points of goodness, rightness, and obligation.[1]

A raft of metaphysical, conceptual, methodological, and empirical arguments has been advanced for preferring virtue ethics to deontology and consequentialism:

(1) The proper objects of moral *contemplation* are not deeds or occurrent motives, but something broader—either behavior-producing traits of character or character as such.

(2) The proper objects of moral *evaluation* are not deeds or occurrent motives, but something broader—either behavior-producing traits or character as such.

(3) Theorizing about virtues and character transports moral discourse from the rarified air of abstract principles into the evaluatively and descriptively "thick" realm of motives and reasons.

(4) Reflecting on the virtues is a better guide to action than reflecting on abstract principles.

(5) The conceptual apparatus of virtue ethics helps to bridge the 'is'-'ought' gap.

(6) Moral cultivation or education is more effective when the focus is on virtues and character than when it is on the application of abstract rules.

It would take us too far afield here to walk through these arguments in detail; my current aim is to motivate the idea that virtue ethics may have more to offer than its competitors. The question remains, though, whether virtue ethics is empirically adequate. Perhaps it is merely the best of a bad lot. To answer that question, we must identify its minimal commitments.

III. IDENTIFYING THE HARD CORE OF VIRTUE ETHICS

Philosophers of science such as Imre Lakatos (1980) sometimes speak of the "hard core" of a research program, designating by that term the conjunction of claims that the research program must defend at all costs. Their other claims are considered auxiliary hypotheses intended to form a "protective belt" around the hard core. For instance, Newtonian astronomers allowed themselves to tweak the gravitational constant in light of new data, but they could not allow themselves to give up the

inverse-square law. A theory is not falsified until its hard core can no longer be protected by new auxiliary hypotheses, or until such hypotheses grow so ad hoc that researchers abandon it and seek an alternative.

To see whether the situationist challenge truly threatens virtue ethics, we must decide which propositions constitute its hard core. In this section I canvass ten candidate claims, of which I weaken two and relegate one to the auxiliary belt. The remaining seven, along with the weakened two, constitute the hard core of virtue ethics. These ten claims are:

(*acquirability*) It is possible for a non-virtuous person to acquire some of the virtues.

(*stability*) If someone possesses a virtue at time *t*, then *ceteris paribus* she will possess that virtue at a later time *t¢*.

(*consistency*) If someone possesses a virtue sensitive to reason *r*, then *ceteris paribus* she will respond to *r* in most contexts.

(*access*) It is possible to determine what the virtues are.

(*normativity*) *Ceteris paribus*, it is better to possess a virtue than not, and better to possess more virtues than fewer.

(*real saints*) There is a non-negligible cohort of saints in the human population.

(*explanatory power*) If someone possesses a virtue, then reference to that virtue will sometimes enable one to explain her behavior.

(*predictive power*) If someone possesses a virtue, then reference to that virtue will sometimes enable one to predict her behavior.

(*egalitarianism*) Almost anyone can be virtuous.

(*integration*) Possession of the virtues is positively correlated; in other words, if someone possesses one virtue, she is more likely to possess other virtues as well.

The balance of this section adjudicates the arguments for including these ten candidates in the hard core of virtue ethics.

III. A. ACQUIRABILITY

If virtues were innate and immutable dispositions, virtue ethics would be a strange theory indeed. It would be puzzling to encourage people to be or behave in a certain way if they *must* be or behave that way or *cannot* be or behave that way. So if the virtues could not be acquired, it would be senseless to recommend being virtuous or behaving virtuously. Praising people for their beauty troubles us for precisely this reason. While it is of course good to be beautiful, and while beauty itself merits praise, it seems odd to praise *people* for having it.

Furthermore, if *ought* really does imply *can*, and if virtue ethics is right in saying that people ought to be virtuous, it follows that they can become virtuous or, if they already are virtuous, remain so.

Finally, if virtue-possession is praiseworthy and people are only (or most) legitimately praised for what they are responsible for, virtue-possession is something one can be responsible for. *Mutatis mutandis* for vice and blame. It seems hard to imagine, however, that one could be responsible for an innate trait. Someone born with sociopathic tendencies is more to be pitied than censured, whereas someone who becomes a sociopath through habituation is presumably more blameworthy. Similarly, while being born with a genetic defect such as blindness is pitiable, and we pity people who have such a defect, it would be odd—even inhumane—to blame them for the defects. By contrast, if they were to acquire similar defects through their own intentional action (say, by self-mutilation) we would be more willing to cast aspersions on them, or at least to pity them less.

III. B. TEMPORAL STABILITY

Once acquired, virtues should be hard to lose. If they pick out anything, virtue terms designate psychological features that are more than ephemeral.

I also prefer to distinguish between stability of virtue-possession and stability of virtue-expression. Though these two are tightly connected, it is possible for someone possessing the relevant trait to fail to express it in some circumstances. Aristotle (1095b) himself makes this point when he says that the virtuous person is still virtuous when asleep, and when he claims that some things are beyond human endurance, such that even the virtuous person should not be expected to hold up under such strains. Nevertheless, Aristotle argues that virtues are stable, saying that "actions done in accordance with virtues are done in a just or temperate way not merely by having some quality of their own, but rather if the agent acts . . . from a firm and unshakeable character" (1105b).

III. C. CROSS-SITUATIONAL CONSISTENCY

A related idea is that if someone possesses a virtue responsive to reasons of type *r*, she will exhibit responsiveness to all such reasons. As N. J. H. Dent puts it, virtue causes appropriate behavior in "ever-various and novel situations" (1975, 328). For instance, the generous person countenances the well-being of others as a reason to share resources beyond what he merely owes them. And he continues to countenance this reason to act regardless of virtue-irrelevant (i.e., reason-irrelevant) features of his beneficiaries (age, sex, attractiveness, ethnicity, and ability to reciprocate), himself (mood, state of hurry), and his environment (ambient noise, ambient smells, and presence of bystanders).

The rider about normatively irrelevant features is crucial. The generous person should not be expected to give when able in all circumstances. Aiding and abetting criminals is not generous. Donating one's last penny is foolish. Attempting to help someone who wants to be left alone is rude. Nevertheless, if a man shared only

with Bibi Andersson lookalikes who gave him come-hither looks he would be at best imperfectly generous.

A virtue's characteristic reason is typically cited in explanations of virtuous actions of the form, "He φ'd because p."[2] For instance, the characteristic reason of honesty is non-deception; the characteristic reason of temperance is moderation; and the characteristic reason of justice is desert:

(Q-Honesty) Why did Albert admit that he didn't enjoy dinner?

(A-Honesty) Because he saw that otherwise his interlocutor would have been deceived.

(Q-Temperance) Why did Beatrice have water rather than wine?

(A-Temperance) Because she realized it would have been immoderate to have another glass of wine.

(Q-Justice) Why did Carlos concede the game?

(A-Justice) He saw that his opponent deserved to win.

Each of these mini-explanations is couched not merely in terms of beliefs and desires, but in terms of the reasons the protagonist has to act. Albert is worried about deceiving others; Beatrice watches out for extreme behavior on her own part; Carlos wants the best man to win. It would seem that virtue-referencing explanations typically take this form.

Like the stability requirement, the consistency requirement is not exceptionless. Someone can be temperate even if she occasionally fails to countenance moderation as a reason. Also like the stability requirement, the consistency requirement is not tied directly to action. Someone can be sensitive to a reason without always acting on that reason, but such failure should be the exception rather than the rule.

III. D. ACCESS

Any normative theory worth its salt should hold out at least the possibility of identifying its norms. Consequentialism is often thought to stumble on the access condition because the computational complexity involved in determining what would maximize happiness (or goodness, or utility) is arguably beyond our ken. In fact, consequentialist theories that identify right action as maximizing *expected* good consequences or *direct* good consequences have been formulated at least in part as a reply to this objection.

For virtue ethics, the access condition comes down to knowing what the virtues are. As Aristotle puts it, actions "are called just and temperate when they are such as the just and the temperate person would do" (1105b). Knowing whether any particular action is virtuous, then, presupposes knowing what the virtuous person would have done in the circumstances, and knowing in general what makes an action virtuous presupposes knowing what the virtues are and how exactly to balance them against each other from one case to the next.

III. E. NORMATIVITY

Virtue theorists differ on whether the virtues invariably lead to right action or good consequences but, with the exception of Nietzsche, agree that having a virtue is better than not having it, having more is better than having fewer, and having all is better than having only some. According to Philippa Foot (1997, 3), "virtues are in general beneficial characteristics, and indeed ones that a human being needs to have, for his own sake and that of his fellows." Judith Jarvis Thomson (1997, 282–284) likewise argues that virtuous individuals are good for their communities, and that virtue-possession is also (though perhaps not exceptionlessly) good for the possessor himself.

III. F. REAL SAINTS

Another way to insulate virtue ethics is to say that there need not be real saints, or fully virtuous people. On this view, which was recently articulated at great length by Daniel Russell (2009), virtue ethics erects a regulative ideal of the saint, rather than identifying actual individuals to emulate. A more sanguine virtue ethicist should accept the real saints condition, however, and anyone tempted by Linda Zagzebski's (2010) attempt to ground the meaning of virtue terms in real moral exemplars must accept it.

I worry, however, about debating the real saints condition given the constraints on psychological research. A scientific study to determine whether a given individual is a saint would require systematically tempting and tormenting the poor person. This is hardly something a human subjects committee would look favorably upon. Suggestive evidence, however, is available. In a fascinating study, Jeremy Frimer et al. (2011) interviewed twenty-five "moral exemplars" (recipients of a national award for extraordinary volunteerism) and twenty-five demographically matched ordinary people. They found that the exemplars exhibited higher levels of commitment to the promotion of their own interests, to the promotion of the interests of their communities, and, crucially, to the integration of their and their communities' interests. These "moral giants," as Frimer and his colleagues call them, may have managed to exemplify complete virtue because they managed to identify (or at least reconcile) their narrow self-interest with the interest of their fellows.

Especially since the situationist challenge does not apply to the real saints condition, I am willing to accept this condition tentatively into the hard core of virtue ethics.

III. G. EXPLANATORY POWER

Many of the advantages claimed for virtue ethics above relied on the assumption that virtues are explanatory as well as normative. In other words, in explaining why someone performs an action, it should often be necessary to appeal to her possession of a virtue. Alasdair MacIntyre (1984, 199) says that much of human behavior would be "genuinely inexplicable" without appeal to virtues.

Explanatorily powerful properties support lawlike generalizations, i.e., generalizations that are confirmed by observation of their instances and can be projected to

novel observations. The property of *being green* is explanatorily powerful because the fact that all observed emeralds have been green supports the generalization that all emeralds are green. The property of *being grue* (green if observed before time *t* but blue otherwise), by contrast, is not only unprojectable but counterprojectable. The fact that all observed emeralds have been grue supports the generalization that no emeralds are grue.

Explanatorily powerful properties are typically understood as natural kinds, and it is contemporary orthodoxy that natural kinds are metaphysically robust properties that can and should be investigated a posteriori (Kripke 1972). Furthermore, I follow David Lewis (1986) and Wesley Salmon (1984) in thinking that explanatory power is grounded in causal mechanisms. Most virtue theorists who commit themselves to the explanatory power requirement do so by saying that virtues are causally efficacious.[3] The best way to show that virtues have explanatory power would be to demonstrate that they cause (or prevent) behavior. The next best way is to demonstrate their correlation with behavior. Since much of psychology has yet to graduate to the level of demonstrating causal mechanisms, virtue ethicists and their critics should be content for now if it can be shown that virtue-possession is reliably correlated with behavior and that a plausible functional story connecting virtue-possession to behavior can be told.

III. H. PREDICTIVE POWER

The social sciences obviously do not formulate exceptionless laws consonant with the deductive-nomological model. Economists do not predict recessions with probability 1.0. Political scientists do not forecast elections with certainty. Psychologists do not predict human behavior or mental states with anything approaching the rigor of the hard sciences.

Nevertheless, if virtue ethics is to have explanatory power, it stands to reason that it should have predictive power as well. How much? The minimal metric is doing at least as well as would have been expected without the trait. For example, if a randomly chosen person can be expected not to lie in a given context with probability 0.7, then an honest person can be expected not to lie in the same context with probability greater than or equal to 0.7. Still, this constraint is disappointingly weak. Beefing up the requirement with a strict inequality seems only trivially better. Anything else, though, feels ad hoc. Perhaps all can agree, though, that acting in accordance with virtue at a significantly better rate than could be expected without it is a fair requirement.

Robert Merrihew Adams (2006, 124) makes a useful distinction in this regard. He distinguishes virtues related to imperfect duties, such as generosity, from virtues related to perfect duties, such as chastity. A person can be generous if he gives to charities only occasionally. Someone can be helpful even if she doesn't always help her friends carry boxes when they move. A person simply does not count as chaste if she refrains from violating her wedding vows only sometimes (Doris, 2010, 139n5). Someone hardly counts as temperate if he only goes on one bender a week. It seems to me that Adams may be moving too far from the notion of virtue when he introduces the notion of duties, but a related distinction between high-

fidelity and low-fidelity virtues would do most of the same work. A high-fidelity virtue requires near-perfect consistency, whereas a low-fidelity virtue requires much higher consistency than one would expect without the trait in question. The high-fidelity virtues include chastity, fairness, fidelity, honesty, justice, and trustworthiness. If someone acts in accordance with chastity in 80 percent of the opportunities he has for cheating on his spouse, that hardly makes him chaste. If someone doesn't steal in 70 percent of the cases where she could, that doesn't make her honest. By contrast, low-fidelity virtues include charity, diligence, friendliness, generosity, industry, magnanimity, mercy, tact, and tenacity. (These lists aren't meant to be comprehensive or uncontroversial, but I hope they at least point in the right direction.) If someone gives to charity 20 percent of the time (assuming the sums are sufficient), that could count as charitable. If someone shows mercy even occasionally, that might qualify him as merciful. While it's more difficult to argue against the low-fidelity virtues using the sorts of psychological studies currently available, it's not nearly so difficult to argue against the high-fidelity moral virtues, a point I discuss in more detail below.

III. I. EGALITARIANISM

One way to insulate virtue ethics from empirical critique is to say that most people could never become virtuous. Only an elite cadre—owing to their genes, upbringing, drive, or luck—can ever become virtuous. If this is right, then psychological experiments showing that two thirds of people will comply with an authority figure in administering potentially deadly shocks to an innocent victim (Blass 1999) can be shrugged off. Such an attitude, though plausible for Plato, Aristotle, and Nietzsche, rubs our democratic ethos the wrong way.

I therefore prefer to weaken the egalitarianism requirement in the following way: almost anyone can act in accordance with virtue; indeed, almost anyone can reliably act in accordance with virtue. This relaxed condition does not go so far as to require that anyone can be virtuous, just that almost anyone can be brought reliably to do what the virtuous person would do.

III. J. INTEGRATION

The integration requirement is a weaker version of the unity of virtue thesis, according to which someone (fully) possesses any particular virtue if and only if she possesses all virtues (Aristotle 1144b33–1145a2). To defend this prima facie implausible theory, one may point out that the courageous person is not rash, and so does not enter into dangerous situations without a little prudence. Similarly, the honest person is not tactless, and therefore does not blurt truths better left unmentioned. Integration requires less; on this theory, someone is more likely to be just given that she is courageous, more likely to be temperate given that she is humble, more likely to be honest given that she is faithful. The most recent sustained treatment of the unity of virtue thesis is in Daniel Russell's excellent monograph, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues*. There, he distinguishes the purely normative interpretation of the thesis from its thick interpretation (2009, 335–373). On the

purely normative understanding, in order for some agent *fully* to possess a given virtue, she must fully possess practical wisdom. We measure our progress and regress from the normative ideal of full virtue by our closeness to fully integrated practical wisdom. On the thick understanding of the unity thesis, someone's even partially possessing a given virtue makes him more likely to possess all the others. This normative-cum-descriptive interpretation is the one in Doris's sights, but Russell does not endorse it. He says, for instance, that no particular agent we may consider possesses all of the virtues (336).

Like Russell and also Badhwar (1996), I find the thick version of the integration thesis heroic but implausible. Furthermore, since the normative version is not implicated in any of the arguments for virtue ethics discussed above, it seems to be outside the hard core of virtue ethics.

III. K. THE HARD CORE OF VIRTUE ETHICS

To sum up then, the following set of claims constitutes what I consider to be the hard core of virtue ethics:

(*acquirability*) It is possible for a non-virtuous person to acquire some of the virtues.

(*stability*) If someone possesses a virtue at time *t*, then *ceteris paribus* she will possess that virtue at a later time *t¢*.

(*consistency*) If someone possesses a virtue sensitive to reason *r*, then *ceteris paribus* she will respond to *r* in most contexts.

(*access*) It is possible to determine what the virtues are.

(*normativity*) *Ceteris paribus*, it is better to possess a virtue than not, and better to possess more virtues than fewer.

(*real saints*) There is a non-negligible cohort of saints in the human population.

(*explanatory power*) If someone possesses a virtue, then reference to that virtue will sometimes help to explain her behavior.

(*predictive power**) If someone possesses a high-fidelity virtue, then reference to that virtue will enable nearly certain predictions of her behavior; if someone possesses a low-fidelity virtue, then reference to that virtue will enable weak predictions of her behavior.

(*egalitarianism**) Almost anyone can reliably act in accordance with virtue.

IV. THE SITUATIONIST CHALLENGE

Until now, the impetus of the situationist challenge has remained unclear in part because it was unclear what it was a challenge *to*. Now that we have the hard core of virtue ethics clearly in view, however, we can say more carefully what the

situationist challenge amounts to. It is an attack primarily on the conjunction of *consistency*, *explanatory power*, *predictive power*, and *egalitarianism*. In this section I do not rehearse the details of the situationist arguments, a task far beyond the scope of this paper. I want, instead, to show how those arguments threaten the hard core of virtue ethics.

According to the situationist critique, people do not respond—or do not respond robustly and primarily—to moral reasons. Seemingly trivial and normatively irrelevant features of our environments predict and explain our behavior better than traits. Though the consistency condition requires that people respond the same way whenever they have the same reasons, psychologists and other social scientists have found that they respond differently depending on weather conditions, presence of bystanders,[4] social distance,[5] ambient smells, and ambient sounds,[6] among other things.

The point here is not the familiar platitude that it's hard to be good, that temptations and other counterincentives lead people astray. Mood effects and ambient sensibilia are not temptations. In *Lady Windermere's Fan*, Oscar Wilde's avatar, Lord Darlington quips that he can resist anything but temptation. If the situationist challenge succeeds, even that might be too strong. The idea is not that people easily succumb to temptations: a temptation is a reason to do what you ought not to do. The idea is that *non-temptations* play a surprisingly large role in moral conduct, including both external behavior and more internal phenomena such as thought, feeling, emotion, and deliberation.

Situationists are fond of pointing out that the typical correlation coefficient between measures of trait possession and behavioral outcomes maxes out around 0.3, and is often even lower. By contrast, in Stanley Milgram's infamous obedience study, situational pressures induced complete obedience in roughly two-thirds of participants. Traits (of which virtues are a subset) seem to lack explanatory power. For the same reason, traits also seem to lack predictive power.

Finally, the modified egalitarianism condition holds that nearly anyone can be brought to act reliably in accordance with virtue. The fact that situations hold such sway over us suggests, however, that no intervention could ensure that most people could be brought to act reliably in accordance with virtue.

V. THE DEFENSE OF VIRTUE

The situationist challenge is not without opponents. Three primary responses can be identified:

(*dodge*) Virtue is a rare ideal, so empirical data showing that most people are not virtuous is irrelevant.

(*retreat*) Although the situationist critique shows that reasons-responsive traits do not exist, an empirically informed theory of virtue can still be formulated in terms of virtuous actions or local traits.

(*counterattack*) The empirical evidence does not support the situationist critique.

In this section, I canvass the best versions of all three arguments and assess them in light of the hard core of virtue ethics. Most of these arguments turn out either to be unsound or to concede part of the hard core. A few developments of the counterattack and retreat look promising, however, and raise two interesting possibilities. If situationists are right that context determines much of human behavior, then behavior can be controlled by arranging to find oneself in the appropriate context. It can also be controlled by actively producing appropriate contexts instead of submitting to them passively.

V. A. THE DODGE

Advocates of the dodge point out that for the ancients, full virtue was a rare last fruit of a lifelong project. That most people are not virtuous is therefore no surprise; in fact, it may be a prediction of a suitably elitist virtue ethics. Myles Burnyeat (1980), for example, discusses the myriad ways in which an aspirant to virtue can go wrong, strongly insinuating the rarity of virtue before philosophers took up the situationist challenge.

Christian Miller (2003, 379) fleshes out this argument by drawing on the Aristotelian distinctions among virtue, continence, incontinence, and vice. The virtuous person does the right thing wholeheartedly. The continent person does the right thing, but only conflictedly. The vicious person does the wrong thing wholeheartedly. The incontinent person, like the continent, is conflicted, but his better self loses the battle and he does the wrong thing. Christine Swanton (2003, 30) points out that participants in the Milgram studies in obedience, a favorite stalking horse of situationists, displayed intense emotional distress. This is evidence, she claims, of nascent or incomplete virtue, not of lack of virtue. Obedient subjects were incontinent; they wanted to do the right thing but failed.

The dodge may seem successful, but there are reasons to worry. First, it appears to cede the egalitarianism, explanatory power, predictive power conjuncts in the hard core of virtue ethics. If moral education is as hard as Burnyeat makes it seem, most people could not be brought to behave in accordance with virtue, let alone be virtuous. If most people are non-virtuous, then, pace MacIntyre's claim that much of human behavior would be "genuinely inexplicable" without appeal to virtues, the virtues are loose cogs in our motivational machinery, reliably licensing neither the explanation nor the prediction of behavior.

Furthermore, if most people are non-virtuous, then moral education may involve the very "moral schizophrenia" that virtue ethicists have criticized in other ethical theories (Stocker 1976). If moral education takes the form of advising someone to do what the virtuous person would do, learners would be forced to ask "Is what I propose to do what the virtuous person would do [or advise] in my situation?" rather than "Is my maxim universalizable?" or "Will my action maximize happiness?" Such an attempt to emulate (or follow the advice of) an imaginary virtuous person introduces the same rift between reasons and motives that virtue ethics is taken to bridge by its proponents.

V. B. THE RETREAT

Instead of dodging the situationist charge, some have preferred to retreat and retrench, allowing that much of what situationists say is correct but claiming that despite this, a suitably weakened version of virtue theory is empirically adequate. Two directions for the retreat can be distinguished: the retreat into one-off virtuous acts and the retreat into local virtues.

1. Virtuous Acts. If one agrees that the dodge gives up too much, one might be tempted to retreat to an act-virtue theory like that of Thomson (1996, 1997). Thomas Hurka (2001, 2006) goes so far as to say that the act-virtue theory should not be considered a retreat from its dispositional cousin. Instead, he argues, people really recognize only virtuous acts as intrinsically valuable, relegating virtuous dispositions (if there are any) to mere instrumental value. Moving virtue ethics in this direction strips it of much of its appeal, however, since it gives up on the consistency, stability, explanatory power, and predictive power of virtues.

Situationist critics have explicitly admitted that their arguments do not apply to act-based theories of virtue. Despite this, most responders to the situationist challenge do not follow this route. I take it that their reluctance is best explained by the fact that this way of defining virtue is unattractive to anyone who finds the arguments for virtue ethics canvassed in section II compelling.

2. Local Virtues. A less extreme retreat endorses something like John Doris's (2002, 62; see also Adams 2006, 125–130) theory of local virtues. If virtues are natural kinds, then they should be discovered a posteriori. Though ethicists may be disappointed to find that the global trait of honesty does not exist, they should be excited by evidence that there are local traits. Parsimonious lists of cardinal virtues notwithstanding, if it turns out that there are hundreds of virtues, so be it. Doris seems inclined, for instance, to distinguish a large variety of local traits that fit within the global virtue of courage. His preferred method is to individuate traits as finely as required for them to actually support counterfactuals and confident predictions. Instead of *courage* or even *physical courage*, he would have us speak of *battlefield physical courage*, of *storms physical courage*, of *heights physical courage*, and of *wild animals physical courage*. Indeed, he seems inclined even to differentiate between *battlefield physical courage in the face of rifle fire* and *battlefield physical courage in the face of artillery fire*. Though it might seem that he is being flip by cutting the fabric of traits so finely, he claims that this principle of individuation "is the beginning of an empirically adequate theory" (2006, 62).

Doris's notion of local traits is not entirely unprecedented. As Rachana Kamtekar (2004, 479) points out, Aristotle himself paved the way for this idea in the *Nicomachean Ethics* when he distinguished greatness of soul from due pride (1123b) and magnificence from generosity (1122a). If theorists of local traits are right, people should aim not so much to develop robust global traits like courage but to reinforce and amalgamate local traits like courage-in-the-face-of-physical-danger-while-in-a-good-mood and courage-in-the-face-of-social-pressure-while-smelling-coffee. If one knows the limits of one's local virtues, one could at least

in principle aim to ensure that one is called upon to act courageously only when one is in the appropriate circumstances.

One problem for the theory of local traits is that, from a normative point of view, virtues are best individuated by their characteristic reasons, a point on which a wide variety of virtue ethicists concur.[7] The *consistency* condition implicitly does so because it is formulated in terms of virtues' characteristic reasons. For instance, generosity appeals to the needs of others; courtesy appeals to conventions of society; courage appeals to threats to valued objects and ends. Local traits, by contrast, are individuated by both their characteristic reasons and the causal powers of the situation. Generosity-while-watched-by-fellow-church-members appeals to both the needs of others and social pressure; courtesy-while-in-a-good-mood appeals to both conventions of society and one's normatively irrelevant subjective state; battlefield-courage-in-the-face-of-rifle-fire appeals to both threats to valued ends and the normatively irrelevant type of the threat.

If local traits really are as fine-grained and individualized as Doris suggests, then a virtue theory framed in terms of local traits would have to modify the consistency condition (since as currently formulated it appeals only to reasons) and possibly reject the access condition (since there may end up being so many traits that we could not possibly determine what they are). Perhaps both changes are acceptable, but they do come at a cost.

V. C. THE COUNTERATTACK

The dodge and the retreat both attempt to make virtues of necessity. Some defenders of virtue ethics, however, want to make a necessity of virtue. They argue that the evidence cited by situationists is unconvincing. The cheekier among them even claim that social psychology supports virtue ethics.

1. Introspection. The counterattack comprises a slew of independent ripostes. The first I discuss comes from Julia Annas, who claims that the deliverances of introspection confirm the existence of character traits—damn the social scientists' torpedoes, and full speed ahead. She objects to considering character traits primarily "from the point of view of a scientific observer," preferring instead to focus on how "we understand our own dispositions" (2003, 23). She then goes on to say, "I don't discover my own generosity or the lack of it by doing correct or faulty probability calculations." Instead, Annas would prefer to determine why someone does what she does by focusing on "her own account of her actions."

It should be plain, however, that introspection cuts no ice here. The question is not whether people take themselves to have traits or to be motivated by their traits but whether they actually do have these traits. Worse still, research in moral dumbfounding suggests that the reasons people give for their moral judgments are often confabulated post hoc. Jonathan Haidt (2001), for instance, discusses studies in which participants read vignettes in which the protagonists engage in morally questionable behavior. Participants are asked to make moral judgments about the protagonists, then asked for the reasons supporting these judgments. Even when it should be clear to them that their reasons are invalid, they typically do not revise

their moral judgments. In one representative vignette, a brother and sister commit incest. While they have sex only one time, use a condom, enjoy the experience, keep the event a secret, and never regret what they've done, the protagonists are nevertheless roundly condemned by most participants. When asked for reasons for this judgment, they cite the dangers of inbreeding, the possibility of emotional harm, and so on, but these reasons are clearly inoperative in the vignette. If experimenters point out the problems associated with these reasons, participants usually respond by getting angry or saying things like, "I don't know, I can't explain it, I just know it's wrong." Such research suggests that the reasons people give for their moral judgments are unreliable. It's only a small leap from confabulation about reasons for judgments to confabulation about reasons for actions. Barring evidence to the contrary, we should assume that the reasons people give when explaining their own moral behavior will be similarly untrustworthy.

2. Equivocation. In his defense of virtue ethics against the situationist challenge, Gopal Sreenivasan (2008, 604) points out that the meaning of 'cross-situationally consistent trait' is a function of how one individuates situations into equivalence classes. "In one sense," he says, "a trait is cross-situationally consistent if it is manifested across situations that differ in respect of the kind of feature inviting behaviour that manifests that trait," (consistency$_1$) while in another sense, a trait is cross-situationally consistent if it is manifested "across situations in which this feature remains constant, but other features vary" (consistency$_2$). According to Sreenivasan (605), virtues are traits individuated by consistency$_1$. I contend that they are individuated *neither* by consistency$_1$ *nor* by consistency$_2$, and that the correct principle of virtue individuation appeals only to reasons (call it consistency$_3$).

A hypothetical example based on the case of Wesley Autrey (section I) illustrates this objection. Suppose that Romo is in a good mood, sees a seizure-victim lying in the path of an oncoming train, and risks his own life to save the victim

Table 1: Romo's Counterfactual Reaction Profile

	Oncoming Train	**Charging Bull**	**Knife-Wielding Murderer**
Good Mood	Saves victim		
Neutral Mood	Doesn't save victim		
Bad Mood			

If Romo were in a good mood and saw a victim in the path of an oncoming train, a charging bull, or a knife-wielding murderer, he would recognize that someone was in danger and needed help, which would lead him to save the victim. However, if Romo were in a neutral or bad mood, he would fail so to act—perhaps because he would not notice that someone was in danger and needed help, perhaps because he would not care whether the victim needed help, perhaps because he would be frozen with fear, or perhaps for some other reason. According to consistency$_1$, Romo should be considered courageous. Across situations that differ in respect of the kind of feature inviting behavior (the threat), he is disposed to behave in the

appropriate way. The fact that his behavior would seem non-virtuous if we looked at possible worlds that differ in another respect, namely his mood, is irrelevant to consistency$_1$. For consistency$_1$, what matters is similarity across the rows of the table.

In contrast, for consistency$_2$, what matters is the columns, not the rows. So, according to consistency$_2$, Romo is not courageous. Holding the feature of the situation that invites the behavior (the threat) while allowing his mood to vary, his behavior changes, so he doesn't possess the trait. Also according to consistency$_3$, Romo is not courageous; he has decisive reason to help in all nine permutations but only responds in three of them, so he is not courageous.

Now suppose that another person, Schlomo, is in a bad mood, sees a seizure-victim lying in the path of an oncoming train, and risks his life to save the victim. Further suppose that Schlomo would act as Table 2 indicates:

Table 2: Schlomo's Counterfactual Reaction Profile

	Oncoming Train	**Charging Bull**	**Knife-Wielding Murderer**
Good Mood	Doesn't save victim		
Neutral Mood	Saves victim		
Bad Mood			

If Schlomo were in a neutral or bad mood and saw a victim in the path of an oncoming train, a charging bull, or a knife-wielding murderer, he would recognize that someone was in danger and needed help, which would lead him to save the victim. However, if Schlomo were in a good mood, he would fail so to act—perhaps because he would not notice that someone was in danger and needed help, perhaps because he would not care whether the victim needed help, perhaps because he would be frozen with fear, or perhaps for some other reason.

Is Schlomo courageous? As before, consistency$_2$ and consistency$_3$ deliver negative answers in this case as well. Using consistency$_1$, however, Sreenivasan is committed to saying that Schlomo is courageous; holding the courage-irrelevant factor of mood constant, he would react appropriately to all courage-eliciting circumstances.

But Romo and Schlomo have precisely opposite counterfactual profiles. It hardly makes sense to attribute the same virtue to both.

Worse still, if cowardice is a trait that entails failing to do the courage-appropriate thing across courage-eliciting situations as individuated by individuation consistency$_1$, and if Romo and Schlomo are placed in courage-eliciting circumstances while in a good mood, Romo is courageous and Schlomo cowardly, but if they are placed in courage-eliciting circumstances while in a bad or neutral mood, the attributions are reversed: Romo is cowardly and Schlomo courageous. Presumably cowardice and courage are contraries, though; the same person cannot possess both traits at the same time. One could get around thinking of cowardice and courage as contraries by speaking not of cowardice but of cowardice-before-bulls-while-in-a-good-mood and speaking not of courage but of courage-before-

murderers-while-in-a-bad-omod. This is the way Doris suggests individuating local traits, as I explained above, but of course Sreenivasan is unwilling to accede to this suggestion.[8]

Evidently, both trait-relevant and trait-irrelevant features of the situation should be allowed to vary if global virtues are being tested for. Being globally courageous means reacting appropriately to all situations that provide decisive reason to protect something even at a risk to oneself. In other words, being courageous means responding appropriately to all situations where the decisive *reason* is courage's characteristic reason.

3. Morally Unimportant Behavior. Next, consider the counterattack according to which situationist experiments do not test morally crucial behavior. As John Sabini and Maury Silver (2005, 540) say, "picking up or not picking up" a stranger's papers is not "a very important manifestation of a moral trait." While this is a fair criticism of the Isen and Levin (1972) phone booth experiment, it ignores a large swath of the situationist literature. Consider just the Darley and Batson (1973), Milgram (1974), and Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo (1973) studies so often referenced by both situationists and defenders of virtue. Is the failure to help a distressed man lying by the side of the road morally trivial? Is applying dangerous shocks not morally crucial? Is forcing guiltless fellow-participants in an experiment to clean latrines with their bare hands morally unimportant? While some experiments test for unimportant behaviors, many test important ones.

Worse still, evidence from behavioral economics (which, by the way, is a vein of empirical information hitherto un-mined by both situationists and their opponents) suggests that people's actions in low-stakes situations reliably predict their actions in high-stakes situations. For instance, Hoffman, McCabe, and Smith (1996) found no significant differences in the behavior of proposers or responders in ultimatum games when the stakes were $10 or $100.[9] Slonim and Roth (1998) found that behavior changed only slightly even when financial stakes were varied by a factor of 25. If these results can be extrapolated to non-economic behavior, then the studies that use trivial actions as independent variables do in fact provide (indirect) support for skepticism about virtues.

4. One-off vs. Longitudinal Studies. Another counterattack claims that one-off experiments cannot provide evidence for or against virtue. Sreenivasan (2008, 607) is responsible for this argument as well; he claims that the question of consistency cannot be answered by comparing different cohorts under different experimental treatments. Instead, the only evidence he would accept looks at the same cohort under different experimental treatments over the course of days, weeks, months, or even years. He categorically denies that "any data from a one time performance experiment [can] do anything to establish" the conclusion that the participants in the experiment lack a character trait. Such data are not thick on the ground. However, what little there are (e.g., Hartshorne and May 1928) lend no comfort to this counterattack.

In addition, if the traits in question are high-fidelity virtues, one-off experiments *can* provide strong evidence against (though only weak evidence for) the presence

of the traits. Because generosity and beneficence are low-fidelity virtues, it may be that whether someone gives money to a charity is only weak evidence for or against his generosity. But because chastity and most other types of loyalty are high-fidelity virtues, whether someone cheats on his wife even once can constitute strong evidence of a lack of fidelity (though perhaps only weak evidence for fidelity).[10]

Sreenivasan has a point here, but the issue is more complicated and asymmetric than he realizes. By way of comparison, consider how you might test whether a given coin has the "virtue" of always landing *heads* or a given die has the "virtue" of always turning up *ace*. These dispositions require a certain kind of consistency. If you flip a coin once and note that it shows *heads*, you gain only very weak evidence that it is double-headed. If you roll a die once and it turns up *ace*, you should update your confidence in its being loaded only minimally. Many repeated trials would be required to determine or even strongly corroborate that the coin is double-headed or the die loaded. But now consider what you could conclude if the coin turned up *tails* or the die showed *six*. At the very least, you could say that the coin was not double-headed and the die not sufficiently loaded that it *always* showed *ace*. Virtues—at least high-fidelity virtues—are like being double-headed or maximally loaded. A single test can *disconfirm* someone's possession of a virtue, but it cannot *confirm* the virtue's presence. Since many situationist studies test for high-fidelity virtues, these studies (at least) can in fact disconfirm the presence of the relevant traits.

5. Confounding Traits. The next counterattack argues that situationist experiments are confounded by other, uncontrolled dispositional variables. They presume to test for one virtue, say honesty, but other virtues like prudence kick in and dampen the expression of the target trait. People with multiple, inconsistent character traits are bound to have opposing impulses and must violate at least some of them. Rachana Kamtekar (2004, 473; see also Miller 2003, 369 and Sreenivasan 2008, 607) claims that subjects in the Milgram experiments may have had two contrary virtues: compassion and obedience. Hence, when they did not express compassion it was not because they were the passive pawns of situational influences but because they were expressing the opposing virtue. Obedience may not be a virtue, but at least it is a trait. A less contentious version of this counterattack would therefore say that tests for trait t_1 may be confounded by the presence of traits t_1, t_2, ... , t_n, which may but need not be virtues.

As an a priori exercise this argument is valid, but I am unconvinced that it actually applies to the studies on which situationists rely. Milgram varied his experimental conditions to see whether people were simply obedient (as these defenders of virtue now suggest post hoc) or only obedient when certain situational cues were present. His results support the latter thesis. Subjects' maximum obedience rate dropped from 65 percent when the "learner" was in another room to 40 percent when he was in the same room and 30 percent when they could only shock him by physically placing his hand on the electrode (1974, 35). Whether it is compassionate to shock someone does not vary as a function of distance, but subjects' willingness to shock did. Other normatively irrelevant

situational influences produced similar effects. When the experimenter delivered his instructions to participants over the phone, their maximum obedience dropped to 20 percent (61). This is of course still an appalling result, but it is less than one third the maximum obedience rate when the experimenter was present. The issue was not just one of obeying the experimenter's authority. When the experimenter demanded that he himself be shocked, maximal obedience plummeted to 0 percent (95). It is just not possible to explain all of the results of this series of experiments by claiming that subjects were obedient.

6. Parity of Traits and Situations. The final counterattack has two prongs. The first points out that the infamous 0.3 ceiling (Mischel 1968) on correlations between trait possession and trait expression is not a 0.0 ceiling, concluding that 0.3 might just be "sufficient to underwrite some conception of character" (Sabini and Silver 2005, 541). While personality variables may be of little use in predicting whether a given agent will act in accordance with a trait on any particular occasion, in the aggregate they turn out to be quite powerful (542). This is a fair point, and one that Doris at least is more than willing to concede. What this discussion requires, however, is the distinction between high-fidelity and low-fidelity virtues. Aggregation is warranted with the latter but, I contend, not the former. In a fascinating series of recent studies, Angela Duckworth and her colleagues have demonstrated that the virtue of grit (which she glosses as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals," [2007, 1087], and is able to measure with a short questionnaire) correlates with a variety of behaviors, from educational attainment and grade point average to retention at West Point and success in the National Spelling Bee.[11] Because it has world enough and time, even a small dose of the low-fidelity virtue of grit is enough to produce important behavioral effects. The same does not go for high-fidelity virtues. A small dose of honesty, even if aggregated over time, does not make one an honest person. If the allegations against him are true, the disgraced biologist Marc Hauser, who fabricated data for his research on primates, arguably lacks the virtues of integrity and intellectual honesty even if he is guilty of only the eight counts of scientific misconduct for which he has been sanctioned. Think about that: just eight failures over the course of a decades-long career may be enough to disqualify Hauser.

The second prong of this counterattack argues that situational influences have a correlation ceiling of their own, at roughly 0.4 (Funder and Ozer 1983), putting the power of dispositions and the power of situations roughly on par. Kenneth Bowers argued decades ago that situationism overstates its case by treating the 0.3 correlation as negligible. Like Doris and Harman in their less provocative moments, Bowers believes that "a position stressing the interaction of the person and the situation is both conceptually satisfying and empirically warranted" (1973, 307).

It may be that those toeing the situationist line have taken it for granted that if dispositions explain $N\%$ of behavior then situations explain $(100-N)\%$. This is emphatically not the case. What neither explains independently must be attributed to their interaction, to a third factor, or to randomness. Psychologists such as David Funder (2006) and John Jost and Lawrence Jost (2009) argue persuasively that the

psychology of the twenty-first century should supplement the recognition of the 0.3 ceiling with another that recognizes the limited power of situations. This new consensus would domesticate the situationist attack without removing its sting. Combined with the second version of the retreat, however, it opens up the possibility of a virtue ethics couched in terms of the *portability of context* (the degree to which agents may intentionally situate themselves in contexts that encourage action in accordance with virtue) and the distinction between *situation-consumerism* and *situation-producerism* (taking an active role in shaping one's own situation and the situations of others, rather than viewing oneself as a passive pawn of situational influences).

VI. FACTITIOUS VIRTUE

Suppose one has taken the situationist critique to heart, has largely given up on acquiring global high-fidelity virtues, holds out hope of acquiring global low-fidelity virtues, and wishes to find a way to make the best of what locally consistent virtues one has. What practical strategies might one employ? In this closing section, I identify two strategies that can be used in tandem to co-opt the power of situations. The guiding insight behind both strategies is to simulate full-fledged global virtues. I call such simulation factitious virtue.[12]

VI. A. THE PORTABILITY OF CONTEXT

One strategy involves the *portability of context*: seeking out situations conducive to one's particular situational susceptibilities. While Doris (2002, 147) is right that a romantic dinner with a flirtatious colleague while one's spouse is out of town is an easy sort of temptation to recognize and avoid, what is to be said about situational influences that are not temptations or counterincentives, such as ambient sounds, ambient smells, all-too-mercurial moods, and ever-changing social distance? Should jackhammers be banned? Should people always wear perfume? Should we all take mood-enhancing drugs? Should people make sure always to look one another in the eye? The question is whether (or to what extent) a person can carry her preferred context with her (and to what extent social networks, institutions, and governments may enable and even participate in this process).

Maria Merritt (2000) attempts to answer the portability question with a theory of socially sustained virtues, arguing for the "sustaining social contribution to character." People may behave as if they possessed global virtues not because they actually do possess the traits but because they find themselves in virtue-eliciting situations only when they are also in appropriate contexts. She argues that, rather than trying in vain to galvanize your character against all temptations great and small, "a more sensible [project] would be the exercise of care in your choice of [social situations]" (378). The primary difficulty for Merritt's theory is that local virtues are not sustained solely through the social contribution; non-social situational factors like moods also affect virtue-relevant behavior. Thus, her theory should be considered an essential proper part of a complete response to the situationist challenge.

Recall that for virtues to have explanatory power, they must support subjunctive conditionals where the antecedent refers to the reasons the agent has for acting and the consequent describes virtue-consonant behavior. For example, if Salina were honest, she wouldn't steal (unless she had decisive, overriding reasons to do so). The theory of local traits strengthens both the antecedent and the consequent of the relevant subjunctive conditional: if Salina were honest-while-watched, then she wouldn't steal (unless she had decisive, overriding reasons to do so) while watched. The trick, then, is to identify which local traits one has (or could develop) and ensure that one remains in the appropriate contexts.

One pragmatic use of research in social psychology, then, is the identification of such contexts. We may dream, for instance, that some day people will be able to take a virtue-battery, which would say which local traits they have. With this knowledge, they could then plot out a life trajectory that (so far as possible) avoided situations uncongenial to their trait signature. They could carry their preferred contexts with them—making use of the portability of context.

Sadly, that the current state of psychology is nowhere near realizing this dream. In the meantime, we may want to investigate other ways to encourage action, thought, and feeling in accordance with virtue.

VI. B. SITUATION-CONSUMERISM VS. SITUATION-PRODUCERISM

A more active strategy for dealing with the power of situational influences involves the distinction between *situation-consumerism* and *situation-producerism*. The portability response treats situations like restaurants. If Burger King is conducive to health, visit Burger King. If Taco Bell is not conducive to health, avoid Taco Bell. If situation S_1 is conducive to virtue, seek situation S_1. If situation S_2 is not conducive to virtue, avoid situation S_2.

If we think of ourselves not only as situation-consumers but also as situation-producers, the power of situational influences becomes a tool rather than a threat. To continue the health analogy, another way to approach nutrition is to make one's own meals. In the same way, rather than simply seeking and avoiding situations based on their virtue-conducive properties, we may take a more active role and create (both for ourselves and for others) situations with an eye to their virtue-conduciveness.

Hagop Sarkissian (2010) seems to have this idea in mind when he argues that "minor tweaks" in someone's comportment may lead to "major payoffs" both for her and her community. This is a promising line of argument, but Sarkissian's development of it leaves much to be desired. Though he is doubtless right that "not only do situations affect our own behavior, but we too return the favor," he provides no warrant for the further, blithely optimistic, claim that "we influence the situations we find ourselves in *as much as* they influence us" (emphasis mine). The fact that there is a two-way street running between situations and persons does not entail that the traffic is equal in both directions. My own view, as I explained above, is that situations are more influential than traits, but not overwhelmingly so. Sarkissian also asserts that one particular Confucian virtue (*de*, or moral charisma) enables its possessors "to control situational contexts and influence others through non-coercive means." That may be, but of course like any other global trait, *de* may

not be common or even commonly acquirable. Answering the situationist challenge to virtue ethics by baldly asserting the existence of a virtue that gives one power over situations is clearly question-begging.

I prefer to focus on ways in which situations can be rigged in advance, before one is called on to act in accordance with some virtue or other. Interventions designed to trigger social distance heuristics, which we unconsciously use to track the social closeness of others and determine the degree to which we will regard their preferences as compelling reasons, are a nice example of this. Cicero reports in *De Finibus* 5.1.3 that Roman Epicureans adorned many of their household objects with images of Epicurus as a way to remind themselves of his teachings, including the injunction to "behave at all times as if Epicurus were watching you," (Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius* 11.8 and 25.5. Translation done by Richard Sorabji for a seminar.). My own speculation is that the statue of Epicurus in the Garden was meant to trigger social distance heuristics in exactly this way. Realizing that people, including his devoted followers, were not globally virtuous but were at least to some extent virtuous-when-watched, Epicurus had the statue erected to make them *feel* at all times as if he were watching.

I mentioned above that the distance between learner and teacher in the Milgram experiment had a huge effect on subjects' obedience levels. Recent work in behavioral economics demonstrates just how powerful the feeling of being watched, even when unconscious, can be. Andreoni and Petrie (2004) found that providing participants in an economic game with photos of other players resulted in 59 percent higher contributions to the public good. Charness and Gneezy (2007) had participants play variants of the dictator and ultimatum games; they found that merely providing the surname of the receiver or responder increased the allocation made by the dictator or offerer.

Even more suggestive studies have induced generous and honest behavior using only images of watching faces or eyes. Burnham and Hare (2007) used a photo of KISMET the robot to trigger the facial recognition module of participants' brains. Even though it was clear that they were not actually being watched by KISMET, participants *felt* they were being watched. And KISMET had the intended effect, inducing an increase in dictators' allocations of about one third. Haley and Fessler (2005) replicated the KISMET experiment with a computerized dictator game in which the presence of iconic eye spots on the computer's background induced extra giving. Bateson, Nettle, and Roberts (2006) replicated these results with a real-world experiment: they set up an honesty box in an academic tearoom to test whether felt level of privacy would influence whether people paid in full for their beverages. On alternate weeks the experimenters put up either an unobtrusive photograph of flowers or a small photograph of human eyes. "On average, people paid 2.76 times as much [per cup] in the weeks with eyes" (1). Presence of eyes explained a stunning 63.8 percent of the variance. Perhaps the most astonishing evidence for the power of social distance heuristics is a study by Rigdon, Ishii, Watabe, and Kitayama (2009), which used a minimal stimulus consisting of three black dots known to activate the fusiform face area of the brain. Merely presenting dictators with this arrangement of dots induced more giving, but when the figure was inverted, the

effect disappeared. An exit interview with the dictators in this experiment found that they did not realize that they felt watched, even though their behavior showed clear signs of it. It seems that people can be brought to behave more generously through unobtrusive, unconsciously-processed social distance cues.

Instead of trying to instill the virtue of *de* in ourselves, I suggest that we attempt to design our environments in such a way as to encourage action, thought, and feeling in accordance with virtue. Karl Marx famously contended, "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it" ([1845] 1998). Echoing that sentiment, I conclude with the following maxim: Situationists and defenders of virtue ethics have hitherto only interpreted situations in various ways; the point is to change them.[13]

ENDNOTES

1. See Hursthouse 1999, 74; Kupperman 1995, 7; 2001, 250; Oakley 1996; and Taylor 1991, 108.

2. For an excellent discussion of the individuation of virtues by characteristic reasons, see Russell 2009, 177–203.

3. See Dent 1975, 328; Hudson 1980; MacIntyre 1984, 199; and Wallace 1974, 193.

4. For more on the power of bystanders, see Latané and Darley 1968, 1970; Latané and Nida 1981; Latané and Rodin 1969; Schwartz and Gottlieb 1991.

5. For more on the power of social distance, see Bohnet and Frey 1999a, 1999b; and Hoffman, McCabe, and Smith 1996.

6. For more on the power of ambient sensory stimuli, see Baron 1997; Baron and Thomley 1994; Boles and Haywood 1978; Cohen 1978; Cohen and Lezak 1977; Geen and O'Neal 1969; Konecni 1975; Korte and Grant 1980; Korte, Ypma, and Toppen 1975; Matthews and Cannon 1975; and Page 1974.

7. Hursthouse 1999, 128; Russell 2009, 185; Swanton 2003, 22; Williams 1995, 18.

8. The same argument could be made against consistency$_2$ by varying what happens in the columns rather than the rows.

9. For more on this topic, see Camerer and Thaler 1995; Hoffman, McCabe, Shachat, and Smith 1994; and Roth, Prasnikar, Okuno-Fujiwara, and Zamir 1991.

10. If this is right, it casts doubt on most of Christian Miller's (2003, 2009, 2010) otherwise persuasive arguments, which focus almost solely on helping behavior and thus only on low-fidelity virtue.

11. See Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, and Kelly 2007; Duckworth and Seligman 2005, 2006; Duckworth, Tsukayama, and May 2010; and Duckworth, Kirby, Tsukayama, Berstein, and Ericsson 2010.

12. See also Alfano (forthcoming).

13. With thanks to John Doris, Gilbert Harman, Jesse Prinz, and the referees of the *Journal of Philosophical Research*.

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