38
VIRTUE AS SKILL
Self-regulation and social psychology

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38.1 Introduction[1]

Skills have become increasingly important to virtue theory, given the recent trend of conceptualizing virtue as a skill in both virtue ethics and virtue.[2] Given that I and others have laid out these accounts elsewhere (including in some of the other contributions in this volume), I will not cover that ground again here. However, in this chapter I will be adding to these accounts by grounding an account of skill within the larger framework of the psychological research on self-regulation.[3] Self-regulation theories cover both the considerations involved with setting goals and striving to accomplish those goals.[4] Since skill acquisition is essentially a sophisticated form of self-regulation, this approach will shed further light on the nature of skill and thereby virtue.

The main issue I hope to shed light on in this chapter is what moral skill training might look like, given what we know about self-regulation and skill acquisition. Skills are improved by deliberate practice, where in such practice you are attempting to improve by correcting past mistakes and overcoming your current limitations. So, in acquiring moral virtues as skills, we have reason to focus on some of the common moral mistakes we make, along with other frequent obstacles to acting well.[5]

Here this project converges with the situationist critique on virtue, as social psychology experiments highlight some of our current weaknesses when it comes to acting morally.[6] Experiments have shown that whether people act morally well or poorly is often strongly influenced by irrelevant (and sometimes trivial) factors of a situation. Whether people stop to help someone in need, for example, can be affected by whether there are passive bystanders nearby (Latané and Darley 1970). Furthermore, our moral judgments can be influenced by stereotypes, or how moral dilemmas are framed (Tversky and Kahneman 1981). Then there are the more (in)famous experiments, such as the Milgram obedience experiment, where it seems far too easy to elicit cruel behavior out of average people (Milgram 1974).

Fortunately, there are resources in the self-regulation and skills literature to devise strategies to combat these situational influences. In the rest of this chapter, I will begin by outlining some general features of the psychological research on self-regulation and skill.[7] I will then discuss the results of some social psychology experiments (such as framing effects and the bystander effect), and what kinds of training can be used to overcome those obstacles to better moral behavior.

In the process I will show how a skill model of virtue can respond to the situationist critique, as we can view the results of the experiments as presenting us with opportunities to further develop virtue.

38.2 Self-regulation: goal setting and goal striving

Self-regulation theories in psychology begin with commitment to a goal, which implies adopting certain standards of behavior by which one judges oneself.[8] This also has an affective dimension, as Albert Bandura relates, because "self-regulatory control is achieved by creating incentives for one's own actions and by anticipative affective reactions to one's own behavior depending on how it measures up to personal standards" (Bandura 1999: 176).[9] In terms of self-reactions, achieving a goal is usually a source of self-satisfaction, while failing to do so can lead to self-censure. Furthermore, the strength of the self-reaction, in terms of the motivation it provides for self-regulation, depends in part on how the goal is valued.[10] Goals that are highly valued can provide more self-satisfaction from achievement, and likewise more self-censure from failing to achieve them, than goals that are only minimally valued. A highly valued goal will make you feel really bad for violating it or really good for conforming to it. So, motivation to strive for the goal arises from self-evaluative reactions (anticipated feelings of self-satisfaction or self-censure), the strength of which depends in part on the degree of value placed on the goal.

The value that a goal has (its desirability), however, is not the only factor to affect motivation. The above assumes a situation where the person believes that the desired outcome can be achieved, or the undesirable outcome can be avoided, by acting. If instead someone believes that they are not capable of achieving the desired outcome, she will have little motivation to self-regulate. As Bandura notes:

> Among the self-referent thoughts that influence human motivation, affect and action, none is more central or pervasive than people's judgments of personal efficacy … Unless people believe that they can produce desired results by their actions, they have little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties.
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> *Bandura 1999: 180–181*

'Perceived self-efficacy' then refers to people's beliefs about what they are capable of achieving, and self-efficacy beliefs can strengthen or undermine one's motivation to engage in self-regulation.[11] Thus, goal setting is both a matter of perceived desirability and feasibility.

Setting a goal frequently leads to adopting a set of goals that are organized hierarchically, as a complex or abstract (or superordinate) goal will give rise to more context-specific subsidiary (or subordinate) goals (Carver and Scheier 2003: 189). It could be that the goal itself is complex and thus requires many intermediary steps to accomplish, or that the goal itself is abstract enough that it requires a more concrete specification to act on. For example, wanting to do well in an academic class will require achieving several minor subgoals along the way, such as registering for the class, picking up the textbooks, etc. The relationship between the differing levels of the goals need not be merely a product of means-end reasoning, though, as sometimes the lower order goals provide the constitutive elements of a higher order goal.[12] Achieving an abstract goal such as being kind, for example, often requires a more practical specification in circumstances, like how being kind to a friend might require that you now tell that person a hard truth.[13]

Once you have committed yourself to realizing a goal, it is time to start figuring out how you are going to realize it, and this marks a transition from goal setting to goal striving. This distinction

is important, as deciding whether to commit to a goal in the first place, or later whether to maintain commitment to that goal, requires a different kind of mindset from the activities associated with striving to achieve a goal (which involves planning and acting) (Achtziger and Gollwitzer 2007; Heckhausen 2007). In short, in phases of goal setting you are undecided about your goal commitments, whereas phases of goal striving assume a decided goal commitment that you are now trying to realize.[14] Bandura notes this connection in self-regulation, stating that "people motivate themselves and guide their actions anticipatorily through the exercise of forethought. They anticipate likely outcomes of prospective actions, they set goals for themselves, and they plan courses of action designed to realize valued futures" (Bandura 1989: 19). Committing yourself to a goal is part of this process of forethought. It motivates the next phase of forethought in planning what steps to take to achieve that goal, where you are likely trying to figure out what needs to be done, how you are going to do it, when and where you will take action, etc.[15]

With self-regulation it matters how the goals are spelled out, as more specific and proximate goals (as compared to vague or distant goals) allow for better planning before acting, and better feedback after acting. Similarly, not all plans of action for implementing those goals are equally effective. We can make plans of action in the moment, responding to our current situation and trying to determine what act would best further our goals. But that approach suffers from two main drawbacks. First, it is often cognitively demanding to figure out how to achieve a goal (especially in the given context), and you may have to decide quickly on what course of action to take in the moment. Second, with this reactive approach you are forced to respond to the current situation, and you may find out that the situation you have gotten yourself into is not conducive to achieving your goals (such as trying to quit drinking alcohol but then agreeing to meet up with friends at a bar).

A more effective route to achieving your goals is through the use of implementation intentions, which differ from the kinds of intentions we have when we decide to commit ourselves to goals (i.e. goal setting). Trötschel and Gollwitzer explain the difference as follows:

> In contrast to goal intentions, implementation intentions specify a plan on the when, where, and how of acting on one's goal intentions. Implementation intentions are subordinate to goal intentions and have the format of "If situation x arises, then I will perform goal-directed behavior y!", thus linking an anticipated opportunity to a select goal-directed response. By forming implementation intentions, people plan out in advance (i.e., pre-select) which situations and behaviors they intend to use to achieve their goals (goal intentions).
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> *Trötschel and Gollwitzer 2007: 581*

Basically, an implementation intention has an 'if-then' structure – if this situation arises, then I will respond in this particular way (in order to achieve the goal I have committed myself to). Perhaps this sounds rather obvious as a strategy to realize one's goals, but people frequently do not form detailed implementation intentions at all, and rely instead on having just a very specific goal intention (e.g. I am going to snack less than I do now). Furthermore, there is evidence that forming a mere goal intention has a low correlation with actually acting on that intention (Webb and Sheeran 2006). Numerous studies have shown, however, that forming implementation intentions that detail when, where, and how a behavior will be performed significantly increase goal attainment (Trötschel and Gollwitzer 2007). To take an example connected to a virtue like temperance, to achieve the goal of snacking less often, you might form the intention 'if I find myself filling up my plate at a buffet line in a restaurant, I will choose fruit instead of

cake for dessert'. Forming such intentions requires you to anticipate the kinds of situations that might provide opportunities to advance your goal, or those that might threaten to undermine your goal, and decide on a course of action to take in response. So, for example, exercising temperance for someone trying to quit alcohol might involve trying to find places other than at a bar to get together with friends.

There are a few generic advantages to having implementation intentions of this kind. First, the kind of planning it involves requires you to do some thinking in advance as to what kind of situations you want to seek out, or avoid, in order to be in the best position to achieve your goal. This is certainly acknowledging the power of situational influences. Second, forming an implementation intention does not require conscious awareness of the situational cue in order to prompt the goal-directed behavior you decided on earlier.[16] As Weiber et al. note, "[b]ecause forming an implementation intention entails the selection of a critical future situation, the mental representation of this situation becomes highly activated and hence more accessible" (Wieber, Gollwitzer, and Sheeran 2014: 32). This is especially helpful when a goal is not easy to implement because one has habitual responses that steer one away from the goal (for example, being in the habit of ordering dessert when you have recently formed a new goal of losing weight). In essence, forming the implementation intention will prompt the intended goal-directed response, thus pre-empting the prior habituated response (Gollwitzer 1999). This represents an interesting interplay between deliberative and automatic processes, as you are using a deliberate self-regulatory strategy (i.e. implementation intentions) in advance, which works by later prompting "goal-directed behavior efficiently and in the absence of conscious intention" (Fujita, Trope, Cunningham, and Liberman 2014: 56). Interestingly, this kind of automaticity develops even without repetition, in contrast to how automaticity is usually the result of repeated performance.[17]

38.3 Skill acquisition, deliberate practice, and automaticity

Skill acquisition is basically a sophisticated form of self-regulation, and skills enable us to achieve a desired goal in a domain of high complexity.[18] It is important to note that a skill involves some flexibility in how one goes about achieving that outcome (to cope with changes in one's environment – which is part of what makes the domain complex), as well as a broad view of the outcome (such as in learning how to speak a language, rather than a single phrase). In committing yourself to acquiring a skill, you begin internalizing standards about what counts as a good performance, which will guide your efforts to learn the skill. Skill acquisition involves a progression from tackling simple tasks to more challenging tasks, no matter what level of skill you are aiming at, and as one advances in skill development which tasks count as 'simple' or 'challenging' will change. Learning how to be a competent and safe driver on the road can be one's superordinate goal, and reaching that goal requires successfully achieving many subgoals along the way (e.g. learning how to start the car, how to change gears, how to back out of a driveway, how to parallel park, etc.). Each of those subgoals requires planning how to achieve them (e.g. 'if I reach 20 mph, then I switch to third gear'), and there is a progression of difficulty in the subgoals that requires successful completion of the previous subgoal.

This progressive mastering of subgoals requires 'practice, practice, practice'. However, neither mere experience, nor rote repetition, is sufficient for improvement. People reach a certain level of acceptable performance, after which further experience does not lead to any improvement in performance. Additional experience may make performing at that level of skillfulness easier, but that is not the same as actually improving one's performance.

What more is needed? Research indicates that a particular kind of experience is necessary for improvement, as it turns out that the quality of the practice matters just as much as the quantity. Improving your level of skill requires not the mere repetition of things you already know how to do, but continually striving to do things that you currently cannot do. This kind of experience is referred to as 'deliberate practice'. Deliberate practice requires having specific goals in mind for improvement, rather than the vaguer goal of 'getting better', as is true with self-regulation in general. There need to be specific aspects of your performance that you go about planning how to improve, which then structures the kind of deliberate practice you engage in (Horn and Masunaga 2006: 601). As you engage in deliberate practice you seek out feedback about your performance, in the hopes of identifying and correcting errors. You keep monitoring your progress as you practice. If you do not seem to be progressing, you may need to redesign your practice sessions. If instead you keep up a steady progression, then at some point you achieve your current goal. At that point it is time to set out to strive to accomplish the next more difficult goal (i.e. you advance to planning how to achieve the next higher-ordered subgoal on the vertical hierarchy). This is how you improve upon your current level of performance.[19]

Not only does practice allow you to improve your level of skill, it can also function as a form of planning for actual performances if the practice session attempts to simulate actual conditions under which someone will perform. For example, pilots can use simulators to engage in deliberate practice with regard to emergencies, and Ericsson reports on findings that show that "if prior to the emergency event the expert pilots had practiced the same emergency situation in the simulator, they were reliably more successful in dealing with the actual event" (Ericsson 2006: 693). However, since skill acquisition is needed to deal with complex domains of action, where one has to be able to respond dynamically to the current situation, plans formed in the planning phase will either be vague in detail or will specify a default approach to take – both of which one has to be prepared to modify while acting.[20] So, for example, a firefighter might go into a fire with a certain plan of how to keep it under control, but if the wind unexpectedly shifts, it will likely require a change in plans. Thus, to remain in control, one must be able to develop some flexible hierarchical structures to guide action in a dynamic context.[21]

In order to make progress in learning a skill, the currently effortful tasks need to become relatively effortless, in order to free up your attention to handle more complicated tasks. As Daniel Kahneman explains, you have

> a limited budget of attention that you can allocate to activities, and if you try to go beyond your budget, you will fail. It is the mark of effortful activities that they interfere with each other, which is why it is difficult or impossible to conduct several at once.
>
> *Kahneman 2011: 23*

With practice, tasks can be accomplished more effectively and more efficiently. This allows a person to devote less attention to the tasks at hand without any reduction in performance, and to shift that attention to other matters. This phenomenon is referred to as automaticity, and it is what allows one, through practice, to make progress on tackling ever more difficult tasks (Feltovich, Prietula, and Ericsson 2006: 53).

Novices learning a skill will have to pay a lot of attention to what they are doing, and attention is a scarce resource. Due to limitations in our short-term or working memory, we can only focus our attention on a limited number of activities at one time. For example, you are not going to be able to pay full attention to changing lanes in heavy traffic if you still have to

pay a lot of attention to changing gears. You need that changing of gears to happen with little attention or effort, so that you can focus your effort on a more demanding task. As performance becomes more automatic in its implementation, cognitive resources are freed up, either for engaging in multi-tasking, like carrying on a conversation (deliberate) while driving (automatic).[22] But importantly for skill acquisition, one's attention is now freed up for more control over the performance, such as being able to pay closer attention to traffic patterns or road conditions while driving.[23]

Automaticity reflects the fact that the processes by which one engages in self-regulation can be broadly characterized by dual-processes theories of cognition. The first is cognition that is automatic, intuitive, fast, and effortless; while the second is cognition that is deliberate, analytic, slow, and effortful. Daniel Kahneman distinguishes the two processes as System 1 (automatic) and System 2 (deliberate).[24] However, while much of the dual-process literature makes it sound as if you are guided by either one process or the other, a more nuanced view sees the two systems as working together, as will be shown with skill acquisition.[25]

Deliberate practice clearly involves a transition from deliberate to automatic processing, as Ericsson notes that "[c]onsistent with the mental demands of problem solving and other types of complex learning, deliberate practice requires concentration that can be maintained only for limited periods of time" (Ericsson 2006: 699), and furthermore,

> the requirement for *concentration* sets deliberate practice apart from both mindless, routine performance and playful engagement, as the latter two types of activities would, if anything, merely strengthen the current mediating cognitive mechanisms, rather than modify them to allow increases in the level of performance.
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> *Ericsson 2006: 692*

Chess players, for example, when engaging in deliberate practice will spend time studying opening moves and playing through past games played by grandmasters (to see if the move they made turns out to be the same move made by the expert player). This kind of study takes focused concentration, as you are trying to figure out the mistakes you are prone to make, and how to correct them.

This is why, as I mentioned earlier, the findings of the social psychology experiments are helpful to improving our existing levels of moral skillfulness, as they reveal the mistakes we are prone to making, and thus can serve as the target of deliberate practice (when conceiving of virtues as skills). That is, if virtues are skills, skills are improved through deliberate practice, and deliberate practice requires focusing on specific mistakes to correct; then the situationist experiments provide us with feedback on the mistakes we are prone to make. They are helpful in providing us some structure for deliberate practice, so that we can improve our moral skillfulness (i.e. virtues). So, the next step is then figuring out what kind of strategies we can implement to correct for these mistakes.

38.4 Framing effects, stereotypes, and the bystander effect

One seemingly irrelevant factor that has a significant impact on our moral decision making is the way a moral issue is framed. For example, Tversky and Kahneman (1981) tested subject's responses to a public health crisis, specifically a disease that threatened to kill 600 people. They presented the subjects with two treatment options, where both treatment options had the same predicted outcome in terms of how many people would survive, but one was framed in terms of a 100% chance of saving 200 lives and the other in terms of a 33% chance of

saving 600 lives (and 66% chance of saving none). Subjects overwhelmingly preferred the first treatment, even though the treatments had the same predicted outcome. However, the really surprising result was that if the same two treatment options were framed instead in terms of chances that people will die (i.e. 400 lives lost), they overwhelmingly preferred the second treatment. It seems as though we react differently to issues when framed in terms of gain (positive) or loss (negative), such that we want to secure a definite gain but we try to avoid a definite loss.

The literature on implementation intentions, as a way to self-regulate, offers a way to resist some framing effects. Trötschel and Gollwitzer studied the effects of using implementation intentions on achieving prosocial goals (such as fairness and cooperation) in negotiations, specifically in respect to loss framing. The framing effect in this context is that the outcomes of negotiations depend on whether they are framed in terms of gains or losses. People appear to be more motivated to avoid a loss than to seek a gain, and so if the outcomes are framed in terms of losses then people are less likely to make concessions in negotiations, such that "loss frames lead to comparatively unfair outcomes and hinder the finding of integrative solutions" (Trötschel and Gollwitzer 2007: 580). In other words, while framing in terms of gains leads to fairer outcomes, those who adopt a loss frame typically come out ahead of the other person. This, of course, just provides incentives to go in with a loss frame to start.

However, they found that this effect could be mitigated if people supplied their goals (e.g. be fair) with implementation intentions specifying how they would be fair. In the experiment, "participants were randomly assigned to play the role of one or the other representative of two neighboring countries (blue nation vs. orange nation) disputing over an island, said to be close to the main land of both countries" and one group had neither goal nor implementation intentions, a second group had the goal to be fair but not implementation intention, and the third group had both the goal and were supplied with the implementation intention "if I receive a proposal on how to share the island, then I will make a fair counterproposal!" (Trötschel and Gollwitzer 2007: 583). The first group experienced the typical framing effect, the second group partially mitigated the effects of the framing, and the third group managed to fully mitigate the loss frame effects. Importantly, the results of these experiments have implications beyond just the context of negotiations, for

> negotiations are cognitively very demanding tasks in which a large amount of information has to be processed on-line and the course of events is hard to predict. Thus, negotiations can be understood as the prototype of a complex situation in which the pursuit of desired goals can easily become derailed.
>
> *Trötschel and Gollwitzer 2007: 582*

Given how easily the pursuit of moral goals can become derailed, as the social psychology literature highlights, the effects of implementation intentions will likely be of use in resisting some situational influences.

Implementation intentions are not the only way to resist the effects of some situational influences. Deliberate practice programs and skilled training can be used, for example, to resist stereotypes and problematic situational influences. Plant et al. (2005) studied how to counteract automatic racial bias in a situation that mirrored police encounters with potential criminals. The subjects were shown a picture of a face of someone with either black or white skin, and an object that was either a gun or something with a similar shape to the gun – a camera, cellphone, or wallet. Subjects had to make an instant reaction as to either shoot or not shoot the suspect, based on these two factors. Initial reactions by subjects showed a racial bias – they were

more likely to mistake a gun for something harmless when the picture was of a white person, and more likely to mistake something harmless for a gun when the picture was of a black person. Sadly, this is what we see in the many recent real-life examples of police shooting black males who were actually unarmed.

Plant et al. were able to eliminate the bias in this task after participants went through a program designed to make race a non-diagnostic factor in determining criminal behavior. Their approach emphasized training the subjects that race was not relevant to determining the presence of a weapon, via practice with a program where statistically the faces were equally likely to be black or white, and each face was equally likely to be paired with a gun or a harmless object. After extensive practice with the program, the initial bias of the subjects was eliminated on the task when tested both immediately after the practice, and 24 hours later. A similar result was obtained in experiments performed by Kawakami et al. (2000). They had participants practice saying 'No' when presented with stereotypic representations of social categories (e.g. elderly are afraid), and 'Yes' when presented with counter-stereotypic representations. After training, participants demonstrated significantly reduced levels of stereotype activation, both immediately after the training, and 24 hours later as well.

Two aspects of Plant et al.'s results are worth pointing out. First, it might be supposed that the automatic bias was counteracted by a conscious and deliberate response. However, they found that "training directly influenced the degree of automatic racial bias as opposed to resulting in some degree of controlled, conscious compensation for the bias" (Plant, Peruche, and Butz 2005: 153). So the deliberate practice is leading to changes in later automatic responses. Second, this result could have occurred either because the program changed the positive or negative associations someone had with those racial categories, or because people were not thinking in terms of racial categories at all. They found that it was the latter, since "race was non-diagnostic and paying attention to race only impaired performance on the shoot/don't shoot task, extensive exposure to the program encouraged the inhibition of the participants' racial categories" (Plant, Peruche, and Butz 2005: 152). So this gives hope to overcoming some of our automatic biases with deliberate practice.

Another situational influence to impact helping behavior is the presence of an unresponsive bystander, but deliberate practice can also mitigate this influence. Latané and Darley (1970) did a series of experiments that showed that when people are alone and witness an emergency (like someone having a seizure), they show high rates of responding to the emergency. But all it takes is the presence of one unresponsive bystander in the situation, and helping rates decrease dramatically. There are, however, some examples of being able to mitigate the bystander effect with deliberate practice. Cramer et al. (1988) found that registered nurses were not subject to the bystander effect when it came to an emergency situation in which they were skilled in responding. The experiment involved a group of registered nurses who were part of a nursing program, and a group of students who were part of a general education program. Half of each group were working alone in a room when they heard a person fall off a ladder in an adjoining room, and the other half were working with a partner in the room when the same event occurred. When each subject was initially led to their room they passed by a person working on a ladder, but the sound of that person falling off the ladder was produced by a prerecorded tape.

Cramer et al. found that when alone, both groups of students responded to the emergency with the same frequency (about 75%). When with a bystander, the general education students rate of helping dropped by half, thus showing the bystander effect. However, the registered nurses helped just as often when with a bystander as when alone. Cramer et al. attributed the difference to the greater competency of the nurses:

> As expected, high-competent subjects reported that when the emergency occurred they felt more confident about their ability to help the workman, and more sure about what steps to take to help than their low-competent counterparts. Even among the subjects who helped, high-competent subjects compared to low-competent ones reported feeling more confident about their abilities, and about what steps to take to help. Thus, minimization of the bystander effect appears to have been mediated, in part, by the nurses' skill at emergency responding.
>
> *Cramer, McMaster, Bartell, and Dragna 1988: 1142*

So, some practice with helping in an emergency situation has an influence on self-efficacy beliefs and minimizing the bystander effect.[26] It seems we underestimate just how uncertain people are about how to respond to emergency situations without some skilled training.

Further support for the importance of self-efficacy beliefs and the bystander effect can be found in studies on bullying. Bullying is a pervasive problem in schools, and such behavior frequently occurs with bystanders who do not intervene to help. Thornberg and Jungert (2013) studied the bystander effect in bullying situations, and found that a significant factor that was positively associated with those who intervened to help was self-efficacy beliefs. That is, those adolescents who had strong beliefs about their ability to successfully intervene were more motivated to actually help. Those who lacked such beliefs did not see intervention as a feasible goal, even if they knew it was the right thing to do, and so did not strive to intervene. I suspect attempts at moral training stop too often at having mere goal intentions or appropriate attitudes and miss the kind of training that would be needed to actually realize such intentions. It would be a great benefit for adolescents to get this kind of training in school, to curb the pervasive harm of bullying, and likely there are other kinds of moral training we should be receiving long before we reach adulthood.

Some work has been done on putting moral courage training programs into effect, to mitigate against the bystander effect. Brandstätter and Jonas (2012) have been involved with training programs aimed at increasing people's abilities to intervene in situations of intolerance, discrimination, and violence within their community. The problem is that while people typically express attitudes that they and others should intervene to stop displays of intolerance and discrimination, it rarely translates into actual behavior. Brandstätter and Jonas describe the work being done by a couple of moral courage training programs taking place in Germany and Switzerland (Brandstätter 2007). The programs "aim to strengthen an individual's assertiveness and self-efficacy, on the one hand, while preparing the ground for establishing behavioral routines, on the other hand, as core competencies for bystander intervention" (Brandstätter and Jonas 2012: 273).

The programs use the work of Latané and Darley to help identify the different psychological mechanisms that can impede intervention, in order to formulate a training program to help counter those mechanisms. The training has three main components. The first is to increase the knowledge base of the participants, including both potential problems brought out in the work of Latané and Darley on bystander intervention, as well as general strategies for self-regulation as discussed by Gollwitzer (1999). Of special note is that:

> participants learn about what to do and what to refrain from doing in diverse situations of neighborhood violence (e.g., put the victim at the center of your intervention; never touch the perpetrator; never intervene directly in a fist fight; make an emergency call). Notably, participants are informed about the emergency services in their community, which is an important issue in combating neighborhood violence,

> since bystanders often remain passive simply because they lack the knowledge of how to activate the emergency system.
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> *Brandstätter and Jonas 2012: 277*

What is important about this is that it reinforces the point above that lack of knowledge, and connected to that low self-efficacy beliefs, about how to handle emergency situations is a significant part of the problem. I imagine that some of the tips they give about what to do or not do in a situation of violence are likely to be new to you, the reader, as well. After all, without proper training, how could you be expected to know these things?

The second component is the use of role-playing and mental simulations to simulate situations of harassment and violence, so people can try out different ways to respond to such situations. Of interest here is that "participants practice useful de-escalating behavioral strategies in different role-playing situations (e.g., inviting the insulted victim to leave the situation; speaking up in a non-aggressive way; seeking collaborators; confusing the perpetrator by doing something unexpected)" (Brandstätter and Jonas 2012: 277). Again, I think it helpful to highlight the kind of tactics that may never occur to someone outside of training, and even if they do it is probably difficult to find ways to practice them on your own. Role-playing the tactics gives a chance to practice them and get feedback on what might be the most effective response, and how best to carry it out. The third component is for the participants to form some specific goal and implementation intentions that are relevant to their personal situations, in the manner documented by Gollwitzer (1999).

This is a great example of deliberate practice aimed at overcoming a specific moral weakness. There is also some evidence of their effectiveness, though of course it is harder to gauge as we cannot simply place the participants in dangerous situations to see what happens. But participants in the training had much stronger self-efficacy beliefs about their abilities to intervene even months after the program. Memory tests also showed that they had a high retention of the information provided in the training, which Brandstätter and Jonas note "is important in that the greater mental presence of the concept of moral courage is an important prerequisite for strengthening the corresponding behavior" (2012: 278). The training has helped make the concept of moral courage more accessible, thus it should make the participants more likely to see situations through this perspective.

After seeing such a program laid out, it seems unwarranted to expect untrained people to reliably act well in such situations. In which case, it is no surprise that people are generally not intervening when they should, as they do not have the skills and corresponding self-efficacy beliefs they would need to reliably respond well. In support of this, in their studies of bystander effects and moral courage, Osswald et al. reported that "in moral courage situations people feel less competent to intervene compared to other prosocial incidents" (Osswald, Frey, and Streicher 2011: 400). Moral training really does need to go beyond having mere goal intentions or appropriate attitudes. Osswald et al. have offered training courses based on Brandstätter's work, to impart more practical knowledge of how to successfully intervene. They found that "participants feel more responsible to show moral courage and they indicate to have more specific self-efficacy concerning how to intervene well – always compared to a control group and not only directly after the training but also 6 weeks later" (Osswald, Frey, and Streicher 2011: 402). This is a promising result, but they also note that more research would need to be done to determine the longer-term effects of the training.

Overall, the moral courage training programs offer hope for mitigating the bystander influence, and a path toward increasing our skillfulness in courage. Granted, it is still at a speculative stage, as we cannot directly test the effects of such programs by intentionally putting people

in dangerous situations and seeing how they respond. But there are some other reasons to be hopeful. First, the training program is using methods that have proved efficacious elsewhere (i.e. implementation intentions – Gollwitzer (1999); deliberate practice for emergencies – Ericsson (2006)). Second, out of the outcomes that could be documented from the programs, there is an increase in practical knowledge and self-efficacy beliefs. Since we know that greater self-efficacy beliefs are positively associated with greater intervention (Cramer et al. 1988; Thornberg and Jungert 2013), then that provides additional reasons to think that the training will actually pay off in some situations. Finally, a larger lesson to draw is that this is a helpful illustration of how social psychology experiments can make us aware of obstacles to moral behavior (e.g. the bystander effect), as well as providing us some information useful to strategizing how to overcome such obstacles (e.g. affected by self-efficacy beliefs), such that we can design deliberate practice routines aimed at improving our moral skillfulness.

38.5 Situationism and the rarity of virtue

There are ways to mitigate the effects of situational influences through self-regulatory strategies, deliberate practice, and skilled training. I take these examples to point to a reason why we might expect virtue to be rare, at least currently. Insofar as people think of moral education in terms of merely internalizing moral standards, the research on implementation intentions shows that much more work needs to be done to effectively implement those standards. It requires you to consider the potential obstacles in your way, and to develop plans ahead of time for how to respond. Specific kinds of deliberate practice may then be required to effectively implement one's goals. To the extent that people do not tend to think of moral development in terms of the self-regulation strategies and deliberate practice that goes into skill acquisition, people presumably have not been doing the kinds of activities that they would need to engage in to significantly develop virtue. That is, because it has not been well-known what steps are required to overcome the more troublesome obstacles to appropriate moral behavior, people have not usually been taking those steps. So, is it really any surprise if we frequently test low for moral competency?

If full virtue is not widespread, then the situationist critique loses much of its power, given that in these experiments some smaller percentage of people manage to still act well, and so the experiments do not necessarily undermine the possibility of acquiring high degrees of virtue. However, there may be a cost to going this route. Mark Alfano argues that the idea that virtue possession is fairly widespread is deeply ingrained in our traditional conceptions of virtue. As he points out, "[i]f virtues are what humans need, but the vast majority of people don't have them, one would have thought that our species would have died out long ago" (Alfano 2015: 134). I think the skill model of virtue can accommodate this thought, if we distinguish between different levels of skill acquisition. I think without some basic competency with respect to many of the virtues, it would be hard for humans as a social species to survive. So we might have some minimal levels of virtue, but that's also consistent with us having a lot of room for improvement. To use a skill analogy, people need to display some basic competencies with driving a car in order to get a driver's license, to ensure that those on the road are not a constant hazard to themselves and others. You do not need to exhibit expertise, though, to get a license, as it certainly does not take 10,000 hours of training to get a handle on the basics of driving.

But that basic competency is compatible with finding people driving poorly in a variety of situations (such as in the snow, or while texting). It is also the case that those who have put in a lot more training in driving will have a higher level of skill than the minimum we

require to get a license. With skill acquisition, improvement in skill can be a matter of being more reliable in familiar situations (e.g. driving with greater safety), extending your current level of performance in a more difficult situation (e.g. driving as safely in wintry conditions as dry conditions), or tackling a more complex task (e.g. driving while also navigating to a new location). So we can view virtue possession as a matter of degree in the same way – there are some basic levels that you need to attain so that you are not a constant danger to yourself and others, while also recognizing that there are higher levels of performance above our minimum expectations of people. While we might need basic moral competency to survive, higher levels of moral skill development can enable us to live well, and this is consistent with virtue theorists who conceive of virtues as constitutive of living well (and not merely surviving).[27]

In this respect, I think the skill approach gives a different twist to the situationist critique. Instead of viewing situational influences as barriers to moral development and acquiring virtue, the skill model of virtue can view the overcoming of these influences as opportunities for further developing virtue. That is, improvements in skill come about through awareness of our errors and limitations, along with deliberate practice and strategies targeted at correcting those errors and expanding our abilities. Without that process, one remains at a fixed level of skill development. In that sense, the situationist literature is helpful in bringing out shortcomings we were not fully aware we had, so that we can begin the process of strategizing how to overcome those shortcomings, and increase our level of moral skillfulness. While we should expect that we have acquired lower degrees of virtue than we might have initially suspected, it also means that the situation can be remedied (at least to some extent) once people learn what steps they need to take to further their moral development. A better account of moral development should thus lead to improvements in moral education and development, and there is much work to be done in identifying our most important weaknesses and devising training to improve our current levels of moral and intellectual skills.

Notes

1 My thanks to Ellen Fridland and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong for very helpful advice in revising this chapter.

2 See for example: Annas, 2011; Sosa 2007; Stichter, 2017.

3 This essay draws from chapters in my book: *The Skillfulness of Virtue: Improving our Moral and Epistemic Lives*, Cambridge University Press (2018), reprinted with permission of Cambridge University Press © Cambridge University Press.

4 Self-regulation is thus much broader in scope than what is more narrowly thought of as 'self-control', which is merely one aspect of self-regulation.

5 Given limited space, I will confine my discussion to implications for moral skills, though there are also implications for epistemic skills.

6 I will not go into detail on the situationist critique itself, as there is already a voluminous literature on it. However, I will discuss some of the findings of the experiments themselves later in this chapter. For the situationist critique, see Doris (2002), Alfano (2013), and Miller (2013).

7 Space permits only a brief overview of some aspects of the empirical literature on self-regulation and skill here, so I will highlight those aspects most relevant for responding to the findings of the social psychology experiments. Also, since there is research in psychology showing how to resist some situational influences with self-regulation strategies, I provide a framework for self-regulation from the perspective of psychology, rather than, say, from a philosophical perspective on action (though there is sure to be a lot of overlap between the two).

8 Some goals need not necessarily be adopted with a conscious goal commitment, such as goals related to satisfying basic needs like hunger.

9 This does not mean, however, that such anticipation is necessarily conscious to the agent.

10 How much a goal is valued may depend in part on whether the goal is intrinsically or instrumentally valued, or how closely a goal is tied to one's identity, but these need not always go together. My thanks to Walter Sinnott-Armstrong for pushing this point.
11 Connected to self-efficacy are people's beliefs regarding whether the abilities needed to reach the goal are ones that are relatively fixed, or malleable through improvement, as setbacks tend to undermine motivation to improve in the former. Of note is that skills (and thus virtue) when viewed in terms of deliberate practice as I describe in detail later, represent a malleable view of abilities (see Dweck and Leggett, 1988).
12 In fact, this is how many virtue theorists view the relationship between virtues and living well. Virtues are not merely means to the end of living well, but rather the virtues are constitutive of what it means to live well.
13 Also, given that we set for ourselves many different types of superordinate goals, there inevitably arise situations in which our different goal commitments conflict (e.g. I want to study, and I want to party). How we resolve these dilemmas is another aspect of self-regulation, but one I don't have space to cover here.
14 See Achtziger and Gollwitzer, 2007. Though, as Heckhausen (2007: 168) points out, while it is common and usually efficient to move sequentially through these phases, "individual agents can be expected to perform these switches from goal choice to goal engagement and from goal engagement to disengagement and evaluation imperfectly."
15 I will go into further detail on strategies for improved planning (i.e. implementation intentions) later on in the chapter. I don't have space to address issues that come up when acting, such as the need for self-control (i.e. virtues of willpower) to prevent acting in a way that undermines one's goal commitments.
16 For evidence that implementation intentions are still effective even under dual-task interference tasks, see Brandstätter, Lengfelder, and Gollwitzer (2001).
17 As Fujita et al. (2014, p. 55) point out:

> What is remarkable about implementation intentions, however, is unlike habits and acquired skills, they do not appear to require repeated practice to automate. Indeed, simply repeating an implementation intention several times ("If I see the number 5 on the computer screen, then I will type in my response particularly fast!") is sufficient in prompting cognitively efficient goal-directed behavior when the context specified by the plan is later encountered.

18 That is, not all acquired abilities are necessarily skills. Some tasks are so simple, such as tying one's shoelaces or opening doors, that once you have done it a few times there is nothing else to learn. The need to acquire sophisticated competencies such as skills arises when dealing with complex issues, since the skills enable one to handle the complexity by progressively developing one's abilities (via deliberate practice). So I agree with Ellen Fridland (2014a) when she claims that skills "are characterized by the fact that they are refined or developed as a result of effortful attention and control to the skill itself."
19 This helps to explain why Ellen Fridland (2014b: 2740) takes "attention-governed, practice-related improvement as a criterion of skill".
20 This likely has overlaps with philosophical accounts of intention and planning, like those put forth by Michael Bratman. Space, however, does not permit me to going into detail on the connections. My thanks to Ellen Fridland for drawing my attention to this.
21 Note that changing plans in such a situation is not a matter of changing goal commitments – which, for example, remains stopping the fire – but rather to the 'when, where, and how' details of goal striving.
22 Furthermore, you are unlikely to be able to recount all the driving conditions you experienced afterwards, since you were not paying explicit attention to them. Dual-process also explains how we can be paying conscious attention to one matter while simultaneously engaged in another activity.
23 By this, though, I don't mean to deny Ellen Fridland's (2017) argument that attention can be deployed automatically as well.
24 Kahneman, 2011. For concerns regarding dual-process theory, see Keren and Schul (2009). For a defense of dual-process theories, see Evans and Stanovich (2013).
25 See Christensen et al. (2016).
26 Furthermore, as detailed in the following paragraphs, one does not need as much training as a nurse to mitigate the bystander effect. While some situations may call for specialized training, other forms of helping, like giving basic first aid or being able to deescalate a situation, will apply across a variety of

situations. It is even helpful just for people to know better how to effectively contact someone who can help in situations, rather than doing nothing at all (as happens with the bystander effect).

27 Virtue in this regard is necessary, but not sufficient, for living well. Economic, political, and other social factors matter significantly in this regard.

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