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Malleable Character: Organizational Behavior Meets Virtue Ethics and Situationism

Abstract

This paper introduces a body of research on Organizational Behavior and Industrial/Organizational Psychology (OB/IO) that expands the range of empirical evidence relevant to the ongoing character-situation debate. This body of research, mostly neglected by moral philosophers, provides important insights to move the debate forward. First, the OB/IO scholarship provides empirical evidence to show that social environments like organizations have significant power to shape the character traits of their members. This scholarship also describes some of the mechanisms through which this process of reshaping character takes place. Second, the character-situation debate has narrowly focused on situational influences that affect behavior episodically and haphazardly. The OB/IO research, however, highlights the importance of distinguishing such situational influences from influences that, like organizational influences, shape our character traits because they are continuous and coordinated. Third, the OB/IO literature suggests that most individuals display character traits that, while local to the organization, can be consistent across situations. This puts pressure on the accounts of character proposed by traditional virtue ethics and situationism and provides empirical support to interactionist models based on cognitive-affective processing system theories of personality (CAPS). Finally, the OB/IO literature raises important challenges to the possibility of achieving virtue, provides valuable and untapped resources to cultivate character, and suggests new avenues of normative and empirical research.

Keywords: Virtue Theory, Character, Situationism, Interactionism, Moral Psychology, Organizational Behavior, Industrial/Organizational Psychology

He who walks with wolves learns to howl. He who walks into honey becomes sticky.
—Popular Iberoamerican Proverb

1. Introduction

Recent decades have witnessed a lively debate in the social sciences and in philosophy concerning the importance that internal traits and external situations play in moral behavior. On one end of the spectrum are character-based approaches according to which a person's behavior is explained mainly by character traits that are consistent and stable across situations. A series of empirical results, mostly in social psychology, suggested that minor and normatively irrelevant situational factors often predicted better a person's behavior than the person's alleged character traits (Darley and Batson 1973; Mischel 1968; Ross and Nisbett 1991). These results led various philosophers to challenge character-based approaches (Doris 2002; Harman 1999, 2009). The polarization between character-based and situationist approaches has gradually given way to interactionism*,* an intermediate position that grants the variance in human moral behavior cannot be explained solely by character traits nor solely by situational variables but instead by the interactions among them. Interactionist views have been increasingly adopted by philosophers influenced by social science research, including those committed to virtue ethics (e.g., Russell, 2009; Snow, 2010; West, 2018), those who are critical of this tradition (e.g., Merritt, Doris, and Harman 2010; Doris, Stich, Phillips & Walmsley 2020); and those who position themselves somewhere in between (Alfano, 2014; Miller, 2013).

Most environmental influences discussed in the literature come from studies of situations that show up in people's ordinary lives episodically and haphazardly.[1] In this paper we will argue that not all environmental influences are of this type. An established body of empirical research on Organizational Behavior and Industrial/Organizational Psychology ("OB/IO" henceforth) –mostly ignored by moral philosophers– expands the kinds of environmental influences that have been typically discussed in the debate. The OB/IO scholarship suggests that an organization's environment affects members in continuous and coordinated ways that don't just affect their episodic behavior but also shape their character traits.[2]

Consider Dennis Gioia. He was the recall coordinator during the infamous Ford Pinto scandal.[3] This case garnered much public attention when several young people were killed or seriously injured after being rear-ended by a car driving at less than 30 miles per hour (Dowie, 1977). Ensuing litigations against Ford marked the first time a corporation faced criminal charges for a defective product.

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[1]Because most of these results come from studies conducted in Western industrial societies, our conclusions will be limited to these societies.

[2] Following Miller (2013, 2014), we conceptualize "character" as the sum total of character traits and their interactions, where character traits are taken to be a type of personality trait for which agents can be normatively evaluated (Miller 2013, pp. 13, 22, 2014, pp. 11, 15). Character, in this sense, is associated with ways of being that manifest in patterns of perceiving, feeling, judging, and acting (cf., Cohen et al. 2014). We will circumscribe our investigation to moral character, or the patterns that make people the kind of moral agents that they are.

[3] For more information about the case see: Danley 2005; Dowie 1977; Gioia 1992; Gladwell 2015; Schwartz 1991; Treviño and Nelson 2014 p. 63-7, 96-104.

Even though Gioia now believes that he should have led an effort to recall the car, this was not what he did while working at Ford (Gioia 1992). A character-oriented approach may be tempted to explain Gioia's behavior by positing a vicious character, portraying him as a "corporate sell-out" ruthlessly prioritizing profit over safety. This explanation, however, would be off the mark. As an MBA student, Gioia wore his hair long, railed "against the conduct of business," "was the voice for social activism," and "got the reputation as the bleeding-heart liberal in the room" (Gioia 1992, p. 379). In fact, he went to work at Ford with the idea that "he would fight them from the inside" (Gladwell 2015). But instead of doing so, he ended up transformed by Ford's culture, making decisions that he now regrets. A situationist style account is also not particularly well positioned to explain Gioia's behavior. As Gioia himself describes it, his decisions about the recall process were influenced not by one-off situational factors, but by pervasive and persistent features of the corporate environment that transformed not just how he episodically behaved *but who he was and how he perceived the world*. As he recounts it, "I went in with a strong value system, with intent and purpose, and got flipped within the space of two years" (Gladwell 2015).

Here is the plan for the paper. In Section 2, we point out that the character-situation debate has focused its attention on situational influences that are episodic and haphazard. In Sections 3 and 4, we introduce a wide range of empirical evidence from the OB/IO literature which highlights the need to distinguish situational influences from organizational influences, the latter of which shape our character traits because they are continuous and often coordinated. In Section 5, we discuss how some of the OB/IO empirical evidence bears on some of the most influential positions defended in the character-situation debate. Section 6 examines some important challenges and opportunities that the OB/IO literature poses for the development and attainment of virtue. Section 7 concludes with a brief discussion of future directions of research that our account opens up both in the normative and empirical domains.

2. Situations as episodic and haphazard

The received view about many of the classic situationist social psychology experiments is that they are "interesting and worrisome," because "powerful dispositions could be neutralized so easily by certain subtle environmental manipulations" (Flanagan 1991, p. 298). Merritt et al. (2010, p. 357) characterize these influences as "minor and insubstantial" as well as "morally arbitrary." For Alfano (2013, p. 44), the core feature is that they are "hugely and secretly influential," in particular that "people are unconsciously susceptible to such seemingly trivial and normatively irrelevant influences as their degree of hurry, receiving cookies, and finding dimes" (p. 37).

Situationist accounts tend to conceive of the environment as a source of disconnected, random, and capricious inputs that powerfully affect our behavior. Most of the situational effects described in studies of bystander effects (e.g., Latane and Darley 1968, 1970), priming (e.g. Bargh 1994, Dijksterhuis, Chartrand, and Aarts 2007), conformity (e.g. Asch, 1951), helping behavior (e.g. Darley and Batson 1973; Isen and Levin 1972; Cann and Blackwelder 1984), obedience (e.g. Milgram 1963,), actor-observer biases (e.g., Jones and Nisbett, 1971), and fundamental attribution tendencies (e.g.,

Ross, Amabile, and Steinmetz, 1977) are supposed to show up in our ordinary lives capriciously and are not expected to influence us beyond the here and now.[4]

We argue below that not all environmental influences are of this sort. The OB/IO literature helps us to see that there are important environmental influences relevant to the debate which have not been explored in the literature and which do not just affect people's momentary behavior, but shape their character traits. Henceforth, we distinguish between "environmental," "situational," and "organizational" influences. We use "environmental influences" as a catch-all term. "Situational influences" are environmental influences that are episodic and haphazard. "Organizational influences" are environmental influences within organizations that are continuous and often coordinated.[5]

3. Organizational influences that are neither episodic nor haphazard

The empirical evidence from OB/IO is an important body of research because, among other reasons, most people spend most of their waking lives interacting in workplaces. Employed Americans, for instance, spend, on average, over 42 hours per week at work (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019). Moreover, and as Solomon (1992, p. 326) suggests, "we find our identities and our meanings only within communities, and for most of us that means at work in a company or an institution" (cf., Snow 2010, 53; Rogers 2020, ch. 7). In addition, there is a vast body of evidence substantiating the claim that, for better or worse, the workplace provides important inputs for the development of one's identity and self-concept (e.g., Ashforth and Mael 1989). Research in OB/IO offers some of the best and most thorough analyses of the social dynamics within these organizations.

Moreover, because this research is often conducted in the environments where people habitually interact, it is less likely to be challenged for its lack of ecological validity than many classic findings in experimental social psychology. And while there is little empirical work testing this directly (but see Hofmann et al. 2014), we suspect that moral issues arise in the workplace at least as often as in the kinds of controlled experimental settings usually cited in the philosophical debates. Lastly, even though most of the lessons learned from this body of research concern business organizations, we think they generalize beyond the context of the workplace to other hierarchical social domains of philosophical significance (such as political, civic, or religious organizations). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the OB/IO research expands the body of empirical work relevant to the character-situation debate in philosophy, calling attention to the important role that organizational influences play in people's behavior and character traits.[6]

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[4] This is not to say that these features characterize each and every experiment relevant to the debate. Our point is that being episodic and haphazard is a central feature of most of the situations that have shaped the debate in philosophy.
[5]The distinction between "situational" and "organizational" influences is not exhaustive; there are many environmental influences that are neither situational nor organizational. For example, our intimate friends and romantic partners provide influences that are neither situational (they are not episodic but continuous) nor organizational (they do not take place within an organization). What is important for our purposes is not a full taxonomy of environmental influences, but a clear distinction between the kinds of influences typically described in situationist accounts and those typically described in the OB/IO literature.
[6]It is worth pointing out one shortcoming in the OB/IO literature, namely, that its studies tend to focus more attention on the ways in which organizations corrupt ethical behavior than on how they foster ethical behavior. Thanks to an anonymous referee for calling our attention to this point.

To demonstrate this, we show that leadership behavior, job incentives, peer behavior, and role design powerfully influence the behavior of organization's members. Because these influences are systematic, pervasive, and often coordinated, they contrast with the episodic and haphazard situational influences that have been so central to the character-situation debate. Then, in section 4 we argue that these organizational influences don't just affect people's episodic behavior; they have significant power to shape their character traits.

3.1 Leadership

Studies assessing ethical behavior in an organization have shown that leaders have a strong influence on the behavior of subordinates (Brown and Treviño 2006; Brown, Treviño, and Harrison 2005; Mayer et al. 2007). Leaders have been shown to influence subordinates in at least two ways. On the one hand, leaders are seen as role models who subordinates emulate. On the other hand, leaders send powerful messages concerning the organizational values and what's important via their communications, the policies they enact, the initiatives they support and spearhead, and the resources they allocate (Schein 2004). It has also been shown that abusive and unjust management influences lower-level employees and increases their unethical behavior (Hannah et al. 2013; Mawritz et al. 2012; Tepper et al. 2007). Conversely, ethical leadership has been shown to trickle down from the top, first affecting supervisors' ethical leadership behavior and then employee behavior (Mayer et al. 2007).[7]

3.2 Compensation, rewards, and punishments

The organization's systems of compensation, rewards, and punishments also have a strong influence on people's ethical behavior. These dimensions were especially salient in the Gioia case we introduced in Section 1. Describing his trajectory at Ford, he writes:

> Predictably enough, I found myself on the fast track at Ford, participating in a 'tournament' type of socialization (Van Maanen, 1978), engaged in a competition for recognition with other MBAs who had recently joined the company. And I quickly became caught up in the game (Gioia 1992, p. 380).

These dynamics have been observed in a variety of studies in the OB/IO literature. For example, Harris and Bromiley (2007) found that unethical behavior, manifested in increased misrepresentation of financial statements, increased when there were incentive compensation goals and when the level of performance achieved relative to aspired goals was inferior.

Ordonez et al. (2009) showed that incentives designed to motivate employees often come with unintended negative consequences, many of which have ethical implications. In particular, they argue that the rise in unethical behavior often results when members narrow their focus on meeting the incentive goals set by the organization.[8] Our limited attentional capacities entail that this focus takes attention away from non-incentivized goals (such as ethical goals) and causes a distortion in

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[7] An important caveat is that the literature we are reviewing tends to focus on the behavior of subordinates. Consequently, our discussion will similarly only focus on cases where agents interact as subordinates in an organization. Future research should explore the extent to which the same dynamics obtain (or don't) for organizations' leaders.

[8] While Latham and Locke (2009) have sharply criticized Ordonez et al.'s study, they nevertheless agree with the point we are making here, namely that "dimensions for which goals are not set do not get the same attention as dimensions for which goals are set" (Latham and Locke 2006, 337).

participants' risk preferences that often motivate them to riskier behavior. This study also showed that falling short of a goal can lead to increased lying about performance, and more generally, to the deterioration of interpersonal relationships and the corrosion of the organization's ethical culture.

Financial incentives tend to increase unethical behavior. Kouchaki et al. (2013) showed that individuals primed to think about money tend to adopt a business decision frame, which in turn leads to an increase in unethical intentions and behavior. Similarly, Tenbrunsel and Messick (1999) and Gneezy and Rustichini (2000) showed that if one adds a (weak) economic sanction to the failure to comply with a certain regulation, individuals will tend to perceive the choice in economic terms, framing the decision as a cost-benefit analysis between the cost of the fine and the potential benefit of non-compliance. When there were no financial sanctions for non-compliance, individuals tended to conceive the failure to comply as an ethical decision.

Despite the conventional wisdom that managers should motivate employees through rewards and not through punishments, research has shown that punishments for ethical violations can improve the ethical behavior of employees (Treviño 1992). "If people expect their misconduct to be detected and punished, they're less likely to engage in it" (Treviño and Nelson 2014, p. 263). Even mild punishments, like criticizing the person's decisions, have the power to influence their ethical behavior. In a multi-round game, "affective responses to feedback from subordinates shaped the generosity of their future behavior" (Oc, Moore, and Bashshur 2015). The authors of this last study found that individuals were less likely to make selfish allocations (take more for themselves) in a later decision if they had received feedback that their prior behavior had been unfair. They also found this positive shift in behavior was mediated by guilt (Moore and Gino 2015, p. 270).

3.3 Peer behavior

Recounting his experience at Ford, Gioia mentions that, early on during his tenure, he would ask himself whether he was an insider or an outsider. But he recalls that, not long after he started working at the company, "[i]t was becoming apparent to me that my perspective was changing" and, "I had long since cut my hair" (Gioia 1992, p. 380). After working at Ford for a bit more than a year he said that he had become "an insider in the industry and the company" (Treviño and Nelson 2014, p. 99). These changes are well documented in the empirical literature. Numerous studies have shown that people's ethical behavior frequently mirrors their peers' behavior. "Norms in the local work group provide powerful behavioral guidance and most people want to fit into the behavior context that surrounds them" (Treviño and Nelson 2017, p. 272).

An early study among marketing practitioners showed that self-reports about their unethical behavior were more strongly correlated with their perceptions of their peers' unethical behavior than with their own personal beliefs (Zey-Ferrell, Weaver, and Ferrell 1979). A later study that examined the degree to which participants cooperated in social dilemmas found that "people would compete more if they see that others have unexpectedly competed in a prior situation and cooperate more when others have unexpectedly cooperated in a previous situation" (Pillutla and Chen 1999, p. 81).

The fact that people adapt their ethical behavior to the behavior of their peers has been further substantiated in a study on the behavior of vehicle emission testing inspectors, which showed that "when inspectors work across different organizations, they adjust the rate at which they pass vehicles to the norms of those with whom they work" (Pierce and Snyder 2008, p. 1891). Gino, Ayal, and Ariely (2009) also showed that the social identity of a cheater in a group often influences

the ethical behavior of the members of the group who share the cheater's social identity. Finally, Kamp and Brooks (1991) showed that employee theft was strongly correlated with coworker attitudes towards theft and with coworker instances of such theft.

3.4 Roles and professional identities

Treviño and Nelson (2014, p. 268) point out that "roles are strong forces for guiding behavior, and workers are assigned roles that can powerfully influence their behavior." Aside from the well-known and now contested evidence from Zimbardo's Prison Experiment, there is empirical research in management and organizational behavior that further substantiates this. Cohn, Fehr, and Marechal (2014) showed that the culture of financial organizations weakens and undermines honesty. They showed that when the identity of participants as bankers was made salient, a substantial number of them acted dishonestly compared to a control group. Making salient the identity of other professionals did not have this effect. It has also been shown that the cheating rates of a group primed by an individual confederate depended on whether the confederate was perceived as having the identity of the in-group or out-group members (Gino, Ayal, and Ariely 2009). On the positive side, it has been found that making the moral identity of the participants salient can improve their likelihood of behaving ethically (Aquino, Freeman, et al. 2009; Bryan, Adams, and Monin 2013).

Not surprisingly, Gioia's own account highlights the important role that professional identities played in his decision:

> "Another way of noting how the organizational context so strongly affects individuals is to recognize that one's personal identity becomes heavily influenced by corporate identity. As a student, my identity centered on being a "good person" (with a certain dose of moral righteousness associated with it). As recall coordinator, my identity shifted to a more corporate definition… Upon putting on the mantle of a profession or a responsible position, identity begins to align with your role. And information processing follows from that identity" (Treviño and Nelson 2014, p. 99).

3.5 What the OB/IO research shows

This brief review suffices to show that there is a vast body of empirical work in OB/IO —much of it neglected in philosophical debates— documenting the variety of pervasive organizational influences on agents' moral behavior. A number of studies on organizational climate confirm that caring, benevolent, and principled organizational climates are positively correlated with ethical behavior, and self-interested and egoistic climates with unethical behavior (Martin and Cullen 2006; Kish-Gephart et al 2010).

One might object at this point that the foregoing is just old situationist wine in new bottles. This objection, however, misses what is distinctive about organizational influences. As we showed in Section 2, most of the influences that have been central to philosophical situationism are episodic and haphazard. But the OB/IO literature shows that there are also a wide range of organizational influences that are decidedly not episodic and haphazard.

For example, recalling Section 3.1, organization's leaders tend to be in the organization for extended periods of time. To the extent that they are consistent in their behaviors, communications, and attitudes, they will provide a continuous and persistent influence over subordinates. The organization's policies, incentives, and promotion processes tend also to guide organization's

members continually, typically for long periods of time. Similarly, those working in an organization tend to hold stable roles and to interact repeatedly with many of the same groups of people. The influence of such roles and groups of people will also tend to be persistent. Finally, the decision procedures, the linguistic conventions used in the organization, as well as some of its rituals, are also fairly consistent. Thus, organizational influences are not episodic or one-off.

Organizational influences are also not haphazard. Policies, incentives, promotion processes, and decision procedures are often purposely designed with specific aims in mind. When they are well designed, they operate in unison and seek to get organization's members to pursue the aims that are valued by the organization. Communications by leaders are carefully curated to ensure that their reception is aligned with the organizational goals. Many of the interactions among peers, as well as the language that organizational members use, are often highly regulated (Gioia, 2012, p. 381), reflecting management's explicit efforts to get members to act in alignment with certain organizational goals.

Thus, the organizational influences we have discussed from the OB/IO literature are neither episodic not haphazard. As such, they are distinct from the situational influences which have featured prominently in the character-situation debates. Even with this new empirical evidence in hand, one might wonder about its relevance to philosophical debates about *character*. After all, many of the studies discussed in this section have more to say about the observable behavior of agents in organizations than about the character traits that underlie such behavior. In the next section we will address this worry and explain why there is good reason to believe that the organizational influences we discussed affect people's traits, not just their behavior.

4. Malleable traits

We contend that as members' tenure in an organization becomes prolonged, the organizational influences not only affect them in piecemeal, one-off ways (in the way traditional philosophical situationism might suggest); over time, such influences fashion settled dispositions to perceive, feel, judge and act. In other words, organizational influences transform members' character.

Section 3 summarized evidence that highlights the power of organizations to shape the *behavior* of its members. This empirical evidence, however, does not show that organizations shape the *character* of its members. To properly establish that organizations shape their character traits would require longitudinal studies measuring how the character traits of organizations' members change as they get socialized into the organization. Unfortunately, there are very few longitudinal studies in the OB/IO literature that assess character traits, and none of them assesses how character traits get transformed by the organization. This is not surprising given that these kinds of studies take a long time, are expensive and difficult to conduct, and may raise various ethical concerns (Miller 2013, 234).

Thus, our claim that organizations have the power to shape the character traits of members of the organization should be understood as a hypothesis, but one that has strong theoretical support. In this section, drawing from both the philosophical and OB/IO literature, we bolster this hypothesis by describing the underlying mechanisms which help to explain how, over time, organizational influences can transform, not just agents' episodic behaviors, but also their very dispositions to perceive, feel, judge, and act. To the extent that moral character is constituted by such dispositions, this would demonstrate that organizational influences shape the character traits of the organizations' members.

4.1 Routine

One of the first steps in the process of shaping members' character traits may involve accepting courses of action that might initially seem at odds with the person's previously held values. This process is facilitated by their routinization. As behaviors are routinized, they become easier to accept and to perform. Routinizing behaviors "blunt awareness that a moral issue…is at stake" (Ashforth and Anand 2003, p. 12). And, if what individuals take to be a moral issue is not recognized, then their moral decision-making process cannot be engaged (Upton 2009, p. 12). In addition, as behaviors become routinized, they will tend to be enacted less mindfully. Individuals performing them may become desensitized about the extent to which these behaviors may conflict with what they take to be their own moral identity. Such mindless repetition may reduce, and eventually annul, any inclination to reflect on the ethical dimension of their behavior, causing "individuals to not even notice what might arouse outrage under other circumstances" (Upton 2009, p. 23).

Treviño and Nelson (2014) appeal to precisely this kind of mechanism to explain the Pinto case. Because Ford's criteria for recall decisions required high frequency and traceable causes of safety issues, the habitual focus on these two criteria caused Gioia to disengage emotionally from some key details of the case and miss the fact that the Pinto's safety concerns were serious.

4.2 Rationalization

The processes of routinization are often facilitated by a series of rationalizations and neutralization techniques. It is well-established that people like to think of themselves as moral (Aquino and Reed 2002). By complying with organizational pressures that members identify as unethical, these members confront a mismatch between their moral commitments and their immoral behaviors. Quite frequently, this is resolved by engaging in self-serving rationalizations and neutralizations that allow members to hold on to their identities as moral individuals without modifying their unethical behaviors (Aquino and Becker 2005; Bandura 1999).

Rationalizations are used to diminish the guilt or overall discomfort an individual may feel towards an action they may have reluctantly performed. More importantly for our purposes, the rationalizations that happen in the aftermath of an individual's unethical behavior will shape how the individual will face similar future situations, making it easier for her to engage in this kind of behavior in the future (Moore and Gino 2015). Even if these rationalizations start as cynical, as they become repeated, they tend to become "an article of faith" (Ashforth and Anand 2003, p. 24). Moreover, when these rationalization and neutralization techniques are accepted, utilized, and reaffirmed by peers and coworkers, they create a "mutual echo" that transforms them "from self-serving fictions to social facts" (Ashforth and Anand 2003, p. 24).

4.3 Frames, narratives, and identities

There is a substantial body of research showing the powerful behavioral effects of how we frame actions, decisions, and situations (Kahneman 2002, 2013). Our cognitive capacities are limited and can only focus our attention on a few features at a time. As Moore and Gino (2015, p. 261) write: "Though we approach most decisions thinking we understand the entire landscape of options, we actually approach decisions as if we are looking through a cardboard tube, seeing only what is visible down the pipe. Aspects of a decision that are peripheral to our primary objectives in a situation are easily neglected, and often not noticed at all."

Framing effects often explain why members of an organization may conform to behavior that may seem contrary to their values. For instance, the way a decision is presented can, on the one hand, make salient features that make it easier for its members to conform and, on the other, conceal features that would make it harder for them to comply with. Euphemisms, for example, often lead agents to act in ways they would otherwise find objectionable (Ashforth and Anand 2003; Bandura 1999). Formulating a bribe as a "commission" makes salient the compensatory nature of the exchange and obscures the corrupting nature of the act. In Gioia's case, he was forbidden to talk about "safety problems" and had to refer to them as "conditions" (Gioia, 1992, p. 381). How an organization conceptualizes certain actions, decisions, and situations can lead its members to focus on certain things and to ignore others. For instance, by framing a decision as a business decision instead of a personal one, or by formulating corporate goals in merely financial terms, members of an organization will tend to make more self-interested choices and to base their decisions on cost-benefit analyses. In focusing on these issues, the ethical dimension of these decisions will often be relegated from view or neglected altogether (Greenbaum et al. 2012; Kouchaki et al. 2013; Pillutla and Chen 1999; Tenbrunsel and Messick 1999).

Job design can also affect how individuals frame their activities. It is documented that stress, hunger, lack of sleep, or tiredness leads individuals to focus on the immediate term, ignoring the ethical implications of what they are doing and overlooking the long-term consequences of their actions (Barnes et al. 2011; Barnes, Gunia, and Wagner 2015; Danzinger et al. 2011; Gailliot et al. 2007; Treviño 1986). As these working conditions become settled, they start to take on a normative force. In certain jobs, where being cognitively exhausted becomes a norm, those who execute the job may take it for granted that their job affords no leisure to think about the ethical implications of what they do. As Moore and Gino (2015, p. 272) argue, "A lengthy tenure in such an organization might, over time, educate our moral intuitions in a dangerous direction" (cf., Treviño et al 2014). Moreover, these frames tend to become self-perpetuating and contagious (Ashforth and Anand 2003).

Again, Gioia's experience illustrates this well. He writes: "It is difficult to convey the overwhelming complexity and pace of the job of keeping track of so many active or potential recall campaigns. (…) I thought of myself as a fireman — a fireman who perfectly fit the description by one of my colleagues: 'In this office everything is a crisis. You only have time to put out the big fires and spit on the little ones.' By those standards, the Pinto problem was distinctly a little one" (Gioia 1992, p. 382).

The organization's roles and professional identities, as well as the narratives associated with them, provide members with a powerful framework through which they understand their place in the organization and how to look at the world within it. When an individual is just starting her tenure in an organization, these frames may not be firmly entrenched. However, as they are used again and again around her, setting standards about how others see the world, and therefore requiring her to use them herself, she will gradually become habituated into them. She will get used to deploying a certain language to describe the situations she typically faces, utilizing certain arguments to justify or defend the decisions and behaviors of members of the organizations, identifying certain goals as salient, and using a specific set of strategies to achieve them. The extensive use of these frames by her peers and coworkers will furnish them with legitimacy. In this way, what may have initially been a questionable perspective open to dispute, a set of norms to which the member reluctantly complies, will gradually become a settled disposition to perceive, feel, judge and act in the specific ways that are sanctioned by the organization. In recalling the scandal, Gioia asked of himself: "What

happened to the original perception that Ford was a socially irresponsible giant that needed a comeuppance? Well, it looks different from the inside… my identity shifted in degrees toward a more corporate identity" (Treviño and Nelson 2014, p. 99).

4.4 The forward- and backward-looking dimensions of actions

In their review on the psychological frameworks that explain unethical behavior within organizations, Moore and Gino (2015) emphasize important forward- and backward-looking dimension of our actions. On the one hand, they highlight the importance of the behavior's "aftermath," namely the psychological ramifications that follow our behavior (where behavior, here, is not limited only to overt actions, but also includes our perception, emotions, and judgments). They emphasize that "we will approach situations that we have encountered previously similarly to how we responded during those previous encounters" (Moore and Gino 2015, 265; cf., Mischel and Shoda 1995). Future behavior, they argue, is determined in important ways by how previous similar behavior has been encoded in our memory. "The positive spin that we put on our actions after they occur [through rationalizations and neutralizations] plays into how our future approaches to new ethical choices are construed" (Moore and Gino 2015, p. 271). An important dimension of this positive spin, often aided by an enabling organizational environment, involves how we characterize (and remember) our past. In particular, they highlight that our efforts to understand our moral selves in a positive light often include episodes of motivated forgetting, where we are unable to recall either the moral rules we have contravened or the unethical behaviors in which we have engaged (Liebrand, Messick, and Wolters 1986; Shu and Gino 2012; Shu, Gino, and Bazerman 2011).

4.5 Some implications and caveats

If the foregoing is on the right track, then we have a plausible account of some of the mechanisms that explain how organizational influences can shape, often over a short time frame, many of our character traits.[9] Indeed, in Gioia's own words, the "socialization processes and the overriding influence of organizational culture provide a strong, if generally subtle, context for defining appropriate ways of seeing and understanding" (Treviño and Nelson 2014, p. 98).

Our argument suggests that some of the character traits displayed by individuals in an organization may be specifically indexed to their activities in such an organization and need not carry over to other aspects of their lives. There is, in fact, empirical research in OB/IO substantiating that "people flexibly adjust their virtue states to salient role demands" (Bleidorn and Denissen 2015, 701; cf., Heller et al. 2007), and that a good predictor of within- and between-person differences in personality is the person's social role context (Bleidorn and Denissen 2015, 703). Not surprisingly, scholars in OB/IO frequently remark that "[a]s adults, we play highly differentiated roles, and we assume that each social context presents different behavioral expectations" (Treviño and Nelson 2014, 252-3; cf., Mischel and Shoda 1995, 258).

[9] Of course, these organizational influences are only able to generate such a transformation if the culture where they operate showcases a certain consistency and stability. In organizations that lack a strong culture, the influences will be much more like situational influences, episodic and haphazard, that have typically figured in the character-situation debate.

The dependence of some of our character traits on the organizations in which we work is also reflected in our ordinary attributions. We sometimes appeal to an organization to evaluate, predict, and explain the moral dispositions of its members, which is to say, their character traits. "Because she works at Facebook," or "Oh, he works at Wells Fargo!" are perfectly sensible explanations for why a person is disposed to perceive, feel, judge, and act in a certain way while fulfilling their corporate roles.

It is worth highlighting that our claim is not that individuals are empty puppets at the total mercy of their organizational environments. The fact that individuals frequently seek "person and organization fit" suggests that they are not blank slates whose behavior is simply imposed by their environment. As Schneider (1987) pointed out, organization's members are recruited through a process of attraction, selection, and attrition processes that tend to interest, recruit, and retain individuals with certain antecedent character traits. If there happens to be a poor fit between the organization's culture and the individual's values, the organization will be less likely to hire this individual and the individual will be less likely to work or stay in this organization (Kristof 1996; Schneider 1987; cf., Miller 2014, 177). Moreover, while organizational influences can develop certain character traits among its members, we suspect that there are important individual differences that modulate how such influences shape each person (cf. Blass 1991). For example, some individuals may have more malleable character traits than others; some may identify more strongly with the organization's values and mission and this may lead them to be more easily shaped by the organization's influences; and some may be more susceptible to the influence of leaders, others to the influence of peers, and others to the power of incentives or punishments.

5. OB/IO meets virtue ethics, situationism, and interactionism

In the previous sections, we have argued that careful consideration of the empirical literature in OB/IO reveals that there are systematic organizational influences on agents which, over time, shape their patterns of perception, feeling, judgment, and action, which is to say, their character traits. We will now proceed to articulate some of the implications of the OB/IO empirical evidence for the character-situation debate. We examine traditional versions of virtue ethics (5.1), situationism (5.2), and interactionist accounts inspired by social-cognitive theories of personality (5.3). We conclude (5.4) by contrasting our account with Merritt (2000).[10]

5.1 Traditional virtue ethics

Virtue ethicists[11] readily acknowledge that character is highly malleable during our formative years. Some virtue ethicists, particularly those influenced by traditional accounts like Aristotle's, believe that, once we reach adulthood, our character becomes much more stable. The OB/IO evidence shows that many character traits of adult individuals are quite malleable by organizational forces, a

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[10]We believe that the implications of the OB/IO dovetail nicely with recent Confucian approaches to the character-situation debate (e.g., Mower 2013; Robertson 2018; Sarkissian 2010; Slingerland 2011). These approaches are attuned to the sustained and systematic nature of some environmental influences and to the ability of such influences to shape the kind of people we are. It is regrettably beyond the scope of the paper to engage with this body of literature.
[11]Because the philosophical literature on virtue ethics and situationism is vast and diverse, it is difficult make assertions that apply to everyone in the literature. Our aim is to identify how the OB/IO literature fits in some of the most widely discussed accounts.

view that puts pressure on accounts that construe our character as stable over time. This lack of stability is made strikingly clear in Gioia's own retrospective account of the Pinto case:

> Before I went to Ford, I would have argued strongly that Ford had an ethical obligation to recall. After I left Ford, I now argue and teach that Ford had an ethical obligation to recall. But, while I was there, I perceived no strong obligation to recall, and I remember no strong ethical overtones to the case whatsoever. It was a very straightforward decision, driven by dominant scripts for the time, place, and context (Gioia, 1992, p. 388).[12]

Second, the OB/IO evidence also puts into question the assumption that character traits are consistent across environments. It suggests that people behave differently in different organizational environments and, consequently, that they will display localized traits of character that are indexed to the organizations in which they are acting (Bleidorn and Denissen 2015; Heller et al. 2007).[13] These properties of our character traits fail to be captured by much of the empirical laboratory evidence, given that such evidence is acquired in settings that fail to replicate the organizational environments where individuals typically interact.[14]

5.2 Situationism

The OB/IO evidence puts pressure on situationism because it suggests that it is legitimate to attribute robust character traits to individuals. Even if these character traits are local to a particular organization, they differ significantly from the extremely fine-grained, narrowly local behavioral dispositions defended by situationists like Doris (2002, 25).

First, character traits shaped by organizations are not merely *behavioral* dispositions. Organizational influences shape patterns of perception, feeling, judgement and action. Because organizational influences lead to the development of dispositions with a rich cognitive and affective complexity, it is wrongheaded to conceptualize them as mere behavioral dispositions.[15]

Second, character traits shaped by organizations are not *fine-grained*. When an organization has a relatively unified culture, its members will display character traits that have much more consistency across situations than what situationists grant. In particular, an organization with a unified culture will foster character traits that further the organization's goals across many dimensions of members' behavior. Thus, even if one may be willing to say that a person has "Wells-Fargo callousness,"

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[12] Cf., Spier 2014, pp. 14-16; Novogratz 2021.

[13] To say this does not entail those organizational influences will never carry over to other areas of a person's life. While the empirical studies substantiate that people behave differently in different organizational environments, these studies do not rule out that some organizational influences may have an impact on the person's character traits outside of the organization. While we don't know of any empirical studies confirming this directly, we would be very surprised if this was not the case, not least because of normative considerations in favor of acting consistently across different situations and environments.

[14] These two features also challenge any account, such as Miller (2013, 2014, 2017), which portrays character traits as stable and consistent.

[15] See Upton (2009, pp. 177, 180-3), Snow (2010, 8), and Miller (2014, 4-8) for a fuller elaboration of this point.

"Patagonia generosity," or "Facebook greed," these dispositions are much more general than fine-grained disposition such as "dime-finding-dropped-paper compassion" or "sailing-in-rough-weather-with-one's-friends-courage" (Doris 2002, 115).

It is worth clarifying that our view leaves unchallenged what we think is an important nugget of truth in situationism. To the extent that the evidence from experimental social psychology is reliable, replicable, and generalizable, members of an organization are still going to be affected by many of the episodic and haphazard situational influences discussed by situationists. For instance, empirical research on organizational behavior suggests that cultivating a speak-up culture in an organization will reduce the Milgram-type effects that organization's authorities have over their subordinates (Treviño and Nelson 2014). Despite this, the ability of members to resist the orders of authority figures will still be modulated by somewhat irrelevant factors such as the particular choice of words to describe the action, the perceived psychological distance between the member and the potential victim, various bystander effects, the person's antecedent moods, etc.

5.3. Interactionist approaches inspired by CAPS

We'd like to turn our attention to philosophers influenced by the cognitive-affective processing system theory of personality best known as CAPS (e.g., Miller 2003; Russell 2009; Snow 2010; West 2018). While there is disagreement among CAPS scholars about the specific nature of trait dispositions, moral philosophers influenced by CAPS (henceforth "CAPS philosophers") have usually followed Snow in understanding personality as constituted by clusters of "cognitive-affective units, such as beliefs, desires, expectations, values, and self-regulatory strategies and plans" (Snow 2010, 9). These cognitive-affective clusters are developed "in social and cultural contexts," "are activated in social settings" (Snow 2010, 19), and become established as dispositions through "the repeated activation of sets of such variables over time" a repetition that "can build relatively stable personality traits" (Snow 2010, 19).

The research we have discussed lines up nicely with the accounts proposed by CAPS philosophers. To begin, they explicitly acknowledge the local nature of our character traits (Russell 2014, 326; Snow 2010, 19–25, 31–8; West 2018, 82, 88–89). It is a conception of local character traits that, unlike the fine-grained situationists' traits, has plenty of room for cross-situational consistency.

These philosophers also recognize that habituation often shapes our character traits beyond our conscious awareness (Russell 2014 102-4, 2015 94, 104; Snow 2010 14, 32-33; 39-62; West 2018, 89). They also seem committed to the view that habituation can happen at any stage of an adult's development. Finally, their commitment to a social-cognitive model of personality would make CAPS philosophers amenable to recognize the power that organizations have to shape the character traits of its members. After all, models like CAPS emphasize that our character traits are developed in "social and cultural settings." If we devote a significant part of our time to interacting in a specific "social and cultural" setting, particularly one that seeks to instill and reproduce certain patterns of perception, judgment, feeling, and behavior, these scholars should grant that our interactions in such

settings are likely to develop clusters of "beliefs, desires, expectations, values and self-regulatory strategies" that, by becoming recurrent, will develop into settled character traits.[16]

While the OB/IO scholarship can be seen as providing further empirical support to philosophical accounts influenced by CAPS, there are also a few ways in which the former can advance the latter.

According to the CAPS model, an individual's personality can be described by various "if… then situation-behavior contingencies" that represent our personality and character traits. The power that organizations have to shape such character traits, however, shows that it is important to also recognize second-order "if… then" dispositions that describe how environmental factors (such as organizations) shape these first-order dispositions (such as character traits).

To illustrate this distinction between first-order and second-order "if-then dispositions" we adapt an example from Snow (2010, pp 20):

> "If, for example, Jill consistently reacts fearfully to teasing from playmates whom she perceives as threatening, and Jack consistently reacts aggressively to teasing from playmates whom he perceives as threatening, Mischel and Shoda [leading proponents of CAPS] contend that these facts about their personalities can be described in terms of "if … then" personality profiles or "behavioral signatures."

These first-order dispositions that Snow discusses are meant to capture the fact that "if" certain environmental factors take place (teasing from playmates whom one perceives as threatening) "then" a certain characteristic behavior is activated (reacting fearfully if you are Jill and aggressively if you are Jack). These "if… then" dispositions are what allows us to attribute "appropriately circumscribed traits of timidity and aggressiveness" (Snow 2010, 21): "if Jill perceives she is being threatened, she will typically be timid," (Snow 2010, 21) and "if Jack perceives he is being threatened, he will typically be aggressive" (Snow 2010, 21).

The OB/IO literature helps us to see that, to properly understand the way in which environmental influences shape behavior, we need to also recognize the existence of second-order "if… then" dispositions. These second-order dispositions capture the fact that if we are exposed to certain continuous environmental influences (such as organizational influences), then certain character traits (the first-order "if... then" dispositions that Snow discusses) become established.

Taking license to adapt Snow's example, and assuming that Jill and Jack are adults working in different organizations, we might say that Jill's first-order timidity or Jack's first-order aggressiveness have been developed through the mechanisms described in Section 3 (e.g., taking cues from those in leadership roles, responding to incentive structures, conformity with peers, etc.). From this perspective, an organization's continuous tendency to disincentivize disagreement among team members corresponds to the "if" component of a second-order disposition that, over time, shapes Jill's first-order disposition to be timid. Similarly, an organization's rewarding of individuals for being competitive and assertive shapes Jack's first-order disposition to be aggressive.

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[16]Russell has explicitly acknowledged claims along these lines. He has granted that "bad company corrupts good character" (Russell 2009, 327) and that "our virtues are surely not independent of the company we keep" or from the "the practices, cultures, and institutions of the groups to which we belong" (Russell 2015, 96).

Attending to the power of organizations to shape first-order dispositions (in particular, character traits) helps CAPS philosophers, and virtue theorists more generally, to recognize the particular challenges to the acquisition of virtue posed by organizations, but also to identify powerful strategies to cultivate virtue. We discuss this in the next section. But before doing so, we conclude this section by contrasting our account with Merritt (2000), a view in the literature that may be thought to come close to ours.

5.4 Merritt: on character's dependence on our social environments

Merritt (2000, p. 374) has argued against conceptions of character which portray virtue as motivationally self-sufficient, i.e., as "independent of factors outside of oneself." She invites us to consider our virtue traits as having a "deep, ongoing dependence upon particular social relationships and settings" (Merritt 2000, p. 365). What explains a person's behavioral consistency, she proposes, is not internal stable character traits but the important social relationships in the person's life. It is these social relationships that sustain a person's virtue: "what we take to be virtuous conduct is in fact elicited by narrowly specific social settings, as opposed to being the manifestation of robust individual character" (Merritt 2000, p. 365). She calls this picture of virtue "the sustaining social contribution to character" (Merrit 2000, p. 374).

There are echoes between her proposal and ours. Like her, we are suggesting that some of our character traits are sustained by important social settings. However, there are important differences. In particular, engaging with her position will allow us to showcase the value of paying close attention to the empirical evidence provided by OB/IO.

First, we disagree with Merritt that "behavioral consistency" is sufficient for attributing character traits, much less virtue. Possessing a character trait requires a complex set of cognitive and affective dispositions that involves not just a consistent disposition to behave in a certain way, but also to perceive, feel, and judge. Merritt does not provide evidence that these more complex set of dispositions are at stake in her alleged "virtuous dispositions," and the situationist literature on which she relies is poorly equipped to support her view. Most of this literature has been used to defend fine-grained, narrowly local dispositions that lack the cognitive and affective complexity required of virtue. Additionally, many of the situationist experiments that illustrate dispositions to behave in conformity with virtue involve motivations that disqualify the action as virtuous. For instance, many of the cases where people help those in need have been shown to be motivated, not by the other person's needs, but by self-interested factors such as the avoidance of personal guilt or embarrassment (for a review of these studies, see Miller 2013, ch 2).

Merritt claims that a person's behavior is shaped by "social relationships and settings that have importance in a person's life" (Merritt 2000, p. 375). However, this thesis cannot be substantiated by her evidence. Most of the experimental evidence on which she relies comes from studies conducted in laboratory settings, with random strangers, and in unfamiliar settings that don't "hold importance in a person's life." Second, many of the influences discussed by situationists have little to do with our *social* environments (regardless of whether these environments are important to our lives or not). For instance, several influential situational experiments seek to show that people's behavior depends on subtle environmental factors on our *physical* environment such as the background smell, noise levels, temperature, or cleanliness of the room.

By contrast, our account of the impact of certain social environments on people's character traits is firmly grounded in the empirical evidence. The OB/IO literature attends, precisely, to social settings that are important in our lives: hierarchical organizations where we work. Our reliance on such evidence provides validity to our conclusions in a way that Merritt's reliance on situationism does not.

Attending closely to the empirical results also makes our conclusions more nuanced (and restrained) than Merritt's. We don't, as Merritt does, make the blanket claim that our behavior is elicited by social relationships in general. The empirical research on which we rely requires us to circumscribe this claim only to formal hierarchical organizations. We suspect that other kinds of social environments influence people's behavior and character in structurally different ways. For instance, even though our domestic partners, friends, children (all examples discussed by Merritt 2000, p. 377), arguably have an effect on our behavior (and character), the interaction between our character and these intimate social relationships may be more iterative and dialectic than in hierarchical organizations, where we spend our time as subordinates (cf., Alfano and Skorburg 2017; Skorburg 2019). Similarly, our conclusions only hold for subordinates in organizations. There is a question of the extent to which the dynamics discussed in this paper obtain (or not) for leaders of hierarchical organizations, members of a non-hierarchical organizations, or individuals who are part of groups that don't amount to a formal organization.

6. Virtue theory and OB/IO: challenges and opportunities

While some virtue theorists acknowledge that institutions play an important role in the development of people's character, nearly all their attention has focused on formative institutions like the family and the school, or on political institutions like the state and its laws.[17] The OB/IO literature, however, shows the importance of attending to intermediate institutions like organizations, given their central role in the development of character. This literature, like any empirical literature, does not establish that virtue is impossible. However, it does makes us wonder whether it is realistic for us to aspire to it.[18] In this section we discuss two important challenges to the possibility of attaining virtue: a challenge to what has been called "the self-sufficiency of character" (6.1) and a challenge to the possibility of developing the types of motivations that virtue requires (6.2). We conclude by highlighting some valuable and untapped resources that the OB/IO empirical research provides philosophers interested in the cultivation of character traits.

6.1 The self-sufficiency of character

[17]Rogers' (2020) recent work can be seen, to some extent, as an exception to this trend. While he also focuses most of his attention on formative and political institutions, he provides powerful normative arguments highlighting the significant place that intermediate institutions (such as business organizations) play in the development and exercise of virtue (132, 139). There are several instances where one finds echoes to what we discussed in section 4. For instance, Rogers acknowledges that institutions have a profound "formative role" on individuals (110), partly because they shape choices and the circumstances where they we make them (107). He has recognized the significant place that institutions play in developing habits which shape character (135), habits which are often established through incentives and social norms (135), and which owe their existence to the fact that "much of our day-to-day activities are routinized" (135). Rogers has also highlighted that organizations shape people's behavior through "coercive political power, or the sometimes equally persuasive force of social opinion and censure" (109).

[18]For a good overview of some of the challenges see: Miller 2014, Ch. 8.

According to certain accounts, virtue is supposed to be self-sufficient. Within these accouts, virtuous actions are supposed to arise from "a firm and unchanging disposition" (Aristotle 2002, 1105a) and the virtuous person is supposed to have consistent and stable traits that serve as a bulwark to protect her from vicious environmental pressures. As Snow (2010, 7) argues, "we need to cultivate our inner states as indemnity against the day when our social sustenance is taken from us" (cf., Alzola 2015).

Virtue theorists who recognize that our character traits tend to be local, usually propose that those seeking virtue should use these local character traits as steppingstones to establish more global dispositions (Russell 2009, 326; Snow 2010, 31–8; West 2018, 82, 88–89; cf., Miller 2014, 239). The OB/IO literature helps to see how tall an order this is. In particular, and to use Snow's example (Snow 2012, 34), it shows that it will be very difficult to extend a compassionate response to cuddly animals at home into an compassionate response to one's coworkers when compassion is not valued (and even disincentivized) in the organization where one works (say, in a highly competitive investment bank). Within such an organization, there will be an array of organizational forces (incentives, social pressures, frames of reference, etc.) that will typically lead members to act competitively instead of compassionately.

We don't think that this is particularly devastating for virtue theory. Upton (2009) has compellingly argued that the globalist aspiration for agents to have consistent character traits across situations should not prevent us from using virtue concepts to attribute virtue in localized contexts. She argues that local character trait attributions, including local attributions of virtue, are necessary to accurately "execute the crucial moral function of appraising moral agents" (191), serving "evaluative, informative, predictive, and explanatory purposes" (p. 188). Such attributions also ensure that our appraisals are just, i.e., that they can capture different degrees of moral virtue and thereby better distribute moral rewards (189-191).

It may also be worth stating that while the malleability of our character may be problematic in a number of ways (see Snow 2010, 6–7), it also fulfills an important function. We are social animals who flourish through social institutions, and virtue is developed through and instantiated in our social roles (Rogers 2020, 11–2, 109). Being able to adapt and function within an organization is part of what it is to flourish. The ability of our organizational environments to shape our character traits should be recognized as contributing to our ability to integrate and meld into such environments. This helps us to see why a certain degree of malleability in our character traits should be considered, to use Snow's language, an important dimension of our "social intelligence," a valuable part of our ability "to be full and effective participants in social life" (Snow 2010, 84).

6.2 Reason and motivation

According to certain accounts of virtue, virtuous action ought to be motivated by virtuous reasons that are recognized as such. In particular, many virtue theorists have argued that, for a trait to be considered virtuous, the person who possesses it needs to have a range of conscious beliefs and desires which guide her actions.[19] Moreover, it has often been argued that the process of character development must be intentional and guided by conscious states of mind. Annas, for instance, has argued: "The learner [of virtue] needs to understand what in the role model to follow (. . .) you have to make the effort to understand what you have been taught, and to grasp it for yourself" (Annas

[19]CAPS philosophers are not committed to this view.

2011, 17). Similarly, Alzola has argued that the moral worth of a virtuous person depends partly on the fact that her character is an "acquired excellence" arising from her "choice and achievement" (Alzola 2015, 294).

There is little empirical evidence in the OB/IO literature supporting the claim that the ways in which organizations shape people's character traits proceeds by way of their "choice" or through their effort to understand and grasp the virtuous dimension of their actions. While many of the traits of character that organizations instill into their members reflect (and are sometimes justified) by organizational values, the empirical evidence often suggests that members are unaware of how such values shape the way they behave. In fact, in many of the studies discussed in the OB/IO literature, the evidence suggests that, even when members of the organization act in accordance with moral norms, their motivations are morally problematic or morally neutral. Pleasing a leader that inspires or threatens them, conforming to a norm because of social pressure, achieving certain incentives out of self-interest, or simply following a routine that has been imposed on them are not the kinds of motivations that characterize virtuous actions (cf., Miller 2014, pp. 106, 111, 212).

Again, we don't think that this is devastating to virtue theory. Even if one believes that virtuous behavior, of the highest kind, may require the agent to be conscious of the proper motivations and reasons that move her, one should still recognize that it is important and legitimate to attribute virtue concepts to agents who may not have this exalted form of virtue. The reason is precisely the same that Upton offers to justify the application of virtue to local contexts, namely, that these attributions "deliver different degrees of moral credit and discredit, they allow for highly information specific trait attributions, which fuel accurate and pragmatically relevant prediction and explanation. [. . . And they prove successful] to appraise the psychologically complex agent's moral status" (Upton 2009, p. 187).

6.3 Leveraging organizations to enhance character

Discussions of organizations and workplaces —where many adults spend a good deal of their time— are almost entirely absent from leading philosophical accounts of character development. Nowhere is this clearer than in the proposals that virtue theorists offer to cultivate character. Such proposals tend to focus on what individuals can do to improve their character traits, but seldom discuss how organizational design can be leveraged for that purpose (e.g., Kamtekar 2004, 487–9; Miller 2014, 227–239; 2017, 169–218; Snow 2010; West 2018: 89, 98-99). The OB/IO literature, however, shows that organizational influences represent a powerful force that, if harnessed correctly, can contribute to developing better character traits. As Gioia counsels: "organizations are potent contexts, be aware of how strongly, yet how subtly, your job role and your organizational culture affect the ways you interpret and make sense of information . . . Organizational culture has a much greater effect on individual cognition than you would ever suspect" (Treviño and Nelson 2014, p. 100).

Many scholars have suggested that individuals can improve their character and behavior by becoming more aware of the empirical studies that showcase how environmental influences affect them (see, for instance, Miller 2014, 233–7; 2017, 209–239, Snow 2010, 34–37; West 2018, 97–8). Learning about this research can also help them curate the situations around them, thereby allowing them to "avoid certain kinds of situations and to seek out others." (Russell 2009, 327; cf., Doris 120–21, 146–7, Merritt 2000, 377–380; Miller 2014, 204–7). Learning about these influences has also

been said to enhance individual's ability to monitor their own responses, intervene when these influences are happening, and re-habituate themselves into having more virtuous responses (Russell 2015; Snow 2010, 33–4, 35–7; West 2018, 88–9, 97–8).

As has often been pointed out, the promise of these strategies is limited. First, we ask too much of ordinary individuals if we expect them to keep up with the vast empirical research on the topic. Second, it is not realistic to think that one can carefully control the situations in which one has to interact. Third, it is not possible for one to track all the specific environmental influences that are affecting one's behavior in the here and now, especially given that many of these influences are subtle and unconscious.

But when one thinks of these strategies from an organizational perspective, they look more promising. Organizations have more resources than individuals to keep up with the empirical research. They can, for instance, hire specialists who are well-versed on the topic or seek guidance from consultants who are experts on it. Because many organizational environments have a high degree of consistency and stability, it is more feasible to believe that experts on OB/IO will be able to identify the kind of situations and environments that pose particular ethical risks.[20] Based on the assessment of such risks, the organization can curate some of the situations which its members will face, regulating how certain interactions happen, how certain jobs are described and conceived, how certain environments are designed, etc. It will never be possible for an organization to control all of the situations and environments in which members of the organization interact. However, proper organizational design can play an important role in addressing the most significant sources of unethical behavior and cultivate situations and environments that promote ethical behavior.[21]

For instance, the organization can use the communication of its leaders to highlight the value they place on integrity and character; include language about the value of moral character in job descriptions, promotion standards, and yearly evaluations; recognize (both formally and informally) individuals who showcase virtuous character traits; and disseminate narratives from the organization's history and its people to serve as models that current employees can emulate (Treviño and Nelson 2014). There are also many specific practices that could be specifically tailored to particular situations or roles. For example, auditors may be required to keep at arm's length from those they audit to make sure that the empathy elicited by personal relationships does not interfere with their assessments. Leaders, by contrast, may be asked to interact frequently and personally with vulnerable individuals affected by the organization to help ensure that their strategic decisions are humane and empathetic.

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[20]Some of these risks will be general risks about the organization's culture, mission, and industry. Others will be specific to the individual roles and positions of different members in the organization.

[21]Organizations are also in a privileged position to pursue many other initiatives that scholars have proposed to enhance our moral character. Miller (2017, Ch. 8-10), who offers one of the most thorough discussions on the topic, highlights that character can be improved by using virtue labels, creating institutional nudges, being inspired by role models, and creating a positive environment. Organizations have a variety of financial and managerial resources that make them well-positioned to successfully implement many of these initiatives. In addition, because of the stability and consistency of many the organizational environments, it is often possible to make interventions that are specifically tailored to such environments. As part of his account, Miller (2017, 219–233) also discusses how the rituals and practices in Christianity have the potential to improve the character of its members. Attunement to the OB/IO literature allows one to recognize that most of his proposals are empirically justified, not so much on the fact that they are happening on a religious context, but on the specific nature of the organizational context associated with these rituals and practices.

Before concluding, we should also highlight some potential difficulties with these proposals. While we are convinced that organizations have significant power to improve the character traits of their members, we are not particularly sanguine about the fact that this will be done in our current environment. First, as Rogers has noted, "the dynamism of liberalism has slowly stripped away public concern for the virtues in liberal democracies" and as "institutions have abandoned their role in cultivating the virtues, morality has become a purely private matter" (2020, 130). Second, many of the organizations where contemporary adults spend a good deal of their time are driven by financial goals and incentives. However, financial goals and incentives, as we discussed above, tend to have a corrupting effect on individuals (Cohn, Fehr, and Marechal, 2014; Gneezy and Rustichini, 2000; Greenbaum et al. 2012; Kouchaki et al. 2013; Harris and Bromiley, 2007; Pillutla and Chen 1999; Tenbrunsel and Messick, 1999). Third, it is well established in the OB/IO literature that hierarchical organizations wanting to cultivate ethical behavior among its members need to foster an environment where subordinates are comfortable "speaking up" (Morrison 2014). But fostering a speak-up culture is a tall order. Such an environment will sometimes conflict with the loyalty and camaraderie that is supposed to exist among organization members, it can pose a threat to the achievement of the organizational goals set up by leaders, and it requires leaders to welcome pushback and complaints by their subordinates, something that, despite their frequent statements to the contrary, they are seldom open to.

Some virtue theorists will have additional worries about these kinds of organizational interventions. First, some may argue that these interventions may foster character traits that conform to what morality recommends, but which do not amount to full virtue. After all, and as we have argued above, these character traits will often be local, automatic, and not always motivated by the right reasons. Second, others may be worried that many of these interventions amount to nothing less than cloaked forms of manipulation that are morally problematic because they violate the person's autonomy (Miller 2014, 185). Third, they may worry about tasking private institutions with little public accountability with the task of cultivating the character of its members. Still, despite these potential worries, there are reasons to think that organizations can be leveraged to improve character and that this topic deserves more attention than it has received to date.

7. Conclusions and future directions

Our paper expands the range of empirical evidence on which the character-situation debate can draw. Such debate has relied mostly on experimental results conducted in the lab, but these studies don't track the powerful forces of our organizational environments. After all, and as Treviño et al. (2014) note, "replicating authority relations, group dynamics, or the role of identification with and commitment to the organization is challenging in experimental settings" (654). Attention to OB/IO makes salient that organizational influences, unlike situational influences, are not episodic and haphazard, but have the power to shape people's character traits. As such, this evidence points to the need to distinguish between first-order dispositions that account for our current character traits, and second-order environmental influences that account for how environmental influences like organizations shape such first-order dispositions. The OB/IO literature suggests that most individuals display character traits that, while local to the organization, can nevertheless be consistent across situations. This puts pressure on the accounts of character proposed both by traditional virtue ethics and situationism and provides empirical support to virtue theories based on CAPS. Finally, the OB/IO evidence underscores some challenges to the possibility of achieving

virtue, but also provides valuable and untapped resources to moral philosophers interested in the cultivation of virtuous character traits among adults.

We hope that this work inspires moral philosophers to pay more attention to organizations and their power to shape character traits. We also hope that it opens up new avenues of research in both the normative and empirical domains. Regarding the latter, our account raises important questions about the social and psychological mechanisms underlying the malleability of character. Future work combining, for example, qualitative research methods (e.g., semi-structured interviews), longitudinal research designs within organizations, high-frequency data collection within individuals (e.g., Ecological Momentary Assessment), and follow-up studies after individuals leave organizations can help to shed light on the ways in which dispositions to perceive, feel, judge and act are shaped by various organizational contexts. Similarly, not everyone's character is equally malleable, nor malleable by the same kinds of organizational influences, so future empirical work should examine these relevant individual differences. On the normative side, our account highlights how choosing which organizations to work in carries significant ethical weight, given the power of organizations to shape character traits. Moreover, our account raises questions about whether and how the organizational influences described here might be harnessed to improve the moral character of agents, the extent to which these character traits should be considered virtuous, and the degree to which cultivating these traits is among an organization's responsibilities.

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