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Situationism, Manipulation, and Objective Self-Awareness

Hagop Sarkissian[1]

Abstract Among those taking the implications of situationism seriously, some have suggested exploiting our tendency to be shaped by our environments toward desirable ends. The key insight here is that if experimental studies produce reliable, probabilistic predictions about the effects of situational variables on behavior—for example, how people react to the presence or absence of various sounds, objects, and their placement—then we should deploy those variables that promote prosocial behavior, while avoiding or limiting those that tend toward antisocial behavior. Put another way, some have suggested that we tweak situations to nudge or influence others toward good behavior. A question arises: Isn't this manipulative? In this paper, I describe some existing proposals in the literature and consider the manipulation worry. Drawing on classical Confucian ethics, I argue that, when all is considered, it is chimerical to think we can refrain from influencing or manipulating others. We must rather accept that influence (whether intended or not) is part of social existence. Once we accept this, the only remaining question is *how* to influence others. I suggest that this should make us conceive ourselves in an objective fashion.

Among those taking the implications of situationism seriously, some have suggested exploiting our tendency to be shaped by our environments toward desirable ends. The key insight here is that if experimental studies produce reliable, probabilistic predictions about the effects of situational variables on behavior—for example, how people react to the presence or absence of various sounds, objects, and their placement—then we should deploy those variables that promote prosocial behavior, while avoiding or limiting those that tend toward antisocial behavior. Put another way, some have suggested that we tweak situations to manipulate people—nudge them—toward the good.

✉ Hagop Sarkissian
hagop.sarkissian@baruch.cuny.edu

[1] Department of Philosophy, Baruch College & Graduate Center, City University of New York, Box B5/295, One Bernard Baruch Way, New York, NY 10010, USA

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Doris raises this possibility in *Lack of Character*, where he suggests that, regardless of the prospects of character based moral theories, the lessons of situationism might be marshalled toward promoting desirable behaviors.

> I'm urging a certain redirection of our ethical attention. Rather than striving to develop characters that will determine our behavior in ways substantially independent of circumstance, we should invest more of our energies in attending to the features of our environment that influence behavioral outcomes (Doris 2002, 146).

Doris does not develop this line of thought at any great length in that work, but others have. Mark Alfano, for example, believes that "the resolution of the situationist challenge lies not in resisting it but in co-opting it" (Alfano 2013a, 102). Along these lines he has suggested that we use the lessons of situationism to devise 'moral technology' and introduce situational variables that will prompt ourselves and others to virtuous behavior (and perhaps, eventually, to virtue itself).

A question arises: Isn't this manipulative? In what follows, I describe some existing proposals and consider the manipulation worry. I argue that while manipulation (understood as surreptitiously or subtly exercising influence over others) is something we can try to avoid doing intentionally, it is chimerical to think we can effectively refrain from influencing others in our midst. We must rather accept that influencing others is part of social existence, something we bring about not solely through volitional acts but simply by being a focus of others' attention and awareness. Once we accept these facts, I argue that the only remaining question is *how* to influence others. I conclude that this should make us conceive ourselves in a third-personal, objective fashion.

1 I

Mark Alfano (2013a) has suggested that we can shape the behavior of people in particular situational contexts intentionally by attributing to them virtues and other laudable character traits. Attaching such labels to persons sways them to act in accordance with the traits so ascribed. In support, Alfano draws upon a long standing research program in social psychology (going back to the 1970s) showing how such labeling can be efficacious in bringing about behavior in line with the labels themselves. For example, in a seminal study, Richard Miller et al. (1975) found that schoolchildren were more likely to maintain tidy classrooms if they were told that they were above-average at being tidy, as opposed to being subjected to efforts to persuade them to be tidy. Other studies show similar effects with traits such as generosity, niceness, and eco-friendliness (Alfano 2013a, 88–91). This does not justify us attributing corresponding virtues to those behaving in virtuous fashion; acting charitably after being told that one is charitable does not entail one's having the corresponding virtue or character trait. Nonetheless, the mere fact of behaving in line with the label is, on its own, desirable. Alfano speculates that, over prolonged periods of time, such labeling can indeed lead individuals to develop real virtues.

Alfano clarifies that labeling can only be expected to be efficacious when a number of considerations obtain. The attributions should be plausible given the target

person's past behavior, and should also cohere with the target's typical patterns of behavior. The attributions should also be made publicly, in front of other individuals; the more public the attribution, the better the chance that others' expectations will influence the target person to behave according to the attribution. Social pressure, through the target's realization that she (or even her in-group) merits the attribution in the eyes of others, reinforces the target's tendency to produce such behavior. If the person herself believes the attribution plausible, and if she expects others will anticipate her to act accordingly, this improves the odds that the person will act accordingly. Finally, the person should have a more or less common or paradigmatic conception of what the label entails, or else the target will end up acting according to her own idiosyncratic understanding of it, thus violating the expectations of the attributor.

Alfano's idea here is that such practices of labeling can prompt people toward the good. In this regard, his proposal shares broad similarities with that of Thaler and Sunstein (2008), which they motivate for analogous reasons. Thaler and Sunstein note the demise within the social sciences of a formerly prominent conception of persons as effective pursuers of their own self-interest. They call this conception *homo economicus* or economic man, which affirms the capacity of persons to reflect, remember, and implement their interests at highly efficient levels. They note, with some regret, that "the folks that we know are not like that" (Thaler and Sunstein 2008, 7).

> The false assumption is that almost all people, almost all of the time, make choices that are in their best interest or at the very least are better than the choices that would be made by someone else. We claim that this assumption is false—indeed, obviously false. In fact, we do not think that anyone believes it on reflection" (Thaler and Sunstein 2008, 9).

Instead, people are forgetful, biased, and prone to error. Crucially, they are forgetful, biased, and prone to error in *predictable ways*, as demonstrated through the experimental record in social psychology and behavioral economics.

Armed with this knowledge, what ought we to do? They recommend that we give up the illusion that actual human beings are anything like the rational agents of classical economic theory. Instead, they suggest that social and public policy ought to be about *humans*—individuals with finite capacities, and with tendencies that lead them predictably astray in a range of circumstances. Hence, they propose that when policies affect significant life outcomes, such as those concerning health care, education, and retirement, they be administered in ways to 'nudge' or manipulate individuals toward making decisions and acting in ways that are in their best interest. These include setting defaults in plans and policies, framing options in ways that dispose individuals to choosing one option over another, and steering individuals toward beneficial choices by exploiting cognitive biases and patterns of reaction that are part of human nature. People are still free to choose and decide otherwise. They could, for example, opt out of retirement plans when the default is set to opt-in, or choose to purchase unhealthy food even when they are relegated to less favorable display stands. "If no coercion is involved," they write, "we think that some types of paternalism should be acceptable to even the most ardent libertarian" (Thaler and Sunstein 2003, 175). Hence, they characterize their view as 'libertarian paternalism.'

Many people have drawn parallels between situationism and nudges (Brink 2013; Vargas 2013; McTernan 2014), and Alfano himself acknowledges the similarity between his own proposal and that of Thaler and Sunstein (Alfano 2013a, 11). However, Alfano takes it as a strength of his view that the kind of moral technology he describes (labeling) aims to change a person's behavior by first changing their emotions, deliberations, and thoughts. He tries to leverage this claim to deflect a charge that the attributions of labels are paternalistic and threaten to undermine a person's autonomy—that such attributions are manipulative.

> … libertarian paternalism is solely about human behavior: as long as the right behaviors are manifested, libertarian paternalists do not care how they were brought about. This is, of course, not to say that they deny the existence of thoughts, feelings, and emotions. It's just that they don't care as such about *how* those thoughts, feelings, and emotions conspire to bring about the desired behavior, only *whether* they bring it about. Moral technology is stricter in this regard: because having certain thoughts, feeling certain emotions, and deliberating in certain ways are themselves morally good (in addition to the behaviors such mental phenomena result in), the moral technologist aims (among other things) to generate the right sorts of thoughts, emotions, and cognitive processes. Doing what the open-minded person does is admirable, but thinking as the open-minded person thinks is too. Acting as the encouraging person acts is praiseworthy, but feeling as the encouraging person feels is too. Investigating as the curious person investigates is excellent, but wanting what the curious person wants is too. This means that moral technology must concern itself more than libertarian paternalism with the mind and the heart (2013a, 12, emphasis in original).

Cass and Sunstein's work does, in fact, include several examples of 'nudges' engaging the mind and the heart by making social norms salient, such as telling hotel guests that the majority of people staying in their room in the past have chosen to forego daily laundry services to conserve water use (2008, 66), or telling individuals that they are above-average in their energy use and thereby making them conform to the average (ibid, 68). However, I won't quibble with the claim that they don't care how the thoughts, feelings, and emotions generated by norm salience drives behavior.

Instead, in the next section, I want to suggest that one of the most prominent objections to libertarian paternalism does not distinguish between desirable behaviors generated by thoughts, deliberations, and emotions on the one hand, and those generated by more subtle mechanisms escaping one's awareness on the other. Rather, the objection is concerned more generally with *any* attempt to shape another's behavior intentionally, regardless of *how* that behavior is brought about. In short, the worry is about manipulation.

2 II

The idea of 'nudging' individuals one way or another has garnered considerable debate (e.g. Hausman and Welch 2010; Selinger and Whyte 2011; Wilkinson 2012). In particular, the idea of manipulating individuals through nudges rubs against core commitments we have to preserving individual autonomy and respecting individuals' capacity to decide what is best for themselves. Nudges surreptitiously or subtly exercise influence or sway over persons, outside their awareness and perhaps against the person's desires or preferences. This is akin to

manipulation, as it risks undermining a person's autonomy and their ability to reflect and decide for themselves what they ought to do.

And yet, troubling though it may seem, the precise contours of manipulation are complicated and hard to pin down, partly because influence and sway are part of the very fabric of social life—as endemic to it as interaction itself. T.M. Wilkinson notes that "people can be manipulated when they go shopping, strike contracts, vote, study at school, visit their doctors, decide whether to have sex or take turns to do the housework" (Wilkinson 2012, 4). All of these are entirely mundane occurrences where the possibility that we might manipulate (or be manipulated) is hardly worth noting. The brute fact of being swayed or influenced or otherwise prompted to one course of action or another seems a part of everyday life.

In this sense, manipulation can be thought to lie somewhere between suggestion on the one hand, and coercion on the other. Joseph Raz contrasts manipulation with coercion, claiming that whereas the latter interferes with a person's options, the former "perverts the way that [a] person reaches decisions, forms preferences, or adopts goals" (Raz 1986, 377–78). Presumably, this means that whereas coercion substantially curtails a person's range of options, manipulation leaves them open—even while shifting or steering a person's reasoning in arriving at a particular choice. Raz continues that since manipulating people interferes with their autonomy, "resort to manipulation should be subject to the same condition as resort to coercion. Both can be justified only to prevent harm" (Raz 1986, 431). Put another way, threats to autonomy should be minimized whenever possible. Since manipulation undermines autonomy, it should never be used unless it prevents harm (to others or the person herself).

Such a characterization seems overreaching. For one, it seems very difficult to determine when a decision, preference, or goal is influenced in a way that is 'perverted'. Wilkinson raises this issue through a series of questions:

> Subliminal advertising may be manipulative, but is playing music in restaurants to encourage people to eat more? What if the music worked because people feel uncomfortable eating in a silent restaurant (even if they do not realise that they do)? If advertisers use colour to make their products stand out and more people buy them as a result, is that manipulative? If they use a comedian to tell jokes in their beer advertisements, is that manipulative, and any more so than using humour in teaching? (Wilkinson 2012, 8)

As social creatures we are intimately aware of how certain prompts or stimuli can affect others. Indeed, many of these exploit rather stable features of human nature. Soothing pieces of music can cause people to feel relaxed, bright colors can attract attention and please the eye, and a funny turn of phrase can put people at ease. We internalize these regularities and avail ourselves of their efficacy.

Returning to our previous topic—is labeling manipulative? Alfano claims not. He notes that there are indeed similarities between his conception of moral technology on the one hand, and libertarian paternalism on the other. However, he argues that his notion of 'moral technology' should not be considered as worrisome as the 'nudges' described by Thaler and Sunstein. First, Alfano asserts that the intentions lying behind labeling are modest. "Telling someone that she is honest, at least when it's done in the way I will argue, may be an attempt to steer her, but it is not an attempt to steer her *too much*" (2013a, 12, emphasis in original), whereas nudges usurp others' abilities to make decisions for themselves, and puts them under undue pressure. However, many of the nudges suggested by Thaler and Sunstein, such as setting the defaults of a retirement plan as

opt-in rather than opt-out, or putting healthy foods on prominent shelves, or telling people about the behavior of other, similarly situated people, or placing a picture of a fly in a urinal to help men avoid splashing, seem no more ambitious or manipulative than labeling. Are such nedges really steering a person *too much*, so as to set them off as especially worrisome? I find it hard to answer this question. It's unclear how these sorts of nudges are any different than the ones Alfano discusses when it comes to their degree of influence.

Second, Alfano notes that moral technology can be practiced on *oneself*, whereas nudges are primarily aimed at shaping the behavior of *others*.

> Paternalism essentially involves one person facilitating another's well-being. It hardly makes sense to say that someone could treat herself paternalistically. This is presumably one of the reasons people find paternalism, even the libertarian paternalism espoused by Thaler and Sunstein, worrisome. Moral technology, by contrast, can be practiced on oneself (Alfano 2013a, 11-12).

This is a reasonable point, and Alfano does indeed speak about changing features of one's environment so as to shape one's own behavior (2013a, Chapter 8). However, this response does not show that moral technology escapes the worry of manipulative paternalism. Instead, it shows that one particular use of moral technology—namely, the use of it on oneself—is capable of escaping the charge of paternalism. And, as already noted, Alfano is keen to present his notion of labeling as a practice meant to direct and steer others' behavior.

3 III

In an earlier foray (Sarkissian 2010) I made suggestions broadly in line with Alfano's own views. That is, I suggested that we ought to think of situationism as a way to reconceive how to shape and prompt behavior toward desirable ends. In doing so, I drew upon resources from classical Confucian ethical writings. I argued that whereas the situationist literature came as something of a surprise to many whose conception of virtue, personhood, and agency arise from dominant models in Western philosophy and folk psychology, it would have been unsurprising to virtue theorists in the classical Confucian tradition. While virtue talk abounds in classical Confucian texts such as the *Analects* of Confucius (fl. ca. sixth century BCE), the *Mengzi* (or *Mencius* ca. fourth century BCE), and the *Xunzi* (ca. third century BCE), persons are not characterized as immune from situational influence—even those of advanced virtue.[1]

Instead, a shared assumption across these thinkers (in spite of some considerable differences) is that persons are highly sensitive to influence, and that influence itself—whether personal, social, or asocial—is pervasive and inescapable. Given this assumption (one shared by situationists and behavioral economists alike), much of their ethical writings are devoted to structuring contextual variables so as to steer influence toward beneficial and productive outcomes. They do this for social and asocial variables alike. Strikingly, they also devote considerable attention to self-scrutiny and objective self-awareness, so as to reveal and thus properly channel the sources of influence that arise from one's own publicly scrutable person.

In previous work (Sarkissian 2010), I have focused on this general theme in the *Analects*, so I won't rehash those arguments. Here, then, I will focus on Mengzi and Xunzi. Both of these

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[1] Mengzi sometimes deviates from this pattern. See, e.g. Mengzi 2A2 (Van Norden 2008).

thinkers point out that there are patterns to how humans react to their environments. Mengzi, for example, claims that "in years of plenty, most young men are gentle; in years of poverty most young men are violent. It is not that the potential that Heaven confers on them varies like this. They are like this because of what sinks and drowns their hearts" (Mengzi 6A7, Van Norden 150). Virtuous, prosocial behavior will be realized (naturally) in one set of circumstances, while vicious, antisocial behavior will be realized (predictably) in another set of circumstances. Humans are reactive. They respond to external stimuli in broad patterns that can be uncovered through careful observation (with some qualifications noted in the next section).

Xunzi agrees that humans are supremely sensitive to external influence. Yet, in addition to Mengzi's observations at the macro level, Xunzi says much more about what occurs at the micro level—including the more immediate effects of contextual cues on a person's behavior. For example, he maintains that individuals must be very attentive to their surroundings because certain social and asocial factors can cause predictable changes in an individual's temperament and behavior. Xunzi observes the effects of ritual settings and ceremonies—that they elicit, strengthen, and express appropriate emotions and sentiment in particular situation types.

> Ritual cuts off what is too long and extends what is too short. It subtracts from what is excessive and adds to what is insufficient. It achieves proper form for love and respect, and it brings to perfection the beauty of carrying out *yi* [what is right / fitting]. Thus, fine ornaments and coarse materials, music and weeping, happiness and sorrow—these things are opposites, but ritual makes use of all of them, employing them and alternating them at the appropriate times. (Hutton 2014, 209)

Take, for example, funerals, which are ritualistic occasions where one must negotiate a wide range of emotional upheavals. Xunzi notes how funeral practices such as ornamenting the corpse and keeping it at an appropriate distance were developed so as to situationally manage and properly channel them, and how the accompanying regalia all serve similar purposes.

> One who takes up the garments and cane of a mourner does not listen to music, not because his ears cannot hear it, but because his accoutrements make him so. One who wears the sacrificial robes does not eat meat, not because his mouth cannot taste it, but because his accoutrements make him so (Hutton 2014, 226-227).

Deborah Mower (2013) highlights such passages, and explores Xunzi's detailed and probing comments of the logic and value structure of ritual funeral practice.

> Because funeral rituals are structured in such a way to elicit positive emotional responses and to provide avenues for remembrance and consolation, they provide interpretive frameworks by making aspects of events salient; although one may be overcome with personal grief, the structure of the funeral (the placement of the family at the front, speeches made by family members, prayers offered in consolation and support to family members, etc.) makes the family's grief salient and redirects one's attention accordingly. In addition to providing models for proper behavior, rituals provide models for proper thought by shaping one's emotional responses, expectations, interpretations, etc. (Mower 2013, 119)

Rituals structure personal, social, and asocial factors in such a way as to bring them into coherence with one another, and so Xunzi "makes it clear that the regularity of a situation as an instance of a situational type is not separable from the regularity of individuals' action and thought as an instance of type-level psychological models" (124). These "type-level models" constitute "patterns or standards for appropriate action and thought indexed to particular situation types, and hence, stable but not consistent" (122).

Xunzi makes similar comments about the influential power of music. We are told that "sounds and music enter into people deeply and transform people quickly" (Hutton 2014, 219), so one must be sensitive to its effects: "If music is balanced and peaceful, then the people will be harmonious and not dissolute. If music is solemn and majestic, then the people will be uniformly ordered and not cause chaos" (ibid). Music's great situational efficacy made it a key tool for shaping behavior.

> Music is something in which the sages delighted, for it has the power to make good the hearts of the people, to influence men deeply, and to reform their manners and customs with facility. Therefore, the former kings guided the people with ritual and music, and the people became harmonious and congenial. For the people have dispositions to like and dislike things, but if they are allowed no happy or angry reactions, then there will be chaos. The former kings hated this chaos, and so they cultivated their conduct and set in order their music, and all under Heaven became peacefully compliant by these things. (ibid, 220)

Beyond music, other aspects of the immediate environment, including the dress and garb of the participants, had their own ability to move and sway.

> Thus, the mourning garments and the sounds of weeping make people's hearts sad. To strap on armor, don a helmet, and sing in the ranks makes people's hearts emboldened. Dissolute customs and the tunes of Zheng and Wey make people's hearts licentious. Putting on the ritual belt, robes, and cap, and dancing the *Shao* and singing the *Wu* make people's hearts invigorated. (ibid)

As Hutton notes, "what is significant here is that a fairly strong power to cause certain emotions is attributed to various sounds and clothing" (Hutton 2006, 45). Even the practice of labeling (as discussed above) finds expression in early texts (Slingerland 2011, 413).

Armed with these social psychological observations, thinkers such as Confucius and Xunzi argue that one must not only be mindful of one's environment and how it may be affecting those present (for example, what music is being played and what ceremonial garbs are being worn), but so too must one be mindful of how one might *oneself* be a situational variable, swaying others toward one behavior or other by one's visible, scrutable, public self. In this way, the process of self-cultivation "is like molting"—gradually changing the person's outer appearance to both signal and bring about the changes within. "And so, in walking, he works on it. In standing, he works on it. In sitting, he works on it. In arranging the expression on his face and voicing his words and tone, he works on it" (Hutton 2014, 30). One's *presence* (including not just one's clothing but one's posture, tone and volume of voice, countenance, demeanor, and other factors that are the focus of others' attention and part of others' perceptual field) is taken

to be a source of influence on one's immediate environment, and therefore a site of scrutiny (cf. Sarkissian 2010; Slingerland 2011).[2] For example, we are told in the *Analects* that a morally advanced person has telltale effects on *others* simply by being attentive to *himself*: "by altering his demeanor he avoids violence and arrogance in others; by rectifying his countenance he welcomes trustworthiness by others; through his words and tone of voice he avoids vulgarity and impropriety by others" (*Analects* 8.4, translation mine). Such scrupulous attention to one's own expressions and signals is cultivated so as to influence others in a positive manner, putting them at ease and comforting them (14.42) or gaining their assent (12.19).

This impact on others is keyed to concept of *de* in these texts, one without an obvious or clear counterpart in the Western tradition. A person's *de* is the way in which that person serves to affect, influence, or sway others in their midst and in their broader social circles. A person' *de* could put other people on edge or reassure them, lure them to mischief or dissuade them from vice. Part of one's *de* stems from one's self-presentation and the way one interacts with others, but one's *de* is also a product of the sum of one's past interactions, and the fame or renown that one may (or may not) have as a result. Thus, both in the immediate context and also for long-term considerations, the Confucians heed us to mind how we, through our *de*, may be partly responsible for others' behavior, even while recognizing that others may, in turn, be partly responsible for our own. Minor changes in the way we prompt others can be decisive.[3]

Levy (2016) also argues for this latter point, though from a different perspective. Levy focusses on the impact of situational variables on one's decision-making, and notes that subtle environmental cues can sway persons from one course of action to another in manifest ways. However, Levy makes it clear that such cues do not influence a person by overwhelming all other considerations, or by nullifying all other sources of immediate influence and sway. Instead, in most cases, they serve to nudge in a direction for which

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[2] Alfano agrees that a proper understanding of situationism yields both that situations affect persons and that persons affect situations, yet he finds my development of this theme "leaves much to be desired." "Though [Sarkissian] is doubtless right that 'not only do situations affect our own behavior, but we too return the favor,' he provides no warrant for the further, blithely optimistic, claim that 'we influence the situations we find ourselves in *as much as* they influence us' (emphasis mine). The fact that there is a two-way street running between situations and persons does not entail that the traffic is equal in both directions" (Alfano 2013b, 253). Alfano interprets the latter quotation as suggesting something very strong—namely, that the impact of persons and situations is always equivalent. Taken out of its original context, such a reading is understandable. However, this does not reflect my considered view. In that article, I emphasize the *potential* for the impact to be equal in both directions. This leaves it open whether, to what extent, and how often influences flow one way or the other.

[3] Alfano claims that invoking *de* as capable of influencing others is question-begging because, "like any other global trait, *de* may not be common or even commonly acquirable. Answering the situationist challenge to virtue ethics by baldly asserting the existence of a virtue that gives one power over situations is clearly question-begging. I prefer to focus on ways in which situations can be rigged in advance, before one is called on to act in accordance with some virtue or other" (Alfano 2013b, 254). These criticisms reveal a potential misunderstanding of how the Confucians understand *de*. First, *de* is something each person has without even trying to acquire it. The way that a person characteristically impacts or influences others constitutes that person's *de*. Confucians were preoccupied by the *de* of noble persons (or, for our purposes, moral exemplars). They noted that the noble person's *de* would characteristically put others at ease. Through their appearance, countenance, demeanor—that is, through their very presence—such persons would harmonize with others. The *de* of a noble person stems as much from his or her scrutable self as it does from inner character. And minding one's self-presentation is the kind of thing that can be done in advance of interacting with others through practice and habituation (DePaulo 1992). Finally, rather than "baldly asserting" the efficacy of *de*, I support it with experimental evidence (Sarkissian 2010, 9–10).

there already exists antecedent forces and considerations. In other words, 'nudges' of the kind under consideration here,

> … make a decisive difference to decision-making (so that we make one decision rather than another) only under certain conditions: centrally, when our reasons are evenly balanced. They serve as a tie breaker in such conditions—conditions under which our reasons do not settle how we act, where the subsequent act therefore does not conflict with our values. In most (although not all) of the kinds of experiment with which Doris is concerned, the influence on cognition is subtle, showing up only at a group level, and then only with sophisticated statistical analysis. These subtle influences do not lead agents to act contrary to their values; rather, they lead them to act in one way—rather than another—that is consistent with their values (Levy 2016, 606-607).

I suggest that we think of *de* in the same way–a power or force emanating from features of a person that can inspire, move, or nudge others to act according to values that they already hold, or toward which they are already well disposed. The Confucians believed that the signals that one gives off from one's own self-presentation can, during the course of one's interactions with others, sway them in decisive ways. But, this should not be understood as getting people to work against their values or their best interests. Rather, the efficacy of *de* is mitigated by the antecedent desires, preferences, experiences, and values of one's audience, and one's ability to sincerely communicate and express a sympathetic understanding of them. Slight changes in tone of voice, framing of the issue, use of analogy or image—any number of these could make the difference in achieving harmony on the one hand, or being driven to discord on the other. The Confucians were concerned not that individuals had fundamentally different values, or that moral conflicts were insurmountable, but that individuals could be distracted from realizing the values they share because of misunderstandings, failures of communication, and a lack of trust or credence in one another. This can lead to protracted and needless discord which sensitivity, awareness, and thoughtfulness might have prevented. Prolonged care, consideration, and practice can help one to better recognize, influence, and steer such factors toward beneficial outcomes.

4 IV

In section II, I argued that influence is pervasive, and that there is no interesting or substantive sense in which one can exist as a social creature free from influence. In section III, I claimed that this is precisely a focus of early Confucian moral psychology. Confucians recognized the impact of both social and asocial situational variables on a person's thoughts, values, and behavior. However, they also recognized that one is inextricably a part of one's own situational contexts, that one influences those in one's field just as they do in turn. With this in mind, they advanced norms and practices meant to habituate mindfulness of self-presentation and sensitivity to others and their values.

In this final section of the paper, I want to emphasize and expand on a particular point–that the influence emanating from one's person does not consist solely of discrete volitional or intentional actions. Instead, influence emanating from one's own person is pervasive, automatic, and impossible to fully suppress. To understand why, it might help to distinguish

thinking of oneself as an agent on the one hand, and as an object on the other. Thomas Nagel's discussion of this in "Moral Luck" may serve as a common reference point.

Nagel points out that broad reflection on the human condition reveals how factors outside any person's control serve to shape and influence the trajectory of a person's life significantly. One's basic physical constitution, the circumstances of one's birth and upbringing, prevailing socio-economic conditions, larger geo-political events, as well as smaller chance events—all of these are, to a significant degree, outside one's control. Nonetheless, they shape and influence the trajectory of one's life immeasurably. This realization unsettles conceptions of ourselves as actors or agents who shape the course of our lives through our thoughts, intentions, motives, and volitions. Such broad reflection forces us to consider ourselves, instead, as objects who endure the impacts of forces outside our control.

Yet, while we may acknowledge the influence of luck in this way, Nagel believes "we are unable to view ourselves *simply* as portions of the world" (Nagel 1979, 37, emphasis added).

> … we have a rough idea of the boundary between what is us and what is not, what we do and what happens to us, what is our personality and what is an accident of handicap... we cannot simply take an external evaluation of ourselves—of what we most essentially are and what we do (Ibid).

That is, even while we may acknowledge the impact of factors outside our control—luck—in our lives, we cannot view ourselves simply as objects prompted to one course or another without the input of our considered judgments, volitions, desires, and actions. Were we to do so, our sense of genuine agency would seem to "shrink under the scrutiny to an extensionless point" (Ibid, 35). This is because "the self which acts and is the object of moral judgment is threatened with dissolution by the absorption of its acts and impulses into the class of events" (36). Put another way, "something in the idea of agency is incompatible with actions being events, or people being things. But as the external determinants of what someone has done are gradually exposed… it becomes gradually clear that actions are events and people things" (37).

Nagel's discussion of these issues raises questions about moral responsibility and judgment. Yet the distinction between authored actions on the one hand, and mere events on the other, is also consequent to the situationist debate. If situational variables bypass our reasoning capacities (Doris 2014), if they impinge on us in ways we do not recognize and hence have no control over, then this shakes our conceptions of ourselves as reflective agents as much as it shakes our faith in the efficacy of virtue or character traits. In Nagel's language above, the agential self is associated with choice, deliberation, character, volition, and will, whereas the self as object is the one that is passively pushed around by external forces. The agentic self *does*; the 'object-ive' self is the site where *things happen*. Agents author *actions*; objects are swallowed into larger *events*. Are we agents or patients?

For many, situationism suggests greater patiency (e.g. Nahmias 2007). One of the unsettling results of the situationist literature is to force such a third-personal, objective perspective on ourselves. It forces us to acknowledge that no matter how much we tend (or even desire) to view ourselves otherwise, we too are part of the world, prone to be swayed, moved, nudged, or otherwise subtly and surreptitiously prompted to one behavior or another without our knowledge, let alone assent. In this sense, we react to these forces in a passive fashion.

However, this does not mean that we are mere billiard balls, lacking ability to influence the trajectory of our lives. We can choose to modify aspects of our social and asocial environments in ways to help facilitate our agency, as maintained both by classical

Confucian thinkers as well as others in the current situationist debate (e.g. Merritt 2000). Of course, coming to realize and acknowledge the impact of situational variables is a key first step to begin such modifications. But one does not, in response, attempt to shield oneself from all influence. As noted, it is futile to desire freedom from influence. Instead, one can choose to *shape the nature of influence*, including not only modifying one's environment but also the influence that emanates from one's own person, as it is seen, experienced, and impacted by others.

To help illustrate these latter points, consider the literature on nonverbal behavior and self-presentation, which consists of "facial expressions; bodily orientations, movements, and postures; vocal cues (other than words); aspects of physical appearance; interpersonal spacing; and touching," and even (for some theorists) attire and the arrangement of one's personal items and objects (DePaulo, 205). As DePaulo notes, "one of the most interesting properties of non-verbal cues in social interaction is that they are *irrepressibly impactful*. Try as they might, *people cannot refrain from behaving nonverbally*" (Ibid, emphasis added). One could try, of course, to be passive and not engage with others in the hope of not affecting or influencing them. But this behavior will have its own impact, signaling lack of interest, inhibition, or withdrawal. DePaulo therefore claims that the impact of nonverbal behavior is "irrepressible."

> It is futile to hope, then, that one can manage to convey nonverbally no particular impression at all simply by interacting in blithe obliviousness to one's own nonverbal behaviors. Others will form some impression that is based in some manner on the nonverbal behavior they are observing, whether one wants them to or not and whether they want to or not… (DePaulo, 205)

Indeed, persons are normally in the dark as to how others see them and feel their presence; awareness of one's own nonverbal behaviors is difficult. And "because they cannot see their [own] faces or hear their voices the way others do, they are deprived of an important source of online information about the kinds of impressions they may be conveying" (Ibid, 206). Achieving awareness of oneself in this third-personal way is referred to, in the psychological literature, as objective self-awareness, a state whereby one is aware of how one appears to and is perceived by others (Duval and Wicklund 1972). "In a state of objective self-awareness, people are aware of how they appear as an object (a "me") in contrast to the experience of being a subject (an "I")" (Heine and Buchtel 2009, 373). Taking such a perspective on oneself can be genuinely informative, bringing factors normally outside one's awareness under the scope of one's moral concern and enabling a more expansive view of how one brings about changes in the world. While reflective, volitional action is perhaps a paradigm of being an agent of change, it does not exhaust one's impact. One is a source of influence merely by *being*, by existing in the midst of others and being part of their observable world, within the scope of their experience and awareness. By living in the midst of others, by being in contact with them or within their purview, we influence them whether we intend to or not. The Confucian insight is to cultivate oneself mindfully so as to be a source of positive influence. This is one's *de*, which resonates with others. (In this regard, Nagel's contrasting agents with objects can be misleading, for it risks limiting one's influence to the agential, willing, volitional self while overlooking how the objective self is itself a source of influence.)

Herbert Fingarette expresses this idea from the perspective of the *Analects*, focusing not on *de* but instead on the virtue *ren*. *Ren* is appropriately translated as 'benevolence' or 'kindness' or 'humaneness' in most Confucian texts, and it emerges during the classical period as the chief, overarching quality of character to which individuals are meant to strive. It also evokes notions of being noble, in the sense of having refined or excellent personal qualities that draw the admiration and assent of others. A person who is *ren* is thus a model, enjoying a reputation for being fair, upright, courteous, reverential, and magnanimous, while also maintaining scrupulous attention to his conduct, appearance, and expressions in order to match these qualities of character. Such a person has a particular kind of presence in the world that affects others. This is the noble person's *de*. Fingarette does not token the latter concept in the following discussion. However, he focuses on precisely this aspect of *ren* that is germane to the current discussion.

> Let us attempt finally to place Confucius's own way of seeing *ren* in focus… and try to find an image that both distinctively and truly reflects Confucius's way of seeing *ren*. Such an image must suggest a power emanating from the actor... but our image must not direct our attention to the "interior" of the man… Finally, this power is to be essentially human power; that is, it is a power of human beings (when they are truly human) and it is directed toward human beings and influences them... It seems to me that the Western image that would serve best is one drawn from physics—the vector. In the case of *ren*, we should conceive of a directed force operating in actions in public space and time, and having a person as initial point-source and a person as the terminal point on which the force impinges. The forces are human forces, of course, not mechanical ones (Fingarette 1972, 36-37).[4]

The Confucians maintained an overarching commitment to achieving harmony, and so their own practices of self-cultivation were meant to foster cooperative, productive, and even joyful relationships with others; minding one's self-expressions and self-presentation and with such goals in mind was considered unproblematic.

This suggests a way of allaying the manipulation concern raised in section II above. Alfano notes that, when psychologically plausible and done in public, ascribing a virtue term to a person ('labeling') can prompt her to act virtuously. However, such an attempt to influence the person should not be considered manipulative because "it is not an attempt to steer her *too much*" (Alfano 2013a, 12, emphasis in original). What is taken for granted is that virtue labeling is unobjectionable because of what it promotes— namely, virtue (or at least a facsimile of it). Similarly, the particular modifications and alterations of behavior undertaken by the Confucian nobleman (in full awareness of their impact on others) should be seen as objectionable only if they engender decisions or patterns of behavior that the person would otherwise reject, that would run afoul of her moral values and preferences, that would cause harm to her (or others), that would undermine her effective agency or involve her in one's scheme of action in ways that she would not in principle consent (to borrow a phrase), etc. Conversely, such modifications can be acceptable (even laudable) if prosocial or moral goals are advanced (as advocates of 'nudges' have argued). As noted, the Confucians maintained harmony to be the

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[4] In the original text, Fingarette's transliterations observe the outdated Wage-Giles system (hence he uses *jen* for *ren*). Pinyin has been used here for consistency.

ultimate moral value to instantiate or realize in the world (Li 2006), but other plausible candidates are near at hand (care, compassion, happiness, dignity, etc.).

In sum, the main goal of this section has been to highlight that, whatever value or end that one would like to promote, one should be objectively self-aware about the ways in which one might be fostering or undermining it by being an objective source of influence on others, and choose to shape one's impacts accordingly. In this way, adopting a third-personal, objective perspective provides a richer framework through which to think of agency and influence in a situationist paradigm, for it renders problematic the idea that one can abstain from influencing others simply by forming no intention to do so.

5 V

I have been trying to tease out a certain tension. On the one hand, there is something unseemly about influencing or manipulating others. On the other, manipulation seems an inevitable and inescapable part of social existence. Let's think back to Wilkinson's example of the teacher and the restauranteur above. A restaurant owner could, for example, choose to *forego* playing soothing music to avoid *manipulating* his dinner guests into feeling at ease and ordering more food, yet the decision to forego music is itself a source of influence on them—namely, by having them eat in awkward silence. Similarly, we can (as educators) drop humor from our lectures so as not to endear ourselves to our students and influence their evaluations of us, but a humorless lecture has its own consequences. Thaler and Sunstein agree.

> [The] misconception is that it is possible to avoid influencing people's choices. In many situations, some organization or agent *must* make a choice that will affect the behavior of some other people. There is, in those situations, no way of avoiding nudging in some direction, and whether intended or not, these nudges will affect what people choose (Thaler and Sunstein 2008, 10).

Thaler and Sunstein are, of course, talking about policies and decisions. But analogous points can be made with regard to personal conduct and social intercourse. And if we take this point seriously, this should force us to think of ourselves in an objective fashion, as situational variables impinging on the behavior of others. We can no longer ask whether we should influence or manipulate others. Instead, we should focus on understanding how we do so and also how we should do so.

Few studies are longitudinal. Life, however, *is*. And with greater observation points of similar individuals in repeating contexts, we can come to know these facts intimately. Not all of them, of course. However, how any given factor stemming from one's scrutable, public self is likely to affect any given person can become revealed the longer one observes that person. This is the first step in taking ownership of one's impacts and, hopefully, adjusting oneself accordingly. It is the first step of minding and possibly shaping one's *de*.[5]

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