

## ABSTRACT

Cultivating Character:  
Spiritual Exercises, Remedial Virtues, and the Formation of the Heart

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According to philosophical situationists, empirical psychology suggests that most people are not virtuous, and that we should be skeptical about the possibility of cultivating virtue. I argue against the second claim by offering an empirically informed model of character formation. The model begins with ancient formational wisdom emphasizing emotion education, the practice of spiritual exercises, self-monitoring, and willpower, and is confirmed, nuanced, and supplemented by insights from recent empirical psychology.

Many ancient philosophers, recent social psychologists, and philosophers of emotion agree that emotions are central to moral cognition. I defend a perceptual account of emotion, and show how this account suggests a practical upshot that empirical psychologists tend not to emphasize, but that the ancients would endorse: emotion education should be a primary focus of character formation. I dilate on this practical point using the remediation of inappropriate anger as a test case. Taking my remedial cues from the Stoic and Christian traditions, I argue that training the emotions through self-monitoring, willpower, and the use of “spiritual exercises”—practices of mind and body whereby one digests the doctrines of one’s philosophical school, so that those doctrines are not matters of mere notional

understanding, but actually take up residence in one's vision of the world—provides hope for meaningful movement in the direction of virtue.

The rigorous practice of spiritual exercises involves difficult work. To have much success, the moral trainee will need at least the seeds of what I call “remedial virtues”: character excellences that enable an agent to do the demanding work of re-cultivating her character. The remedial virtues include self-vigilance (a kind of moral watchfulness) and the virtues of willpower (e.g., self-control, courage, perseverance, and patience). I develop empirically informed philosophical analyses of self-vigilance and the virtues of willpower, and offer empirical evidence to support the claim that they can be cultivated. Then I show how the remedial virtues can help us resist temptation, leverage temptation in the interest of further growth in character, and correct for the subtle situational forms of moral interference that situationists emphasize.

Cultivating Character:  
Spiritual Exercises, Remedial Virtues, and the Formation of the Heart

by

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To Karla, Ella, Greyson, and Maxwell  
with love

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The present inquiry does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others (for we are inquiring not in order to know what virtue is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use).

—Aristotle<sup>1</sup>

#### *Virtue Ethics and Character Formation*

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle expends considerable philosophical energy clarifying the nature of virtue, offering arguments concerning the place of the virtues in a good life, and limning the contours of individual virtues like temperance, magnanimity, and practical wisdom. What is his ultimate aim? In case we're tempted to think he simply wants theoretical knowledge about moral matters, in the passage cited above Aristotle corrects us: he wants to become good, he wants his readers to become good, and he counts inquiry into virtue that lacks a formational telos useless. Given that the passage is an aside (as indicated by the translator's use of parentheses), it would appear that Aristotle assumes his fellow inquirers share his impulses. That is, he takes himself to be reminding them (us) of what they (we) should already know: we think hard about virtue in order to become virtuous.

Formational aims are also characteristic of Aristotle's teacher, and his teacher's teacher. When Socrates engages his interlocutors in dialectical conversation concerning the nature of courage, or justice, or piety, what is he after? To the uninitiated onlooker, it might appear that he simply wants an airtight definition of each virtue, replete with necessary and sufficient conditions. On this reading, we imagine Socrates having the same philosophical

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford World's Classics, trans. with an intro. by David Ross, rev. J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925), 2.2.

temperament as some contemporary metaphysicians: he likes an intellectual challenge, and virtue concepts provide scintillating puzzle-solving exercises. But we know that Socrates—both the real Socrates and Plato’s literary figure—ultimately wants wisdom, not mere mental stimulation or theoretical precision. That is, through his philosophical reflection on the virtues, Socrates seeks deep contact with the Good, in the hope that he and his interlocutors might be transformed in and through the process.<sup>2</sup>

In light of the way many of Socrates’ contemporaries respond when he plays the gadfly—roused not to virtue, but to vicious anger—we might wonder whether the impulse toward formational philosophy was as widespread in the ancient world as Aristotle’s aside might imply. (Or maybe Socrates just needed to find better interlocutors.) Whatever was the case back then, the formational impulse has been weak for some time among modern analytic moral philosophers. In place of the goal of moral *wisdom*—one specification of which is wisdom about how to become virtuous—moral *theory* is now the unquestioned aim of professional philosophical ethics. As I use the term, theory-driven ethicists seek to explain or ground (often reductionistically) all moral concepts in terms of some foundational concept or set of concepts.<sup>3</sup> Some of these ethicists place virtue concepts in the explanatory foundation of their moral theory; call them virtue *theorists*.<sup>4</sup> (By contrast, virtue *ethicists*, in my usage, are ethicists for whom virtue concepts are central—though not necessarily theoretically foundational—in their ethical reflection.) Reductionistic virtue theory turns

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<sup>2</sup> Other ancient schools of thought, including Stoicism and Epicureanism, set their philosophical sights on real life formation as well. For commentary, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995); and Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>3</sup> On the tendency toward and perils of reductivism in moral theorizing, see Edmund L. Pincoffs, *Quandaries and Virtues: Against Reductivism in Ethics* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Michael Slote, *Morals from Motives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); and Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Aristotle's aside on its head: the inquiry *does* aim at theoretical knowledge, and there is relatively little risk of its edifying the reader. Thus, what Aristotle and company would have deemed "of no use" has, in some circles at least, become the "routine" way of doing business.<sup>5</sup> My point is not to denigrate moral theorizing (at least in the broad, non-reductive sense). I would argue, though, that formation needs to regain its rightful place as a prominent telos of, and explicit topic of inquiry within, analytic virtue ethics. Reflection on character formation should not be left solely to educational psychologists or spiritual theologians.<sup>6</sup>

The need for careful reflection on character formation should be obvious. I take it as a datum that most people are not robustly virtuous. Most of us suffer from at least partial blindness to the good, and/or see at least some things as good that aren't. Most of us love at least some things we ought not love, or fail to love at least some things we should love. And even when we know and love the good, most of us exhibit weakness of will. This much has been recognized for millennia. In recent years, a fresh push toward philosophical reflection on formation has been provided by the situationist challenge to virtue ethics.<sup>7</sup> Though I

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<sup>5</sup> David Solomon, "Virtue Ethics: Radical or Routine?," in *Intellectual Virtue: Perspectives from Ethics and Epistemology*, ed. Michael DePaul and Linda Zagzebski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 57–80. As the title of Solomon's essay suggests, there are some "radical" exceptions. For instance, two recent edited volumes offer several chapter-length treatments of individual virtues: Michael W. Austin and R. Douglas Geivett, eds., *Being Good: Christian Virtues for Everyday Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012); and Kevin Timpe and Craig A. Boyd, eds., *Virtues and Their Vices* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> This comment is meant to suggest two things: (1) educational psychologists and spiritual theologians, among others, have rightly kept moral formation in their sights; and (2) philosophers may be able to provide insights regarding moral formation that those in other fields lack.

<sup>7</sup> For early statements of the challenge, see Gilbert Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999): 315–331, and "The Nonexistence of Character Traits," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100, no. 2 (2000): 223–226; and John M. Doris, *Lack of Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For an updated and expanded statement that also notes the dearth of attention to character formation among analytic moral philosophers, see Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

disagree with some of the more extreme conclusions put forth by some situationists,<sup>8</sup> I think their arguments, and the social psychology on which their arguments rely, call for serious work on moral formation.

According to situationists, empirical psychology suggests that most people—even those we otherwise would have thought to be virtuous—do not exhibit the sort of cross-situationally consistent behavior we would expect of virtuous agents. Moreover, the empirical studies cited by situationists seem to show that morally trivial situational factors exert greater influence over behavior than we might have expected. Thus, if the situationists are even partly right, the need for wisdom about how to form character is both *quantitatively greater* than many have thought (i.e., virtue is even rarer than previously believed) and *qualitatively different* than many have thought (i.e., there are obstacles to our attainment of virtue that have heretofore been un- or under-appreciated). In light of the various barriers—whether perennially recognized, or only recently uncovered—that stand between us and virtue, two questions naturally arise for the virtue ethicist (and, more generally, the human): *Can we become more robustly virtuous?* and *If so, how?*

Though recent philosophical discussions of virtue have not given these questions the attention they deserve, philosophers have not totally ignored them.<sup>9</sup> Some have doubts about virtue formation, and argue that we should channel our moral efforts in other directions.<sup>10</sup> Others are more hopeful about the attainment of virtue, and offer suggestions about how to

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<sup>8</sup> E.g., Gilbert Harman's claim that "there is no empirical support for the existence of character traits" ("Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology," 330).

<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the first question has been a key aspect of the debate surrounding the situationist challenge to virtue ethics. Moreover, there seems to be a trend toward giving increased philosophical and interdisciplinary attention to moral formation. See, e.g., Nancy E. Snow, ed., *Cultivating Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Theology, and Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). I know of at least two other edited volumes in progress that focus on philosophical perspectives regarding virtue cultivation as well.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*.

cultivate it.<sup>11</sup> These and other thinkers have done good work. Still, much of what they say requires greater defense and detail, or qualification, or extension. In this dissertation, I provide my own defense of the thesis that the virtues can be cultivated, even if only in a “fragmentary and frail”<sup>12</sup> form, and offer my own partial model for doing so.

### *A Map of What's to Come*

In Chapter Two, I explain the situationist challenge to virtue, offer an initial defense of what I take to be the best reply to that challenge—the “CAPS response”—and then sketch how the rest of this dissertation extends the CAPS response. I begin by clarifying the situationists’ charge—or better, charges—that virtue ethics is “empirically inadequate” by differentiating four families of empirical inadequacy charges, explaining the conceptual connections between the families, and showing how three leading situationists press different versions of charges from each family. Then I explain how philosophers Daniel Russell and Nancy Snow utilize the work of empirical psychologists Walter Mischel and Yuichi Shoda to rebut the situationists’ charge that virtue ethics is empirically inadequate.<sup>13</sup> Mischel and Shoda’s model is known as the cognitive affective personality system, or CAPS model, so I call the response offered by Russell and Snow the “CAPS response.” The CAPS response has its detractors, and I reply to their main criticisms in this chapter. As a part of my reply, I suggest some ways in which the CAPS response should be expanded so as to address better than it already does the pressing need for wisdom about character formation.

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<sup>11</sup> E.g., Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); and Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Adams, 115.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Walter Mischel and Yuichi Shoda, “A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, Dynamics, and Invariance in Personality Structure,” *Psychological Review* 102 (1995): 246-268.

In particular, I argue that the CAPS-friendly virtue ethicist should draw on the formational wisdom of ancient philosophical and religious perspectives, like Stoicism and Christianity, which emphasize emotion education, the practice of spiritual exercises, self-monitoring, and willpower in virtue cultivation. The rest of the dissertation implements this proposed expansion.

In Chapter Three, I defend the theses that we have much to learn about character formation from the ancients, and that emotion formation deserves special attention. I do so by considering recent empirical work on the importance of the emotions in our moral lives, which serves as a jumping off point for a discussion of ancient and recent philosophical psychology by providing a striking example of how the empirical psychologists' understanding of our minds is (a) rather similar to that of the ancients, but (b) comparatively less rich in normative insight. I argue that Jonathan Haidt's work on the primacy of intuition in moral reasoning coheres well with much ancient philosophical psychology (despite Haidt's protestations to the contrary), and then bring Haidt's work into conversation with recent philosophical work on the emotions.<sup>14</sup> I defend an account of the emotions according to which they are evaluative perceptions, and show how this understanding suggests a practical upshot of Haidt's work that he does not emphasize, but that the ancients would heartily endorse: educating the emotions should be a primary focus of character formation.

In Chapter Four, I develop the character formation model sketched in the previous chapters by applying it to the remediation of inappropriate anger. Anger features prominently in moral reflection on the emotions throughout the history of philosophy, so its remediation serves as a fitting test case. I give an account of anger consistent with the perceptual model of emotions sketched in Chapter Three, and discuss how anger, so

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<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

understood, relates to various character traits. Then I turn to formational issues. In keeping with my methodological suggestion in Chapter Two, I take my remedial cues from the ancients. I argue that training the emotions through the use of what Pierre Hadot calls “spiritual exercises”—practices of mind and body whereby one digests the doctrines of one’s philosophical school, so that those doctrines are not matters of mere notional understanding, but actually take up residence in one’s vision of the world—provides hope for meaningful movement in the direction of virtue.<sup>15</sup> Seneca’s *On Anger* is my focal text, though I also explain how a non-Stoic could apply Seneca’s insights.

As might be expected, the rigorous practice of spiritual exercises involves serious work. Indeed, given the self-monitoring and willpower that such exercises require, I suggest that a moral trainee seeking to follow the ancients’ advice will need at least the seeds of what I call “remedial virtues.” This novel virtue category label is not meant to indicate any deep metaphysical difference between these virtues and any others; nor is it intended to isolate the unique function of these virtues. Rather, the label is a handy way of talking collectively about a cluster of character excellences that share an important function in the moral life: they enable an agent to do the demanding work of re-cultivating her character.<sup>16</sup> The remedial virtues include what I call “self-vigilance,” as well as the group of traits Robert C. Roberts calls “the virtues of willpower” (e.g., self-control, courage, perseverance, and patience).<sup>17</sup> The self-vigilant person appreciates the moral dangers to which she is liable, and is on the watch for the internal and external cues of those potential moral dangers. The person with the virtues of willpower has the “muscular” effort capacity, disposition to exert effort, and self-

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<sup>15</sup> Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*.

<sup>16</sup> My “re-cultivation” language is intended to stress that my primary focus is the development of virtue among those with previously established bad moral habits, not among the otherwise unformed.

<sup>17</sup> Robert C. Roberts, “Will Power and the Virtues,” *Philosophical Review* 93, no. 2 (1984), 227–47.

management skill required to respond to the cues to moral danger so as to avoid and/or overcome the dangers. The remedial virtues take center stage in chapters five and six. Here's why. We need to have some reason to think self-vigilance and the virtues of willpower are attainable traits if something like Seneca's anger-remediating advice—or the adaptations of it that I argue would be useful for growth in other areas of the moral life—is to have any traction. And if it is to have any traction *as a response to situationism*, we'll need to bring some *empirical* evidence to bear on the issue. In chapters five and six, I do just this.

In Chapter Five, drawing on dual-process cognitive psychology and empirical work related to self-regulation, I develop empirically informed philosophical analyses of self-vigilance and the virtues of willpower, suggest how those virtues might be cultivated, and show how they might help us not only resist temptation but also leverage temptation in the interest of further growth in character. Then, in Chapter Six, I show how the remedial virtues can also help correct for the situational factors that situationists claim affect our behavior “on the sly.”<sup>18</sup> By thus focusing on the remedial virtues, I provide a triple response to the situationists' charge of empirical inadequacy: (1) I give empirical reasons to think that the remedial virtues can be cultivated, and argue that they can enable us to (2) cultivate other virtues and (3) actively resist the subtle situational forms of moral interference that situationists emphasize.

### *Some Qualifications*

Before getting down to business, a few clarifications are needed. First, I do not claim that the model of character formation I offer here is the only, or most important, model. Indeed, I think factors that I do not discuss much are likely to be even more significant for the shaping of character than is the practice of spiritual exercises (e.g., a good upbringing,

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<sup>18</sup> Alfano, 41.

membership in a morally serious community, divine grace, etc.). Still, the practice of spiritual exercises features prominently in multiple historically significant traditions of moral formation, and such exercises (and the remedial virtues that enable their practice) have not received adequate attention in contemporary philosophical discussions. My aim is to give this model a fresh hearing, and to argue for its viability, not its preeminence.

Second, I do not claim that all virtue cultivation requires the possession of remedial virtues. My thesis regarding the remedial virtues is more limited: malformed persons—i.e., people with established patterns of moral malfunctioning—who want to carry out a remedial character formation program involving spiritual exercises will need remedial virtues to have much success (even if they could make fitful progress without the remedial virtues).

Third, I do not claim that the cultivation of remedial virtues must temporally precede the cultivation of traditional virtues. The remedial and traditional virtues may be cultivated contemporaneously. Moreover, it may be that some people are genetically endowed with greater willpower than others. In such cases of “moral luck,” these individuals would have an advantage to exploit in learning and deploying the remedial virtues, while people who are not so blessed would have to work harder at the disciplines.<sup>19</sup>

And finally, I do not claim that the model I offer can deliver complete virtue, or even a complete version of any particular virtue. I agree with Robert Adams: “such virtue as we may attain is never complete, always surpassable. Always fragmentary, it is often visible only from a certain angle, so to speak. At best we can be virtuous sinners.”<sup>20</sup> We will always be subject to temptation; and the subtle features of situations that can interfere with virtuous action are likely to have at least some effect on every agent in at least some circumstances.

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<sup>19</sup> Thanks to Bob Roberts for suggesting this last point.

<sup>20</sup> Adams, 12.

Still, virtue can be *real* without being *complete*. Put succinctly, my thesis is this: we can make significant progress in character formation; the practice of spiritual exercises, empowered by the remedial virtues (themselves in a “frail and fragmentary” form) can enable this progress; and the excellences of character thus attained deserve the honorific “virtue.”

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Empirical Adequacy of Character Formation

It is true that the evidence does not show that the instantiation of virtue in actual human psychologies is impossible. But it also looks to be the case that the available systematic empirical evidence is compatible with virtue being psychologically impossible (or at least wildly improbable), and this suggests that the impossibility of virtue is an empirical possibility that has to be taken seriously. So while the evidence doesn't refute an empirically modest version of virtue ethics, it is plausibly taken to suggest that the burden of argument has importantly shifted: The advocate of virtue ethics can no longer simply assume that virtue is psychologically possible.

—John M. Doris and Stephen P. Stich<sup>1</sup>

#### *Introduction*

I have suggested that I take the upshot of the situationist challenge to be that those who wish to be virtuous have more—and potentially different—work to do than we otherwise might have thought, and that philosophical reflection on the hows, whys, and wherefores of character formation is a pressing need. Needless to say, my conclusion differs markedly from that of the situationists themselves. I set out in this chapter to substantiate my claim. In the rest of the dissertation, I'll get to some of the hows, whys, and wherefores.

According to situationists like Gilbert Harman, John Doris, and Mark Alfano, the available empirical psychological data show that virtue ethics is “empirically inadequate.”<sup>2</sup> This claim is ambiguous, and part of the task of this chapter is to clarify what exactly

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<sup>1</sup> John M. Doris and Stephen P. Stich, “As a Matter of Fact: Empirical Perspectives on Ethics,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. Frank Jackson and Michael Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 121.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Harman, “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999): 315-331, and “The Nonexistence of Character Traits,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 100, no. 2 (2000): 223-226; John M. Doris, *Lack of Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

“empirical (in)adequacy” amounts to. One thing is clear, though: the charge of empirical inadequacy includes the claim that we should be skeptical about the possibility of cultivating virtue and should direct our moral efforts elsewhere.

The empirical psychological story admits of multiple interpretations, though. For instance, Daniel Russell and Nancy Snow have each recently argued that CAPS psychology—the cognitive affective personality system developed by psychologists Walter Mischel and Yuichi Shoda—helps to rebut the situationists’ charge that virtue ethics is empirically inadequate.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, Snow (more than Russell) has sought to show how the CAPS model could inform one’s efforts at character formation.

The CAPS response is not without its detractors. Even before Snow or Russell entered the fray, Doris expressed doubts about the CAPS model’s helpfulness as a rebuttal to his arguments.<sup>4</sup> And more recently, Mark Alfano and Christian Miller have each challenged the usefulness of the CAPS model as a response to the situationist challenge.<sup>5</sup> I think the CAPS response is a good one, and I set out here to defend and extend it. To begin, I clarify the situationists’ charge—or better, charges—of empirical inadequacy by differentiating four families of empirical inadequacy charges, explaining the conceptual connections among the families, and showing how three leading situationists press different

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<sup>3</sup> Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010); Walter Mischel and Yuichi Shoda, “A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, Dynamics, and Invariance in Personality Structure,” *Psychological Review* 102 (1995): 246-268. Other responses to the charge of empirical inadequacy that do not emphasize the CAPS model in the way Russell and Snow do include Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 115–229; Rachana Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of our Character,” *Ethics* 114, no. 3 (2004): 458–91; John Sabini and Maury Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” *Ethics* 115, no. 3 (2005): 535–62; and Gopal Sreenivasan, “The Situationist Critique of Virtue Ethics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, ed. Daniel C. Russell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 290–314.

<sup>4</sup> Doris, 76–85. Doris refers to the CAPS model as “social-cognitive theory.”

<sup>5</sup> Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*; Christian Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

versions of charges from each family. Then I explain how Russell and Snow utilize the CAPS model as a response to these charges. Finally, I summarize and reply to the main challenges to the CAPS response, as presented by Doris, Alfano, and Miller. As a part of my reply, I suggest some ways in which the CAPS response might be expanded so as to address better than it already does the pressing need for wisdom about character formation. The rest of the dissertation implements this proposed expansion.

### *The Charge(s) of Empirical Inadequacy*

Situationists and their allies draw on scores of social psychological studies to show that virtue ethics is “empirically inadequate.”<sup>6</sup> In response, defenders of virtue have begun developing “empirically adequate” accounts of virtue.<sup>7</sup> At times, though, it seems the interlocutors are talking past each other. Part of the problem is ambiguity: the various voices in the debate are operating with divergent (and often shifting) senses of empirical (in)adequacy. If we can sort out the sense(s) in which the empirical literature in psychology might render an ethic of virtue inadequate, we’ll have a better sense of both the force of the situationist challenge and the prospects and limits of the available responses, including the CAPS response.

There are a number of senses in which situationists and their allies have explicitly or implicitly charged virtue ethics with empirical inadequacy. If we think in terms of family

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<sup>6</sup> These include the widely discussed Milgram obedience studies, the “good Samaritan” studies conducted at Princeton, and a large family of studies focused on the effect of mood on behavior, among others. For a representative sample, see Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); J. M. Darley and C. D. Batson, “From Jerusalem to Jericho: A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27 (1973): 100–8; A. M. Isen and P. F. Levin, “Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and Kindness,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 21 (1972): 384–8; R. A. Baron, “The Sweet Smell of ... Helping: Effects of Pleasant Ambient Fragrance on Prosocial Behavior in Shopping Malls,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23 (1997): 498–503; B. Latané and J. M. Darley, *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn't He Help?* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1970). The details of the studies do not bear directly on my argument in this chapter, so I will not engage them directly.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, see Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*; Russell, *Practical Intelligence*; and Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence*.

resemblance, the various versions of this charge fall roughly into four families. The names and initial descriptions I give to these families derive from their starkest members:

- (1) The *Rarity* family claims that the empirical evidence suggests that people do not have the traditional virtues.
- (2) The “*No Traits*” family claims that the empirical evidence suggests that people do not have character traits.
- (3) The *Explanatory Irrelevance* family claims that the empirical evidence suggests that people’s character traits (if they have any at all) lack explanatory and predictive power.
- (4) The *Developmental Skepticism* family claims that the empirical evidence suggests that people cannot develop the traditional virtues.

These families of claims can come apart. Indeed, most virtue ethicists affirm a *Rarity* claim; that is, they think any theory of virtue committed to the claim that most people, or even a few, actually have the traditional virtues in a robust form is “empirically inadequate,” in the sense that studies and everyday experience seem to reveal that most of us aren’t very virtuous. This is not a recent development. As Julia Annas notes, given their view of the nature and unity of virtue, the ancients also seem to be committed to the idea that “nobody is actually virtuous.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, if the situationists were charging only *Rarity*, the charge wouldn’t be very interesting; the virtue ethicist could simply shrug and reply: *Rarity* isn’t an objection to my view, it’s part of it.<sup>9</sup>

Every situationist affirms some *Rarity* claim; but they affirm more than this. And the “more” is where the real action lies. I will explain how three of the most prominent philosophical situationists—Gilbert Harman, John Doris, and Mark Alfano—level versions of each kind of empirical inadequacy charge. The comparison of their views is instructive for

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<sup>8</sup> Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 83.

<sup>9</sup> In my view, too many virtue ethicists have limited their response to situationism to this kind of shrug. It doesn’t show up so much in print as in casual conversation about situationism.

at least two reasons: first, it demonstrates the nuanced ways in which a shift in one element of the charge of empirical inadequacy affects the overall charge; and second, it reveals how the charge of empirical inadequacy has softened over the years.

I begin with Harman. Few situationists have put the charge of empirical inadequacy as starkly as Harman, whose central charge is a member of the “*No Traits*” family. As he puts it, “despite appearances, there is no empirical support for the existence of character traits;” and again, “there is no reason at all to believe in character traits as ordinarily conceived.”<sup>10</sup> We must take care in understanding what Harman means by “character traits,” for his claim isn’t quite as sweeping as it may seem. He allows, for instance, that people “differ in their perceptions of situations” as well as in their “goals, strategies, neuoses [sic], optimism, etc.”<sup>11</sup> What he denies is that people have “relatively long-term stable disposition[s] to act in distinctive ways,” dispositions that “involve habits and not just skills, involving habits of desiring,” and which are “broad based” (i.e., not indexed to narrow situations).<sup>12</sup> Even with these qualifications, though, Harman’s “*No Traits*” charge is rather bold. Moreover, it implies bold versions of the charges characteristic of the other three families: if people totally lack character traits, then traits cannot serve as a basis for explaining or predicting behavior (= *Explanatory Irrelevance*); if the virtues constitute a subset of traits, and people totally lack traits, then people totally lack the virtues (= *Rarity*); and, in Harman’s own words, “if there is no such thing as character, then there is no such thing as character building” (= *Developmental*

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<sup>10</sup> Harman, “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology,” 330; “The Nonexistence of Character Traits,” 223.

<sup>11</sup> Harman, “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology,” 329.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 317–8.

*Skepticism*).<sup>13</sup> In short, if Harman’s “*No Traits*” claim sticks, virtue ethics is empirically inadequate four times over.

John Doris is less extreme than Harman. He presses what we might call the “*No (Global) Traits*” charge. Global traits, in Doris’s terminology, are both *consistent* and *stable*—where *consistent* traits are “reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior across a diversity of trait-relevant eliciting conditions that may vary widely in their conduciveness to the manifestation of the trait in question,” and *stable* traits are “reliably manifested in trait-relevant behavior over iterated trials of similar trait-relevant eliciting conditions.”<sup>14</sup> Doris’s “global traits” bear a striking resemblance to Harman’s “character traits,” for each is defined as a behavioral disposition that reliably manifests across various situation types. But there are differences between the two views. Harman denies that anyone has character traits, while Doris allows that some people might. Moreover, Doris allows for the existence of what he calls “local traits,” which are “temporally stable,” “situation specific,” and “extremely fine-grained.”<sup>15</sup> So, while he denies that most people are courageous, he allows that some people may have, say, physical-courage-in-the-face-of-rifle-fire. Harman would deny that such a “trait” really counts as a trait.<sup>16</sup> Even with these allowances, though, Doris thinks virtue ethics, which he thinks is committed to global character traits, cannot withstand empirical

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 328. Elsewhere, Harman elaborates on the latter point: “if we know that there is no such thing as a character trait and we know that virtue would require having character traits, how can we *aim* at becoming a virtuous agent? If there are no character traits, there is nothing one can do to acquire character traits that are more like those possessed by a virtuous agent” (“The Nonexistence of Character Traits,” 224; italics original).

<sup>14</sup> Doris, 22.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Harman, “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology,” 318.

investigation. As he puts it, “systematic observation typically fails to reveal the behavioral patterns expected by globalism; *globalist conceptions of personality are empirically inadequate.*”<sup>17</sup>

I’ve noted that Doris’s “*No Traits*” charge applies to fewer traits, and to fewer people, than Harman’s. Still, he affirms versions of each of the other empirical inadequacy charges as well. But the logical connections between these aren’t as clean as in Harman’s case. Doris affirms *Explanatory Irrelevance*, in the sense that global traits (including virtues) don’t explain the behavior patterns we observe. Instead, he thinks behavior is explained by a combination of local traits and situational factors, with the situational factors doing the explanatory heavy lifting.<sup>18</sup> He also affirms *Rarity*, but again his version is weaker than Harman’s: Doris allows that a few exceptional “saints” might actually have virtues;<sup>19</sup> Harman makes no exceptions. Given Doris’s concession, one might wonder why the defender of virtue cannot simply suggest that we need to redouble our efforts at moral formation so that the balance of saints and sinners shifts in the saint direction. We might imagine, for instance, that local traits, as Doris understands them, could provide the building blocks for growth in virtue.<sup>20</sup> But Doris doubts such a move. That is, he affirms *Developmental Skepticism*. Unlike Harman, though, his skepticism doesn’t follow deductively from his “*No Traits*” charge. Rather, Doris’s *Developmental Skepticism* is inductive: given the lack of virtue we observe, it is unrealistic to think most people can develop the virtues.<sup>21</sup> As a result, Doris suggests a different practical upshot than our imagined virtue optimist: rather than try to build character, we should focus

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<sup>17</sup> Doris, 23; italics original.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 24–5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Adams (*A Theory of Virtue*, 127–9, chapter 12), Nancy Snow (*Virtue as Social Intelligence*, 31–7), and Edward Slingerland (“The Situationist Critique and Early Confucian Virtue Ethics,” *Ethics* 121 (2011): 390–419) each advocate a version of the local-to-global developmental strategy.

<sup>21</sup> Doris, 125.

our efforts on avoiding situations that lead to bad behavior and seeking out (and shaping) situations that conduce to good behavior.<sup>22</sup> I would stress, though, that nothing in Doris's view of traits and their relationship to situations requires one to think it is unrealistic for people to develop the traditional virtues (at least in a non-idealized form).<sup>23</sup> It may be, for instance, that reliable character formation methods are available, but that most people do not avail themselves of them.<sup>24</sup> This, in fact, is my view. But more on that later.<sup>25</sup>

For now, let's consider the views of Mark Alfano. It is not altogether clear whether Alfano affirms a "*No Traits*" charge, since—unlike Harman and Doris—Alfano does not focus on the question of whether people have "traits," generically conceived. Still, it seems that his view basically tracks Doris's "*No (Global) Traits*" perspective. For the purposes of assessing virtue ethics, Alfano joins Doris in treating traits roughly as cross-situational behavioral dispositions, argues that most people lack these, and allows for traits with "intra-situational stability."<sup>26</sup> Alfano, though, is a bit more nuanced than his situationist predecessors here, acknowledging that behavioral dispositions are not the whole story when

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 120–1.

<sup>23</sup> The "non-idealized" caveat flags the fact that philosophers have long regarded full-fledged virtue as an ideal to which we aspire, but will likely never reach. As Annas notes, "once we accept the need to take the structure of a virtue seriously, it points us towards an ideal of the fully virtuous person, which functions as a normative ideal even if never met with in real life" (*The Morality of Happiness*, 83). The ancients did not regard this as a reason to cease aspiring to virtue. I suggest, contra Doris, that we shouldn't either.

<sup>24</sup> No doubt other impediments to virtue development exist as well. For instance, the social conditions that would be most conducive to character development (a good family, virtuous friends, etc.) are often inaccessible. Thanks to Bob Roberts for pointing this out to me.

<sup>25</sup> I should note that the proponent of character formation should be happy to admit that Doris's positive suggestions are wise. We should by all means seek to avoid situations that incline us to wrongdoing and seek to shape our situations in virtue-friendly ways. Of course, while wise, this advice is not new. Moreover, actually following Doris's situation-management advice may require certain virtues. Indeed, the skills of recognizing and avoiding and seeking and shaping situations for the purpose of shaping behavior may actually constitute a virtue or set of virtues. Or so I'll argue in a later chapter; see also Travis J. Rodgers and Brandon Warmke, "Situationism versus Situationism," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 18, no. 1 (2015): 9–26.

<sup>26</sup> Alfano, 61. Alfano's intra-situationally stable traits are akin to Doris's "local traits."

it comes to traits.<sup>27</sup> Even so, he does not think alternative conceptions of traits help the virtue ethicist escape the other charges of empirical inadequacy. To understand both why this is so and how Alfano's claims differ from Harman's and Doris's, it will help to consider his updated statement of the situationist challenge.

Alfano draws on a larger set of empirical studies than any of his situationist forerunners, and organizes the situational factors that influence behavior under two broad headings: "bad reasons" and "situational non-reasons."<sup>28</sup> The "bad reasons" divide into traditional "temptations" (concerning which the situationist offers no new challenges) and "situational demand characteristics." The latter "comprise the subtle features of situations that either give people bad reasons without their realizing it or induce them to attend too much to bad reasons and too little to good reasons. They tend to influence behavior on the sly, as it were."<sup>29</sup> Many of the examples from the situationist literature qualify as "situational demand characteristics," including the presence of bystanders and social distance cues.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 74–6, 78–9.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 40–50.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 41–3. Representative bystander studies include B. Latané and J. Darley, "Group Inhibition of Bystander Intervention in Emergencies," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 10 (1968): 215–21; B. Latané and J. Rodin, "A Lady in Distress: Inhibiting Effects of Friends and Strangers on Bystander Intervention," *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 5 (1969): 189–202; J. Darley and B. Latané, "Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8 (1968): 377–83; and S. Schwartz and A. Gottlieb, "Bystander Anonymity and Reactions to Emergencies," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 39 (1991): 418–30. For meta-analyses, see B. Latané and S. Nida, "Ten Years of Research on Group Size and Helping," *Psychological Bulletin* 89 (1981): 308–24; and Peter Fischer et al., "The Bystander-Effect: A Meta-Analytic Review on Bystander Intervention in Dangerous and Non-dangerous Emergencies," *Psychological Bulletin* 137, no. 4 (2011): 517–537.

Representative social distance studies include Milgram, *Obedience to Authority*; I. Bohnet and B. Frey, "Social Distance and Other-regarding Behavior in Dictator Games," *The American Economic Review* 89, no. 1 (1999): 335–39; I. Bohnet and B. Frey "The Sound of Silence in Prisoner's Dilemma and Dictator Games," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 38 (1999): 43–57; B. S. Frey and I. Bohnet, "Institutions Affect Fairness: Experimental Investigations," *Journal of Institutional and Theoretical Economics* 151, no. 2 (1995): 286–303; R. Kurzban, P. DeScioli, and E. O'Brien, "Audience Effects on Moralistic Punishment," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 28 (2007): 75–84; and C. Haney, W. Banks, and P. Zimbardo, "Interpersonal Dynamics of a Simulated Prison," *International Journal of Criminology and Penology* 1 (1973): 69–97. For discussion of social distance, see Alfano, chapter 8.

Interestingly, Alfano admits that the virtue ethicist can both account and correct for the effects not only of temptations, but also of situational demand characteristics. For “the better we come to understand situational demand characteristics, the more they transform into temptations,” so the virtue ethicist’s methods for dealing with temptations can be retooled to counteract situational demand characteristics.<sup>31</sup> For instance, if two friends walking together in a crowded part of town pass a building where smoke is coming from a window, it may be that the bystander effect—“the phenomenon that an individual’s likelihood of helping decreases when passive bystanders are present in a critical situation”<sup>32</sup>—would incline them both to continue on without helping, even if they notice the smoke. But if one of the friends has recently read some situationist literature, she might recognize her own failure of inclination to help *as* a result of the bystander effect. In such a scenario, what functions as a situational demand characteristic for one friend is experienced as a temptation for the other: “Should I counteract the bystander effect and help, or go on my merry way?” Having thus ceased to do its work “on the sly,” the bystander effect is partially sapped of its behavioral influence. Since this point seems to apply to any recognized situational demand characteristic, Alfano thinks situational demand characteristics aren’t ultimately a threat to virtue ethics.<sup>33</sup> One will look in vain for similar concessions from Harman and Doris.

Still, Alfano thinks virtues ethics is in deep trouble. The real problem for virtue ethics, according to Alfano, is the effect of “situational non-reasons” on action. He writes:

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<sup>31</sup> Alfano, 43.

<sup>32</sup> Fischer et al., 517.

<sup>33</sup> Alfano does not say anything about *how* the virtue ethicist can counteract situational demand characteristics; he only says that she theoretically could. I’ll say more about the how in Chapter 6.

Unlike bad reasons, non-reasons don't even provide the agent with *a* reason for conduct contrary to her all things considered reasons. They're merely causal influences on moral conduct, and yet they are hugely and secretly influential. This is why I take situational non-reasons to be the heart of the situationist challenge. ... The idea is not that people easily succumb to temptation, but that *non-temptations* play a surprisingly large role in moral conduct, including both external behavior and more internal phenomena such as thought, feeling, emotion, and deliberation.<sup>34</sup>

Alfano goes on to argue that empirical studies show that situational non-reasons—e.g., ambient sounds, ambient smells, and mood elevators and depressors—regularly cause the majority of people to behave in ways inconsistent with virtue.<sup>35</sup>

How does any of the foregoing relate to the charge(s) of empirical inadequacy? As Alfano sees it, the situationist attack is best understood as a challenge to at least three theses that are central to virtue ethics:<sup>36</sup>

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

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

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

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<sup>34</sup> Alfano, 44; italics original.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 44–8. Studies of ambient sound include K. E. Matthews and L. K. Cannon, “Environmental Noise Level as a Determinant of Helping Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32 (1975): 571–77; R. Page, “Noise and Helping Behavior,” *Environment and Behavior* 9 (1974): 311–34; and V. Konecni, “The Mediation of Aggressive Behavior: Arousal Level Versus Anger and Cognitive Labeling,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32 (1975): 706–16.

Studies of ambient smell include R. A. Baron, “The Sweet Smell of ... Helping,” and R. A. Baron and J. Thomley, “A Whiff of Reality: Positive Affect as a Potential Mediator of the Effects of Pleasant Fragrances on Task Performance and Helping,” *Environment and Behavior* 26 (1994): 766–84.

Mood studies include R. Apsler, “Effects of Embarrassment on Behavior Toward Others,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32 (1975): 145–53; J. Carlsmith and A. Gross, “Some Effects of Guilt on Compliance,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53 (1968): 1178–91; J. Regan, “Guilt, Perceived Justice, and Altruistic Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 18 (1971): 124–32; and J. Weynant, “Effects of Mood States, Costs, and Benefits on Helping,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 36 (1978): 1169–76.

<sup>36</sup> Alfano, 34–5. Alfano actually takes the empirical data to challenge a fourth thesis of virtue ethics as well: “(*egalitarianism\**) Almost anyone can reliably act in accordance with virtue” (34–5). Since this claim does not enter into my argument, I set it aside.

low-fidelity virtue, then reference to that virtue will enable weak predictions of her behavior.<sup>37</sup>

It seems to me that Alfano is employing a modus tollens argument here. In other words, it is not so much that he thinks the conditionals stated in (*consistency*), (*explanatory power*), and (*predictive power\**) are false. Rather, he thinks the empirical data regarding situational demand characteristics and situational non-reasons show that the consequents of these conditionals fail to obtain for the vast majority of people. Alfano's denial of the consequents in (*explanatory power*) and (*predictive power\**) amounts to a version of what I've called *Explanatory Irrelevance*.<sup>38</sup> And the claim that the antecedents of all three theses fail to obtain for the vast majority of people—a claim that follows logically from the conjunction of the theses and the denial of their consequents for the vast majority of people—amounts to a (non-universal) *Rarity* claim.

Alfano also affirms a version of *Developmental Skepticism*, but he appears to be of two minds about it (at least in some of his moods). On the one hand, he explicitly expresses skepticism about the development of virtue. As far as I can tell, he offers no direct argument for such skepticism; rather, he simply assumes that if the situationist is right about the empirical evidence, then “not enough people do *or could* possess the sorts of traits virtue ethicists care about.”<sup>39</sup> Most likely, Alfano's skepticism is rooted in his belief that the various situational factors (especially the situational demand characteristics and situational non-reasons) have widespread, significant, and “secret” influence on behavior, so most people will not be able to counteract them to a virtuous degree.

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<sup>37</sup> The asterisk modifying (*predictive power*) signals that it is a revised version of a claim he considers earlier in the book.

<sup>38</sup> As we'll see below, Alfano actually claims more than this, for he thinks even people's non-virtuous CAPS traits lack sufficient explanatory and predictive power to be of use to virtue ethicists. But since this does not enter into his original statement of the situationist challenge, I'll leave discussion of this issue until later.

<sup>39</sup> Alfano, 82; italics added.

On the other hand, Alfano seems not to think that the situationist attack challenges the psychological possibility of virtue development. For while he thinks the “hard core” of virtue ethics includes the claim that “it is possible for a non-virtuous person to acquire some of the virtues”—a claim he calls (*acquirability*)—he does *not* include (*acquirability*) in his list of situationist targets.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, as we’ve seen, Alfano thinks situational factors can be counteracted. Toward this end, he urges his fellow philosophers to engage in what he calls “moral technology”—the part of the ethical project that “attempts to bridge the gap between moral psychology and normative theory by proposing ways in which we, as moral psychology describes us, can become more as we should be, as normative theory prescribes for us.”<sup>41</sup> Admittedly, Alfano’s proposed program of moral technology is an expression of *Developmental Skepticism*, for it is not designed to encourage robust virtue. Instead, Alfano suggests we aim a bit lower and seek to inculcate “artificially virtuous conduct,” or “factitious virtue.”<sup>42</sup> This, he thinks, is an empirically respectable goal, for studies seem to suggest that labeling people as virtuous can lead to relatively stable virtue-consistent behavior, where the labeling serves as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>43</sup> The details of this account need not detain us here. But it is worth noting that once he gets into the nitty-gritty of his account, it becomes apparent that Alfano’s *Developmental Skepticism* is far from complete. For instance, he argues that if the target of virtue labeling has an adequate

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 34–5.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., chapter 4.

understanding of the relevant virtue, then “factitious virtue may, in the long run, bleed into outright virtue.”<sup>44</sup> And again, he states:

Aristotle thought that people became courageous by acting courageously; I contend that people become courageous (or near enough) by being called courageous. ... Admittedly, the rider “or near enough” must be added here; as I have argued, factitious virtue isn’t real virtue, at least not as traditionally conceived. But if it’s the closest we can come to actual virtue, it would be strange indeed to pooh-pooh it. ... That said, over time, *it might be possible to drop the “near enough” rider*. It may be that, after sufficient habituation, people with merely factitious moral virtues reliant on self-concept and social expectation end up *fully virtuous*, unencumbered by these artificial supports.<sup>45</sup>

Alfano considers this to be speculation on his part; he awaits the verdict of the social scientists.<sup>46</sup> Still, if he is open to the possibility of cultivating real virtue by way of virtue labeling and habituation, the defender of virtue might wonder why we should not be open to the possibility of alternative virtue cultivation methods. At the very least, Alfano offers no critique of historic methods of virtue cultivation, and he gives no reason to think there is anything unique about his version of moral technology, such that virtue labeling, and virtue labeling alone, can “bleed into outright virtue.” Thus, in Alfano’s views we see a further softening of *Developmental Skepticism*. Harman thinks virtue development is impossible. Doris thinks it highly doubtful on inductive grounds. Alfano thinks that we can counteract the effects of situational demand characteristics, and offers a moral technological program that he thinks might result in character traits that shade toward real virtue.

This brief survey of the views of Harman, Doris, and Alfano should make it clear that the charge of empirical inadequacy is a many splendored—and ever-softening—thing. Still, each version of the charge falls into one of the four families I’ve outlined. If this is

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 102–3; italics added.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 103.

correct, then the virtue ethicist's task is clear: develop responses to all four families of empirical inadequacy charges. In the next section, I explain the CAPS model, and show how it provides resources for a response to the charge of empirical inadequacy in all its forms.

### *The CAPS Response*

Situationists commonly cite the work of psychologist Walter Mischel in support of their views. This makes sense, for Mischel was among the earliest to argue that empirical studies suggest that behavior cannot be explained in terms of what Doris would call global traits.<sup>47</sup> But Mischel denies the claim, common among situationists, that situational factors do most of the explaining when it comes to behavior, arguing instead that character traits (properly understood) have explanatory power as well.<sup>48</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that virtue ethicists like Daniel Russell and Nancy Snow have drawn on Mischel's positive view—the cognitive-affective personality system, or CAPS model—in their responses to situationists.<sup>49</sup> In what follows, I give a rough sketch of the CAPS model, and explain how it can be put to use as a response to the charge of empirical inadequacy.

I begin by highlighting two points of contrast between the CAPS model and the globalist model of traits and situations described by Doris. As we've seen, Doris thinks of global traits as behavioral dispositions that are reliably manifested both across various situation types (= consistency) and in iterated versions of the same situation type (=

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<sup>47</sup> See, e.g., Walter Mischel, *Personality and Assessment* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1968).

<sup>48</sup> Mischel notes that his earlier work “has been widely misunderstood to imply that people show no consistencies, that individual differences are unimportant, and that ‘situations’ are the main determinants of behavior,” and that it “would be wasteful to create pseudo-controversies that pit person against situation in order to see which is more important.” See Walter Mischel, “Toward a Cognitive Social Learning Reconceptualization of Personality,” *Psychological Review* 80 (1973): 254–6; cited in Miller, 107.

<sup>49</sup> Russell, *Practical Intelligence*; Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence*; Mischel and Shoda, “A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality.” See also Christian Miller, “Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics,” *The Journal of Ethics* 7, no. 4 (2003): 365–92.

stability). Advocates of the CAPS model challenge globalist models in at least two ways: first, they suggest that we think of *traits* not as simple behavioral dispositions, but as clusters of cognitive-affective units; and second, they suggest that we reconceive the *situations* by which we evaluate traits. I begin with the CAPS conception of traits, and then move to the CAPS conception of situations.

Traits, on the CAPS model, are not simple behavioral dispositions, but rather are interactive clusters of “cognitive-affective units.”<sup>50</sup> Mischel lists five categories of cognitive-affective units: constructive competencies, encoding strategies and personal constructs, behavior-outcome and stimulus-outcome expectancies in particular situations, subjective stimulus values, and self-regulatory systems and plans.<sup>51</sup> Snow translates this list from psychology-speak to common parlance when she gives the following list of cognitive-affective units: “beliefs, desires, feelings, goals, expectations, values, and self-regulatory plans, which can be activated either in response to external situational features, or to stimuli internal to the agent, such as her imaginings or practical reasoning.”<sup>52</sup> Russell’s summary of the CAPS view of traits is similar to Snow’s:

The personality differences between us, then, consist largely in the different goals and priorities we have, how we conceive of ourselves and others, the meanings we attach to different situations, our various ‘executive’ practical skills, features of

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<sup>50</sup> CAPS psychologists are reticent to use “trait” language, whereas CAPS-friendly philosophers like Snow and Russell regularly do so. I follow the philosophers on this point, and recognize that what follows is a contestable philosophical interpretation of the empirical literature. For a convincing argument that “given the other commitments of the CAPS model, the advocate of that model should not only accept that there are trait dispositions, but also understand them as having causal powers and as being grounded in a person’s mind,” see Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 122–6 (quote from 124). Miller goes on to suggest, as I do here, that the trait dispositions in question “can simply be *identified with* ... clusters [of cognitive-affective units]” (ibid., 125; italics original). For further discussion of cognitive-affective units, see ibid., 112–3; Snow, 19–21; and Russell, 252–67.

<sup>51</sup> Mischel, “Toward a Cognitive Social Learning Reconceptualization of Personality,” 265, 275; cited in Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 112.

<sup>52</sup> Snow, 19.

situations to which we attend, and of course, the unique whole that is the sum of all these diverse parts and their interrelations with each other.<sup>53</sup>

Needless to say, this is a far cry from the simplistic behavioral disposition model posited by globalism.

The reference to the “meanings we attach to different situations” in the preceding quote points to the second way in which the CAPS model departs from the globalist model described by Doris: its conception of situations. On Doris’s view, traits are assessed in terms of reliable manifestation within and across “situation types.” Situations, for Doris, are defined “nominally”—that is, solely in terms of their objective features. Snow explains: “By objective features of situations, [situationists] mean the physical or environmental characteristics of situations that are accessible to observers and that can be characterized independently of the meanings those features might have for subjects.”<sup>54</sup> By contrast, the CAPS model defines situations in terms of what is psychologically salient for the subject. On this view, two people may be in the same nominal situation, but construe it in very different ways, and these differences in construal, along with the associated activation of cognitive-affective units, explain differences in action.

An example adapted from Robert Cialdini will help illustrate the two differences I have highlighted between the globalist and CAPS models.<sup>55</sup> Imagine a server at a restaurant. Over the course of one night, she might wait on a family with four young children, a grumpy old curmudgeon, a young couple on their first date, or any number of other patrons.

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<sup>53</sup> Russell, 259. Note the similarity between this summary of the CAPS view and Harman’s concession that we considered earlier, that people “differ in their perceptions of situations” as well as in their “goals, strategies, neuses [sic], optimism, etc.” (Harman, “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology,” 329).

<sup>54</sup> Snow, 18.

<sup>55</sup> Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: Science and Practice*, 2d ed. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman/Little, Brown, 1988). For discussion, see Lee Ross and Richard E. Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology* (London: Pinter and Martin, 2011), 164; and Russell, 178–9.

Understood in nominal terms, one might think these situations are either quite similar, or quite different, depending on the nominal feature(s) one is considering. (They're all nominally similar in being table-waiting situations; they're all nominally different in being situations involving very different kinds of people.) Now, say the server behaves very differently at each table: she's playful with the family, say, in a way she isn't with the curmudgeon or couple. The globalist model will suggest that her behavior is not cross-situationally consistent; she's behaving very differently across table-waiting situations. Still, she might have a collection of local traits: playfulness-while-waiting-on-families, and so on. The CAPS approach, by contrast, would have a different verdict. Even if her outward *behavior* is inconsistent (i.e., her body does different things at different tables), the waitress shows cross-situational consistency, for she construes each situation as an opportunity to earn tips, and this construal activates a variety of beliefs and desires leading to consistent tip-seeking *actions*.<sup>56</sup> One important finding in CAPS research is that agents and their traits show a great deal of cross-situational consistency when the situations under consideration are defined psychologically, rather than nominally.<sup>57</sup> As Mischel puts it, "individuals are characterized by distinctive and stable patterns of behavior variability"—or, more precisely, action variability—"across situations."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Of course, even if the server construes each situation in terms of tip seeking, that does not mean her construals are identical in each case. She also construes each situation somewhat differently—she sees different challenges, different opportunities. The governing concern is to get tips, perhaps (though it's probably more humane than that), but her "server wisdom" generates a variety of strategies in response to variations in the situation. Thanks to Bob Roberts for pointing this out.

<sup>57</sup> See Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 112–21.

<sup>58</sup> Walter Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," *Annual Review of Psychology* 55 (2004), 7; cited in Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 117n29. For elaboration on cross-situational consistency as understood in the CAPS model, see W. Mischel, "Convergences and Challenges in the Search for Consistency," *American Psychologist* 39 (1984): 351–64 (esp. 360–1); W. Mischel, "Personality Coherence and Dispositions in a Cognitive-Affective Personality System (CAPS) Approach," in *The Coherence of Personality: Social-Cognitive Bases of Consistency, Variability, and Organization*, ed. D. Cervone and Y. Shoda (New York: Guilford Press, 1999): 37–60 (esp. 43–4); W. Mischel, "Toward an Integrative Science of the Person," 7, 15; W. Mischel, "From *Personality*

Much more could be said about the CAPS model. But from what I've said it should be clear that the CAPS model of traits is far richer and more nuanced than the globalist model described by Doris. It should also be clear that it is the sort of model assumed by virtue ethicists throughout history. Indeed, Christian Miller goes so far as to suggest that the CAPS model is "unoriginal and uncontroversial," and that "*using technical language, the CAPS model re-describes and finds supporting evidence for basic platitudes of commonsense folk psychology.*"<sup>59</sup> Ultimately, I think Miller's assessment isn't quite fair (more on this below). But he is surely onto something: virtue ethicists have always thought about character using the concepts (but not the language) of clusters of cognitive-affective units, not simple behavioral dispositions.

So how does the CAPS model help the virtue ethicist respond to the charge(s) of empirical inadequacy? I'll summarize briefly. In reply to the "*No Traits*" charge, the CAPS-friendly virtue ethicist points out that the situationist has been operating with the wrong view of traits and situations, and provides empirical (and other) evidence for the existence of traits (properly understood) that are consistent across situations (properly understood).<sup>60</sup> It is true that many people's CAPS traits fall short of being "global" in Doris's sense. After all, we do not always respond psychologically in the same way to nominally similar situations. Even so, relatively "local" CAPS traits have the potential for greater globality. Snow, for instance,

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*and Assessment* (1968) to *Personality Science*, 2009," *Journal of Research in Personality* 43 (2009): 282–90 (esp. 284); and W. Mischel and Y. Shoda, "A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality," 246–68 (esp. 255–7).

<sup>59</sup> Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 108; italics original.

<sup>60</sup> For the empirical evidence, see the studies cited above in footnote 58. Among the non-empirical evidence a CAPS proponent could offer is her introspective awareness of her traits; for one version of this kind of approach, see Julia Annas, "Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology," *A Priori* 2 (2003): 20–59 (esp. 23). Situationists tend not to give much weight to introspection; see, e.g., Alfano, 68–9.

offers one model whereby local CAPS traits can be globalized by way of “self-scrutiny and practical reason.”<sup>61</sup> She provides the following illustrative example:

Suppose that I show great compassion, but only in certain cases, perhaps those involving small, cuddly animals. My compassion is domain-dependent. I wish I could extend my compassion to the domain of people and take as my goal becoming a more globally compassionate person. ... I begin to monitor and evaluate my compassionate reactions, examining them with the plan of self-development. First, I ask myself why I show compassion only toward small animals. ... Through reflection, I ascertain that I perceive them as vulnerable, and this perception of vulnerability evokes compassionate feelings in me. I then ask myself why I do not perceive the vulnerabilities of fellow humans. ... I work to become more aware of common human vulnerabilities. ... I reflect on and seek to remove or overcome factors that might inhibit my compassionate response ... . I educate myself to become more aware of compassion-eliciting circumstances, to pick up on cues from others that might reveal distress. I try to habituate myself to perceive these cues and react compassionately.<sup>62</sup>

Snow goes on to discuss empirical studies that support the claim that this sort of self-regulation can successfully result in more globalized traits.<sup>63</sup> Thus, it seems we have empirical support for traits after all.<sup>64</sup>

In reply to the *Explanatory Irrelevance* charge, the CAPS-friendly defender of virtue points to empirical evidence suggesting that cross-situational consistency of trait manifestation is quite high when we both define situations psychologically rather than

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<sup>61</sup> Snow, 31–7 (quote from 34). For more on the local-to-global strategy, see Adams, 127–9, chapter 12; and Slingerland, “The Situationist Critique and Early Confucian Virtue Ethics.”

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 33–4. Though she does not make the connection herself, Snow’s recommendations here are very much like Mengzi’s advice for how to “extend” one’s compassion. See, e.g., *Mengzi*, 1A7. For English translation, see *Mengzi: With Selections from Traditional Commentaries*, trans. Bryan W. Van Norden (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2008), 7–15; for commentary on Mengzi’s view of ethical cultivation, see Van Norden’s introduction to this volume, xxxiii–xxxvii.

<sup>63</sup> Snow, 34–7. Specifically, she draws upon the empirical literature on combating stereotypes and prejudice. Relevant studies include P. G. Devine, “Stereotypes and Prejudice: Their Automatic and Controlled Components,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56 (1989): 5–18; P. G. Devine and M. J. Monteith, “Automaticity and Control in Stereotyping,” in *Dual-process Theories in Social Psychology*, ed. S. Chaiken and Y. Trope (New York: Guilford Press, 1999), 339–60; and P. G. Devine, E. A. Plant, and B. M. Buswell, “Breaking the Prejudice Habit: Progress and Obstacles,” in *Reducing Prejudice and Discrimination*, ed. S. Oskamp (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2000), 185–210.

<sup>64</sup> Since compassion is not merely a trait, but a virtue, Snow’s example also counts against *Developmental Skepticism*.

nominally and define traits in terms of cognitive-affective units rather than simple behavioral dispositions.<sup>65</sup> Understood in this way, traits (together with the trait-relevant situations) have quite a lot of explanatory power.

In reply to the *Rarity* charge, the CAPS-friendly virtue ethicist (like most other virtue ethicists throughout history) typically acknowledges that most people are not robustly virtuous. Most of us have false beliefs, inordinate desires, inadequate self-regulatory plans, weak wills, and misshapen habits of situational construal. But, they suggest, we should not despair, for at least two reasons.

First, as even Doris recognizes, there is good evidence for local traits.<sup>66</sup> Doris individuates such traits by the nominal situations in which they are instantiated. But a proponent of the CAPS model could utilize the same empirical evidence to point to patterns of construal, concern, belief, etc., that are activated in certain situations. Presumably some of these clusters of CAPS units will be well integrated, even if only “locally,” and could qualify as “local virtues.”<sup>67</sup> So it seems that at least some people already have the seeds of more robust virtues in their psychological makeup.

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<sup>65</sup> See the studies cited in footnote 58.

<sup>66</sup> See, e.g., W. Mischel and P. K. Peake, “Beyond Déjà Vu in the Search for Cross-Situational Consistency,” *Psychological Review* 89 (1982): 730–55; J. Wright and W. Mischel, “A Conditional Approach to Dispositional Constructs,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 53 (1987): 1159–1177, and “Conditional Hedges and the Intuitive Psychology of Traits,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 55 (1988): 454–469; Y. Shoda, W. Mischel, and J. Wright, “Intuitive Interactionism in Person Perception: Effects of Situation-Behavior Relations on Dispositional Judgments,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56 (1989): 41–53, and “Intraindividual Stability in the Organization and Patterning of Behavior: Incorporating Psychological Situations into the Idiographic Analysis of Personality,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 67 (1994): 674–687; and Mischel and Shoda, “A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Personality.” For discussion, see Miller, “Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics,” 382–88.

<sup>67</sup> See Snow, chapter 1.

Second, even if “local virtues” turn out to be relatively rare,<sup>68</sup> if virtues are simply well-integrated clusters of excellent cognitive-affective units, then even those who lack “local virtues” still possess the psychological building blocks of virtue—namely, currently-not-so-well-integrated cognitive-affective units and/or the more fundamental capacities to develop new CAPS units. In other words, CAPS units are the raw materials of virtue, and we have good reason (empirical and otherwise) to think we can alter and restructure our cognitive-affective units for the better, or even create new CAPS units, by way of self-regulation, habitual action, and other methods. Thus, if these methods really are effective, then even the non-virtuous could become more virtuous, provided they actually employ the methods.

The aforementioned character formation methods did not develop as an aspect of the CAPS response. But the CAPS proponent may lay claim to any number of them in response to the charge of *Developmental Skepticism*. Snow gives both a self-regulatory model—wherein the agent reshapes her own character in a rather self-conscious, intentional way—and a habituation model—in which growth in character happens more or less naturally as the agent pursues her extra-characterological goals.<sup>69</sup> Others treat character formation much like the development of a practical skill or expertise,<sup>70</sup> while those influenced by the Confucian tradition think of “virtue cultivation as immersion into a way of life.”<sup>71</sup> Still other

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<sup>68</sup> Christian Miller expresses doubts about the widespread possession of local virtues (and vices) in *Character and Moral Psychology*, 198–202.

<sup>69</sup> Snow, chapters 1 and 2, respectively.

<sup>70</sup> See, e.g., Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley, “The Psychological Foundations of Everyday Morality and Moral Expertise,” in *Character Psychology and Character Education*, ed. Daniel K. Lapsley and F. Clark Power, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 140–65. For commentary on these views, see Nancy E. Snow, “How Habits Make Us Virtuous,” (paper presented at “Virtue and Its Development: An Interdisciplinary Symposium,” University of Notre Dame, 22 May 2014).

<sup>71</sup> See, e.g., Slingerland, “The Situationist Critique and Early Confucian Virtue Ethics;” and Deborah Mower, “Situationism and Confucian Virtue Ethics,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16 (2013): 113–37. Quote from Snow, “How Habits Make Us Virtuous,” 20.

methods could be mentioned.<sup>72</sup> I will have much to say about these, as well as some historic methods that have not received much attention within the situationism debate, in the chapters to come. For now, I simply note that the charge of *Developmental Skepticism* has not gone unanswered.

The foregoing sketch of the CAPS response provides at least a basic sense of both the nature of the CAPS model and the potentially powerful role it could play in a response to situationism. In sum, a CAPS-informed virtue ethic is empirically adequate in four ways: (1) we have good empirical evidence for CAPS traits; (2) we have good empirical evidence that CAPS traits have explanatory power; (3) we have good empirical evidence that most people are not virtuous, but a commitment to widespread virtue was never a part of virtue ethics, and it seems as though some people have local CAPS virtues that could be globalized; and (4) we have good empirical evidence that people have both the psychological raw material (i.e., changeable/developable cognitive-affective units) and the methods needed to move from the CAPS traits we now have toward virtuous CAPS traits.<sup>73</sup> In my view, this last piece of the CAPS response requires the most ongoing work by philosophers, and the rest of this dissertation will contribute to this work in ways I'll describe below. First, though, I need to do a little ground clearing, for the CAPS response has detractors. In the next section, I summarize the main objections to the CAPS response and provide my own replies.

### *Objections and Replies*

John Doris, Mark Alfano, and Christian Miller each have challenged the CAPS response. Their arguments are not so much against the CAPS model of psychology itself, but

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<sup>72</sup> See, e.g., Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, chapter 9; and Nancy E. Snow, ed., *Cultivating Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Theology, and Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>73</sup> For references, see the footnotes above.

against its usefulness as a response to situationism. Here's a brief summary of their main objections: (1) switching from a behavioral standard of consistency to a psychological standard merely changes the subject, leading the CAPS proponent to ignore a morally significant form of inconsistency; (2) switching from a behavioral disposition account of virtues to a nuanced, multi-layered account actually makes the empirical case against virtue ethics even stronger; (3) CAPS traits don't have the kind of explanatory power required by virtue ethics; (4) virtues cannot be considered a subset of CAPS traits because the former require a sensitivity to reasons, whereas the latter do not; and (5) the CAPS model needs to be supplemented significantly by work in empirical psychology if it is going to help us (a) move beyond folk psychology or (b) improve our character. The astute reader may have noticed that these five objections relate directly to the four families of empirical inadequacy charges outlined above. So if these objections stick, the CAPS response to situationism is no response at all.

I think the first four objections are misplaced. In short, the objections either shift between senses of empirical inadequacy to make their point, or they make false assumptions about the commitments of virtue ethicists. The fifth challenge is more difficult. I agree with it to some extent, but my agreement is qualified. In the rest of this section I'll explain and respond to the five challenges.

*Challenge #1: The CAPS Response Simply Changes the Subject*

We have seen that when we move from a behavioral model of traits and situations to a CAPS model—according to which traits are understood as clusters of cognitive-affective units and situations are defined psychologically—we find that agents exhibit far more cross-situational consistency than is suggested by the situationists. These results serve as the basis for the CAPS response to *“No Traits”* and *Explanatory Irrelevance*. However, John Doris argues

that the CAPS psychologist has objectionably changed the subject, and still needs to account for our seeming lack of consistency across nominally defined situations. Granting that CAPS psychology may reveal one form of cross-situational consistency, he asks, “is it a mistake to [continue to] worry about failures of consistency across nominal situations?”<sup>74</sup> He develops his challenge using what he calls a “personological fantasy,” which features a mountain climber who has compassion below 8,000 meters, but thinks compassion isn’t needed above 8,000 meters and so isn’t compassionate above that altitude.<sup>75</sup> Even if the climber exhibits total consistency in both her below-8,000-meters compassion and her above-8,000-meters lack-of-compassion, this still amounts to a striking and morally significant form of inconsistency across nominally similar situations (where the situations all “involve a person in need of help and a person able to help”).<sup>76</sup> Yet, Doris suggests, the CAPS psychologist will see only consistency here—the climber exhibits “aipassion” (altitude-indexed compassion)—thereby turning a blind eye to the very real inconsistency in the climber’s behavior. He summarizes the problem:

Consistency is relative. Talk of consistency or inconsistency *simpliciter* is meaningless, and inconsistency relative to one standard may be consistency relative to another. ... While a change in context, as from nominal to psychological situations, may reveal consistency on one perspective, it cannot resolve inconsistency on the other. The real question concerns what regularities, or failures of regularity, should interest us. ... Without compelling argument to the effect that the standards expressed in traditional moral trait names are misbegotten, inconsistency with regard to them is important for moral psychology.<sup>77</sup>

Doris is right to push against speaking of (in)consistency *simpliciter*. (Thus the distinctions I have made.) But is he right to imply that the CAPS model leads us to overlook

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<sup>74</sup> Doris, 78.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 78–85.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

the “regularities, or failures of regularity, [that] should interest us” when considering “the standards expressed in traditional moral trait names,” in the interest of focusing on less significant regularities? I think not.

To begin, it seems to me that Doris misrepresents what the CAPS psychologist would say about his mountain climber.<sup>78</sup> There is no reason to suppose that Mischel and company would invent a new trait name in an effort to find consistency where there isn’t any to be found. Rather, they would (rightly) recognize consistently compassionate behavior below 8,000 meters and consistent omissions of compassionate behavior above, and would try to explain the differences on the basis of the climber’s varying construals of the objectively similar situational features, along with her underlying beliefs, desires, etc. For instance, it could be the case that above 8,000 meters the climber does not help because her underlying beliefs and desires incline her not to construe the suffering of others as a reason to help, say, when helping would put one’s life in jeopardy or when the sufferer has willingly taken on the relevant risks.<sup>79</sup> (Any number of explanations of this sort could be available, depending on the actual circumstances.) This seems like a perfectly reasonable way to understand the case that recognizes an important form of cross-situational consistency without either ignoring the purportedly troublesome inconsistency or attributing a very odd trait to the climber.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> For a similar line of argument, see Snow, 26–7.

<sup>79</sup> The risks are well known: mountain climbers call the terrain above 8,000 meters “the death zone.” Thanks to Bob Kruschwitz for pointing this out.

<sup>80</sup> Doris’s invention of the odd trait “aipassion” does raise an important metaphysical question about how bundles of CAPS units get individuated as traits. A wide spectrum of views is possible here. For instance, one could be a mereological nihilist about traits, feeling free to call *any* grouping of CAPS units a trait. Or one could try to stay very close to ordinary language (this is my favored view). Or one could deviate from ordinary language in a principled way, looking for genuine but typically unrecognized connections between CAPS units (Christian Miller’s “Mixed Traits” view seems to be a version of this approach; see his *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013]). I won’t attempt to adjudicate this debate here. I

Now, if we judge the climber's inconsistent behavior to be normatively deficient, we will need to recognize that she probably isn't globally compassionate (even if she has a local version of the virtue). But the solution to her moral inconsistency wouldn't be a matter of simply tinkering with her *behavior* above 8,000 meters (thus achieving cross-situational consistency on Doris's terms); rather, we'll want her to learn to *see* the compassion-relevant features of her situations *in compassion's terms*, to *care* in the right kinds of ways, and to *act* (and not merely *behave*) accordingly. In other words, "the standards expressed in traditional moral trait names" (like "compassion") are standards of construal, desire, belief, action, etc.; they are not merely behavioral standards. Doris's behavioral standard of consistency might still be of interest to us in assessing character, at least as a rough heuristic for understanding an agent's internal psychology. But it is woefully inadequate apart from the consideration of something like a CAPS conception of character. Of course, the proponent of the CAPS response shouldn't be concerned *only* with agents' internal psychological consistency. We should also care about normative standards of action. But the normative standards of action are not merely behavioral; they're psychological. (An agent's psychology—his intentions and motives—are determinative of the identity of his actions; strictly speaking, behavior is just bodily movements.) Thus, the ultimate goal for an agent should be to achieve internal consistency of construal, belief, desire, etc. that is also normatively excellent. That is, we should aim to have the patterns of interpretation, concern, action, etc. that would characterize the ideal agent (patterns that, incidentally, would not necessarily issue in consistent behavior across nominally defined situations). Admittedly, the empirical evidence seems to suggest that most people don't measure up on this score. But the CAPS proponent is free to affirm *Rarity*, even as she claims that the CAPS model provides a strong response

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simply want to point out that the debate exists, that it cannot be settled on purely empirical grounds, and that the CAPS-friendly virtue ethicist is not forced by the empirical evidence to invent odd traits.

to “No Traits” and *Explanatory Irrelevance*, and puts us on track to answer *Developmental Skepticism*.

Still, one might worry that we seem to fare *even worse* by CAPS standards than by merely behavioral standards. And that brings us to our second challenge.

### *Challenge #2: CAPS Virtues Make it Worse*

The second challenge applies not only to the CAPS response, but to any response to situationism that complains that the conception of character assumed by Doris and company is overly behavioristic.<sup>81</sup> Both Alfano and Miller level versions of this challenge. I’ll focus on Alfano’s.<sup>82</sup> Here it is in brief.

The virtue ethicist claims that Harman and Doris have attacked a straw man of sorts by thinking about virtues as behavioral dispositions, when virtue ethicists have a much more nuanced idea of what a virtue consists in. But, the objection goes, the virtue ethicist’s more nuanced conception of virtue is also empirically inadequate, for the psychological studies show not only that people aren’t disposed to behave virtuously, but also that most people lack the beliefs, desires, self-regulatory plans, moral attentiveness, etc. that are supposed to be aspects of virtue.

To illustrate the problem, Alfano develops a hypothetical scenario based on the real-life story of Wesley Autrey, “who risked his own life to save a stranger from an oncoming

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<sup>81</sup> For versions of this response that do not assume a CAPS model, see, e.g., Kamtekar, “Situationism and Virtue Ethics,” and Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*. Alfano (74–6) calls this general family of responses “the behaviorism bogeyman;” Miller (*Character and Moral Psychology*, 214–5) prefers the label “The ‘Wrong Conception of Character’ Response.”

<sup>82</sup> Alfano, 74–6. Here’s Miller’s statement: “The immediate problem with this strategy for responding is that the alternative picture of virtue that is being presented *does not fare any better* (and perhaps, fares *even worse*) than the original account that Harman and Doris had in mind” (Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 215; italics original). This way of putting the point is in keeping with Miller’s general strategy of pressing virtue ethicists to accept a *Rarity* thesis (which most virtue ethicists gladly do).

train.”<sup>83</sup> He imagines several bystanders: one doesn’t notice the imperiled stranger because of the volume of his iPod; another is oblivious to the stranger because of her dejected mood; another is in a great mood and notices the stranger fall onto the tracks, but mistakes the fall for performance art; and the list goes on. Alfano asks whether any of these bystanders “share anything of moral value with Wesley Autrey? Which of them, if any, possesses the virtue of courage?”<sup>84</sup> Regarding the latter question, Alfano’s answer is: None.

To be courageous is to have a complex disposition to *notice* when others are in need, to *construe* ambiguous cues well, to *want* to intervene on behalf of threatened values, to *deliberate* soundly about what would in fact be the best way to intervene, and to *succeed* in interventions one decides to make. That’s a five-napkin burger of a disposition. If this is the right way to think about virtues, what follows is that simply correlating objective conditions with behavior is *too lenient, not too stringent*.<sup>85</sup>

Though we might quibble with details, Alfano’s account of courage is at least close to what some CAPS-friendly virtue ethicists would say courage amounts to. And it does seem that such a trait may be even rarer than its behavioral counterpart. So, CAPS virtues remain empirically inadequate.

In reply, I’ll begin with Alfano’s take on the upshot of his argument: “what follows is that simply correlating objective conditions with behavior is *too lenient, not too stringent*.”<sup>86</sup> In a sense, Alfano is right. To move from a behaviorist standard to a multi-layered, richly psychological standard of virtue does “raise the bar.” But in another sense, the categories of *lenient* and *stringent* are simply misplaced. The more relevant conclusion we ought to draw from Alfano’s hypothetical scenario is that “simply correlating objective conditions with behavior” is insufficiently subtle. Alfano’s scenario nicely displays the fact that a lot of

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<sup>83</sup> Alfano, 75.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*; italics original.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*; italics original.

factors could contribute to a failure of courage. Simply saying that such widespread failures show that people aren't virtuous papers over the vast differences that exist among people, and hides from view important insights we might be able to gain concerning how the non-virtuous might grow in virtue. To take just one example, what if we were to find that the iPod listener has all the CAPS dispositions Alfano lists as essential parts of courage, but fails to act simply because of the distracting iPod? Such a person's plan for moral formation would be quite different from someone who, say, listens to her iPod at maximum volume *and* cannot manage her fears. Focusing on behavior and nominal situational factors in the way Harman and Doris do, while largely ignoring cognitive-affective units and the psychological situation as the subject construes it, sets one up to miss the most significant ways people differ from one another in their character.

The foregoing suggests the fundamental problem with Alfano's argument: he seems to be thinking of the CAPS response as a response to the *Rarity* charge. But I've argued that the CAPS model is primarily meant as a response to the other versions of the charge of empirical inadequacy. Indeed, I (like most CAPS proponents and traditional virtue ethicists) accept some *Rarity* thesis. So even if virtue turns out to be even rarer by CAPS standards than behaviorist standards, this does nothing to suggest that a CAPS model of traits is not superior to the behavioral model *as a model of traits in general and of virtues in particular*. It is true that thinking of virtues along CAPS lines could make it more difficult to respond to *Developmental Skepticism*; plausibly, it is easier to train people to act *in accordance with* virtue than *from* virtue. But that's OK; that just means the CAPS-friendly virtue ethicist has more work to do—e.g., work like that found in this dissertation. If she's working with a CAPS conception of virtues, rather than a behavioral one, she'll at least be aiming her efforts in the right direction.

In sum, then, virtue ethicists have multiple responses available to various versions of the charge of empirical inadequacy. We should let them have a layered response, and avoid pressing one aspect of their case to do more work than it is intended to do.

*Challenge #3: CAPS Traits Don't Explain*

Alfano doesn't just think CAPS virtues are rare; he also thinks CAPS traits (whether virtuous or not) fail to provide the kinds of explanations of behavior virtue ethicists think they do. As he puts it, "both Snow and Russell seem to think that CAPS traits, unlike ordinary dispositions, explain and predict most of the variance in people's behavior."<sup>87</sup> The problem as Alfano sees it is that CAPS traits "explain at most 20 percent of the variance in behavior"—a marked increase over the 10 percent explained by "ordinary dispositions," but far from "most of the variance in people's behavior." He stresses that this isn't a problem with the CAPS model as defended by Mischel and associates, for they think "behavior is attributable in part to personality, in part to situation, and in part to the interaction of the two." He concludes: "At best, the CAPS view is one more reason to opt for an interactionist picture of human agency, not a personalist one."<sup>88</sup>

My reply to Alfano in this case is simply to suggest that he misreads both Russell and Snow. They both argue (as Aristotle did before them) for what Alfano calls an "interactionist picture of human agency."<sup>89</sup> Thus, Alfano has set the bar too high for the virtue ethicist regarding the *Explanatory Irrelevance* charge. The defender of virtue need not show that character traits are the primary explanations of action; they just need to show that they figure

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> See Russell, 254–8; and Snow, chapter 1.

significantly in the explanation of action.<sup>90</sup> And the CAPS model provides a way to show this.<sup>91</sup>

#### *Challenge #4: CAPS Traits and Reasons*

Alfano's next argument against the virtue ethicist's application of the CAPS model to virtue theory is this:

CAPS traits are individuated internally. For example, someone would count as having CAPS-compassion if he were reliably disposed to want to help, deliberated well about how to help, and acted successfully on the basis of that deliberation *whenever he thought someone needed or deserved help*. ... But of course compassion isn't (just) a matter of helping when you *feel* that someone needs or deserves help; it's a matter of helping when someone *does* need or deserve help. ... Virtues as traditionally conceived include a sensitivity to reasons. CAPS traits don't.<sup>92</sup>

Alfano's objection admits of two interpretations. Neither works.

On the first reading, Alfano is suggesting that the CAPS traits people *actually have* are not sensitive to reasons in the way virtues are supposed to be.<sup>93</sup> This reading is suggested by

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<sup>90</sup> Indeed, we might wonder whether what Alfano calls "personalism" is even a coherent concept. After all, actions are by nature responsive to situations; that's an essential aspect of the metaphysics of action. Thanks to Bob Roberts for pointing this out.

<sup>91</sup> Miller does not make the same complaint about Russell's and Snow's appropriation of CAPS, but he does argue that the more general category of responses he calls "The 'Mental States are Important Too' Response" is inadequate. His focus is the work of John Sabini and Maury Silver, who argue that not only situational factors but also character traits contribute to behavior (see their "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued"). Miller agrees with this general view. But he suggests that the only way in which Sabini and Silver apply their insights to the situationist challenge is in the final footnote of their paper, where they say the empirical evidence "might give us reason to believe that virtuous characters are rarer than we might have imagined, but it does not trouble the notion of character or show that virtue is unattainable" (Sabini and Silver, 562n59; for discussion, see Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 217). Miller goes on to point out that their response requires the admission of *Rarity*, and that they haven't shown *how* we can grow in virtue. I would simply point out, again, that various responses do various work. Sabini and Silver's argument, like the CAPS response, responds to the "*No Traits*" and *Explanatory Irrelevance* charges. That we still have to address other aspects of the charge of empirical inadequacy is a separate matter. Miller recognizes that defenders of virtue can use multiple tactics in response to situationism (*ibid.*, 223); his point is to stress what the response misses (the *Rarity* and *Developmental Skepticism* charges). My point is to stress what it achieves.

<sup>92</sup> Alfano, 78–9.

<sup>93</sup> Taken in this way, Alfano's objection looks like a twist on Doris's argument considered above, framed in terms of sensitivity to reasons rather than behavioral consistency. At the very least, Doris's mountain climber, who thinks helping isn't required above 8,000 feet, is aptly described as being disposed to help "*whenever he thought someone ... deserved help.*"

a comment Alfano makes about his CAPS-and-reasons argument: “This is the same point I made above in responding to the charge of behaviorism.”<sup>94</sup> But we’ve already seen that *that* point was misplaced, for it took the CAPS proponent to be responding to the *Rarity* charge. But someone like Russell or Snow would be totally consistent if she claimed (a) that virtues make up a subset of CAPS traits; and (b) most people’s CAPS traits aren’t robustly virtuous. In fact, this is precisely what Snow claims. Indeed, a primary aim of her book is to explain how to move from the CAPS traits we have to more virtuous ones. Russell is less clear about how commonly instantiated he thinks the virtues are.<sup>95</sup> But he is clear that a CAPS trait counts as a virtue only if it is responsive to the right kinds of reasons: “on a cognitive-affective conception of the virtues, we understand ... one’s consistent character trait to be a virtue just in case one’s own standard of consistency where that trait is concerned is *also* an ethically good one, in virtue of which one acts for ethically good reasons.”<sup>96</sup> So if this is the right reading of Alfano’s argument, he (again) mistakenly thinks the CAPS response is intended as a response to *Rarity*. Of course, if *Rarity* has force (as I think it does), this does raise the question of *Developmental Skepticism*: can we move from non-virtuous to virtuous CAPS traits, and if so, how? In a sense, the rest of this dissertation is my answer to these questions. But for now, I reiterate two points: first, if it makes sense to think of virtues as a subset of CAPS traits, this gives us some reason to think we could cultivate the virtues (since we can cultivate CAPS traits); and second, the move from our current CAPS traits to real virtue might not be a huge leap, at least for some people. For example, the person with CAPS-compassion (as Alfano describes it) is pretty far along the path to real compassion:

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<sup>94</sup> Alfano, 79.

<sup>95</sup> Russell notes that he doesn’t favor responding to the situationist challenge by accepting some *Rarity* thesis (240); but he never explicitly denies *Rarity*. His opposition seems to be aimed at attempts to use it as a stand-alone response.

<sup>96</sup> Russell, 324; italics original.

She has most of the psychology in place, but needs to become better at recognizing suffering. This task, I'll admit, may be a significant challenge, especially in light of the (supposedly) pervasive and subtle influence of what Alfano calls situational demand characteristics and situational non-reasons. But, I'll argue, it can be met.

This leads to the second reading of Alfano's argument. He might be suggesting that CAPS traits *aren't* sensitive to reasons because they *cannot* be. To get to this reading, we would need to take Alfano's claim that "CAPS traits don't [include a sensitivity to reasons]" as a categorical statement about the nature of all CAPS traits, such that virtues could not—either conceptually, or as a matter of contingent fact—be a subset of CAPS traits.

The conceptual claim is implausible, and Alfano doesn't substantiate it. As we saw in the discussion of Alfano's hypothetical bystander scenario, he does a pretty good job of showing how something like a CAPS model can make conceptual sense of a virtue like courage. However, Alfano might be thinking that, given the power and ubiquity of situational factors, humans could not, as a matter of contingent fact, cultivate CAPS traits that are sensitive to reasons in the way required by virtue.<sup>97</sup> This, it seems to me, is the most potent reading of Alfano's argument (even if not the most natural), for it raises (yet again) the practical, developmental question. As a result, unsurprisingly, I direct the reader to the rest of this dissertation for my response. That brings us to the final challenge.

#### *Challenge #5: CAPS Needs Supplementation*

The final challenge to the CAPS response comes from Christian Miller. The essence of his challenge is this: the CAPS model needs to be supplemented significantly by work in

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<sup>97</sup> Nicole Smith pushed this reading of Alfano's argument in her very helpful comments on material from this chapter delivered at the 2015 Pacific Division Meeting of the American Philosophical Association.

empirical psychology if it is going to help us (a) move beyond folk psychology or (b) improve our character.<sup>98</sup>

As I noted above, Miller thinks the CAPS approach does not advance our understanding of human personality beyond some platitudes of folk psychology. This is not to say that he thinks the CAPS model is wrong. Indeed, Miller “largely agree[s] with the basic points the [CAPS] model is making.”<sup>99</sup> Rather, like Walter Mischel himself, Miller thinks of CAPS not as a theory of personality, but as “a background framework or ‘meta-theory’ with general principles from which to *start* developing an actual, detailed account of personality, and so by application, of moral traits.”<sup>100</sup> Here’s how Miller thinks CAPS should function in debates about character:

Starting with CAPS as a background framework, two things need to happen next. First, psychologists need to work out what the mental states actually are which form clusters in our minds that lead to a kind of consistent behavior across time and situations. ... Secondly, once psychologists get a good grip on these mental states and their causal relationships, then philosophers and other normative theorists need to come along and *evaluate* them.<sup>101</sup>

He also thinks more empirical psychological work is needed if virtue ethicists (whether they affirm the CAPS model or not) are going to be able to say anything to address the charge of *Developmental Skepticism*. As he sees it, advocates of virtue ethics “need to outline realistic and

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<sup>98</sup> I’m eliding two issues Miller treats separately in his book: the work he thinks CAPS psychologists need to do, and the work virtue ethicists need to do. The two are closely related, especially for a virtue ethicist who affirms CAPS psychology. So I treat them together.

<sup>99</sup> Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 127. The “largely” caveat mostly has to do with a tendency among CAPS psychologists to treat trait dispositions as something other than causal dispositions (see *ibid.*, 122–6). But Miller acknowledges that the causal view is compatible with CAPS, and he notes that philosophers who utilize CAPS affirm the causal interpretation of traits. I agree with Miller on this matter, and affirm the causal interpretation of CAPS traits. So I won’t address this issue further.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 127–8; italics original.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 128; italics original.

empirically informed ways for most human beings to improve their [less than virtuous character], and so far they have not done so.”<sup>102</sup>

My reply to Miller’s challenge is mixed. On the one hand, I agree with him that much more needs to be said about both human personality and character development than what the CAPS model has said. Indeed, my dissertation aims to do just this. But I part ways with Miller in at least three directions: (1) I think the contribution of the CAPS account in providing support for what Miller calls “folk psychology” is more significant than he does; (2) I think we are farther along in understanding human personality and character development than Miller suggests we are; and (3) I take a different view of the cognitive division of labor going forward than Miller does. My three disagreements with Miller are interrelated.

First, regarding CAPS and folk psychology, Miller undersells the import of what CAPS gets us in the debate with situationists. He notes:

Now to be fair, Harman and Doris have called into question certain specific folk commitments concerning the possession of traditional virtues and vices. So if the CAPS model ends up vindicating other folk platitudes about the role of clusters of beliefs and desires across time and situations, then at least it holds out the promise of providing a defense of the possession of the traditional virtues and vices which starts from an empirically secure foundation.<sup>103</sup>

This is hardly a ringing endorsement. But from where I sit, Miller’s recognition that (in my words) the CAPS model answers the “*No Traits*” and *Explanatory Irrelevance* charges is no small thing. To get a sense of the importance I give to this upshot, consider this slightly modified version of Miller’s quotation (changes in brackets):

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 210. The bracketed phrase replaces ‘Mixed Traits’ in the original quotation, which refers to Miller’s own positive view of character traits. The substitution is simply for the sake of avoiding confusion, since I don’t interact with Miller’s Mixed Traits view here. For a brief discussion, see Chapter Four below.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 218.

Harman and Doris have called into question certain specific folk commitments concerning the possession of traditional virtues and vices [as well as other character traits]. So if the CAPS model ends up vindicating other folk platitudes about the role of clusters of beliefs and desires across time and situations [—and things are looking very good on this front—] then [the CAPS model] holds out the promise of providing a defense of the possession of the traditional virtues and vices which starts from an empirically secure foundation[!]

And this enthusiastic response grants Miller’s point that all the CAPS model gives us is folk psychology dressed up in technical vocabulary. I’m actually inclined to think it gives us more, which brings me to my second point of disagreement with Miller.

Miller thinks CAPS is a *starting point* for developing a theory of personality, and he writes as though we’re just getting started.<sup>104</sup> He’s probably right about this, if we are thinking about personality theory in terms of empirical psychology (and Miller seems to be thinking in these terms). But why think contemporary empirical psychology is in a uniquely privileged position when it comes to understanding human personality? I don’t doubt that empirical psychology can help us in the pursuit of such understanding. But we should not overlook the vast stores of rich resources available to us for understanding human personality by way of the work of the great philosophical and religious psychologists, both contemporary and long dead. This is especially true for those of us who operate within a traditional moral outlook. Consider Christianity. If a Christian wants to understand human psychology, she may do as well to read Augustine, Aquinas, or Kierkegaard—not to mention contemporary thinkers who draw on and contribute to this tradition—as to read any work in contemporary empirical psychology.<sup>105</sup> To be clear, these thinkers are not merely offering

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> For a recent attempt to bring Augustine into conversation with contemporary psychology, see Sandra Lee Dixon, John Doody, and Kim Paffenroth, eds., *Augustine and Psychology* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013). For a recent application of Thomistic psychology to the issue of addiction, see Kent Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue: Beyond the Models of Disease and Choice*, Strategic Initiatives in Evangelical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011). For a wise treatment of Kierkegaard’s thought as it

*ideals* of character (though they do sometimes offer ideals). They are also making claims about the nature of human personality *as it actually exists*. When, say, Augustine claims in his *Confessions* that all human hearts find rest in God alone, that's a claim about human personality. If it isn't too crude to put it this way, he's claiming (among other things) that we all share a desiderative CAPS unit—a desire for union with our Creator—that varies in articulacy, intensity, and sensitivity across the population. This is not the sort of claim that could be established or falsified by empirical studies, though it could potentially inform empirical studies.<sup>106</sup> Still, it is a part—indeed, a crucial part—of some people's theory of personality. Again, I don't mean to demean contemporary psychology here. But we need to be realistic about where we are in the development of a theory of personality. I think we're fairly far along, provided we don't equate “theory of personality” with “theory of personality based on contemporary empirical studies.”

A similar point applies to the issue of character development. Miller notes that Aristotelians have not yet provided “realistic and empirically informed ways for most human beings to improve their [character].”<sup>107</sup> In the final chapter of his book, Miller considers a number of proposals for growth in character, all of which he draws from recent academic work informed by empirical psychology.<sup>108</sup> Again, I think empirical psychology can help us understand character development; each of the models Miller mentions is helpful in its own way. But people have been thinking about these issues for millennia. While the Aristotelian

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relates to human psychology, see C. Stephen Evans, *Soren Kierkegaard's Christian Psychology: Insight for Counseling and Pastoral Care* (Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 1990).

<sup>106</sup> To clarify, I think there is empirical evidence for Augustine's claim. But one couldn't establish the claim empirically because it is universal in scope. And one couldn't falsify the claim empirically because it is part of Augustine's view that the desire for God is present even in those in whom it seems to be absent.

<sup>107</sup> Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 210.

<sup>108</sup> Similarly, Snow (*Virtue as Social Intelligence*, chapter 1) develops her self-regulatory model of virtue cultivation without interacting with historic philosophical sources.

tradition might not have particularly rich resources here (Aristotle is sometimes faulted, perhaps unfairly, for speaking about habituation, but not saying much more than that), the Hellenistic schools of Greece and Rome developed a rich tradition of spiritual exercises by which to reshape character.<sup>109</sup> The Christian tradition is similarly rich.<sup>110</sup> One need not be a Stoic or a Christian to gain formational wisdom from Stoics and Christians, either. As psychologist Roy Baumeister notes, “even when social scientists can’t accept supernatural beliefs, they recognize”—or, *should* recognize—“that religion is a profoundly influential human phenomenon that has been evolving effective self-control mechanisms for thousands of years.”<sup>111</sup> I would suggest that those concerned to figure out how to move in the direction of virtue should start with these historic sources, rather than try to reinvent the wheel via empirical psychology. Here’s one reason for thinking this: the ancient Hellenistic and Christian thinkers were operating with a rich, CAPS-like conception of human psychology. Since their trait framework appears to be empirically adequate, perhaps we should think some of their proposed trait formation practices work as well. It is true that contemporary psychology has uncovered some liabilities of human character that have been heretofore un- or under-appreciated. But I suspect the ancient thinkers could provide resources for dealing even with these newly uncovered barriers to virtue. Indeed, I’ll argue for this later in this dissertation.

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<sup>109</sup> See, e.g., Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995); and Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>110</sup> For recent treatments of Christian spiritual exercises, see, e.g., Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperCollins, 1978); and Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperOne, 1988).

<sup>111</sup> Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 171.

I've already begun pointing to my third point of divergence from Miller. When it comes to personality theory, Miller suggests the following division of labor: psychologists figure out what traits we have, while philosophers evaluate them. And in the character development arena the trend is the same: empirical psychologists need to be at the forefront of fresh thinking. But again, I think philosophers and theologians have different (and perhaps more) work to do in supplying the material that makes up a theory of personality or a program of character formation than Miller suggests. For instance, philosophers and theologians can tell us what traits we ought to have (and then perhaps the psychologists can study the extent to which it is actually possible to acquire these traits); they can offer diagnoses (and not merely evaluations) of the ways in which we fall short of the ideal (diagnoses which the psychologists can test experimentally); in light of the ideals and diagnoses they offer, they can suggest methods for acquiring the traits we ought to have (which the psychologists can test experimentally); and so on. One reason it is important to involve philosophers and theologians in all these ways, and not merely as trait evaluators, is that virtues are indexed to moral traditions. For instance, a Christian will understand the virtue of compassion differently than, say, a Buddhist, and a Stoic won't even consider it a virtue. These different understandings will require different formational regimens, and philosophers and theologians will be of great help to psychologists in discerning the relevant differences.<sup>112</sup> Empirical psychologists undoubtedly have an important role to play in all this; I just think it is a different role than Miller does.

In sum, then, I agree with Miller that the CAPS model needs to be supplemented. But for the reasons I've cited, I think the supplement may end up being as philosophical as it

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<sup>112</sup> I will illustrate this point in Chapter Four, where I point to some ways in which philosophical reflection on anger varies across moral outlooks, and show how such reflection could play a significant role in the development of a character formation program.

is empirical, and as much a matter of retrieval as of innovation. In this dissertation, I propose to supplement the CAPS-friendly case against *Developmental Skepticism* in the following ways.

First, I will give voice to some ancient philosophical and religious perspectives on character formation—particularly the Stoics and early Christians—that have not received much attention in the situationist controversy. These traditions have much to say about how best to reshape our beliefs, emotions, etc., and consulting them will add a great deal of richness and wisdom to the contemporary models on offer. In due time, I will also attempt to show that these ancient character formation methods are empirically adequate by interacting with recent work in psychology. However, by attending to the historic sources first, I intend to push against the empirical-first (or empirical-only) epistemology that seems to rule the day in contemporary moral psychology, showing that in fact the ancients knew quite a bit about character formation long before sophisticated empirical studies arrived on the scene.

Second, I will give focused attention to the role of emotion formation in virtue cultivation. Some responses to situationism discuss the formation of emotion (e.g., the example from Snow cited above that deals with the reshaping and expanding of one's compassion), but little has been said about whether there is anything special about the emotions in human psychology such that targeting our emotions could be strategically important in our character formation efforts. In the next chapter, I'll suggest a number of reasons for thinking the emotions are special in this way, and will go on to treat a number of specific emotions in the remainder of the dissertation.

Finally, I will give special attention to a potential challenge to the sort of character formation I (and the ancients) envision. As we will see, vice inhibition and virtue cultivation

is difficult work. This raises a concern: even if we have both the psychological building blocks of virtue (i.e., CAPS units) and effective methods for restructuring those building blocks into virtuous clusters, what if we do not have (or could not develop) the psychological wherewithal actually to employ those methods to good effect? I will address this issue by drawing not only on the ancients, but also on recent work in both cognitive and social psychology to suggest that we can, in fact, develop the character required to carry out these methods. Indeed, I'll suggest that the traits needed for growth in virtue should themselves be counted as virtues: "remedial virtues." I focus on these issues for at least three reasons. First, attending to the nature and function of the remedial virtues provides a new angle for gaining fresh insights about the psychology of character formation, including insights about how we might respond directly to the subtle situational factors that seem to interfere with virtuous behavior. Second, focusing on the remedial virtues provides an additional layer of response to *Developmental Skepticism* by showing that we have empirical reasons to think not only that ancient remedial *practices* can help us cultivate (traditional) virtues, but also that a specific cluster of *virtues* (viz., the remedial virtues) are themselves attainable. And third, this way of proceeding allows me to bring a distinct body of empirical evidence to bear in response to *Developmental Skepticism* (in addition to the empirical literature cited by others).

### *Conclusion*

Situationists like Harman, Doris, and Alfano charge virtue ethics with empirical inadequacy. I've argued that the CAPS response, as developed by Russell and Snow, shows that the charge fails in each of its forms. I've also argued that the CAPS response can withstand the strongest objections raised against it. Even so, the situationist challenge does have an important upshot: most people aren't virtuous, and we need to figure out how to

move in the direction of virtue. I've suggested that a good place to begin that task is with the rich traditions of philosophical and religious psychology, with special attention given to the education of the emotions. The next chapter begins that task.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Forming the Heart: Emotion Education as Character Formation

A neglect of moral psychology and in particular of the role of emotion in morality has distorted and made unrealistic a good deal of recent discussion; having disposed of emotivism as a theory of the moral judgement, philosophers have perhaps tended to put the emotions on one side as at most contingent, and therefore philosophically uninteresting, concomitants to other things which are regarded as alone essential. This must surely be wrong: to me, at least, the question of what emotions a man feels in various circumstances seems to have a good deal to do, for instance, with whether he is an admirable human being or not.

—Bernard Williams<sup>1</sup>

If the traditional route to moral action is said to involve perception, analysis, and strength of will necessary to “do the right thing,” perceptions may be the most important, involving the framing of the situation, setting our relations to others involved, and so on. ... Emotions work faster and more accurately than reason, with the mind resembling a pattern matcher in which arguments and evidence work best when they tap into basic intuitions.

—Kristen Renwick Monroe<sup>2</sup>

The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles but to irrigate deserts. The right defence against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments.

—C. S. Lewis<sup>3</sup>

#### *Introduction*

In Chapter Two I suggested that a promising way to respond to the situationists’ charge of *Developmental Skepticism* would be to mine the wisdom of the ancients regarding character formation and to do careful work in philosophical psychology, particularly related

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<sup>1</sup> Bernard Williams, “Ethical Consistency,” in *Problems of the Self: Philosophical Papers 1956–1972* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 166.

<sup>2</sup> Kristen Renwick Monroe, *Ethics in an Age of Terror and Genocide: Identity and Moral Choice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 253.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (New York: Harper One, 1974), 13–4.

to the emotions. I begin that task in this chapter. Perhaps surprisingly, I start by considering recent empirical work on the importance of the emotions in our moral lives. I am not going back on my methodological suggestions. Rather, the empirical work serves as a jumping off point for my discussion of ancient and recent philosophical psychology by providing a striking example of how the empirical psychologists' understanding of our minds is (a) rather similar to that of the ancients, but (b) comparatively less rich in normative insight. I argue that Jonathan Haidt's work on the primacy of intuition in moral reasoning coheres well with much ancient philosophical psychology (despite Haidt's protestations to the contrary). I then bring Haidt's work into conversation with recent philosophical work on the emotions. I defend an account of the emotions according to which they are evaluative perceptions, and show how this understanding suggests a practical upshot of Haidt's work that he does not emphasize, but that the ancients would heartily endorse: educating the emotions—"forming the heart"—should be a primary focus of character formation. In the next chapter, I develop the model sketched here by applying it to a particular test case.

### *Reason and the Emotions in Recent and Ancient Moral Psychology*

In recent years there has been a tremendous upsurge in philosophical and psychological interest in the moral significance of the emotions.<sup>4</sup> The literature is vast, and

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<sup>4</sup> Important philosophical contributions include Carla Bagnoli, ed., *Morality and the Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions: A Theory of Practical Reasoning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Michael S. Brady, *Emotional Insight: The Epistemic Role of Emotional Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Ronald de Sousa, *Emotional Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Peter Goldie, *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Jesse Prinz, *The Emotional Construction of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and *Emotions in the Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: Emotion and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993); and Linda T. Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Important psychological contributions include Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994); P. Ekman, "Are There Basic Emotions?" *Psychological Review* 99 (1992): 550–53; Nico Frijda, *The Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Joshua Greene,

my purpose here is not to survey it. Rather, my aim in this section is twofold: (1) to show that ancient philosophical psychology foreshadows recent empirical psychology, and does so with comparatively greater normative insight; and (2) to argue that the emotions are strategically important as targets for character formation. I do so in conversation with the influential work of Jonathan Haidt.<sup>5</sup>

### *Jonathan Haidt's Social Intuitionist Model of Moral Reasoning*

Haidt takes recent work in empirical psychology to support a neo-Humean understanding of the relationship between reason and the passions. As Hume famously put it, “reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”<sup>6</sup> Haidt agrees, but modifies Hume’s view in three ways. First, he replaces Hume’s “slave” language with the “less offensive and more accurate term servant.”<sup>7</sup> Second, he expands Hume’s category of “passions” to include the “dozens or hundreds of rapid, effortless moral judgments and decisions that we all make every day,” but which do not qualify as “full-blown emotions.”<sup>8</sup> Haidt calls these effortless judgments “intuitions.” Third, he takes more seriously the “social nature of moral judgment” than does

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*Moral Tribes: Emotion, Reason, and the Gap Between Us and Them* (New York: Penguin, 2013); Jonathan Haidt, “The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment,” *Psychological Review* 108 (2001): 814–34; R. S. Lazarus, *Emotion and Adaptation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); J. LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, ed., *Moral Psychology*, vol. 3, *The Neuroscience of Morality: Emotion, Brain Disorders, and Development* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Penguin, 1969/1739–40), 462.

<sup>7</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 381n5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

Hume.<sup>9</sup> The latter two amendments to Hume supply Haidt with the name for his view: the social intuitionist model of moral reasoning. He expounds this model using a principle and a metaphor. The principle is: “Intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second.” The correlated metaphor is: “the mind is divided, like a rider on an elephant, and the rider’s job is to serve the elephant.”<sup>10</sup> It will help us understand Haidt’s view if we consider the views against which he pits it.

In his treatment of the historical debate about the relationship between reason and the passions, Haidt identifies two figures as Hume’s chief foils: Plato and Thomas Jefferson. Plato, Jefferson, and Hume all agree “that the mind is divided into parts that sometimes conflict.”<sup>11</sup> But they characterize the cognitive division of labor differently. As we’ve seen, Hume puts the passions in the driver’s seat. In Haidt’s view, Plato is at the other end of the spectrum, defending “the ultimate rationalist fantasy—the passions are and ought only to be the servant of reason.”<sup>12</sup> In light of Plato’s alleged “contempt for the passions” and “worshipful attitude” toward reason, Haidt labels Plato’s view “the rationalist delusion.”<sup>13</sup> Other deluded rationalists include Immanuel Kant and Lawrence Kohlberg.

Jefferson seeks a *via media*. With Plato, he thinks reason is a ruler. But with Hume, he thinks the passions also rule in a sense. He strikes this balance by claiming, in Haidt’s words, that “reason and sentiment are (and ought to be) independent co-rulers.”<sup>14</sup> In the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., xx–xxi.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 33–4.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 36.

“divided empire” of the mind, Jefferson thinks reason rules “the field of science,” and sentiment “that of morals.”<sup>15</sup>

Haidt tries to adjudicate this three-way debate via recent work in empirical psychology. In his view, the results are in: Hume wins. Take the work of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio.<sup>16</sup> Damasio worked with patients whose brain damage had all but eliminated their capacity for emotion. Situations that would trigger emotional responses in anyone else—scenes of tremendous joy or moral horror—sparked no feeling in them at all. Damasio found that even though these patients’ brain damage had not affected their IQ, they could no longer make wise decisions in their personal lives. Haidt notes: “Damasio’s interpretation was that gut feelings and bodily reactions were *necessary* to think rationally, and that one job of the [part of the brain damaged in these patients] was to integrate those gut feelings into a person’s deliberations.”<sup>17</sup> Findings like Damasio’s count against both Plato and Jefferson, claims Haidt. Damasio’s patients were as close to pure reasoners as humans can be; their thinking was effectively quarantined from the infection of emotion. “Yet the result of the separation was not the liberation of reason from the thrall of the passions. It was the shocking revelation that reasoning *requires* the passions.”<sup>18</sup> In Haidt’s view, these findings “were as anti-Platonic as could be.”<sup>19</sup> Jefferson’s model fits the facts a bit better: “when one co-emperor is knocked out and the other tries to rule the empire by himself, he’s

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 35. These quoted phrases are from Thomas Jefferson, *Letter to Mary Cosway* (New York: Penguin, 1975/1786), 406.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 39–41; cf. Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*.

<sup>17</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 40. I consider Damasio’s “gut feeling” account of the emotions below.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

not up to the task.”<sup>20</sup> If Jefferson got it right, though, we would expect Damasio’s patients to retain their decision-making capacities in non-moral matters. But they didn’t. “[T]he collapse of decision making, even in purely analytic and organizational tasks, was pervasive. The head can’t even do head stuff without the heart.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, Haidt concludes, Hume was right: “when the master (passion) drops dead, the servant (reasoning) has neither the ability nor the desire to keep the estate running.”<sup>22</sup>

Haidt’s own research into “moral dumbfounding”—the phenomenon in which people make a moral judgment, but cannot explain that judgment when pressed for justification—also seems to support Hume. In one study, Haidt asked people to evaluate the following scenario:

Julie and Mark, who are sister and brother, are traveling together in France. They are both on summer vacation from college. One night they are staying alone in a cabin near the beach. They decide that it would be interesting and fun if they tried making love. At the very least it would be a new experience for each of them. Julie is already taking birth control pills, but Mark uses a condom too, just to be safe. They both enjoy it, but they decide not to do it again. They keep that night as a special secret between them, which makes them feel even closer to each other.<sup>23</sup>

Most people (80%) condemned the sexual encounter. But when pressed for justification, they came up largely empty. This is not to say that they gave no reasons for their judgments. In fact, subjects threw out “reason after reason.”<sup>24</sup> But the reasons usually did not apply to the case. For example, many subjects pointed to potentially harmful consequences of the incident. But when the experimenter pointed out that the story ruled out such consequences, subjects could not find alternative explanations of the wrongness. Still, most stuck to their

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 45–6.

intuitive guns. Haidt comments: “it’s obvious that people were making a moral judgment immediately and emotionally. Reasoning was merely the servant of the passions, and when the servant failed to find any good arguments, the master did not change his mind.”<sup>25</sup> Once again, Hume (supposedly) wins.<sup>26</sup>

The foregoing case sheds light on Haidt’s foundational principle: “*Intuitions come first, strategic reasoning second.*”<sup>27</sup> Subjects’ intuitions about Julie and Mark arose immediately upon grasping the situation. A perceptual analogy is apt: they could simply *see* that their actions were wrong. Only after the fact did conscious reasoning enter the picture. And the specific form of this reasoning was *strategic*. The goal was not *truth*; rather, like a press secretary, reason was looking for justification—*any* justification—that might convince *someone else* to agree with what President Intuition had already decided.<sup>28</sup> This claim accords well with Haidt’s more general view that intuition and reasoning are “very different kinds of cognitive processes”: intuition is the domain of “seeing-that,” not “reasoning-why.”<sup>29</sup>

The Julie-and-Mark study also illuminates Haidt’s central metaphor: “*the mind is divided, like a rider on an elephant, and the rider’s job is to serve the elephant.*”<sup>30</sup> The elephant represents the mind’s automatic processing; the rider, controlled reasoning. (This distinction maps roughly onto what cognitive psychologist Daniel Kahneman labels System 1 and System 2 thinking, where System 1 is the intuitive elephant, and System 2, the reasoning

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>26</sup> In chapter 3, Haidt cites six further areas of empirical research that supposedly support his neo-Humean view of moral reasoning.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., xx.

<sup>28</sup> See *ibid.*, chapter 4, for an extended defense of the press secretary model of deliberate moral reasoning.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 48–52.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., xxi.

rider.)<sup>31</sup> The rider may think she is in charge of the elephant, but in fact, the elephant largely goes where it pleases. Still, the elephant is not dumb (the drift of most of Haidt's examples notwithstanding). Indeed, Haidt chose the metaphor of the elephant (rather than, say, the horse) not simply because of its relatively great power, but also because of its intelligence.<sup>32</sup> In other words, the elephant is open to reason. This is one reason Haidt prefers his own "servant" language to Hume's "slave."<sup>33</sup> Unlike the truly servile slave, reason can question its master. To use Kahneman's vocabulary, although System 2 usually accepts and works with the deliverances of System 1, System 2 can also reflectively evaluate the deliverances of System 1 and overrule it. One example of this is when subjects in the Julie-and-Mark experiment came to reject their initial condemnation of the sexual encounter upon reflection. Haidt thinks intuition-overruling reasoning is quite rare, at least when we are alone. More commonly, he thinks, our elephants respond to *other people's* riders and/or elephants (like the questioning experimenter in the Julie-and-Mark study).<sup>34</sup> Thus, "*social* intuitionism."

Let me sum up. Haidt thinks the mind is divided into two parts: intuition and strategic reasoning. Intuition—"seeing-that"—takes the lead. It is both quicker and more powerful than reasoning, and it sets the agenda for post hoc strategic reasoning. In turn, strategic reasoning—"reasoning-why"—serves intuition. Although reasoning overturns intuition on occasion, it far more commonly functions as a press secretary, seeking not truth, but intuition-justification. Thus, despite the rider's preening, the elephant is in charge.

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<sup>31</sup> See Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011). I will interact extensively with Kahneman's work in Chapter Five.

<sup>32</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 53.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 79–80.

## *Evaluating Haidt's Model*

What should we make of Haidt's model? As a description of the way ordinary people's minds work in particular time slices, I think it is largely accurate (with some qualifications to be outlined below). The dual-process model of the mind is very well attested, and System 1 does seem to be running the show in many regards.<sup>35</sup> But even if this is so, it is far from clear that empirical psychology vindicates Hume's normative view that passion is *and ought to be* the master. For one thing, as Hume himself would argue, we cannot derive our normative theory of the relationship between reason and the passions from descriptive empirical claims about the way most humans in fact operate. More fundamentally, though, we might ask: Is it even true that the empirical psychology supports descriptive Humeanism? I think not. If we look more closely at both the empirical data and at Plato's (and Aristotle's) philosophical psychology, we will find that the ancients, even more than Hume, foreshadowed much that contemporary psychology has uncovered about the mind.

To begin, consider Plato. Haidt acknowledges that his depiction of Plato's view is an alteration: he "simplifies" the tripartite soul into a dual-process system.<sup>36</sup> The simplification is a distortion. By eliding Plato's spirited and appetitive parts into one passionate part, Haidt obscures the fact that Plato thinks reason (ideally) rules the appetites *through the spirit*.<sup>37</sup> That is, in the virtuous soul (but not the typical soul), reason rules over the appetites and spirit *by*

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<sup>35</sup> In addition to Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, see, e.g., J. T. Evans and K. E. Stanovich, "Dual-Process Theories of Higher Cognition: Advancing the Debate," *Perspectives On Psychological Science* 8 (2013): 223–241; Gary Klein, *Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1998); and Gary Klein, *Streetlights and Shadows: Searching for the Keys to Adaptive Decision Making* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011). For an alternative to the two-systems approach, highlighting the unified nature of human judgment, see A. W. Kruglanski et al., "On Parametric Continuities in the World of Binary Either Ors," *Psychological Inquiry* 17, no. 3 (2006): 153–165.

<sup>36</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 381n9.

<sup>37</sup> See Plato, *Republic* 4.

*training and informing the spirit* (i.e., the seat of emotions like anger and indignation) *over the course of a lifetime*. Plato would acknowledge that in the typical (i.e., non-virtuous) soul, passion in fact rules (where spirit is allied with appetite, not reason), and would resist the idea that reason, as a purely external ruler, could reliably rise up *in the moment* to correct the passions of the unvirtuous. No, if reason is to reign, it will do so only by way of a lifetime of careful emotion-shaping thought.

Moreover, while it is true that Plato distinguishes reason from spirit and appetite, and identifies the latter two parts of the soul as “non-rational,” we shouldn’t think that reason in Plato is totally non-affective, nor spirit and appetite totally non-cognitive. As Hendrik Lorenz points out,

[J]ust as the functions of reason (in the *Republic*) and of the soul (in the *Phaedo*) are not restricted to cognition, but include desire and emotion, such as desire for and pleasure in learning, so the functions of non-rational soul (in the *Republic*) and of the body (in the *Phaedo*) are not restricted to desire and emotion, but include cognition, such as beliefs (presumably) about objects of desire, ‘descriptive’ or (rather) non-evaluative (“there’s food over there”) as well as ... evaluative (“this drink is delightful”).<sup>38</sup>

The potential for something like passionate reason or reasonable passion is even more explicit in Aristotle, whose views Haidt does not consider. Aristotle also distinguishes the rational and irrational aspects of the soul, and divides the latter into two parts: one that cannot listen to reason, the other “having a tendency to obey as one does one’s father.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Henrik Lorenz, “Ancient Theories of Soul,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2009 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/ancient-soul/>>. Of course, the details of Plato’s psychology are the subject of some scholarly controversy. For instance, Julia Annas and John Cooper think even the lowest part of the soul (appetite) has the capacity for means-end reasoning; others, such as Lorenz, deny this claim, while agreeing that the non-rational parts are still broadly cognitive. See Julia Annas, *An Introduction to Plato’s Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 129–30; John Cooper, “Plato’s theory of human motivation,” in his *Reason and Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 128; Henrik Lorenz, *The Brute Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). There seems to be some consensus, though, that reason and passion are not neatly sequestered on Plato’s view.

<sup>39</sup> See Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Oxford World’s Classics, trans. with an intro. by David Ross, rev. J. L. Ackrill and J. O Urmson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1.13.

Elsewhere, Aristotle suggests that reason and desire actually interpenetrate, forming a single quasi-perceptual mental state—“desiderative reason or ratiocinative desire”—in which the agent’s desire characterizes his reasoning, and vice versa.<sup>40</sup> Of course, for the reasoning, and thus the desire, to be normatively good, the person needs to possess virtue. This condition will not necessarily be satisfied in a random sampling of human beings, according to Aristotle. Nevertheless, *if* reason rules, its rule is no external matter.

Haidt’s official doctrine leaves little room for this kind of integration, for as we’ve seen he starkly divides “seeing-that” from “reasoning-why.”<sup>41</sup> It seems, though, that there is a third kind of cognitive process at work in human psychology: “seeing-why.”<sup>42</sup> In seeing-why, one’s reason is embedded in one’s intuition. A simple, non-moral case is the learning of arithmetic. The novice has to think carefully, perhaps recruiting her fingers for support, in order to calculate  $4+4=8$ . After some training, though, when she looks at the markings ‘ $4+4=?$ ’ on the page, she will simply see-that the answer is 8. We can imagine a student being quite inarticulate about this, particularly if her training has been characterized more by rote memorization than reasoning. Even in this case, though, the student’s perception has been penetrated by reason—her *teacher’s* reason. By contrast, the teacher himself will not only see-that the answer is 8, but see-why. That is, the teacher *understands* what is going on in the problem, and his understanding has penetrated his intuition. Moreover, part of the teacher’s job is to be articulate about his reasoning. So when the student asks for an explanation of what the teacher “sees,” he can give it. And the explanation is not simply a self-serving

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 6.2.

<sup>41</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 48–52.

<sup>42</sup> I owe this point, as well as the take on Aristotle presented in the previous paragraph, to a class lecture by Robert C. Roberts.

justification of a reasoning-free intuition; it is an explication of what the teacher understands and has habituated into his mathematical perception.

Aristotle suggests that the same process happens in the moral realm. The young, he thinks, need to be trained to have the right emotional reactions to the moral features of the world.<sup>43</sup> This process begins as the moral analogue of rote mathematical memorization—the student is trained to see-that some particular actions are good or bad. But over time, with practice and training, the agent can come to understand the moral issues at hand, and thereby learn to see-why. For instance, say, in a silent movie, Charlie Chaplin pushes somebody, and this person starts looking and gesturing angrily. The audience immediately not only sees-that the person is angry, but also sees-why (though perhaps with varying levels of articulacy). And this is far from being self-serving, post-hoc reasoning. In fact, it is not *reasoning*; but it is reason—at least, it’s seeing the reason.<sup>44</sup> Or consider again the Julie-and-Mark study. Aristotle could explain the case as follows: the dumbfounded subject may see-that incest is wrong, perhaps as the result of what seems to be an innate (at least at this stage in human history) feature of moral cognition, or, absent that, as the result of training. But the subject’s moral understanding and/or vocabulary are simply insufficient. It is not hard to imagine a more articulate subject who intuitively sees-that the incest is wrong, but whose intuition has been penetrated by reason—she also sees-why the incest is wrong, conceptualizing it in “thicker” terms. That is, the wise subject sees the incest *as* a violation of God’s will, or a perversion of human nature, etc. Perhaps even the less articulate subject has some measure of seeing-why. If she thinks incest is wrong, simply seeing this case of

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<sup>43</sup> For Aristotle’s view of moral education, see *Nicomachean Ethics* 2; for commentary, see M. F. Burnyeat, “Aristotle on Learning to Be Good,” in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 69–92.

<sup>44</sup> Thanks to Bob Roberts for suggesting this example.

consensual sex *as* a case of incest may count as seeing-why, though perhaps a lower grade version.

I said Haidt's official doctrine leaves little room for the kind of reason-intuition interpenetration I've been describing. But he acknowledges it in practice. Indeed, one of the main theses of his book is that our emotional reactions to moral issues are deeply shaped by our culture and upbringing. He simply fails to note (explicitly) that this is a matter of reason—either borrowed reason (the reason of one's parents, or culture, or tradition), or the subject's own reason (within the resources of her culture), or both, but reason nonetheless—penetrating intuition. The disconnect in Haidt's thinking on this point seems to be due in large part to the fact that he treats "reason" in terms of time-slices of *reasoning*, rather than in terms of thought more generically conceived. As a result, he's left with the false choice between reasoning (in the moment) trumping intuition (in the moment), or vice versa. The ancient understanding is different: the influence of rational reflection on a person's ability to "see" morally (that is, to make the kinds of intuitive judgments that Haidt rightly thinks to be the momentary stuff of moral cognition) takes years of disciplined thinking. In other words, the sense in which reason can "rule" the passions is that living an ethically thoughtful life can have a cumulative effect on one's emotional responses and dispositions. (Of course, a lifetime of poor or little thinking will also shape the passions, though reason's "rule" in this case will not be a good one.) This descriptive fact about human psychology—that reason (thought) can and does inform passion (intuition) over the course of a lifetime—seems to me to fit a Platonic/Aristotelian view of the relationship between reason and passion better than it does a Humean one ("reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them").<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hume, 462.

Another way to put the previous point is that Plato, Aristotle, and Haidt agree, against Hume, that the elephant is open to reason. Admittedly, Haidt thinks elephant training is not easy. As he puts it, “if you want to make people behave more ethically,” one option is to “change the elephant, which takes a long time and is hard to do.”<sup>46</sup> But this strikes me as another point at which Haidt agrees with Plato and Aristotle. When one considers Plato’s depiction of the guardians’ education in the *Republic*, or Aristotle’s claim in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that only those with an adequate upbringing can profitably study ethics, it becomes clear that they think our elephants progressively become less trainable, and that an adult with an untrained elephant is more or less a lost cause.<sup>47</sup> C. S. Lewis nicely sums up their views:

Aristotle says that the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought. When the age for reflective thought comes, the pupil who has been thus trained in ‘ordinate affections’ or ‘just sentiments’ will easily find the first principles in Ethics; but to the corrupt man they will never be visible at all and he can make no progress in that science. Plato before him had said the same. The little human animal will not at first have the right responses. It must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likeable, disgusting and hateful. “... All this before he is of an age to reason; so that when Reason at length comes to him, then, bred as he has been, he will hold out his hands in welcome and recognize her because of the affinity he bears to her.”<sup>48</sup>

For reasons I will delineate in Chapter Four, I am more optimistic about retraining malformed elephants than Plato, Aristotle, and Haidt seem to be. But I agree with them that apart from serious work the elephant will not change.

I have been arguing that Haidt’s foundational principle is too simple. Intuition is often first, but not always; and reasoning is sometimes strategic and self-serving, but not

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<sup>46</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 106.

<sup>47</sup> One might think Aristotle is also subtly suggesting that the irrational part of the soul is hard to train when he says it “obeys as one does one’s father,” at least if one has any experience trying to get children to obey.

<sup>48</sup> Lewis, 16–17. Lewis cites Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104 B and 1095 B, and Plato *Laws* 653 and *Republic* 402 A (from which the quoted material derives).

always. One crucial way in which reasoning can precede intuition in a non-strategic-and-self-serving way is by penetrating and characterizing intuition. Moreover, I have suggested that Haidt's central metaphor is potentially misleading. As a *description* of most people's time-slice cognition, it may be fairly accurate. But this says nothing of the *normative* standard. *Should* our elephants be better trained than they currently are? Plato and Aristotle say, "Yes!" Haidt seems to be of two minds about the question.

On the one hand, much of Haidt's book is an attempt to motivate elephant training: he wants people with an overly narrow repertoire of moral intuitions to expand their moral sensitivities. But when explicitly addressing how one should proceed in light of empirical psychology, he passes over the possibility of elephant training in one somewhat dismissive sentence about the difficulty of such training (quoted above), and quickly suggests—in words reminiscent of John Doris's assessment of the practical upshot of the situationist literature—that a more fruitful option may be to “change the path that the elephant and the rider find themselves traveling on. You can make minor and inexpensive tweaks to the environment, which can produce big increases in ethical behavior.”<sup>49</sup>

Ultimately, I think Haidt would say altering one's situation and working on one's character are not mutually exclusive options. Again, the ancients would agree, but they would emphasize working on a person's character. For them, situational manipulation is normatively insufficient; mere ethical “behavior” is morally substandard, for good *action* must come from good motives (including the motives that derive from apt emotions). Moreover, contra Hume, they think our emotions are not mere projections of subjective value, but can actually track (or fail to track) the moral value that objectively exists independently of the emotions. As a result, they conceive of the education of the emotions—a central source of

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<sup>49</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 106.

moral knowledge and moral motivation—as one of the central ethical tasks of anyone who wishes to be a mature human being. As C. S. Lewis puts it, a common theme among ancient moral thinkers, from Plato and Aristotle to the Stoics, early Hindus, Confucians, Jews, and Augustine, is “something we cannot neglect”:

It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of the thing the universe is and the kind of things we are. ... For those within [this tradition], the task is to train in the pupil those responses which are in themselves appropriate, whether anyone is making them or not, and in making which the very nature of man consists.<sup>50</sup>

For those who agree with the ancients on these normative matters—matters that empirical psychology cannot finally settle—the question of how to train our elephants will be paramount.<sup>51</sup>

I agree with the ancients’ normative assessment, and conceive of the rest of this dissertation as an exploration of the hows of elephant training. A good way to begin that exploration is by considering the nature of emotion. Haidt does not provide us with anything like an account of the emotions, but he does make some suggestive remarks about them that point us in the right direction: emotions are “appraisals;” they involve “information processing;” and they are closely related to our concerns or cares.<sup>52</sup> This sketch fits nicely with the perceptual view of the emotions that Robert C. Roberts has rigorously developed over the past few decades. In the next section, I explain, defend, and apply Roberts’s view.

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<sup>50</sup> Lewis, 18, 21.

<sup>51</sup> As Lewis points out, for those who deny this picture of the relationship between emotions and moral values, emotion “education” amounts to one of two things: propaganda, or emotion suppression/eradication. In chapter 3 of *The Abolition of Man*, Lewis paints a rather bleak picture of the world such a view would eventuate in, and sees it as closely linked to a hyper-scientific take on morality. One can hope that those who find wisdom in Haidt’s “biologized” ethics (*The Righteous Mind*, 38) will see in it an attempt to “explain without explaining away” (to adapt a phrase from Lewis, 79), and will “not be free with the words *only* and *merely*” (ibid.).

<sup>52</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 52, 53, chapter 7.

### *Emotions as Evaluative Perceptions*

In light of the many structural and functional parallels that exist between sense perception and emotion, a number of philosophers and psychologists have defended their own perceptual theories of emotion, each sharing the core idea that emotions are perceptions of value.<sup>53</sup> Among the various versions of the perceptual model, I favor the view defended by Robert C. Roberts, according to which emotions are “concern-based construals.”<sup>54</sup> I set out here to present, defend, and apply Roberts’s view. More specifically, my fourfold aim is to (1) explain Roberts’s view, (2) show how his view makes better sense of Haidt’s project than two rival emotion theories, (3) situate emotions within the CAPS model of personality defended in Chapter Two, and (4) briefly sketch how Roberts’s view could inform a program of emotion education.

### *Emotions as Concern-Based Construals*

A construal is an immediate interpretive perception, or “seeing as.” When one, say, sees the famous duck-rabbit gestalt figure *as* a duck—a paradigmatic construal—one may or may not *believe* that the image is of a duck. For instance, one might construe the figure as a duck while believing it *only* represents a rabbit (“My, how duck-like that rabbit looks!”); or, to take the opposite sort of case, one could believe the figure represents a duck—perhaps on the basis of testimony—and yet be “duck-blind.” Thus, the duck-construal is not a judgment. Rather, it is a quasi-perceptual “take” on the image, involving not only sensory data (e.g., the markings on the page) but also conceptual ordering (e.g., a particular marking

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<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., Catherine Z. Elgin, *Considered Judgment*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Ronald de Sousa, *The Rationality of Emotion* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987); Adam C. Pelsner, “Emotion, Evaluative Perception, and Epistemic Justification,” in *Emotion and Value*, ed. Sabine Roeser and Cain Todd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 107–123; and Zagzebski, *Divine Motivation Theory*.

<sup>54</sup> See Roberts, *Emotions*, and *Emotions in the Moral Life*. See also, Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007).

is conceptualized as an eye), so that the image makes a particular impression on the subject. There is an element of subjectivity present in construals, since one object can be variously interpreted. Still, construals are not wholly subjective, for they are interpretations of objective states of affairs by which one can discover, or fail to discover, something true about the world (e.g., when a hunter construes a scrap of driftwood as a duck, she *misconstrues* her situation). As such, construals can be either veridical or non-veridical.

Emotions are construals, but not all construals are emotions. Rather, emotions constitute a subset of construals, namely, those that are “concern-based.”<sup>55</sup> For a construal to be concern-based, it must impinge upon, or take up into its structure, something the subject cares about (or perhaps better, the care itself). An example will help. Say I walk into the library and notice a woman carrying a book. This construal of my situation—as of a woman carrying a book—will likely not constitute an emotion (unless, say, I have some strange aversion to others’ book-carrying). But if the book looks to me to be the library’s only copy of the very book I had ventured across campus to acquire, which I desperately need to meet a pressing deadline, my construal will be an emotion—perhaps fear (if I construe my missed opportunity to acquire the book as a genuine threat to the success of my research), or hope (if I think there’s a good chance I misread the book’s cover and so construe it as probably not the needed book).

This account will be filled out below as I deal with a number of specific emotions. But this brief sketch is sufficient to clarify that, as concern-based construals, emotions are

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<sup>55</sup> Roberts allows for the possibility that some concern-based construals are not emotions. I ignore this complication.

“states in which the subject grasps, with a kind of perceptual immediacy, a significance of his or her situation.”<sup>56</sup>

*Social Intuitionism and Rival Accounts of Emotion*

The concern-based construal view of emotion accords nicely with the data Haidt cites in developing his social intuitionism. As he notes, much recent empirical work suggests that our emotions (in part) “appraise something ... based on whether it advanced or hindered our goals.”<sup>57</sup> He goes on to say that “[e]motions are a kind of information processing.”<sup>58</sup> Moreover, throughout his treatment of particular emotions he frequently notes that emotions are rooted in what the subject is concerned or cares about.<sup>59</sup> Here’s one example.

Haidt thinks all humans share certain “moral foundations” upon which their moral judgments are based.<sup>60</sup> He highlights six such foundations—care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation, and liberty/oppression—but acknowledges that there are likely more. Each foundation is basically a combination of a concern and a correlated sensitivity—for instance, having a well-functioning sanctity/degradation foundation simply is to care about sanctity and degradation of certain things and thereby to be sensitive to sanctity- and degradation-relevant “triggers.” Each foundation has characteristic triggers, and when a subject notices triggers that impinge upon her foundations, she experiences emotions. For instance, those with a functioning sanctity/degradation foundation will respond emotionally to scenarios involving the

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<sup>56</sup> Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 52.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 53; italics original.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, chapters 6–8.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, chapters 5–8.

“unclean”—whether physically unclean things like waste products, or morally unclean things like incest. The characteristic emotion of the sanctity/degradation foundation is *disgust*.

Roberts’s view nicely explains what is going on here. The subject with a “moral foundation” has a “concern,” which gets taken up into her construal of the relevant “triggers.” Those who experience disgust upon hearing the Julie-and-Mark case are construing the brother and sister and their incestuous liaison in light of their sanctity/degradation concerns (which may be more or less articulate). Roberts suggests that the “defining proposition” for disgust—the generic form of its conceptual ordering—is (roughly): “*X is repulsive and worthy to be shunned; may it depart from me.*”<sup>61</sup> It may be that the disgusted subjects do not have any conscious views about incest; they simply see the scenario as repulsive in a primitive way.<sup>62</sup> But the disgust construal can be more conceptually laden. One subject might be disgusted because *all* sex is physically repulsive to her; another, because *incestuous* sex is morally repulsive to her in some generic sense; a third, because incestuous sex is morally repulsive *in its degradation of human sexual nature as designed by God*; and so on. In the latter two cases—the final more than the penultimate—the subject sees why incest is wrong via her disgust. Yet all these cases of disgust, as varied as they are in conceptual content, are concern-based construals—that is, they are conceptualized noticings of triggers in light of a moral foundation.

The chief rivals to the perceptual account of emotion—the “feeling” and “judgment” theories of emotion—have comparatively less explanatory power. Consider first the feeling theory. It is natural to think of emotions as feelings, since emotions usually manifest themselves physically, and we often use the words ‘emotion’ and ‘feeling’

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<sup>61</sup> Roberts, *Emotions*, 253. I say “roughly” because Roberts goes on to suggest that this defining proposition may not cover all cases.

<sup>62</sup> Cf., *ibid.*, 254.

interchangeably. Contemporary defenders of feeling theories draw inspiration from the well-known James-Lange view of emotions, named after William James and Carl Lange, according to which emotions are “feelings caused by changes in physiological conditions relating to the autonomic and motor functions.”<sup>63</sup> The feeling theorist perhaps most responsible for the current revival of the James-Lange view is neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, whom we met above. On his view, emotions are experienced as “somatic markers,” or, more colloquially, “gut feelings.”<sup>64</sup> That is, the perception of some state of affairs causes a physiological change in the perceiver (or simply causes a neurological change that is experienced by the perceiver “as-if” it were a bodily change), and the experience of that (actual or “as-if”) bodily change, in the form of a more or less pleasant or uncomfortable somatic sensation, *is* the emotion.

To see how greatly this view differs from Roberts’s, consider how each would describe the role of emotion in one’s decision to buy a particular house.<sup>65</sup> According to Damasio, as one tours a neighborhood one will notice features of the houses that cause one to have pleasant or unpleasant bodily sensations. The valence of these sensations will “push” or “pull” the prospective homeowner toward or away from particular houses. It is this bodily guidance that Damasio thinks is necessary for practical reasoning. The concern-based construal view would tell a different cognitive/affective story. The house hunter has various concerns: she wants to work from home and so desires an office space; she wants a spacious and updated kitchen and dining area to accommodate entertaining; she would prefer close proximity to good schools in case the family begins to grow; and so on. She comes to her

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<sup>63</sup> Ronald de Sousa, “Emotion,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = < <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/emotion/> >. See William James, “What is an Emotion?” *Mind* 9 (1884): 188–205.

<sup>64</sup> See Damasio, *Descartes’ Error*.

<sup>65</sup> This case is adapted from an example given by Robert C. Roberts in class lecture.

housing options with these concerns in place, and they affect her appraisals. She hardly notices the houses that do not begin to satisfy her wish list. Other houses get mixed reviews because they meet some concerns, but not others. Eventually, she settles on a home that is most “satisfying,” all things considered. Along the way, each option is construed in light of her concerns, and her feelings of approval or disapproval are not mere “gut feelings,” even if she does respond physiologically to each house. Rather, the “feelings” are appraisals (to use Haidt’s term), arising from satisfactions or frustrations of her concerns.

It strikes me that the concern-based construal account accords more closely with our actual experiences of decision making. Here are three further reasons to think the feeling theory is inadequate. First, bodily feelings, or even “as-if” bodily feelings, do not always accompany emotions. This is an empirical claim that appears to be well supported. As Roberts notes, “Novelists describe, and psychotherapists regularly confront, people who are angry, resentful, envious, and anxious, yet do not feel these emotions.”<sup>66</sup> If this is so, then we cannot identify emotions with feelings.

Second, bodily feelings are inadequate to individuate the wide variety of emotions humans experience. Distinct emotions can shade into one another—e.g., annoyance, frustration, anger, resentment, rage, indignation, etc.—and the felt quality of these emotions (if they are felt at all) may be identical. Likewise, the many varieties of any *particular* emotion—say, the varieties of incest-related disgust described above—might be indistinguishable in terms of their physiology. Thus, the differences between them cannot reside in their characteristic “feel.” It is perhaps for this reason that William James was “dismissive of the project of distinguishing between particular emotions within the same

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<sup>66</sup> Roberts, *Emotions*, 60.

family.”<sup>67</sup> But any rigorous account of the emotions must be able to say something about what distinguishes these emotions from one another. The concern-based construal view has a story to tell here: even if two emotions feel the same, they can be differentiated by their distinctive conceptual content (that is, their ingredient concerns and/or construals).

This points to the final and perhaps deepest problem with the feeling theory: it fails to make sense of the intentionality of emotions. Emotions have directedness or aboutness; they take objects. We hope *that we get that promotion*; we feel guilty *that we engaged in that particular wrongdoing*. But mere bodily feelings cannot be *about* anything. Damasio and other feeling theorists have some level of intentionality built into their feeling theories, since they think emotions are perceptions *of* bodily feelings.<sup>68</sup> But this gets the intentional objects of the emotions wrong. The states of affairs picked out by the italicized phrases above are the intentional objects of our emotions, not the correlated bodily feelings.

Thus, although the feeling theory accommodates some of our intuitions about the emotions, it is inadequate as a complete account. I have given four reasons to think so: it does not fit well with a common sense conception of decision making; bodily feelings do not always accompany emotions; feelings cannot individuate emotions; and emotions have conceptual intentionality, but bodily feelings (sensations) do not. I conclude that we should think of bodily feelings as corollaries that usually accompany emotions. But they are not at the heart of what an emotion is.

The point about the intentionality of emotions strongly suggests that emotions are “cognitive” in some sense. If this is so, perhaps we should think of emotions as judgments.

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<sup>67</sup> Macalester Bell, *Hard Feelings: The Moral Psychology of Contempt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 28. For James’s discussion of these matters, see his *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2 (New York: Dover, 1950), 448.

<sup>68</sup> E.g., Jesse J. Prinz, *Gut Feelings: A Perceptual Theory of Emotion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

After all, the judgment theory, as defended in recent years by such philosophers of emotion as Martha Nussbaum and Robert Solomon, makes perfect sense of the intentional, cognitive features of emotions.<sup>69</sup> On this view, emotions are identified with judgments, or beliefs. To feel disgust, for instance, simply is to judge that some object is repulsive.

The main problem with the judgment theory is that it makes the connection between emotion and belief too tight. Take Haidt's case of the subject who reacts emotionally to Julie and Mark's incest, and then is reasoned out of her belief that the incest is wrong. It may be that the subject's emotions continue to suggest to her that the incest is wrong, even after she no longer believes it. Indeed, Haidt suggests that this is just what happens: "My harmless-taboo stories were like the Müller-Lyer illusions: they still felt wrong, even after you had measured the amount of harm involved and agreed that the stories were harmless."<sup>70</sup> Likewise, a subject might judge that Julie and Mark have engaged in a wrong action, and yet fail to experience any emotion. So, while it is true that we often come to believe what our emotions present to us, and our beliefs often affect our emotions, emotions are not beliefs. Seeing is not always believing, nor is believing seeing.

Space precludes an assessment of any other alternative accounts of the emotions. But this brief treatment suggests that the perceptual account bests the two most promising alternative theories, and provides us with a particularly insightful way of understanding the empirical findings cited by Haidt. Throughout the rest of this dissertation I will assume and utilize Roberts's view. It will be helpful, therefore, to consider briefly how this view functions in the CAPS model of personality defended in Chapter Two. To this issue I now turn.

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<sup>69</sup> See, e.g., Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*; and Solomon, *The Passions*.

<sup>70</sup> Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 51.

### *Concern-Based Construals within the CAPS Model*

As I noted in the previous chapter, the CAPS model of personality takes traits to be bundles of cognitive-affective units. In Daniel Russell's words:

The personality differences between us, then, consist largely in the different goals and priorities we have, how we conceive of ourselves and others, the meanings we attach to different situations, our various 'executive' practical skills, features of situations to which we attend, and of course, the unique whole that is the sum of all these diverse parts and their interrelations with each other.<sup>71</sup>

Let's consider how some of these CAPS units relate to emotions as Roberts conceives them. The "goals and priorities" to which Russell refers are among the concerns that partially constitute our emotional lives. We might think of these goals and priorities—along with many of the other ways in which we can "be for" something, to use Robert Adams's phrase: loving, liking, respecting, etc.<sup>72</sup>—as emotion dispositions. It is when we take our situations as impinging upon our goals, priorities, and other concerns that we have emotional reactions.

Furthermore, our emotional "takes" often amount to what Russell calls "the meanings we attach to different situations," and arise in part on the basis of "how we conceive of ourselves and others." That is, our situations have the emotional meaning they do because of the ways we construe ourselves, other people, and other situational factors in the light of what we care about.

Additionally, emotions are often a matter of focus.<sup>73</sup> We feel fear, for instance, when we attend to the threat in our situation and see it as a threat. In other words, in our fear the threat is made salient to us. The temporal ordering of attention and emotion can vary: we

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<sup>71</sup> Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 259.

<sup>72</sup> On "being for," see Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 15–18.

<sup>73</sup> Some emotions are non-focal, as when we're focusing on something else, but are being "bothered" by we know not what about the situation. Thanks to Bob Roberts for pointing this out to me.

might first notice a threat by way of our fear; or we might notice a threat (but not *as* a threat), and then come to fear it (upon construing it as a threat), and thereby attend to it even more than we were previously. In either case, though, our emotion plays a key role in determining the “features of situations to which we attend.”

It would seem, then, that emotions, understood as concern-based construals, serve as important hubs of CAPS unit activity. They are ways of interpreting the scenarios in which we find ourselves; they attune us to the presence of things we value in our situations; and they give rise to further concerns, thereby motivating us to act. This picture of the importance of construals, and especially construals that impinge upon our concerns, within human personality should be no surprise to students of social psychology. As psychologists Lee Ross and Richard Nisbett suggest, social psychology rests upon a conceptual “tripod”: situation, construal, and the dynamic “tension systems” that exist between situations and persons.<sup>74</sup> Concerning the importance of construals, they comment, “the impact of any ‘objective’ stimulus situation depends upon the personal and subjective meaning that the actor attaches to the situation.”<sup>75</sup> As we saw in Chapter Two, this is one of the key factors that distinguishes the CAPS approach from Doris’s situationism: the CAPS model takes the situation *as construed by the subject*—not the nominal situation, as Doris would have it—to be what is psychologically important in assessing character. On this view, as both Russell and Nancy Snow point out, a key part of growth in virtue is going to be learning to construe one’s situations correctly.<sup>76</sup> Here is an important corollary: if our construals are going to lead

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<sup>74</sup> Lee Ross and Richard E. Nisbett, *The Person and the Situation: Perspectives of Social Psychology* (London: Pinter and Martin, 2011), 8–17. For commentary, see Russell, 254–58.

<sup>75</sup> Ross and Nisbett, 11.

<sup>76</sup> Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence* (New York: Routledge, 2010), chapter 1; Russell, 324.

to right action and emotion, the right concerns need to be integrated into them. In other words, we find yet again that emotion training is a crucial aspect of moral education.

### *Concern-Based Construals and Emotion Education*

I've noted two aspects of the ancients' views about moral education: (1) training the emotions is central; and (2) one goal of moral education is for the student to learn to “see-why” certain things are right or wrong, good or bad. Roberts's view of the emotions shows how these two ideas can come together. It is not as though the virtuous person's “right emotions” are disconnected from, or mere corollaries to, her “seeing-why” a particular action is good. Rather, her emotions are one way she can learn to “see-why.” That is, the virtuous person's moral reasoning and moral concerns interpenetrate in a single mental state: ratiocinative desire, or desiderative reason—or, a concern-based construal.<sup>77</sup> (Think again of the varieties of disgust mentioned above.)

Here's a further reason to think emotion training, rather than simple “construal” training, is strategically important for moral formation. Even though emotions are not feelings, they are (typically) accompanied by bodily sensations. Thus, as we try to understand and reshape our construals of our situations, emotions often provide us with noticeable *cues* as to how we are construing the world—cues to which our “rider” can respond. Snow highlights the fact that sensitivity to such cues is an important aspect of retraining our moral perception.<sup>78</sup> I will develop this point at greater length in the coming chapters.

If this is the right way to think about the emotions, an emotion education method immediately suggests itself: if we want to feel the right emotions, we need to train our

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<sup>77</sup> To be clear, I'm applying Aristotle's language to the case of emotion; he speaks of ratiocinative desire and desiderative reason as characteristic of choice.

<sup>78</sup> E.g., Snow, 34–7.

concerns and our patterns of construal so that we can respond rightly to the world. If one's emotions are misfiring, perhaps one can learn to notice the cues of one's errant emotions (which are often felt), cues that could help one counteract one's "elephant" before it leans too far in the wrong direction. I will expand on how this might work in the next chapter.

### *Conclusion*

Drawing on ancient and recent work in psychology (both philosophical and empirical), I have argued that the cultivation of proper emotions is a strategically important aspect of character formation, and that understanding emotions as concern-based construals provides insight concerning how emotion education works. To "retrain our elephants"—or, in more traditional language, form our hearts—we need to retrain our concerns and perceptual dispositions in such a way that we care about and notice what is genuinely important. But how can we do *that*? In the next chapter I develop the model sketched here by considering a test case: the remediation of inappropriate anger.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Spiritual Exercises and the Remediation of Inappropriate Anger: A Test Case

Everywhere you will find occasion for anger—unless the mind steps in to intercede. Your rage will sweep you this way and that, that way and this. New provocations will constantly be cropping up and your fury will never stop. Poor man, will you ever find yourself *liking* people? What a waste of precious time on a bad business!

—Seneca<sup>1</sup>

“What do you do in this desert other than we do? You fast: and we fast also. You chastise your bodies and so do we. Whatever you do, we do the same.” The monk replied, “We trust in God’s grace, and keep a watch on our thoughts.”

—*Apophthegmata Patrum*<sup>2</sup>

Even when social scientists can’t accept supernatural beliefs, they recognize that religion is a profoundly influential human phenomenon that has been evolving effective self-control mechanisms for thousands of years.

—Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney<sup>3</sup>

#### *Introduction*

In the last chapter I argued that a centrally important ethical task is the education of our emotions, and suggested that we can do this by retraining our concerns and perceptual dispositions in such a way that we care about and notice what is genuinely important. I didn’t say much about how this latter task might be accomplished. In this chapter, I start to address the “how” by considering a test case: the remediation of inappropriate anger. Anger has

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<sup>1</sup> Seneca, *On Anger* 3.28.1 (104). Throughout this chapter I use the foregoing notation method, which provides the book, section, and paragraph numbers from *On Anger*, followed by the pagination (in parentheses) from the English version found in *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays*, ed. John M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks (De Vitis Patrum, Book 5, 16:16)*, trans. Benedicta Ward (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 174–175.

<sup>3</sup> Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), 171.

featured prominently in moral reflection on the emotions throughout the history of philosophy, receiving attention from Plato, Aristotle, Seneca, the Desert Christians, Thomas Aquinas, David Hume, and many contemporary writers, to name just a few of the heavy hitters.<sup>4</sup> In keeping with my methodological suggestion in Chapter Two, I'll take my remedial cues from the ancients. In the end, I suggest that training the emotions through spiritual exercises, aided by "remedial virtues," provides hope for meaningful movement in the direction of virtue. Before getting to this remedial advice, though, I give an account of anger consistent with the perceptual model of emotions sketched in Chapter Three, and discuss how anger, so understood, relates to various character traits.

### *Anger and Character*

#### *What Is Anger?*

If emotions are evaluative perceptions rooted in what an agent cares about, how should we think about anger? Consider the case of Walter Berglund:

Late on a dismal afternoon in March, in cold and greasy drizzle, Walter rode with his assistant, Lalitha, up from Charleston into the mountains of southern West Virginia. Although Lalitha was a fast and somewhat reckless driver, Walter had come to prefer the anxiety of being her passenger to the judgmental anger that consumed him when he was at the wheel—the seemingly inescapable sense that, of all the drivers on the road, only he was traveling at exactly the right speed, only he was striking an appropriate balance between too punctiliously obeying traffic rules and too dangerously flouting them. In the last two years, he'd spent a lot of angry hours on the roads of West Virginia, tailgating the idiotic slowpokes and then slowing down himself to punish the rude tailgaters, ruthlessly defending the inner lane of interstates from [jerks] trying to pass him on the right, passing on the right himself when some fool or cellphone yakker or sanctimonious speed-limit enforcer clogged the inner lane, ... muttering "Unbelievable! Unbelievable!" when a driver ahead of him braked for a green light and then accelerated through yellow and left him stranded at red, boiling when he waited *a full minute* at intersections with no cross traffic visible *for miles*, and painfully swallowing, for Lalitha's sake, the invective he yearned to vent

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<sup>4</sup> See Plato, *Republic* 4; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.5; Seneca, *On Anger*; John Cassian, *The Institutes* 8; Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil* 12; David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* 2.2; Martha Nussbaum, "Transitional Anger," *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 1, no. 1 (2015): 41–56; and Glen Pettigrove, "Meekness and 'Moral' Anger," *Ethics* 122, no. 2 (January 2012): 341–370.

when stymied by a driver refusing to make a legal right turn on red: “Hello? Get a clue? The world consists of more than just you! Other people have reality! Learn to drive! Hello!” Better the adrenaline rush of Lalitha’s flooring the gas to pass uphill-struggling trucks than the stress on his cerebral arteries of taking the wheel himself and remaining stuck behind those trucks. This way, he could look out at the gray matchstick Appalachian woods and the mining-ravaged ridges and direct his anger at problems more worthy of it.<sup>5</sup>

Walter’s driving-infraction-radar is always on high alert. He has a clear vision of how his time behind the wheel should look, and he sees the contravention of that vision not merely as an inconvenience, but *as an offense*, an injustice of serious magnitude. Moreover, it is clear to Walter that these offenses have agential roots: they have been perpetrated by the other drivers, whom he sees *as offenders*. These “fools” have not done wrong by accident; they are morally culpable for their malefactions. (If Walter were convinced that the other drivers had legitimate excuses for their behavior, or if they simply raised a hand in apology as he passed them, one surmises that Walter’s anger would abate to some degree.) The other drivers and their transgressions seem to be the focus of Walter’s emotional vision. But they are not all he “sees.” Walter also sees himself—along with the “other people [who] have reality”—as having been *offended*. Bad driving, in Walter’s eyes, is not a victimless crime; and he is among the victims. In sum, then, we might say Walter’s anger—and anger more generally—is partially constituted by an interpretive template of offense: it is a three-term “take” on a situation, involving an *offense*, an *offender*, and an *offended*.

A further feature of Walter’s anger is that he sees himself *as being in a moral position to judge* the other drivers. He has an “inescapable sense” that he alone is a model motorist, so he has a privileged perspective—a moral perch—from which to look down on the other drivers and condemn their failures. To see that this self-construal is an element of anger, imagine that as Walter fumes over the car currently hugging his bumper Lalitha points out—

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Franzen, *Freedom: A Novel* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 290–1. Thanks to Karla West for recommending the use of this passage.

perhaps with a twinkle in her eye—how much the actions of the “rude tailgater” resemble Walter’s treatment of “idiotic slowpokes.” Provided that Walter doesn’t simply blow up at Lalitha for pointing out his shortcomings (a very real possibility), and instead comes to see himself as guilty of the same crime he is judging, he will be knocked off his high horse. Undoubtedly this would dampen his anger, at least to some extent. It is hard to look down on others when we have been put on their level.

The last feature of Walter’s anger I want to point out is his *desire for “pay back.”* He is quite explicit about this: he slows down to “punish” tailgaters.<sup>6</sup> More than likely that same impulse would yield a certain pleasure in Walter were he to see the “jerk” who passed him on the right receiving a ticket. It might also color the way Walter passes “sanctimonious speed-limit enforcers,” conspicuously revving his engine or aggressively cutting back into the inner lane so as to sting them for their blameworthy ineptitude.

Anger, then, is a rather complex appraisal. It presents the world to us in terms of offense; it presents certain others as victims; it presents us to ourselves as being in a moral position to judge; and it breeds in us a desire for “pay back.”<sup>7</sup> As such, anger can be an appropriate “take” on a situation: offenses are real, there are victims, we are sometimes in a position to judge, and punishment is sometimes called for. (By this standard, Walter’s anger over the “mining-ravaged ridges” of Appalachia may be appropriate.) But pitfalls abound. Our anger is often misdirected or selectively self-centered; and even when it is not, it is often

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<sup>6</sup> Seneca (*On Anger*, 1.2.3–4 [19]), Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics* 4.5), and Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica* II-II.158.2) each think anger’s grammar includes the desire to punish.

<sup>7</sup> Here I follow Robert C. Roberts (*Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 204), who suggests anger’s formal “defining proposition” is “S has culpably offended in the important matter of X (action or omission) and is bad (is to some extent an enemy of what is good); I am in a moral position to condemn; S deserves (ought) to be hurt for X; may S be hurt for X.” So defined, anger can be distinguished from neighboring emotions, such as frustration, resentment, and indignation (see *ibid.*, 214–8). Though these emotions can be referred to loosely as ‘anger’ (we could say they are members of the anger family), my focus in this chapter is anger proper. Still, what I say below could be adapted to apply to anger’s cousins.

too quick to flare up, too hot, or too slow to burn out. A bit of reflection on a number of virtues and vices will help clarify what kind of person will be disposed to have the right sort of anger but not the inappropriate sort. I offer some reflections toward this end in the next section as a prelude to considering how one might attain the sort of anger-wisdom characteristic of virtue.

### *Anger and Virtue(s)*

According to a venerable tradition, there is a single virtue that specifically pertains to anger. Aristotle notes that this virtue is unnamed, but calls it *προσθης*, which is translated variously: good temper, mildness, meekness, gentleness.<sup>8</sup> This virtue is said to be a mean between two extremes, which also lack names, but which Aristotle calls irascibility (*οργιλοτης*) and inirascibility (*αοργησια*). Some of Aristotle’s language notwithstanding, the mean here should not be thought of as a merely quantitative measure, as though the virtuous have their internal thermostat perpetually set to “medium anger.” Rather, the good-tempered person is angry “at the right things and with the right people, and, further, as he ought, when he ought, and as long as he ought.”<sup>9</sup> There are many ways to go wrong here, and Aristotle discusses many varieties of “excess” and “deficiency” with regard to anger, including the “hot-tempered,” the “choleric,” the “sulky,” and the “slavish,” among other unnamed vicious characters. To my mind, the variety here suggests that the simple vice-of-deficiency/virtue/vice-of-excess schema is far from adequate. Yet it remains a popular model for thinking about anger.

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<sup>8</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.5 (1125b28). Aristotle is representative of this tradition, but Aristotelians aren’t the only ones who think of anger as correlating to a single virtue. The Stoics, for instance, eschew Aristotle’s idea of tempering one’s anger, but agree that there is a single anger-virtue (indeed, one passion-virtue): *apatheia*.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.5 (1125b31).

One recent proponent of a broadly Aristotelian approach is Zac Cogley.<sup>10</sup> Like Aristotle, Cogley struggles to name *the* anger virtue. He settles for ‘patience,’ but expresses dissatisfaction with the term, and even tries to avoid using it, since he thinks virtue can require great anger, while ‘patience’ has a ring of “passivity and quietude.”<sup>11</sup> In his view, the virtuous person’s anger is excellent with regard to three functions: (1) appraisal of wrongdoing, (2) action motivation, and (3) communication. That is, a person is “angrily virtuous” when “her anger is fitting, it motivates her to take assertively resistant actions, and she communicates her anger to others with nuanced attention to appropriate social norms governing its display.”<sup>12</sup> In Aristotelian fashion, Cogley identifies two anger vices—meekness and wrath—the former being a deficiency with regard to all three of anger’s functions, the latter, a triple excess. But also like Aristotle, Cogley ultimately finds the dyadic vice framework inadequate, for he notes that one could be viciously excessive or deficient in only one or two of anger’s functions, and highlights the existence of other common anger-related vice terms (e.g., ‘furious’ and ‘resentful’) that don’t map neatly onto his ‘meekness’ and ‘wrath.’<sup>13</sup>

The difficulty that Aristotle and Cogley have in identifying and naming *the* anger virtue and its correlated vices is not primarily a vocabulary problem. Rather, I think their diction difficulty points to a deeper inadequacy of the single-virtue take on anger: a faulty model of virtue individuation. When we individuate virtues, we have to assign them their functions in the moral life, and if we think there is more than one virtue, we will be

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<sup>10</sup> Zac Cogley, “A Study of Virtuous and Vicious Anger,” in *Virtues and Their Vices*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Craig A. Boyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 199–224.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 217–20.

committed to assigning different functions to different virtues.<sup>14</sup> Anger can express a wide variety of virtues and vices, often at the same time. And various virtues have different functions with respect to anger. While it may be true that we sometimes speak of people as having “good” or “bad” temper, such language does not pick out a single trait. Or, to put the point differently, if “good temper” is a single trait, it supervenes on a number of other traits—e.g., gentleness, patience, self-control, justice, love, and so on—each of which can be expressed through one’s anger (or lack thereof).

Let me clarify my view by contrasting it with two others. Those who hold to the “unity of the virtues” claim (roughly) that a person cannot have any single virtue without having the others.<sup>15</sup> Aristotle held a view like this.<sup>16</sup> In response to my complaint, he might say, “Sure, one cannot have good temper without the other virtues: the intemperate may get inappropriately angry when their disordered desires for food and sex are thwarted; the vainglorious may be inappropriately angered when their attempts at unjustified glory fail; and so on. But virtues are individuated by the domain of human activity for which they equip us to act excellently, and good temper is the virtue related to the activity of dealing with offenses. That good temper depends on the other virtues is not an objection to treating it as a distinct virtue, for *all* the virtues depend on each other.”

I am not merely saying that one must have, say, the virtues of justice, temperance, courage, and so on if one is to have the virtue of good temper. I have no interest in defending a strong “unity of the virtues” thesis, though, as we’ll see, I do think virtues tend to cluster in personalities. Rather, I am denying that “good temper” names a unique virtue

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<sup>14</sup> This way of putting this point was suggested to me by Bob Roberts.

<sup>15</sup> There are a number of variations on this general theme. For discussion, see Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 171–5.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.13; for discussion, see Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 73–84.

(except in the qualified sense mentioned above). For even if the virtues are individuated in part by their respective spheres of human activity, there are *multiple* virtues that relate directly to how we deal with offenses (or so I'll argue below). Simply speaking of "good temper," or picking out a single aspect of good temper (e.g., patience) and treating it as the single anger virtue, covers over many important distinctions.

Christian Miller suggests another way of thinking about the traits that govern this area of the moral life. (Admittedly, Miller is not focused on anger per se, but rather on the area of the moral life empirical psychologists treat under the label "aggression." But his account is in the neighborhood, and serves as an instructive foil.) Miller offers his model as an alternative both to a simplistic model according to which we have a single dispositional desire to harm others (or not), and to the traditional moral psychology of the virtues and vices. He thinks people typically have a "Mixed Aggression Trait," made up of many sets of dispositions to form beliefs and desires.<sup>17</sup> Here are three that he suggests:

- (1) Beliefs and desires concerned with harming the offender in order to retaliate for his offense, or to get even with him, or to get revenge.
- (2) Beliefs and desires concerned with harming others in order to maintain a positive opinion of oneself.
- (3) Beliefs and desires concerned with harming others in order to obey instructions from a legitimate authority.<sup>18</sup>

In one sense, Miller's view is similar to my take on "good temper" as a summarizing trait, for he thinks the Mixed Aggression Trait is constituted by various other dispositions. But Miller's trait individuation method gets him into a problem like Aristotle's, for he focuses on a "trait" that governs an area of the moral life—"aggression" or "harm"—with which *many* traits directly relate. For instance, each of the belief/desire sets he cites is directly related to

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<sup>17</sup> Christian Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 271.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

traditional virtues: justice for (1), humility for (2), and obedience and autonomy for (3). To lump all these together under a Mixed Aggression Trait is insufficiently subtle if our aim is to identify the unique moral functions of the various virtues.

If our ultimate aim is wisdom as it relates to anger, and the ability to cultivate virtue that is wisdom's corollary, I suggest that we would do well to jettison the attempt to find a unified anger trait and instead consider the many anger-expressing character traits in all their particularity. This is no small task. There are deep divides both within and across moral outlooks about the nature of each of these traits. Entire books could be (and have been) written on any one of them. Still, it will be instructive to sketch a handful of the traits in order to get a better sense for how anger and character relate. For reasons that will become apparent below, I will assume a Christian moral outlook throughout this discussion. I begin with a few traits that are more narrowly concerned with anger, and then broaden my scope a bit.<sup>19</sup>

Among the Christian virtues, gentleness comes closest to Aristotle's "good temper." (Indeed, some translations of Aristotle call his anger-virtue "gentleness.") The virtuously *gentle* (or meek) person is not anger-free; significant injustice draws her ire (see below). But she is not angered by the trivial slights that provoke many of us to wrath, and the anger she does experience is appropriately tempered in intensity. As such, the gentle are characteristically tender and calm, avoiding harshness and severity in favor of mildness.

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<sup>19</sup> No doubt my sketches of these traits will be controversial not only to those outside the Christian outlook but also to some within it. It cannot be helped. A defense of my take on any of these traits would pull the discussion away from its central purpose: to illustrate the variegated connections between anger and character.

‘Patience’ has a temporal connotation that ‘gentleness’ lacks.<sup>20</sup> The virtuously *patient* person is unruffled by (or can control frustrations caused by) delay, prolonged difficulty, and so on. She is able to “dwell gladly in the present moment when [she has] some desire, or what would normally be a reason to desire, to depart from it.”<sup>21</sup> The OED nicely captures the temporal dimension of patience, which it defines as “the calm, uncomplaining *endurance* of pain, affliction, inconvenience, etc.; the capacity for such endurance” (italics added). In the ideal case, the patient person’s “glad dwelling in the present moment” requires no exertion of willpower. Yet ‘endurance’ connotes effort, and this befits another form of patience. Frustrations arise even for the virtuously patient (just as fears arise for the virtuously courageous), and the virtue of patience often consists in having the willpower to “wait, and wait, and wait with a smile,” as one virtue education curriculum describes the characteristic action of this virtue.<sup>22</sup> Delays, prolonged pain, and inconveniences are often sources of anger, for they are easy to construe in terms of offense. And bona fide offenses often involve delay, etc. But not always. Thus, patience’s characteristic function is not solely anger management. It also relates to dealing with boredom, inconveniences for which no one is morally culpable, and so on. Still, forestalling certain instances of anger is one of patience’s functions. For the Christian—whose ideals include being “slow to anger”<sup>23</sup>—patience is one virtue that protects one against overly quick anger (among other things).

‘*Self-control*’ has both broad and narrow usages. In its broadest application, the term can cover all the virtues of willpower by which one regulates oneself. On this rendering,

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<sup>20</sup> Strangely enough, Cogley’s discussion of “patience” lacks any reference to the temporal dimension in anger.

<sup>21</sup> Robert C. Roberts, *The Strengths of a Christian* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 53.

<sup>22</sup> See <<http://wechoosevirtues.com>>.

<sup>23</sup> James 1:19, NRSV.

patience can be a form of self-control. ‘Self-control’ is often defined more narrowly, though, as the virtue of willpower responsible for regulating one’s anger. One might be tempted to think of self-control, so understood, as a non-virtue, reserved for those lacking in gentleness, patience, etc., much as Aristotle thinks of continence vis-à-vis temperance. I think this is a mistake. While it is true that self-control sometimes compensates for a lack of some other virtue, it doesn’t always. After all, virtue does not imply perfection, so even the virtuously gentle may need to control some untoward anger from time to time. And if we think that no one will ever attain the perfect attunement of anger, all of us will have a perpetual need for some measure of self-control. But even more importantly, the ability to control one’s anger and act well in the face of it is a good in itself, much as the ability to control one’s fear and act well in the face of it (i.e., courage) is a good in itself. If we think courage is a virtue, surely self-control is as well.

The foregoing three virtues—gentleness, patience, and self-control—are negatively related to anger; they enable one to avoid inappropriate anger, each in its own way. Gentleness is a direct disposition not to be subject to or express anger inappropriately, for it is constituted (in part) by a low sensitivity to trivial slights and a tendency toward calm. Patience, by contrast, equips one to dwell gladly in the present despite frustrations (including, but not limited to, offenses). Self-control is a virtue of willpower whereby one actively regulates one’s anger. I have begun with these “negative” virtues because the Christian outlook is characterized by an emphasis on avoiding and controlling inappropriate anger. (See, e.g., Ephesians 4:31 and Colossians 3:8, where believers are instructed to “get rid of” or “put away” anger; see also Galatians 5:22–3, whether gentleness, patience, and self-control are each identified as “fruit of the Spirit.”) In this, the Christian outlook agrees with Aristotle, who taught that the mean with regard to anger is closer to inirascibility than it is to

irascibility.<sup>24</sup> Even so, some virtues dispose the Christian toward good anger. Two of these are justice and love.

The virtuously *just* person cares deeply that justice be done, and is emotionally sensitive to instances of justice and injustice. Anger is (in part) an appraisal of a state of affairs as characterized by injustice (offenses against objective justice). Thus, the just person will be disposed both to fitting anger (i.e., anger that gets the justice appraisal right) and to just expressions of anger (e.g., punishments that fit the crime). The Christian will be sensitive to some injustices that others wouldn't see, especially those pertaining to God and God's kingdom (see, e.g., Jesus's anger over the mistreatment of the temple in John 2:13–17, and his anger with the Pharisees for failing to welcome the manifestation of God's kingdom found in Jesus's healing of a man with a withered hand in Mark 3:1–6). Even so, the Christian's just ("righteous") anger will be qualified by her gentleness, patience, and self-control.

It will also be qualified by her *love*. Love can be the root of anger.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this is a key source of the difference between Christianity and Stoicism as regards anger. As we will see below, one way Stoics achieve freedom from anger is detachment. It is true that *partial* detachment is characteristic of Christian wisdom. But the Stoic's *total* detachment is a path to anger-freedom that is closed to the Christian, precisely because of the Christian view of love.

As Martha Nussbaum points out:

In some manner Christian love has reopened the space within which fear, and anxiety, and grief, and intense delight, and even anger, all have their full force. And

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<sup>24</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.5 (1126a1–2).

<sup>25</sup> Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung suggests that anger, "when it is a *holy* emotion, has *justice* as its object and *love* as its root." See her *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 130.

correct love promises no departure from these other emotions—if anything, it requires their intensification.<sup>26</sup>

Surely Nussbaum is correct that one's anger often is (and ought to be) directly proportionate to one's love: the more one loves a victim of injustice, the more anger one will feel toward the perpetrator. But love—which, on the Christian view, ought to include perpetrators within its scope—also tends to delay and dispel anger. As the apostle Paul notes, “Love is patient . . . . It is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.”<sup>27</sup> Here's one reason this is so: love's vision is generous. The lover has eyes to see the good in the beloved.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the lover *actively looks* for the good in the beloved (even beloved offenders). But the object of anger's vision *looks like an enemy* for as long as anger endures. Thus, love will tend to decelerate, mitigate, and otherwise qualify anger by making one prone to see the putative offender in loving terms, and love will hasten the release of anger.

The release of anger in favor of a benevolent view of the offender is at the core of Christian forgiveness. The virtuous disposition to forgive—a trait Bob Roberts calls *forgivingness*<sup>29</sup>—is one form of Christian love, and one of its central functions is the removal of fitting anger. The forgiving person does not deny that the offender has offended her; nor does she necessarily give up her claim to just recompense; but she does foreswear her angry construal of the offender in favor of a loving one. This function of forgivingness is distinct from the functions of the other virtues mentioned so far. For instance, it isn't hard to

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<sup>26</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 530.

<sup>27</sup> I Corinthians 13:4–5, NIV.

<sup>28</sup> Many philosophers have argued that love involves seeing the good in the other. See, e.g., Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Iris Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 100; Martha Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), chapters 11–14; Glen Pettigrove, *Forgiveness and Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 77–86; and Roberts, *Emotions*, 286–89.

<sup>29</sup> See Robert C. Roberts, “Forgivingness,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (1995): 289–306.

imagine a person who is quite gentle, yet tends to be unwilling to forgive bona fide offenders. (This seems to be the position of the person with Aristotelian *πραοτης*.)<sup>30</sup> Yet both gentleness and forgivingness (not to mention many other virtues) are ingredients of, and not merely aids to, (Christian) “good temper.”

Other Christian virtues also tend to ward off inappropriate anger, even if this function is not definitive of those virtues. In this way, these virtues’ anger-function is akin to the role of temperance in the fictionalized Aristotelian explanation of the unity of the virtues above. A few brief examples will suffice: the *contrite* Christian is painfully aware of her own sinfulness, and so is less prone (than, say, the self-righteous) to take on anger’s judgmental stance; the *humble* Christian’s heart is not set upon her own status, so she is less apt to notice the status-snubs that give rise to so much anger in the vain, the conceited, and the arrogant; the *grateful* Christian is ever poised to see herself as the beneficiary of benefits from gracious benefactors (chiefly God, but also other humans), a three-term construal that tends to edge out anger’s offense-offender-offended template;<sup>31</sup> and so on.

No doubt other traits are relevant to anger as well. But the foregoing discussion amply suggests that remediating one’s inappropriate anger is not simply a matter of moving from “irascibility” to “good temper.” It is a multi-front battle for one’s character. The battle will not be easy, and those who wish to get rid of inappropriate anger need a plan. As a first step in formulating such a plan, I suggest we look to the Stoics.

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<sup>30</sup> Thanks to Bob Roberts for pointing this out.

<sup>31</sup> See Robert C. Roberts, “The Blessings of Gratitude: A Conceptual Analysis,” in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, ed. Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 58–78.

*Seneca on the Remediation of Anger*

Given what I've said so far, the Stoics may seem like a strange source to consult for anger-mitigating advice. After all, in the last chapter I argued against the judgment theory of emotion, a theory first championed by the Stoics. And in this chapter I have suggested that the virtuous person should be prone to certain forms of anger, a claim that (at least *prima facie*) violates Stoic doctrine. These points of disagreement, while philosophically significant, are not as practically significant as they might first appear. For, as we'll see below, the vast majority of Stoic strategies can be easily adapted to an outlook that acknowledges anger as a sometimes fitting moral perception. Thus, these quibbles should not keep us from considering the Stoics' rich anger-mitigating wisdom.

The Stoics (along with several other ancient schools of philosophy) conceived of philosophy as a way of life aimed at attaining psychological wellbeing. As Martha Nussbaum has pointed out, the Hellenistic schools of philosophy all “saw the philosopher as a compassionate physician whose arts could heal many pervasive types of suffering.”<sup>32</sup> Whereas the medical doctor seeks to heal physical ailments, the philosopher seeks to heal the soul. And chief among the soul's diseases, according to these schools, is the problem of unruly emotions. As Pierre Hadot notes, “in the view of all [ancient] philosophical schools, mankind's principal cause of suffering, disorder, and unconsciousness [i.e., lack of awareness of morally significant realities] were the passions: that is, unregulated desires and exaggerated

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<sup>32</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3. Technically, the Stoic soul doctor should resist being compassionate, since compassion is a passion, and therefore, to be eschewed. Still, in their written responses to suffering souls, the Stoics at least present themselves as compassionate. Perhaps they're making a literary application of Epictetus's advice concerning how to respond to a mourning friend: “So far as words then do not be unwilling to show him sympathy, and even if it happens so, to lament with him. But take care that you do not lament internally also” (*Enchiridion*, Dover Thrift Edition, trans. George Long, ed. Tom Crawford [Mineola, NY: Dover, 2004], section 16, page 7).

fears. ... Philosophy thus appears, in the first place, as a therapeutic of the passions.”<sup>33</sup> ‘Unregulated’ and ‘exaggerated’ are important qualifiers here. It is often thought that the Stoics opposed all emotion. Their own rhetoric, of course, tends to support this reading. The Stoic ideal of *apatheia* (literally no-passion) “is often described as a thesis about the emotions, since the Greek word *pathos* covers both feelings and emotions, and the thrust of the thesis is that virtue, far from requiring a settled state of the agent’s emotions, demands their elimination.”<sup>34</sup> But as Julia Annas points out,

As often with the Stoics, the startling appearance of the thesis conceals a much milder, and more interesting core. The Stoics are not saying that the virtuous person should simply *lack* all feeling and emotion. Rather, they define the *pathe* as faulty by definition. ... The *pathe*, feelings or emotions that one should not have, are feelings that are already excessive, going contrary to the agent’s reason.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, even with this qualification, the non-Stoic will typically allow for more appropriate emotions than the Stoic. But, as I’ll argue below, the non-Stoic can adapt the Stoic therapies to cover a narrower range of problematic passions.

The Stoics counted anger among the chief enemies of psychological wellbeing. Thus, the practical question of how to eliminate anger was of tremendous philosophical import to them. As with the other passions, the anger that Stoics aim to eradicate is, by definition, disordered. And although one will look in vain for “good anger” among the Stoic list of *eupatheiai* (literally, good-passions), they seem to allow for some psychological states that border on what the rest of us would call anger. For instance, according to Seneca, “if it listens to reason and follows where led, it is no longer anger;” and again, “if it accepts a limit, it needs some other name, having ceased to be anger, which I understand to be something

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<sup>33</sup> Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), 83.

<sup>34</sup> Annas, 61–2.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 62; italics original.

unbridled and ungoverned.”<sup>36</sup> Still, the Stoics advocate eliminating more anger than would many rival moral outlooks (e.g., Aristotelianism). In my view, though, the rigorous anti-anger stance of the Stoics may be a practical benefit even to those inclined to a less severe view. Aristotle pointed out that habituation into the mean with regard to anger involves aiming at the extreme (i.e., vice) that is further away from the vice toward which humans naturally gravitate. In the case of anger, the human tendency is toward irascibility, not inirascibility.<sup>37</sup> So even the more moderate Aristotelian will suggest that, for the purposes of moral training, one should overcompensate by aiming at something like the Stoic ideal. Given the dearth of specific anger-purging advice in the Aristotelian tradition, the Aristotelian would do well to consider what the Stoics have to say (always on the lookout, of course, for advice that must be purified of its “infection” by Stoic doctrine).

What are the Stoics’ strategies? And can they be sufficiently de-Stoicized for non-Stoic use? I begin addressing these questions by considering the general outlook and methods of Stoic philosophy, highlighting the role of spiritual exercises in Stoic character formation. I then try to systematize some of the specific anger remedies commended in Seneca’s *On Anger*. Finally, I suggest how a non-Stoic might tweak Seneca’s anger-mitigating wisdom.

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<sup>36</sup> Seneca, *On Anger* 1.9.2–3 (27). Elsewhere he notes that even the wise will sometimes feel a “slight, tiny throb,” which is (supposedly) only a “hint or shadow” of real anger, and suggests that this “first mental jolt which affects us when we think ourselves wronged” only amounts to anger’s “prelude.” See *On Anger* 1.16.7 (35) and 2.2–3 (43–44). See also 1.2.5 (20), where he discusses “quasi-anger.”

<sup>37</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.5 (1126a29–31).

### *General Stoic Strategies*

The Stoic way of life involves “a conversion, a total transformation of one’s vision, life-style, and behavior.”<sup>38</sup> The ideal Stoic has a depersonalized self- and world-perception; she sees herself, and all else, “as a part of the reason-animated cosmos.”<sup>39</sup> Attaining this Stoic vision requires detachment from that over which one lacks control (which is just about everything). Such a comprehensive change is a tall order, especially for those habituated into non-Stoic ways of seeing and being. Still, more than Aristotle, the Stoics are optimistic about the possibility of malformed folks making significant progress toward the ideal.<sup>40</sup> Annas puts the contrast like this:

Aristotle’s exposition focusses [sic] on initial moral development, the formation in the young of good dispositions. He stresses the importance of this to the extent that some have ascribed to him the position that it is impossible for a developed agent to change from vice to virtue. This is surely a mistake, though Aristotle does stress the difficulty of changing one’s disposition once it is developed. In any case, the later schools lay more stress on the possibility of converting mature but badly developed people; once convinced that your life is not as it should be, you can change, though because of the need for habituation the process is difficult and requires a process of continual self-monitoring to be successful.<sup>41</sup>

The primary vehicle of this total conversion, according to all the ancient schools of thought, is the practice of spiritual exercises. As Hadot notes,

Each school had its own therapeutic method, but all of them linked their therapeutics to a profound transformation of the individual’s mode of seeing and being. ... Such a transformation of vision is not easy, and it is precisely here that

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<sup>38</sup> Hadot, 103.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>40</sup> Remember that, like the other ancient schools, Stoics saw perfect virtue as a “limit” concept—an ultimately unattainable ideal toward which one nevertheless strives.

<sup>41</sup> Annas, 58.

spiritual exercises come in. Little by little, they make possible the indispensable metamorphosis of our inner self.<sup>42</sup>

But what *are* spiritual exercises, and how are they supposed to enable inner change?

Spiritual exercises are practices of mind and body whereby one digests the doctrines of one's philosophical school, so that those doctrines are not matters of mere notional understanding, but actually take up residence in one's vision of the world. Spiritual exercises make possible "a complete reversal of our usual way of looking at things."<sup>43</sup> Let's consider a few.

The chief Stoic spiritual exercise—the "fundamental Stoic spiritual attitude"<sup>44</sup>—is *attention* (*prosoche*). Attention is "a continuous vigilance and presence of mind," whereby "the Stoic always has 'at hand' (*procheiron*) the fundamental rule of life."<sup>45</sup> A key aspect of Stoic training in the art of living is the provision of concise, memorable, clear, simple statements of the most basic Stoic doctrines. In the practice of attention, the Stoic keeps these formulae at the ready, so that they may be applied "with the sureness and constancy of a reflex. ... It is this vigilance of the spirit which lets us apply the fundamental rule to each of life's particular situations, and always to do what we do 'appropriately.'"<sup>46</sup> As we'll see, without attention, one wouldn't be able to follow Seneca's anger-mitigating advice.

Vigilant attention is necessary, but it isn't sufficient. "We must also associate our imagination and affectivity" into our training.<sup>47</sup> The formulae must be presented to us—by others and by ourselves—in "the most striking and concrete way. We must keep life's events

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<sup>42</sup> Hadot, 83.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 85.

‘before our eyes,’ and see them in the light of the fundamental rule.”<sup>48</sup> Here the exercises of *memorization* and *meditation* are key. By memorization, we etch the rhetorically persuasive maxims of our philosophy into our memory, so that they become our default interpretive schema for the events of life. By meditation, we dwell upon the events of life, both before and after they happen, so as to reframe them in light of the formulae we’ve memorized.

The foregoing exercises are formal; they need matter. The philosophical matter is provided by the explicitly *intellectual exercises*, which include reading, listening, research, and investigation.<sup>49</sup> But training the mind in Stoic philosophy is not sufficient to retrain *bodily* habits. So *practical exercises* are also needed, wherein one masters oneself or engages in the practical behavior required by one’s duties.<sup>50</sup> Together with the other exercises, these allow the trainee to make progress toward the Stoic ideal of transformed vision. Hadot summarizes:

For the Stoic, then, doing philosophy meant practicing how to “live”: that is, how to live freely and consciously. Consciously, in that we pass beyond the limits of individuality, to recognize ourselves as a part of the reason-animated *cosmos*. Freely, in that we give up desiring that which does not depend on us and is beyond our control, so as to attach ourselves only to what depends on us: actions which are just and in conformity to reason.<sup>51</sup>

For the non-Stoic, the ideal toward which one aspires will obviously differ. But, as I will argue below, the vigilant application of spiritual exercises can be adapted to other moral outlooks.

Note that the Stoics do not think of the transformative application of spiritual exercises as a mere phase; the exercises aren’t training wheels, props to be removed after a

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 86.

bit of practice. Rather, since bona fide sage status is understood as an unattainable ideal, “spiritual exercises must be taken up again and again, in an ever-renewed effort.”<sup>52</sup> Those who join the Stoics in thinking moral formation is never complete will likely take a similar attitude.

Up to this point I have been trading in generalizations. But we will get a much clearer idea of the role of spiritual exercises in moral formation if we look closely at a particular test case: Seneca’s treatise *On Anger*.<sup>53</sup>

#### *Seneca’s Anger Remediation Exercises*

Seneca brings all of the Stoics’ spiritual exercises to bear in the service of anger therapy. A full survey of all of his remedial devices is beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, I will discuss a number of representative spiritual exercises that he suggests, organized around five themes: conversion, situation management, re-construal, behavioral response, and generic expedients.

First are exercises of *conversion*. One will not engage in the Stoics’ rigorous moral formation program if one does not appreciate the dire need for just such a program. Thus, the would-be Stoic must be converted: she needs to see vividly just how nasty anger is, and just how wonderful Stoic *apatheia* is by contrast, so that she will “buy in.” Thus, the conversion seems ultimately to be a conversion of concern—from concern about “indifferents” to concern about virtue and tranquility—which the trainee gradually integrates into her “vision, life-style, and behavior.”<sup>54</sup> Julia Annas notes that the Hellenistic schools

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>53</sup> I have chosen *On Anger* not only because it is rich in anger-mitigating advice, but also because it is “the only treatment of anger (or the emotions generally) by a Stoic to survive substantially complete from antiquity” (Cooper and Procopé, Introduction to *On Anger*, in *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays*, 14).

<sup>54</sup> Hadot, 103. Thanks to Bob Roberts for helping me clarify this point.

gave great prominence “to types of writing that aim to jolt and shock people out of bad and vicious habits in order to facilitate ... conversion.”<sup>55</sup> There is no doubt that Seneca aims to “jolt and shock” his reader. His underlying assumption is that if the reader receives a sufficiently arresting depiction of the nature and consequences of anger (what Wittgenstein might call a “perspicuous representation”<sup>56</sup>), she will desire to be rid of it. And Seneca uses every rhetorical device at his disposal toward this end.

Seneca’s definition of anger is not far from the one I offered above: “Anger is ‘a burning desire to avenge a wrong’ ... ‘a burning desire to punish him by whom you think yourself to have been unfairly harmed.’”<sup>57</sup> But even before defining anger, Seneca endeavors to impress his reader with its ugliness: anger is “the most hideous and frenzied of all the emotions. ... Raving with a desire that is utterly inhuman for instruments of pain and reparations in blood, careless of itself so long as it harms the other, it rushes onto the very spear-points, greedy for vengeance that draws down the avenger with it.”<sup>58</sup> In short, it is “brief insanity.”<sup>59</sup> Such brutal descriptions recur throughout the treatise. At one point Seneca explains why. Aristotle and others offer arguments that make it seem that some anger may be good, and they must be answered. But mere intellectual counterargument is insufficient: “there really is a need to prove [anger’s] foulness and savagery, to *place before your eyes* the sheer monstrosity of man raging at man.”<sup>60</sup> Where the oncologist might try to shock a

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<sup>55</sup> Annas, 54–5.

<sup>56</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3d ed., trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 1.122 (49).

<sup>57</sup> Seneca, *On Anger* 1.2.3–4 (19).

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.1.1 (17).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.1.2 (17).

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.3.2 (78–9); italics added.

smoker into quitting by wheeling in a blackened lung, Seneca wheels in example after example of anger's morally cancerous effects.

His attempts are not entirely successful. One reason may be that his depiction of anger shades into dishonesty. Under the influence of his Stoic dogma, and in the interest of the rhetorical impact of a literary "jolt," Seneca seems to exaggerate the nastiness of anger by selecting the most horrible cases without admitting that this is only a selection, or even a minority of the cases.<sup>61</sup> Of course, hyperbole is an important rhetorical device. The trouble is that Seneca seems to think he isn't hyperbolizing. Thus, even after looking anger's ugliness in the face for several pages, it is hard for anyone but a confirmed Stoic to sympathize with passages like this: "'Tell me then, is the good man not angry if he sees his father slain and his mother ravished?' No, he will not be angry. He will punish and protect. Why should not filial devotion, even without anger, be enough of a stimulus?"<sup>62</sup> The Aristotelian responds: the son is slavish. The Christian: he does not love his parents.<sup>63</sup> Even so, Seneca is right to think that the graphic depiction of the horrors of anger is more likely to sway (if not fully convert) a non-Stoic than mere argument. In this way, official Stoic doctrine about reason's supremacy over affect notwithstanding, he appears to agree with Jonathan Haidt that moral persuasion is more effective when one addresses one's interlocutor's emotional "elephant."<sup>64</sup>

Even if Seneca succeeds in converting his reader, though, momentary conversion to the Stoic way of seeing is not enough. The Stoic, in a sense, must be re-converted on an ongoing basis, for it is all too easy to fall back into old ways of seeing. Thus, what Seneca has

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<sup>61</sup> Thanks to Bob Roberts for discussion of this point.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.12.1 (30).

<sup>63</sup> Another example: when Seneca asks, "What need is there to kick the table over?" (1.19.4; 38), the Christian might say: "because they have made God's temple into a den of thieves" (see Mark 11:15–17).

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 57.

done for his reader, he commends that the reader regularly do for herself. “We shall guarantee that we do not become angry if repeatedly we put all the faults of anger on show and appraise it rightly.”<sup>65</sup> Thus, the Stoic-in-training should frequently reflect on the small-mindedness of anger, its ugliness and consequences, its unwieldiness, and so on.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, this reflection should be vivid and memorable. Here is just one among many images Seneca offers in aid of such appreciative meditation:

No one, surely, would want to hit the enemy so hard as to leave his own hand in the wound and find himself unable to draw back from the blow. But anger is that sort of weapon—it can hardly be withdrawn. We keep an eye out for arms that we can easily use, for the handy, manoeuvrable [sic] sword. Should we not likewise avoid those mental impulses that are heavy, burdensome, and cannot be drawn back?<sup>67</sup>

Of course, Seneca knows that the trainee is bound to fail. But even failure (or the possibility of it) can serve as further fuel for ongoing conversion, by way of the daily examination of conscience. The mind “should be summoned each day to give account of itself. ... Your anger will cease or moderate itself, if it knows that each day it must come before a judge.”<sup>68</sup> In these and many other ways, the would-be sage (philosopher) strives to be captured daily by the Stoic vision of the world.

Once recruited, the philosopher has a couple of options: she can seek to become the kind of person who doesn’t get angry, or she can try to change her situation so that it does not conduce to anger. (Or both.) With thinkers like Haidt and John Doris, Seneca acknowledges the wisdom of *situation management*. He suggests that “we must take care to

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<sup>65</sup> Seneca, *On Anger* 3.5.3 (81).

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.31.6 (69), 2.35 (73–4).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.35.1 (73).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.36.1–2 (110).

avoid being wronged, since we do not know how to endure it.”<sup>69</sup> So, for instance, we should live with tranquil people who do not provoke us.<sup>70</sup> Additionally, he recognizes that various situational factors will make us more liable to anger: a busy schedule, exhaustion, attempting feats beyond our powers, draining intellectual activities, hunger and thirst, parties with wine, and so on.<sup>71</sup> These, he thinks, we should take care to avoid. Thus, exercises of situation management have a place in anger remediation.

But they are far from adequate as a total response. For one thing, they are a mixed blessing. For instance, even though Seneca recommends that the anger-prone “should pick out people who adapt themselves to our looks and words,” he also recognizes a downside to his advice: “That, of course, will make us spoiled, and give us the bad habit of not listening to anything that we do not want to hear.”<sup>72</sup> But a deeper reason Seneca thinks mere situation management is ultimately inadequate is that potential sources of anger are *everywhere*. As the epigraph to this chapter notes:

Everywhere you will find occasion for anger—unless the mind steps in to intercede. Your rage will sweep you this way and that, that way and this. New provocations will constantly be cropping up and your fury will never stop. Poor man, will you ever find yourself *liking* people? What a waste of precious time on a bad business!<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 3.8.1 (84).

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 3.8.3 (84).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 3.6.3–6 (83), 3.9.1 (85), 3.9.4 (86), 3.13.5 (90).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 3.8.7 (85).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 3.28.1 (104). Seneca’s point is general: anger occasions are everywhere. In *The Road to Character*, in the chapter on A. Philip Randolph, David Brooks points out that non-violent political resistance requires daily exercises of self-control of anger. His point is more specific than Seneca’s: anger occasions are everywhere *for people committed to a particular moral practice*. See David Brooks, *The Road to Character* (New York: Random House, 2015), 135–38. Thanks to Bob Roberts for this point.

Thus, if we are to avoid anger, Seneca thinks we cannot simply “change the path that the elephant and the rider find themselves traveling on.”<sup>74</sup> Rather, we must become *indisposed* to anger. And for this, the mind must intercede. So he offers a number of exercises of mind and body by which to change one’s character. Let’s begin with his exercises of *re-construal*.<sup>75</sup>

The language of ‘construal’ (and its corollaries: ‘perception,’ ‘impression,’ ‘take’) is not entirely true to Seneca’s considered view. For although he thinks impressions play a part in anger, he also thinks anger is, in the end, a judgment. “Anger is undoubtedly set in motion by an impression received of a wrong,” but “our view is that it undertakes nothing on its own, but only with the mind’s approval.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, according to Seneca’s official doctrine, the passions aren’t exactly passions; they’re active judgments.<sup>77</sup> Even so, he acknowledges that targeting our construals can be an important part of anger training: “Some things look like wrongs *because of the interpretation placed on them*; you should put off thinking about them, or laugh them off, or make allowance for them.”<sup>78</sup> And again, “It is not how the wrong is done that matters, but *how it is taken*.”<sup>79</sup> Thus, in light of my preference for the perceptual account of emotion, the ease of adapting Seneca’s advice to that account, and the tedium of stating his view in terms of judgment and then translating it later to perception-talk, I’ll adapt his recommendations rather freely.

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<sup>74</sup> Haidt, 106.

<sup>75</sup> What I call “reconstrual” some psychologists call “reframing” or “reconceptualization.”

<sup>76</sup> Seneca, *On Anger* 2.1.3–4 (42).

<sup>77</sup> Robert Solomon pushes a similar view, at least in his early work. See, e.g., Robert C. Solomon, *The Passions: Emotion and the Meaning of Life* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1993). Thanks to Bob Roberts for pointing this out to me.

<sup>78</sup> Seneca, *On Anger* 3.11.1 (87); italics added.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.11.3 (88); italics added.

We saw above that anger is a rather complex construal. It presents the world to us in terms of offense/offender/offended; it presents us to ourselves as being in a moral position to judge; and it breeds in us a desire for “pay back.” If this is right, then one way to fight anger would be to undercut one or more of the elements in anger’s construal. Seneca offers exercises to accomplish just such re-construal.

First, he explains how to avoid applying what I’ve called anger’s offense template. As Seneca sees it, “the prime causes are what we should fight against; and the cause of bad temper is the opinion that we have been wronged.”<sup>80</sup> That opinion is all too easy to fall into, since putative offense is ubiquitous. So, if we want to avoid anger, we must learn how to keep from interpreting supposed slights and crimes, and the agents responsible for them, in terms of offense. He offers many expedients.

For one thing, many supposed offenses are simple matters of “false accounting.”<sup>81</sup> We might see a loss as unfair because we are too attached to the non-valuable thing (e.g., money) we’ve lost.<sup>82</sup> Or we might see a lack of gain as unfair because we have an inappropriate sense of entitlement: “Such is the human impertinence that, having received much, people think themselves wronged if they could have received more.”<sup>83</sup> In other cases, we are angered by circumstances simply because they take us off our guard. “People judge things to be ‘unfair’ either because they ought not to have suffered them or else because they did not expect to do so. Things unforeseen are, we think, undeserved.”<sup>84</sup> In each case, Seneca recommends heading off anger by seeing through the illusion: money is not valuable,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 2.22.2 (61).

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 3.31.3 (107).

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 3.33.1 (108).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 3.31.1 (106).

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 2.31.2 (68).

so don't construe its loss as an offense; don't expect so much from others, so that whatever they give you won't look unfair; to avoid confusing surprises for offenses, "expect every thing!" (especially bad fortune).<sup>85</sup>

Another favored strategy is to look for excuses that exonerate the offender. We are prone to "giving the worst interpretation to someone else's look or smile and thus losing our tempers with the innocent. So we must plead the other person's case in his absence, against ourselves, and suspend the sentence of anger."<sup>86</sup> One excuse Seneca thinks always applies is that misdeeds are really non-culpable errors. "Error is what has driven them to their sort of misdeeds. But there is no reason for a man of understanding to hate those who have gone astray."<sup>87</sup> And again, "surely no one would be angry with people who stumble in the dark or whose deafness stops them from hearing. ... This too is one of the misfortunes of our mortal condition: darkness of mind, the inevitability of error—and still more, the love of error."<sup>88</sup> The non-Stoic will not buy Seneca's line that all crime is error. Still, it is no doubt true that re-construing crimes as errors undercuts anger. Given Seneca's moral outlook, this is prudent advice. Non-Stoics who wish to be rid of anger via something like this method could look for alternative excuses that might mitigate the offender's culpability. Whatever one's moral outlook, though, this will not always be easy. We will sometimes too readily trust the initial impression of culpability. But again, Seneca has advice for turning failure into self-improvement. "Whenever our suspicions prove to be false, we should reproach our

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 2.31.4 (69).

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 2.22.4 (61).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 1.14.2 (32).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 2.10.1 (49).

readiness to believe. Such castigation will put us in the habit of not readily believing things.”<sup>89</sup>

So undercutting the offense template is one way to defuse anger. Coming to see oneself as *not* in a moral position to judge is another. Seneca appreciates this fact, and seeks to exploit it in the interest of moral growth. A number of his therapeutic arguments in this area are pithy and memorable, perfectly suited to the Stoic’s practices of memorization and meditation:

All of us are *bad*. Whatever he blames in another, each will find in his own heart.<sup>90</sup>

You may not be guilty of wrongdoing. But you are quite capable of it.<sup>91</sup>

If we wish our judgment to be fair in all things, we must start from the conviction that no one of us is faultless. For here is where indignation most arises—“I haven’t done anything wrong!”, “I haven’t done a thing!” On the contrary, you won’t *admit* anything!<sup>92</sup>

Other people’s faults are before our eyes, our own lie over our shoulders.<sup>93</sup>

The implication of this last apothegm is clear—if we want anger-free moral vision, we have to redirect our gaze. “A look at ourselves will make us more forbearing, if we start to consider: ‘Surely we too have done something like this? Surely we have made this sort of mistake. Is it in our interest to damn it?’”<sup>94</sup> This change of vision could result from the daily practice of examination of conscience discussed above. But keeping these things before one’s mind’s eye in the moment of putative offense will also require vigilance, wherein one actively applies these insights on the spot, so to speak. As Seneca suggests, one “can avoid

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 2.24.2 (62).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 3.26.4 (103).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 3.26.5 (103).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 2.28.1 (65); italics original.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 2.28.8 (66).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

immediate anger, especially if he says quietly to himself at every vexation ‘I too have done this myself.’”<sup>95</sup>

All these re-construals take effort, practice, and finesse. Some people are less athletic in their re-construal abilities than others, and some putative offenses are rather hard to reinterpret. Seneca has a bit of backup advice. If we cannot manage to re-construe offenses, we should ignore them. “Many offences ought to pass us by. ... If you wish to avoid bad temper, mind your own business.”<sup>96</sup>

The foregoing intellectual exercises target the “prime causes” of anger. But Seneca also recommends *behavioral response* exercises. In large part, these exercises involve actively avoiding anger’s characteristic physical expressions. “Fight with yourself. If you wish to conquer anger, it cannot conquer you. The start of the conquest is to conceal it, to allow it no way out. We should suppress its symptoms and keep it, so far as possible, hidden and secret.”<sup>97</sup> Anger’s symptoms are legion.

Eyes ablaze and glittering, a deep flush over all the face as blood boils up from the vitals, quivering lips, teeth pressed together, bristling hair standing on end, breath drawn in and hissing, the crackle of writhing limbs, groans and bellowing, speech broken off with the words barely uttered, hands struck together too often, feet stamping the ground, the whole body in violent motion “menacing mighty wrath in mien”, the hideous horrifying face of swollen self-degradation—you would hardly know whether to call the vice hateful or ugly.<sup>98</sup>

Even apart from active re-construal of one’s situation, one can fight anger by replacing these symptoms with gentler corollaries. “We should turn all its indications into their opposites: the face should be relaxed, the voice gentler, the pace slower. Little by little, the externals will

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 2.28.6 (66).

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 3.11.1 (87).

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 3.13.1 (89).

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 1.1.4 (18).

be matched by an inner formation.”<sup>99</sup> One might be tempted to think this is merely a practice for controlling the *expression* of anger. In some cases it is; some strong-willed folks sometimes act gently while seething under the surface. But the therapy can go deeper. Gentle behavior provides the agent with an interpretation of the situation—a self-construal—that is in deep tension with anger: when she is aware of herself acting gently, it is very hard—though not impossible—to see herself as the victim of an offense. Moreover, remaining outwardly “cool” can serve as a bulwark against rage, buying one time to “look again” in an effort to “see” the factors that should count against one’s anger—factors to which the angry are blind. In this way, exercises of behavioral response buttress exercises of re-construal. Were such outward behavior to become habitual, that would be a big step in the direction of anger remediation.

Finally, Seneca offers several practices that serve as *generic expedients* to engaging the other practices. First, delay. “The greatest remedy for anger is delay. ... The first attacks are the heavy ones; anger will leave off, if it has to wait.”<sup>100</sup> In addition to the way delay takes advantage of anger’s natural entropy, it also provides time for the vigilant to enact their intellectual and behavioral anti-anger measures. Second, we should do our anti-anger work in stages, and start with the easiest cases. “Do not try to be rid of it all at once; you will overcome it entirely, if you attack it piecemeal.”<sup>101</sup> Just as a new runner wouldn’t attempt a marathon on the first day of training, the would-be sage should be pleased with fitful baby

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 3.13.2 (89). William James gives very similar advice for emotion control: “If we wish to conquer undesirable emotional tendencies in ourselves, we must assiduously and in the first instance cold-bloodedly go through the outward motions of those contrary dispositions we prefer to cultivate. ... Soothe the brow, brighten the eye, ... and your heart must be frigid indeed if it does not gradually thaw” (*The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2 [New York: Dover, 1950], 463). For discussion, see Roberts, *Emotions*, 81–3. Some recent empirical studies confirm that behavioral feedback can influence emotional feeling; see James J. Gross, “The Emerging Field of Emotion Regulation: An Integrative Review,” *Review of General Psychology* 2, no. 3 (1998), 285.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 2.29.1 (67).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

steps at first. Third, catch anger early. “Some things at the start are in our power; thereafter they sweep us on with a force of their own and allow no turning back.”<sup>102</sup> In an analogy with the lack of control characteristic of bodies in free fall, he notes that “the mind, if it throws itself into anger ... is not allowed to restrain the impulse. It is bound to be swept along and driven to the bottom by its own weight and by the natural downward tendency of any falling.”<sup>103</sup> (This sounds quite a bit like Haidt’s comments about how a leaning elephant is very hard to redirect.)<sup>104</sup> The conclusion is clear: “it is best to beat back at once the first irritations, to resist the very germs of anger and take care not to succumb.”<sup>105</sup> How is one to do this? Be vigilantly on the watch for anger’s internal and external cues. “It is easy to intercept one’s affections as they first arise, since illnesses are preceded by symptoms. In the way that storm and rain have signs that come before them, there are certain heralds of anger.”<sup>106</sup> Indeed, among the passions, anger’s cues are among the most obvious: “The other affections [merely] make themselves seen. Anger sticks right out.”<sup>107</sup> The internal cues are the “preliminaries” to the affection,<sup>108</sup> the “throb” that even the sage feels at the sight of putative offenses.<sup>109</sup> The external cues are many and varied: “an overconfident look, a voice too loud, speech too bold, a manner too refined, a rather too ostentatious show of support,

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 1.7.4 (25).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 1.7.4 (26).

<sup>104</sup> Haidt, chapters 2–3.

<sup>105</sup> Seneca, *On Anger* 1.8.1 (26).

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 3.10.2 (87).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 1.1.7 (18).

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 2.2.5 (44).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 1.16.7 (35).

popularity with the public.”<sup>110</sup> Of course, different people have different anger cues. While some apply quite broadly, we should recognize that anger is rather person-relative. “We are not all of us vulnerable in the same place. You should know your weakness so as to give it the maximum protection.”<sup>111</sup> Just as a doctor might prescribe different treatments to two patients with similar symptoms, two anger-prone souls may require quite particularized philosophical therapies for what ails them. But if one will vigilantly apply the required regimen—some personalized combination of practices of conversion, situation management, re-construal, behavioral response, and generic expedients—Seneca is confident that it will have its desired effect.

*Anger Remediation and Other Moral Outlooks*<sup>112</sup>

What are non-Stoics supposed to do with Seneca’s advice? I have flagged a couple of areas where Aristotelians and Christians will object, but much more needs to be said. Various outlooks will both accept and reject different elements in Seneca’s advice. As one example of how a non-Stoic might partially apply (and potentially transcend) Seneca’s insights, let’s entertain the possibility of a Christianized version of his therapy.

The Christian could adopt some of Seneca’s exercises wholesale. For instance, there is nothing particularly Stoic in the recognition that delay mitigates anger. On the other end of the spectrum, other recommendations will likely be jettisoned altogether. One Stoic attitude I have not highlighted is what we might call the practice of contempt. “Beyond any doubt, one raises oneself from the common lot to a higher level by looking down upon

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 1.18.2 (36).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 3.10.4 (87).

<sup>112</sup> Portions of this section of the chapter are adapted from Ryan West, “Getting Rid of Inappropriate Anger,” in *Anger, Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics*, 53 (Waco, TX: The Institute for Faith and Learning at Baylor University, 2014): 21-9, and Ryan West, “Contempt and the Cultivation of Character: Two Models,” *Journal of Religious Ethics* 43, no. 3 (2015): 493–519.

those who provoke.”<sup>113</sup> But anyone who values love as a central virtue will eschew an inner life that says of other humans, “Do all that you will, *you are too insignificant* to cloud my serenity.”<sup>114</sup> But between these extremes of complete adoption and utter rejection, there are various ways of adapting Seneca’s advice to Christian sensibilities.

One way is to retain the *form* of the practice, but to exchange the Stoic *matter* for Christian. For instance, imagine that Walter Berglund, the road rager we met above, is converted to Christianity and is cut to the quick about his inappropriate anger behind the wheel. In an effort to “put away” anger (Ephesians 4:31 and Colossians 3:8), he might engage in something like Seneca’s exercises of re-construal. But the content of his re-construal, and his motivation for endeavoring to change his “view” at all, will (ideally) be explicitly Christian. He cannot, in good conscience, view *all* the sins of other drivers as mere errors. But that interpretation will apply in many cases, and he can make it a general policy to “plead the other person’s case in his absence.”<sup>115</sup> As Aquinas suggests, “no man ought to despise or in any way injure another man without urgent cause: and, consequently, unless we have evident indications of a person’s wickedness, we ought to deem him good, by interpreting for the best whatever is doubtful about him.”<sup>116</sup> Yet Walter’s motivation for doing so will not be his own *apatheia*; ideally, it will be a desire to *love* the other drivers. Because Walter wills the good (or at least wills to will the good) of his fellow motorists, he is inclined to give them a “charitable reading.” In this way, love orients him to them in such a way that he actively looks for the good in them, sees their potential, and hopes for their improvement, all of which a person lacking love will not have eyes to see. As Kierkegaard

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<sup>113</sup> Seneca, *On Anger* 3.25.3 (102).

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.25.4 (102); italics added.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.22.4 (61).

<sup>116</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II.60.4.

notes, “what one sees depends upon how one sees; all observation is not just receiving, a discovering, but also a bringing forth, and insofar as it is that, how the observer himself is constituted is indeed decisive.”<sup>117</sup> Jamie Ferreira comments on this aspect of Kierkegaard’s view of love’s vision: “what we bring to a situation will influence what we see there. What we see when we come lovingly, generously, will differ from what we see when we come deliberately looking for something to find fault with, gossip about, or condemn.”<sup>118</sup> This function of love is illustrated well in one of John Wesley’s sermons:

“Love believeth all things.” It is always willing to think the best; to put the most favourable construction on everything. It is ever ready to believe whatever may tend to the advantage of anyone’s character. ... It is glad to excuse whatever is amiss: to condemn the offender as little as possible; and to make all the allowance for human weakness which can be done without betraying the truth ... . And when it can no longer believe, then “love hopeth all things.” Is any evil related of any man? Love hopes that the relation is not true, that the thing related was never done. Is it certain it was?—“But perhaps it was not done with such circumstances as are related; so that, allowing the fact, there is room to hope it was not so ill as it is represented.” Was the action apparently undeniably evil? Love hopes the intention was not so. Is it clear, the design was evil too?—“Yet it might not spring from the settled temper of the heart, but from ... some vehement temptation, which hurried the man beyond himself.”<sup>119</sup>

Watchful Walter, appreciative of his proneness to anger and poised to counteract it when the cues arise, would do well to have a Wesley-inspired script ready at hand to aid his practice of love. When a sanctimonious speed-limit enforcer clogs the inner lane, he makes himself say (perhaps aloud), “she likely means well.” When someone tries to pass him on the right, he actively attends to the possibility that there may be a bona fide emergency. And so on. In each case, Walter actively disrupts his offense template, either by reinterpreting an offense as

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<sup>117</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, “Love Will Hide a Multitude of Sins,” in *Eighteen Upbuilding Discourses*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990), 59.

<sup>118</sup> Jamie Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 105.

<sup>119</sup> John Wesley, “On Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, Discourse II,” in *Sermons on Several Occasions*, vol. 1, 10th ed. (London: [no press indicated], 1829), 246; also quoted in Pettigrove, “Meekness and ‘Moral’ Anger,” 366.

a non-offense, or providing an excuse to a would-be offender. Thus, his anger is undercut. Putting a loving “spin” on such situations when anger cues are present will no doubt take effort, especially in the early stages of the fight against anger. But as it becomes second nature for Walter to “read charitably,” he will not have to try so hard to “put on” love; he will simply love. Such love would be anathema to the Stoic; it is the very center of the Christian’s vision of her neighbor.

Walter’s exercises of re-construal could take a variety of Christian forms beyond the practice of love. In this way, he can fight inappropriate anger by “putting on” (Colossians 3:12) any number of the Christian virtues discussed above. For instance, consider contrition.<sup>120</sup> When tailgated, Walter could call to mind his own history of tailgating, much of which (he will now appreciate) was far from morally innocent. This will tend to knock him off his moral perch, thereby making him less apt to take anger’s judgmental stance. A similar method could work even when faced with offenses of which he is not guilty. Augustine expresses this idea powerfully in his *Confessions* when recounting his foray into pear thievery.

I know that it is only by Thy grace and mercy that Thou hast melted away the ice of my sins. And the evil I have not done, that also I know is by Thy grace . . . . I confess that Thou hast forgiven all alike—the sins I committed of my own motion, the sins I would have committed but for Thy grace.

Would any man, considering his own weakness, dare to attribute his chastity or his innocence to his own powers and so love Thee less—as if he did not need the same mercy as those who return to Thee after sin? If any man has heard Thy voice and followed it and done none of the things he finds me here recording and confessing, still he must not scorn me: for I am healed by the same doctor who preserved him from falling into sickness, or at least into such grievous sickness. But let him love Thee even more: seeing me rescued out of such sickness of sin, and himself saved from falling into such sickness of sin, by the one same Saviour.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> I invite the reader to explore how practicing the omitted virtues could defuse anger, and what such practice might look like concretely.

<sup>121</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 2d ed., trans. F. J. Sheed, ed. Michael P. Foley (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2006), 2.7 (32–3).

Having internalized this “there but for the grace of God go I” attitude, when Walter’s moral status enters into a reflexively comparative appraisal of someone else, he will not look particularly lofty to himself. Indeed, he will recognize that he is rather “low” in at least some areas of his character, and that he might indeed stoop to any number of other sins. And yet, Walter will not fall into the Stoic’s pattern of exonerating everyone simply because everyone is guilty. Yes, all have sinned. But Walter’s sense of Christian justice prevents him from making the Stoic inference, “therefore, no one is guilty.”

Walter could also adapt Seneca’s *behavioral response* practices. But again, the orientation will shift toward Christian virtue. As he seeks to replace his firm grip, tense face, and explicative-ridden yells with calmer versions of each, Walter will be habituating himself into gentleness (not *apatheia*). And such gentleness will serve to fortify the loving, contrite vision of others and himself that he seeks by supplying the “coolness” needed for a clear-eyed view of the situation.

In addition to altering the content and motivation of Seneca’s practices, the Christian will need an explicitly Christian understanding of the project of engaging in spiritual practices in the first place. For the Stoic, the practices are all about what *I* can accomplish. For the Christian, moral and spiritual growth is a matter of partnering with a God of grace, within a community of fellow Christians, in a joint venture; and the partnership is far from equal.<sup>122</sup> This difference between Christian and pagan moral formation is depicted in a story from the *Apophthegmata Patrum* in the fourth century:

Some philosophers once came to test the monks. One of the monks came by dressed in a fine robe. The philosophers said to him, “Come here, you.” But he was indignant and insulted them. Then another monk came by, a good person, a Libyan by race. They said to him, “Come here, you wicked old monk.” He came to them at once, and they began to hit him, and he turned the other cheek to them. Then the philosophers got up and did homage to him, saying, “Here is a monk indeed.” They

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<sup>122</sup> Of course, Stoics also acknowledge the need for community.

made him sit down among them and asked him, “What do you do in this desert other than we do? You fast: and we fast also. You chastise your bodies and so do we. Whatever you do, we do the same.” The monk replied, “We trust in God’s grace, and keep a watch on our thoughts.” They said, “That is what we cannot do.” They were edified, and let him go.<sup>123</sup>

We’ve seen that the Stoics do “keep a watch on their thoughts,” in a certain sense. But they do not trust in God’s grace. According to Christianity, though, no one will bear true spiritual fruit apart from God’s grace (see John 15). And while grace does not preclude moral *effort* on the part of the Christian, it does preclude *earning*.<sup>124</sup> Therefore, whatever progress the Christian makes should be construed as a gift.

Moreover, re-conceiving the practice of spiritual exercises in terms of grace-empowered partnership changes the very *identity* of those practices. Even as Walter engages in exercises of re-construal or behavioral response, these are no longer exercises-Walter-does-to-change-himself (as in Stoicism); they are exercises-Walter-does-by-God’s-grace-to-be-reshaped-by-God. The precise division of labor in this human/divine partnership is a vexed question, and I don’t pretend to be settling any debates here.<sup>125</sup> My point, rather, is that grace is a necessary ingredient in a Christian understanding of moral growth that is missing in Stoicism, an ingredient that changes the shape of the whole enterprise.

The centrality of grace not only reshapes the meaning of the practices, but also suggests further practices. Here I am thinking mainly of prayer, which doesn’t make the

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<sup>123</sup> *The Desert Fathers (De Vitis Patrum)*, Book 5, 16:16), 174–75. Thanks to Bob Kruschwitz for this source.

<sup>124</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 61.

<sup>125</sup> There are many Christian views of the relationship between spiritual exercises, God’s grace, and moral growth. See Jennifer A. Herdt, *Putting on Virtue: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008). I have tried here to offer something of a “mere Christian” take, to borrow C. S. Lewis’s phrase. Undoubtedly, some (following in Martin Luther’s train) will think I have put too much stress on human activity; others may think I overstress divine activity.

Stoic's exercise itinerary.<sup>126</sup> The chief reason prayer aids character formation is that in prayer the Christian calls on God for help, and without God she can do nothing. But the practice of prayer can also have a direct effect on the participant as an aid to changing her construal of her situation. Let's consider both on-the-spot and off-the-spot versions of the tactic.

First, on-the-spot prayer. Many Christians engage in what we might call automated prayer—automated not in the sense of being robotic and without meaning, but in the sense of being second nature. For instance, many have developed the habit of saying “the Jesus Prayer” throughout the day: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” The novice needs to focus on her praying if she wants to recite the prayer dozens or even hundreds of times in a day. The veteran, though, need not *endeavor* to pray the prayer; she simply *does* it, without “trying.” It is possible for such a prayer to be robotic in the pejorative sense of the term. But it can also be deeply meaningful. Indeed, it can be deeply meaningful even when done somewhat robotically.

Other automated prayers—like the brief, condemnatory ones that might slip from Walter's angry tongue when someone cuts him off in traffic—are not so nice. Still, such unsavory supplications are worth pondering. The person who has habituated herself to damning those who offend her has (unintentionally) attached a prayer to a cue—offenses. I want to suggest that the Christian trying to rid herself of anger could redeem this mental mechanism. One way might be to adapt the Jesus Prayer as an automatic response to offense. When an anger cue is present, Walter might pray: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on *us sinners*,” including both himself and his offender (whether actual or merely perceived) in his prayer. This is not only a good way to ask for God's help, and to heed

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<sup>126</sup> We might think more broadly of Christian worship in this connection as well. Engaging the liturgy is surely a formative spiritual exercise. See, e.g., James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

Jesus's exhortation to pray for one's "enemies." It is also a direct assault on Walter's angry construal of the situation. By praying that God might have mercy on the "jerk" who just cut him off, he counteracts his desire for punishment. In asking for mercy for himself, a sinner, he puts his attention on his own liability to wrongdoing—perhaps the very same wrongdoing just suffered—and so may be less tempted to take on the role of judge. By connecting himself to his offender—"us sinners"—he begins the process of reconciliation, or preemptively avoids the break in relationship that comes with anger, by attending to their joint membership in the community of those for whom Christ died and who stand in need of God's forgiveness. In these and other ways, an angry construal is undercut.<sup>127</sup>

The Christian can supplement such on-the-spot prayers, and the shifts in perspective they may precipitate or embody, with off-the-spot prayers. Here is an excerpt from one such prayer, crafted by Mother Teresa:

Dearest Lord, may I see you today and every day in the person of your sick, and, whilst nursing them, minister unto you. Though you hide yourself behind the unattractive disguise of the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable, may I still recognize you, and say: "Jesus, my patient, how sweet it is to serve you." Lord, give me this seeing faith, then my work will never be monotonous. I will ever find joy in humoring the fancies and gratifying the wishes of all poor sufferers. O beloved sick, how doubly dear you are to me, when you personify Christ; and what a privilege is mine to be allowed to tend you. Sweetest Lord, make me appreciative of the dignity of my high vocation, and its many responsibilities. Never permit me to disgrace it by giving way to coldness, unkindness, or impatience.<sup>128</sup>

Few people share precisely Mother Teresa's calling. Yet everyone interacts daily with people—from other drivers to one's children, from over-demanding bosses to one's spouse—who at least sometimes fall under the descriptions "the irritable, the exacting, the unreasonable." Undoubtedly, it can be very hard for a parent to see her Terrible Two as a

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<sup>127</sup> The reader will notice a certain affinity between this practice and Seneca's advice that one "can avoid immediate anger, especially if he says quietly to himself at every vexation 'I too have done this myself'" (*On Anger* 2.28.6 [66]).

<sup>128</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge, *Something Beautiful for God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1986), 74–5.

disguise worn by Christ, or the third diaper change in one night as a sweet opportunity to serve the Risen Lord. It is far more natural to regard one's fussy son as an offender, and his dirty diapers as irritating interruptions. But both aspects of the situation admit of reconstrual. To quote C. S. Lewis:

The great thing, if one can, is to stop regarding all the unpleasant things as interruptions of one's "own," or "real" life. The truth is of course that what one calls the interruptions are precisely one's real life—the life God is sending one day by day; what one calls one's "real life" is a phantom of one's own imagination. This at least is what I see at moments of insight: but it's hard to remember it all the time.<sup>129</sup>

One way the Christian could remember this insight more often, and thereby re-"regard" the unpleasant things in her life, would be to pray Mother Teresa's prayer (or a version of it slightly adapted to her own station in life) with some regularity. (The prayer is designated for *daily* use in the Missionaries of Charity Children's Home.)<sup>130</sup> Doing so not only enlists God's help, but also provides, and primes her to apply, an alternative set of interpretive categories to her life. In a sense, as she speaks to God, she says to herself: "Put away your offense lenses, and stop thinking about punishment. Christ is before you; look for Him; serve Him. This is your real life; and this is life indeed." To the extent that the Christian can make headway here, it will be anger's undoing.<sup>131</sup>

Much more could be said about ways in which a Christian, or a proponent of another moral outlook, might try to adapt or transcend Seneca's anger-mitigating advice. But these comments show that his advice is not narrowly applicable to would-be Stoics. Duly modified, they are the common property of all who would be rid of inappropriate anger.

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<sup>129</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves, 1914-1963*, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Collier Books, 1986), 499.

<sup>130</sup> Muggeridge, 74.

<sup>131</sup> Again, the practice bears a certain resemblance to one of Seneca's: the wise Stoic "will *start each day* with the thought: 'Many will meet me who are given to drunkenness, lust, ingratitude, avarice, many who are disturbed by raving ambition.' All this he will view with the kindly gaze of a doctor viewing the sick" (*On Anger* 2.10.7 [51]; italics added).

*Conclusion: Looking Back and Ahead*

Let's consider where we've been, so as to understand where we are going. In Chapter Two, I argued that the upshot of the situationist challenge is that most people aren't virtuous, and that we need to figure out how to move in the direction of virtue. I suggested further that a good place to begin that task is with the rich traditions of philosophical and religious psychology. In Chapter Three, I began that task by drawing on both ancient and recent work in psychology (both philosophical and empirical) to argue that the cultivation of proper emotions (and, more broadly, desires and intuitions) is a strategically important aspect of character formation, and that understanding emotions as evaluative perceptions provides insight concerning how emotion education works. To "retrain our elephants" (or, "form our hearts"), I suggested, we need to reshape our concerns and perceptual dispositions in such a way that we care about and notice what is genuinely important. In this chapter, I have treated the remediation of anger as a test case, attempting to put meat on the bones of the general strategy for character formation hinted at in Chapter Three. In coming chapters I will adapt the insights gained here to other aspects of character in need of formation.

I admit that the anger-mitigating advice we've considered, both Stoic and Christian, can be better carried out by some people than by others. In addition to the Christian's claim that growth requires grace, the advice assumes that the moral trainee will have a cluster of character excellences, which in the next chapter I will refer to generically as "remedial virtues" and specifically as "self-vigilance" and "the virtues of willpower" (e.g., self-control, courage, perseverance, and patience). In short, the self-vigilant person appreciates the moral dangers to which she is liable, and is on the watch for the internal and external cues of those potential moral dangers. The person with the virtues of willpower has the "muscular" effort

capacity, disposition to exert effort, and self-management skill required to respond to the cues to moral danger so as to avoid and/or overcome the dangers. It is easy to see why at least the seeds of these traits are needed to heed the advice given above. Without self-vigilance, one would not be adequately attuned to anger's cues; and even if one were on the watch for such cues, without willpower one would be carried away by one's passions, despite one's best intentions. So, if something like Seneca's anger-remediating advice—or the adaptations of it that I argue would be useful for growth in other areas of the moral life—is to have any traction, we need to have some reason to think self-vigilance and the virtues of willpower are attainable traits. Moreover, if this response is to have any traction *as a response to situationism*, we'll need to bring some *empirical* evidence to bear on the issue. In the next two chapters, I seek to do just this.

I am not aware of empirical studies that provide *direct* support for the formational regimen I've discussed in this chapter. That is, I know of no longitudinal studies that, say, test the efficacy of outlook-specific spiritual exercises practiced within a community of likeminded individuals over the course of a lifetime. (Perhaps some psychologists will put Seneca's and my advice to their own test in the future.) Still, the way such character training is supposed to work is relevantly similar to well-attested methods for growth in expertise in other fields, wherein a pupil apprentices herself to a master. Thus, the empirical literature on cultivating "moral expertise" provides some *indirect* empirical support for the claim that spiritual exercises can effect meaningful character change.<sup>132</sup> I will interact with this literature to some extent in the coming chapters, but it won't be my focus. Rather, I concentrate on

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<sup>132</sup> See, e.g., e.g., Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley, "The Psychological Foundations of Everyday Morality and Moral Expertise," in *Character Psychology and Character Education*, ed. Daniel K. Lapsley and F. Clark Power, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 140–65; Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley, "Moral Identity, Moral Functioning, and the Development of Moral Character," in *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation*, vol. 50, ed. Daniel M. Bartels, Christopher W. Bauman, Linda J. Skitka, and Douglas L. Medin (Burlington: Academic Press, 2009), 237–274.

the empirical adequacy of the traits that enable character training: the remedial virtues. My reason for doing so is threefold. First, this way of proceeding allows me to bring a distinct body of empirical evidence to bear on the issue (in addition to the moral expertise literature). Second, focusing on the remedial virtues provides an additional layer of response to the situationists' *Developmental Skepticism* by showing that we have empirical reasons to think not only that ancient remedial *practices* can help us cultivate (traditional) virtues, but also that a specific cluster of *virtues* (viz., the remedial virtues) are themselves attainable. And third, attending to the nature and function of the remedial virtues provides insight into how we might respond directly to the subtle situational factors that situationists argue interfere with virtuous behavior.

In Chapter Five, I develop empirically informed philosophical analyses of self-vigilance and the virtues of willpower, suggest how those virtues might be cultivated, and show how they can help us not only resist temptation, but also leverage temptation in the interest of further growth in character. Then, in Chapter Six, I show how the remedial virtues can help correct for the situational factors that situationists claim affect our behavior “on the sly.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 41.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Remedial Virtues and Temptation

Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. ... A man who gives in to temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. That is why bad people, in one sense, know very little about badness—they have lived a sheltered life by always giving in.

—C. S. Lewis<sup>1</sup>

No one undergoes a stronger struggle than the man who tries to subdue himself. This should be our chief employment: strive to overcome ourselves and gain such a mastery that we daily grow stronger and better.

—Thomas à Kempis<sup>2</sup>

Our strength grows out of our weakness. ... In general, every evil to which we do not succumb is a benefactor. As the Sandwich Islander believes that the strength and valor of the enemy he kills passes into himself, so we gain the strength of the temptation we resist.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson<sup>3</sup>

#### *Introduction*

I have suggested that both the Stoics and the Desert Christians recognize the importance of being intelligently sensitive to internal and external cues to possible moral misfiring. On these views, this sensitivity—which I call self-vigilance—serves as an early warning system by which to recognize when to switch into a more active mode of self- and situation-monitoring, thereby equipping the agent to counteract temptation and initiate character re-shaping exercises. Of course, the self-vigilant must also be willing and able to

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2015), 142 (book III, chapter 11).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Vintage Spiritual Classics, ed. and trans. Joseph N. Tylenda (New York: Random House, 1998), 6 (book I, chapter 3).

<sup>3</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Compensation”, in *Essays: First Series* (New York: John B. Alden, 1890), 114–15.

put forth the effort required to respond appropriately to the cues they notice. In my view, such willingness and ability is the purview of another cluster of virtues, those Robert Adams calls “structural” and Robert Roberts calls “virtues of will power” (e.g., self-control, courage, perseverance, and patience).<sup>4</sup> Given the important remedial functions self-vigilance and the virtues of willpower (potentially) play vis-à-vis our character ills, I refer to them collectively as “remedial virtues.” This novel virtue category label is not meant to indicate any deep metaphysical difference between these virtues and any others; nor is it intended to isolate the unique function of these virtues. Rather, the label is a handy way of talking collectively about a cluster of virtues that share an important function: they enable an agent to do the demanding work of re-cultivating her character.

In the last chapter, we began to see how the remedial virtues are supposed to help in the fight against inappropriate anger. But more can and must be said about the remedial virtues themselves. I have not, so far, given a careful analysis of either self-vigilance or the virtues of willpower. Nor have I provided empirical evidence that such virtues could actually be cultivated. Nor have I specified the role they might play in responding to anything beyond inappropriate anger, such as other forms of temptation or the subtle versions of moral interference that situationists emphasize. I tackle these issues in this chapter and the next, which together are structured around Mark Alfano’s helpful taxonomy of situational factors that interfere with virtuous behavior.<sup>5</sup>

As we saw in Chapter Two, Alfano divides the moral-interference landscape three ways: traditional temptations, situational demand characteristics, and situational non-

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Robert C. Roberts, “Will Power and the Virtues,” *Philosophical Review* 93, no. 2 (1984), 227–47.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), chapter 2.

reasons.<sup>6</sup> In Alfano’s terminology, “situational demand characteristics ... comprise the subtle features of situations that either give people bad reasons without their realizing it or induce them to attend too much to bad reasons and too little to good reasons,” thereby influencing behavior “on the sly.”<sup>7</sup> These, he thinks, potentially reduce to temptations: “[t]he better we come to understand situational demand characteristics, the more they transform into temptations. A demand characteristic is, if you like, a temptation in disguise.”<sup>8</sup> As a result, he thinks virtue ethicists could handle situational demand characteristics in a way that parallels their handling of temptations proper, though he doesn’t say anything about how either task might be accomplished. I think Alfano is onto something, and I dilate on his insight over the next two chapters. I wait until Chapter Six to consider the significance of situational demand characteristics (e.g., the presence of bystanders, social distance cues, etc.) and situational non-reasons (e.g., ambient sounds, ambient smells, mood elevators and depressors, etc.), and the role remedial virtues might play in addressing them. As a precursor to that discussion, this chapter provides an empirically informed analysis of the remedial virtues themselves, and shows how they might help us not only resist (traditional) temptations, but also leverage temptation in the interest of growth in character.

I begin with self-vigilance. Drawing on recent work in dual-process cognitive psychology, I explain the nature of the virtue and its potential role in temptation resistance and character formation. Then I turn to the virtues of willpower. I distinguish that class of virtues from what Robert Adams and Robert Roberts call the “motivational virtues,” and provide an empirically informed conceptual analysis of the psychological raw material that,

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<sup>6</sup> Alfano notes that some people think “non-moral individual differences” (e.g., culture, gender, “Big Five” traits) constitute a further interfering factor. He ultimately judges that these factors shouldn’t enter into the situationist critique (ibid., 50–53). I agree, so I do not address them.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 43.

when excellently formed, constitutes those virtues: namely, willpower. Finally, I consider the particularities of some individual virtues of willpower through a discussion of their potential functions in a particular life. More specifically, I consider how self-control, courage, perseverance, and patience, along with self-vigilance, might enable a less-than-virtuous agent to resist temptation and grow in character.

### *Temptation and the Virtue of Self-vigilance*

To say, as Alfano does, that “a demand characteristic is, if you like, a temptation in disguise” signals a potential confusion about the nature of temptation, for it seems to assume that traditional temptations aren’t disguised.<sup>9</sup> But many (most?) temptations—including the most effective ones—operate incognito. Indeed, seeing through a temptation’s mask is often the first step toward successful resistance.

Adam Pelsler’s distinction between objective and subjective temptation is helpful here. “Objective temptation should be understood as involving a desire for some state of affairs and a perception of an opportunity to satisfy that desire by acting in a way that is contrary to virtue.”<sup>10</sup> Those who are objectively tempted need not desire the unvirtuous option *under that description*. Indeed, “the most effective temptations are often those that present the relevant opportunity to the temptee as an opportunity to satisfy her desire by acting in a way that is virtuous, or, if not virtuous, at least morally permissible or ‘not that bad.’”<sup>11</sup> So, although objective temptation can be and often is characterized by an internal battle with oneself, it need not be. Pelsler calls such self-battle “subjective temptation”: “the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>10</sup> Adam C. Pelsler, “What a Temptation Is: A Sketch” (in progress), 10.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

kind of internal conflict or struggle that happens when one feels pulled by desire (i.e., one *feels tempted*) to act in a way that she occurrently judges or perceives to be wrong.”<sup>12</sup>

When Alfano speaks of “temptation,” he seems to have the subjective variety in mind: “You want to eat healthy food, exercise regularly, stop slouching, and drink less beer. And yet, the burger is so tasty, the couch so inviting, good posture so forgettable, and the India Pale Ale so hoppy.”<sup>13</sup> In the section on the virtues of willpower, I’ll suggest some ways the virtue ethicist might address such felt temptations. But my primary concern in this section is cases of objective temptation in which subjective temptation is absent—“temptation in disguise.”

What is going on in such cases? I’ve noted that they don’t involve inner struggle in the sense that the agent does not feel pulled in two directions. But in another sense, such cases do involve a conflict within the tempted person, if she has the relevant virtuous concerns: her perception of the situation is (unwittingly) at odds with some of her considered values and/or judgments. Thus, if the tempted person cares about acting virtuously, making the unvirtuousness of the temptation salient to her should have one of two effects: either she will cease desiring it, or she will experience subjective temptation. Consider an example.

C. S. Lewis, in his masterwork on temptation, *The Screwtape Letters*, gives us a peek inside the mind of an arch-tempter. Drawing a distinction between “the gluttony of excess” and “the gluttony of delicacy,” one devil explains how tempting someone to the latter can be

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 11; italics original.

<sup>13</sup> Alfano, 40.

the easier and more effective route.<sup>14</sup> After all, just about everyone knows that eating too much is a bad thing, but delicacy can look like a virtue:

[The woman who is subject to the gluttony of delicacy] would be astonished—one day I hope, *will* be—to learn that her whole life is enslaved to this kind of sensuality, which is quite concealed from her by the fact that the quantities involved are small. . . . She is a positive terror to hostesses and servants. She is always turning from what has been offered her to say with a demure little sigh and a smile, “Oh, please, please . . . *all* I want is a cup of tea, weak but not too weak, and the teeniest weeniest bit of really crisp toast.” You see? Because what she wants is smaller and less costly than what has been set before her, she never recognizes as gluttony her determination to get what she wants, however troublesome it may be to others. At the very moment of indulging her appetite she believes that she is practicing temperance.<sup>15</sup>

The woman’s blindness to the temptation is central to its effectiveness. Thus, her tempting devil must ever be on the watch to counteract even a “faint suspicion that she is too interested in food.”<sup>16</sup> But what if the tempter fails in his job, and such a suspicion goes from faint to firmly established? If the woman comes to appreciate her penchant for delicacy for what it is—not temperance, but gluttony—she will have, to a large extent, come to *see through* the temptation. Perhaps we can imagine someone for whom such self-insight would transform her appetite in such a way that she no longer minds receiving insufficiently crisp toast. But given the years of habituation that have formed her appetite, the more likely result is that her objective temptation will remain, but with a new subjective element added. So, when presented with, say, tea that is too weak, she’ll still be inclined to complain, at least at first; but now she’ll see that that inclination is itself unvirtuous, so she’ll *feel* the temptation. With the temptation on her moral radar, she now has a better chance of fighting against it.

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<sup>14</sup> The Desert Christians provide an insightful analysis of gluttony that is even more fine-grained than this. For discussion, see Robert B. Kruschwitz, “Gluttony and Abstinence,” in *Virtues and Their Vices*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Craig A. Boyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 137–56; and Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 139–57.

<sup>15</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters: Also Includes “Screwtape Proposes a Toast”* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 67–8 (Letter XVII).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

But it is on her radar to begin with only because she has come to appreciate her moral condition.<sup>17</sup>

This brings us to the first aspect of the virtue of self-vigilance: an appreciation of one's own susceptibility to moral misfiring.<sup>18</sup> The term “appreciation” is important. I intend it to denote a special kind of knowledge whereby you “get” the import of what you know. Even if you have justified true beliefs about your susceptibility to moral failings, if you don't *appreciate* that susceptibility, you won't be adequately self-vigilant.

Recent work in dual-process cognitive psychology—which, as we saw in Chapter Three, emphasizes the differences and interplay between fast, “System 1” thinking, and slow, “System 2” thinking—supports both the distinction between appreciation and mere knowledge and the claim that the former will go much farther than the latter to enable self-vigilance. Daniel Kahneman reports a study conducted by Ralph Nisbett and Eugene Borgida of emergency helping behavior under conditions of awareness that other potential helpers are present, but of unawareness whether the others have gone to help.<sup>19</sup> The study seems to show that under such conditions very few people (27%) help the victim. Nisbett and Borgida then divided a psychology class in two. One group of students was told about the setup of the experiment, but not the results. The other group was told about both setup and results. Then both groups were shown a videoed interview with two people supposedly from the group of subjects, but carefully designed to be uninformative about whether the

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<sup>17</sup> Presumably, the practical aid provided by the unmasking of temptation was a central motivation for Lewis's writing of *The Screwtape Letters*.

<sup>18</sup> Much of the material to follow on the virtue of self-vigilance is taken or adapted from Robert C. Roberts and Ryan West, “Natural Epistemic Defects and Corrective Virtues,” *Synthese* (2015), DOI: 10.1007/s11229-015-0669-5.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 170–4. The study in question is Richard E. Nisbett and Eugene Borgida, “Attribution and the Psychology of Prediction,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32 (1975): 932–43.

two would be more or less likely to help than any other random person. Someone tracking the statistics should say that the interviewees probably didn't help the victim. (27% is the base-rate for the problem.) The students who were uninformed about the outcome of the study were then asked to predict whether the two interviewees went to help the victim. They answered that both did. Then the students who knew the statistics were asked to predict whether the interviewees helped. They too answered that both did.

Kahneman says that the statistically uninformed group understood the situation of the experiment, and in giving their answer applied their understanding of human nature. The informed group understood the situation and the statistical results of the experiment, but they didn't *appreciate* the bearing of the experimental results on the truth about human nature.<sup>20</sup> In other words, although they knew the "facts" about the experiment and its results, and "understood" the statistics, they had in a sense not learned any psychology from the exercise. Their deep, intuitive view of human nature hadn't changed. So there's a distinction between knowing and understanding, on the one hand, and appreciating what they know and understand, on the other. This appreciating kind of understanding is necessary for the wisdom about human nature that psychology is supposed to engender.

Nisbett and Borgida then

took a new group of students and taught them the procedure of the experiment but did not tell them the group results. They showed the two videos and simply told their students that the two individuals they had just seen had not helped the stranger, but asked them to guess the global results. The outcome was dramatic: the students' guesses were extremely accurate.

Kahneman continues:

To teach students any psychology they did not know before, you must surprise them. But which surprise will do? Nisbett and Borgida found that when they presented their students with a surprising statistical fact, the students managed to learn nothing at all. But when the students were surprised by individual cases—two nice people

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<sup>20</sup> Kahneman, 173.

who had not helped—they immediately made the generalization and inferred that helping is more difficult than they had thought. Nisbett and Borgida summarize the results in a memorable sentence:

Subjects' unwillingness to deduce the particular from the general was matched only by their willingness to infer the general from the particular.<sup>21</sup>

The “inference” that Nisbett and Borgida mention is more than ordinary inference, just as appreciation is more than ordinary knowledge or understanding. To speak of it, we use expressions like “see the light,” “see the point.” The challenging information about the interviewees strikes the student with a kind of realistic insight that is lacking when all she knows is statistics. It is interesting that Kahneman points to surprise, an emotion-like state, as crucial to this kind of learning. Kahneman might point out that one’s System 2 can be surprised, but that kind of surprise doesn’t make as much of an impression as experiencing surprise with one’s System 1: “Wow: that nice person didn’t respond to the call for help?” Perhaps what it takes to generate this kind of knowledge is not so much surprise in particular, as some kind of strong impression. And plausibly, what most naturally and easily makes an impression on people is pictures as contrasted with mere descriptions, concrete descriptions as contrasted with abstract descriptions, narratives as contrasted with mere reports, and instances as contrasted with statistics.

Kahneman notes that “the test of learning psychology is whether your *understanding* of situations *you* encounter has changed, not whether you have learned a new fact.”<sup>22</sup> Notice that “learning psychology” has a special sense in this quotation. Students who can pass the exams with flying colors, or who have learned to apply the techniques of experimentation, might be thought to have learned psychology. But Kahneman has in mind something closer

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 173–4.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 174; italics added.

to learning wisdom about human nature, a kind of knowledge that can be implemented in contexts of life.

Kahneman's point applies not only to students, but also to professional psychologists. Jonathan Haidt provides an example from his own experience illustrating how textbook knowledge differs from appreciation:

On February 3, 2007, shortly before lunch, I discovered that I was a chronic liar. ... In passing, [my wife, Jayne] asked me not to leave dirty dishes on the counter where she prepared our baby's food. Her request was polite but its tone added a postscript: "As I have asked you a hundred times."<sup>23</sup>

Haidt's less-than-truthful response left his mouth before he had time to think about it. Then, appreciation set in.

So there I was at my desk, writing about how people automatically fabricate justifications of their gut feelings, when suddenly I realized that I had just done the same thing with my wife. I disliked being criticized, and I had felt a flash of negativity by the time Jayne had gotten to her third word ("*Can you not...*"). ... I had long teased my wife for altering stories ... but it took twenty years of studying moral psychology to see that I altered my stories too. I finally understood—not just cerebrally but intuitively and with an open heart—the admonition of the sages from so many eras and cultures warning us about self-righteousness.<sup>24</sup>

No doubt Haidt's "twenty years of studying moral psychology" provided him with some background knowledge that helped enable this moment of self-awareness. He "knew the facts" about the way we make many of our moral judgments, and he "knew" that he was like most people in this. But it was his surprising and somewhat distressing experience of catching himself in the act that "brought home" (both literally and figuratively) his years of training. Presumably, many non-psychologists have had similar moments of self-insight without spending two decades hitting the psychology books and running experiments. Of

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 61.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 63–4.

course, reading a bit of Haidt—or the Desert Christians, for that matter—would aid the sort of reflective attentiveness that helps make such moments of insight possible.

Having come to appreciate his own susceptibility to both self-righteousness and automated prevarication, Haidt would now be in a better position to guard against them, should he so desire. More generally, anyone who comes to appreciate the moral pitfalls that beset humanity would seem to have taken a helpful first step toward self-vigilance. For if we grasp, in a deep way, the human susceptibility to many forms of misconduct, then we will be in a better position to protect ourselves against them. In this way, education in a tradition like that of the capital vices—a tradition that is both conceptually refined and aimed at affecting the heart of the student through rich, concrete narratives—ought to be an invaluable resource for one’s education in such appreciation. But it will be more helpful still for the self-vigilant to have self-knowledge of their more particular deficits and liabilities. After all, moral temptations are, to some extent, personality-relative: particular temptations may affect one person, or type of person, more than they affect others.<sup>25</sup> So, my knowledge must not simply be of the *human* condition, but of *my* condition; and that knowledge cannot simply be a matter of “knowing the facts” about myself, but must include “heart knowledge,” a measure of motivating insight about my inner life. This can be a tall order, given the relative opacity of the self to itself. But we are not without resources.

As Julia Annas notes, the Hellenistic schools gave great prominence “to types of writing that aim to jolt and shock people out of bad and vicious habits in order to facilitate ... conversion.”<sup>26</sup> This is not unique to the Hellenistic period. Daniel Kahneman recognizes that a literary “jolt” can surprise a reader into a moment of self-insight, and so commends

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.9 (1109b1–8).

<sup>26</sup> Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 54–5.

and utilizes a demonstrative teaching style intended to produce this result. Since one of his aims is to enable the reader to appreciate her own biased thinking, he peppers the text with examples and activities that elicit such thinking in the reader. As a result, the reader is impressed with her own biases, which helps her appreciate, and not merely “know,” the data. A similar insight seems to lie behind Lewis’s writing of *The Screwtape Letters*. A factually accurate, but rhetorically cold treatise on the necessary and sufficient conditions for gluttony might help a listener come to know that he is gluttonous. But such instruction is more likely to motivate change if presented in an engaging and surprising way. Were a glutton for delicacy to read the crisp-toast passage while in a receptive posture, he might come to appreciate his susceptibility to gluttony by being surprised to “see himself” in the story. All of these examples suggest that moral/spiritual reading—that is, reading of morally/spiritually significant material while in a morally/spiritually receptive mood—can serve as an important resource for appreciation.<sup>27</sup>

Another potential resource is interaction with and instruction from others. (In a sense, spiritual reading is a species of this genus; but I refer here to interacting with live persons.) It is a commonplace, both of traditional moral instruction and contemporary psychology, that it is often easier for others to see our faults than it is for us. It is no wonder that just about every therapeutic tradition—from the Stoics, to the Desert Christians, to contemporary psychology—suggests that personal growth requires opening one’s life to the wise gaze of other people. These may include friends, spiritual directors, religious ministers, professional psychotherapists, or even God himself (according to some traditions). Whoever the sounding board, though, the point is to get an outside perspective, preferably from a

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<sup>27</sup> For discussion of the sort of reading I have in mind, see Paul J. Griffiths, *Religious Reading: The Place of Reading in the Practice of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); and Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

source that both cares about you and has genuine moral insight,<sup>28</sup> and to receive this input “with an open heart” (to borrow Haidt’s phrase).<sup>29</sup>

Now, if the self-vigilant person appreciates her susceptibility to moral failings, how is she to guard against them? The short answer is: watch for cues and respond accordingly. If we are sensitive to situations in which a given temptation is likely to victimize us, we will become intuitively suspicious of ourselves when in those situations, and so can take whatever measures of caution are appropriate to avoid the trap, at least much of the time. I will say more about various forms of active response to temptation in the next section; here my focus is the sort of watchfulness that enables such active response.

Again, the empirical work of cognitive psychologists is helpful. Kahneman notes that System 1 “can be programmed by System 2 to mobilize attention when a particular pattern is detected” and “executes skilled responses and generates skilled intuitions, after adequate training.”<sup>30</sup> Since moral temptations come into play in particular types of situation, intuition ought to be trainable to pick up on situational cues to imminent instantiation of, say, gluttony, lust, wrath, etc. The individual with the virtue of self-vigilance would be so attuned to the environmental and internal cues to the working of these possible moral missteps that his or her System 2 would automatically (intuitively) be triggered into action by warning signs. The individual would gradually learn to see the danger of vainglory, avarice, envy, etc., just as we learn to see the fins on the lines of the Müller-Lyer figure as a cue to distrust the

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<sup>28</sup> On the latter point, I’m told that the second part of Aquinas’s *Summa Theologica* was used to educate priests in the interest of increased discernment in hearing confession. Thanks to Brandon Dahm for this historical point.

<sup>29</sup> My emphasis in the preceding paragraphs on the importance of interacting with others—whether in person or through books—helps forestall a misunderstanding about self-vigilance. While self-vigilance involves taking responsibility for and attending to oneself and one’s character, the self-vigilant are not committed to a project of lone-ranger self-improvement.

<sup>30</sup> Kahneman, 105.

apparent length of the lines. In this way, self-vigilance involves growth in expertise of a sort, a kind of skilled, intuitive pattern matching akin to the automated processes at work in defensive driving.

What do you look for when you drive your car? Novices try to keep the car in the lane and not too close to the car ahead. The rest of us can control our cars automatically. We are more likely to look for hazards that might arise. If we see children, we prepare ourselves in case one of them impulsively runs into the street. If a truck blocks our vision of a crosswalk, we watch for signs that a pedestrian is starting to walk in front of us. ... We aren't predicting these events. We're just readjusting our concerns and focusing our attention on the hot spots.<sup>31</sup>

Analogously, the self-vigilant person working on her susceptibility to moral temptations will appreciate what her "hot spots" are, will monitor for cues that moral danger may be in the offing, and will put herself on alert for appropriate defensive measures.

For example, consider Gloria, a glutton for delicacy. The gluttony of delicacy rears its ugly head in a definite kind of context: meal times (and other occasions for eating). Moreover, this vice has certain telltale signs (e.g., pickiness about food preparation). Having been alerted to these facts, Gloria ought to be able to pick up on cues when she is in a situation where this temptation is likely to trip her up, and compensate by recruiting her resources for avoiding the pitfall. To have the virtue of self-vigilance is to have cultivated our intuition to alert us to danger when the cues are offered. Some of the cues will be internal: Gloria finds herself getting a little hot under the collar when her steak comes out slightly rarer than requested. But she's trained herself to think, "Look out. That incipient frustration is a danger sign." So she slows down and takes the time to reconsider the significance of the chef's "mistake." Of course, it will take time for Gloria to recognize what her vulnerabilities are; and learning to take her gluttony-cues *as cues to fight against gluttony*, rather than *as cues to engage in gluttonous behavior*, will presumably be a new cognitive activity that requires conscious

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<sup>31</sup> Gary Klein, *Streetlights and Shadows: Searching for the Keys to Adaptive Decision Making* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2011), 159.

effort. After some time, though, as these cues are internalized, this process may become second nature.

Miranda Fricker commends something like self-vigilance as a response to the vice of “epistemic injustice.”<sup>32</sup> In her view, this vice is instantiated when societal prejudices—sexism, racism, etc.—take up residence in an agent’s “social imagination”—roughly what Kahneman calls System 1 and Haidt calls intuition—so that the agent’s perceptions of others’ epistemic credibility is unjustly diminished.<sup>33</sup> Like me, Fricker thinks a certain kind of character could help correct the problem, and looks for “a particular virtue that the hearer needs to have in order to counteract the risk of letting such prejudice distort his perceptions of speakers.”<sup>34</sup> She calls the relevant virtue “testimonial justice.”<sup>35</sup> It involves a “reflexive critical awareness of the likely presence of prejudice,” which the agent then corrects for by “shift[ing] intellectual gear out of spontaneous, unreflective mode and into active critical reflection in order to identify how far the suspected prejudice has influenced her judgment,” and then “revising the credibility upwards to compensate.”<sup>36</sup> I would reserve the name “testimonial justice” for the virtue that motivates the remedial project, or the virtue that results from successful correction. The “reflexively critical” virtue by which one watches for cues of misfiring (whether in one’s perception of others’ credibility or in one’s assessment of the moral significance of a steak’s rareness) I call self-vigilance. This would be self-vigilance motivated by testimonial justice and in its service.

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<sup>32</sup> Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Fricker differentiates *testimonial* from *hermeneutical* injustice. I focus on the former. For the latter, see Fricker, chapter 7.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>35</sup> Fricker discusses two forms of the virtue: *corrective* and *naïve* (chapter 4). I focus on the former.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

In some cases, training in self-vigilance might go so far as to circumvent the direct need for the active form of the virtue. You might train your System 1 to such a degree that, say, you recognize the external cues of the gluttony of delicacy and entirely avoid getting frustrated. This level of training, though, would be something beyond self-vigilance—indeed, it would mark the beginning of the kind of spontaneous wisdom characteristic of the virtue of temperance.

Kahneman, in some moods at least, seems to think that training that results in such spontaneous wisdom is unrealistic, at least with regard to some temptations. He recounts a story from his graduate student days, when a professor of psychotherapy warned him and his fellow students about psychopathic charm:

“You will from time to time meet a patient who shares a disturbing tale of multiple mistakes in his previous treatment. He has been seen by several clinicians, and all failed him. The patient can lucidly describe how his therapists misunderstood him, but he has quickly perceived that you are different. You share the same feeling, are convinced that you understand him, and will be able to help.” At this point my teacher raised his voice as he said, “Do not even *think* of taking on this patient! Throw him out of the office! He is most likely a psychopath and you will not be able to help him.”<sup>37</sup>

Kahneman notes with agreement that his teacher had assumed that any therapist’s sympathy, which arises from System 1, would not be controllable. The only solution, he claims, is for System 2 to override System 1: “even when cues to likely error are available, errors can be prevented only by the enhanced monitoring and effortful activity of System 2.”<sup>38</sup> This advice—encouraging enhanced monitoring and the effortful overriding of intuitions—amounts to an exhortation toward self-vigilance, but rules out the possibility of the deep wisdom mentioned above.

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<sup>37</sup> Kahneman, 27–8.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

This seems overly pessimistic. In an article Kahneman co-authored with Gary Klein, a psychologist who is generally more optimistic about training our intuitions than Kahneman, the authors note that skilled intuitions are a matter of *recognition*.<sup>39</sup> So long as one's environment provides "adequately valid cues to the nature of the situation," and one has "opportunity to learn the relevant cues," one can grow in skilled intuitions.<sup>40</sup> It seems that these criteria are met in the case just described. Therapists who have been told about the warning signs of psychopathic charm, and who perhaps have had a chance to role-play interactions where such charm is demonstrated, or to practice detecting and resisting it in real situations, could likely learn to recognize such signs without feeling (much) either sympathy (for the psychopath) or vanity (in seeing themselves as the psychopath's unique potential savior). Instead, I think they could develop the deeper wisdom required to see the situation for what it is, and respond properly.

The parallel in the broader moral realm is clear. The capital vices tradition (not to mention others) is rich with insights about the cues to the onset of various sins. And the vices themselves tend to operate in recognizable settings: lust in contexts involving potential mates, avarice in monetary settings, envy in competitive situations, and so on. With reflection on one's experience, especially if one discusses one's life with insightful friends or counselors, one can come to recognize these cues.

In sum, then, the virtue of self-vigilance involves (1) appreciating one's vulnerability to moral misfiring, (2) recognizing those particular temptations to which one is most susceptible, and (3) internalizing and habituating the detection of those temptations' cues.

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<sup>39</sup> Daniel Kahneman and Gary Klein, "Conditions for Intuitive Expertise: A Failure to Disagree," *American Psychologist* 64, no. 6 (2009): 515–526.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 520.

Over time, (4) vigilance can move from being conscious and effortful to being second nature, and (5) may lead eventually to the spontaneous wisdom characteristic of virtue.

What makes self-vigilance a virtue? It has the obvious instrumental value of correcting for the various kinds of temptation for which it is vigilant. But in the best kind of case, the agent who implements it also expresses the intrinsic motivational value of caring about treating others well, becoming more virtuous, doing the right thing, etc. It seems obvious that the virtue of self-vigilance is not identical to the virtues by which one loves the good, since it could be deployed for other motives, such as avoiding looking like a fool or trying to exert one's superiority over some rival with whom one shares a particular moral vulnerability. It thus *mediates* intrinsic moral value, as a kind of vehicle, in the best cases. And third, as a kind of self-mastery, it has a kind of Nietzschean agentic value, as expressing the power and control of an intelligent agent. For these three reasons, it merits the title of virtue.<sup>41</sup>

Of course, the self-vigilant must also be willing and able to put forth the effort required to respond appropriately to the cues they notice. In my view, such willingness and ability is the purview of another cluster of virtues, those Robert Adams calls "structural" and Robert Roberts calls "virtues of will power."<sup>42</sup> I take up those virtues, and the empirical case for them, in the next section.

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<sup>41</sup> Is it possible to be *too* vigilant? Since self-vigilance is a virtue concept, it would be an error to think so, on Aristotle's reckoning: "there is no excess and deficiency of temperance and courage because what is intermediate is in a sense an extreme" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 2.6). The concept of the virtue of vigilance is the concept of a disposition to pay attention *properly* or *appropriately* or *optimally* or *intelligently* to one's intuitions and situations. It is a sensitivity to context and therefore would not be exemplified in, say, compulsively and indiscriminately checking every intuition.

<sup>42</sup> Adams, *A Theory of Virtue*; Roberts, "Will Power and the Virtues."

*Varieties of Virtues*

Robert Adams distinguishes two categories of virtues: motivational and structural.<sup>43</sup> The motivational virtues “are defined by motives which in turn are defined by goods that one is for in having them.”<sup>44</sup> Generosity is an example. The generous person is sensitive to and positively disposed toward the pleasure and wellbeing of others, and is motivated by a concern for those goods. By contrast, the structural virtues—which include courage, self-control, patience, and perseverance, among others—are not defined “by particular motives or by one’s main aims, but are rather structural features of the way one organizes and manages whatever motives one has.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, the structural virtues, unlike the motivational virtues, are not about “having one’s heart in the right place;” rather, “the excellence of structural virtues is a matter of personal psychic strength—of ability and willingness to govern one’s behavior in accordance with values, commitments, and ends one is for.”<sup>46</sup> An example will help.

Consider courage. In paradigm instances, an agent exemplifies courage when she acts for some end in a situation perceived as threatening. In this way, courageous actions are paradigmatically characterized by two kinds of motivations.<sup>47</sup> On the one hand, the agent is motivated by some end—say, she wants to save a child trapped in a burning building. On the other hand, she faces a motivational obstacle—the emotion of fear, which is a response

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<sup>43</sup> These two categories do not exhaust the categories of virtues.

<sup>44</sup> Adams, 33.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>47</sup> For a helpful discussion of the motivational dimension of courage, see Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 217-221.

to a perceived threat and will tend to discourage the motivationally virtuous action. The first kind of motivation is not what makes a courageous action courageous. Rather, courageous actions are courageous inasmuch as the agent overcomes, circumvents, or transcends the motivational obstacle presented by her fear.<sup>48</sup> Thus, we could say, very roughly, that courage is an ability to manage one's fears in such a way that one is able to act for one's ends (whatever those ends happen to be).<sup>49</sup>

Adams notes that he borrows the motivational/structural distinction from Robert C. Roberts, though he borrows only half of Roberts's terminology.<sup>50</sup> Roberts prefers to contrast the motivational virtues with what he calls the "virtues of willpower." The shift in language is significant, for the different labels point to different features of the relevant virtues. The term 'structural,' rich in architectural overtones, highlights a characteristic *function* of these virtues: they provide the agent with a kind of structural integrity, keeping her from being toppled by countervailing forces as she pursues the goods she is "for." (In this way, the structural virtues are the character analogue of a cathedral's flying buttresses.) The term 'willpower,' though, doesn't tell us much about what a virtue of willpower *does*; rather, it highlights the *aspect of the agent's psychology* (viz., her willpower) that can enable her structural integrity.<sup>51</sup> (We learn something about flying buttresses when we're told that they are made

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> It is a vexed question whether the courageous person's ends must be morally good. I need not take a stand on that issue here, though. My point is simply that courage does not have a particular end (whether good, bad, or neutral) built into its grammar in the way that the motivational virtues do. If courage does require a good end, it will have to borrow that end, so to speak, from another, motivational virtue.

<sup>50</sup> Adams, 33n22.

<sup>51</sup> Of course, willpower isn't *always* utilized in the interest of integrity; for instance, it's possible to use one's willpower to act out of character. Moreover, even when willpower yields integrity, the integrity in question can be a feature of a morally neutral or immoral person. (Flying buttresses could support a den of thieves rather than a cathedral, or a cathedral that's turned into a den of thieves.) My focus is the ways willpower can be used to dismantle immoral orientations and build, reinforce, and protect moral orientations. Thanks to Bob Kruschwitz for helping me clarify this point.

of stone.) It is not obvious that every structural virtue is, in fact, a virtue of willpower. For instance, self-vigilance is not a virtue of willpower, but it might qualify as a structural virtue, depending on how one parses Adams's language. Still, it does seem that every virtue of willpower has a structural function. Indeed, Roberts's alternative terminology for the virtues of willpower—the “strengths”—carries this double meaning.

One burden of this chapter is to show how, precisely, the virtues of willpower can imbue one's character with structural strength. Before looking at the particular functions of particular virtues of willpower within the particular kinds of situations that call for them (the task of a later section), it will help to pursue a set of questions that pertains generally to all the virtues of willpower: What exactly is willpower? Do we have any empirical reasons to think that willpower exists? Can willpower be cultivated? I address these conceptual and empirical questions in the next subsection.

### *Varieties of Willpower*<sup>52</sup>

Confusion threatens any discussion of the nature and potential efficacy of “willpower,” in part because the term is ambiguous, naming a variety of distinct, but interrelated, features of human psychology. In this section, I introduce a bit of conceptual order to the discussion by sorting through several empirical studies of willpower. In the end, I differentiate three dimensions of willpower: (1) muscular willpower, (2) self-management skill, and (3) the disposition to exert the first two kinds of willpower. In the next section, I'll explain how these three elements come together in the virtues of willpower.

Folk conceptions of self-control have long treated willpower as a kind of personal strength or energy, a psychic muscle that can be toned up by strenuous exercise. Near the

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<sup>52</sup> Some ideas in this section are adapted from an early draft of Robert C. Roberts and Ryan West, “Natural Epistemic Defects and Corrective Virtues.” The relevant section of that paper was cut before publication.

turn of the twentieth century, as empirical psychology was beginning to take on a more robustly scientific form, some psychologists also held this view. Thus, William James, the “father of psychology,” recommends to “do every day or two something for no other reason than that you would rather not do it, so that when the hour of dire need draws nigh, it may find you not unnerved and untrained to stand the test.”<sup>53</sup> Gradually, psychologists began to look askance at this way of thinking, preferring to explain behavior in terms of factors outside the agent (like many situationists do today), and doubting whether people could consciously control themselves.<sup>54</sup> More recently, though, empirical researchers have had renewed interest in “self-regulation”—“the capacity to override natural and automatic tendencies, desires, and behaviors; to pursue long-term goals, even at the expense of short-term attractions; and to follow socially prescribed norms and rules”<sup>55</sup>—and the “strength model of willpower” has risen to favor yet again as an important element in the psychology of self-control, thanks to scores of empirical studies that lend support to it.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> William James, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1890), 126.

<sup>54</sup> For a whirlwind tour of the reception of the idea of willpower, see the introduction to Roy F. Baumeister and John Tierney, *Willpower: Rediscovering the Greatest Human Strength* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011).

<sup>55</sup> Isabelle M. Bauer and Roy F. Baumeister, “Self-regulatory Strength,” in *Handbook of Self-Regulation: Research, Theory, and Applications*, 2d ed., ed. Kathleen D. Vohs and Roy F. Baumeister (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 65.

<sup>56</sup> Relevant studies include Roy F. Baumeister, Kathleen D. Vohs, and Dianne M. Tice, “The Strength Model of Self-Control,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 16, no. 6 (2007): 351–55; M. Muraven, D. M. Tice, and R. F. Baumeister, “Self-control as Limited Resource: Regulatory Depletion Patterns,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74 (1998): 774–789; R. F. Baumeister, E. Bratslavsky, M. Muraven, and D. M. Tice, “Ego Depletion: Is the Active Self a Limited Resource?” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74 (1998): 1252–1265; M. T. Gailliot, R. F. Baumeister, C. N. DeWall, J. K. Maner, E. A. Plant, and D. M. Tice, “Self-control Relies on Glucose as a Limited Energy Source: Willpower Is More than a Metaphor,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92 (2007): 325–336; R. F. Baumeister, M. Gailliot, C. N. DeWall, and M. Oaten, “Self-regulation and Personality: How Interventions Increase Regulatory Success, and How Depletion Moderates the Effects of Traits on Behavior,” *Journal of Personality* 74 (2006): 1773–1801. For a meta-analysis of 83 studies, see M. S. Hagger, C. Wood, C. Stiff, and N. L. D. Chatzisarantis, “Ego Depletion and the Strength Model of Self-control: A Meta-analysis,” *Psychological Bulletin* 136 (2010): 495–525.

This is not to say that all self-regulation researchers are on board with all aspects of the strength model of willpower. Detractors have called various aspects of the model into question (see, e.g., Xiaomeng Xu, Kathryn E. Demos, Tricia M. Leahey, Chantelle N. Hart, Jennifer Trautvetter, Pamela Coward, Kathryn R.

The strength model proposes at least two key characteristics of willpower: first, “you have a finite amount of willpower that becomes depleted as you use it;” and second, “you use the same stock of willpower for all manner of tasks.”<sup>57</sup> Roy Baumeister and his colleagues summarize the foundational empirical method for testing the model:

The basic approach to testing the depleted-resource hypothesis was to have some research participants perform a first self-control task, while others performed a comparable but neutral task, and then all would move on to perform a second, unrelated self-control task. If self-control consumes a limited resource, then performing the first task should deplete the person’s resource, leaving less available for the second task—and therefore causing poorer performance on the second task.<sup>58</sup>

For instance, in one study, participants who either stifled or amplified their emotional responses to an emotionally charged film were less able to resist the urge to quit during a subsequent test of physical stamina than a control group. In other studies, suppressing forbidden thoughts led to a decreased ability to stifle laughter (as compared to those who hadn’t suppressed any thoughts), and participants were quicker than a control group to give up on frustrating tasks after they had made themselves say “no” to dessert and “yes” to radishes.<sup>59</sup> Researchers coined the phrase “ego depletion” to refer to “the state of diminished

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Middleton, Rena R. Wing, “Failure to Replicate Depletion of Self-Control,” *Plos One* 9, no. 10 [October 2014]: 1–5), and ongoing research continues (see., e.g., Alfred Mele’s “Philosophy and Science of Self-Control” research initiative, funded by the Templeton Foundation: URL = <<http://philosophyandscienceofself-control.com>>). But the central features of the strength model are widely accepted in the field, and the model as a whole offers a plausible explanation of an expansive range of the recent empirical data. So while we must remain open to the possibility that the strength model will be criticized, qualified, or even overturned in light of future research, it is currently a leading model in the literature.

<sup>57</sup> Baumeister and Tierney, 35.

<sup>58</sup> Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice, 351–2.

<sup>59</sup> Muraven, Tice, and Baumeister, “Self-control as Limited Resource;” Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Muraven, and Tice, “Ego Depletion;” cited in Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice, 352.

resources following exertion of self-control (or other tasks that might deplete the same resource).”<sup>60</sup>

Additional studies have suggested further ways in which willpower is like a muscle. Depleted willpower can be re-strengthened by an in-flow of glucose.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, just as you are not stuck with your given muscular strength, you are not stuck with your innate level of willpower. Rather, as William James had suggested, by practice you can increase it.<sup>62</sup> That is, regular exercises of self-control can help build resistance to ego depletion “in the sense that performance at self-control tasks deteriorates at a slower rate,” so that dispositional willpower varies from person to person not only in strength, but also in endurance.<sup>63</sup> Additionally, this increase in willpower is transferable from one context of use to another, as is shown by studies in which practicing simple self-control tasks (like regularly brushing your teeth with your non-dominant hand) lead to improvements in self-control in other domains.<sup>64</sup> Finally, ego depletion can be compensated for, to some extent, by the agent’s vigorous exertion or effort, especially in high stakes scenarios.<sup>65</sup> Still, this further exertion ultimately leads to even greater depletion, as has been found when those who have exerted

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<sup>60</sup> Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice, 352.

<sup>61</sup> Gailliot et al., “Self-control Relies on Glucose.” Some researchers have been unable to replicate these findings; see Florian Lange and Frank Eggert, “Sweet Delusion: Glucose Drinks Fail to Counteract Ego Depletion,” *Appetite* 75 (2014): 54–63.

<sup>62</sup> Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall, and Oaten, “Self-regulation and Personality.”

<sup>63</sup> Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice, 352.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> M. Muraven and E. Slessareva, “Mechanisms of Self-control Failure: Motivation and Limited Resources,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 29 (2003): 894–906.

extra effort to overcome depletion exhibit “severe impairments” when surprised by yet another self-control task.<sup>66</sup>

Let us think further about the exertion of effort. The dispositional strength of a muscle is a prerequisite for the episodic exertion of that strength. An agent can’t exert strength that she doesn’t have, but in exertion the *agent* must *activate* that strength in some application. Analogously, there seems to be a kind of episodic exertion of willpower that is not the same as the strength or capacity for its exertion. Strength is capacity, while exertion is act, and the degree of exertion—*how hard* one tries, *how much* effort one expends—is within the scope of the agent’s agency. A person with a lot of (muscular) willpower might elect not to exert it much, while a person with less willpower exerts it almost to the limit, thus *exerting* more willpower than the person who *has* more willpower.

How might this happen? In the scenario that comes most readily to mind, the person who exerts more with less is more strongly motivated than the one who exerts less with more. For instance, we might compare an average successful dieter with David Blaine, endurance artist extraordinaire.<sup>67</sup> Consider this partial list of Blaine’s feats:

He stood for thirty-five hours more than eighty feet above New York’s Bryant Park, without a safety harness, atop a round pillar just twenty-two inches wide. He spent sixty-three sleepless hours in Times Square encased in a giant block of ice. He was entombed in a coffin with six inches of headroom for a week, during which he consumed nothing except water.<sup>68</sup>

It would require incredible exertion of strong (muscular) willpower, not to mention self-management skill (see below), to train for and successfully complete such tasks. Blaine has shown again and again that he *has* such willpower. But he often opts not to *exert* it. Blaine

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<sup>66</sup> M. Muraven, D. Shmueli, and E. Burkley, “Conserving Self-control Strength,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91 (2006): 524–537. Quotation from Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice, 353.

<sup>67</sup> The following account of Blaine’s career is drawn from Baumeister and Tierney, chapter 6.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 124–5.

reports that when he is not training for an endurance stunt, he will let his self-control go, sometimes gaining 50 pounds in a three-month span.<sup>69</sup> During that span, Blaine hasn't lost his tremendous (dispositional, muscular) willpower; he simply neglects to exercise it. By contrast, an average dieter with sub-Blaine willpower muscles might exert every bit of his willpower in his effort to retrain his eating habits, thereby resisting treats to which non-training Blaine might succumb. Perhaps the dieter does so because of a deep desire for temperance and the health and longevity that tend to accompany such temperance, or maybe because he has his eye on some extrinsic reward (e.g., catching the eye of a certain someone, or winning "The Biggest Loser").<sup>70</sup> We might think only the former motivation is *morally* virtuous. But any of these motivations will do as an impetus to the exertion of willpower. As exertion of willpower, the exertion is no less impressive because extrinsically motivated.

So exertion of willpower is not the same as muscular willpower, and it requires some motivation, either intrinsic or extrinsic. Might the degree of exertion be exhaustively explained by the degree (intensity, strength) of motivation? I'm inclined to say no, because to say yes would seem to identify the agent too much with his motives. You have to have a reason for exerting your willpower, but the strength of the reason (your attraction to the goal) is not the whole story about your exertion. This actualizing of exertion seems to be the mysterious center of human agency, the performing of tasks by a subject.

Exertion of willpower is episodic, but it expresses *two* dispositions: the "muscular" character strength that it exerts (most of what Baumeister and company call willpower), *and* an exertion-disposition (we might call this disposition "spirit"). People seem to differ not only in the strength of (muscular) willpower that they have to call on, but also in the strength

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>70</sup> "The Biggest Loser" is a television show aired on NBC featuring a weight loss competition.

of their disposition to call on it (their strength of “spirit”). The latter can be distinguished from, and does not reduce to, the strength of the agent’s motivation for a particular goal. An individual could be relatively indisposed to exert her (muscular) willpower in the service of her goal because, say, she does not appreciate the bearing of such exertion on the attainment of the goal, or because a history of failure leads her to think that such exertion is pointless. But if she comes to realize that the exertion of willpower could help, or, better yet, actually makes some progress toward her goal as a result of such exertion, we might expect her “spirit” to increase, even if her intrinsic desire for her goal and her muscular willpower remain the same. After all, success breeds encouragement, the optimism that effort will be repaid, that one “can do it,” that that for which one exerts oneself is accessible to one. In this way, spirit seems closely connected with self-concept, especially as it bears on one’s agency. Spirit can be externally produced, by such expedients as AA meetings, Weight-Watchers clubs, the kind of managers that you see on “The Biggest Loser,” and so on, but unless the agent internalizes such encouragement—that is, unless she develops *her* spirit—the prospects of sustained self-regulation will remain fairly dim.<sup>71</sup> Both the muscle and the exertion-disposition can rightly be called “willpower.”

So far I have highlighted the ways in which willpower is rather strength-like. But we should not think that strength of will and the disposition to exert that strength are the only important psychological ingredients in self-regulation. Baumeister also recognizes (though he does not distinguish sufficiently) another aspect of willpower, namely, self-management skill. People who have good willpower usually use “techniques” for managing their impulses. For example, David Blaine explains one way he tried to get through the stunt in which he was encased in ice for sixty-three hours:

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<sup>71</sup> Thanks to Bob Roberts for helping me clarify this point.

“I looked through the ice at a guy standing in front of me and asked him what time it was. He says, ‘Two o’clock.’ I say to myself, *Oh, man, I’m not done with this until ten P.M. That’s eight more hours!* I tell myself it won’t be so bad once there’s only six hours left, so I just have to get through the next two hours. That’s the kind of time-shift technique I use to change perspective so I get through these stunts.”<sup>72</sup>

Similar skills, particularly techniques for changing perspective or shifting attention, apply in all sorts of domains (not just when one is encased in ice!). Children can withstand the pull of marshmallows by diverting their attention away from the chewy morsels, or by reconceptualizing them as fluffy white clouds;<sup>73</sup> alcoholics can “stay on the wagon” by taking it “one day at a time,” consciously choosing not to dwell on the fact that they have to say “no” to every drop of alcohol they come across for the rest of their lives;<sup>74</sup> establishing “bright lines”—“clear, simple, unambiguous rules” that set behavioral limits that one will not cross under any circumstances—significantly enhances one’s ability to resist temptation;<sup>75</sup> and so on. Because I will discuss further self-regulatory techniques below, I won’t multiply examples here.<sup>76</sup> My point at this juncture is threefold: (1) skill with such techniques constitutes an important aspect of willpower, (2) self-management skill isn’t the same as either muscular or spirit willpower, and (3) there is strong empirical support for the efficacy of such techniques.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 138; italics original.

<sup>73</sup> Walter Mischel and Ozlem Ayduk, “Willpower in a Cognitive Affective Processing System: The Dynamics of Delay of Gratification,” in *Handbook of Self-Regulation: Research, Theory, and Applications*, 2d ed., ed. Kathleen D. Vohs and Roy F. Baumeister (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), 83–105.

<sup>74</sup> For an empirically informed philosophical treatment of alcoholism and other addictions, see Kent Dunnington, *Addiction and Virtue: Beyond the Models of Disease and Choice*, Strategic Initiatives in Evangelical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

<sup>75</sup> The quote is from Baumeister and Tierney, 185; they draw the terminology of “bright lines” from George Ainslie, *Breakdown of Will* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>76</sup> Baumeister and Tierney discuss several more techniques, and the empirical studies that support them, that have been shown to aid self-control with one’s finances, time-management, diet, and more.

Now, self-management techniques are not, in themselves, constituents of a person's psychology. This may be one reason that Baumeister and his associates tend to treat these techniques not as *aspects* of willpower, but rather as tools that a person with (muscular) willpower can use to enhance her self-regulation, or methods one can learn to avoid depleting one's (muscular) willpower. However, another empirical approach to willpower, rooted in the CAPS approach to human psychology, helps explain how self-management techniques can become embedded in one's character. As we saw in Chapter Two, advocates of the CAPS model suggest that we think of character traits not as simple behavioral dispositions, but as clusters of cognitive-affective units, such as "beliefs, desires, feelings, goals, expectations, values, and self-regulatory plans."<sup>77</sup> Empirical research from the past few decades helps explain the relationship between CAPS units, self-management techniques, and willpower.<sup>78</sup>

Mischel and his colleagues have conducted many studies on the delay of gratification. One focus of their research has been the self-regulative strategies of preschool-aged children,<sup>79</sup> though they have conducted longitudinal studies as well, which provide good evidence for "the long-term stability and predictive value of individual differences in the self-

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<sup>77</sup> Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 19.

<sup>78</sup> The following discussion draws heavily from Mischel and Ayduk, "Willpower in a Cognitive Affective Processing System."

<sup>79</sup> Relevant studies include W. Mischel and N. Baker, "Cognitive Appraisals and Transformations in Delay Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 31 (1975): 254–61; W. Mischel and E. B. Ebbesen, "Attention in Delay of Gratification," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 16 (1970): 239–337; W. Mischel, E. B. Ebbesen, and A. R. Zeiss, "Cognitive and Attentional Mechanisms in Delay of Gratification," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 21 (1972): 204–18; W. Mischel and B. Moore, "Effects of Attention to Symbolically-Presented Rewards on Self-control," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 28 (1973): 172–79.

regulatory competencies assessed in the delay of gratification paradigm early in life.”<sup>80</sup> A typical study would run like this:

Young children wait for two cookies (or other little treats) that they want and have chosen to get, and which they prefer to a smaller treat, such as one cookie. They then are faced with a dilemma: They are told that the experimenter needs to leave for a while and that they can continue to wait for the larger reward until the experimenter comes back on his or her own, or they are free to ring a little bell to summon the adult at any time and immediately get the smaller treat at the expense of getting the larger preferred reward.<sup>81</sup>

The scenario provides an excellent test of willpower by tapping into an aspect of human psychology that is well-known to make self-control difficult: “temporal discounting.” Temporal discounting is “the systematic discounting of the subjective value of a reward, outcome, or goal as the anticipated time delay before its expected occurrence increases.”<sup>82</sup> In other words, settling for one cookie starts looking increasingly tempting the longer I have to wait for two.

Children differ quite a bit in their ability to wait. What explains the individual differences? Mischel’s model is predicated on the difference between “hot” and “cool” systems, which are akin to what Daniel Kahneman calls Systems 1 and 2.<sup>83</sup> The hot system (System 1) “is a ‘go’ system. It enables quick, emotional processing.”<sup>84</sup> The cool system (System 2), by contrast, “is an emotionally neutral, ‘know’ system: It is cognitive, complex, slow, and contemplative.”<sup>85</sup> Subjective temptation occurs when the subject’s hot, “go”

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<sup>80</sup> Mischel and Ayduk, 92. Elsewhere (100) the authors note that “self-regulatory ability assessed in the delay of gratification paradigm reflects stable individual differences in regulatory strength that are visible early in life and cut across different domains of behavior (e.g., eating, attachment, aggression).”

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.

<sup>84</sup> Mischel and Ayduk, 85.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

system is viscerally attracted to the quick reward, despite the cool, “know” system’s recognition that the delayed reward is better. Resistance to temptation through “effortful control and willpower [becomes] possible to the extent that the cooling strategies generated by the cognitive cool system circumvent hot system activation.”<sup>86</sup> The chief “cooling strategies” identified in the studies are what we might call, following the language from our discussion of Seneca in the previous chapter, “practices of reconstrual.” In short, the key to delay of gratification, in many of these studies at least, is the internalized ability to move one’s attention away from the “hot, arousing, consummatory” features of the situation, and to reframe the situation in cooler terms.<sup>87</sup> For instance, subjects who pretended that the tempting items were pictures waited longer than a control group.<sup>88</sup> As one subject quipped, “you can’t eat a picture.”<sup>89</sup> In another study, those cued to construe marshmallows as “white, puffy clouds” and pretzels as “little, brown logs” delayed gratification for 13 minutes, whereas those cued to view the treats as “yummy, and chewy” or “salty and crunchy” (respectively) waited only five minutes.<sup>90</sup> Mischel summarizes: “Taking these findings collectively, it became clear that delay of gratification depends not on whether or not attention is focused on the objects of desire, but rather on just how they are mentally represented.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>88</sup> B. Moore, W. Mischel, and A. Zeiss, “Comparative Effects of the Reward Stimulus and its Cognitive Representations in Voluntary Delay,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 34 (1976): 419–24.

<sup>89</sup> Mischel and Ayduk, 90.

<sup>90</sup> Mischel and Baker, “Cognitive Appraisals.”

<sup>91</sup> Mischel and Ayduk, 90. In personal conversation, Bob Roberts suggested to me that the first exercise cited above sounds more like a game than the second, and one might wonder whether it’s less the reconstrual than the challenge of the game that’s effecting the delay in that case. That may be so, at least for some subjects. I would point out, though, that even if that were true, the mechanism of reconceptualization is

Mischel's work focuses on overcoming "hot" temptations through cooling strategies. I would add, though, that some forms of temptation—for instance, temptations precipitated not by being overly motivated to go astray, but by being insufficiently drawn to the good—may require a different kind of self-regulation, perhaps involving what we could call "heating" strategies. Given the psychological dynamics at play in the CAPS model, it seems plausible that actively placing one's concerned attention on features of the situation that one (coolly) knows *should* be hot, but currently are not, and reframing them in attractive ways, could result in increased motivation. Such strategies would provide another way to reduce the need simply to "muscle" oneself into action.

The examples given above illustrate the many diverse strategies by which subjects can self-regulate (I'll give further examples below). Mischel is careful to point out that these strategies must "be accessed before automatic impulsive action is triggered by the hot system that preempts the person from thinking rationally and creatively."<sup>92</sup> This point, which echoes Seneca's self-regulatory advice,<sup>93</sup> highlights the need for something like the self-vigilance discussed above. If one is not on the watch, poised to counteract one's hot system with pre-planned cooling strategies (or encourage one's hot system with heating strategies), self-control will be quite difficult. Ideally, the vigilant, active application of self-management strategies merely serves as a steppingstone, a necessary waypoint en route to a more automated form of self-regulation. As Mischel puts it:

In order for these adaptive control efforts in the hot system/cool system interactions to be maintained over time and accessed rapidly when they are urgently needed, they

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still operative: the subjects are better able to resist temptation because they construe the task *as a game*. Perhaps there is wisdom here: at least some of the time, we might do well to treat temptations with a bit of playfulness, rather than always approaching them with utter solemnity.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>93</sup> See, e.g., Seneca, *On Anger*, in *Seneca: Moral and Political Essays*, ed. John M. Cooper and J. F. Procopé (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1.7.4–1.8.1 (25–6).

have to be converted from conscious, slow, and effortful to automatic activation, in this sense taking the effort out of “effortful self-control.”<sup>94</sup>

In other words, self-regulation becomes more successful when, through habituation into planned, rehearsed self-management strategies—what psychologists call “implementation plans” (e.g., “I will start writing the paper the day after Thanksgiving,” “When the dessert menu is served, I will not order the chocolate cake”)—the agent takes the pressure off her muscular willpower and leans on her skill willpower, which has become an integrated part of her personality.<sup>95</sup>

We saw above that you can build muscular willpower through exercise. How might one grow in skill willpower? Mischel notes that “attention control strategies are experimentally modifiable,”<sup>96</sup> and that modeling such strategies can have at least short-term positive outcomes.<sup>97</sup> But he thinks further research is needed for us to understand “whether—and how—socialization, education, and therapy can effectively be utilized to help individuals gain the necessary attention control competencies to make willpower more accessible when they need and want it.”<sup>98</sup> He is surely right that more studies of this nature could help. But research in parallel fields in empirical psychology suggests some ways that these skills can be internalized. The connection between Mischel’s hot and cool systems and

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<sup>94</sup> Mischel and Ayduk, 92. Baumeister also stresses the need for automated self-control (see, e.g., Baumeister and Tierney, 154–59).

<sup>95</sup> Mischel and Ayduk, 92. See also P. M. Gollwitzer, “Implementation Intentions: Strong Effects of Simple Plans,” *American Psychologist* 54 (1999): 493–503; C. J. Patterson and W. Mischel, “Plans to Resist Distraction,” *Developmental Psychology* 11 (1975): 369–78; and T. L. Webb and P. Sheeran, “Can Implementation Intentions Help to Overcome Ego Depletion?” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 39 (2003): 279–86.

<sup>96</sup> See O. Ayduk, W. Mischel, and G. Downey, “Attentional Mechanisms Linking Rejection to Hostile Reactivity: The Role of the ‘Hot’ vs. ‘Cool’ Focus,” *Psychological Science* 13 (2002): 443–48; W. Mischel, Y. Shoda, and M. L. Rodriguez, “Delay of Gratification in Children,” *Science* 244 (1989): 933–38.

<sup>97</sup> A. Bandura and W. Mischel, “Modifications of Self-imposed Delay of Reward Through Exposure to Live and Symbolic Models,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2 (1965): 698–705; quote from Mischel and Ayduk, 100.

<sup>98</sup> Mischel and Ayduk, 100.

Kahneman's Systems 1 and 2 is importantly suggestive here. As we saw above, System 1 "can be programmed by System 2 to mobilize attention when a particular pattern is detected" and "executes skilled responses and generates skilled intuitions, after adequate training."<sup>99</sup> These skilled intuitions are a matter of *recognition*. So long as one's environment provides "adequately valid cues to the nature of the situation," and one has "opportunity to learn the relevant cues," one can grow in skilled intuitions.<sup>100</sup> So, provided one is motivated to grow in self-management skill (admittedly, not everyone is), has been informed about techniques that work (here the ancient and contemporary psychologists will be of much help), and has adequate opportunity to practice the techniques (the never ending onslaught of temptation has this condition covered), we should expect to see growth in skill willpower.<sup>101</sup>

I have attempted to glean insights from both the strength model of willpower and the CAPS approach. This might seem strange to some readers, for these two approaches are sometimes taken to be rival accounts of willpower. For instance, Baumeister and company suggest that the multiple-task ego depletion studies summarized above count against views, like Mischel's, according to which "self-control mainly [involves] activating a cognitive schema or mental program," because the latter would not predict diminished results over multiple self-control tasks.<sup>102</sup> It is not clear to me that Baumeister is correct. It is true that the

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<sup>99</sup> Kahneman, 105.

<sup>100</sup> Kahneman and Klein, 520.

<sup>101</sup> See also the literature on growth in moral expertise; e.g., Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley, "The Psychological Foundations of Everyday Morality and Moral Expertise," in *Character Psychology and Character Education*, ed. Daniel K. Lapsley and F. Clark Power, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 140–65; Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley, "Moral Identity, Moral Functioning, and the Development of Moral Character," in *The Psychology of Learning and Motivation*, vol. 50, ed. Daniel M. Bartels, Christopher W. Bauman, Linda J. Skitka, and Douglas L. Medin (Burlington: Academic Press, 2009), 237–274.

<sup>102</sup> Baumeister, Vohs, and Tice, 352.

ego depletion studies seem to provide evidence against the claim that self-control involves *only* activating a cognitive schema. But the reality of ego depletion is fully compatible with a comprehensive view of willpower that gives cognitive schemas an important (or even a “main”) role to play. Why pit the two views against each other? Indeed, Baumeister is keen to admit the importance of self-management skill, even if he doesn’t usually refer to such skill as an aspect of willpower;<sup>103</sup> and Mischel acknowledges the reality of ego depletion and the need for effortful acts of will at various points in the self-regulatory process, even if he doesn’t stress the muscular side of willpower.<sup>104</sup> So long as neither model is taken as a comprehensive theory, they seem obviously compatible. Indeed, as my analysis suggests, it may well be that the two research programs are getting at distinct but complementary aspects of the complex phenomenon that we colloquially refer to with the single term “willpower.” I close this section with a summary of my proposed way of interpreting the data, highlighting the interrelations between the three key aspects of willpower I’ve identified.

“Muscular” willpower is the capacity to compensate “directly” for shortfalls of immediate motivation or to resist impulses of various kinds. It is a finite resource that gets depleted with use, applies across domains of activity, and can increase in strength through exercise. “Skill” willpower is a kind of know-how with self-management techniques; it constitutes the artful side of willpower, a kind of self-finesse that is trainable with adequate education, experience, and practice. It may take “muscular” willpower to implement such self-management techniques (at least at first), but doing so can reduce the demand on the “muscle.” Indeed, over time, as the techniques become second nature, the agent will need

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<sup>103</sup> See the detailed discussion of many self-management techniques in Baumeister and Tierney.

<sup>104</sup> See, e.g., Mischell and Ayduk, 100.

less effort to use them. Still, both muscular and skill willpower need to be exerted, since they are only dispositions. “Spirit” willpower is the disposition to exert them. Since utilizing self-management techniques is typically more effective than simply “willing oneself” to attain one’s goals more “directly,” the self-regulatory success that is likely to come with an increase in skill willpower may also increase one’s inclination to exert one’s willpower (of both the muscular and skill varieties). In other words, learning how to exert one’s muscular and skill willpower can enhance one’s spirit willpower. All three dimensions of willpower will be actualized only on condition that the agent is interested, either intrinsically or extrinsically, in some ends. Intense motivation for one’s ends might be regarded as a fourth kind of willpower, and it is certainly right to think of it as a kind of will. But I reserve the term “willpower” for the other three, since they are ways to compensate for a shortfall of immediate motivation, or to resist impulses that pull contrary to it.

If, as I’ve suggested, willpower is a matter of “muscle,” “skill,” and “spirit,” it would be natural to think of the *virtues* of willpower—self-control, courage, perseverance, and patience, among others—as *excellences* of willpower in all three of its aspects. That is, the agent with the virtues of willpower has both toughness of will and finesse with self-management techniques, and is intelligently disposed to exert these to govern herself in the interest of whatever goods she is “for” (though there is no particular motivation that defines any of these virtues). Thus, each of the virtues of willpower shares the same psychological building blocks (*viz.*, the three kinds of willpower), and each serves some self-regulatory function(s). This analysis will be clarified if we move from the general to the specific, and from the psychologist’s lab to an everyday setting, to consider the particular functions of particular virtues of willpower within the particular kinds of situations that call for them. (As

noted in the previous chapter, I take it that virtues are indexed to moral traditions. To make the following case more concrete, therefore, I procedurally adopt a Christian outlook.)

*The Virtues of Willpower, Temptation, and Character Formation: A Case Study*

Kenji and Denise are approaching their second wedding anniversary. They are obviously in love, and have navigated the notoriously challenging opening months of marriage with only a few relational bumps and bruises. The couple moved to Dallas last month when Kenji landed his dream job at a local law firm. They've started to settle in to their new life: the boxes are (mostly) unpacked; they've found a local church they really like; they've learned where to find good (and not-so-good) espresso. Although some things are taking some getting used to (Denise didn't realize how many hours Kenji was going to be putting in at the office), things are looking pretty good for these two.

In an attempt to get relationally connected in their new town, Kenji decides to join the Tuesday morning men's Bible study at his church. The group is going through the "Sermon on the Mount" as it is found in the Gospel of Matthew. At first, all is well. The men are friendly; the coffee is drinkable; the conversation is encouraging. But things take an uncomfortable turn when they get to Jesus's teaching on adultery:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to lose one of your members than for your whole body to be thrown into hell." (Matthew 5:27–29, NRSV)

Kenji is no philanderer, but he has long struggled with lustful looking and fantasizing. As group discussion proceeds, he realizes that he isn't alone in this struggle. Although no one is putting all their cards on the table, there's a tacit understanding among those gathered that they have unwittingly stumbled into a meeting of Adulterers (of the heart) Anonymous.

If Kenji were fully virtuous, he would be, among other things, chaste (i.e., sexually temperate) and loving. And, given his moral outlook, these virtues would be informed by an explicitly Christian understanding of the world. As chaste, his sexual appetite would be trained on his wife, and that appetite would have a particular conceptual shape: he would see Denise not merely as a source for his own pleasure, but as his beloved, lifelong partner and the (potential) mother of his children.<sup>105</sup> As loving, he would “be for” (in desire and action) the good of all people, and would be inclined to see and look for the good in everyone as fellow creatures made in God’s image and for whom Christ died.<sup>106</sup> The real Kenji deeply desires to be virtuous in these ways, and in fact has some measure of each quality. Indeed, that’s why he’s cut to the heart about his moral shortcomings in this area of his life and desires to grow morally. But he faces a number of challenges. He is already habituated into lustful ways; his culture is strongly at odds with his sexual ethic, and regularly presents him with both sexual temptations and an alluring (in some senses) narrative about the role of sex in a good life; thanks to humanity’s history, he is genetically disposed to being overly sex-focused (by his current standards);<sup>107</sup> and so on. How might Kenji not only resist the temptations to which he is vulnerable, but also undertake the task of reshaping his character toward chastity and love?

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<sup>105</sup> See Robert C. Roberts, “Temperance,” in *Virtues and Their Vices*, ed. Kevin Timpe and Craig A. Boyd (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 93–112.

<sup>106</sup> See, e.g., Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 286–89.

<sup>107</sup> For a summary of recent work on the evolutionary psychology of human sexual practices, see Glenn Geher and Scott Barry Kaufman, *Mating Intelligence Unleashed: The Role of the Mind in Sex, Dating, and Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). The aim of “mating intelligence,” as defined by the authors, is reproductive success (i.e., getting one’s genes passed on to the next generation). Needless to say, by Christian standards, “mating intelligence” is far from synonymous with “sexual wisdom.”

One part of the answer is that he will confess his failures to God, pray for renewal, submit to God's work in his life, and so on. As a Christian, he knows that character formation is ultimately the work of God's grace, and that his effort alone will not suffice. But he also knows that, according to Christian doctrine, an important part of growth in holiness is the grace-empowered effort of the sinner-cum-saint. To put forth that effort effectively, Kenji will do well to have (at least the beginnings of) the virtues of willpower.<sup>108</sup>

Let's begin by thinking about resisting temptation, with a focus on the virtue of (sexual) self-control.<sup>109</sup> In the last chapter, I suggested that an important step toward overcoming temptation is to unmask it *as* temptation, and to be vigilantly on the watch for its cues. Through the teaching of his church, discussion with fellow strugglers, and reflection upon his own failings, Kenji has come to appreciate his vulnerability to sexual temptation, and is gradually learning to recognize some of the cues that lust is in the offing. Some are obvious and external: the twelve-foot tall lingerie ad in the storefront window, the links to pornographic websites that bypass his spam filter and arrive unbidden in his email inbox, the almost innocent scenes in the PG-13 romantic comedies he watches (at Denise's request, of course). Some are subtler and internal: the sense of anticipation he feels just before Colleen, a particularly attractive and interesting colleague of his, is scheduled to arrive at his office for their weekly appointment; the not quite unconscious impulse to take the long way exiting the gym, which happens to take him past the yoga class; and so on. As Kenji develops self-

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<sup>108</sup> We can see the Bible's assumption of a synergistic model of self-control in the fact that self-control is listed both as a "fruit of the spirit" (Galatians 5:22–23) and as a trait that the Christian is to "make every effort to add" to her life (2 Peter 1:5–6).

<sup>109</sup> "Self-control" can refer to many different traits. In its broadest application, the term can cover all the virtues of willpower. More narrowly, it commonly refers to the virtues that fit us to act well in the face of anger-inducing offenses or gustatory temptations (respectively), in addition to the sexual variant of the virtue upon which I focus.

vigilance, he'll take these as cues not to lust, but to resist it. That resistance is where self-control comes in.

If Kenji's muscular willpower is strong enough, he could simply decide on the spot not to succumb, say, by looking away from the lingerie ad or leaving the gym by an alternate route. Undoubtedly, muscular action will be needed in some circumstances, and Kenji will be more able to engage in such action if he follows some of Baumeister's advice for building up his muscular willpower and avoiding unnecessary ego depletion (for instance, by regularly undertaking needless difficulties as a form of exercise, or getting more organized so as to reduce willpower-consuming stress).<sup>110</sup> But muscular willpower alone, applied directly in the moment of temptation, is known to fail with some regularity.<sup>111</sup> (This helps explain why some people who advocate the development and use of what I've called skill willpower sometimes also, misleadingly, say that willpower [simpliciter] isn't particularly helpful in the face of temptation: they implicitly reduce willpower to its muscular element.)<sup>112</sup> Thus, Kenji will need to appreciate the foolishness of planning always to resist temptation directly, an appreciation that he will evince in his spirited exertion of muscular willpower aimed at growing in skill willpower.

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<sup>110</sup> See, e.g., Baumeister and Tierney, chapters 3–6; Baumeister et al., “Self-regulation and Personality.”

<sup>111</sup> See, for instance, the testimonies of alcoholics (Dunnington, chapter 2) and failed dieters (Baumeister and Tierney, chapter 10). Here's just one example: “Were a keg of rum in one corner of the room, and were a cannon constantly discharging balls between me and it, I could not refrain from passing before that cannon, in order to get at the rum” (quoted in Dunnington, 33).

<sup>112</sup> E.g., Baumeister and Tierney (chapter 10) repeatedly say that self-control and willpower often don't correlate with dieting success (e.g., 217), but also give several self-management techniques that are supposed to help “produce lasting effects” (219). A bit of clarity in terminology helps eliminate the apparent tension.

What skills could he use and, eventually, internalize? One would be to formulate implementation plans.<sup>113</sup> Some of these will be plans for avoiding “near occasions for sin”: “if Colleen suggests that we go for drinks after work, I will give her an excuse, such as . . . .” John Doris and Gilbert Harman also recommend such commonsense wisdom.<sup>114</sup> For instance, Harman writes:

If you are trying not to give into [sic] temptation to drink alcohol, to smoke, or to eat caloric food . . . it is best to head [sic] the situationist slogan, ‘People! Places! Things!’ Don’t go to places where people drink! Do not carry cigarettes or a lighter and avoid people who smoke! Stay out of the kitchen!”<sup>115</sup>

But they seem not to appreciate adequately that it takes a certain kind of person—a self-controlled one—actually to formulate and follow such plans as a matter of course.<sup>116</sup> For instance, in the passage just cited, I replaced an important phrase with an ellipsis. The full first sentence reads: “If you are trying not to give into temptation to drink alcohol, to smoke, or to eat caloric food, *the best advice is not to try to develop ‘will-power’ or ‘self-control.’*”<sup>117</sup> There is a small grain of truth in this advice, provided Harman has a purely muscular view of willpower in mind. (Even if muscular willpower is necessary, it isn’t sufficient.) But his advice hardly makes sense once we realize that internalized implementation plans constitute an *aspect* of self-control, properly understood.

In addition to implementation plans for avoiding certain kinds of situations, Kenji’s plans will include behavioral scripts for when temptation strikes: “when I receive an

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<sup>113</sup> See, e.g., Mischel and Ayduk, 92; Gollwitzer, “Implementation Intentions;” and Patterson and Mischel, “Plans to Resist Distraction.”

<sup>114</sup> See, e.g., John Doris, *Lack of Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 147; and Gilbert Harman, “No Character or Personality,” *Business Ethics Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (2001), 91.

<sup>115</sup> Harman, 91.

<sup>116</sup> Hagop Sarkissian makes a similar point in “After Confucius: Psychology and Moral Power” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2008), 59n9.

<sup>117</sup> Harman, 91; italics added.

unwanted, salacious email, I will immediately delete it.” Still others will include attentional cooling strategies: “during my meeting with Colleen I will imagine that my wife Denise is in the room with us.” Each of these plans will take some “muscle” to implement at first. But as they become second nature, Kenji won’t need to “try” to execute them. They’ll simply be tools in his automated self-control repertoire, reflex-like responses that won’t deplete his resources in the same way that “direct” resistance would.

The foregoing strategies not only help Kenji resist temptation; they also form his character. By *exercising* self-control, he *grows* in it. But we can imagine slightly altered self-management skills that could also help Kenji grow in the motivational virtues of chastity and love. For instance, when Kenji turns down the offer of drinks, he could plan to mention that he needs to get home to his “beautiful bride,” such language serving as both a cue to Colleen that he is happily taken, and a cue to himself to fix his desire on his beloved. (It might also be wise to meditate on just how beautiful his bride is as he stops by the flower shop on his way home.) Or, Kenji’s email response plan might include not only an automated delete instruction, but also an automated prayer script like the one discussed in the previous chapter: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us sinners” (where the “us” includes himself and his fellow strugglers, as well as his broken culture whose systems encourage the exploitation of women as sex objects). Or, when meeting with Colleen, he could hold before his mind the fact that she is his sister in God’s family, where this very unsexy aspect of Colleen (his sister?!) is also something about her for which Kenji, in Christian love, should have eyes. In each of these ways, repeated exercises of self-control in the face of temptation can encourage not only behavior modification, but also a change of heart.

This kind of on-the-spot recalibration of moral vision—itsself a kind of spiritual exercise—will be greatly enhanced by off-the-spot engagement in spiritual exercises. As we have seen, spiritual exercises are practices of mind and body whereby one digests the doctrines of one’s philosophical school, so that those doctrines are not matters of mere notional understanding, but actually take up residence in one’s vision of the world. In Kenji’s case, these could include the careful study of Christian teaching on sex, marriage, and the family, or the memorization of various relevant portions of the Bible (e.g., some pithy sayings from Proverbs 5–7), so that the Bible’s sexual ethic would become a deep part of his psychology, “ready at hand” for on-the-spot exercises of reconstrual.

The regular use of spiritual exercises is one historically prominent model for how we can retrain our concerns and perceptual dispositions so that we gradually learn to notice what is morally significant and are increasingly motivated to act properly in response to what we notice. In light of the cognitive psychology surveyed above, I propose that we think of these exercises (in part) as practices for retraining System 1 (or, in Jonathan Haidt’s even more metaphorical language, our elephants). That is, by regularly setting our minds upon the good—through study, meditation, memorization, and so on—and then actively trying to view the world through the lenses thus acquired (i.e., learning to see by looking), we can gradually grow in what Darcia Narvaez and Daniel K. Lapsley have called “moral expertise.”<sup>118</sup> I am not aware of empirical studies that focus directly on the efficacy of spiritual exercises. But the way such character training is supposed to work is relevantly similar to well-attested methods for growth in expertise in other fields, wherein a pupil apprentices herself to a master. Narvaez and Lapsley write:

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<sup>118</sup> See, e.g., Narvaez and Lapsley, “Moral Identity, Moral Functioning, and the Development of Moral Character.”

Experts in training receive instruction that builds skills and theoretical understanding simultaneously. They are immersed in situated practice while being coached by someone with more expertise. They are immersed in well-functioning environments that provide corrective feedback so that appropriate intuitions are formed. In other words, expert-education in a particular domain cultivates deliberative understanding and intuitions simultaneously ... . During expert training, interpretive and action frameworks are learned to automaticity, perception is honed to chronically accessed constructs.<sup>119</sup>

The classical and Christian model of moral formation through spiritual practices is similar. In Kenji's case, he would apprentice himself to Christian "moral experts" (especially Jesus) and engage in spiritual exercises (study, meditation, memorization, corporate worship, prayer, silence, solitude, etc.) within a Christian community (the local church, including his small group Bible study) that provides corrective feedback.<sup>120</sup>

The Christian pattern differs from the expert-education model proposed by Narvaez and Lapsley in at least two ways. First, like the classical traditions that preceded it, the Christian tradition explicitly recognizes that Kenji's training and practice aims not merely at increased moral-perceptual ability, but increased *concerned* moral-perceptual ability. It is possible to have discriminating vision without caring in the right way about what you see. Thus, moral-perceptual training is inadequate if the trainee's heart is not moved by what she has learned to see; and in the typical case, she will learn to see, in part, *because* she has learned to care. Ultimately, this addendum might not amount to much if, as I am inclined to think, desires are seemings (perceptions) of goodness.<sup>121</sup> On this understanding, genuine moral-perceptual ability includes the disposition to see the good *as* good and the bad *as* bad.

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>120</sup> On the theme of Christian discipleship as apprenticeship to Jesus, see Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998).

<sup>121</sup> Talbot Brewer ably defends this take on desire, calling his view the "evaluative outlook" conception of desire." See his *The Retrieval of Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter 1. His somewhat odd word 'outlook' bears similarity to what some have called 'seeming' and others 'appearance' and Aristotle calls 'phainomenon.'

(Perhaps Narvaez and Lapsley tacitly assume that perception has a motivational element built into it, but they aren't explicit about it.) There is a second difference. All models of expert-education recognize the formational importance of the relationship between pupil and master. This isn't just a lecturer-listener interchange; there is modeling, mimesis, and more at work. According to the Christian tradition, though, the Master has an additional resource for forming the pupil: a supernatural ability to alter the pupil's character directly.<sup>122</sup>

The virtues of willpower help enable the effective practice of spiritual exercises. Though engaging in exercises like meditation and prayer can be quite pleasant and even exhilarating at times, this seems not to be the norm for most people most of the time. Spiritual exercises require time and effort, are sometimes inconvenient, and are often quite slow in yielding their fruit. Thus, if Kenji wants to practice them with the regularity and intensity that befits them, he will need muscular and spirit willpower (to get over the relevant motivational barriers) and skill willpower (to establish routines, and to manage his attention when tempted, say, to sleep through his scheduled prayer time).

So far, I've emphasized self-control's role in resisting temptation, cultivating virtue, and enabling the practice of spiritual exercises. Another element in Kenji's self-control wisdom will be sensitivity to time periods and situations in which his willpower isn't up to the task, in a sense. (Perhaps he'll recognize that on some days he has the unhappy combination of an uncharacteristically strong craving to misbehave and a relatively low level of "spirit.") Here he might borrow a common and highly effective tactic utilized by participants in Alcoholics Anonymous: he'll have an implementation plan to "call my

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<sup>122</sup> Again, the difference might not be as great as it appears. Andrew Pinsent argues that Aquinas's notion that God "infuses" the believer with certain virtues is best understood in relational terms, wherein the believer takes on God's character through second-personal relationship (friendship) with God. See Andrew Pinsent, *The Second-Person Perspective in Aquinas's Ethics: Virtues and Gifts*, Routledge Studies in Ethics and Moral Theory (New York: Routledge, 2012). Even if Pinsent is right, though, the Christian must also recognize that God can work in more obviously supernatural ways.

‘sponsor’ when I’m feeling weak.” Now, I’m not imagining that Kenji literally attends a meeting for sex addicts (though some people need such meetings). But the men’s Bible study he attends could function in a similar way, and he would be wise to expend some willpower to open up to at least one friend about his struggles. The self-controlled are not moral Lone Rangers, for resisting temptation is not an autonomous affair (even if it requires a certain amount of agential autonomy). Establishing morally serious relationships, and actually reaching out to one’s friends when tempted, can thus both express and require willpower.

The foregoing suggestion highlights Kenji’s need for additional virtues of willpower beyond sexual self-control in his battle for his character. For one, he’ll need some level of courage—the strength and ability to manage his fears—if he is going to be willing to reveal his moral shortcomings to a friend (not just once, but perhaps embarrassingly often). He’ll also need courage if wisdom dictates that he open up to his wife (say, when she asks why he no longer wants to watch romantic comedies). Even if the virtues of willpower are distinct—(sexual) self-control deals directly with sexual temptations, while courage deals with fearsome threats—they often build on and reinforce each other.

Kenji’s self-control will also require reinforcement from perseverance. Resistance to sexual temptation is not merely the task of a moment; it is a lifelong project. There will be times when Kenji feels the urge to throw in the towel, attracted by the “ease” associated with conforming to the pattern of his culture—and even the pattern of his friends, many of whom think he’s a bit fanatical—even if he knows, deep down, that living with habitual lust is far from easy. Thus, to maintain his “long obedience in the same direction,”<sup>123</sup> Kenji will

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<sup>123</sup> The phrase is from Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, Dover Thrift Editions, trans. Helen Zimmern, ed. William Kaufman (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997), section 188, page 57, and was popularized among Christians by Eugene H. Peterson’s, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980).

need the strength and finesse that perseverance provides. For perseverance, as I'll use the term, is the virtue of willpower by which an agent sticks with her long-term commitments. In this way, my take on perseverance differs from Nate King's.<sup>124</sup> I agree with King that a disposition to put forth "serious effort" in the interest of overcoming obstacles is an aspect of the virtue of perseverance.<sup>125</sup> But King goes too far in claiming that perseverance "just is the virtue needed to overcome ... obstacles."<sup>126</sup> I would say that diverse virtues overcome special obstacles (e.g., courage overcomes obstacles associated with fear; self-control, those associated with anger, or sexual or gustatory temptations; etc.), and that these virtues are (in part) specifications of willpower to a particular domain, the domain being constituted by the kind of urge or emotion or habit that the virtue fits its possessor to resist, along with the range of situations in which that psychological obstacle arises. As a virtue of willpower, perseverance taps into the same muscular resource as courage and self-control. But perseverance's techniques aim at continuing in a task over the long haul, and thus tend to have a temporal dimension.

Bob Roberts highlights two time-related perseverance techniques, each of which involves a shift in attention.<sup>127</sup> As he notes, to every situation "we bring an implicit sense of our location in time, and how we focus that sense and exploit its elements is [an] aspect of

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<sup>124</sup> Nathan King, "Erratum to: Perseverance as an Intellectual Virtue," *Synthese* 191, no. 15 (2014): 3779–3801, DOI: 10.1007/s11229-014-0511-5. King focuses on *intellectual* perseverance. But since he seems to take that virtue as a variant of the more general virtue of perseverance, I have generalized his account by removing references to the intellectual life.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 3789–3792.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 3799.

<sup>127</sup> Robert C. Roberts, *The Strengths of a Christian* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 104–9. For empirical evidence concerning the importance of skilled attention shifting for self-control, see Mischel and Ayduk, "Willpower in a Cognitive Affective Processing System;" Mischel and Ebbesen, "Attention in Delay of Gratification;" Mischel, Ebbesen, and Zeiss, "Cognitive and Attentional Mechanisms in Delay of Gratification;" and Mischel and Moore, "Effects of Attention to Symbolically-Presented Rewards on Self-control."

perseverance.”<sup>128</sup> In some instances, perseverance will take the form of “attending to the long-term *significance*” of the required acts of willpower.<sup>129</sup> In others, attending to the short-term will be perseverance’s way. Consider a case of each kind.

As this week’s meeting begins, conversation with Colleen is as enjoyable as ever. The scenario calls for self-control, for Kenji is more than a little tempted to flirt. And, thanks to his self-vigilance, Kenji recognizes this temptation *as* temptation. But the scenario also calls for perseverance, for Kenji also feels the urge *not to resist this time*. This desire is not explicitly sexual, even if it is occasioned by a sexual desire; rather, it is the impulse to give up (at least temporarily) on his long-term commitment to sexual fidelity, Christianly understood. Kenji is, of course, aware (in some sense) that his resistance is not a standalone event; rather, this act gets its significance, in part, from its place in Kenji’s long-term project of marital faithfulness. But it can be very natural, in the moment, not to *attend* to the larger context, so that the act doesn’t *seem* (in Kenji’s moral perception) to have the significance that he *knows* (coolly) that it has. One application of Kenji’s perseverance, then, will be the skillful turning of his attention to the big-picture importance of resisting. At first, this will involve the effortful turning of his heart’s (and perhaps his eyes’) gaze; eventually and ideally, attending to the “big picture” will be second nature.

Sometimes, though, the temptation to throw in the towel comes precisely from attending to the long term. What if, as Kenji endeavors to keep things totally professional in thought, word, and deed, it begins to bear in on him that he is going to have to fight his attraction not just to Colleen, but to every woman who is not Denise, until death do them part. It occurs to him that the odds of withstanding for *that* long seem rather low at the

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<sup>128</sup> Roberts, *Strengths of a Christian*, 105.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 106; italics original.

moment. He begins to reason (if we can stretch that word to include the unconscious mental rehearsal of moral non sequiturs), “If I’m going to fail eventually, why not fail today?” (A thought which, if followed, will likely engender subsequent thoughts like, “I’ve already failed today; why not fail *big?*”)<sup>130</sup> Here, like a “one day at a time” alcoholic, persevering Kenji shifts his focus away from the long-term and onto the next hour: “All I have to do is get through this meeting.” (Recall David Blaine’s time-shift technique inside the block of ice.) It isn’t as though Kenji stops believing that sexual fidelity is a long-term project; he just decides not to focus on the length of the term, for now. In doing so, he exercises self-control-bolstering perseverance.

Perseverance, as I’ve described it, is closely related to the virtue that Angela Duckworth and associates call “grit.”<sup>131</sup> They write:

We define grit as perseverance and passion for long-term goals. Grit entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress. The gritty individual approaches achievement as a marathon; his or her advantage is stamina. Whereas disappointment or boredom signals to others that it is time to change trajectory and cut losses, the gritty individual stays the course.<sup>132</sup>

This formulation of grit—as “perseverance *and* passion for long-term goals”—tacitly recognizes that passion is not itself a proper part of perseverance, while also affirming that perseverance will not “stay the course” without passion. This is in keeping with Roberts’s insight that virtues of willpower are, in a sense, motive-borrowing virtues. Although those who research grit empirically do not specify which aspects of the trait relate to perseverance

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<sup>130</sup> See Baumeister and Tierney, 220–22. They call the tendency to binge after mentally classifying a day as a “failure” the “What-the-hell effect,” as in, “what the hell, I might as well enjoy myself today” (221).

<sup>131</sup> See, e.g., Angela Lee Duckworth, et al., “Grit: Perseverance and Passion for Long-term Goals,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 92, no. 6 (2007): 1087–1101; and Angela Lee Duckworth and Patrick D. Quinn, “Development and Validation of the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S),” *Journal of Personality Assessment* 91, no. 2 (2009): 166–174.

<sup>132</sup> Duckworth et al., “Grit,” 1087–88.

and which to passion, the analysis developed in this chapter suggests a way to do so. Grit is a combination of perseverance (i.e., excellent muscular, spirit, and skill willpower in the service of long-term commitments) and passion (i.e., motivational interest intrinsic to the long-term commitments themselves). Thus, if Kenji is “gritty” in his commitment to Denise, the “perseverance” element in his grit will take something like the shape outlined above, while the “passion” element will be (ideally) his love for Denise, and his desire to please God, have a pure heart, and love and respect all persons (including the sometime objects of his lust).<sup>133</sup>

I have not yet mentioned the role of patience in all of this. The patient person is able to “dwell gladly in the present moment when [she has] some desire, or what would normally be a reason to desire, to depart from it.”<sup>134</sup> In its most developed form, patience equips an agent to remain unruffled by the delays and setbacks that tend to disturb the rest of us. Since the deeply patient often seem not to have to “will themselves” to “dwell gladly in the present moment,” it might seem that patience does not qualify as a virtue of willpower. But “deep patience” depends, developmentally, upon the regular application of “willpower patience.” And even the deeply patient will need to utilize their willpower at times, for they are not immune to frustration, any more than the deeply courageous are immune to fear. Thus, we shouldn’t expect to be able to “wait, and wait, and wait with a smile”<sup>135</sup> if we lack the particularization of willpower that is patience.

Patience could enter in at many points in Kenji’s struggle with lust. I’ll briefly mention just two. First, his practice of spiritual disciplines will require patience. Anyone who has spent much time seriously attempting to meditate or pray knows that there is often an

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<sup>133</sup> Of course, other motives might enter in as well: his fear of losing his job and his reputation if he were to have an affair with Colleen that became public, etc.

<sup>134</sup> Robert C. Roberts, *Strengths of a Christian*, 53.

<sup>135</sup> See <<http://wechoosevirtues.com>>.

urge to stop what you're doing and move on to some other task. Thus, Kenji will need patience's variety of muscular, spirit, and skill willpower to stay on task. Second, Kenji will need patience with himself. Coming to terms with one's lust (or any other moral flaw, for that matter) is difficult; figuring out how to fight against it takes time; and successfully retraining one's habits of construal and desire requires more time still. Kenji should not be surprised when he fails; he is not going to turn into a paragon of love or chastity or any of the other virtues overnight. Thus, he needs to learn to practice patience with regard to his own progress in moral development. Toward this end, he would do well to strive to appreciate God's patience toward him and to emulate God's attitude. As C. S. Lewis notes, borrowing a line from George MacDonald, "God is easy to please, but hard to satisfy.' ... Each time you fall, he will pick you up again."<sup>136</sup> Elsewhere Lewis commends joining God by "picking ourselves up":

I know all about the despair of overcoming chronic temptations. It is not serious, provided self-offended petulance, annoyance at breaking records, impatience etc., don't get the upper hand. *No amount* of falls will really undo us if we keep on picking ourselves up each time. We shall of course be [very] muddy and tattered children by the time we reach home. But the bathrooms are all ready, the towels put out, and the clean clothes are in the airing cupboard. The only fatal thing is to lose one's temper and give it up. It is when we notice the dirt that God is most present in us: it is the [very] sign of His presence.<sup>137</sup>

Internalizing and drawing on these insights in the moment of failure is one application of the virtue of patience.

Let me summarize. The virtues of willpower are each specifications of muscular, spirit, and skill willpower to particular domains. The various versions of self-control allow one to manage untoward impulses to anger, sex, and eating and drinking (respectively);

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<sup>136</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 203 (book IV, chapter 9).

<sup>137</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, ed. W. H. Lewis, rev. and enlarged version (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, 1966), 365.

courage enables one to manage fearsome threats; perseverance keeps one going over the long haul; and patience fits one to “dwell gladly in the present moment.” I’ve illustrated the functions of each of these virtues with reference to a Christian’s struggle to battle sexual temptation and cultivate virtues like love and chastity. No doubt, the precise functions of these virtues would look different in Denise’s life, or at another point in Kenji’s life (say, when he and Denise have been married not two, but 22 years, now with four kids underfoot), or if directed toward the aims of an alternative moral outlook, or if applied to another domain of human activity. But the illustration is adequate to suggest the various ways in which the virtues of willpower can give solidity or strength to one’s character. First, they serve as a bulwark for one’s considered values, loves, passions, desires, and so forth, allowing one to act in accordance with them, even when one’s inherent motivation to do so is insufficient on its own (perhaps thanks to conflicting desires). And second, they enable the difficult moral work needed to cultivate one’s passions, so that what one “is for” (or *wants* to “be for,” but currently isn’t) becomes a more thoroughgoing part of one’s motivational structure and perceptual dispositions. I have not argued that the virtues of willpower are sufficient to achieve these goals; nor have I argued that they are the most important factor in character formation. But I have argued that they can make a significant contribution to growth in the moral life.

### *Conclusion*

The task of this chapter was threefold: first, to give a careful analysis of self-vigilance and the virtues of willpower, which I refer to collectively as the “remedial virtues”; second, to provide empirical evidence that the remedial virtues could actually be cultivated; and third, to specify how these virtues might enable a less-than-ideal agent to resist temptation and grow in character. Regarding the first, I suggested that the virtue of self-vigilance involves

(1) appreciating one's vulnerability to moral misfiring, (2) recognizing those particular pitfalls to which one is most susceptible, and (3) internalizing and habituating the detection of those temptations' cues. Over time, (4) vigilance can move from being conscious and effortful to being second nature, and (5) may lead eventually to the spontaneous wisdom characteristic of virtue. Moreover, I suggested that the virtues of willpower—self-control, courage, perseverance, and patience—are domain-specified excellences of willpower in all three of its aspects: “muscle,” “skill,” and “spirit.” Regarding the second task of the chapter, I pointed to a number of insights from recent work in dual-process cognitive psychology and the psychology of self-regulation to suggest that we can develop these virtues. Regarding the third task, I developed an extended case study to illustrate how the remedial virtues might help us not only resist (traditional) temptations, but also leverage temptation in the interest of growth in character.

I take the foregoing to be the heart of my response to the *Developmental Skepticism* of the situationists, for I've offered empirically informed methods for growing in motivational virtues, like temperance and love, and remedial virtues, like self-vigilance and self-control. But the remedial virtues have more work to do yet. In the next chapter, I consider how they can help us fight against both situational demand characteristics and situational non-reasons.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Remedial Virtues and the Situationist Challenge

The better we come to understand situational demand characteristics, the more they transform into temptations. A demand characteristic is, if you like, a temptation in disguise.

—Mark Alfano<sup>1</sup>

[One] option of interest is to identify specific mediating mechanisms between implicit attitudes and prejudicial behavior that may be open to self-monitoring and self-control, so that people who realize that bias is possible can try to correct it in their behavior ... . By way of remediation, then, the traditional virtue-ethical approach can prescribe, in effect, an agenda of deliberate self-improvement.

—Maria Merritt, John M. Doris, and Gilbert Harman<sup>2</sup>

#### *Introduction*

In one sense, I have already begun to apply the remedial virtues to the situationist challenge. After all, the situationists suggest that we should be skeptical about our ability to grow in virtue, and I've given some reason to think both that we can cultivate self-vigilance and the virtues of willpower, and that those virtues can help us cultivate other virtues. But in this chapter, I consider how the remedial virtues can help us actively correct for some of the sneaky situational factors that situationists think undermine our virtue. By way of reminder, Alfano calls the factors I have in mind “situational demand characteristics” and “situational non-reasons.” Situational demand characteristics constitute “the subtle features of situations that either give people bad reasons without their realizing it or induce them to attend too much to bad reasons and too little to good reasons,” thereby influencing behavior “on the

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Maria Merritt, John M. Doris, Gilbert Harman, “Character,” in *The Moral Psychology Handbook*, ed. John M. Doris and the Moral Psychology Research Group (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 388.

sly.”<sup>3</sup> These, he thinks, potentially reduce to temptations, so he suggests that virtue ethicists could handle situational demand characteristics in a way that parallels their handling of temptations proper. I agree, and in the opening section I apply insights from the previous chapter to the problem posed by these sly sources of moral interference. Then I turn, in the second section, to situational non-reasons—e.g., ambient sounds, ambient smells, mood elevators and depressors, etc.—and consider both their place in the situationist challenge and the role the remedial virtues might play in addressing them. According to Alfano, situational non-reasons “don’t even provide the agent with *a* reason for conduct contrary to her all things considered reasons. They’re merely causal influences on moral conduct,” which he thinks are “hugely and secretly influential.”<sup>4</sup> As a result, he takes “situational non-reasons to be the heart of the situationist challenge.”<sup>5</sup> I will explain why they are less of a problem than Alfano thinks. I close the chapter with a response to an objection and concluding remarks about the overall argument of this dissertation.

### *Remedial Virtues and Situational Demand Characteristics*

Situational demand characteristics are many and varied. They include hurry, the presence of bystanders, social distance cues, the presence of authorities, and more.<sup>6</sup> Given the way these factors typically operate below our conscious radar, they comprise a potentially significant obstacle to robust virtue. Still, Alfano is right to recognize that situational demand

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<sup>3</sup> Alfano, 41.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Classic studies include J. M. Darley and C. D. Batson, “From Jerusalem to Jericho: A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27, no. 1 (1973): 100–8; B. Latané and J. Rodin, “A Lady in Distress: Inhibiting Effects of Friends and Strangers on Bystander Intervention,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 5 (1969): 189–202; C. Haney, W. Banks, and P. Zimbardo, “Interpersonal Dynamics of a Simulated Prison,” *International Journal of Criminology and Penology* 1 (1973): 69–97; and Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

characteristics ultimately reduce to temptations: “[t]he better we come to understand situational demand characteristics, the more they transform into temptations. A demand characteristic is, if you like, a temptation in disguise.”<sup>7</sup> In the previous chapter, drawing on the work of Adam Pelsler, I distinguished objective from subjective temptation: objective temptation “should be understood as involving a desire for some state of affairs and a perception of an opportunity to satisfy that desire by acting in a way that is contrary to virtue,” whereas subjective temptation is “the kind of internal conflict or struggle that happens when one feels pulled by desire (i.e., one *feels tempted*) to act in a way that she occurrently judges or perceives to be wrong.”<sup>8</sup> In light of that distinction, we can refine Alfano’s statement in the following way. Situational demand characteristics already are, or contribute to, objective temptations; but as we come to understand (appreciate) both how they work and our own susceptibility to them, we can learn to see these temptations for what they are, thereby taking a big first step toward counteracting them. For when we “see through” these otherwise “disguised temptations,” one of two effects is likely to follow: the temptations will lose their appeal, thereby eliminating the need to fight actively against them; or subjective temptation will ensue, thereby signaling the need to fight actively.<sup>9</sup> In either case, noticing temptation potentially enables overcoming it. Thus, it would seem that the remedial virtues could relate to situational demand characteristics in a way that mirrors their roles in overcoming traditional temptation. More precisely, the self-vigilant could come to appreciate their vulnerability to situational demand characteristics and so be on the watch for

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<sup>7</sup> Alfano, 43.

<sup>8</sup> Adam C. Pelsler, “What a Temptation Is: A Sketch” (in progress), 10–11; italics original.

<sup>9</sup> If one is not concerned to act virtuously, additional possibilities remain: the morally unmotivated might be largely unaffected motivationally by the recognition that they are susceptible to the untoward effects of situational demand characteristics; or they might even increase in their moral laziness as they increasingly see themselves as victims of circumstance; and so on.

the internal and external cues to these possible pitfalls, and the virtues of willpower could enable the watchful agent to act according to her considered values in the face of the motivational obstacles resulting from the situational factors. Some examples will help.

Take the bystander effect, “the phenomenon that an individual’s likelihood of helping decreases when passive bystanders are present in a critical situation.”<sup>10</sup> Evidence for the psychological power of the bystander effect is plentiful, with scores of empirical studies confirming what we should already have been aware of by observing real world scenarios like the infamous murder of Kitty Genovese and the presence of countless Germans who witnessed the horrors of Nazism during WWII and did nothing.<sup>11</sup> Why do people tend not to help when in the presence of others who aren’t helping?

Many plausible, mutually consistent explanations have been suggested. In some instances, it seems that diffusion of responsibility is at work: the more bystanders there are, the less any *individual* bystander feels responsible. In others, bystanders fear looking silly (or worse) to others who aren’t responding. In still others, bystanders take cues on how to interpret an ambiguous situation from other bystanders: “they aren’t responding; thus, the situation must not require response.” And so on.<sup>12</sup> Given the variety of situations in which the bystander effect can be relevant, along with the vast number of factors at play, I doubt

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Fischer et al., “The Bystander-Effect: A Meta-Analytic Review on Bystander Intervention in Dangerous and Non-dangerous Emergencies,” *Psychological Bulletin* 137, no. 4 (2011): 517.

<sup>11</sup> Classic studies include J. M. Darley and B. Latané, “Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8 (1968): 377–83; B. Latané and J. M. Darley, “Group Inhibition of Bystander Intervention in Emergencies,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 10 (1968): 215–21; and B. Latané and S. Nida, “Ten Years of Research on Group Size and Helping,” *Psychological Bulletin* 89 (1981): 308–24. More recent studies include Peter Fischer et al., “The Unresponsive Bystander: Are Bystanders More Responsive in Dangerous Emergencies?” *European Journal of Social Psychology* 36 (2006): 267–78; and S. C. Voelpel, R. A. Eckhoff, and J. Forster, “David Against Goliath? Group Size and Bystander Effects in Virtual Knowledge Sharing,” *Human Relations* 61 (2008): 271–95.

<sup>12</sup> These three explanations are identified in B. Latané and J. M. Darley, *The Unresponsive Bystander: Why Doesn’t He Help?* (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, 1970). For discussion, see Fischer et al., “The Bystander-Effect,” 518; and Christian Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 142–9.

that we need to choose between these explanations. But we should note three important features of these explanations. First, they are not psychologically mysterious; they ring true to everyday experience. Recognizing this can help counter the feeling (sometimes engendered by reading the situationist literature) that situational factors affect behavior in occult ways. (Perhaps others do; but the bystander effect seems fairly straightforward.) Second, these are the kinds of psychological processes one could learn to notice in oneself, particularly if one were tipped off about their likely presence. Thus, they could provide internal cues for the vigilant. (“Uh oh, I’m feeling anticipatory embarrassment as I imagine helping that person; perhaps she needs my help more than I thought.”) And third, even if one is not aware of which particular psychological process(es) tend to give rise to the bystander effect in oneself, the bystander effect’s external cues are obvious: a potentially critical situation, and non-responsive others. When the vigilant notice these cues, perhaps combined with mixed feelings within themselves (“should I help or not?”), they have reason to look again. If we judge Aristotle wise to advise us to lean away from the more common human errors, perhaps we should even make it a default policy to help in such scenarios, absent overriding factors.

Here’s a simple example from my own life. I first learned about (or better, came to appreciate) the bystander effect not by reading about it in a psychology book, but by noticing (via my emotional response of shame) that on a particular occasion my presence in a non-responsive group had played a part in my failing to help a person in need. (I cannot say for sure which psychological mechanism was at work at the time.) Since then, I have recognized on multiple occasions a similar pattern in myself: (1) I notice (usually through an emotion or emotion-like mental state, like fear, anxiety, or surprise) a potentially critical situation (a roadside fire, a neighbor couple arguing violently, a low-riding car stuck on a

bump in the pavement with its tires barely touching the ground); (2) I feel an initial impulse to help; and then (3) that impulse quickly fades in the presence of non-responsive bystanders. But with appreciative watchfulness has come this difference: in each case, I have taken the bystander-induced decrease in motivation *as a sign that I should help anyway*. With my intrinsic (emotional) motivation already dissipated, it has taken some willpower to act. But since I have instituted a help-when-around-bystanders implementation plan, it hasn't taken much "muscle." Even apart from such a plan, though, we might anticipate that resisting at least some situational demand characteristics will require less muscle than traditional temptations. After all, there's nothing particularly alluring about, say, the diffusion of responsibility once we see through it, whereas traditional temptations often have stronger residual appeal. (Fear of embarrassment might be harder to overcome.) In any case, having followed my implementation plan a few times now, I can report that helping gets easier every time.<sup>13</sup>

My experience appears not to be all that unique. In one study, Arthur Beaman and his associates "found that students who had learned about the bystander effect in a lecture were more likely to intervene in a bystander emergency at a later date than were students who were not informed."<sup>14</sup> Indeed, a recent meta-analysis of bystander effect studies found that "the bystander effect has declined over the years," and suggests that, "perhaps this trend

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<sup>13</sup> For the curious: I called 911 about the fire, which turned out to be a controlled burn; I also called 911 about the neighbors, but I don't know what came of the altercation; and I pulled out of the Starbucks drive-thru to push the low-riding car off the bump. In fact, I turned the last case into a "teachable moment," treating it as a field study in the bystander effect for my watching children: "Kids, I bet the people in those other cars wanted to help, too; but they probably thought, since so many people are around, that someone else would do it. When you find yourself thinking that way, you should help anyway." I mention this not to toot my own horn, but rather to point out that it can be quite easy to spot and counteract this situational demand characteristic. Of course, I don't deny that I might have been affected on other unnoticed occasions.

<sup>14</sup> See A. Beaman et al., "Increasing Helping Rates Through Information Dissemination: Teaching Pays," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 4 (1978): 406–11. Quote from Fischer et al., "The Bystander-Effect," 534.

reflects a positive societal impact of social psychological knowledge.”<sup>15</sup> It would appear, then, that Alfano is right: this temptation is resistible.

To this point I have granted that the bystander effect is quite strong, and have focused on self-conscious ways of counteracting it. I should note, though, that the bystander effect does not exert the same influence on all people. Yes, helping *rates* diminish quite a bit when unresponsive bystanders are present. But a lot of individuals still help in these circumstances. For instance, Bibb Latané and Steve Nida found that the bystander effect caused helping rates to decrease from 75% to 53%.<sup>16</sup> This is a significant drop. But we should notice that 53% of subjects helped *even in the presence of unresponsive bystanders*. What is different about these helpers?

Latané and John Darley suggest that in order for a bystander to help, a five-step process needs to happen: “the bystander needs to (1) notice a critical situation, (2) construe the situation as an emergency, (3) develop a feeling of personal responsibility, (4) believe that he or she has the skills necessary to succeed, and (5) reach a conscious decision to help.”<sup>17</sup> It seems to me that the mental processes psychologists think mediate the bystander effect—diffusion of responsibility, fear of embarrassment, taking interpretive cues from non-responders, and so on—tend to short-circuit steps (2) and (3). That is, the bystander effect renders agents disinclined to see the situation *as requiring a response*, or at least a response *from them*. Rescuers during the Holocaust provide a suggestive contrast here. In her extensive interviews with rescuers, bystanders, and unrepentant Nazi sympathizers, Kristen Renwick

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<sup>15</sup> Fischer et al., “The Bystander-Effect,” 531. The authors recognize one other potential explanation: “a more general regression effect, where strong effects attenuate over time” (ibid., 532).

<sup>16</sup> Latané and Nida, “Ten Years of Research on Group Size and Helping,” cited in Fischer et al., “The Bystander-Effect,” 519.

<sup>17</sup> Latané and Darley, *The Unresponsive Bystander*; quoted summary from Fischer et al., “The Bystander-Effect,” 518.

Monroe has found a consistent pattern among the rescuers: they had “a strong sense of moral extensivity, a feeling of concern for and a desire to help all people,” that developed into a “habit of internalizing the suffering of others as something personally relevant,” a “way of life that required not just concern for others but also action to alleviate their suffering.”<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the presence of bystanders had some effect on these rescuers as well. But it appears that their sensitivity to the suffering of others and their sense of personal responsibility was strong enough to offset it.

It is plausible to think that at least some (though surely not all) of the rescuers Monroe interviewed are confabulating, and *really* helped for other reasons. But her findings are still suggestive: one way to counter the bystander effect, which wouldn't require self-consciously fighting against it, would be to widen the circle of one's concern, and strengthen one's sense of moral responsibility for others. In other words, either intentionally or unintentionally, one could fight the bystander effect by cultivating compassion. Unsurprisingly, I think we could pursue that goal by engaging in a regimen of spiritual exercises combined with self-vigilant self-regulation. For instance, a Christian might memorize and regularly meditate on compassion-relevant passages from the Bible (such as the parable of the Good Samaritan), allowing the extravagance of God's love toward sinners (*all* sinners), and the call to emulate God's attitude, to make an impression on her heart. Or she might fast occasionally, imposing a bit of “suffering” on herself in an attempt to appreciate the plight of those who miss meals not by choice, but because they cannot afford to eat. In addition to these off-the-spot exercises, she could participate in her church's mercy ministries, not only for the inherent value of the ministry, but also as an on-the-spot

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<sup>18</sup> Kristen Renwick Monroe, *Ethics in an Age of Terror and Genocide: Identity and Moral Choice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 190, 200. Tony, a rescuer, is representative: “We all are like cells of a community that is very important. Not America. I mean the human race. You should always be aware that every other person is basically you. You should always treat people as though it is you” (*ibid.*, 35).

opportunity to learn to love the hurting. Or, whenever she notices herself responding to the suffering of others with aloofness (perhaps as the result of the bystander effect, perhaps not), she could slow down, repent, ask for grace, attempt to emulate God's compassion toward that sufferer, and help anyway. Little by little, over the course of a lifetime, practices like these will help shape one's heart. And, as in Kenji's fight for chastity, I would suggest that the remedial virtues would facilitate such a compassion-cultivation process.<sup>19</sup>

I've been suggesting that growing in one's concern for others and one's sense of responsibility for their wellbeing would help one notice the suffering of others and to construe that suffering as a critical situation requiring a response from oneself. That is, being intelligently disposed to the emotion of compassion will help one engage steps (1)–(3) of Latané and Darley's 5-step helping procedure. Growing in other virtues could also help with this procedure. For instance, growing in the virtue of autonomy, which involves a solid sense of one's efficacy as an agent and a healthy independence from others, would buttress one's ability to "believe that he or she has the skills necessary to succeed"—Latané and Darley's step (4)—thereby further disabling the bystander effect.<sup>20</sup> (Significantly, in Monroe's interviews, bystanders consistently showed a self-image characterized by "helplessness and lack of agency bordering on low self-esteem," whereas rescuers "exhibited an internal locus of control over their fate."<sup>21</sup>) Other virtues could be relevant as well (e.g., the sense of duty

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<sup>19</sup> For an analysis of the Christian virtue of compassion, along with a discussion of exercises for growing in that virtue, see Robert C. Roberts, *Spiritual Emotions: A Psychology of Christian Virtues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), chapter 12.

<sup>20</sup> Both Robert Adams and Robert Roberts suggest that the virtue of autonomy could help in the fight against the morally pernicious effects of situational factors. See Robert Merrihew Adams, *A Theory of Virtue: Excellence in Being for the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 154–55; and Robert C. Roberts, "Situationism and the New Testament Psychology of the Heart," in *The Bible and the University*, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series, vol. 8, ed. David Lyle Jeffrey and C. Stephen Evans (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 158. For an analysis of the intellectual variant of the virtue of autonomy, see Robert C. Roberts and W. Jay Wood, *Intellectual Virtues* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 257–85.

<sup>21</sup> Monroe, 202–3.

would help enable taking the third step: “develop a feeling of personal responsibility”). I won’t develop these examples. My point is simply to emphasize that a traditional program of moral formation could go a long way toward combating the bystander effect even apart from an explicit understanding of the bystander effect.

Let me sum up. The bystander effect is real and powerful. But it is neither omnipresent nor omnipotent. It affects some people more than others, and its power has declined over the past few decades, plausibly as a result of coming to understand it. Plus, even when it exerts its power, it can be combated both directly (via self-vigilance and willpower) and indirectly (via traditional methods of character formation, which are also aided by the remedial virtues).

The bystander effect isn’t the only situational demand characteristic that potentially reduces to a temptation. Consider the effect of hurry, as found in Darley and Batson’s “Good Samaritan” experiment.<sup>22</sup> In this well-known study, Princeton seminarians were sent across campus to give a talk under varying degrees of time pressure. Along the way, each crossed the path of a confederate displaying signs of need. As it turned out, those in a “high-hurry” condition helped significantly less often than those who had been given more time. For the reasons given in Chapter Two, I think many philosophical situationists draw unwarranted conclusions from experiments like this one. Such experiments admit multiple interpretations, and the data do not require that we think that humans lack character traits, or that situational factors affect behavior much more than character traits do, or that attaining virtue is impossible. Still, any interpretation of the experiment has to reckon with the fact that being in a hurry can lead many people not to respond to morally significant features of their situation to which they would be more likely to respond if not in a hurry.

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<sup>22</sup> Darley and Batson, “From Jerusalem to Jericho.”

That is, everyone should admit that hurry is a “situational demand characteristic”: it induces subjects to attend too little to their reasons to help, and too much to a (supposedly) bad reason not to help (e.g., “I need to get to my talk”).<sup>23</sup>

According to a plausible interpretation of the experimental data, being in a hurry does not directly cause behavior, apart from the agent’s character. John Sabini and Maury Silver suggest that one help-inhibiting mental state that hurry can induce is the anticipation of being embarrassed over being late.<sup>24</sup> Robert Adams comments, “the aversion to embarrassment in this case is specifically an unwillingness to disappoint the expectations of people to whom the subject has made some commitment or granted some authority.”<sup>25</sup> The psychologists seem to agree with the philosophers here, at least in part, for in a follow-up study, Batson and associates suggest that future research on hurry and helping should investigate not only the impact of situational factors, but also subjects’ mental states.<sup>26</sup> Thus, hurry alone doesn’t explain behavior; rather, it is one factor among many, each of which affects the subject’s construal of her situation, and thus, her assessment of how to act.

Fear of embarrassment isn’t the only psychological mediator of hurry’s effect on behavior.<sup>27</sup> Hurry also triggers the automatic focusing of attention. Heightened focus while in a hurry is generally a good thing. When we need to accomplish a task quickly, we will be

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<sup>23</sup> Some people think it isn’t clear that the seminarians had an all-things-considered reason to help. I’ll take the more difficult route and assume that they did.

<sup>24</sup> John Sabini and Maury Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” *Ethics* 115, no. 3 (2005), 557–9.

<sup>25</sup> Adams, 153–4.

<sup>26</sup> See C. D. Batson et al., “Failure to Help When in a Hurry: Callousness or Conflict?” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 4, no. 1 (1978): 97–101; for discussion, see Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 106.

<sup>27</sup> Since hurry-induced fear of embarrassment can be resisted via the same straightforward application of self-vigilance and willpower that I suggested would help us resist bystander-induced fear of embarrassment, I won’t repeat my advice.

hindered if we are easily distracted. The problem is that many of us become *too* focused; we fail to notice when the situation calls for giving up the task at hand in favor of some greater good. Appreciating this fact about ourselves can be the beginning of correcting for it.

Increased focus is not the same as exclusive awareness. Darley and Batson report that many of the high-hurry non-helpers were aware of the needy confederate. Indeed, realizing this fact about themselves—that they had noticed the need, but didn’t help—was a source of distress for at least some of the high-hurry non-helpers.<sup>28</sup> This distress potentially signals both appreciation of the problem and virtuous concerns—they “get” their vulnerability to hurry-induced over-focus, and they don’t like what this says about their sensitivity to the needs of others.<sup>29</sup> Given the trainability of System 1 noted in the previous chapter, we have good reason to think that with a bit of practical experience, these folks could become more sensitive to the cues to the imminent onset of this cognitive/moral pitfall, and grow in their disposition to switch into a more attentive mode when the cues are offered. We typically know when we’re in a hurry. Having been tipped off to her tendency to over-focus in such scenarios, the person learning self-vigilance can monitor herself and her environment accordingly. This is not to say that she won’t increase her focus when in a hurry. Hurry-induced focus is a built-in, beneficial feature of human psychology. But she’ll be more willing to break her focus to consider, at least momentarily, situational features beyond the task at hand, provided she has some measure of willpower. And if she has otherwise virtuous concerns—as some of the distressed high-hurry non-helpers seemed to—she’ll be more willing and able to act in accordance with her considered moral values.

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<sup>28</sup> As Darley and Batson (108) put it, those who decided not to stop appeared “aroused and anxious.” Similar distress can be noted in some of the subjects in Stanley Milgram’s experiments.

<sup>29</sup> Darley and Batson (108) give another potential explanation of the distress: the subjects are torn between helping the victim and “helping” the experimenter (by getting to their talk on time).

Self-vigilant self-regulation is one potentially helpful corrective for hurry-induced over-focus. I don't mean to suggest, though, that such an active response is the only (or even the primary) corrective. As is the case with the bystander effect, hurry affects different people differently. A number of people help those in need even when in a hurry and (presumably) without having reflected very much about the effects of hurry on attention, so recognizing and actively fighting against hurry-induced over-focus seems not to be a necessary condition for improving behavior and character. Moreover, if virtue cultivation (and not merely behavior in keeping with virtue) is the ultimate goal, increasing one's concern for and sensitivity to the needs of others will be even more important than doing battle with inhibitors like hurry. Such character formation is typically the product of spiritual exercises, formative experiences, and so on. Still, as we have seen repeatedly, the remedial virtues have a role to play in this more fundamental kind of character formation as well. After all, noticing others *as people I should help* is a learned (habituated) ability, and self-vigilance and the virtues of willpower will help an agent acquire this ability in the context of life.

An exhaustive treatment of every situational demand characteristic is beyond the scope of this chapter, but what I've said indicates the kind of role the remedial virtues might play in responding to them. (I invite the reader to consider how self-vigilance and willpower could help counteract social distance cues and the presence of authority figures.) One reason I won't multiply examples is that leading situationists seem open to the sort of proposal I'm offering. For instance, Maria Merritt, John Doris, and Gilbert Harman note that one "option of interest is to identify specific mediating mechanisms between implicit attitudes and prejudicial behavior that may be open to self-monitoring and self-control, so that people

who realize that bias is possible can try to correct it in their behavior.”<sup>30</sup> Admittedly, these three think such an approach will fail as a total response. They write:

Given the ubiquity and power of behavior-influencing cognitive processes that may resist reflective supervision, and the limitations on the cognitive resources required to implement such supervision, there is good reason to doubt whether a program of deliberate self-improvement will *alone* suffice to alleviate tendencies toward moral dissociation [i.e., acting in a way that is at odds with one’s values].<sup>31</sup>

In principle, I agree. As noted in the previous paragraph, I am not offering a panacea. Rather, I am developing one character-based dimension of a larger response to the situationist challenge, a dimension that has not received detailed enough attention.

At the same time, though, I am more optimistic than Merritt et al. are about the potential effectiveness of a character-based approach like mine, for at least two reasons. First, I am less worried about the supposed “ubiquity and power of behavior-influencing cognitive processes that may resist reflective supervision” than they are. (More on this below, when I treat “situational non-reasons.” With Alfano, I wouldn’t place situational demand characteristics in the category of the unsupervisable.) Second, I think they overestimate the “limitations on the cognitive resources required to implement such supervision.” It is true that some forms of self-monitoring require the activity of System 2, and that these resources are limited. But, as we saw in the last chapter, we can build up the endurance of our willpower “muscles” through exercise. Moreover, with a bit of practice we can transfer the task of self-monitoring from System 2 to System 1—a shift from a more thoroughgoing attentiveness to a kind of background awareness that triggers intelligent

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<sup>30</sup> Maria Merritt, John M. Doris, Gilbert Harman, “Character,” in *The Moral Psychology Handbook*, ed. John M. Doris and the Moral Psychology Research Group (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 388. For empirical support, see N. Dasgupta, “Implicit Ingroup Favoritism, Outgroup Favoritism, and Their Behavioral Manifestations,” *Social Justice Research* 17 (2004): 143–169 (esp. 157–60), and N. Dasgupta and L. M. Rivera, “From Automatic Antisocial Prejudice to Behavior: The Moderating Role of Conscious Beliefs about Gender and Behavioral Control,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91 (2006): 268–80.

<sup>31</sup> Merritt, Doris, and Harman, 388–9; italics added.

attentiveness as needed—which will be far less cognitively draining. (Recall the parallel between self-vigilance and defensive driving.) So while I agree that a program of self-vigilant self-regulation is not a cure-all, I think it is one helpful aspect of a multifaceted response to the situationist challenge.

Since the proposal I offer here is intended only as a partial response, it is worth highlighting how self-vigilant self-regulation relates to a few other proposed responses to the developmental challenge posed by situationism.<sup>32</sup> First, applications of the remedial virtues that actively correct for situational demand characteristics presuppose something like what Christian Miller labels the “Getting the Word Out” strategy.<sup>33</sup> He writes:

If there are a number of psychological processes which (i) often operate subconsciously or outside our conscious awareness, (ii) have important implications for moral behavior, and (iii) can prevent that behavior from having moral worth or can even lead to the performance of morally forbidden actions, then a natural strategy to use in trying to become a more virtuous person is to first become better aware of and familiar with these processes.<sup>34</sup>

My treatment of self-vigilance in Chapter Five adds at least two things to Miller’s suggestion. First, it highlights that the project of *utilizing* knowledge about situational influences in the service of counteracting those influences is itself a project that requires the development of character. Spelling out how knowledge of psychological data needs to be appropriated by an agent and taken up into his character, as I have attempted to do in highlighting the

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<sup>32</sup> The discussion to follow draws on Christian Miller’s treatment of proposed virtue cultivation strategies; see Christian Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), chapter 9.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 233–6.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 233. See also Beaman et al., “Increasing Helping Rates Through Information Dissemination;” and Steven M. Samuels and William D. Casebeer, “A Social Psychological View of Morality: Why Knowledge of Situational Influences on Behavior Can Improve Character Development Practices,” *Journal of Moral Education* 34 (2005): 73–87.

difference between appreciation and mere knowledge, provides an added layer of insight that might aid the remedial project.

Second, my treatment stresses that not just any mode of information dissemination will do. “Getting the word out” will be far more effective if educators consciously *aim* to induce appreciation, and not mere knowledge. Thus, popular treatments of the psychological data that stress concrete descriptions over abstract descriptions, narratives over mere reports, and instances over statistics will prove helpful. Moreover, avoiding overblown conclusions will be essential. It is more difficult to take the psychological data seriously when they are attached to extreme (and unwarranted) conclusions like “character traits do not exist.” (Recall how Seneca’s perhaps unwittingly dishonest anti-anger hyperbole can undercut his message.) In short, the psychological data cited by situationists need to be presented to a popular audience in a way that is both more moving and more measured than is typical of the situationist literature.

Self-vigilant self-regulation can also serve a favored strategy of the situationists: situation selection. As Doris puts it, “the way to get things right more often, I suggest, is by attending to the determinative features of situations. We should try, so far as we are able, to avoid ‘near occasions for sin’—ethically dangerous circumstances.”<sup>35</sup> Success in this venture will no doubt be aided by a bit of active self- and situation-monitoring, powered by appreciative self-understanding and willpower. Indeed, it’s hard to see how one could attain much success at all in avoiding tempting situations apart from some measure of the remedial virtues.

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<sup>35</sup> John M. Doris, *Lack of Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 147.

Likewise, self-vigilant self-regulation enables a strategy commended by Hagop Sarkissian in which we try to help *others* behave well by influencing situations for the better.<sup>36</sup> A simple example comes from my own experience of dealing with my children. I know that if I can get my fussy child to smile, it will be much harder for her to maintain her bad mood. So if I need to address some instance of mood-induced disobedient behavior, I often try to begin with a bit of humor, rather than leading with a reprimand. Self-vigilance will help a parent to be sensitive to the situations in which such a strategy may prove helpful, for as Sarkissian writes, “influencing how situations unfold begins with minding the cues arising from one’s person.”<sup>37</sup> And willpower will enable that parent to resist the urge to respond in a less helpful way. Sarkissian discusses this strategy only with reference to influencing the behavior of others. I would point out, though, that we can influence our own construal of our situations in similar ways. Indeed, I’ve already provided several examples of this in preceding chapters. (Think of Seneca’s exercises of reconstrual, some of which we retooled for Kenji.) It may also be that, in contexts like the parent-child relationship, one’s efforts to reframe situations for others could be a form of training in self-regulation for that other person, provided that they come to appreciate what is going on. (Perhaps my children are learning some self-management skill from my attempts to “manage” them.)<sup>38</sup>

Finally, as I suggested above and in the previous chapters, self-vigilant self-regulation can aid one’s more general attempts to grow in virtue. Through vigilant watchfulness and self-regulation, one can begin exchanging less-than-virtuous responses for more virtuous

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<sup>36</sup> Hagop Sarkissian, “Minor Tweaks, Major Payoffs: The Problem and Promise of Situationism in Moral Philosophy,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 10 (2010): 1–15.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>38</sup> On the important role of caregivers in the development of children’s ability to regulate their own emotions, see Claire B. Kopp, “Regulation of Distress and Negative Emotions: A Developmental View,” *Developmental Psychology* 25, no. 3 (1989): 343–54.

ones. This could be useful in the attempt to move from “local” to “global” virtues, a strategy commended by Robert Adams, Nancy Snow, and Edward Slingerland.<sup>39</sup> And it could help in the prior project of building up the “local” virtues themselves.<sup>40</sup> Since I have already developed this more traditional trait acquisition process at length, I won’t multiply examples.

In summary, then, the remedial virtues can play many roles in the fight against situational demand characteristics. I have emphasized the ways self-vigilance and the virtues of willpower enable one directly to counteract these “disguised temptations.” But I’ve also shown how the remedial virtues relate to other remedial strategies, like “getting the word out,” situation selection, active situation influence, and direct virtue cultivation.

#### *Remedial Virtues and Situational Non-Reasons*

I have not yet addressed what Alfano takes to be “the heart of the situationist challenge”: situational non-reasons.<sup>41</sup> Situational non-reasons include ambient sounds and smells, as well as mood elevators and depressors. According to Alfano, these interfering factors pose a greater difficulty to virtue ethicists than traditional temptations or situational demand characteristics because they affect the agent’s behavior and mental life in a way that (supposedly) circumvents practical reasoning. He writes:

[N]on-reasons don’t even provide the agent with *a* reason for conduct contrary to her all things considered reason. They’re merely causal influences on moral conduct, and yet they are hugely and secretly influential. ... The idea is not that people easily succumb to temptation, but that *non-temptations* play a surprisingly large role in moral conduct, including both external behavior and more internal phenomena such as thought, feeling, emotion, and deliberation.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Adams, 127–9, chapter 12; Snow, 31–7; Edward Slingerland, “The Situationist Critique and Early Confucian Virtue Ethics,” *Ethics* 121 (2011): 390–419.

<sup>40</sup> Christian Miller (*Character and Moral Psychology*, 239) expresses some pessimism about the local-to-global strategy, since he thinks that the evidence suggests that most people don’t even have local virtues.

<sup>41</sup> Alfano, 44.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*; italics original.

As it turns out, Alfano (following the empirical psychologists) explains the effect of both ambient sensibilia and mood elevators/depressors in a unified way: each directly affects our attentional focusing and openness to experiences, thereby indirectly affecting our mental and behavioral responses. Let's consider a few examples.

Much like the high-hurry scenario considered above, experiencing sounds at a high volume (i.e., greater than 80 dB) causes constriction of focus. This accords with common sense and everyday experience. For instance, many people use white noise machines, say, to help them focus while studying. The problem, though, is that noise-induced constricted focus contributes to reduced helping behavior and increased aggression among the already angry.<sup>43</sup> Pleasant ambient smells have the opposite effect: by contributing to dilated attention, either directly or indirectly (i.e., by contributing to a good mood, which directly dilates attention), good smells tend to increase helping behavior.<sup>44</sup>

Mood elevators and depressors work similarly. As with ambient sensibilia, mood elevators and depressors influence behavior not directly, but indirectly: mood affects the agent's attention and level of motivation, which in turn has a direct influence on behavior.<sup>45</sup> Importantly, good moods don't always encourage helping, and bad moods don't always

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<sup>43</sup> See Alfano, 44–5. Relevant studies include K. E. Matthews and L. K. Cannon, “Environmental Noise Level as a Determinant of Helping Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32 (1975): 571–77; R. Page, “Noise and Helping Behavior,” *Environment and Behavior* 9 (1974): 311–34; S. Cohen and A. Lezak, “Noise and Inattentiveness to Social Cues,” *Environment and Behavior* 9 (1977): 559–72; E. Donnerstein and D. Wilson, “Effects of Noise and Perceived Control on Ongoing and Subsequent Aggressive Behavior,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 34 (1976): 774–81; and V. Konecni, “The Mediation of Aggressive Behavior: Arousal Level Versus Anger and Cognitive Labeling,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 32 (1975): 706–16.

<sup>44</sup> See Alfano, 45. Relevant studies include R. A. Baron, “The Sweet Smell of ... Helping: Effects of Pleasant Ambient Fragrance on Prosocial Behavior in Shopping Malls,” *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23 (1997): 498–503; and R. A. Baron and J. Thomley, “A Whiff of Reality: Positive Affect as a Potential Mediator of the Effects of Pleasant Fragrances on Task Performance and Helping,” *Environment and Behavior* 26 (1994): 766–84.

<sup>45</sup> See Alfano, 46–8. Relevant studies include J. Weynant, “Effects of Mood States, Costs, and Benefits on Helping,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 36 (1978): 1169–76; and M. Schaller and R. Cialdini, “Happiness, Sadness, and Helping: A Motivational Integration,” in *Handbook of Motivation and Cognition*, vol. 2, *Foundations of Social Behavior*, ed. E. Tory Higgins and Richard M. Sorrentino (New York: The Guilford Press, 1990), 265–96.

discourage it.<sup>46</sup> Rather, “positive moods and emotions induce dilated attentional focus and openness to new experiences. Negative moods and emotions induce constricted attentional focus and avoidance of new experiences. Whether moods and emotions effect good or bad behavior, then, depends on what we focus on and what new experiences lie open to us.”<sup>47</sup>

What are we to make of situational non-reasons? Alfano thinks they’re hugely significant, for they “are both seemingly trivial and normatively irrelevant, and because they exert a great deal of influence on people’s morally relevant behavior. ... Bad reasons are bad, but it may be possible to handle them. Non-reasons are hugely influential, typically unnoticed, and provide no reason for the conduct they induce.”<sup>48</sup> While Alfano is right to note that these situational factors can be quite influential, his assessment of their significance vis-à-vis virtue ethics is overblown.

The first thing to note about situational non-reasons is that they don’t affect everyone equally. As Neera Badhwar points out, there is a “forgotten minority” that Alfano and other situationists tend to overlook when discussing situational non-reasons: people who help even when sad, or near a lawnmower, or far from a Cinnabon.<sup>49</sup> The existence of such people should at least temper our assessment of the power of these situational factors. Their power isn’t universal.

Second, even if situational non-reasons don’t provide an agent with a *particular* reason for acting, they don’t influence behavior by bypassing practical reasoning altogether. Rather, like hurry and other situational demand characteristics, situational non-reasons affect

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Miller, *Moral Character*, chapters 3 and 6.

<sup>47</sup> Alfano, 48.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>49</sup> Neera Badhwar, “Reasoning About Wrong Reasons, No Reasons, and Reasons of Virtue,” *The Philosophy and Psychology of Character and Happiness*, ed. Nancy E. Snow and Franco V. Trivigno (New York: Routledge, 2014), 41.

behavior by influencing the agent's construal of her situation and her motivations. That is, situation and character each contribute to behavior. Alfano notes that whether non-reasons contribute to good or bad behavior depends in large measure upon "what we focus on."<sup>50</sup> But patterns of attention, which are very often correlated to what we care about, are themselves matters of character.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the empirical data give us reason to doubt that most people are robustly kind or compassionate. After all, many people do not fall into kind or compassionate patterns of awareness when under the influence of inhibiting situational non-reasons, and many others seem to require situational help to notice others' needs. But the data do not give us reason to think that people lack character traits (what I called the "*No Traits*" charge in Chapter Two), or that situations explain people's behavior much more than their character does (*Explanatory Irrelevancy*), or that we cannot grow in our concern for and sensitivity to the needs of others (*Developmental Skepticism*). At most, the situational factors reveal deficiencies in kindness or compassion (*Rarity*).

Moreover, the deficiencies might not be as great as the situationists suggest. After all, those who help when, say, in an aroma-induced good mood *do help*, and it isn't as though the aroma is the only contributing factor. Perhaps some moody helpers have less-than-virtuous motives.<sup>52</sup> But others genuinely care about the people they're helping. In such cases, the aroma or good mood simply supplements the virtuous motive; it doesn't supplant it.<sup>53</sup> Those who require a mood-boost in order to help probably don't count as robustly kind or

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<sup>50</sup> Alfano, 48.

<sup>51</sup> Others who note the connection between attention and concerns include Nicolas Bommarito, "Modesty as a Virtue of Attention," *Philosophical Review* 122, no. 1 (2013): 103; Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998), 39–41; and Nomy Arpaly, "Open-Mindedness as a Moral Virtue," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2011): 77.

<sup>52</sup> Christian Miller (*Moral Character*, chapter 3) suggests that some people help in order to maintain their good mood.

<sup>53</sup> I borrow the supplement/supplant contrast from Badhwar, 41.

compassionate. But their helpfulness is still morally valuable, and it provides a foundation from which to work toward greater virtue.

What about those who don't help when in a bad mood? I would argue that moody non-helping is not always evidence of a lack of kindness or compassion. After all, why should we think that the virtuous would be invulnerable to situationally-induced mood swings, or that they would be as sensitive to the needs of others when they are in a bad mood or in the presence of loud noises as when they are in a cheerful, quiet place? As Neera Badhwar suggests, “[n]oisy lawnmowers that prevent kind acts simply prove, once again, that we are physical beings.” Moreover, “not being helpful when depressed doesn't seem like a moral failing—unless the depression itself is due to some moral failing, or unless one wallows in it.”<sup>54</sup> Consider an analogy. No one denies that Andre Agassi was a great tennis player. Yet in the aftermath of a difficult break-up, his depressed mood decreased his motivation to play tennis and he lacked the focused attention needed to win against the best in the world. So he began to lose—a lot.<sup>55</sup> Agassi's losing streak might lead us to adjust downward our assessment of his greatness. Perhaps we think a truly great player would have been able to overcome these tennis-irrelevant interfering factors and continue to play his best. More likely, we would acknowledge that human nature is such that mood swings are inevitable and that performance declines with bad moods, and we would expect his game to improve when he gets over the breakup. But surely we wouldn't think that Agassi's less-than-stellar play revealed that he lacked, say, a world-class backhand. If his dip in performance revealed anything, it would be that he lacked the will and ability to overcome his mood in the interest of playing tennis.

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<sup>54</sup> Badhwar, 43.

<sup>55</sup> Andre Agassi, *Open: An Autobiography* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010).

Similarly, even very virtuous people may perform less well when in a bad mood or when in the presence of loud noises. That is, sensitivity to situational non-reasons might keep the kind or compassionate from *acting* kindly or compassionately, and might well disqualify them from being counted virtuous, full stop. But it isn't clear that this phenomenon would show that they aren't *kind* or *compassionate*.<sup>56</sup> As I suggested in Chapter Four, when we individuate virtues, we need to assign them their distinctive roles in the moral life. Just as Agassi's backhand is distinct from his will and ability to overcome his bad mood in the interest of playing tennis well, an agent's compassion is distinct from her will and ability to transcend her moods in the interest of helping others.

Thus, my understanding of the requirements for the virtue of compassion differs from Christian Miller's.<sup>57</sup> The following rough summary doesn't do justice to his lengthy and nuanced list, but it will suffice for our purposes:

- (a) Two behavioral requirements together state that a compassionate person has a tendency to help in moderately demanding situations, at least when the need is obvious and the effort involved is minimal.
- (b) Four requirements pertaining to enhancers and inhibitors state, among other things, that “the compassionate person's compassion will not be dependent on the absence of certain inhibitors”—like anticipated embarrassment or a bad mood—or “the presence of certain enhancers”—including not only factors like embarrassment or good mood, but also morally admirable enhancers like empathy—“if it is also the case that were these [factors] not present, then his

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<sup>56</sup> In the language of contemporary metaphysics, it may be that genuine compassion is often “masked” by situational non-reasons.

<sup>57</sup> Miller, *Moral Character*, 309–10.

frequency of helping” would be significantly affected in the same nominal situations.

- (c) Seven motivational requirements call not only for altruistic motivations, but also a *lack* of subconscious motives “which he would not endorse (if he knew about them),” and a *lack* of egoistic motives (without which he wouldn’t otherwise help, or which might [or do] also motivate non-virtuous actions, or which keep him from helping when he otherwise would).
- (d) The only requirement pertaining to compassion’s relation to other virtues states that compassion requires practical wisdom.

To appropriate a line from Alfano, “That’s a five-napkin burger of a disposition.”<sup>58</sup> It isn’t so much that Miller has included requirements that don’t befit a *virtuously compassionate person*. Rather, he seems to have included too many requirements as characteristics of *the virtue of compassion itself*. Here’s one clue that this is the case: Miller lists only one requirement pertaining to compassion’s relation to other virtues. But we can quite naturally assign a number of his compassion-requirements to other traditional and non-traditional virtues.

Among the traditional virtues, a lack of invidious egoistic motives is characteristic of humility, as is a lack of vanity that would give rise to inappropriate fear of embarrassment. Likewise, the ability and willingness to circumvent and overcome the fear of embarrassment is characteristic of courage. Other compassion-requirements are characteristic of non-canonical virtues, including some remedial virtues. In light of the empirical data, we should certainly include mood on the list of the features of one’s mental life that one must learn to monitor, manage, and transcend if one is going to live and act well. (Of course, this isn’t a wholly new insight, even if recent studies have revealed a greater human susceptibility to

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<sup>58</sup> Alfano, 76.

mood elevators/depressors than was previously appreciated.) While it is true that the causal sources of our moods are often beyond our conscious awareness, we can be aware of our moods and their effects on our outlook and behavior, and our moods are at least sometimes subject to our wills. The virtuous ability to monitor our moods is an application of self-vigilance; the virtuous ability to manage and transcend one's moods lacks a name (like many of the virtues that Aristotle discusses), but it is an example of a virtue of will power.<sup>59</sup>

In the end, Miller and I might agree on the requirements for fully compassionate action, though I think his standards regarding purity of motives are too high if he wants his requirements to cover cases of genuine, but less than fully robust, compassion. (This is especially so regarding Miller's suggestion that the compassionate lack motivational dependence on empathy, since empathy is intrinsically connected to compassion.) But his requirements for having the virtue of compassion go beyond compassion's ken. In my view, one could be pretty compassionate, but fail to act compassionately due to a lack of other virtues. Thus, failures to help are not necessarily failures of *compassion*, even if they end up being failures of *virtue*. (And, as I have suggested, they aren't always failures of virtue, either.)

It was not my aim in the foregoing excursus on virtue individuation to argue that there might be more virtue in the world than appears at first blush (even if I find such an argument attractive). Rather, my interest is in the practical upshot of the discussion. (Recall that I take myself to be responding chiefly to *Developmental Skepticism*, not *Rarity*.) And the upshot is this: if we want to succeed in cultivating character, we need to get clearer about which virtues we actually need to cultivate. And, I would argue, some people might do better

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<sup>59</sup> Another virtue relevant to transcending one's moods in the interest of acting well is the sense of duty, in that the latter provides a source of back-up motivation when one lacks the motivation characteristic of other virtues, like compassion. But the sense of duty isn't a virtue of willpower; it's a motivational virtue, and its characteristic motivation is the desire to do one's duty. The nameless mood-overcoming virtue of willpower would also be needed whenever one's mood quiets duty's call.

to worry less about cultivating compassion per se, and work more on their humility, courage, mood-management, or self-vigilance.

Let me say a bit more about the role of self-vigilance with regard to situational non-reasons. Insofar as situational non-reasons are harder to detect than traditional temptations and situational demand characteristics, self-vigilance will be less relevant to counteracting them directly. Even so, I think they are more noticeable than Alfano lets on. Even if loud ambient noises are sneakier than, say, the effect of hurry, we aren't wholly unable to monitor them. Again, I'll give just a few examples "from my own table."<sup>60</sup> My wife, who has not studied the situationist literature at all, regularly turns off the stereo when she starts to feel that she can't attend well to the needs of the family. That is, she appreciates the role that loud ambient noise has on her attention, and she counteracts it actively. I have learned to do likewise in counteracting both loud noises and bad moods. Regarding the former, I have taken to wearing earplugs when bathing my sons. My boys loathe having their hair washed, and communicate their distaste through screaming—very, very loud screaming. I've come to appreciate that I tend to overreact to their protestations, and actively fight this tendency with vigilance. The former two cases involve vigilance in the service of situation management. But it can also serve self-management. My wife likes to say (tongue in cheek) that I could be officially diagnosed with "nighttime depression." My "ailment" amounts to having a less-than-cheerful mood starting at about 8pm, which often leads to less-than-optimal parenting. By way of my wife's loving help, I've come to appreciate this about myself. So I watch for the cues of my moodiness and respond by "putting on" cheerfulness in the interest of loving my children. Much of the time, this translates rather quickly into genuine cheerfulness.

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<sup>60</sup> I borrow the phrase from Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.7.

I recognize that the foregoing examples are a far cry from rigorous empirical studies. But they at least suggest that situational non-reasons are more open to supervision than the situationists suggest. As with situational demand characteristics and traditional temptations, though, the deeper “corrective” for over-sensitivity to situational non-reasons will be an increased concern for and sensitivity to the morally significant features of the situations in which we find ourselves. That is, we need to grow in virtue. And as we’ve seen, the remedial virtues can help with that project as well.

#### *Reply to an Objection*

An objection arises at this point. I have suggested that the remedial virtues can help fight against sly situational factors. But can’t those sly situational factors short-circuit the functioning of the remedial virtues?

I admit that they can. Willpower diminishes when we don’t have enough glucose in our systems; our ability to monitor ourselves is no doubt impeded to some extent when we are hurried or in a bad mood; and so on. But is that a problem for my view? I have not suggested that the remedial virtues could be perfected in anyone. And we should not expect anyone to become immune to situational demand characteristics or situational non-reasons. In fact, it might not be a good thing to become so immune, even if we could. After all, the non-conscious cognitive processes that mediate situational influences can play a number of positive roles in our lives, as noted above.

The real question is this: Can we, despite adverse situational influences, make significant progress in developing the remedial virtues? In light of the vast body of empirical data cited in the previous chapter, we have every reason to think that the answer is Yes. I admit that forming these virtues requires a bit of ethical bootstrapping: we have to use them to grow in them. But I don’t think such bootstrapping is problematic. We don’t need a

robust version of these traits to get the formational ball rolling. Indeed, a very local version will do for that task. With time and experience, we should expect the range of situations in which these virtues operate to expand—never fully, but significantly. As with traditional virtues, so with the remedial virtues: we cannot ask for perfection.

### *Concluding Remarks*

In this chapter I have defended the thesis that the remedial virtues can help us to counteract the morally deleterious effects of situational demand characteristics and situational non-reasons. With adequate training, the agent equipped with these virtues can learn to notice and fight actively against at least some situational factors. And although some situational factors are so sly that they resist detection, I've suggested that they all could be counteracted indirectly through more traditional methods of virtue cultivation. I doubt that we can ever fully eliminate their influence (and we might not want to, even if we could). But, for the reasons I've given, I think we can mute their pernicious effects to a considerable degree.

This chapter's thesis is but one among many I've defended in this dissertation. Here are six others:

- (1) The upshot of the situationist challenge is that we need to grow in character (and not, as some situationists suggest, that we should stop worrying so much about character formation and focus on situation management);
- (2) Emotion education is a strategically important form of character formation;
- (3) Philosophical and theological reflection (including *ancient* philosophical and theological reflection) can and should play a different and more significant role in the development of character formation strategies than is sometimes thought;

- (4) At least one character formation strategy commended by multiple ancient philosophical and religious schools—the practice of spiritual exercises—can enable growth in virtue;
- (5) The practice of spiritual exercises will be most effective if the practitioner has remedial virtues like self-vigilance and the virtues of willpower; and
- (6) The remedial virtues can be cultivated.

Each of these theses has been part of my case for my ultimate thesis: *through the practice of spiritual exercises, empowered by the remedial virtues, we can make significant progress toward virtue*. My arguments for this thesis (and the sub-theses that specify and qualify it) collectively constitute my response to the situationists' *Developmental Skepticism*.

I want to close by reiterating two qualifications I flagged in the introduction. First, I do not claim that the model of character formation I offer here is the only, or most important, model. I am confident, for instance, that a good upbringing, membership in a morally serious community, and God's grace all shape people's character more than the practice of spiritual exercises does. Of course, one need not choose between these various methods. Indeed, according to Christianity, one *must not* choose between them, for the Christian spiritual exercises are best practiced as a member of the Christian community, and no spiritual exercise will ultimately be of much use apart from God's grace. Still, contemporary philosophical discussions of character formation have not given ancient Stoic and Christian spiritual exercises (and the remedial virtues that enable their practice) the focused attention they deserve. My aim has been to give them a fresh hearing, and to argue for their empirical adequacy, not their unique importance.

And finally, I do not claim that the model I offer—or any other model, for that matter—can deliver complete virtue, or even a complete version of any particular virtue.

Temptations—whether traditional or recently discovered—will persist. So, with Robert Adams, I think that we mere mortals, even at our very best, can only be “virtuous sinners.”<sup>61</sup> May God help us in our struggle.

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<sup>61</sup> Adams, 12.

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