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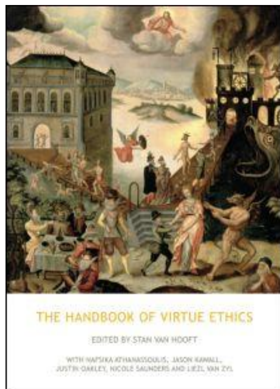

The Handbook of Virtue Ethics

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The problem of character

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37

The problem of character

Christian Miller

In the recent literature there has been a widely discussed attack on using what I will call "traditional" character traits in ethical theorizing. These character traits include the classic moral virtues such as compassion, honesty and courage, along with the classic moral vices such as cruelty, dishonesty and cowardice. The main philosophers leading this attack have been Gilbert Harman (in a series of papers dating back to 1999), and John Doris in several papers and most importantly in his *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (2002).[1] In this chapter, I first summarize the main line of argument used by Harman and Doris against Aristotelian virtue ethics in particular. In the following section I present what seems to me to be the most promising response to their argument. Finally I briefly review and assess the other leading responses in the now sizable literature that has developed in this area.

THE HARMAN/DORIS ARGUMENT

In this section I shall focus on Doris's line of argument as it is more thoroughly developed. His target is what he calls a *globalist* conception of character, which is one that accepts the following two theses:

(a) *Consistency*. Character traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behaviour across a diversity of trait-relevant eliciting conditions that may vary widely in their conduciveness to the manifestation of the trait in question.
(b) *Stability*. Character traits are reliably manifested in trait-relevant behaviours over iterated trials of similar trait-relevant eliciting conditions (Doris 2002: 22).[2]

A *global character trait*, then, is a character trait which exhibits both cross-situational consistency in a wide variety of trait-relevant circumstances, as well as stability in repeated

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instances of the same kind of trait-relevant circumstances. To take an example, someone who is courageous is expected to exhibit courage in a wide variety of relevant situations (e.g. the battlefield, the courtroom, the sports field), as well as in repeated instances of the same kind of situation (e.g. many battles over multiple years). All the traits I am calling "traditional" character traits, such as sloth, temperance or bravery, count as global traits.

Now, ethical theories in general and virtue ethics in particular are not *necessarily* wedded to a global view of character traits,[3] but it is certainly true that most theories have been inclined towards such a view when it comes to understanding the virtues and vices. Indeed, with respect to virtue ethics, Owen Flanagan puts the point a bit stronger than I would when he writes that, "The entire enterprise of virtue ethics depends on there being individual traits of character which are causally effective in the production of behaviour across situations of a kind" (Flanagan 1991: 282; see also Annas 2003: 6). For the remainder of this chapter I will only focus on Aristotelian versions of virtue ethics, which are standardly committed to traditional global traits, and which have been the central target of Harman and Doris's discussion.

As I understand it, Doris's argument against Aristotelian virtue ethics proceeds in two stages. First he argues that:

(a) If there is widespread possession of the traditional virtues and vices understood as global character traits, then systematic empirical observation using appropriate psychology experiments will reveal most people behaving in a certain kind of way (Doris 1998: 523 n. 23).
(b) However, systematic empirical observation using appropriate psychology experiments fails to reveal that most people act in this kind of way.
(c) Therefore, there is not widespread possession of the traditional virtues and vices understood as global character traits.[4]

This "behaving in a certain kind of way" is acting virtuously in a wide variety of situations relevant to the particular virtue in question. Thus the main focus of Doris's argument is the cross-situational consistency of traditional virtues and vices, and he claims that there is little empirical evidence that most people are consistently virtuous from one relevant situation to the next.

The specific virtue which ends up being central to both Harman and Doris's discussion is the virtue of compassion. They reason that if most people were compassionate, then at the very least they would perform a variety of simple helping tasks, and we could reliably predict when they would probably help in the future. But in study after study, a significant number of participants do not help, and our predictions about their behaviour are often badly mistaken.[5]

The studies that Harman and Doris appeal to are familiar ones in psychology, such as the Darley and Batson Princeton Theological Seminary hurry study, the Milgram shock experiments, the Isen and Levin dime phone booth study, and the Latané and Darley group effect studies. All of these studies are intended by Harman and Doris to bear on the extent to which people have the specific virtue of compassion. But they assume, albeit without citing much supporting evidence, that similar empirical results can be found which challenge the widespread possession of other traditional virtues, and similarly for the vices as well.

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Before moving on to the second stage of their argument, it is worth getting clearer about what exactly the Harman/Doris conclusion is supposed to be. They clearly are not just after as weak a claim as:

(i) Given the psychological evidence, we are not justified in believing on the basis of that evidence that most people possess the traditional virtues or vices.

While they would readily accept this claim, it is only a claim about the absence of evidence, namely that we currently lack support from psychology for the widespread possession of these traits. But Harman and Doris repeatedly make stronger claims than this based on their reading of the psychology literature. Indeed, the title of one of Harman's early papers is "The Nonexistence of Character Traits" (Harman 2000) and he claims that "it may even be the case that there is no such thing as character" (1999: 328).[6] Doris argues that, "people typically lack character" (1998: 506; 2002: 2).[7] And together they have written that "Behavior is *not* typically ordered by robust traits" (Merritt *et al.* 2010: 358, emphasis original).

So instead, I think the right interpretation of their conclusion is this:

(ii) Given the psychological evidence, we are justified in believing on the basis of that evidence that most people do not possess the traditional virtues or vices.

This then is the first stage of their argument against virtue ethics.

I will not challenge the conclusion of the above argument as interpreted in (ii). In fact, in my *Character and Moral Psychology* (2014), I argue in much greater detail that this conclusion about the traditional virtues and vices is, when properly understood, one that we have *excellent* reason to accept. So let me turn to the second stage of their argument. Here they assess the plausibility of Aristotelian virtue-ethical accounts, along with any other theories in ethics which rely on such traits. Unfortunately it is much less clear how their argument is meant to go.

According to Harman, "this sort of virtue ethics presupposes that there are character traits of the relevant sort, that people differ in what character traits they have, and these traits help to explain differences in the way people behave" (1999: 319).[8] This does seem accurate as a description of certain commitments of standard forms of virtue ethics. But none of these claims seems to be threatened by the empirical results as presented above. Simply denying that there is widespread possession of the virtues and vices is straightforwardly compatible with, for example, still thinking that these traits exist and that people differ in whether they have them or not. Some people might have one virtue, others one vice, and still others several virtues or vices, while perhaps the majority do not have any virtues or vices at all. So this brief argument needs further development.

In "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics" (1998), Doris claims that "Aristotelian virtue ethics, when construed as invoking a generally applicable descriptive psychology … [is] subject to damaging empirical criticism" (*ibid.*: 520). Here I think is where we get to the heart of the matter. This quote isolates the key assumption that must be doing a lot of work for Harman and Doris, namely that Aristotelian virtue ethics is committed in some way to a descriptive account of our psychologies which attributes the virtues or vices to most people. Unfortunately, though, no evidence is offered that there actually *are* any virtue

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ethicists who accept this assumption, and as I will note in the next section, it seems highly implausible on its own merits.[9]

Indeed, by his 2002 book it is hard to find Doris offering any clearly developed arguments connecting (i) the denial of the widespread possession of traditional character traits to (ii) an assessment of the truth of Aristotelian virtue ethics as a normative theory. Instead the main project seems to have evolved into showing, first, that approaches in moral psychology which appeal to traditional character traits are empirically inadequate as descriptive accounts of most people and, second, to then raising concerns about how *practically relevant* virtue ethics would be if most of us do not have such traits (see Doris 2002: ch. 6).[10]

THE RARITY RESPONSE

Whatever exactly the Harman/Doris concern is with virtue ethics, it seems to centre on the idea that the theory is committed to the widespread possession of traditional virtues or vices, and that this commitment, once rendered empirically inadequate, somehow threatens the plausibility of the view. To this there is a now familiar response, one which I developed some years ago. It is to just deny that any reasonable form of virtue ethics is committed in the first place on descriptive grounds to the widespread possession of the virtues.[11]

There is good precedence for this "rarity" response. Acquiring a particular virtue has typically been thought throughout Western ethics to be a very gradual process as a person struggles to overcome character defects and obstacles. For the Plato of the *Republic*, for instance, it is recommended that virtue be cultivated through participation in a long and demanding educational process out of which only a few might emerge successfully.[12] Similarly for Aristotle, the virtues are traits that must be habituated in children and positively reinforced in adults over extended periods of time.[13]

Thus, virtue ethicists can readily agree that experiments in psychology justify the belief that there currently is not widespread possession of the virtues – there was never any expectation otherwise. As Aristotle himself writes:

> the many naturally obey fear, not shame; they avoid what is base because of the penalties, not because it is disgraceful. For since they live by their feelings, they pursue their proper pleasures and the sources of them, and avoid the opposed pains, and have not even a notion of what is fine and truly pleasant, since they have had no taste of it. (*NE* 1179b11–16)[14]

While contemporary virtue ethicists need not commit themselves to these particular empirical claims, they can accept that people have characters which are for the most part continent, incontinent or in some other way non-virtuous. In doing so, they can also accept claims like (i) and (ii) from the previous section.[15]

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THE LEADING ALTERNATIVE RESPONSES TO HARMAN AND DORIS

Needless to say, the claims made by Harman and Doris have inspired a great deal of critical scrutiny, with dozens of articles and significant sections of at least four important recent books aimed at providing responses (Adams 2006; Russell 2009; Upton 2009; Snow 2010). But over time I have come to think that, aside from the rarity response, the other published responses are insufficient as currently stated. In this section I briefly explain why I think this with respect to at least the leading responses.

The "wrong conception of character" response, part one

Perhaps the most common response by Aristotelian virtue ethicists has been to argue that Harman and Doris are working with an uncharitable or overly simplistic conception of character, which may indeed be threatened by the experimental results, but which is not the conception that comes down to us from Aristotle. As Rachana Kamtekar nicely summarizes the strategy: "the character traits conceived of as debunked by situationist social psychological studies have very little to do with character as it is conceived of in traditional virtue ethics. Traditional virtue ethics offers a conception of character far superior to the one under attack by situationism" (2004: 460).[16]

What are supposed to be some of the features of character traits on a more charitable understanding of the Aristotelian framework? Following Kamtekar's presentation, we need to start with the virtues in particular, which are "dispositions to respond appropriately – in judgment, feeling, and action – to one's situation" (2004: 477). According to Aristotle, they require practical wisdom, "A disposition to deliberate well about what conduces to the good life in general" (*ibid.*: 480). And they can give rise to consistent behaviour, but where "consistency" is to be understood in terms of the individual's own goals, constraints, options, and the like (*ibid.*: 485).

Kamtekar has much more to say in spelling out this picture of virtue in detail, as do the others mentioned above. But I do not need to consider those details here. Nor do I need to entertain the question of whether *in fact* Harman and Doris were employing a distinct and less charitable understanding of character in criticizing virtue ethics. I will just suppose that they were. 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. For instance, given the existing experimental evidence, most people do not come close to approximating Kamtekar's conditions for being virtuous.[17] They sometimes do not respond appropriately even when the opportunity to do so is obvious and relatively costless, and if they do, their judgements or feelings are frequently not morally praiseworthy.

At one point Kamtekar seems to even concede the insufficiency of her response when she anticipates the objection that:

> the experiments find people inconsistent in situations where behavior consistency would not be maladaptive, or particularly difficult; it is easy to see, and the virtuous person would surely see, that one should defy the experimenter [in the Milgram experiment] rather than continuing to shock an experimental subject.
>
> (*Ibid.*: 484–5)

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This objection seems exactly right to me, and so too does her response that "perhaps there was no virtuous person among the subjects of these experiments: if virtue requires practical wisdom, one would expect virtuous persons to be rare" (*ibid.*: 485). But this is just to accept the rarity response, and for that there does not need to be a discussion of different conceptions of virtue.[18]

The "wrong conception of character" response, part two

Perhaps Aristotelian accounts of character are indeed empirically inadequate with respect to most of us. But it does not follow that *all* conceptions of character involving global character traits fall victim to the same problem. For instance, Maria Merritt (2000) argues for the plausibility of a Humean account, Eric Wielenberg (2006: 466, 469) for a Kantian account, and Edward Slingerland (2011) for a Confucian account.[19]

I will not comment on the comparative plausibility of these alternative accounts of character (and specifically virtue) in relation to the Aristotelian approach. Here I am only interested in whether they offer conditions for being virtuous which obtain any more regularly as a matter of fact than the Aristotelian conditions do. While I do not have the space to consider each of these approaches, my view is that none of them ends up implying that, given the available evidence from psychology, there is anything approaching widespread possession of the virtues as each approach understands them. Indeed, Wielenberg seems to admit as much when he writes that, despite his alternative Kantian approach, the experiments in the end "are compatible with the ancient idea that virtue is rare but real" (2006: 490). And the same is true for Slingerland as he writes that "it is an open question whether or not one could achieve an effective enough combination of virtue training and situational control within the context of modern, secular democracy" (2011: 418).[20]

The "mental states are important too" response

One common interpretation of arguments of the kind that Harman and Doris offer is that it is "situational forces" which primarily influence behaviour, rather than a person's traits or even ordinary mental states such as beliefs and desires (e.g. Ross & Nisbett 1991: 59). John Sabini and Maury Silver (2005) respond to such arguments by closely re-examining the central studies in question, in particular the Milgram studies, the Asch conformity studies, the Latané and Darley bystander studies, and the Darley and Batson seminary study. One conclusion that they draw from all these studies is that mental states did indeed have an important role to play in explaining the behaviour exhibited by participants.[21] In particular, "People who must act in such circumstances are confused and inhibited by the anticipation of embarrassment, and that we argue is the lesson to be drawn from social psychological research. People are also, we suggest, unaware of how potent fear of embarrassment is as a motivation for behaviour" (Sabini & Silver 2005: 559).[22]

I will not pause to evaluate the plausibility of this explanation.[23] What I want to examine here is only what Sabini and Silver think follows *if* their explanation is correct. They claim that mental states do play an important role in producing morally relevant behaviour. They also accept that such behaviour is affected by "features of the immediate situation which are not in themselves of moral significance" (*ibid.*: 561). Ultimately they seem to

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conclude that character exists, that it is grounded in mental state dispositions, and that it is not often virtuous.

The obvious question that remains, however, is this: are the points made by Sabini and Silver sufficient as a response *on behalf of virtue ethics* to the Harman and Doris challenge? It would be one thing if they never claimed to be addressing the relevance of this challenge to virtue ethics. But Sabini and Silver explicitly state at the very beginning of their article that their overall aim is "to show that virtue ethics can survive the challenge from social psychology" (*ibid.*: 536).

Yet surprisingly, as far as I can tell the only place where they end up addressing this aim is in the final footnote of their paper, where almost as an afterthought they note that:

> A question remains: does our narrow conception save virtue ethics? Advocates of virtue ethics have always understood that the application of virtue requires the exercise of practical intelligence. We think that the import of the social influence studies is that the exercise of practical intelligence is, in specific circumstances, harder than the commonsense view expects. This fact 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. (*Ibid.*: 562 n. 59)

And this just takes us back to the same rarity response from the previous section.

The "CAPS" response

An emerging trend in the philosophy literature responding to Harman and Doris has been to draw on the "cognitive-affective personality system" or "CAPS" model in psychology developed over the course of the past forty years primarily by Walter Mischel, Yuichi Shoda and Jack Wright.[24] The CAPS model is highly intricate, and I do not have the space to elaborate on it here. But here are a few of the basic ideas.

Very roughly, the model starts with what are called "cognitive-affective units", which are essentially mental states such as beliefs, desires and intentions. Using these units, each individual's personality can be represented by various "if–then situation–behaviour contingencies". The "ifs" are situations, and the "thens" are behavioural outputs. In other words, the idea is that there are true conditional statements linking the situations a person encounters with the resulting behaviours. These conditionals vary from person to person: two people can be in the "same" situation, and yet act in very different ways. The CAPS model can explain this variability in terms of differences in their cognitive-affective units: different people can have different particular units, and furthermore they can be activated and also be related to each other in different ways from one person to the next. Hence it is important on the CAPS model to distinguish between the "nominal" versus the "psychologically salient" features of situations; any given person might react to a variety of different features in a given nominal situation, and furthermore react to those features in different ways, given which features are psychologically salient to her. Finally, these various ideas can be put together to introduce the concept of an "intraindividual behavioral signature". This label refers to the pattern of behavior that one person (hence "intra" individual) exhibits in *multiple* situations, where the situations are distinguished by their psychologically relevant features.[25]

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Regardless of the merits of the CAPS model itself, I think we should be cautious about using it as the primary basis for a response to Harman and Doris. For one thing the CAPS model is not really a theoretical advance in understanding the psychology of behaviour, but rather a repackaging of relevant claims from folk psychology into technical language (C. Miller 2014: ch. 5). But second, the CAPS model *by itself* does nothing to support the widespread possession of either traditional virtues or vices. Even if it could be argued that the CAPS model supports the existence of *some character traits or other*, that does nothing to show that the possession of the virtues or vices is any more empirically adequate. Indeed, advocates of CAPS like to emphasize the high degree of within-person *variability* exhibited by people's behaviour from one situation to the next. It is true that they could quickly point out that such variability is compatible with a high degree of cross-situational consistency with respect to features of the situation which are psychologically relevant to the person in question. But in order to vindicate the possession of the moral virtues, it needs to be shown that at least for some people, those features are also the *morally appropriate ones*. But I have raised numerous doubts about whether most people are in fact consistently responding to the morally appropriate features of situations (C. Miller 2013, 2014).[26]

The "deficiencies of particular experiments for evaluating character" response

Another common strategy has been to argue that, for various reasons, the central experiments cited by Harman and Doris do not in fact lend support to thinking that the participants in question either did or did not have a given traditional virtue.

For instance, Gopal Sreenivasan considers at length the Hartshorne and May (1928) experiments on stealing, lying and cheating, and raises a number of doubts about whether they can tell us much about the extent to which those participants possessed the virtue of honesty. To take just one of his points, the situation Hartshorne and May used to test lying behaviour was one in which "the intention to mislead serves to achieve a genuine good, namely, preventing another child from getting into trouble" (Sreenivasan 2002: 59). Sreenivasan then notes that this serves as a highly contestable behavioural measure of honesty: telling a lie in such a situation could in fact be justified (*ibid.*: 60).[27] In C. Miller (2003), I raised concerns about the Isen and Levin (1972) phone booth experiment.[28] Others have questioned the relevance of the Milgram experiment and the Darley and Batson seminary experiment as measures of the extent to which those participants possessed the virtue of compassion.[29]

This line of response might initially look promising. If the concerns are legitimate, then they can call into question the main support Harman and Doris provide for being sceptical about the widespread possession of traditional virtues. Thus, whatever exactly their challenge is supposed to be to virtue ethics, it would not even be able to get off the ground.

The concerns raised by Sreenivasan and others about the details of these particular experiments are often, in my opinion, worth taking seriously. I will not pause here to evaluate each of them, and indeed in fact *agree* with many of the points that have been raised.[30] But there is an extensive array of *other* studies of morally relevant behaviour which avoid the same concerns. I have discussed many such studies elsewhere (C. Miller 2013, 2014), and here will briefly mention only one.

Regan *et al.* (1972) ran a study where visitors to a mall were each approached by a male confederate of the experimenters who was asking to have his picture taken using an

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expensive-looking camera. He went on to say that the camera was rather sensitive, and each participant who then tried to take a picture found that the shutter did not work. Half the participants (the controls) were assured that the camera "acts up a lot" and that the participant did not do anything wrong. The other half were told by the camera owner that she must have done something wrong and jammed the camera, and that it would now have to be fixed (presumably at significant expense to the owner).

Next, a few stores further along, the visitor would encounter a female shopper walking across her path carrying a grocery bag with a tear in the bottom from which candy was falling to the ground. Every indication was that the shopper had no idea that the candy was leaking out of the bag. Would you expect most people to let this shopper know about the leak? I think we would expect this. After all, it is clear what the problem is, and the effort involved in solving it is very minimal and would not cause much of a delay. The shopper would also most probably be very grateful. And helping the shopper is clearly what a good person is expected to do, other things being equal.

But it turned out that only 3 out of 20 control participants made any attempt to help. The other 17 simply let the candy continue to fall. On the other hand, in the broken camera group 11 out of 20 helped (*ibid*.: 44). Thus a very slight change of this kind in a person's environment had a significant impact on helping behavior, a finding which is not what you would expect if most people are compassionate.

Thus, while the *particular* evidence Harman and Doris have provided to be sceptical about the widespread possession of traditional virtues might be suspect in some instances, in my opinion there is more than ample evidence from *elsewhere* in psychology to arrive at the same conclusion.

The "competing virtues" response

This final approach to be considered here is an extension of the previous strategy. Perhaps the experiments cited by Doris and company do not really show the rarity of the virtues, but just serve to illustrate how we can have multiple virtues at work that can be outweighed by each other. Virtues are character traits, character traits are dispositions, and dispositions can be "masked" by outweighing forces. For instance, perhaps participants in the Milgram experiment still had the virtue of compassion, but simply had it outweighed by other virtues such as trust, obedience or cooperativeness. Perhaps participants in the Good Samaritan experiment similarly had their compassion outweighed by the virtues of punctuality or responsibility. And so on for the other experiments.[31]

My response here is much the same as above. There is some plausibility to this strategy: one should not immediately infer a lack of virtue in these particular experiments if there is a coherent and defensible competing hypothesis about how one virtue can mask another. In order to evaluate the hypothesis adequately, empirical predictions need to be generated and then assessed using an array of additional experiments. For instance, the competing virtues response would predict that with respect to a virtue such as compassion:

(a) In moderately demanding situations relevant to helping where (i) there are no competing virtues at work, (ii) the need for help is obvious, and (iii) the effort involved is minimal, most participants will likely help and do so from compassionate motives.

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But this prediction does not hold up well in light of the data, as hundreds of experiments on helping have been done in which the majority of control participants do not help.[32]

In addition, consider the connection between virtue and practical wisdom. If having the virtues requires having practical wisdom, and if:

(b) A person with practical wisdom is disposed so as to be reliably motivated to act in a way that is appropriately responsive to the good reasons there are to act in a given set of circumstances[33]

then studies like the Milgram and Princeton seminary experiments *do* suggest that many of these participants did not have the virtues after all, because they clearly did not exhibit practical wisdom. Naturally the reasons in favour of not shocking to death an innocent test taker outweigh the reasons for obeying the experimenter, and naturally the reasons in favour of checking on someone slumped over against a wall outweigh giving a lecture as part of an experiment. These are serious breakdowns in practical reasoning that, given enough similar studies, call into question how widespread the possession of practical wisdom is, and so thereby, at least according to traditional Aristotelian views, the virtues themselves. And even regardless of any connection to practical wisdom, virtues as traditionally understood are expected to enable a person to recognize and be appropriately motivated by normative considerations in a way that clearly participants were not in, say, the standard Milgram setup.

The upshot of this concern is that the competing virtues response is too quick to assume that there is a conflict of "virtues", without first offering good reasons for thinking that the participants have the relevant virtues to begin with.[34]

Of course, none of these responses needs to be given in isolation. In fact and in contrast to what my presentation of them may have misleadingly suggested, many of the philosophers mentioned above often combined their responses in a variety of ways. But in my view, even these combined responses do not help the virtue ethicist unless the rarity response is also included in the combination.

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NOTES

1. See Harman (1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2009), Doris (1998, 2002, 2010) and Merritt *et al.* (2010).
2. Doris also mentions a third globalist thesis, evaluative integration (1998: 506; 2002: 22), but, as he does in much of his discussion, I leave it to one side in what follows. In a recent article, talk of "global character traits" is replaced with talk of "robust character traits" (Merritt *et al.* 2010: 356). The terminology of "global" traits is not original to Doris; it has been used for decades in psychology.
3. As both Harman and Doris readily acknowledge. See e.g. Thomson (1996, 1997), who develops a version of virtue ethics centred on virtuous action rather than on the cultivation of virtuous character dispositions.

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4. While he does not formulate the argument this explicitly in either his 1998 or 2002, something like the above reconstruction seems to be what Doris has in mind. See in particular his 1998: 505–7 and his more recent co-authored paper Merritt *et al.* (2010: 357–8). For similar reconstructions, see Montmarquet (2003: 356) and Winter & Tauer (2006: 75). For a formulation stated in terms of inference to the best explanation, see Fleming (2006: 34–7). Merritt *et al.* (2010: 357 n. 5) acknowledge that the argument can be stated in abductive terms.
5. This does not quite capture their concern, though. For in some studies, a majority of participants in one group *did* indeed help. But then there would be another group in which very few people helped. The only relevant difference between the two groups was a morally insignificant change in the situation, such as a change in the smell or temperature. These are not changes that should make a difference to compassionate people. But they clearly resulted in significant differences in behaviour. Hence most people do not have the virtue of compassion, because as premise (i) indicates, they are not behaving in the *kind of way* that people with such a virtue would.

   Thus "both disappointing omissions and appalling actions are *readily* induced through seemingly minor situations. What makes these findings so striking is just how *insubstantial* the situational influences that produce troubling moral failures seem to be" (Merritt *et al.* 2010: 357, emphasis original). See also Doris (1998: 507; 2002: 2, 28, 35–6) and Harman (2003: 90). For similar statements of the idea, see Merritt (2000: 366), Wielenberg (2006: 468), Winter & Tauer (2006: 77) and Besser-Jones (2008: 312–13).
6. He also writes that "Aristotelian style virtue ethics shares with folk psychology a commitment to broad-based character traits of a sort that people simply do not have" (2003: 93). For recent qualifications to this kind of claim, see Harman (2009: 238, 241).
7. Similarly speaking for the situationist position, which he supports, Doris writes that the situationist "denies that people typically have highly general personality traits that effect behavior manifesting a high degree of cross-situational consistency" (2002: 39). See also *ibid*., 6, 64, 115.
8. Later he writes that "Character based virtue ethics may offer a reasonable account of ordinary moral views. But to that extent, these ordinary views rest on error" (Harman 1999: 327).
9. Similarly, Sabini and Silver claim that "virtue ethics will be troubled if the data show that there aren't many people who do (or are) what virtue ethics says they should (be)" (2005: 538). Similar claims are made by Sreenivasan (2002: 48, 57, 63) and Merritt (2000: 366). But none of them offers any explanation for why the virtue ethicist would need to be committed to any of these claims. As I go on to note in "The Rarity Response", below, they look highly contestable.
10. In C. Miller (2014: ch. 8), I try to help out Harman and Doris by developing in some detail, and ultimately supporting, a practical concern for virtue ethics in this neighbourhood.
11. DePaul was perhaps the first to develop this response to Harman and Doris in his 1999: 150–53, and I explore it at length in my 2003. For additional use of the rarity response, see Athanassoulis (2000: 217–20), Kupperman (2001: 242–3, 250; 2009: 248–9), Sreenivasan (2002: 57), Kamtekar (2004: 466), Fleming (2006: 41–2), Wielenberg (2006: 490), Winter & Tauer (2006: 78–9), Appiah (2008: 48–9), Arjoon (2008: 227), Kristjánsson (2008: 66–7), Russell (2009: 170) and Sosa (2009: 287). For criticism of the rarity response from virtue ethicists, see Annas (2003; 2011: 173) and Russell (2009: 284).
12. As DePaul writes, "The *Republic* so obviously presents the view that virtue is hard to acquire and rare that one almost feels embarrassed making a case for the claim" (1999: 150). For further discussion of Plato's view in the context of responding to Harman and Doris, see DePaul (1999: 150–53) and Kupperman (2001: 242, 250).
13. See in particular Aristotle (*NE* 1099b29–32, 1103b16–31, 1152a30–34, 1179b25–9, 1180a1–5, 15–19), and Burnyeat 1980 for Aristotle's account of moral development. The claim in the text above is intended to apply to what Aristotle calls "full" as opposed to "natural" virtue (*NE* 1144b1–16).
14. Aristotle seems to locate most people somewhere between continence and incontinence when he writes that "Incontinence and continence are concerned with what exceeds the state of most people; the continent person abides [by reason] more than most people are capable of doing, the incontinent person less" (*NE* 1152a25–27). See also Aristotle (*NE* 1150a15), Doris (1998: 511 n. 32) and Kristjánsson (2008: 66–7).
15. In his original 1998 paper, Doris anticipates this response, and seems to even concede that it is sufficient to block the alleged threat from psychology to virtue ethics. But then, in his view, new problems would emerge for the virtue ethicist who makes use of it. Given limitations of space, I cannot address these concerns here, but I do so in C. Miller (2003; 2014: ch. 8).

16. Many others have employed this strategy as well. See DePaul (1999: 149–50), Kupperman (2001: 241–3), Annas (2003: 13; 2011: 172–6), Swanton (2003: 30–33), Fleming (2006: 38), Webber (2006: 205–8; 2007: 431), Besser-Jones (2008: 313–28), Kristjánsson (2008: 67–71), Lukes (2009: 293). Not everyone on this list is committed to a traditional Aristotelian form of virtue ethics in general (such as Swanton), but in the context of responding to Harman and Doris they are all suggesting that the kinds of claims that, as a matter of fact, would be accepted by Aristotelian virtue ethicists have not been adequately addressed.
17. For an extensive review and discussion of this evidence, see C. Miller (2013, 2014).
18. For a helpful elaboration of the "wrong conception of character" response, followed by a closely related objection, see Adams (2006: 121) and Sosa (2009: 280–83). For additional criticism of this response, see Prinz (2009: 126–7), Badhwar (2009: 264–5), Doris (2010: 140–44) and Merritt *et al.* (2010: 358–60).
19. Robert Adams at times seems to employ this response as well (see e.g. his 2006: 131–8).
20. On Slingerland's reading, the normative requirements involved in the early Confucian concept of virtue are highly demanding, and so necessitate "intensive, life-long, highly regimented training" (2011: 404, see also 413). To his credit, Slingerland does devote the second half of his paper to briefly highlighting different strategies from within that tradition for cultivating these virtues.
21. For a similar line of response, see Kupperman (2001: 245–7), R. C. Solomon (2003: 48, 56) and Wielenberg (2006: 471–90), although in Wielenberg's case he is out to defend a Kantian rather than an Aristotelian approach to character. For criticism, see Prinz (2009: 124–5).
22. Wielenberg (2006: 486) endorses this proposal.
23. But I also agree with Lee Ross that "a lot of research in the 'situationist' tradition involves interpersonal factors that could hardly be termed embarrassment or face-saving" (2001: 39). See also Merritt (*et al.* 2010: 367–9) for a similar point. For other criticisms of the Sabini and Silver proposal, see Russell (2009: 288).
24. See C. Miller (2003), Russell (2009: chs 8–10), Snow (2010: ch. 1). For a brief connection, see also Adams (2006: 131–8).
25. For a thorough presentation of the central claims and supporting evidence for the CAPS model, see Mischel & Shoda (1995).
26. For a similar criticism, see Doris (2002: 76–85). For a response to Doris on behalf of virtue ethics and the CAPS model, see Russell (2009: 323–31). But as far as I can tell, Russell does not supply any empirical evidence to show that people are reliably sensitive to morally appropriate features of situations, so I am not clear how he does, in fact, purport to meet Doris's challenge. Instead, he seems to be primarly interested in showing that his version of Aristotelian virtue ethics is compatible with the CAPS model, rather than showing that anyone actually does (or could, in a psychologically realistic manner) live up to its normative standards. See in particular Russell (2009: 330–31).
27. For other concerns, see Flanagan (1991: 291), Kamtekar (2004: 466 n. 30), Sabini & Silver (2005: 540–44), Sreenivasan (2008) and Kristjánsson (2008: 62–3). To be fair to Doris, he never used the Hartshorne and May studies as evidence for the conclusion in section one (2002: 63; see also Webber 2006: 197–8).
28. See also Montmarquet (2003: 366 n. 17), Kristjánsson (2008: 63) and Snow (2010: 101–2).
29. On Darley and Batson, see Flanagan (1991: 302), Sreenivasan (2002: 60–61), Annas (2003: 14), Adams (2006: 147) and Snow (2010: 103–7). On Milgram, see Athanassoulis (2000: 216–17, 219–20), Swanton (2003: 30–31), Montmarquet (2003: 365–6), Kristjánsson (2008: 63), Sreenivasan (2008: 606–11), Kupperman (2009: 246) and Snow (2010: 111–16). On Zimbardo's prison experiment, see Webber (2006: 196–7). For general discussion of this line of response, see Montmarquet (2003: 365–8), Fleming (2006: 38–9), Arjoon (2008: 231) and Russell (2009: 279–87).
30. Although for a recent defence of the Milgram experiments and the Darley and Batson seminary experiment from many of these earlier concerns, see Russell (2009: 279–87).
31. See e.g. R. C. Solomon (2003: 53, 55–6), Swanton (2003: 31), Kamtekar (2004: 473), Webber (2007: 431), Kristjánsson (2008: 64–5), Lukes (2009: 294) and Snow (2010: 106).
32. For further discussion see C. Miller (2013). It is open to the advocate of this response to claim that in these various studies, there were always competing virtues which were in fact outweighing compassion. This is a possible move, but one might worry that the view starts to look empirically unfalsifiable.
33. As Ernest Sosa notes, "One manifests practical wisdom in any given situation to the degree that one's motivational structure reflects the relevant rational structure in that situation" (2009: 282).
34. For additional criticism of this strategy when applied to the Milgram and Darley and Batson experiments, see Harman (2003: 91), Prinz (2009: 123) and Russell (2009: 282–3, 286).

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