Circumstance, Character or Both? The Intersection of Situationist Social Psychology, Virtue Ethics and Virtue-Ethical Moral Education

by

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Abstract

Situationist social psychology challenges the existence of robust character traits of the sort moral virtues are taken to be. This problematizes a virtue-ethical moral education project which aims to develop good character and thereby improve "interpersonal human relations" (Carr 1999, p.29). Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that the virtue-ethical concept of character can withstand the critique from situationist social psychology in such a way that the theoretical basis of virtue-ethical moral education (VEME) is not wholly undermined. Moreover, there is reason to believe that VEME may be educationally valuable as it encourages students to be critical and reflective, but also caring and creative, and it does so while trying to develop good character. Consequently, there is reason to believe that experimentally investing in VEME as a way of improving relations among people may be fruitful. However, as the situationist literature suggests, situations do indeed have the power to overwhelm virtuous dispositions and the sensitivities required to recognise a situation calling for a virtuous response. Furthermore the cognitive-affective personality system (CAPS) theory suggests that the details of situations and the meanings that situations have for people play a significant role in virtuous character and action. Given the power of situations, it is reasonable to believe that the insights of situationism and CAPS theory should be taken into account when creating social programmes, such as VEME, that aim to improve interpersonal human relations. Therefore, situation selection and institution development (as suggested by the situationists) should go hand in hand

with VEME that is sensitive to CAPS theory when trying to improve "interpersonal human relations" (Carr 1999, p.29).

For my mother, Lillian Carmen Ann Finnie, and in memory of my father, Rodney Andrew Finnie

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Introduction

> *A virtue of the virtue approach is that it charts the complexity of human moral life and response more accurately than any other way of thinking about moral development and education. While reflex psychological and character education approaches focus mainly on behaviour shaping or training, the ethics of care concentrates on emotional development, and liberal educational and cognitive developmental approaches dwell primarily on the rational-intellectual aspects of moral understanding, virtue ethics regards moral development as a matter of crucial interplay between all these dimensions of human beings, and it has been the concern of all the great virtue theorists from Aristotle to the present to give a coherent account of this interplay (David Carr and Jan Steutel, Virtue Ethics and Moral Education, p.252).*

History depicts the perpetrators of atrocities such as genocide and terrorism as monsters who lack good character. We assert that we would not become like such people were we placed in the same situations because we are good, moral, virtuous people; we have good character. Nevertheless, character is also thought of as something that can be developed. Therefore, we might attempt to improve relations among people with a scheme of character development or moral education in which we develop robust, virtuous, situation-independent characters that will guide actions. However, research in situationist social psychology (situationism) suggests that seemingly morally irrelevant factors in situations are the major determining factors in ethical decision-making, and not a person's character, as is commonly thought[1]. This implies that we might become the very monsters we condemn were we placed in the same situations. Gilbert Harman, a proponent of situationism, thus claims that if we wish to avoid becoming such

[1] For example, finding a dime in a phone booth determines whether or not Mary will help John pick up all of his dropped papers that have fallen across her path (Doris 2002, p.30). The degree to which a seminary student considers himself to be in a hurry to deliver a talk (on the parable of the Good Samaritan) determines whether or not he will stop to help a person who seems to be injured or distressed in some way (Harman 1999, p.324).

people, and if we wish to improve relations among people, we should not focus on character development or moral education. Instead, we should make every effort to arrange social institutions in ways that will prevent us from being "placed in situations in which [we] will act badly" (Harman 2005, p.14).

In this thesis I will ascertain whether a particular virtue-ethical conception of moral education and character is conceptually coherent, and I will also ascertain to what extent situationism challenges or complements this conception of moral education and character. By doing so I wish to ascertain how virtue-ethical moral education and situationism could be employed to "improve interpersonal human relations" (Carr 1999, p.29). I also wish to ascertain whether they should be used to attempt to improve such relations. My thesis is not an empirical investigation. Even if there are good reasons for belief in the conceptual coherence of virtue-ethical moral education, this does not prove that its methods will work in actual classrooms. However, it does suggest that experimentally employing virtue-ethical moral education methods in classrooms may be fruitful. Working within this particular virtue-ethical conception of moral education and character, I will answer the following questions:

1. Can investing in a virtue-ethical moral education scheme as a way of improving interpersonal human relations be justified (given the conclusions we can draw from the situationist literature)?
2. Should we abandon all talk of and schemes of virtue-ethical moral education and instead focus on situation selection and institution development when trying to improve interpersonal human relations?
3. Do virtue-ethical moral education and situationism both have value and roles to play when trying to improve interpersonal human relations?

However, in order to answer the preceding questions, I will first answer the following question: Can the virtue-ethical concept of character withstand the situationist critique in such a way that the theoretical basis of virtue-ethical moral

education (hereafter referred to as VEME) is not wholly undermined and an investment of effort in VEME is warranted?

I see VEME as an educational programme that could be developed into a school subject and taught alongside traditional school subjects in primary/elementary schools and high schools (alternatively, it could also be developed into a supplemental programme or subject offered by schools). In order to function as a school subject, age-appropriate curriculums for each school level that meet the educational needs and abilities of the students would need to be developed. Given the complexities involved in character development and improving relations among people, I think VEME should be sustained throughout a student's school life, starting with the most basic ideas and activities in the early years of primary/elementary school and gradually increasing in complexity through to the end of high school. As a school subject, VEME would also require competent teachers committed to promoting the aims of the programme. Teachers delivering the programmes would thus require some training, ideally from within schools of education, but perhaps less formal training would suffice as long as the teacher could demonstrate competency, interest in the programme and a commitment to promoting its aims. In this thesis I thus understand VEME as a school subject or educational programme which requires competent, interested, and committed teachers; aims to develop good character and improve relations among people; and which, depending on the evidence, may be worth investing in experimentally.

VEME rests on the possibility of a student being able to develop a rather robust, situation-independent character, and through its methods, attempts to enable a student to cultivate a developed, virtuous character that will guide her actions (a student's actions should not be predominantly determined by morally irrelevant factors in the situation within which she finds herself). Situationism undermines this possibility. It, therefore, undermines the justifiability of an investment in

VEME and suggests that we should instead focus on developing robust social institutions that will constrain us.

Given the questions I will be answering in my thesis, it is important to be clear about the commitments of VEME and situationism. With regard to situationism, for the moment it is enough to say that situationists argue that the appearance of character traits can be explained by appealing to details of particular situations, and that, therefore, "there is no empirical basis for belief in the existence of character traits" (Harman 1999, p.316). VEME requires a more extensive exposition at this stage. A virtue approach to moral education is one in which the development of virtuous character traits is a central aim of the education and the education is "founded in an ethics of virtue in a narrow sense (excluding Kantian and utilitarian accounts of virtues)" (Carr and Steutel 1999b, p.7). Virtue ethics emphasises character development over actions. This does not mean that actions are of little or no importance. Actions are, of course, important. However, virtue ethicists argue that it is a person's character, something internal to a person, which ultimately determines the (moral) actions that a person will take. VEME aims to develop, support, and strengthen character that is conducive to being virtuous and that is conducive to the performance of virtuous actions. It aims to enable a student to see being virtuous as worthwhile, while simultaneously aiming to promote action that is from a virtuous disposition and that hits the target of a virtue.

In order for VEME to achieve its educational aims, I will argue that there are reasons to endorse the use of three major methods: habituation and role-play, exemplification, and collaborative inquiry through stories and discussions[2]. These

[2] Mostly due to some overlap of educational methodologies such as habituation and exemplification, VEME and something else called character education can be, and often are, easily and erroneously conflated. The two types of education are in fact very different, and it is important to distinguish one from the other. In contrast with VEME, basic character education is often seen as "part of a neoconservative social and cultural agenda...linked to the call to return to traditional values and teaching methods" (McLaughlin and Halstead 1999, p.138). It emphasizes the need to teach character traits directly by (predominately) making children practise the traits "until they

methods have a dual purpose. The first is to develop thoughtful patterns or habits of actions. The second has two parts. The first is to develop those aspects of emotional life relevant to the development of character and that should encourage students to consider being virtuous worthwhile[3]. The second is to develop the types of reasoning (critical, creative, and caring reasoning) that it is reasonable to believe are important for the development of character and that should stimulate the student's ability to make moral judgements, to know what actions those judgements require, and to be disposed to act in the ways those judgements require (McLaughlin and Halstead 1999, p.138).

However, VEME is still without any concrete content. In *Justifying Emotions*, Kristjan Kristjansson notes that "we cannot ignore [Martha] Nussbaum's warning…about the futility of discussing what role particular emotions play in morality without defending an overall normative view" (Kristjansson 2002, p.49). In the same way we cannot discuss moral education without defending an overall normative view because without the normative view it will be impossible to give the moral education any content. While the dominant form of contemporary virtue ethics is neo-Aristotelianism (e.g. Rosalind Hursthouse, 1999), I will be assessing the implications of situationism for virtue ethics and VEME by drawing upon Christine Swanton's pluralistic conception of virtue ethics, a new and important alternative to neo-Aristotelianism. Swanton's position is distinctive in its attempt to deal with a number of problems that any neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics has to face: (1) eudaimonism - the view that a particular character trait is a virtue if and only if it contributes to "the flourishing of the possessor of the virtue" (Swanton

become second nature" (McLaughlin and Halstead 1999, p.138). Character education places considerably less emphasis on developing reasoning and affective skills than VEME.

[3] I adopt a rather Aristotelian understanding of the emotions as "more or less intelligent ways of grasping situations, dominated by a desire" (Kristjansson referring to Aristotle 2002, p.18). Emotions are not irrational, uncontrolled or irresponsible responses to situations. They are rational states that change with our opinions or irrational ones that can be changed or "defused" (Kristjansson 2002, p.18). In the *Nichomachean Ethics* (hereafter referred to as NE) Aristotle argues that virtues are a matter of feeling correctly at the right time and with regard to the right person or situation. Emotions are thus central to virtue and vice, virtue being defined as "a mean of actions and passions" (Kristjansson referring to Aristotle 2002, p.19).

2003, p.77); (2) egoism - the absence from Aristotle's scheme of certain "other-regarding" virtues (such as compassion) that are important in contemporary ethical thought; (3) anti-liberalism and (4) elitism.

However, I will not be adopting Swanton's entire virtue ethical framework (especially her controversial appropriation of Nietzsche (a point I will return to in Chapter 1)), and I will be retaining some ties with Aristotelian virtue ethics (as Swanton does, too), specifically Aristotle's concept of virtue as "a state in which both reason and emotion are well-ordered" (Swanton 2003, p.8; NE1105b25-1106a8, NE1106b35-1107a5**)**. The claim that virtue is a state in which reason and emotion is well-ordered is all-important for my thesis, as is the content that is given to this claim by Swanton's conception of virtue and the development of virtue provided by VEME. I see Swanton's conception of virtue and VEME interacting in the following ways:

(1) Through thoughtful, reflective processes of habituation and exemplification students should develop virtuous patterns of action, thought, and emotion that will form the foundation of virtuous character and the interdependent intellectual virtue, practical wisdom[4].

(2) Swanton's virtues of practice and her emphasis on dialogue suggest that we need certain specific intellectual and emotional abilities if we are to act rightly or virtuously (in addition to the habits of action developed in (1)) (Swanton 2003, p.251, pp.260-262). This is addressed by the VEME method of collaborative inquiry which aims to develop critical, creative, and caring thinking skills. I also see this as giving practical wisdom additional content and as explaining how it develops; it does not diminish its importance.

(3) However, since VEME is not only about acting virtuously but developing virtuous character (which involves intellectual and emotional dispositions and

[4] Aristotle argues that no one is fully virtuous or has true moral virtue without having the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom (NE1144b7-17, NE1144b30-2), and that no one can become practically wise without first possessing natural or habitual moral virtue (NE1144a29-37, NE1144b20). Practical wisdom is all-important for the development of virtue; a person is practically wise when she has acquired the ability to think, feel, and act correctly with regard to moral problems.

skills), a method for developing virtuous dispositions is needed. I see the VEME method of collaborative inquiry building on (1) to develop virtuous dispositions. In addition, Swanton's ideas regarding universal love, self-love, respect, and creativity[5] as dispositions that form part of a virtuous character, should be able to be developed through the development of caring, creative and critical thinking respectively (Swanton 2003, pp.99-100, p.106, p.116).

Thesis Structure

My thesis will be divided into five chapters:

In Chapter One I will argue that Swanton's conception of virtue is the most appropriate virtue-ethical normative view that can be employed to give VEME content. Unlike Aristotelian virtue ethics, Swanton's virtue ethics is not beset by a number of problems that are troubling for a virtue-ethical moral education project in a modern setting. Swanton's virtue ethics is an attractive replacement as she avoids the problems associated with Aristotelian virtue ethics whilst complementing and interacting with VEME in a practical sense. I will begin this chapter by providing an overview of virtue ethics. I will then introduce Aristotelian virtue ethics and the problems associated with it before moving onto Swanton's pluralistic virtue ethics, showing it to be better able to deal with the problems associated with neo-Aristotelianism and as providing a much better fit for VEME than neo-Aristotelianism (in terms of the details of the normative view).

In Chapter Two I provide an exposition of VEME. I aim to show that VEME educates, it does not indoctrinate; it takes steps to enable students to be critical and reflective, but also caring and creative and it does so while developing good character. I will argue that VEME creates a structure conducive to the

[5] By these terms Swanton merely seems to mean that we should be moderate (it seems to have hints of Aristotle's doctrine of the mean (NE1106b35-1107a5)); we should value our own lives in ways that still allow us to sacrifice some of our own interests for the good of others etc. We should think and feel appropriately about the virtue situation in question and act accordingly by, for example, balancing universal love with self-respect.

development of virtuous character that should enable students to solve moral problems virtuously. However, there is reason to believe that the methods of habituation, exemplification, and collaborative inquiry should be used in conjunction with one another in order for VEME to be most effective. Firstly, a thoughtful process of habituation should go hand-in-hand with the teacher as an appropriate role-model. Through habituation and role-play games, children will have the opportunity to practise actual moral actions. Secondly, through the method of exemplification, students will be taught not to merely imitate their teacher, but to be inspired by their teacher and to see her as "an example of how a fulfilling life can be lived and what it involves, morally and emotionally" (Kristjansson 2002, p.190). Thirdly, collaborative inquiry will provide children with opportunities to practise and develop the dispositions, knowledge and feelings it is reasonable to believe are needed for successfully acting rightly from a state of virtue, thus ensuring an effective interaction between VEME and this project's virtue ethics. I will conclude that VEME not only has a plan of action in a practical sense but also that its methods are consistent with the spirit of Swanton's virtue ethics. I will also deal with some objections to moral education in general.

In the third chapter I will outline and argue for the situationist critique of virtue ethics and VEME. My aim is to make the strongest case for situationism that the literature allows. In the first section I will outline the major tenets of situationism and explain the situationist critique of character. In the next section I will explain four situationist experiments (the Dime experiment, the Good Samaritan experiment, the Milgram obedience experiments, and the Stanford prison experiment) by employing two complementary accounts of virtue psychology (dispositionalism and intellectualism) in order to show that situationists have a sophisticated conception of the virtue psychology that they are challenging (Doris 1998, p.509).

In the fourth chapter I will show that the situationist data is not damning for virtue ethics. I will proceed by showing that it is reasonable to interpret the situationist research as demonstrating that *some* people are virtuous. I will also show that it is reasonable to believe that these numbers could be increased by defining situations in terms of the meanings they have for agents (as is demonstrated by the cognitive-affective personality system (CAPS) theory) and then further by a process of VEME. Importantly, a focus on situations and social institutions should go hand in hand with VEME (that is sensitive to CAPS theory) because both, the evidence suggests, are needed if we are to improve interpersonal human relations.

In Chapter Five I try to put the foregoing chapters into perspective in light of the task I set for the thesis in this introduction. I also deal with the longstanding general worries about virtue ethic's desirability as a normative theory. Despite having dealt with the situationist challenge to virtue ethics and character, there are still reasons to consider the character based approaches of virtue ethical theories to be inherently problematic. This is because virtue ethical theories are vulnerable to charges of parochialism, (in-) egalitarianism, utopianism, allowing for intolerable actions, and being unable to effectively guide virtuous actions and emotions. After dealing with these final challenges to virtue ethics, I draw my thesis to a close in an overall conclusion.

The Existing Literature

In my thesis I will draw on the existing literature on virtue ethics, situationism, virtue-ethical moral education, collaborative inquiry, and CAPS theory in order to move beyond what has already been said and to create something new. With regard to virtue ethics, I will draw on the substantial literature on Aristotelian virtue ethics as well as the rather limited literature on Christine Swanton's virtue ethics. The virtue ethics that I ultimately use in this thesis is a hybrid of those two approaches that brings the (moral) educationally valuable aspects of both theories to the forefront.

With regard to situationism, the most comprehensive philosophical discussions of it are provided by John Doris in his book *Lack of Character* and Gilbert Harman in his article "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error". Harman and Doris do, however, take different positions. Harman argues that "despite appearances, there is no empirical support for the existence of character traits" (2000, p.178), whereas Doris "allows for the possibility of temporally stable, situation-particular, "local" [character] traits that are associated with important individual differences in behaviour" (Doris 2002, p.25).

The bulk of the philosophical literature that has been written on virtue ethics and situationism is a reply to Harman and Doris. Virtue ethicists make a number of claims with regard to situationism. For example, Joel Kupperman argues that situationist evidence gathers much of its strength from "picking a soft target…an excessively simple view of what character is" (2001, p.240). Nafsika Athanassoulis continues this theme by arguing that situationism is too behaviouristic and that we cannot draw inferences about "the precise state of character of the agent" by looking at outward behaviour alone, as situationists do (2000, p.219). John Sabini and Maury Silver argue that situationism highlights that being virtuous is difficult, but it "does not trouble the [virtue-ethical] notion of character or show that virtue is unattainable" (2005, p.562). Making a similar point, Kristjansson argues that situationism only proves what folk psychology and virtue ethicists have known all along: few people can resist 'evil' actions in morally challenging situations since only a small minority of people are fully virtuous (Kristjansson 2008, p.63). For virtue ethicists this is not in fact a problem; "the results underscore the need for sustained and intense [moral] education" (Kristjansson 2008, p.66).

Maria Merritt, however, argues that the extent to which people are virtuous is linked to situational factors. She argues for a conception of virtue "that openly acknowledges the likelihood of its deep, ongoing dependence upon particular social relationships and settings" (2000, p.365). She argues that although this may prove problematic for a strictly Aristotelian virtue ethics, other types of virtue ethics should not have such problems (2000, p.365). This is because Aristotelian virtue ethics subscribes to what she calls the "motivational self-sufficiency of character" thesis in which the motivational structure of virtue is independent of outside factors (2000, p.365). Gopal Sreenivasan argues against the situationist claim that there is no such thing as character, while acknowledging that situational factors play an important role in being virtuous. Importantly for this project, Sreenivasan argues that the situationist results would be more in favour of virtue ethics had the situationists taken "the subject's own construal of the situations" into account (2002, p.47). Christian Miller makes the same claim (2003, pp.383-384). However, Miller also argues that the same person might behave differently in two situations that are remarkably similar if "some of the features unique to one of the situations pass a recognition threshold and trigger different states in the agent's personality network which ultimately engender different act-tokens" (Miller 2003, p.384).

Miller's ideas are supported by CAPS theory, a theory I was introduced to by virtue ethicist Nancy Snow in her 2010 book *Virtue As Social Intelligence.* The proponents of CAPS theory, Walter Mischel, Yuichi Shoda, Ozlem Ayduk, and Jack C. Wright make the claim that "when situations are defined in terms of the meanings they have for agents behavioural consistency across objectively different situation-types can be found" (Snow referring to Mischel et al 2010, p.101; Shoda, Mischel, and Wright 1994, p. 674). In her book, Snow incorporates CAPS theory insights into her theory of virtue as a type of social intelligence that enables us to function well and successfully in society.

While I am indebted to Snow's work on CAPS theory as a way of lending support to the existence of character traits, I will ultimately make different use of CAPS theory in my thesis. In my thesis, I will argue that CAPS theory insights should be incorporated into the VEME method of collaborative inquiry. I make substantial use of the existing literature on collaborative inquiry (as it is practised within the Philosophy for Children movement) that aims to develop critical, creative, and caring thinking skills. The most noteworthy proponent of Philosophy for Children is Matthew Lipman who defines inquiry as "perseverance in self-corrective exploration of issues that are felt to be both important and problematic" (Lipman 1988, p.20).

With regard to VEME, I am indebted to David Carr and Jan Steutel in *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* (1999) for their general idea of what a moral education programme based on virtue ethics aims to achieve. I am also indebted to Terence H. McLaughlin and J. Mark Halstead (1999, p.138) for helping me to differentiate between character education (divorced from philosophical virtue ethics) and VEME. Carr and Steutel have also argued that virtue education is comprised of training (habituation), example (exemplification), and narrative (1999b, pp.252-253). With further assistance from Kristjansson (2002, pp.187-204) I have been able to flesh out what these three methods entail. Kristjansson, however, makes an argument for emotional (virtue) education based more on a type of Aristotelian naturalistic utilitarianism, rather than VEME based on virtue ethics.

Drawing on the existing literature, in this thesis I draw my own conclusions regarding the situationist critique of character as well as my own conclusion regarding how it influences a moral education project based on virtue ethics. While the first task has been done before, the second is new, interesting, and important from a virtue ethical perspective if we wish to be true to Aristotle's belief that ethics should have practical impact, that it should enable people to

become good. In this thesis I will also draw virtue ethics, situationism, Philosophy for Children, CAPS theory, and VEME into a cohesive and coherent whole. I think my research is distinctive in its attempt to show exactly what a moral education project based on virtue ethics aims to achieve, how it aims to achieve it and why it is valuable. That this is something important and relevant in today's world is also supported by the recent opening of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Values at the University of Birmingham, a philosophically and scientifically informed centre that aims to be a "major international hub of interdisciplinary research into character, virtue and virtue education – research with both theoretical and practical applications" (Kristjansson 2012, p.5).

Conclusion

In this thesis I will argue that the virtue-ethical concept of character can withstand the critique from situationist social psychology in such a way that the theoretical basis of VEME is not wholly undermined and an investment of effort in VEME is warranted. There is good reason to think that VEME should be used as a tool to improve interpersonal relations: VEME educates, it does not indoctrinate; it takes steps to enable students to be critical and reflective, but also caring and creative and it does so while trying to develop good character. However, I will also argue that situations have the power to overwhelm virtuous dispositions and the sensitivities required to recognize a situation calling for a virtuous response. By combining VEME's methods of habituation, exemplification, and collaborative inquiry with the situationist's suggestions (situation selection and institution development), the evidence suggests that the goal of improving interpersonal human relations can be achieved. Furthermore CAPS theory shows us that the details of situations and the meanings that they have for agents, play a significant role in virtuous character and action. Therefore, there is good reason to believe that situation selection, the development of institutions, and VEME that is sensitive to CAPS theory are vital for improving interpersonal human relations.

Chapter 1: Virtue Ethics

In this chapter I will argue that Swanton's conception of virtue is the most appropriate virtue-ethical normative view that can be employed to give VEME content. Unlike Aristotelian virtue ethics, Swanton's virtue ethics is not beset by a number of problems that are troubling for a virtue-ethical moral education project in a modern setting: eudaimonism, egoism, elitism, and anti-liberalism. Swanton's virtue ethics is an attractive replacement as she avoids the problems associated with Aristotelian virtue ethics whilst complementing and interacting with VEME in a practical sense. I will begin this chapter by providing an overview of virtue ethics. I will then introduce Aristotelian virtue ethics and the problems associated with it before moving onto Swanton's pluralistic virtue ethics, showing it to be better able to deal with the problems associated with neo-Aristotelianism and as providing a much better fit for VEME than neo-Aristotelianism (in terms of the details of the normative view).

What is virtue ethics?

Virtue ethics is one of the three major approaches in normative ethics. It can be traced back to Plato and Aristotle and even further to ancient Chinese philosophy. It emphasizes virtues or moral character over actions and is to be contrasted with the principle-based approaches, utilitarianism (which emphasizes the consequences of actions) and deontology (which emphasizes duties or rules). Utilitarianism and deontology offer principle-based decision procedures; they have a principle or two that everyone acquainted with the principles can apply in every situation in order to judge the right course of action (according to that theory) (Annas 2004, p.63). Virtue ethics does not have such a principle (or two). However, this does not mean that actions are of little or no importance to virtue ethicists. Actions are, of course, important. However, virtue ethicists argue that it is a person's character, something internal to a person, which ultimately determines the (moral) actions a person will take.

In contrast with consequentialism and deontology, virtue ethics can also be said to "[base] ethics on virtue evaluation" (Driver 1996, p.111). For example, a virtue ethicist might say that a person did not cheat on his test because he is an honest person and not that answering the questions honestly is what he morally ought to have done (although a virtue ethicist will believe that answering honestly is what he morally ought to have done).This also distinguishes virtue ethics from virtue theory, the latter being solely concerned with giving an "account of what virtues are" (Driver 1996, p.111). A virtue ethics has to do more than give an account of virtue as all ethical approaches are able to offer an account of virtue (even utilitarian and deontological approaches) (Swanton 2003, p.5). Therefore, in order for a theory to be a virtue ethics as opposed to a virtue theory it has to give an account of virtue, base the ethics on virtue evaluation, and its central concepts should be understood within a conception of virtue (Swanton 2003, p.5).

Today the dominant form of contemporary virtue ethics is neo- Aristotelianism (Hursthouse 2013). While some contemporary versions of virtue ethics cannot be characterized as neo-Aristotelian, almost all versions will show their ties to ancient Greek philosophy by their use of three concepts that are derived from it: "*arête* (excellence or virtue*) phronesis* (practical or moral wisdom) and *eudaimonia* (usually translated as happiness or flourishing)" (Hursthouse 2013).

Virtues or *arête* involve both "overt behaviour", that which occurs "on the outside", as well as that which occurs "on the inside", taking the form of motives, emotions and cognitions (Doris 2002, p.16). In this way, "virtues are not mere dispositions but intelligent dispositions characterised by distinctive patterns of emotional response, deliberation, and decision as well as by more overt behaviour" (McDowell 1978 and 1979 referred to in Doris 2002, p.17). Broadly speaking, virtue ethicists can be said to be committed to a "globalist" concept of character (Doris 2002, p.22):

(1) Character traits are reliably expressed in circumstances that may not be overly conducive to the manifestation of the character trait in question; they are consistent;
(2) Character traits are reliably expressed in similar circumstances; they are stable; and
(3) The presence of a particular character trait indicates the presence of other similar character traits (for example, honesty suggests the presence of other virtues such as loyalty and courage); they are evaluatively integrated (Doris 2002, p.22).

Virtuous character traits also involve habits, they are held over a long period of time, and they are more than skills or knowledge. For example, in order to possess the virtue of benevolence we have to know what it will mean to benefit another person in a particular situation as well as how to put this knowledge into action (Harman 1999, p.167). We also have to act from a benevolent disposition which comprises an emotional and an intellectual response. Virtuous agents should also perform these right actions in difficult circumstances; ones that are not overly conducive to performing the trait in question (Doris 1998, p.506; NE1105a8-10, NE1115a25-26).

However, Aristotle argues that no one is fully virtuous or has true moral virtue without having the intellectual virtue of *phronesis* or practical wisdom (NE1144b7-17, NE1144b30-2). Practical wisdom is all-important for the development of virtue; a person is practically wise when she has acquired the ability to think, feel, and act correctly with regard to moral problems. Practical wisdom can be roughly described as "situational appreciation - the capacity to recognise, in any particular situation, those features of it that are morally salient" and to act on this appreciation (Hursthouse 2013). It is thus not merely an intellectual virtue that allow us to deliberate well about *anything*; the person who has practical wisdom is able to "deliberate well about what is good and expedient

for himself, not in some particular respect...but about what sorts of things conduce to the good life in general" (NE1140a26-29). Importantly, a virtue ethicist will (to greater and lesser extents) assess whether he or she should engage in certain projects or actions by thinking about whether the project or action will contribute to his or her virtue and flourishing or *eudaimonia*.

Virtue ethicists consider a life lived in accordance with the virtues to be a significant part of what it means to flourish or to be *eudaimon*. Virtue ethicists argue that it is characteristically human to exercise reason and exercising the virtues involves choice and deliberation, correct feeling and well-thought-out actions. It is for this reason that virtue ethicists claim that "a human life devoted to physical pleasure or the acquisition of wealth is not *eudaimon*, but a wasted life, and also accept that they cannot produce a knock-down argument for this claim proceeding from premises that the happy hedonist would acknowledge" (Hursthouse 2013). However, exercising the virtues is not all that is required for a flourishing life. Some versions of virtue ethics consider external goods to be necessary, while others consider personal satisfaction in addition to moral meritoriousness to be required. Most versions of virtue ethics claim a link between eudaimonism and what makes a character trait a virtue, but they differ on the details. For example, an Aristotelian version of virtue ethics holds that a particular character trait is a virtue only if it contributes to "the flourishing of the possessor of the virtue" (Swanton 2003, p.77; NE11098a7-19), while on a pluralist view it is questionable whether the grounds for a particular trait being a virtue can be understood solely in terms of traditional eudaimonism (due to the restrictions it places on traits that can be virtues by, for example, ruling out some kinds of altruistic actions as candidates for virtuous actions).

Proponents of virtue ethics favour virtue ethics because it captures something important about moral decision-making and moral actions:

> "My moral decisions are mine in that I am responsible for them but in a further way as well. They reveal something about me such that I can be praised or blamed for them in a way that cannot be shifted to the theory I was following. That is so even when it is true that the theory was correct" (Annas 2004, p.65).

While this does make things more complicated for a person trying to make a moral decision, it does allow such a person to own their decisions in a way that is different from merely following a rule or principle: the decisions express character traits that such a person has cultivated or at least endorses. However, virtue ethics faces a number of objections, some of which I think can only be answered by appealing to VEME. In this project I will not be claiming that virtue ethics can stand alone divorced from VEME, I will only be arguing for its ability to function within a VEME framework. Two kinds of objections have been raised to virtue ethics: general objections to any version of virtue ethics and objections specific to the dominant Aristotelian model. I will discuss the general objections in Chapter 5 and the objections to Aristotelian virtue ethics later in this chapter.

Aristotelian virtue ethics

Any explanation of virtue ethics has to start with Aristotle. Aristotle conceives of ethics as a theory of the good life for human beings. It is something practical that we study in order to become good, to flourish as human beings, and not merely to increase our knowledge of what is good for humans (NE1103b26-29). This is because flourishing or *eudaimonia* is an activity; Aristotle argues it is virtuous activity. He also argues that we are largely responsible for whether we become virtuous and flourish. A supportive social community will make becoming a virtuous person easier, but Aristotle is committed to the idea that we should be able to be virtuous, and flourish, relatively independently of situational factors.

Aristotle argues for a tight connection between *eudaimonia* and virtue, arguing that the virtues are intrinsically valuable parts of *eudaimonia* understood as the

perfection of the distinctive form of life of human beings. In support of his claim he argues that we value things in three ways. Some things we value as means such as money, others are valued for their own sakes but also as parts of higher goods (for example, teaching a child to read is valuable for its own sake, but also as part of the higher good of intelligence or education), while the highest good is valued for its own sake (NE1094a1-16). *Eudaimonia*, understood as the perfection of the distinctive form of life of human beings, is the highest good because it is final, self-sufficient and it is the end at which all our actions aim (NE1094a1-16). Aristotle supposes that knowledge of this highest or supreme good should have great practical importance for the way in which we conduct our lives and achieve our aims (NE1094a1-16). Given its importance in our lives it is also vital to ascertain the constituent parts of *eudaimonia* (NE1094a23-30).

Aristotle argues that a specifically human life or function is an "activity of the soul which follows or implies a rational principle" (NE1098a8-9). Therefore, in order to flourish, this rational activity of the soul will have to be perfected. For humans, Aristotle argues, rationality is all important; by our rational and deliberate choices and acts we express our distinctly human nature. A good person will perform his human function well by performing it "in accordance with the appropriate excellence" (NE1109a15-16) (for example, we can say the function of a pianist is to play the well) (NE1098a11-12)). If this is so, Aristotle argues, the "human good then turns out to be an activity of the soul in accordance with...the best and most complete [virtue (or excellence)]" (over an entire lifetime) (NE1098a16-18).

As *eudaimonia* and the function of humans are so intimately connected with virtue, Aristotle's next task is to ascertain how we might define virtue. To this end he claims that a state of character is "the thing in virtue of which we stand well or badly with reference to the passions...Now neither the virtues nor the vices are

passions...for we are neither called good nor bad, nor praised nor blamed, for the simple capacity of feeling the passions" (NE1105b25-1106a8).

A virtue, being a particular type of character trait, can then be defined as

> "a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, i.e. the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it. Now it is a mean between two vices, that which depends on excess and that which depends on deficiency; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate" (NE1106b35-1107a5).

Being virtuous allows a person to actualize the human function and to begin to reach *eudaimonia*; it is characteristically human to exercise reason and to respond well to emotions by choosing that which is virtuous. The virtues also moderate and redirect innate attributes that all humans possess. For example, justice and equity moderate and redirect the innate tendency of taking more than your fair share of goods; friendship does the same for the innate desire for any social interaction; magnificence moderates a desire for wealth. It is advantageous to moderate these things. However, it is also not easy because

> "anyone can get angry – that is easy – or give or spend money; but to do this to the right person, to the right extent, at the right time, with the right motive, and in the right way, that is not for everybody nor is it easy; wherefore goodness is both rare and laudable and noble" (NE1106b36 - 1107a2).

In addition, the act that a person chooses to perform may be a good action to perform but merely choosing to perform it does not mean that the person in question is virtuous; "the agent also must be in a certain condition when he does [it]; in the first place he must have knowledge, secondly he must choose the [act], and choose [it] for [its] own [sake], and thirdly his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character" (NE1105a27-1105b3).

Therefore, for an act to count as (for example) a just act, it is not enough for us to think that something good for someone else will be a consequence of this act and thereby declare it to be a just act. It has to be accompanied by a particular virtuous disposition in the agent; the act has to be done "as the just man would do it" (NE1105b8-9). The just man chooses a just act for its own sake, he has a firm grasp of justice in his character, and he has knowledge about what is involved in the act as well as knowledge about the feasibility and suitability of engaging in such an act for a person in his particular circumstances.

While Aristotle argues that possessing each of the virtues is part of what it is to flourish, individually they are not sufficient for flourishing. Aristotle argues that a unity of the virtues is necessary for *eudaimonia*. In fact he argues that the virtues cannot exist independently of each other – they form a unity; we *cannot* have one virtue without having all of them (NE1144b32-1145a2). This position is referred to as Aristotle's unity of the virtues thesis[6]. Aristotle pre-empts the response that some people, with their particular natural endowments, are not equipped to possess all of the virtues and do in fact possess certain virtues but not others (NE 1144b34-35). His response is that although this may be true with regard to the possession of *natural virtues*, it can never be so with regard to virtues in virtue of whose possession "a man is called without qualification good" (NE1144b37-38)[7]. This is because natural virtues are unreflective states that can be harmful to the possessor who does not know how to use them properly. However, if such a

[6] The unity of the virtues is extensively discussed in the literature and is widely rejected. For example, Gottlieb, P. 1994. 'Aristotle on Dividing the Soul and Uniting the Virtues' in *Phronesis,* 39(3), p.276-290, and Badhwar, N. 1996. 'The Limited Unity of the Virtues' in *Noûs*, 30(3), pp.306-329. Swanton also argues that the virtues are not all universal; we can live the good life even if we do not possess all of the virtues as some virtues may be relative to roles such as parent, doctor, business owner or employee (Swanton 2003, p.72).

[7] Natural virtues are more like personality traits than virtues (in the sense that a person does not have to work at, or even really think about, a personality trait). For example, Mary has a tendency to be courageous and John to be compassionate. Mary finds herself being courageous in many different situations, but she gives neither these actions nor her state of mind while performing these actions much thought. John does the same with regard to compassion. However, Mary struggles to be compassionate and John to be courageous; neither John nor Mary has a natural tendency for the other's natural virtue.

person acquires the ability to reason, deliberate, choose, and feel correctly, his actions will be influenced accordingly and he will come to possess (all) virtues in the strict sense (NE1144b1-20). Aristotle calls this disposition for choice and deliberation the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom.

As I have already stated, the unity of the virtues is supposed to be achieved through the development of practical wisdom. Practical wisdom is necessary for us to be able to acquire and develop character-related virtues and to fulfill the practical tasks of ethics (NE1140b). However, Aristotle sees the relationship between practical wisdom and moral virtue as one of interdependence. He argues that; "choices will not be right without practical wisdom any more than without virtue; for the one determines the end and the other makes us do the things that lead to the end" (NE1145a4-6). Practical wisdom thus determines what we should do, and virtue provides us with the habits and dispositions to do that which virtue requires. However, while practical wisdom helps us to make particular ethical decisions; the particular circumstances of each case are important in ultimately determining the best course of action. Not without significance, an Aristotelian will assess whether he or she should engage in certain projects or actions by thinking about whether the project or action will contribute to his or her virtue and flourishing.

I think Aristotle underestimates the difficulty involved in developing something like practical wisdom that will allow agents to possess and exercise full virtue. While he does not make enough allowance for differences in temperament and ability which leads him to believe that the unity of the virtues is a completely sensible proposition, a weaker version of his claim still needs to be maintained if the project is to retain integrity. For example, we cannot consider a person who is compassionate and honest but completely unjust to be truly virtuous. However, it is reasonable to expect that people will 'specialize' in different virtues (as Swanton suggests (2003, p.72)) and will thus be more proficient in their area of

specialty than in others. For example, the lawyer may have a good idea of what justice requires and how to act justly; he will 'get it right' in more cases than in others. The social worker, however, may be more experienced with acting compassionately; she should be very knowledgeable regarding when compassion is required and when it may be offensive or unhelpful. In this way, a weaker unity of the virtues may be maintained.

Against Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics

Even though Aristotle is an important historical virtue ethicist, there are a number of reasons why we may not want to adopt Aristotelian or neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics in its entirety in a modern setting and as a foundation for a moral education project. Nevertheless, I will be retaining some ties with Aristotelian virtue ethics, specifically the claim that virtue is a state in which reason and emotion is well-ordered. That the ability to reason, feel, and act correctly with regard to issues of morality (what Aristotle calls practical wisdom) is something that needs to be developed, is also central to VEME. However, I will be departing from Aristotle on the following issues:

(1) *Eudaimonism and Egoism*. Aristotle's *eudaimonism* results in the view that a particular character trait is a virtue only if it contributes to "the flourishing of the possessor of the virtue" (Swanton 2003, p.77; NE11098a7-19). *Eudaimonism* is supposed to answer the question, "what makes *this* trait…a *virtue*?" (Swanton 2003, p.77) and the answer it suggests is that a particular trait is a virtue because it contributes to my flourishing; it benefits me in some way. However, something like very bad luck could still prevent an agent from flourishing even though she was virtuous (Swanton 2003, p.78).

Nevertheless, it is questionable whether the grounds for particular trait being a virtue can be understood solely in terms of traditional *eudaimonism* due to the restrictions it places on traits that can be virtues by, for example, ruling out some

kinds of altruistic actions as candidates for virtuous actions[8]. *Eudaimonism* suggests that I should be virtuous because it contributes to *my* flourishing – not because I should be generous, just, truthful etc. to others because that is a good way to treat other people. If the *eudaimonia* of others is considered, it is mostly as "part of the agents own [*eudaimonia*]" (Whiting 2002, p.271):

> "So the *eudaimonist* axiom is standardly interpreted[9] as claiming that an agent chooses (or ought to choose) all things for the sake of her own *eudaimonia*, where this may in some sense include the *eudaimonia* of those- like friends, loved ones, and perhaps even fellow citizens - to whom she stands in certain special relations" (Whiting 2002, p.271)[10].

Consequently, it seems, Aristotle does not place a significant emphasis on the *'other-regarding' aspect* of other-regarding virtues such as compassion, tolerance, helpfulness, kindness, loyalty, open-heartedness, consideration, environmental concern, concern for the welfare of animals (especially not the last two as his view is also anthropocentric). These sorts of 'other-regarding' virtues that are important in contemporary ethical thought are missing from Aristotle's list of virtues. This aspect of his *eudaimonism* thus also makes his virtue ethics somewhat egotistical. Swanton rejects the *eudaimonistic* thesis that all external goods and relationships are sought because they contribute to our ability to exercise the virtues and thus to living a good life (Swanton 2003, p.59). By rejecting *eudaimonism* Swanton is thus able to avoid the problems associated with

[8] For example, Mary's mother does not earn enough money to support herself and Mary's brother (Mary's father having died suddenly). Mary sends her mother enough money to cover the monthly shortfall but, consequently, has to live in a dirty, old apartment building because she cannot afford anything better. She also had to leave university prematurely so that she could earn a salary to support herself and her family but this meant she was unable to finish her degree. This situation cannot be said to contributing to her flourishing in any real way but it still seems like she acted from a state of compassion towards her family when she chose to make the commitment to help her family. It also seems like the right thing to have done in the circumstances suggesting that something like compassion should not be absent from a list of virtues. However, if her action destroyed all of her life prospects then her action should be characterized as reckless rather than virtuous (but this is not the case in the present case).

[9] Terence Irwin, Aristotle's First Principles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) chapters 16-18, especially section 212, referred to in Whiting (2002, p.271).

[10] Jennifer Whiting (2002), however, argues against the egoistic interpretation.

that position as well as those associated with the Aristotelian charge of egoism. This is also the position that I will adopt.

Attempts have been made to make *eudaimonism* more appealing and plausible. For example, Rosalind Hursthouse, a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethicist, tries to combine *eudaimonism* with "'naturalism' – the view that what makes a trait of character a virtue is its being partially constitutive of non-defectiveness in human beings" (Swanton 2003, p.90). Hursthouse explains that a human being is a good human being if he or she

> "is well fitted or endowed with respect to its (i) parts (ii) operations (iii) actions and (iv) desires and emotions. Whether it is thus well fitted or endowed is determined by whether these four aspects well serve (1) its individual survival through its natural life span, (2) the continuance of the species, (3) its characteristic freedom from pain and its characteristic enjoyments, and (4) the good functioning of its social group – in the ways characteristic of the species" (1999, p.202).

However, it is questionable whether this improves the prospects for *eudaimonism*. Hursthouse, Swanton argues, is correct to say that most virtues are grounded in "their serving the four ends of human flourishing. Some virtues however, serve ends other than human flourishing e.g., the flourishing and integrity of natural objects and systems, whether sentient, living or non-living" and other things such as admirability, worthwhile achievement and meaningfulness (Swanton 2003, p.93). Given that I will be adopting Swanton's conception of virtue as a basis for this project, the list of virtues that will form the basis of VEME will be more extensive than if we were to base VEME on Aristotle's virtue ethics or on neo-Aristotelianism.

(2) *Anti-liberalism*. Aristotle's virtue ethics is also problematic because it suggests that there is one good life for all humans; a life in which Aristotelian virtues are exercised to the highest degree (if we live in this way then we will be

living a good life). He does not, for example, think that there could be a plurality of overlapping good lives. In a liberal society we tend to think that an ethical theory should allow for a number of lives to be called *good lives* and that apart from including living virtuously (which can be somewhat relative to the agent as different people will be more 'proficient' in certain virtues than others), things like, health, friends, and family should also be sought because "they are what well-being *consists in*, not because they *promote* well-being", as is the case with Aristotle's ethics (Callan 1999, p.189; Kraut 2014). However, in this project, although I am not going to be making an argument for liberalism, I do think it is important to note that (as is consistent with liberalism) it is not unreasonable to think that there is more than one way in which we can live a good life (that is still consistent with a virtue-ethical view). Importantly, a modern moral educational project should be able to account for this idea in its aims and methods. Swanton argues that although there certainly are deep connections between exercising virtue and living a good life, the connections are not as deep as eudaimonists believe. She argues that the 'good life' has a prudential component ("personal satisfaction, thriving, and so on"), and a moral meritoriousness component (Swanton 2003, p.59). Personal satisfaction and thriving can thus combine with virtue into any number of reasonable overlapping manners to make up a number of lives that we can call good lives. By having overlapping conceptions of reasonable good lives, the anti-liberal charge that is levelled against Aristotle can be avoided.

(3) *Elitism*. Aristotle is quick to admit that we need a number of external goods to be virtuous to and engage in virtuous activity (NE1099a31-1099b8). This is sensible in the sense that abject poverty is undoubtedly a hindrance to being virtuous, but he seems to reserve certain virtues for those who are incredibly wealthy (for example, the virtue of magnificence (NE1122b26-29)). This becomes even more problematic when we consider his unity of the virtues thesis; virtue in the strict sense becomes something reserved for a small societal elite; males who

have had a good upbringing in terms of encouragement in practising virtuous habits. Aristotle is pessimistic about the possibility of somebody with a morally poor upbringing 'turning to virtue' in adulthood. This is because, Aristotle argues, the youth have to be habituated into virtue and then later (as they mature into adults) come to see virtue as worthwhile and valuable in itself (NE1114a15-22). Aristotle also sees himself as addressing and teaching only those young men who already have an interest in virtue and who want to improve themselves[11] (NE1179b10-1179b30; Burnyeat 1980, p.81). Aristotle does not seem to find this problematic or troubling; he does not consider that we might use society's resources to increase the circle of virtue or that society is responsible (and perhaps blameworthy) for the absence of virtue displayed by so many people. In this project, I will argue that Aristotle is correct to say that social position may play a role in the presence or absence of virtue but I differ from him in that I think we ought to use this knowledge to effect change in troubled communities.

Maintaining an Aristotelian position as part of VEME becomes even more problematic when considering Aristotle's belief (as expressed in *The Politics* (POL)) that children do not have any capacity to reason; children cannot be virtuous – they can only develop habits that might later mature into full virtue with proper instruction in adulthood (POL1334b20-29)[12]. Teenagers, as somewhat older people, fare somewhat better in an Aristotelian moral universe but will still require more maturity and experience to appreciate virtue and to see it as something worthwhile. This is problematic for the type of virtue-ethical moral education that I will be introducing given its emphasis on developing critical, creative, and caring thinking skills.

[11] This would exclude all sorts of communities with difficult social problems.
[12] Steutel and Spiecker (2004, p.546) also argue that Aristotle cannot be read as including cognitive activities in habituation.

Swanton's virtue ethics

Given the problems associated with Aristotelian virtue ethics, problems that are significant for VEME, a replacement is needed. Swanton's conception of virtue is the replacement that I have selected. While she does not focus on children, teenagers or moral education (and thus does not directly address Aristotle's characterization of young people), she does tell a virtue developmental story compatible with VEME that is not exclusionary of any groups of people, be they children or adults.

As I have already explained, I will be retaining some ties with Aristotelian virtue ethics, specifically the claim that virtue is a "disposition in which reason and emotion are well-ordered" (Swanton 2003, p.8; NE1105b25-1106a8, NE1106b35-1107a5). Swanton reflects the idea that reason and emotion are central to having a virtuous character when she argues that "what makes a trait a virtue is that it is a disposition to respond in an excellent (or good enough) way (through the modes of respecting, appreciating, creating, loving, promoting, and so on) to items in the fields of the virtue" (Swanton 2003, p.93).

In Swanton's virtue ethical scheme, the field of a virtue is comprised of items that an agent should respond to in order to act in accordance with the virtue; they comprise the virtue's sphere of concern. For example, the items may be things such as bodily pleasures (the area of concern of temperance), property, money, other human beings, dangerous situations (the domain of courage), abstract items such as knowledge or natural objects (which are the focus of environmental virtues) (Swanton 2003, p.20). Importantly, we can respond to the items in the field of a virtue in a number of virtuous ways, but all virtuous responses, Swanton argues, will include at least some of the following modes: universal love or boundless compassion, receptivity and appreciation (which are precursors to universal love), self-love, universal respect and self-respect, and creativity (Swanton 2003, pp.99-100, p.106, p.116). A number of integrated modes (a

plurality of modes) make up a virtuous disposition; this is called the profile of a virtue. However, different virtues will emphasize different modes according to context and the capacity of the agent (Swanton 2003, p.173). For example, as a simple disposition, benevolence merely involves promoting the good of others, but "as a virtue, it is arguable that benevolence requires the promotion of good with love in various manifestations, ranging from parental love to humane concern" (Swanton 2003, p.23). The difficulty is in trying to balance these modes so that a virtuous disposition may be displayed.

What counts as a virtuous response "must [also] be at least partly shaped by a correct conception of healthy growth and development which in part constitutes our flourishing" (Swanton 2003, p.60). Swanton prefers to understand "the rationale of virtue not primarily through the idea of the perfection of our [human] nature" as is the case in Aristotelian virtue ethics, "but through the idea of the multifaceted, pluralistically understood demands of the world[13], 'naturalized' via the Constraint on Virtue" (Swanton 2003, pp.94-95). This allows for the ultimate point of virtues to be something other than human flourishing. Indeed something might be virtuous that detracts in some way from personal flourishing. Swanton is thus able to encompass a wider range of virtues in her virtue ethics than Aristotelian virtues ethics, for example: courage, temperance, generosity, magnificence, magnanimity, pride, patience, truthfulness, wittiness, friendliness, modesty, justice, compassion, tolerance, helpfulness, kindness, fairness, fidelity to trust, loyalty, open-heartedness, consideration, collegiality, environmental concern, concern for the welfare of animals etc.

[13] The concept of the 'demands of the world' is connected to that of the field of a virtue. Whereas the field of a virtue is comprised of items that an agent should respond to in order to act in accordance with the virtue, the 'demands of the world' are the demands made on us by items in a virtue's field (Swanton 2003, p.21). Swanton states that a virtue can be thought of as "a disposition to respond well to the demands of the world" and so an agent will act virtuously when he or she responds well to items with which a virtue is concerned (Swanton 2003, p.21).

However, this comes at a price. Swanton's rejection of eudaimonism means that the justification for being virtuous that Aristotle built into his scheme is lost. Robert Guay argues that "in Aristotle's picture, the account of the virtues, the account of the human good, and the account of human nature are mutually supporting. Once any component is taken away, the question of why one should be virtuous at all finds no easy answer" (Guay 2006, p.77). However, it is important to note that Swanton is not arguing that virtue should be divorced from human flourishing; the exercise of many virtues necessarily contributes to flourishing. Swanton merely rejects the eudaimonistic thesis that it is necessary for a trait to contribute directly to agent's flourishing for it to be a virtue (Swanton 2003, p.77). Swanton wants to allow for the *possibility* of a virtue not contributing to our flourishing at all. Nevertheless, in order to complete the picture supposed by Guay, we need a background theory of human nature and an informative account of what it means to flourish as a human being; something that Aristotle does not adequately provide (Swanton 2003, p.8)[14]. On this score, science tells us that humans are social creatures and "like other social animals, our natural impulses are not solely directed towards our own pleasures and preservation, but include altruistic and cooperative ones" (Hursthouse 2013). What it means to flourish or to have a good life (which in this virtue ethical scheme has a prudential component and a moral meritoriousness component) will depend to an extent on these facts about human nature. What can be expected of humans in terms of meeting the demands of the world; what can count as having acted virtuously from a state of virtue, will be constrained by these facts about humans.

Trying to be virtuous is made more complicated by the fact that human nature is notoriously complicated as is demarcating virtues from vices. Virtues are difficult to delineate due to the complexity of situations and the nature of the virtues themselves. For example, we need to know how to distinguish between something

[14] On this score, Swanton argues, Aristotle's theory is misleading; he seems to be giving an account of human nature; "a theory of human flourishing which plays the role of justifying claims about virtue" but Aristotle in fact understands flourishing "via an account of the virtues" (Swanton 2003, p.9).

like “neurotic pride” and healthy self-confidence (the latter being a virtue and the former a vice) and thus require some kind of background theory of neurotic pride” and its place in human nature (Swanton 2003, p.10). As a background theory of human nature and to assist with the difficulties of distinguishing between virtues and vices, Swanton predominately employs Nietzsche. I am not going to draw on Nietzsche in this project as I do not wish to muddy the waters further and Swanton’s use of Nietzsche is not uncontroversial (Guay 2006, p.75). Instead my strategy will be to marry Swanton’s conception of virtue with VEME when dealing with some problems of virtue delineation whilst acknowledging that psychological and biological theories of human nature will constrain this process[15]. Swanton suggests that situationism can offer virtue ethics “a psychologically realistic account of the nature of character”, which goes some way towards meeting this challenge (2003, pp.31-32). Virtue ethics should also be able to change its conception of character according to the empirical evidence (Swanton 2003, pp.31-32). Ideally, virtue ethics and VEME should be situated within a broader theory of human nature.

Given that virtue delineation and human nature are notoriously complicated, and in order to lessen the difficulty of responding virtuously to “the demands of the world” and balancing the various modes of moral response (that Swanton argues are part of all the virtues), Swanton’s strategies regarding right action, the virtuous patterns of thought and action developed through VEME, as well as Swanton’s virtues of practice and her process of constraint integration are essential. With regard to right action, for our behaviour to be virtuous it has to hit the target of a virtue. The concept is easy to understand if the virtue’s aim is to promote the good of particular individuals because hitting that target is successfully promoting the good of those individuals (Swanton 2003, p.233). However, hitting a virtue’s target is not always this easy because a number of

[15] As Kristjansson argues, “trying to construct a serviceable moral theory without recourse to human psychology and biology must be considered as fruitless as trying to build a fish-friendly aquarium without taking notice of the biology of fish” (2002, p.90).

issues can make things more complicated. Swanton describes these complications as follows:

> "(1) There are several modes of moral response or acknowledgement appropriate to one kind of item in a virtue's field, so hitting the target of a virtue may involve several modes of moral response,
>
> (2) The target of a virtue may be internal to the agent,
>
> (3) The target of a virtue may be plural,
>
> (4) What counts as the target of a virtue may depend on context,
>
> (5) The target of a virtue may be to avoid things (Swanton 2003, pp.233-234)"[16].

Successfully hitting the target of a virtue, however, will only establish that an act is right and not that it proceeds from a virtuous character. Swanton's account of right action is based on Aristotle's distinction between a virtuous act and action from (a state of) virtue. An action is right (but not fully excellent or morally good) if it is a virtuous act (Swanton 2003, p.231). For an action to be right but also fully excellent or morally good – an action from (a state of) virtue – further requirements have to be met given that

> "virtuous acts are not done in a just or temperate way merely because they have a certain quality, but only if the agent also acts in a certain state, viz. (1) if he knows what he is doing, (2) if he chooses it, and chooses it for its own sake, and (3) if he does it from a fixed and permanent disposition" (NE1105a9-b2).

[16] In order to clarify how Swanton understands a specific virtue and its various modes, target, and field, we can consider her discussion of fidelity as a virtue (2003, p. 255). The field of fidelity is comprised of people to whom a virtuous agent is loyal as well as those whom the virtuous agent supports, in addition to causes and beliefs the virtuous agent endorses or to which the virtuous agent is loyal. Fidelity involves trust and sincerity (Swanton 2003, p.255). Therefore, depending on the circumstances of the case, the target of the virtue could be anything from keeping promises (such as keeping promises to your children) to repeatedly engaging in activities that support a cause. In a case of keeping a promise to your children in the face of competing demands on your time, various modes of moral response will have to be balanced: self-love may have to give way to parental-love tempered by self-respect, while creativity may be needed to assist with hitting the target of the virtue.

However, as Swanton asks, "how can an act be just or temperate if it does not exhibit a just or temperate state?" (Swanton 2003, p.232). It can be just or temperate *if it hits the target of those virtues.* The target of a virtue may be hit without the agent exhibiting a state of justice or temperance. The expression of fine inner states is required for action that proceeds *from a virtuous character*. This type of action "has to have an expressive component in a psychological sense" (Swanton 2003, p.127)). Another way of saying this is that in a virtuous state, an agent has practical wisdom, "right ends which are both expressed in and promoted by her actions", and correct affective or emotional states (Swanton 2003, p.8). This is most evident when we consider the meaning of practical wisdom. It is most usefully defined as "the virtue by which one deliberates well i.e. reasons well in a practical way" (Broadie 1991, p.179). What is important about practical wisdom (for the purposes of this project) is that we can roughly describe it as "situational appreciation - the capacity to recognise, in any particular situation, those features of it that are morally salient" and to act on this appreciation (Hursthouse 2013). It enables us to become proficient at recognizing patterns of circumstances that are conducive to being virtuous and to acting virtuously and/or that present opportunities for being virtuous and acting virtuously (it should also enable the agent to recognise situations that are not conducive to virtuous action). The virtuous agent is thus something like a moral expert who is "endowed with appropriate emotional sensibilities and context-sensitive practical wisdom whose deliverances are uncodifiable" (Swanton 2003, p.276).

However, how practical wisdom is to be developed is rather mysterious for the virtue ethicist. As we shall see, VEME provides a plausible solution to this problem by aiming to develop virtuous habits of thought and action and then graduates to developing critical, creative, and caring thinking skills that should enable students to engage in the complex deliberations required to act virtuously from a virtuous disposition.

However, Swanton also provides some useful suggestions regarding the development of virtuous dispositions. If virtue ethics is to function effectively as a practical theory, one that enables agents to be virtuous, dialogue will be an important part of the theory. Traditionally, virtue ethics is thought to be a monological not a dialogical ethics; the choice of a virtuous agent is considered to be that which is virtuous (Swanton 2003, p.251). However, as Swanton argues, judgement informed by the virtues is informed by practical wisdom, which in turn feeds into virtues of self-knowledge. Virtues of self-knowledge tell us that we are personally limited in perspectives, experience, and expertise and that the virtues possessed by us will not exactly match those possessed by others. Consequently, we can learn from each other (Swanton 2003, p.252). Hence a virtue ethicist could and should "accept that ethical decision-making in social contexts is and ought to be collective" (Swanton 2003, p.252). We do not have to solve moral problems alone; we can collaborate. However, we need to be able to do this in a manner that promotes the virtues. Swanton suggests we can do this by exercising what she calls the virtues of practice.

Swanton discusses three groups of "virtues of practice" that are to assist with solving moral problems. The first, virtues of focus, are designed to enable agents to get to the heart of a moral problem by isolating the real issue at stake (Swanton 2003, p.260). The second is a group of imaginative and analytic virtues "required to facilitate constraint integration" (Swanton 2003, p.261). Constraint integration involves "progressively specifying and respecifying the constraint structure of [a moral] problem" (2003, p.255). Through this process we move from a problem that seems to be unsolvable or dilemmatic to one that is open to more solutions. The third and last group is a commitment to correct information "which is an important requirement for constraint integration (Swanton 2003, p.262). In order for our decisions (reached using a process of constraint integration) to be considered excellent or virtuous, they have to satisfy normative standards: (1) The

decision reached must be overall virtuous i.e. right; (2) The integration process must be done by exercising the virtues of practice (Swanton 2003, p.257). While these virtues of practice seem to be useful considerations for making virtuous decisions and acting virtuously, a developmental story still needs to be told. I think VEME can tell such a story.

Overall I think Swanton's suggestions will benefit from collaboration with VEME. Her virtues of practice and her emphasis on dialogue suggest that we need certain specific intellectual abilities if we are to act rightly (Swanton 2003, p.251, pp. 260-262). These intellectual abilities may be developed in the course of encouraging the development of critical, creative, and caring thinking skills through the VEME method of collaborative inquiry. These abilities and dispositions can be seen to give practical wisdom additional content and may explain how it develops; they do not diminish its importance. In addition, Swanton's concepts of universal love and self-love, respect, and creativity (as dispositions that form part of a virtuous character) are things that VEME can aim to develop through the development of caring, creative and critical thinking respectively (Swanton 2003, pp.99-100, p.106, p.116).

Drawing upon Swanton's characterization of virtue (rather than a strict Aristotelian virtue ethics) as a basis for VEME has certain advantages. It provides a way of characterizing virtue that is not tied to a specific concept of eudaimonia. It also avoids the problems associated with Aristotle's version of virtue ethics: strict eudaimonism, egoism, anti-liberalism, and elitism, while still providing a way of understanding what virtues are and what they do for us in a way that is required by a virtue ethics theory.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that although Aristotle is an important historical virtue ethicist, there are a number of reasons why we may not wish to use his

virtue ethics as a foundation for VEME. I have argued that Swanton's virtue ethics is an attractive replacement as she avoids the problems associated with Aristotelian virtue ethics whilst complementing and interacting with VEME in a practical sense. Swanton's virtue ethics also indicates ways in which dialogue and the process of collaborative inquiry are central to virtue ethics if it is to be useful in practical ethics. However, there are still three other objections that can be made to virtue ethics, even virtue ethics as I have modified it here. The first is a practical concern; that having knowledge about virtues is good, but it is not very useful if we do not know how to become virtuous. The second and third objections of are of a more theoretical nature regarding (i) whether virtue ethics relies on incorrect assumptions about human psychology (as situationists argue) and (ii) whether virtue ethics is vulnerable to a group of general objections that challenge its status as an adequate normative theory. There is little point in taking up the group of general objections if we cannot work out how we might become virtuous or if virtue ethics necessarily relies on incorrect assumptions about human psychology. My discussion of VEME in the next chapter will suggest a way in which we might learn how to become virtuous and in the third chapter I will address the worry that VEME relies on incorrect assumptions about human psychology. If VEME and virtue ethics can respond adequately to the first and second objections, then the group of general objections will need to be addressed. I will return to this point in Chapter Five.

Chapter 2: Virtue-Ethical Moral Education (VEME)

Thus far, by drawing on Swanton's virtue ethics, I have started to indicate the ways in which dialogue and the process of collaborative inquiry are central to virtue ethics if it is to be useful in practical ethics. I will now show that VEME creates a structure within which dialogue and collaborative inquiry might be used to assist with becoming virtuous and solving moral problems virtuously. I will do so through a discussion of three methods that I think are central to any VEME project – habituation, exemplification and collaborative inquiry - placing most emphasis on justifying the connection between VEME and collaborative inquiry[17]. I will also deal with some objections to moral education in general before concluding that VEME not only has a plan of action in a practical sense but also that its methods are consistent with the spirit of Swanton's virtue ethics.

VEME

The type of virtue-ethical moral education that I am advocating in this thesis is "more a matter of the cultivation of those excellences of moral and other character commonly called virtues – bringing pupils to an appreciation of the worthwhileness of moral and other enterprises for their own sakes – than of training in obligation or imposition of prohibition" (Carr and Steutel 1999b, p.245). This is not to say that rules have no place in virtue ethics or VEME; they are "preparatory to a critical appreciation of moral reasons and principles" (Carr and Steutel 1999a, p.245) and will also form an important part of any actual VEME curriculum. Even though mature virtue should not be a matter of applying rules, in the early stages of learning to be virtuous, rules act as generalizations and rough guides to virtuous dispositions and actions (Sherman 1999, p.39). Nevertheless, VEME is a *systematic* attempt at ensuring that moral education "is carried out in a controlled and systematic way" rather than merely allowing children or teenagers to 'catch' for better or worse "morally-imbued attitudes,

[17] David Carr and Jan Steutel (1999b, pp.259-260) argue that virtue education is comprised of training (habituation), example (exemplification), and narrative (collaborative inquiry making use of literature and other media is the best instantiation (that I can find) of the use of narrative in moral education).

beliefs and habits" from teachers and parents (Kristjansson 2002, p.182). However, saying that VEME or any type of moral education is "controlled" or "systematic" leads to the justified worry that the real purpose of moral education is to inculcate students with undesirable doctrines that will render them unable to come to their own solutions to moral problems. On this score it is important to remember that VEME is not a form of social engineering even though it may be connected to remedying certain troubling social conditions. As I have indicated previously, the "problem" of moral education is really that of "how we might assist people to conceive and pursue worthwhile, decent and fulfilling lives with regard to character development and the improvement of interpersonal human relations" (Carr 1999, p.29). VEME aims to teach students how to think critically, creatively and caringly when it comes to moral matters. It does not give students a textbook with all of the answers in the back of the book. Importantly, it is also not VEME's aim to declare one particular way of living the one and only way to live and to crush all deviance from this life. While VEME unavoidably has to justify which lives it considers to be "worthwhile, decent and fulfilling", it will justify and explain which *lives* it considers to be this way; there isn't only one virtuous way to live. This is a function of the particular virtue ethics that I will be using as a basis for VEME.

VEME itself has not been experimentally tested. However, based on my research and existing educational projects that make use of virtues, there is reason to believe that experimental tests would be fruitful. For example, Julia Annas argues that the "language of the virtues" has been found to be "the most effective inter-cultural ethical language" (2004, p.61). The Virtues Project (www.virtuesproject.com), a project that is admittedly more or less completely divorced from ethical philosophy, uses the language of virtues to successfully resolve conflict in schools and inter-cultural settings amongst First Nation groups in western Canada and Maori people in New Zealand (Annas 2004, p.61). As I have already indicated, that experimentally testing VEME would be fruitful is

also supported by the recent opening of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Values at the University of Birmingham.

VEME Methods

As Carr and Steutel suggest, VEME should make use of three major methods - habituation and role-play, exemplification, and collaborative inquiry through stories and discussions - to achieve its educational aims (1999b, p.252-253). The aim of these methods is to develop thoughtful patterns or habits of actions and to develop those aspects of emotional life relevant to the development of character that should encourage students to consider being virtuous worthwhile. The methods also aim to develop the types of reasoning (critical, creative, and caring reasoning) that it is reasonable to believe are important for the development of character and that should stimulate the student's ability to make moral judgements, to know what actions those judgements require, and to be disposed to act in the ways those judgements require (McLaughlin and Halstead 1999, p.138).

(1) Habituation

The aim of this VEME method is to develop, through thoughtful, reflective processes of habituation and role-play, virtuous patterns of action and thought that will form the foundation of virtuous character and the interdependent intellectual virtue, practical wisdom. Aristotle argues that virtue arises through repeated action (habituation) (NE1103a32-b2). For example, to become generous we must perform generous actions. If the virtues moderate and redirect innate attributes that all humans possess, then we might make the starting point of habituation these natural attributes and tendencies. John Dewey argues that they (the natural impulse or tendencies) are the starting point of intellectual growth; there can be "no intellectual growth without some reconstruction, some remaking, of impulses and desires in the form in which they first show themselves" (Dewey 1938, p.64). However, these impulses should not be inhibited via external control (for that will only inhibit the impulse for as long as the external control is in place). Instead we

should enable children to inhibit natural impulses that might be vicious and develop those that tend towards virtue by creating situations in which children can reflect on their own actions, thoughts, and feelings and thereby form a "more comprehensive and coherent plan of activity" (Dewey 1938, p.64).

As I have indicated previously, Aristotle argues that young children cannot engage in reasoning / critical thinking skills development; they are unresponsive to reasons, they do not have the "deliberative capacities" necessary for choice and action, they cannot exercise proper judgement to control desires, and they need others to reason for them (POL1334b20-29, POL1260a34, POL1260b3-8; NE1147b5, NE1111a25-6; Sherman 1989, pp.160-161). Aristotle's picture seems to leave us with a miraculous, developed ability for practical wisdom in adulthood that has not been developed very much throughout childhood. Nancy Sherman (1999, 1989), however, argues that if we consider a range of Aristotle's texts and assume the position that is consistent with the spirit of the texts then habituation cannot merely be a mindless process of repetition; habituation should be construed as "a critical practice in which various cognitive capacities are cultivated" (Sherman 1989 referred to in Steutel and Spiecker 2004, p.547). This, however, is not a strictly Aristotelian view, as Steutel and Spiecker argue: Aristotle cannot be read as including cognitive activities in habituation (Steutel and Spiecker 2004, p.546). Nevertheless, in this thesis I favour Sherman's idea that habituation cannot be a mindless process because it does seem to explain how practical wisdom might develop. It also seems to be a more reasonable position to maintain. For example, as Curren argues, "one pictures the intellectual virtues as themselves originating in training or habituation in accordance with norms of reason, as much as in teaching, and one pictures training in the habits of virtue as also including a training in the practice of giving adequate reasons for what one does and respecting the adequate reasons that others give" (2010, p.514).

The aim of this VEME method is thus for students to develop virtuous patterns of action and thought that will form the foundation of virtuous character and the interdependent intellectual virtue, practical wisdom. As Kristjansson argues, rewarding children in class for generous behaviour is likely to induce them to continue to be generous and to begin to experience proper generosity in similar contexts (2002, p.189). However, care has to be taken to prevent students from merely demonstrating generosity in the hope of receiving a reward. Children might also be made to act out situations calling for a virtuous response or to engage in community service projects. As Kristjansson states, "being forced to act out an emotion, that is, to engage in actions associated with the relevant emotion, can lead to its internalisation" (Kristjansson 2002, p.190). However, it is important that this process is turned into a thoughtful one[18]:

> "It is vital that the teacher, as well as the parent, supplement the do's and don'ts from the very beginning with the how's and why's, and prompt children to learn to look at things from another's point of view. For although the children may still be too young to grasp the significance of the explanations, they will at least learn that arguments matter: that any injunction to feel this or that emotion or to exhibit this or that behaviour is mindless and void unless backed up by a moral rationale" (Kristjansson 2002, p.189).

Importantly, this process does not seem to be beyond the capacity of children who seem to engage in basic dialogical argumentation very regularly. Turning habituation into a thoughtful process also highlights the fact that VEME is not interested in indoctrinating students into believing an undesirable doctrine.

(2) Exemplification

Another important VEME method is the teacher as a role-model. This method is significant because a teacher is unable to avoid being a role-model for her class; be it a negative or positive one (Kristjansson 2002, p.190). Carr and Steutel note

[18] Carr and Steutel argue this is central to VEME (1999, p.253).

that this method has come under most fire for "sailing close to the winds of indoctrination" (1999, p.253). However, it is not consistent with VEME to encourage children to merely imitate their teacher. Rather, they should be inspired by their teacher and see her as "an example of how a fulfilling life can be lived and what it involves, morally and emotionally" (Kristjansson 2002, p.190).

In order to encourage this sort of reflection on the part of the students, the VEME teacher should endeavour to create a classroom environment conducive to VEME activities; one in which the virtues of justice, compassion, tolerance, helpfulness, kindness, fairness, trust, and consideration are practised by all members of the group. Importantly, the teacher should also endeavour to get to know and understand the students in her group. A student will have no interest in 'exemplifying' or even learning from a teacher who has no interest in him or her. In addition, Dewey argues that without a teacher having insight into the students "there is only an accidental chance that the material of study and the methods used in instruction will so come home to an individual that his development of mind and character is actually directed" (1938, p. 62). It is thus all-important for the success of a VEME programme that the teacher makes every effort to create an environment that is conducive to VEME.

(3) Collaborative Inquiry – Philosophy for Children

The final VEME method central to any actual VEME programme is collaborative inquiry through stories and discussion. Collaborative inquiry is concerned with developing virtue psychology beyond habituation and exemplification by attempting to instil students with the idea that being and acting virtuously is important and valuable. Collaborative inquiry makes use of stories or another appropriate stimulus (such as an activity, game or artistic activity) to build critical, creative and caring thinking skills. Stories have always been used for moral education purposes; the characters in the stories display how we can respond admirably or badly to life's troubles, challenges and triumphs. Even

though reading stories or having them read to us can have positive moral value, research shows that

> "peer discussions, led by an enthusiastic and experienced teacher can heighten pupils' awareness of moral issues. Their moral vision becomes enlarged by the generation of alternative possibilities as they listen to and reflect on a story and exchange views on how and why the characters felt and acted in this way or that. How should they have felt? How should they have acted? Through grappling with questions of that kind in the relaxed atmosphere of a 'sharing circle' or a 'community of inquiry', children's conclusions and choices, tempered by a critical evaluation of those of their peers, will hopefully strengthen their self-respect, and effect, step by step, a genuine foundation for moral and emotional excellence" (Kristjansson 2002, p.192) [19].

Philosophy for Children (P4C)[20] is one of the best and most developed programmes using collaborative inquiry in the way outlined by Kristjansson. P4C makes philosophy accessible for children and aims to give children the tools to think critically, creatively and caringly. It focuses on "doing philosophy" (rather than learning about the work of philosophers) by engaging children in a community of inquiry through the stimulus of a story in which fictional children

[19] Kristjansson, however, argues that art is perhaps the most important moral education method (Kristjansson 2002, p.194).

[20] In 1969 Matthew Lipman wrote the first philosophical novel, *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*, for use in his new philosophy for children programme. In 1974 he founded the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children and in the same year Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp co-authored the *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery* instructional manual for P4C instructors (http://www.montclair.edu/cehs/academics/centers-and-institutes/iapc/timeline/). Since then Lipman and Sharp have written prolifically on P4C. The following is a list of some of the most comprehensive books and articles on P4C: (1) Lipman, M and Sharp A M. 1978. "Some Educational Presuppositions of Philosophy for Children" in *Oxford Review of Education*, 4(1), pp.85-90; (2) Lipman, M, Sharp, A M, Oscanyon, F. 1980. *Philosophy in the Classroom*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press; (3) Lipman, M. 1988. *Philosophy Goes to School*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press; (4) Lipman, M. 1995. "Moral education higher-order thinking and philosophy for children" in *Early Child Development and Care*, 107, pp.61-70; (5) Lipman, M. 2003. *Thinking in Education* (2nd edition). New York: Cambridge University Press; (6) Lipman, M. 2010. "Education for Critical Thinking" in *Philosophy of Education: An Anthology*. Curren, R (ed.). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing; (7) Sharp, A M. 1995. "Philosophy for Children and the development of ethical values" in *Early Child Development and Care*, 107, pp.1:45-55.

engage in an inquiry about a philosophical issue relevant to their lives (Sharp 1994, p.45; Lipman 1995, p.70). In a P4C class, the fictional characters serve as "models of reasoning and feeling, of valuing and evaluating, of inventing and discovering, of judicious perception and intuitive judgment, of thoughtful conduct and imaginative thought" (Lipman 1995, p.69). Through their own dialogues the children in a P4C class emulate the "logically disciplined moves of the fictional characters" (Lipman 1995, p.69). Lipman argues that children then internalise these moves "forming a more efficient cognitive paradigm, involving more reasonable reflection and judgment" (1995, p.69). Importantly, the major characteristics and preconditions for a community of inquiry are intrinsic to philosophy. This link is more than the link between subject matter and instructional methodology; philosophy "requires conversation, dialogue and community...philosophy requires converting the classroom into a community of inquiry" (Lipman 1988, pp.41-42).

Lipman defines inquiry as "perseverance in self-corrective exploration of issues that are felt to be both important and problematic" (Lipman 1988, p.20). "Inquiry involves thinking about what follows from your own premises", enabling you to clarify your own beliefs and values and ascertain what counts as good reasons to justify them (or to realise that they cannot be justified and that they should probably be abandoned) (Lipman and Sharp 1997, p.86). Importantly, the community of inquiry does not eliminate "right and wrong answers" but instead provides a way of determining which answers provide problems with better explanations (Lipman 1988, p.26).

The immediately preceding discussion might suggest that the community of inquiry is a tool for developing critical thinking skills alone. While this is true to an extent, critical thinking skills need to be complemented by creative and caring thinking skills. As Lipman states, "any empirical instance of thinking is likely to involve aspects of all three modes...and certainly excellent thinking will be

strongly represented in all three categories" (2010, p.433). How are we to understand critical, creative and caring thinking? Lipman argues that critical thinking is thinking that: "(1) facilitates judgement because it (2) relies on criteria (3) is self-correcting, and (4) is sensitive to context" (Lipman 2010, p.428). To distinguish creative thinking from critical thinking we can note that whereas critical thinking is concerned with discovering truth, creative thinking is concerned with "creating [new] meaning: creative thinking in this sense always seems to involve…going beyond, in some fashion, what it has been, so as not to repeat itself" (Lipman 1995, p.65).

The idea here is that P4C is not trying to create a classroom of critics but rather people who, although disposed to be critical, are also able to "propose something new and better" (Lipman 1988, p.160). However, in order to have the inclination to propose something new and better we need the influence of caring thinking. This mode of thinking encompasses a number of thinking types including affective (or emotional) thinking without which "experience is so monotonous and devoid of interest that nothing seems to matter, whatever one's rationality may lead one to conclude" (Lipman 1995, p.68).

It is important to note that there are different ways in which each of these modes of thinking should be developed. Lipman states that

> "A community of reflective, deliberative inquiry, the kind most likely to foster critical thinking, generally emphasizes such values as precision and consistency. A community of creative inquiry, as best illustrated by an artist's atelier, tends to stress both technical prowess and adventurous imagination. And a community of caring inquiry, one that cultivates the appreciation of values, is likely to study how such cultivation can best be accomplished and how to live so that the values of what is worthwhile will be disclosed for all to perceive" (2003, pp.197-198).

By incorporating a community of inquiry into VEME, students will be encouraged to develop the dispositions that will make up the profiles of individual virtues, and they will be given opportunity to develop the skills needed to successfully hit the target of the virtues. Students will thus work towards developing the ability to act virtuously from a state of virtue.

However, while P4C seems like a perfect method for harnessing the power of narrative that is an important part of VEME, there is still a serious worry that P4C seems to be more concerned about the *procedures* of ethical inquiry than it is about *actual virtues*. This seems to be at odds with VEME and its focus on developing virtues. Nevertheless, I do not think P4C and VEME have to conflict; the community of inquiry can be seen as a tool for enabling students to better apply, understand and internalise the virtues in real situations. P4C aims to develop the dispositions and skills needed for putting virtuous traits into action and for acting out of a state of virtue; character traits fall out of the community of inquiry. There is value in the P4C approach as it cultivates a commitment to the procedures of ethical inquiry and thus goes some way towards cultivating thoughtful, creative, and caring children. As a result of engaging in communities of inquiry

> "students [do indeed] develop care and respect for others, tolerance of difference, and a greater capacity for self-direction. In Lipman's terms, collaborative philosophical inquiry offers schools 'a channel...that will enable them to pass between the Scylla of authoritarianism and the Charybdis of vacuous relativism'[21]...It does indeed build students' capacity to exercise judgment and responsibility in matters of morality, ethics and social justice" (Millet and Tapper 2011, p.12).

In addition, Millett and Tapper confirm that empirical studies show "a philosophical community of inquiry is an effective pedagogical approach to teaching values" (Millett and Tapper 2011, p.12). The benefits of the community

[21] This also speaks to the idea that although virtue ethics that I am adopting accommodates some liberal ideas, VEME prevents a relativist situation in which 'anything goes'.

of inquiry "arise from the manner in which [ideas] are discussed" and not necessarily from the topics discussed (Millett and Tapper 2011, p.11). They add that the distinctive contribution of the community of inquiry "is to show how values can be promoted through a particular kind of [collaborative] classroom practice (2011, p.11). Undoubtedly Millett and Tapper's research requires additional confirmation from other independent studies, but it does lend support to the idea that the community of inquiry is an effective method for teaching students how to act virtuously from a state of virtue.

To see how this might play out in an actual classroom, we can consider a P4C approach to teaching honesty. What I want to draw out is that P4C has a method to equip a child with the skills, character traits and abilities to successfully navigate through a large variety of complicated morally problematic situations in a structured and systematic way. Using the novel as the vehicle of moral education, a P4C class may approach the topic of honesty by first considering a related topic of consistency. This is what happens in *Lisa*[22] where consistency is emphasised "as a basic criterion for all reasoning" including ethical inquiry (Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyon 1980, pp.191-192). However, the children soon find that consistency is problematic. They find themselves approving of a character for telling the truth when very shortly before they had objected to him doing so. 'Were the character's actions consistent?' is the question that the children raise. This becomes a way to deal with questions of whether or not we should always be honest, under what circumstances we should be honest or dishonest, and what we have to take into account when making these decisions. By considering all the circumstances of the case, the motives of people who are asking the character for the whereabouts of another character, and the consequences that both honest and dishonest answers will bring about, by following procedures of ethical inquiry, the children in the P4C class come to the conclusion that the character's actions were justified. Not without significance,

[22] *Lisa* is a novel designed to "develop techniques of reasoning that will enable children to demonstrate and defend their moral values" (Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyon 1980, p.189).

the teacher in a P4C class has the role of helping children to see what a commitment to ethical procedures involves and if he or she "can encourage them to practise this inquiry in their everyday life [he or she] successfully achieves the main aim of the programme" (Lipman, Sharp, and Oscanyon 1980, p.192)

Critical, creative and caring thinking thus form a cohesive whole and are all needed in VEME reasoning; we need to be able to have a firm grasp of the particulars of a problem situation, be able to devise good solutions to the problems, and we also need the inclination and interest in the problem to do so. I have already indicated that I think Swanton's ideas of universal and self-love, respect and creativity as part of what it is to have a virtuous character, can be mapped onto caring, creative and critical thinking respectively. Swanton's idea of universal love as meaning something like indiscriminate benevolence needs to be tempered by self-love, and caring thinking development will go some way towards developing the ability to apply these concepts appropriately. I think the same can be said of respect (as a form of "keeping distance" (Swanton 2003, p.173) with regard to critical thinking skills. Creativity, which Swanton describes as the capacity for "constructive, ingenious and inventive solutions to problems" (Swanton 2006, p.173), can be mapped quite easily onto the development of critical and creative thinking skills.

The development of Swanton's virtues of practice is also aided by the community of inquiry. For example, the practical virtues of focus "are designed to overcome the numerous obstacles to an adequate and shared understanding of the focus of a moral problem" and the third group of practical virtues are about commitment to correct information, "an important requirement for constraint integration (Swanton 2003, p.262). The development of critical thinking skills is supposed to target issues such as these; clarity of thought and understanding, an ability to figure out what follows from specific information or arguments as well as an ability to be committed to the most reasonable explanations (not those that have,

at best, tenuous support). The second group of practical virtues (a group of imaginative and analytic virtues that assist with constraint integration) is also most suited to development through critical thinking skills development, due to its analytic feature. Its imaginative feature might be stimulated by a focus on creative and caring thinking. All importantly, collaborative inquiry also provides a structured way in which dialogue can be built into moral-decision-making (something that Swanton argues is important for virtue-ethical decision-making).

Based on the preceding discussion, there is reason to believe that habituation, exemplification, and collaborative inquiry should be used in conjunction with one another in order for VEME to be most effective. A thoughtful process of habituation should go hand-in-hand with the teacher as an appropriate role-model. Through habituation and role-play games, children will have the opportunity to practise actual moral actions while the community of inquiry should allow children to practise and develop the dispositions, knowledge and feelings necessary for successfully acting rightly from a state of virtue, thus ensuring an effective interaction between VEME and this project's virtue ethics.

Objections to moral education

Even if we decide that moral education, such as VEME, is worth trying out in a classroom setting, a number of practical objections inevitably arise. For instance objectors might claim that we cannot 'teach morality' in our schools because "there are no experts in moral behaviour and emotions" (Kristjansson 2002, pp.181-184). In response to this objection Kristjansson argues that is not clear why *moral* educators need to be "omnipotent or infallible" when we do not require the same standard for other types of teachers such as high school teachers (Kristjansson 2002, p.181). In the same way a good moral educator *could* be "a paragon of morality themselves" but they need not be (Kristjansson 2002, p.181). The ability to develop thoughtful patterns or habits of actions, and those aspects of emotional and rational life relevant to the development of character, is what is

really required of a potential VEME teacher. While this is rather demanding, it does not seem beyond the realm of possibility to instruct a potential VEME teacher in the methods required for a VEME class.

If the objection about the impossibility of moral education due to the imperfections of the educators misses the mark, then we may object to moral education on the grounds that children are not fit for moral instruction; they "are not intellectually capable of taking part in advanced moral arguments" (they are only capable of responding to unreflective habituation techniques) (Kristjansson 2002, pp.181-184). Kristjansson provides a useful example:

> "Even if complicated moral quandaries may still be beyond a child's reach, we can envisage a reasonable dialogue with a six-year-old (let alone a ten-year-old) Betty about whether she should still be so jealous of her friend Kate two weeks after only Kate's poster was chosen for display by the teacher, a dialogue which rests on argumentation rather than habituation, and seems definitely to be within the child's intellectual repertoire. Such a dialogue would be concerned with the basic questions Aristotle himself posits about the moral justification of an emotion: whether it is directed towards the right person, at the right time, and in the right amount" (Kristjansson 2002, p.175).

We can imagine many other such dialogues with children regarding fairness, (is it fair for only the student with the highest grade to get a prize? Is it fair to share your cake with only your friends and not the rest of your class?), respect and accountability to others (is it good to let your team down by misbehaving?), and care for others (is it nice to laugh at your classmate who answers incorrectly or loses a game?). At school children deal with these questions on a daily basis which demonstrates that they are capable of taking part in moral arguments that are about things relevant to their lives. VEME is thus also well within the reach of teenagers and would perhaps be more rewarding to engage in with teenagers

given their advanced use of language and their rather developed opinions about issues that are important to them.

Finally, if we accept the just-mentioned examples as demonstrating that VEME is more than likely well within the capabilities of children and teenagers, objectors may still claim that neither children nor teenagers are interested in morality; they "lack motivation to act morally" and thus will not take part willingly in a VEME class (Kristjansson 2002, pp.181-184). Here the assumption is that students will work hard at other subjects because they may get immediate benefits (such as learning to read) and long-term benefits from these subjects (mathematics might help them to do well at college or university) whereas working hard at VEME classes will have no such benefits (Kristjansson 2002, p.183)[23].

Does it seem plausible that this is why young children do their school work at all? It doesn't seem likely that even the excellent Grade 4 mathematics student will work hard because of some possible future benefit or immediate benefits derived from the particular subject matter. I think John Holt (1982, pp.25-29) is correct when he claims that this student will either work hard to please himself (he derives some sort of satisfaction from working out and finding the correct answer and will thus work hard at thinking about how to find the correct answer) or to please the teacher (who will continue to make the child do more and more examples until he gets the right answer – this child merely wants to find the right answer so that the teacher will stop asking him questions and derives no real satisfaction from working it out himself). Holt describes the former child as the "thinker" ("the student who tried to think about the meaning, the reality, of whatever it was he was working on" and the latter as the "producer" (the "student who was only interested in getting right answers, and who made more or less uncritical use of rules and formulae to get them") (Holt 1982, pp.11-12). I think

[23] This might be a more accurate description of teenagers than children. Teenagers nearing school-leaving age may be very reluctant to engage in activities that are not going to be of direct benefit to their school-leaving grades or future studies. They may thus need a lot of encouragement to take part in VEME classes.

this is a fairly accurate characterization of the way children behave in the classroom and can thus be generalized across the school curriculum. The challenge in a VEME classroom will thus be getting the students to think like "thinkers" and not like "producers" when confronted with a particular task. This is no easy task, but I think it is one faced by teachers of all subjects.

Conclusion

In this chapter I hope to have shown that VEME extends our theoretical knowledge of the virtues (that we get from virtue ethics) by showing us how we might begin to become virtuous. Barring the situationist critique of character, there is good reason for belief in the conceptual coherence of VEME. This suggests that investing in VEME as a way of improving interpersonal human relations may be experimentally fruitful. VEME's methods – habituation, exemplification and collaborative inquiry – strongly suggest that VEME educates, it does not indoctrinate; it enables students to be critical and reflective, but also caring and creative and it does so while developing good character. VEME is systematic; it attempts to create a structure within which habituation, exemplification, and collaborative inquiry can be used to develop good character and to solve moral problems virtuously. Habituation, exemplification, and collaborative inquiry should be used in conjunction with one another in order for VEME to be most effective. A thoughtful process of habituation should go hand-in-hand with the teacher as an appropriate role-model. Through habituation and role-play games, children will have the opportunity to practise actual moral actions. Through the method of exemplification, students will not merely imitate their teacher, but should be inspired by their teacher and see her as "an example of how a fulfilling life can be lived and what it involves, morally and emotionally" (Kristjansson 2002, p.190). The community of inquiry will allow children to practise and develop the dispositions, knowledge and feelings there is reason to believe are necessary for successfully acting rightly from a state of virtue, thus ensuring an effective interaction between VEME and this project's virtue ethics.

There are of course other objections to VEME that can be raised. Some are practical concerns regarding precisely how VEME could be implemented in school systems while others are more theoretical in nature regarding (i) the possibility that virtue ethics relies on incorrect assumptions about human psychology and (ii) whether virtue ethics can adequately deal with a number of general objections that need to be answered in a satisfactory manner if VEME is to depend on virtue ethics for its normative view. I cannot deal with the practical implementation issues here as that is for educators to do if they think VEME has a sufficiently sound theoretical basis to be worth investigating. However, in the next chapter I will address the concerns about the psychological assumptions of virtue ethics, and in the last chapter I will address the more general objections raised to virtue ethics as a normative theory. If I can satisfactorily answer these objections, then there will be good reason to believe that VEME has a sufficiently sound theoretical basis to be worth investigating.

Chapter 3: The Situationist Critique

In the thesis introduction I indicated that virtue-ethical moral education (VEME) rests on the possibility of a student being able to develop a rather robust, situation-independent character. Through a VEME process, a student will be given tools to develop a virtuous character that will guide her actions and that will prevent her actions from being predominantly determined by the situation within which she finds herself. Situationism undermines this possibility. It, therefore, undermines the justifiability of an investment in VEME and suggests that we should instead focus on developing robust social institutions that will constrain us. In this chapter I will address concerns about the psychological assumptions of virtue ethics, specifically the situationist critique of the virtue-ethical conception of character. In the first section I will outline the major tenets of situationism and explain the situationist critique of character. In the next section I will explain and evaluate four situationist experiments (the Dime experiments, the Good Samaritan experiments, the Milgram obedience experiments, and the Stanford Prison experiment)[24] by employing two complementary accounts of virtue psychology (dispositionalism and intellectualism) in order to show that situationists have a sophisticated conception of the virtue psychology they are challenging (Doris 1998, p.509).

Situationism and the situationist critique of virtue ethics

The most comprehensive philosophical discussions of situationism are provided by John Doris (2002) and Gilbert Harman (1999, 2000). Harman and Doris draw different conclusions from the situationist data. In brief, Harman argues that "despite appearances, there is no empirical support for the existence of character traits" (2000, p.178), whereas Doris "allows for the possibility of temporally stable, situation-particular, "local" [character] traits that are associated with important individual differences in behaviour" (Doris 2002, p.25).

[24] I have chosen to focus on these experiments because they are widely known, widely discussed in the literature by those on both sides of the debate, and there are also several versions (that are different in ways that are important for virtue ethics and VEME) of all the experiments except the Stanford Prison Experiment.

In critiquing virtue ethics and character, situationists try to use as nuanced a definition of character as possible so that they cannot be accused of caricaturing virtue ethics and character, and so that they cannot be caricatured by virtue ethicists. The situationist definition of character thus has to have room for rational-emotional dispositions; a behaviouristic definition of character is inadequate. Thus, virtuous character traits involve both "overt behaviour", as well as that which occurs "on the inside", motives, emotions, cognitions etc. (Doris 2002, p.16; McDowell 1978 and 1979 referred to in Doris 2002, pp.16-17).

As I have already indicated, a virtuous agent has to act from a virtuous disposition in addition to knowing how act in accordance with a particular virtue. The virtuous agent should also perform right actions in similar circumstances as well as in difficult circumstances; ones that are not overly conducive to performing the trait in question (Doris 1998, p.506; NE1105a8-10, NE1115a25-6). Virtue ethicists can be said to be committed to a "globalist" concept of character in the sense that character traits are consistent (they are reliably expressed in circumstances that may not be overly conducive to the manifestation of the character trait in question), stable (they are reliably expressed in similar circumstances) and "evaluatively integrated" (the presence of one character trait such as honesty, suggests the presence of other related traits such as loyalty and courage) (Doris 2002, p.22) [25].

[25] For clarity's sake, in philosophy, character traits and virtues are "widely held to involve dispositions to behaviour" (Doris 2002, p.15). Owen Flanagan argues that virtue ethicists are committed to the idea that "virtues are psychological dispositions productive of behaviour" (Doris 2002, p.174; Flanagan 1991, p.282). Within psychology, very similar definitions of personality traits abound. For example, Lawrence Pervin defines a personality trait as "a disposition to behave expressing itself in consistent patterns of functioning across a range of situations" (Doris citing Pervin 2002, p.18). Despite their similarities, character and personality traits are somewhat different. Character traits have an "evaluative dimension" that personality traits do not have or need (Doris, 2002, p. 18). Doris provides a useful example: "the honest person presumably behaves as she does because she values forthrightness, while the introvert may not value, and may in fact disvalue, retiring behaviour in social situations" (2002, p.18). Moreover, the honest person has taken time to cultivate this character trait and thus endorses it. This cannot generally be said of the introvert.

Situationists respond to globalist claims by arguing that although individuals display behavioural regularity this is because of "situational regularity" and not because of "robust dispositional structures" (Doris 2002, p.26). Therefore, they reject consistency and evaluative integration. Doris, however, allows for a weak version of stability (Doris 2002, p.25). Nevertheless, this does not help virtue ethics as the traits Doris allows for are likely to be "very fine-grained" or "local traits" as opposed to the more global traits required by virtue ethics (Doris 2002, p.25, pp.65-66). For example, Alberta, who is usually very reserved, is "reliably sociable" at office parties. We can thus attribute to her the local trait of "office party sociability" (Doris 2002, p.66). To provide another example, Tom might be generous in repeated trials of the same situation but fail to display generosity in remarkably similar situations (Doris 2002, p.25). What is important here is that the "behavioural reliability in question is highly specific: One can expect the "usual" only in the usual circumstances" (Doris 2002, p.65). Consequently, people can only be said to have "fragmented personality structures – evaluatively disintegrated associations of multiple local traits" (Doris 2002, p.25). This seems to be especially problematic for a VEME project; if we do not act virtuously because of correct upbringing and education but merely because of slight differences in situation then it does not seems as though we should invest in VEME. However, Doris does not think it is sensible to claim that people are completely at the mercy of situations; what a person will ultimately do is a "function of a complex interaction between organism and environment" (Bem and Funder 1978 referred to in Doris 2002, p.26).

Harman, making a stronger claim for situationism than Doris, argues that when people explain behaviour by focusing on what they think is a "distinctive characteristic" of the person in question, they in fact ignore "the relevant details of the agent's perceived situation"; they commit the "fundamental attribution error" (Harman 1999, p.316). Importantly, we tend to think character traits explain some of the things that other people do; for example, 'she donated money

to a worthy cause that would make good use of it because she is benevolent'. However, as Harman argues, “the fact that two people regularly behave in different ways does not establish that they have different character traits. The differences may be due to their different situations rather than differences in their characters” (1999, p.317).

If this is so virtue ethics seems rather doomed. If we do not behave well because of good character but good circumstance then we should abandon virtue ethics and VEME as we will never be able to achieve any of its aims. Based on empirical evidence, situationists claim that (1) behavioural variations across groups of people are due “more to situational differences than dispositional differences among persons”, (2) behavioural reliability that is observed can be easily disrupted by situational variation, and (3) personality structure is not typically evaluatively integrated (Doris 1998, p.507). The foregoing three points explain why situationists maintain that globalist approaches to character (such as those of virtue ethics) are empirically inadequate.

In support of situationism Harman argues that empirical studies that have been used to test whether people do in fact have 'global' character traits, have all yielded negative results (Harman 1999, p.316). Due to the fact that we can explain the appearance of character traits by appealing to details of particular situations “we must conclude that there is no empirical basis for belief in the existence of character traits” (Harman 1999, p.316). However, how do we then explain the consistencies in behaviour that we seem to observe in individual agents? Our own experience suggests that people do in fact have good or bad characters. Ross and Nisbett explain it as follows:

> “[I]n everyday experience the characteristics of actors and those of the situations they face are typically confounded - in ways that contribute to precisely the consistency that we perceive and count on in our social dealings. People often choose the situations to which they are exposed;

> and people often are chosen for situations on the basis of their manifest or presumed abilities and dispositions. Thus, clerics and criminals rarely face an identical or equivalent set of situational challenges. Rather they place themselves, and are placed by others, in situations that differ precisely in ways that induce clergy to look, act, feel, and think rather consistently like clergy and that induce criminals to look, act, feel, and think like criminals" (1991, p.19).

In order to ascertain whether Ross and Nisbett's analysis is correct, in the next section I will outline and analyze some of the existing situationist experiments in a way that is sensitive to Doris's proposed accounts of virtue psychology (dispositionalism and intellectualism*)*, accounts that accurately capture the virtue ethical conception of character.

The experiments

In order to demonstrate that situationists possess a nuanced understanding of virtue psychology, Doris proposes two accounts of virtue psychology; one a dispositionalist account and the other an intellectualist account. He argues that the former is heavily susceptible to the situationist critique while the latter runs the risk of failing to capture the practical side of ethics that is so important to virtue ethics and especially to VEME. The dispositionalist account can be understood by way of a conditional: "to attribute a virtue is to (implicitly) assert a subjunctive conditional: if a person possesses a virtue, she will exhibit virtue-relevant behaviour in a given virtue-relevant eliciting condition with some markedly above chance probability *p*" (Doris 1998, p.509). However, the conditional seems to be too demanding given the situationist research showing that most people do not behave virtuously in virtue-eliciting conditions (Doris 1998, p.509). Nevertheless, virtue ethicists can be committed to something weaker than this and thus (possibly) escape the situationist challenge. The intellectualist is more concerned that an agent is sensitive to morally important features in an environment; that she has developed "appropriate habits of moral perception" rather than that she has

developed “reliable dispositions to action” (Doris 1998, p.509). This account does seem to sidestep the situationist challenge rather well:

> “situationist experiments do show that dispositions may be "overridden" by situational factors, even surprisingly "insignificant" ones, but this is only to highlight something we knew all along - the activity of virtue is in many cases going to be very difficult. What typifies the virtuous person is a distinctive outlook, or way of seeing (and feeling about) the world, and nothing the situationist has said shows that this cannot be reliable, even if she has shown that its overt behavioural manifestations may not be” (Doris 1998, pp.509-510).

Although on the face of it this seems like an attractive option, intellectualism does seem to equate virtue with merely thinking or feeling what is virtuous whilst not being concerned (enough) about virtuous action. I think Doris is thus right to say that intellectualism can only be a complement to dispositionalism because it highlights that virtuous action must be done from a virtuous disposition. Virtue ethics then seems to be rather vulnerable to the situationist critique. Additionally and as I will demonstrate, Doris argues that even the intellectualist account is vulnerable to the situationist critique.

(1) The Dime Experiments

A much-discussed situationist experiment is the “dime experiment”[26]: when Mary finds a dime in a phone booth, upon stepping out of the booth she is much more likely to help John pick up all of his dropped papers that have fallen across her path than she would be if she had not found the dime (Doris 2002, p.30). We ordinarily think that a compassionate or considerate person will help John pick up all of his dropped papers, whereas a selfish or inconsiderate person will not. In the experiment, out of 16 people who found a dime, 14 helped and 2 did not. Out of 25 people who did not find a dime, 1 helped and 24 did not (Doris referring to Isen and Levin 1972, 2002, p.30). The experimenters suggested that the data

[26] 1972. “Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and Kindness”. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 21(3), pp.384 – 388.

supported a causal relationship between finding a dime and helping. In addition, Doris reports Isen and Levin as arguing that finding the dime influences affective states; it is a "small bit of good fortune" that "elevates mood" and "feeling good leads to helping" (Doris referring to Isen and Levin 1972, 2002, p.30). There are numerous studies demonstrating the effect of mood on behaviour such as risk taking, memory and cooperative behaviour (Doris 2002, p.30). Doris argues that the important observation is not that mood influences behaviour but "how unobtrusive the stimuli that induce determinative moods can be" (Doris 2002, p.30). Finding a coin in a phone booth is not really morally significant, or significant in the course of somebody's day, "yet it makes the difference between helping and not" (Doris 2002, p.30).

The dispositionalist conditional here appears to be too strong; finding the dime seemed to determine whether or not all but one person helped with the dropped papers; character traits or virtues did not seem to be the determining factors. However, the dispositionalist could say that those who found the dime and helped happened, coincidentally, to be of virtuous character while those who did not find the dime (and did not help) did not have virtuous characters. This, however, does not seem very plausible. As an intellectualist we might say that those who neither found the dime nor helped had some moral sensitivities that they had not quite yet figured out how to apply in practice and, therefore, they did not help pick up the papers. This is consistent with virtue ethics as virtue ethicists expect virtuous behaviour to be somewhat uncommon. However, explaining why a group of people who found a dime did in fact help is a little tricky. An intellectualist might say that the dime made no difference to whether or not the subject helped pick up the papers. However, there seems to be something wrong with this line of thought. It assumes that all those who did not find the dime (except for one) were somewhat lacking in character and those who did find the dime had robust, stable virtuous characters. This is unlikely. Given the statistics, ""he found a dime" looks like a plausible, if incomplete explanation" for helping behaviour (Doris

2002, p.31). Doris thus seems (at least provisionally) justified when drawing the conclusion that there are problems for "standards of character that are well short of heroic, and they are often found in very ordinary places like the coin return of a public phone" (Doris 2002, p.32).

However, what of the one person who did not find a dime but helped anyway? Here the virtue explanation seems to be a reasonable one to maintain; this person helped because he has a compassionate character. However, the behaviour called for in the experiment was really only "minimally decent samaritanism", not a very significant, heroic or sacrificial compassionate act (Doris 2002, p.31). However, not all virtue is or has to be heroic; virtue can be displayed in our daily, ordinary interactions with others.

Nevertheless, what is troubling about this experiment is that it is very difficult to replicate the results of the original experiment (Snow 2010, p.102). For example, Blevins and Murphy (1974) conducted a similar experiment but did not get anything like the results of the previous experiment (Snow 2010, p.102). Of 21 people who helped pick up the papers, 6 found a dime and 15 did not. Of the 29 people who did not help, 9 found a dime and 20 did not. Blevins and Murphy found no "correlation between finding a dime and helping" (Snow referring to Blevins and Murphy 1974, 2010, p.102). Their findings are opposed to those of Isen and Levin (Blevins and Murphy 1974, p.326). Isen and Levin then tried a similar experiment again and the results were quite like the original dime experiment (Snow 2010, p.102). It is thus not clear that the results of this experiment really call character traits into question. In fact, the results suggest that some people are civil to the extent of bordering on being minimally virtuous.

(2) The Good Samaritan Experiments

The Good Samaritan experiment adds force to the situationist claims (and has not been criticized for committing any methodological errors (Kristjansson 2008,

p.63)). In this experiment Princeton Theological Seminary students were on their way to give a talk when they passed a stranger, who seemed to be injured or distressed in some way, lying slumped in an alley. The experimenters concluded that the time the students thought they had before their talk was scheduled to start determined how likely they were to assist the person who seemed to be in need. With regard to details, half of the subjects of the experiments were scheduled to talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan and the other half were to speak on a different topic. The subjects were also divided into a further three groups; some were told they were late and that they should hurry along to the talk, others were told they had just enough time in order to be on time, and the last group were told they were early (Harman 1999, p.324). However, "the only one of these variables that made a difference was how much of a hurry the subjects were in" (Harman 1999, p.324). As Ross and Nisbett report, 63% of those who were not in hurry stopped to help and only 10% of those in a hurry stopped (1991, p.131). Harman reports that 45% of those in a moderate hurry stopped to help (1999, p.324). The fundamental attribution error in this case is thinking that the participants' dispositions determined their actions while "overlooking the situational factors; in this case overlooking how much of a hurry the various agents might be in" (Harman 1999, p.324).

This experiment can be interpreted in two ways corresponding with Doris's dispositionalism and intellectualism. With regard to dispositionalism the experiment indicates that the participants' perceptions of the hurry they were in overrode any dispositions they had to help somebody they perceived to be in need of assistance (Doris 1998, p.510). This indicates that "the variability of behaviour with situational manipulation suggests that dispositions to moral behaviour are not robust in the requisite sense" (Doris 1998, p.510). Although, Doris argues, this problematizes the dispositionalist account, it leaves the intellectualist account intact. Nevertheless, the situationist data can be interpreted in a way that problematizes the intellectualist account as well "by suggesting that the requisite

"sensitivity" is itself highly variable with situational variation" (Doris 1998, p.510). Darley and Batson, the Good Samaritan experimenters, think that this is the correct way to interpret the data; it is not that those who were 'in a hurry' did not help because their haste "overwhelmed helping dispositions, but because their haste dampened the awareness required to notice that someone was in need of their assistance" (Doris referring to Darley and Batson 1973, 1998, p.511). This then indicates that both the dispositionalist and intellectualist accounts may be unable to avoid the situationist challenge.

However, while in theory the intellectualist account seemed to produce results too weak for the demands of virtue ethics, when applying it to actual experiments, the result is perhaps not as damning for virtue ethics as may have been expected. Nancy Snow notes that her initial reaction to the idea that the situation dampened the awareness required to notice that somebody was in need of assistance is that the participants do not possess compassion in any robust sense as is required by virtue ethics (Snow 2010, p. 104). However, she suggests a counterexample:

> "Thinking over my lecture on the way to class, for example, I completely miss the beautiful trees and sunshine. Absorbed as I am in hunting for an item on the grocery store's shelves, a good friend must tap me on the shoulder to get my attention. Similarly, one might say, the focus on getting to their talks on time caused the seminarians to miss the plight of the "victim"…A lack of compassion is not their vice, but instead, their vice is a lack of attention or awareness or being too easily distracted. Lacking attention or awareness is different from lacking compassion. One might have the virtues, but be easily distracted or lack awareness. Lack of attention or awareness could be a general vice that affects all of the virtues, but not a limitation in any specific virtue" (Snow 2010, p.105).

Whilst it is difficult to say that such people did in fact "have the virtues", they may be in the process of developing the virtues and thus may be unable to choose the virtuous option when faced with competing demands on their time. Darley and

Batson report that some of the seminarians, appeared "aroused and anxious" after deciding not to stop to help the victim (Darley and Batson 1973, p.108). They were in a state of conflict; the students had committed to help the experimenter by giving the talk and were expected to get to the venue quickly, but they were then faced with the victim in the alley and had to decide either to help the victim and disappoint the experimenter and the audience or to carry on to the talk and hope that someone else would attend to the victim. Darley and Batson state that "this is often true of people in a hurry; they hurry because somebody depends on their being somewhere. Conflict, rather than callousness, can explain their failure to stop" (1973, p.108).

In 1978 Batson et al re-visited the idea with which Darley and Batson closed their 1973 experiment; that conflict (over whom to help) rather than callousness can explain the failure to help (a victim). Not without significance, Snow notes that this experiment is not often cited by situationists such as Harman and Doris (2010, p.106). In this experiment male undergraduate students were told that their data either was or was not important in order for a research project to be completed successfully. Half of them were then told that they were late and should hurry while the other half were told that they had quite enough time to get their data over to the research centre (Batson et al 1978, p.97). As in the Good Samaritan experiment, all of the subjects encountered a person who seemed to be in need of assistance en route to their destination. The results of the experiment indicated, as Batson et al had predicted, that "the importance of their data to the experimenter had a significant effect on whether subjects in a hurry would offer aid to the victim" (1978, p.97). 80% of those whose data was of low importance and who were in the "low hurry" category stopped to help the victim. 70% of those whose data was of low importance and who were in the "high hurry" category stopped to help the victim. However, only 50% of those whose data was of high importance and who were in the "low hurry" category stopped to help,

while only 10% of those whose data was of high importance and who were in the "high hurry" category stopped to help (Batson et al 1978, p.99).

In 1978 Batson et al did replicate almost exactly the Good Samaritan results in which all the subjects were hurrying to an important event (1978, p.99). However, "being in a hurry [does] not by itself reduce concern or compassion" (Batson et al 1978, p.100). Those in a hurry "chose whom to help"; the victim if their data was not important or the experimenter if they were told their data was important. The experiment goes a long way to confirming the hypothesis that "conflicting demands not callousness" accounts for the tendency of those in a hurry to fail to help a person clearly needing assistance (Batson et al 1978, p.100).

What new light does the 1978 experiment shed on the prospects of VEME and virtue ethics given the general situationist critique? Snow states that the idea that situations influence behaviour is without a doubt true. However, if we want to understand exactly what it is about particular situations that influence people to act differently in situations that are objectively speaking the same, we need to turn our attention to the mental states of the agents in question (Snow 2010, p.106). Batson et al end their report with the following statement: "We should direct our future inquiry inward, to an analysis of the factors an individual considers in deciding whom to help. Does one consider the consequences for the people in need, for oneself or both?" (1978, p.100). Given the possible reasons for the actions of the subjects in the Good Samaritan experiment (as demonstrated by the 1978 experiment), it is not obvious why we should accept that character traits required by virtue ethics do not exist. Those who helped could have displayed compassion; those who did not help may be uncompassionate or have "the vice of obtuseness to others"; those who noticed the victim and did not help but were anxious afterwards may have been conflicted over whom to help (Snow 2010, p.107).

(3) The Milgram Experiments

The Milgram obedience to authority experiment has been replicated many times in many different countries (Doris, 2002, p.45; Snow 2010, p.111). In the initial experiment subjects were instructed to administer shocks of increasing intensity to a 'student', who was in another room and not visible to the subject, whenever the 'student' responded incorrectly to a question (note: the 'students' were not actually harmed). The intensity of the shock was indicated by labels "slight shock" to "danger: severe shock" as well as by voltage indicators (15 to 450 volts) (Milgram 1963, p.373; Milgram 1974, p.20). The subjects were instructed to increase the intensity of the shock by 15 volts for every incorrect answer. The student was also instructed to give a predetermined number of incorrect answers in order to give the subject an opportunity to reach high shock intensities.

In the first experiment the student made no sounds of protest until the subject reached 300 volts. At this point the student pounded on the wall and stopped sending answers through to the subject (Milgram 1963, p.374). Most subjects then turned to the experimenter for guidance. The experimenter suggested waiting 5-10 seconds for an answer, then to take a lack of response as an incorrect answer and to continue increasing the shock intensity by increments of 15 for every incorrect answer (Milgram 1963, p.374). At 315 volts the student pounded on the wall again and failed to send an answer. After 315 volts the student was not heard from again nor did he give answers to the subject's questions.

During the experiment if the subject asked the experimenter for advice as to whether to continue or not, the experimenter responded with a series of "prods":

(1) "'Please continue' or 'Please go on';

(2) 'The experiment requires that you continue';

(3) 'It is absolutely essential that you continue'; and

(4) 'You have no other choice, you must go on'" (Milgram 1963, p.374).

The experimenter would always use the just-mentioned order and would only move on to prod two if prod one were unsuccessful (Milgram 1963, p.374). If a subject continued to ask to be released from the experiment after being told (1) - (4) then he would be allowed to leave.

In the initial experiment and at the command or suggestion of the experimenter, all 40 subjects went up to the 300 volt mark (Milgram 1963, p.375). Five subjects refused to go beyond 300 volts and a further four subjects went up to 315 volts and then refused to go further. Two subjects refused to continue with the experiments upon reaching 330 volts and a further 3 subjects broke off at 345, 360 and 375 volts respectively. In total 14 of the 40 subjects were "defiant" in the sense that they did not complete the experiment or administer the highest shock level (Milgram 1963, pp.374-375). However, 26 of the 40 subjects 'punished' the student up to the maximum volt intensity (450 volts). Most of these "obedient" subjects displayed signs of being extremely distressed or of operating under extreme stress yet they continued to obey (Milgram 1963, p.375).

A number of these experiments were conducted yielding more or less the same results. In the second experiment, voice protests were introduced (as opposed to mere pounding on the wall). The third experiment placed the student in the same room as the subject so that the subject could see and hear the student. In the fourth experiment the student would be shocked only if his hand were resting on a shock plate. The student refused to put his hand on the plate at 150 volts at which point the experimenter instructed the subject to force the student's hand onto the plate (Milgram 1974, p.34). In each experiment 40 subjects were studied. In experiment two 25 subjects were fully obedient (they administered shocks of 450 volts), while in experiments three and four only 16 and 12 subjects respectively were fully obedient. The number of subjects who stopped at 150 volts (note that 150 volts is still within the "strong shock" range) increased over the experiments; 5 in experiment two, 10 in experiment 3, and 16 in experiment 4 (Milgram 1974,

p.35). While the rates of obedience decrease across the four experiments, a significant portion of the subjects were still fully obedient and large numbers were still willing to administer what they knew to be strong shocks.

The experimenters did not think that they would get these results; they thought that most subjects would stop at about 150 volts (Harman 1999, p.322). People often react to the experiment by saying something to the effect of, “if I had been the subject I would probably not have administered any shocks and I definitely would not have gone past 150 volts”. As Harman states, it is difficult not to think that there is something really wrong with the people who went up to 450 volts; “it is extremely tempting to attribute the subject's performance to a character defect in the subject rather than to the details of the situation” (Harman 1999, p.322). However, given the fact that all subjects but one (across the four experiments) administered shocks in the “strong shock” range (135-180 volts), it seems difficult, like in the dime and Good Samaritan experiments, to attribute this to a character defect in everyone (Harman 1999, p.322; Milgram 1974, p.35).

Even though the rates of obedience did decrease across the experiments, this does not provide situationists with reasons to alter their view that it is *morally irrelevant situational factors* that appear to be the strongest determinants of behaviour. Consequently, Harman argues that Milgram's results are better explained by appealing to the situation:

> “First, there is 'the stepwise character of the shift from relatively unobjectionable behaviour to complicity in a pointless, cruel, and dangerous ordeal', making it difficult to find a rationale to stop at one point rather than another. Second, 'the difficulty in moving from the intention to discontinue to the actual termination of their participation', given the experimenter's refusal to accept a simple announcement that the subject is quitting. Third, as the experiment went on, 'the events that unfolded did not "make sense" or "add up" .... The subjects' task was that

> of administering severe electric shocks to a learner who was no longer attempting to learn anything....[T]here was simply no way for [subjects] to arrive at a stable "definition of the situation"" (Harman referring to Ross and Nisbett 1991, 1999, pp.322-323).

As Ross and Nisbettt argue, had the subjects been able to press a button to release themselves from the experiment, the "obedience rate would have been a fraction of what it was" (1991, p.57). That, however, would not have demonstrated the presence of a stable, robust, situation-independent character trait to act with compassion. Strength of character would have been displayed by refusing to take part in the experiment once met with all the facts or by stopping at the least severe shock level. Nevertheless Ross and Nisbett conclude that from Milgram's experiments we are reminded of the "capacity of particular, relatively subtle situational forces to overcome people's kinder dispositions" (1991, p.58). They argue that it also demonstrates how observers erroneously presume that it is a person's character that is at fault rather than the person's situation and, importantly, the person's interpretation of his or her situation (1991, p.58). Again we seem to be faced with a situation in which virtue is just not strong enough to stand up to situational factors.

This explanation of the experiment also fits with the dispositionalist account of virtue and character. Are we able to give an intellectualist account of this experiment as well? Doris states that

> "perhaps experimental pressures prevented some of [the] subjects from recognizing their situation as one where moral demands for compassion towards the victim should override their obligation to help the experimenter. In these cases, the failure apparently has more to do with a shortcoming of sensitivity than insufficiently robust dispositions to actions" (1998, p.511).

This analysis is supported by Ross and Nisbett's comment that the subjects were not able to come up with a "definition of the situation" and were thus

insufficiently sensitive to the cries of the victim. This, however, does call the experiment's methodology into question; it does not seem very telling against the dispositionalist account or the intellectualist account if the subjects in fact did not understand the situation within which they found themselves. However, if we accept the experiment as legitimate then we might say (in accordance with the intellectualist account) that the experiment dampened the subjects' awareness required to notice that the students were people to whom they should act with compassion.

Kristjansson, drawing on Sabini and Silver, argues that "the disturbance [the experiment] may cause to our conception of character will at most be 'local' not 'global' since it only reveals very specific weaknesses towards which people are prone" (2008, p.63). For example, "the tendency to yield more or less unquestioningly to the commands of articulate, domineering 'institutional experts...to follow uncritically what other apparently reasonable people around them seem to be doing" (Kristjansson 2008, p.63). Kristjansson argues that all this proves is what folk psychology and virtue ethicists have known all along; that few people can resist 'evil' actions in morally challenging situations since only a small minority of people are fully virtuous (Kristjansson 2008, p.63). For virtue ethicists this is not in fact a problem; it is exactly what they expect. "And far from pointing to the poverty of character building, the results underscore the need for sustained and intense education of that sort" (Kristjansson 2008, p.66).

Swanton also argues that "the lack of cross-situational consistency" that is found in various situationist experiments does not mean that it is impossible to develop robust traits (2003, p.30). For example, the participants in Milgram's experiments almost all seemed to think of themselves as being in a severe "virtue dilemma" (Swanton 20003, p.30). Their differing mental states whilst involved with the experiment might point to character traits such as compassion, respect for authority or benevolence (2003, p.30). Swanton admits that the propensity to

perform "beneficent acts is arguably not as robust as one might hope" but given that the subjects were almost all operating in a situation of extreme stress we may be incorrect to draw situationist conclusions based on this evidence. After all, most virtue ethicists "are not committed to the view that many actual agents are capable of resolving such dilemmas correctly when under severe stress" (Swanton 2003, p.31). However, the presence or absence of virtue in agents can be determined by the agents' emotional reactions to their resolutions of moral problems (e.g. reactions of anguish or indifference) (Swanton 2003, p.31).

The idea in the previous paragraph draws support from the results of further variations of Milgram's experiment. For example, when the experimenter was not in the room with the subject but gave instructions telephonically only 9 out of 40 subjects were fully obedient (shocked to the maximum voltage). Milgram also noted that a number of subjects gave lower shocks than required but failed to inform the experimenter, while others told the experimenter (over the phone) that they were increasing the voltage even though they were constantly giving the lowest level of shocks possible (Milgram 1977, p.100; Snow 2010, p.113). Again, as I found in the Good Samaritan and the Batson et al helping experiment, the subjects do not seem to be callous but rather conflicted. Sabini and Silver argue that in these experiments "subjects want to, are inclined to, are disposed to do the right thing, but they are inhibited" (Snow citing Sabini and Silver 2010, p.115). I agree with Kristjansson that this suggests a need for "sustained and intense [moral] education" (Kristjansson 2008, p.66).

(4) The Stanford Prison Experiment

The final experiment I will consider is the Stanford Prison Experiment. It was designed and executed by Philip Zimbardo and his colleagues. Twenty-four people evaluated as the "most normal and healthiest in every respect were randomly assigned, half to the role of prisoner and half to that of the guard" (Zimbardo 2004, p.39). A real prison situation was modelled in all details

including an initial arrest of 'the prisoners'. A number of data collection methods were used: video recordings, secret audio recordings in the prison cells, interviews and tests at specific times throughout the study, post-experiment reports, and concealed observation reports. The two week experiment was abandoned after six days because of the overly negative behaviour exhibited by the participants and by Zimbardo himself. Zimbardo claims that he really ended the experiment early not only because of the "escalating level of violence and degradation by the guards against prisoners" but because he was being made aware of the transformation that he was undergoing (he had taken on the role of Prison Superintendent whilst still being Principal Investigator). He says,

> "I began to talk, walk, and act like a rigid institutional authority figure more concerned about the security of "my prison" than the needs of the young men entrusted to my care as a psychological researcher. In a sense, I consider the extent to which I was transformed to be the most profound measure of the power of this situation" (2004, p.40).

To be more specific, Doris argues that the fact that the participants were in fact rather aware of the experiment situation's 'unreality', is testament to the power of the situation – the subjects felt 'controlled' by the situation despite there being any number of indications that their situation was not real. Doris, however, argues that this study presents "methodological difficulties" because it does not involve the "controlled manipulation of a small number of variables, as is typical in social psychology experiments", but a number of uncontrolled variables (Doris 2002, p.52). The participants were also constantly being reminded that they were not in a real prison and thus the situation was not the "functional equivalent" of a real prison. However, despite this, the participants' reactions "imply that they were taking things very seriously: psychosomatic rashes are not typical results of laboratory role playing" (Doris 2002, p.52). Five prisoners had to be released early because of "extreme emotional depression, crying, rage, and acute anxiety" (Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo 1973 referred to in Doris 2002, p.51). The guards also appeared to enjoy themselves; they were not instructed to maltreat prisoners

but they creatively set up punishments (for the prisoners) such as making the prisoners clean the toilets with their bare hands and hosing the prisoners with fire extinguishers (Doris 2002, p.51).

We can consider how a dispositionalist and an intellectualist might explain this experiment in order to get clearer on its implications for character. With regard to the former we can say that the difficult, confusing situation overwhelmed the subjects' dispositions to act compassionately. In terms of the latter, the prison situation dampened the subjects' sensitivity to the 'suffering prisoner'; the situation made the subjects unlikely to seriously consider the suffering of the prisoners as something that should not take place but rather felt that maintaining a prison was more important. It is important to recall that the test subjects were all chosen because of their appearance of being most normal and healthy in all respects. This is also clear from a subject's self-identifications prior to the start of the experiment: "As I am a pacifist and non-aggressive individual, I cannot see a time when I might maltreat other living things" (Doris quoting a subject 2002, p.51). The same subject, on day five of the experiment, wrote the following in his diary:

> "This new prisoner, 416, refuses to eat. That is a violation of Rule Two: "Prisoners must eat at mealtimes," and we are not going to have any of that kind of shit...Obviously we have a troublemaker on our hands. If that's the way he wants it, that's the way he gets it. We throw him into the Hole ordering him to hold greasy sausages in each hand. After an hour, he still refuses...I decide to force feed him, but he won't eat. I let the food slide down his face. I don't believe it is me doing it. I just hate him more for not eating (than I hate myself for doing it)" (Doris 2002, p.51).

Although self-identifications should probably be taken with a grain of salt, it does not seem unreasonable to say that the situation overwhelmed this subject's pacifist, minimally compassionate dispositions. As is evident, the dispositionalist conditional (if a person possesses a virtue, she will exhibit virtue-relevant behaviour in a wide variety of circumstances) has once again been shown to be

too strong; “trait attribution does not ground confident predictions of particular behaviours” (Doris 1998, p.509) and is thus (more or less) empirically inadequate. This is troublesome for virtue ethics and VEME. However, adopting intellectualism is also troublesome for virtue ethics and VEME; we can explain the experiment in much the same way as the Milgram experiment – the experiment situation's pressures did not allow the subjects (those who were the prison warders) to recognise the situation as one in which the 'prisoners' deserved to be shown compassion or 'non-aggressive' behaviour.

The Stanford Prison experiment is different from the previous experiments in that it cannot be explained in terms of the conflict going on within a subject with regard to his or her actions. The ‘prison guards’ were (at the times they were acting) deeply committed to the actions they chose and regarded them as justified. However, as Doris highlights, afterwards, some of the guards expressed surprise, dismay and disgust at what they had done; reacting to “themselves much as observers may react to them – with alarm and disgust” (Doris 2002, p.53). It is not clear to me that the results of this experiment do very much damage to the prospects of virtue ethics and VEME. It is clear that the situation affected these subjects significantly and ‘manipulated’ them into behaving atrociously. Snow, however, states that “we know from history that total situations can overwhelm individual dispositions and cause persons to treat their fellows in degrading and inhumane ways” – the Stanford Prison experiment is not needed to tell us that (Snow 2010, p.110). The experiment does not tell us how and why the subjects were affected so negatively (Snow 2010, p.110). This is important for the prospects of virtue ethics and VEME. Snow refers to a body of research conducted by Albert Bandura in which he studied “the mechanisms of construal that enable perpetrators to view victims as less than fully human, or see their own actions as in the service of a just cause, or shunt responsibility for what they do onto others” (Snow referring to Bandura 2004, 2010, p.111). This again points to

the need to understand how subjects understand and interpret the situations within which they find themselves.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that situationists can make a compelling case for the non-existence of character traits and thus of virtuous dispositions. However, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, the data can be interpreted somewhat differently from how it is interpreted by the situationists. Nevertheless, the overall claim that situations influence behaviour in a way that is problematic for virtue ethics is something that should be accounted for by virtue ethics and VEME if it is to be psychologically realistic. For example, the dime experiment, despite the problems associated with it, draws the attention of virtue ethicists to the effects of mood on behaviour. Given that negative moods undoubtedly dampen dispositions towards compassionate acts and our inclinations to act on such dispositions, VEME should take this into account in its programmes in the form of making students aware of the effects of mood on themselves. While the Good Samaritan experiment draws our attention to the idea that dispositions to help somebody in need may be overridden by something that seems morally insignificant like being in a hurry and that hurrying may dampen the sensitivities required to notice the situation as one calling for a virtuous response, what is really interesting about the experiment is the conflict (over whom to help) experienced by the subjects. This in itself is not damning for virtue ethics or VEME. As Batson et al argue, we need to understand the factors that subjects consider when deciding whom to help and the reasons they use to justify failing to help. Perhaps some of these reasons are irrational, others are rational and still others may take the form of an unhealthy emotional response. VEME, with its emphasis on developing critical, creative and caring thinking, is well situated for dealing with such problems. It is also well situated for dealing with a problem that the Milgram and Stanford experiments highlight; the idea that total situations overwhelm people; that "people act like Romans when in Rome...and follow uncritically what other apparently reasonably

people around them seem to be doing" (Kristjansson 2008, p.63). This problem seems to be something that VEME can deal with by focusing on developing critical, creative and caring thinking with an understanding of how situations overwhelm dispositions and the sensitivities required to recognise a situation calling for virtue; we need to understand how subjects understand and interpret the situations within which they find themselves.

Chapter 4: The Way Forward

In this chapter I will show that the situationist data is not damning for virtue ethics. I will also make a positive case for the value of VEME as a tool for improving interpersonal human relations. I will proceed by showing that situationist research demonstrates that *some* people are virtuous, and that these numbers can be increased by defining situations in terms of the meanings they have for agents (as is demonstrated by CAPS theory) and then further by a process of moral education (VEME). Importantly, a focus on situations and social institutions should go hand in hand with VEME (that is sensitive to CAPS theory) because there is reason to believe that both are needed if we are to improve interpersonal human relations.

The dismal results of the situationist experiments suggest that most people do not possess the robust virtuous character traits required by virtue ethics. However, this is what virtue ethicists expect; that few people can resist 'evil' actions in morally challenging situations since only a small minority of people are fully virtuous (Kristjansson 2008, p.63). Despite the virtue ethicist's expectations, the situationist experiments in fact suggest that 20-30% of people (quite a considerable portion of the population) possess "robust character traits" (Kristjansson 2008, p.72). Moreover, an alternate theory of personality traits, CAPS theory, proposed by Walter Mischel, Yuichi Shoda, Ozlem Ayduk and Jack C. Wright, provides grounds for answering situationist objections to character traits as they are understood by personality theorists and virtue ethicists. CAPS theory and how it can answer situationist objections to character traits will be the topic of the next section.

Cognitive Affective Personality System (CAPS)

In CAPS theory personality traits or dispositions are "defined by a characteristic cognitive-affective processing structure that underlies, and generates, distinctive processing dynamics" (Mischel and Shoda 1995, p.257). A disposition's

processing structure is comprised of an organisation of interrelated cognitions, affects, and behavioural strategies that together guide and constrain each other's activations. *Processing dynamics* are comprised of the patterns and sequences by which the cognitions, affects and behavioural strategies are activated when they come into contact with relevant features of situations (for example, particular interpersonal interactions that have certain psychological features for the individual in question) (Mischel and Shoda 1995, p.257). In CAPS theory personality is thus a "dynamic system, an organized network of interconnected cognitions and affects ["beliefs, desires, feelings, goals, expectations, values, and self-regulatory plans" (Snow 2010, p.11)] that are activated in response to particular situations in stable patterns that characterize the individual" (Mischel and Ayduk 2002, p.114).

An important feature of CAPS theory is that the personality system "interacts with relevant psychological features of situations" that generate an individual's distinctive pattern of cognitions, affects and actions (i.e. his personality) (Mischel and Shoda 1995, p.257). An individual's perception of and interpretation of the objective features of situations is a central feature of this theory, and Shoda, Mischel, and Wright argue that recognizing that objective features of situations have different meanings for different people is vital for a proper understanding of personality and character (Snow 2010, p.13). This approach is to be contrasted with the approach taken in the situationist experiments. In those experiments an agent's perception of her own situation is not considered in any real way; the situations are defined "in terms of their objective attributes" (Snow 2010, p.13). In the CAPS approach, however, situations are conceptualised "in terms of their psychologically "active" ingredients or features" (Shoda, Mischel, and Wright 1994, p. 685). When situations are conceptualised in this way, and not in the way they were conceptualised in the situationist experiments, the prospects for personality and character are greatly improved. Rather than finding that behaviour cannot be explained by appealing to differences in character or personality, the

CAPS theory experimenters found that individuals are characterised by differing "stable, *if...then*..., situation-behaviour profiles" which are indicative of real differences in personality (Snow 2010, p.22).

In order to test their theory, Mischel and his colleagues conducted empirical experiments to test two hypotheses[27]. The first was that subjects would exhibit stable "*if...then*" situation-behaviour profiles indicative of significant personality differences (Snow 2010, p.22; Shoda, Mischel, and Wright 1994, p.677-678). For example, if a child is punished by an adult he or she will consistently react with verbal aggression across a number of different objective situations whereas a different child will consistently respond to the same punishment with compliance (Snow 2010, p.22). If the first child is threatened, teased or provoked by a peer he will respond aggressively but with physical aggression and not the verbal aggression with which he reacted to the adult's punishment. The second child will consistently react to the threats, provocation and teasing of a peer with timidity (Snow 2010, p.22). We can then say that "if Jill [the second child] perceives she is being threatened, she will typically be timid," and if Jack [the first child] perceives he is being threatened, he will typically be aggressive" (Snow 2010, p.21). The agent's different reactions are a result of the "psychologically salient ingredient" of the interpersonal situations, (namely "being punished by an adult"

[27] The hypotheses were tested at a children's summer camp by differentiating between objective situations in which the children were placed (such as woodworking or camp meetings) and five interpersonal situations:

> (1) positive contact between peers; (2) teasing, provocation, or threatening between peers; (3) praising by adults; (4) warning by adults; and (5) punishing by adults (Snow 2010, p.21; Shoda, Mischel, and Wright 1994, p.677).

These interpersonal situations occurred during the objective situations and were chosen for the study because they were found (based on interviews) to be important for the children who were attending the camp. The experimenters recorded the frequency of five types of behaviour displayed during each of the five interpersonal situations:

> (1) verbal aggression (teased, provoked, or threatened); (2) physical aggression (hit, pushed, physically harmed); (3) whined or displayed babyish behaviour; (4) complied, or gave in; and (5) talked prosocially (Snow 2010, p. 22; Shoda, Mischel, and Wright 1994, p.677).

Each interpersonal situation included two "psychologically salient features; whether the interpersonal situation was initiated by a peer of the subject child or by an adult counsellor, and whether the interaction was valenced positive or negative" (Snow 2010, p. 22; Shoda, Mischel, and Wright 1994, p.677).

and “”being teased, provoked, or threatened by a peer”) and not merely the situations’ objective features (Snow 2010, p.22). The first child can then be said to have a somewhat aggressive personality whereas the second child is rather compliant and timid. The experimenters found that their data supported their hypothesis. For example, one of the children demonstrated consistent aggressive behaviour across different interpersonal situations: “He or she exhibited low verbal aggression when teased by a peer, higher verbal aggression when warned by an adult, and very high verbal aggression when punished by an adult” (Snow 2010, p.23; Shoda, Mischel and Wright 1994, p.678). The researchers concluded that these profiles were indicative of real personality differences in the children and were not merely “measurement errors to be aggregated away” (Snow 2010, p.23; Shoda, Mischel and Wright 1994, p.682).

With support for differences in personality under their belts, the experimenters next investigated whether behavioural consistency across situations is a function of the similar meanings that different objective situations have for subjects (Snow 2010, p.23; Shoda, Mischel and Wright 1994, p.681). The idea is that an individual will display consistent behaviour across objective situations to the extent that the situations have similar meanings for such an individual; if an individual ascribes a similar meaning to two different objective situations, his or her behaviour will be consistent. However, if the agent ascribes different meanings to two seemingly similar situations, his or her behaviour will be inconsistent across these two situations. For example, when a child is teased by a peer he will respond with verbal aggression across a range of objective situations such as during woodworking class or during a camp meeting. However, if the same child is teased by an older child during woodworking class or during a camp meeting he will respond differently from how he responded when teased by a peer because the situations have different meanings for the child. It is then strongly suggested that consistency in behaviour is “a function of the perceived meaning of situations” (Snow 2010, p.24). The data showed that “the likelihood of [a specific]

verbally aggressive behaviour occurring in response to the same type of interpersonal situation across different types of objective situations was higher than the likelihood of its occurrence across different types of interpersonal situations" (Snow 2010, p.24; Shoda, Mischel and Wright 1994, p.681-682). The researchers supported this claim further by demonstrating that "as the number of shared psychological features of interpersonal situations decreased, the consistency of individual differences in behaviour also decreased" Snow 2010, p.24; Shoda, Mischel, and Wright 1994, pp.681-682)[28].

The results of these experiments seem like a victory for virtue ethics and character over situationism. The different way of approaching, examining and evaluating situations that was employed in the situationist experiments seems to be a major reason for the poor results for character and virtue found in those experiments. That the CAPS approach is a better one is, I think, evident from the idea that individuals are hardly ever engaged in one task alone:

> "Individuals are not just fishing or doing athletics: They are being provoked, teased, threatened, warned, praised, sought out, or shunned. These encounters and events, embedded in diverse nominal situations, contain psychological features—or active ingredients— that interact with the individual's unique configuration of social-cognitive person variables to generate a distinctive behavioural signature. To the extent that such features are found widely in various nominal situations and settings, the stable configuration of if...then..., relationships will constitute a coherent pattern that "stays" with a person across diverse nominal situations and settings" (Shoda, Mischel, and Wright 1994, p.685).

To the extent that we are trying to evaluate the presence or absence of character traits, it thus seems reasonable to take the agent's rich understanding of a situation

[28] According to Sreenivasan, Charles Lord has also found that "an individual's cross-situational consistency in conscientiousness was significantly higher when the pair of situations (behavioural measures of conscientiousness) in question was regarded as similar by the individual himself or herself" (Sreenivasan 2002, p.65).

into account as well as the situation's place in the agent's larger understanding of their experiences and their life.

If we focus on this idea that much of how we understand situations is based on some personality variables, our cognitive and emotional construal of the situation as well as our experience, the situationist experiments can perhaps be seen in a different light. For example, if I am temperamentally disposed to be diffident or confident this will influence my understanding of situations and my reactions to them (Snow 2010, p.19). This also reinforces my dispositions. Seeing a person in need of assistance may activate a desire to help them but it may also prevent or constrain the activation of a belief that helping is appropriate in the circumstances. For example, "my belief that I should help might activate the belief that the other's pride would be wounded by my offer. Other things being equal, this latter belief would typically activate my desire not to cause offense and inhibit or constrain the formulation of plans to help" (Snow 2010, p.20). The conflict over whom to help expressed by the participants in the Good Samaritan experiments (as well as the widespread failure to help the person who seemed to be in need of assistance), can be similarly explained. In this way CAPS theory allows for an alternative interpretation of the situationist experiments that greatly improves the prospects of virtue ethics, virtuous character traits and VEME.

However, CAPS traits are rather like personality traits and they are not necessarily virtues. Moreover, Mischel et al tested for traits such as aggression and compliance in their experiments, and not virtuous traits such as honesty or compassion. However, Snow reasonably suggests that this is not problematic; there is no theoretical or empirical reason why Mischel et al's theory could not be tested with traits that are more relevant to virtue ethics (Snow 2010, p.28). Nevertheless, even without conducting such empirical tests, it seems plausible to think of virtues as a subset of CAPS traits (as Snow does) due to the similarities between virtues (as they are conceived of in virtue ethics) and CAPS traits. CAPS

traits are "activated in response to agents' subjective construals of the objective features of situations, are temporally stable, and have been manifested in cross-situationally consistent behaviour" (Snow 2010, p.31). Virtues can be understood in a similar way in the sense that virtues and CAPS traits both are comprised of an agent's thoughts, emotions, perceptions and "other features of their mental states," and both virtues and CAPS traits are also displayed in "behaviour that occurs across objectively different situation-types" (Snow 2010, pp.13-14). It also seems to be consistent with a virtue ethical understanding of virtuous traits to say that they are like CAPS traits in the sense that they are rather stable organizations of thoughts, emotions, motivations, goals, desires etc. that are "standing "on call" and ready to be activated in response to appropriate stimuli" (Snow 2010, p.31).

However, while it thus does seem plausible to think of virtues as a subset of CAPS traits, there is still a lingering concern: CAPS traits are more like personality traits than virtues in the sense that they tend to reflect dispositions such as introversion, timidity, compliance or aggression that are, in a sense, 'natural' dispositions that a person has neither taken time to cultivate nor necessarily endorses. Virtues on the other hand have an "evaluative dimension" in the sense that the virtuous agent will take time to cultivate a particular virtue and thus endorses it in a way that is not true of basic personality traits and CAPS traits (Doris 2002, p.18). Nevertheless, CAPS traits that a person has taken time to develop and that he or she therefore values and endorses, acquire an evaluative dimension that make them reasonably like virtues in ways that matter for this project.

However, even if we accept that there are good reasons to think of virtues as a subset of CAPS traits, Doris argues that CAPS traits are more like local traits than global traits and Miller raises the same concern; they are not the global traits required by virtue ethics (Miller 2003, p.384). Snow contends that Doris is incorrect; CAPS traits are not like local traits (Snow 2003, p.28). We can ascribe a

local trait to a person "on the basis of narrow behavioural regularities that are keyed to the objective features of situations" (Snow 2003, p.28). For example, we can ascribe local traits of the following natures to the relevant agents; ""office-party-sociability" or "answer-key-honesty"" (Snow 2003, p.29). CAPS traits, however, are different. We ascribe a CAPS trait to a person on the basis of "the psychologically salient features of a situation, such as whether a subject perceives a situation as irritating or threatening" (Snow 2010, p.29). CAPS traits manifest across objectively different situations while local traits are narrowly relative to objective situations (Snow 2010, p.29). Nevertheless, some CAPS traits could be local such as Sally's "local trait of docility-toward-her-father that she does not generalize to situations of demeaning treatment involving strangers because she does not interpret their behaviour in the same way as she construes her father's" (Snow 2010, p.29).

Local trait ascriptions do not look for connections between individual actions or for the underlying reasons for acting; they are like isolated snapshots. CAPS traits, however, reveal these connections and point to real personality differences between people by showing us how an individual will react to situations that he or she perceives as threatening, welcoming, irritating etc. They also show us that these responses will be rather consistent across situations that have the same meaning for the individual. Local traits and CAPS traits are concerned with different things. However, there is still the worry that CAPS traits are not global enough for virtue ethics. Two people may behave differently in the same situation because of the different ways in which they might construe the situation (Miller 2003, pp.383-384). However, the same person might behave differently in two situations that are remarkably similar if "some of the features unique to one of the situations pass a recognition threshold and trigger different states in the agent's personality network which ultimately engender different act-tokens" (Miller 2003, p.384). For example, in two similar situations that call for a compassionate response, a person may only respond compassionately to one of them because

only one of them passes her activation threshold for compassion. An individual may also consistently behave in this way. However, while such an individual's responses may be consistent, they may be consistently bad, neutral or incredibly sensitive to situational variation.

Nevertheless, Miller contends that we might use a type of moral education to habituate an agent "in such a way that different kinds of situations can meet the activation threshold for the same set of plans and strategies for behaviour regulations" (Miller 2003, p.384). Moral education should prevent morally irrelevant situational variation from making a significant difference to an agent's inclination towards virtuous action as well as his or her ability to act on such inclination. It should also allow a large number of situations to meet the "activation threshold" for virtuous action (Miller 2003, p.384). As Miller states, this works the other way around too; after a process of habituation an agent should not be influenced by a negative situation (occurring prior to encountering a potential helping situation) to fail to render appropriate assistance in a potential helping situation (Miller 2003, p.385). Importantly, this sort of habituation seems to be possible. Miller refers to Mischel and Shoda who argue that with different forms of habituation "usually after repeated attempts and over some time, new ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving may become activated in relation to particular features of situations so that the cognitive-affective personality system and its activation pathways itself may change in some degree" (Mischel and Shoda 1995 cited in Miller 2003, p.385). Mischel and Shoda also contend that CAPS theory "suggests ways in which individuals may be able to facilitate goal-directed change" (2008, p.221). If agents understand how they process information, they may be able to anticipate events and conditions "that will activate certain cognitions and affects in them" (2008, p.221). This knowledge may assist agents to recognise "some of the key internal or external stimuli that activate or deactivate their problematic emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dynamics, and to modify them if they prove to be maladaptive or dysfunctional"

(Mischel and Shoda 2008, p.221). By reconstructing the situation, agents may make an effort to change their own thoughts and feelings with regard to the situation (Mischel and Shoda, 2008, p.221). Agents "thus are not merely passive victims of the situations or stimuli that are imposed on them" (Mischel and Shoda 2008, p.221).

Mischel et al's view thus allows an escape from both "crude situationism and naive trait dispositionalism" (Miller 2003, p.384). There is some evidence to suggest that those who did not act compassionately in the situationist experiments had not had a proper moral education that would have enabled them to respond to the situation in the most morally appropriate way (Miller 2003, p.385). From the discussion of CAPS traits it is even more apparent that the details of situations play a significant role in virtuous character and action. When we look at situations from the perspective of the agent, the evidence suggests that situational details have a role to play in right action and being virtuous while not eliminating the need for and the value of moral education. While Miller refers to the moral education involving CAPS theory as habituation, it seems to need to go beyond simple habituation to VEME and the development of critical, caring, and creative thinking skills. Therefore, drawing on the insights provided by Mischel and Ayduk (2008, p.221), VEME should try to be sensitive to CAPS theory in the course of collaborative inquiry by:

(1) teaching students to understand how they process information, thereby providing them with tools to anticipate and recognise the conditions that activate or deactivate certain thoughts and feelings in them;

(2) teaching students how to modify dysfunctional or vicious emotional, cognitive and behavioural dynamics; and

(3) teaching students that even though small situational variations are powerfully influential, they are not passive victims of situations: they can "select, structure, reinterpret or cognitively and emotional transform situations" (Mischel and Ayduk 2008, p.221).

Situation selection and institution development

Based on the discussion in the preceding section of the chapter, it is evident that improving "interpersonal human relations" is a very complicated process (Carr 1999, p.29). However, if we invest in VEME that is sensitive to CAPS theory there is reason to believe that we can go some way towards improving such relations. While going some way towards improving "interpersonal human relations" (Carr 1999, p.29) would be a significant achievement, if we combine the situationist suggestions (situation selection and institution development) with VEME that is sensitive to CAPS theory, there is reason to believe that human relations can be further improved. Explaining what it would mean to focus on situation selection and institution development, as well as the consequences of doing so, will be the topic of this section.

Situationists suggest that "if we want to improve human welfare we may do better to put less emphasis on moral education and on building character and more emphasis on trying to arrange social institutions so that human beings are not placed in situations in which they will act badly" (Harman 2005, p.14). While this is of course not the position I am arguing for in this thesis, given that situations affect us in such subtle ways, I think it is still important to figure out (1) the consequences of focusing our efforts predominantly on social institution development and situation selection, and (2) how might we go about arranging social institutions and situations so that people are not "placed in situations in which they will act badly" (Harman 2005, p.14).

As a starting point, we might invest in cleaning up neighbourhoods, creating more green spaces in cities, improving access to health care services, and improving other social services such as child care support and transport services. The idea seems to be that this will encourage virtuous behaviour such as "minimally decent samaritanism" (Doris 2002, p.31), friendliness, generosity, benevolence and perhaps we can include peaceful (non-violent) behaviour on the list. This seems

sensible but even if we do our best to create situations that are conducive to virtue and we thus behave in ways that are virtuous, we may lose something important. We lose the ability to respond well to situations when these institutions dissolve or when we find ourselves in bad situations. When a loved one dies, when we are facing a terrible illness, when we experience professional disappointment, "when our mortgage is foreclosed in a housing crisis", when a natural disaster strikes or when "a stock market plunge wipes us out", "we need the personal wherewithal to pull through despite the demise of the social supports that once sustained us" (Snow 2010, p. 7). This is why we have to move beyond a mere focus on situation selection and institution development so that we are not victims of the situations in which we find ourselves. VEME aims to provide us with the character traits needed to respond virtuously to situations while acknowledging that situations affect us in very subtle ways and by providing us with the tools to deal with subtle situational factors.

Another reason for claiming that situation selection alone is insufficient is that it is unclear how situation selection or institution development will assist with discouraging things like racism, sexism, or xenophobia and with encouraging tolerance and acceptance of reasonable differences in others. With regard to toleration, Harman argues that the more we understand someone else's situation and how it contributes to his or her actions, the more we will develop "a greater tolerance and understanding of others" (Harman 2000, p.177). This makes sense when thinking about examples that are similar to Harman's example: "a person with poor vision may fail to recognize an acquaintance who then attributes this to coldness in that person" (2000, p.177). However, I am not sure this follows so easily when we think of racism, sexism, homophobia or xenophobia. Firstly, a sexist person may not think there is anything wrong with holding such beliefs and acting on them, and secondly, they thus will see no reason to situation select in order to avoid situations in which their negative beliefs will be displayed, nor will they see any reason to create institutions that aim to address issues of sexism. I'm

also not convinced that social institution development will assist with this problem unless it is an institution that rewards non-sexist behaviour. However, while this may be somewhat effective, it is also susceptible to the same problem I mentioned in the previous paragraph; rather than cultivating a virtuous disposition that is sensitive to the effects of situational variation, it has just made such an agent dependent on a social support that may collapse at any moment leaving this agent as they were before the social institution was established. More is needed. As I have already indicated, an acknowledgment that situations affect us in very subtle ways should be built into VEME. This should provide us with the tools to deal with such situations and their subtle situational forces. A process of VEME should also encourage an agent to select situations most conducive to virtue (or at least ones that will lead to neither virtue nor vice, when such a choice is appropriate). However, when this is not possible or when an agent finds herself operating from within a corrupt institution, training in VEME should function as a safeguard against behaviour that is not virtuous.

This is not to say that we do not need robust social institutions that support communities and ensure their development and prosperity. This is vital. However, as people determine the shape of institutions, improving institutions requires people who wish to improve them and who are committed to maintaining them. We should turn to VEME for help with this task. If more people are exposed to a system of VEME they may have less desire to create 'bad' institutions and regimes and/or to place others in them. They should also feel more inclined to establish and maintain institutions aimed at uplifting communities socially, morally, economically and through access to quality education.

That society plays a role in virtue is an important point. As I have already mentioned, Aristotle is not interested in reform and, therefore, even though he thinks our place in society plays a role in who can be virtuous, he does not go far enough; he does not consider that we might use society's resources to increase the

circle of virtue nor does he consider that society may be responsible (and perhaps blameworthy) for the absence of virtue displayed by so many people. Zimbardo argues for a similar point regarding societal responsibility when discussing what he finds most problematic about 'erroneous' dispositional analyses (apart from the fact that they are, he argues, empirically unsupported).While I maintain that a balance needs to be struck between personal responsibility for actions and societal responsibility, Zimbardo is perhaps correct to argue that pure dispositional analyses let "society "off the hook" as blameworthy; societal structures and political decision-making are exonerated from bearing any burden of the more fundamental circumstances that create racism, sexism, elitism, poverty, and marginal existence for some citizens" (2004, p.25). These dispositional analyses also allow us to draw "me-us-them" distinctions; by claiming that 'we are not like those other evil people' we are able to maintain "an illusion of moral superiority" that comes from not recognising the situational factors at work in determining our actions (Zimbardo 2004, p.26). Thinking in terms of character traits, without considering situational factors, thus distorts our understanding of ourselves and others and has "disastrous effects" on our understanding of what social programmes are the most reasonable to support (Harman 2000, p.224).

It is important to remember that Zimbardo and Harman are arguing that more or less all dispositional analyses are incorrect. I disagree with them. Zimbardo uses an analogy to demonstrate his point:

> "While a few bad apples might spoil the barrel, a barrel filled with vinegar will always transform sweet cucumbers into sour pickles – regardless of the best intentions, resilience, and genetic nature of those cucumbers. So, does it make more sense to spend our resources on attempts to identify, isolate, and destroy the few bad apples or to learn how vinegar works so that we can teach cucumbers how to avoid undesirable barrels?" (2004, p.47).

I do not think this analogy shows dispositional analyses and hence educational approaches to be unnecessary and / or without value. As I have indicated previously, it seems insufficient to merely teach 'cucumbers' how to avoid undesirable situations; we should also teach them how to respond to undesirable situations and institutions, and teach them how to improve them. Those who have knowledge of the way situations affect their thoughts, feelings and actions are unlikely to be "obedient dupes in highly similar situations" (Doris 1998, p.517). However, the problem is that this knowledge may be difficult to apply in different situations in which the subtlety of the differences makes the situation difficult to understand and react to (Doris 1998, p.517). Once again, we are back at a place where education needs to play a central role; education in how to respond to and improve situations and institutions in accordance with a reasonable normative view such as the virtue ethics that I am arguing for in this project.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that CAPS theory strongly suggests that the situationist data is not damning for virtue ethics. When we define situations in terms of the meanings they have for agents, agents display consistency in behaviour indicative of individual personalities and character traits. As situations have such powerful effects on agents, the CAPS approach is to be preferred over the situationist approach as it takes the agent's rich understanding of a situation into account as well as the situation's place in the agent's larger understanding of their experiences and their life. By incorporating CAPS theory into this project, the significant influence of even very small situational variation on behaviour is acknowledged and dealt with by VEME. Importantly, a focus on situations and social institutions should go hand in hand with VEME (that is sensitive to CAPS theory) because the evidence suggests that both are needed if we are to improve interpersonal human relations.

Chapter 5: Criticisms and Conclusions

In this thesis I set out to ascertain whether a particular virtue-ethical conception of moral education and character is conceptually coherent, and to what extent situationist social psychology challenges or complements this conception of moral education and character. My aim in doing so was ascertain whether and how virtue-ethical moral education and situationism could be employed to "improve interpersonal human relations" in addition to ascertaining whether they should be used to improve such relations (Carr 1999, p.29). I set out to answer the following question: Can the virtue-ethical concept of character withstand the situationist critique in such a way that the theoretical basis of virtue-ethical moral education is not wholly undermined and an investment of effort in VEME is warranted? If the arguments in the foregoing chapters are correct, situationist social psychology does not undermine the existence of relatively global, robust character traits of the sort moral virtues are taken to be and, consequently, VEME is not rendered a wholly implausible means of improving human moral character. The conclusions that can be drawn from the situationist literature thus do not render an investment in VEME without justification. I also hope to have shown that we should not abandon all talk of and schemes of virtue-ethical moral education and instead focus on situation selection and institution development when trying to improve interpersonal human relations. Moreover, I have tried to show that VEME and situationism both have value and roles to play when trying to improve interpersonal human relations.

However, it is important to remember that my thesis has not been an empirical investigation. This means that even though I have tried to show that there are good reasons for belief in the conceptual coherence of virtue-ethical moral education, this does not prove that its methods will work in actual classrooms. However, it does (strongly) suggest that experimentally employing VEME methods in classrooms may indeed be fruitful.

Criticisms of virtue ethics

All that now remains is to deal with the longstanding general worries about virtue ethics' desirability as a normative theory. Assuming that we can in fact use VEME to train a person's moral character, there are still reasons to consider the character based approaches of virtue ethical theories to be inherently problematic. This is because virtue ethical theories are vulnerable to a number of charges:

(1) Parochialism – Since we acquire our understanding of the virtues from our families, peers, and culture, virtue ethics is too narrow in outlook to be an adequate normative theory (Annas 2004, p.61);

(2) (In-) Egalitarianism – virtue ethics, unlike utilitarianism and deontology, does not have a principle or two that anybody acquainted with the theory can apply in morally difficult situations in order to judge the right course of action (according to that theory);

(3) Utopianism - the virtue ethicist's focus on character instead of rules is too utopian for a modern world (Loudon 1984, p.234);

(4) Intolerable actions - certain acts such as rape and murder are fundamentally wrong irrespective of the best intentions of the actor, but virtue ethics results in a situation in which any act that is done from the right motive is in fact morally right (or virtuous) (Loudon 1984, p.230); and

(5) Ineffective emotion / action guidance – virtue ethics, especially in seemingly dilemmatic situations, does not provide tools to effectively guide actions and emotions toward that which is virtuous (Kristjansson 2002, pp.65-65).

Based on the arguments in the foregoing chapters, I hope I have shown that I am now in a position to respond satisfactorily to these objections. With regard to parochialism, virtue ethics will indeed be parochial if we merely adopt the moral ideas of others and never critically appraise them (Annas 2004, p.71). However, adopting the moral beliefs of others is the beginning stage only; we have to work at developing into somebody who has a greater understanding of the moral ideas we have adopted from others (Annas 2004, p.71). Annas suggests that we should

do this by "think[ing] for ourselves, hard and critically, about the moral concepts, especially those of the virtues, that we have picked up from our surroundings" (2004, p.71). This process can take a structured form in a VEME curriculum where the aim is to enable students to think critically about the virtues being discussed. This enables a student to move beyond a mere uncritical adoption of the moral precepts that others have suggested the student adopt.

However, moving beyond a mere uncritical adoption of familiar moral precepts requires sustained effort and dedication (as should be evident from the discussion of VEME, CAPS theory and situationism) and it does have the consequence of making virtue ethics inegalitarian in a way that deontology and utilitarianism are not. Nevertheless, reducing morality to the types of decision procedures found in deontology and utilitarianism is problematic for a number of reasons: (1) It allows for a precocious, naive, inexperienced teenager who has "mastered the rule book of morality" to be an expert in morality when we rarely believe such a person to be qualified to make extremely important moral decisions (Annas referring to Hursthouse 2004, p.64); and (2) It also allows for a person with a character and values that are "morally detestable" to master the rule book and teach it to others while at the same time behaving in a morally detestable way in his or her daily life – it is, after all, an advantage of principle-based moral theories that they are available to everybody regardless of moral character (Annas 2004, p.64). If we reject this type of decision procedure, as a virtue ethicist has to, we have to give up the egalitarian appeal but we gain much in return; something that is important about moral decisions: the decisions express character traits that such a person has cultivated or at least endorses. While this does make things more complicated for a person trying to make a moral decision, it does allow such a person to own their decisions and to be a person of moral integrity. Importantly, while this is a complicated process, it need not be mysterious if VEME is employed to assist with the development of the cognitive and affective skills needed to solve moral problems. Not without significance, there does seem to be something valuable in

being a person who thinks through a moral problem and decides to take the virtuous course of action because he thinks that it is right and is disposed to do so again in the future and not merely because the rule book states it is the right thing to do. Surely the former person is the only person of the two whom we would like to call a friend.

Despite these advantages that a virtue-ethical approach seems to have, perhaps the virtue ethicist's focus on character, instead of rules, is too utopian for a modern world (Louden 1984, p.234). Louden argues that to the extent that we can even speak of a moral community in today's world, it is a lot more complex in terms of ethnic, religious and class groups than Aristotle's moral community (1984, pp.234-235). All of the different areas of society, Louden argues, subscribe to different sets of virtues; "indeed, our pluralist culture prides itself on and defines itself in terms of its alleged value neutrality and its lack of allegiance to any one moral tradition" (Louden 1984, p.235). Given this severe lack of consensus on virtue, Louden argues that we need a more rule-based conception of morality than virtue ethics provides (1984, p.235). Despite Loudon's assertions and as I have already mentioned, "the language of the virtues" has been used to successfully resolve conflict in schools and inter-cultural settings (Annas 2004, p.61). It has been found to be "the most effective inter-cultural ethical language" (Annas 2004, p.61). Despite consequentialism being a principle-based theory and being so often "praised as a practical, problem-solving theory" there do not seem to be any teachers "successfully teaching children and actually resolving conflicts in intercultural situations using the language of consequences" (Annas 2004, p.62).

While virtue ethics may not need to succumb to the charge of being too utopian for the modern world, virtue ethics may still be an inadequate normative theory if it permits actions that are intolerable such as murder and rape. Louden argues that virtue ethics results in a situation in which any act that is done from the right motive is in fact morally right (or virtuous) (1984, p.230). While this issue is

possibly problematic for other types of virtue ethics, it is not too troubling for the virtue ethics that I am advocating because it is not the case that all well-intentioned acts are virtuous. In Swanton's terms, actions stemming from the best intentions that do not hit the target of a virtue are not virtuous actions i.e. some actions do not fall within the ambit of a particular virtue. It is not the case that a moral agent may uncritically determine upon a course of action, act according to that intention and be called virtuous. However, it is the case that we cannot be fully virtuous (even if we do a virtuous act) unless we act from a virtuous disposition.

The preceding point leads into the final objection, that virtue ethics is unable to clearly guide actions and emotions (Kristjansson 2002, p. 64). Focusing on the emotional side of this objection, Kristjansson asks, "Can virtue ethics reliably guide our emotional life by telling us what to feel in particular situations?" (2002, p.64). He argues that virtue ethics is unable to do so and provides an example of its inability to guide emotions:

> "I fail to get a promotion in my company because the high-ranking job for which I was vying goes to the boss's nephew. He was, on all accounts, a much less-qualified candidate for the post than I, and the only plausible reason anyone can see for his being promoted over me is sheer nepotism. To complicate matters, the nephew happens to be a colleague and a good friend of mine. Moreover, he has recently had to cope with tragic family events and everyone agrees that he deserves a break. Now, the question arises: Should I be happy for the 'break' he got, or should I be jealous?" [29] (Kristjansson 2002, p.64).

Kristjansson argues that both of these responses seem to be morally justified when considering the situation from different points of view. However, a moral theory should be able to tell us which "emotional response is the (more) appropriate in a

[29] In *Justifying Emotions*, Kristjansson makes an argument for the moral justifiability of jealously (Kristjansson 2002, p.64). However, given that jealousy isn't usually considered morally justifiable, it could be replaced with other emotions such as anger or disappointment (Kristjansson 2002, p. 64).

common everyday situation like that," and virtue ethics cannot (Kristjansson 2002, pp.64-65). Kristjansson argues that while virtue ethics does make somewhat useful suggestions with regard to what we should think and feel, "its lack of an overarching 'first principle' means that it has no way of adjudicating between the conflicting demands of these two potentially virtuous emotional responses in the same situation" (Kristjansson 2002, p.65). From my discussions of Swanton's virtues of practice and constraint integration, Aristotelian practical wisdom, VEME methods, situationism, and CAPS theory, I hope it is now clear that VEME (that is sensitive to situationism and CAPS theory) is well-equipped to deal with such problems of emotion and action guidance in a reasoned and well-thought-out manner that is not impoverished due to the absence of an overarching first principle.

Overall Conclusion

With the longstanding general worries about virtue ethic's desirability as a normative theory addressed, and reason to believe that virtue ethics does not have to rely on incorrect assumptions about human psychology, I hope to have shown that there are good reasons to believe that VEME has a sufficiently sound theoretical basis to be worth investigating. While situationism, as I have shown, is not damning for virtue ethics, the overall claim that situations influence behaviour in a way that is problematic for virtue ethics is something that has to be accounted for by virtue ethics and VEME if it is to be psychologically realistic. Situations do have a powerful effect on individuals and this has to be incorporated into VEME. Situationism calls us to acknowledge the effects of mood on behaviour; given the conflict displayed by subjects in the Good Samaritan and Milgram experiments, we also need to understand the reasons behind an agent's actions; and, moreover, we need to acknowledge the power of total situations to overwhelm virtuous dispositions and the sensitivities required to recognize a situation that calls for a virtuous response. Given VEME's methods, it is well-suited for dealing with these problems. Furthermore, CAPS theory indicates that by defining situations in terms

of the meanings they have for agents, real consistency in behaviour indicative of individual personalities and character traits is more likely to be displayed by agents. By incorporating CAPS theory into VEME, the significant influence of even very small situational variation on behaviour may be acknowledged and dealt with.

"Can the virtue-ethical concept of character withstand the situationist critique in such a way that the theoretical basis of VEME is not wholly undermined and an investment of effort in VEME is warranted?" I hope to have shown that there are good reasons to believe that the virtue-ethical concept of character can withstand the situationist critique in such a way that the theoretical basis of VEME is not wholly undermined and experimentally investing in VEME is warranted. VEME is not nullified by situationism and the evidence also suggests that its methods are educationally valuable as it encourages students to be critical and reflective, but also caring and creative, and it does so while trying to develop good character. Therefore, investing experimentally in VEME as a way of improving interpersonal human relations can be justified. Based on the evidence, we thus should not abandon all talk of and schemes of VEME and instead focus on situation selection and institution development when trying to improve interpersonal human relations. However, situation selection and institution development are important and valuable parts of a social programme, such as VEME, that aims to improve "interpersonal human relations" (Carr 1999, p.19). Furthermore, CAPS theory indicates that the details of situations and the meanings that situations have for agents play a significant role in virtuous character and action. These insights, and those of situationism, need to be incorporated into VEME in order for it to be psychologically realistic. To conclude, situation selection, the development of institutions, and VEME that is sensitive to CAPS theory all have roles to play when attempting to improve interpersonal human relations.

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