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Introduction

A scientific theory survives in the societal consciousness for as long as it remains the *most explanatory description* of a given phenomenon. When a new theory emerges that is capable of explaining even more than the existing one, and doing so more elegantly, the incumbent theory—albeit with significant discomfort and even resistance—is eventually shelved as an interesting historical record of the way we “used to think.” In its place, the new and more explanatory hypothesis is inducted into the larger social paradigm as the better, *more complete* model of the way things *actually are* and as the more informed platform from which decisions about our daily lives may be made. We can nickname this process “theory correction,” and cite as examples: the fifteenth century round-earth model of the globe dethroning the widely believed flat-earth theory; the seventeenth century heliocentric or “sun-centered” model of the solar system replacing the inaccurate geocentric or “earth-centered” model; the light-intromission theory of vision, that light waves enter the eye in the process of seeing, replacing the ancient light-extramission theory, that light shone out of the eye to illuminate the world.

It is the task of this undergraduate thesis to elucidate and assist with an ongoing instance of theory correction in the field of personal ethics. We are accustomed to discussing moral and immoral behavior, as well as attributing praise and blame, in terms of *character, virtues, vices*, and individual moral attributes, all of which “belong to” a singularly responsible moral agent. A growing body of social psychological research presents grave empirical challenges to this customary method of evaluating moral phenomena. I side with the psychologists conducting these experiments and find many of these challenges to be insurmountable for the standard framework of character ethics—an evaluation which engenders an immediate necessity for a

fundamental revision of mainstream ethical thought. I see this requirement for revision as a demand for a shifting of contemporary ethical discourse away from the neo-Aristotelian line of thinking and towards specifically two projects: first, the relatively undiscussed ethics of participation in power structures, and second, the comparatively young project of feminist care ethics.

This thesis proceeds in three parts. First, I make a concerted effort to thoroughly outline *globalism* as the incumbent theory of character ethics—what I call the status quo theory of character—beginning with its conceptual framework and tracing its historical and cultural development over the centuries. Second, I will go to lengths to describe and expound upon the new theory of personal ethics, *situationism*, which is widely seen as the primary opposition to the status quo theory; in so doing, I will conduct a reasonably extensive review of the relevant psychological literature. Third and finally, I attempt an exhaustive reflection on the positive and negative implications presented by the incompatibility of the two ethical frameworks, in the process of which I address the portions of the “old” character ethics theory which are reconcilable with the “new” social psychological one, identify the underlying ethical assumptions that we are no longer capable of making, and examine the way in which this research demands a shift of the current conversations in individual ethics away from Aristotle and toward power structure ethics and the ethics of care.

Globalism, the Status Quo Theory of Personal Ethics

I wrote earlier of the “status quo theory” of character ethics. The most common name for this theory, and the one that I will use for the remainder of this project, is *globalism*, a term which I borrow gratefully from philosopher John Doris.¹ Globalism, in short, refers to all of the assumptions we have always made about moral character—that individuals are describable in terms of their character traits, which make true claims about their behavior in any reasonably conceivable situation (around the globe, if you will), and at any time in the future. Individuals “possess” these descriptors for which they are morally responsible and are thus able to be judged as a good or bad person.

I intend for this section to offer a charitable conceptual treatment of the Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian theories of globalist character ethics—ubiquitous both in modern academic philosophy and in the discourse of our daily lives—as well as an informative account of the history of character ethics, in an attempt to deepen our understanding about what *specifically* is being challenged by the social psychological studies of the following section.

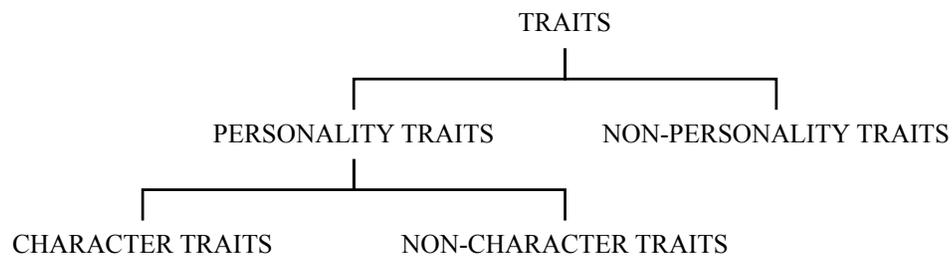
2.1 The Language of Globalism

Rather than begin by delving into the canonical texts on character ethics and the virtues, which for many might seem to be the proper order of things, I will outline globalism, as it were, in reverse, starting with the familiar aspects of character as they crop up in the conduct of daily life, and only then proceeding back to the ancient sources of what we now refer to as globalist thinking.

¹ John M. Doris, *Lack of Character*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2002): 23.

Traits, Personality and Character.

Our customary method of discussing an individual’s moral character relies heavily on terms such as “character trait.” A precise definition of what is meant by such a term is requisite for productive thinking about the state of personal ethics. For a clear-cut conceptual breakdown of the differences between “traits,” “personality” and “character,” I reference a chart featured in



the recent work of Christian Miller.²

This diagram distinguishes between mere traits, traits of a personality, and traits of character. Traits are any fact about a person—this includes everything from height and eye color to movie preferences and lifestyle. A narrower type of trait is a personality trait, or a description of the ways an individual interacts with other people. To possess the personality trait of shyness is “to have some enduring *tendency* or *disposition* to have shy thoughts and act in shy ways.”³

If we are being strict about it, we might wish to adopt Miller’s claim that a personality trait refers specifically to the “mental life” of an individual, to include their dispositions to *want* or to *feel* a certain way given a certain circumstance.⁴ I fear, however, that this runs the risk of being so precise that it becomes difficult to understand—it also seems to leave itself open to discussions in the philosophy of mind for which we have not the sufficient space. I am drawn to

² Christian B. Miller, *Character & Moral Psychology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2014): 9.

³ *Ibid*, 5.

⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

Peter Goldie's claim that function of personality discourse is "to describe people, to judge them, to enable us to predict what they will think, feel and do, and enable us to explain their thoughts, feeling and actions."⁵ This, I think, captures the meaning intended by most who discuss personality.

The diagram further distinguishes between two types of personality traits, of the "character" and "non-character" kinds; a character trait is a *morally relevant* kind of *personality trait*. This is to say that character traits are those specific types of personality dispositions, the possession of which makes an individual a good or bad person. This means that to make the claim that a person possess a good character trait—honesty, for instance—is to claim that, given the sort of circumstances where the character trait of honesty need be exhibited, the possessor of the character trait will (by his or her own nature) develop the right thoughts and dispositional desires in favor of telling the truth. "A character trait," Goldie suggests, "is deeper than a personality trait, and the judgement goes deeper too...it reveals something about them that we are rightly inclined to say is concerned with their *moral worth as a person*. Being cruel is a morally bad thing about someone, and being kind is a morally good thing."⁶

Being "honest" provides a grounds for judging someone to be a good person; at the same time, being dishonest offers a compelling reason to call someone a bad person. The same cannot be said of our earlier example of "shyness," because determining someone to be shy does not entail the passing of a judgment regarding an individual's moral worth in the way that honesty does.

Miller sums up our sense of character thus far when he claims that character traits "are

⁵ Peter Goldie, *On Personality: Thinking in Action*, New York: Routledge (2004): 3-4.

⁶ *Ibid*, 4.

personality trait dispositions which manifest as beliefs, desires, and/or actions of a certain sort appropriate to that trait, as a result of being stimulated in a way appropriate to that trait,” and that “they are those personality traits for which a person can be appropriately held responsible and/or be normatively assessed.”⁷

Alternatively, we may trade Miller’s clarity for a degree of simplicity: a character trait is a tendency of ours to think, feel and behave morally or immorally in a given set of circumstances, for which we can be judged to be good or bad people.

The Two Dimensions of a Character Trait.

The conceptual territory surrounding this idea of global character includes two essential qualities—*consistency* and *stability*. I use “essential” intentionally, to mean that a trait without these qualities *cannot be* a character trait.

While Doris chose to label these twin qualities *consistency* and *stability*, I prefer the slightly more descriptive term he employs elsewhere of *cross-situational consistency* and my own hybrid term of *time-stability*.⁸ I find these qualities to be more readily understandable when they are so named. I consciously omit the third quality Doris offers in his book, as I find it simply beyond the scope of this project.⁹ I will discuss these two essential qualities of a character trait in turn.

Cross-situational consistency. A fundamental quality of a character trait and what it means to possess one is “reliable manifestation of trait-relevant behavior across a diversity of trait-relevant eliciting conditions.”¹⁰ Put simply, a character trait must be consistently displayed in the myriad situations encountered in our daily lives. An honest person is someone who can

⁷ Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 34.

⁸ Doris, “Persons, Situations and Virtue Ethics,” 507.

⁹ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

reasonably be expected to tell the truth *irrespective* of the circumstances in which she finds herself. It is inconsistent with our sense of moral character to think that a person who tells the truth to his coworkers and boss, but cheats on and lies to his wife, is still worthy of being attributed the descriptor of “honesty.”

This means that the attribution of “honesty” to an individual cannot be a correct one if the person only exhibits honest behavior on Sundays, or at a grandparent’s house, or during the holiday season. While we may certainly describe that person’s behavior as “honest behavior” and thus worthy of admiration, that person is not necessarily “an honest person.” There is a difference between *acting honestly*, which refers to a behavior in one situation, and *being an honest person*, which refers to a disposition to a behavior in all situations. All honest people tell the truth, but not all who tell the truth are honest people.

Time-stability. The second essential quality of a character trait is its endurance over time. Doris defines this type of stability of a character trait as being “reliably manifested in trait-relevant behaviors over iterated trials of similar trait-relevant eliciting conditions.”¹¹ In a sense, time-stability of a character trait is similar to the quality of cross-situational consistency in that it deals with a sort of “reliability;” but while cross-situational consistency refers to reliability in changing circumstances, time-stability refers to reliability of character traits in the *same* circumstances but over a protracted period of years and decades. Cross-situational consistency refers to character reliability in different situations at the same time; time-stability refers to character reliability in the same situation at different times.

We understand intuitively that it does not make sense to attribute to a person a character trait that they only recently began to exhibit or that they will soon cease to exhibit. Consider the

¹¹ Doris, *Lack of Character*, 22.

following example: perhaps I was inspired by an excellent movie that I saw last weekend which emphasized dramatically the heroism of self-sacrificial kindness for a greater cause. So inspired was I, that for the twenty-four hours following the movie I was significantly more disposed to be selfless and benevolent in spite of any consequences that may follow. When I wake up the following day, however, that inspiration to more admirable conduct had evaporated, and my usual selfish lifestyle resumed.

It is not in keeping with the sense of character to say that in the twenty-four hours I had spent behaving benevolently I had *actually become a benevolent person*. One can imagine the dialogue: “Sam has been very generous lately—I heard that he donated half his paycheck to a battered women’s shelter this morning!” To which the reply, likely from a coworker that had attended the movie with me and noticed the change of my attitude, might be “Ah that’s just a spell, he watched that Kevin Spacey movie *Pay It Forward* last weekend. He’ll be back to normal tomorrow.”

The implication being, of course, that I have not become generous person but simply that I have been only recently and *temporarily* motivated to acts of benevolence. The fleeting nature of my benevolent impulses, my coworker implies, renders me undeserving of the title “a generous person.”

Hence the introduction of the time-stability quality of a character trait. If an individual suddenly begins to exhibit some seemingly character-related behavior, and can reasonably be expected to revert from such character-related behavior in the near future, then the trait is *not* a character trait.

Being Responsible for Our Character.

There is one additional feature of character traits that is tied up in our everyday use of

characterological reasoning: the trait possessor's *responsibility* for having or lacking a certain trait. Possessing a character trait renders one liable to either blame or praise—this much we stated earlier in our distinction between personality traits of moral and non-moral kinds.

However, there is more to the picture. What is it about character traits *exactly*, besides our colloquial sense of “character,” that exposes trait-possessors to this normative evaluation? A satisfactory account of where the evaluative dimension of character traits is derived must be provided before this account of globalism may be considered reasonably complete. Having large ears is a trait—but no matter how offensively large a person's ears might be, he or she is never subjected to any sort of normative assessment for such a trait. What, then, bestows upon a “character trait” this moral weight that we withhold from physical traits (like ear size) or even non-character personality traits (like shyness)?

For proponents of globalism, the answer, stated briefly, lies in the individual's capacity to *choose to be otherwise*. Though it may not be the case at the moment, I am confident that this claim is quite intuitive for those accustomed to discussing ethics in globalist terms. Consider the following examples.

The poor altruist. An unemployed man exits an office building in disappointment—he has just completed yet another job interview in competition for an opening for which he is one of several dozen candidates, and he inferred from the unimpressed looks on the faces of his interviewers that his chances of being hired and receiving a paycheck this month are slim. He is slowly running out of the money he had set aside in a rainy day fund, and is growing increasingly desperate. He is considering the prospect of living without electricity when out of the corner of his eye he notices a homeless man slumped on the sidewalk outside a pharmacy. The man is aging and understandably unkempt—but he is holding a sign that says “SUFFER

FROM BACK PAIN—NEED \$4 TO BUY ASPIRIN—GOD BLESS.” Upon seeing this sight, the dejected job candidate suddenly forgets his own troubles in a wash of sincere sympathy for this downtrodden individual asking only for the money to purchase over-the-counter pain relievers. He enters the pharmacy and spends sixteen dollars of his precious money and purchases four bottles of aspirin, which he hands to the homeless man. The homeless man’s face lights up in warmth and gratitude for the kindness of this stranger.

This story probably arouses some sort of appreciation for the job candidate, who donated to help the homeless man in spite of his already treacherous financial situation. He could very easily have chosen not to donate, and would have had a compelling reason for such a decision. The fact that he *could have acted otherwise* makes his act of generosity doubly admirable. We can call this man the “willing donor.”

The fined delinquent. Consider an alternate narrative. A small city in the United States—the same one in which the job candidate of the last story carried out his act of generosity—struggles with growing unemployment rates and an increasing number of homeless citizens on the streets. With winter fast approaching, the municipal and state governments take swift action in passing policies aimed at increasing the size of the welfare budget for the afflicted regions. One such policy that they implement is a uniform increase in littering fines by twenty percent. One day, a college student passes a concealed police officer, who notices the student toss a crumpled fast food bag out the driver-side window. The officer promptly pulls the student over. The student rolls down the window at the officer’s request, provides license and registration, and is notified of the increased fine. The student expresses surprise and outrage that the advertised \$200 littering fine has been increased to \$240. The officer explains that the additional twenty percent is part of an initiative to combat homelessness in the area. The student

grudgingly accepts the ticket and continues on his way.

Here, despite the payment of more than twice the amount donated by the job candidate in the previous story, we do not deem it appropriate to praise the college student for his willingness to help ameliorate the spiking homelessness rates. Why is this? Because he did not *choose to do so*; furthermore, he did not *have a choice to do otherwise*. While we might be inclined to blame the college student for his littering and disregard for the environment, our opinion of his generosity is nonplused—being forced to pay a fine for a good cause does not enter into any evaluation of his propensity for community service. We can call the college student the “unwilling donor.”

The willing miser. Imagine the same American city with rising homelessness rates. In this city, as in most, there is a small sector of a wealthier elite. One man in particular has acquired a reputation as a miser—he inherited a large mansion in the hilly north side of the city, and probably a sizable amount of liquid assets as well. But he wears only inexpensive suits and rides the bus to work. He views frugality as the only measure of a man—those who live in poverty are merely those who lack the self-discipline to save enough money to live comfortably. On his way to work, he passes the man slumped outside the pharmacy with a cardboard sign: “SUFFER FROM BACK PAIN—NEED \$4 TO BUY ASPIRIN—GOD BLESS.” He sneers at this homeless man’s sense of entitlement, who thinks that his inability to save money is legitimately the problem of anyone other than himself. The wealthy man strides by without so much as smiling at the afflicted man.

Though I may be guilty of creating something of a Dickensian trope here, I think this example stimulates our intuitive normative evaluation of this wealthy, miserly man as being unequivocally blameworthy for his greediness. Why do we feel such a strong conviction about

this man's character? Because he could have quite easily donated a small amount of money—but did not. Because he chose to do the *ungenerous* thing, and hoard the four dollars that would have meant the world to the man in need. We can call this man the “willing hoarder.”

The oblivious walker. Lastly, consider the case of one more citizen from this unnamed American city. A man is walking his dog at a brisk pace before he has to leave for work. He is single, and though not wealthy he considers himself among the middle-class. As he strides down the sidewalk, he passes a pharmacy, outside of which is slumped a man holding a cardboard sign, reading: “SUFFER FROM BACK PAIN—NEED \$4 TO BUY ASPIRIN—GOD BLESS.” However, the dog-walking man strolls right by the man leaning against the pharmacy wall, completely failing to notice him.

This case is interesting. It is certainly possible that he would have donated money for the man's aspirin, had he noticed him. But he did not. Donating was not even a part of the set of options available to dog walker. For this reason, we are left with nothing to say about his generosity, and reserve judgment. Though it might be a misleading name, we can call this man the “unwilling hoarder.”

Responsibility matrix. I have shared these four examples: the willing donor, the unwilling donor, the willing hoarder, and the unwilling hoarder, in an attempt to outline the way that a trait can only really be a character trait if the individual *chooses to be that way*. Admittedly, I have only offered instances of a single act of exhibiting or failing to exhibit generosity, while the globalist sense of character is more about *dispositions* toward generosity—something that the unwilling hoarder might very well have had, despite his never having had the chance to exhibit the disposition in the instantiation of an *act* of kindness. However, I did my best to build into the examples a sense of a disposition behind the act itself—the miser's

enduring attitude towards the poor and homeless, for instance. For that reason, I think blaming or praising for the act is simply a narrower way of commending or indicting the overall moral disposition—the character trait—as it exists in the person in question.

Organizing those four examples into a simple matrix, we can see the underlying structure of our judgments about responsibility as it relates to the appropriate attribution of character traits in different cases.

	<i>...have generosity.</i>	<i>...lack generosity.</i>
<i>Chooses to...</i>	PRAISEWORTHY	BLAMEWORTHY
<i>Does not choose to...</i>	NEUTRAL	NEUTRAL

This simple table effectively outlines the topography of our intuitions about generosity and other such virtues: we do not consider a character trait—or the subsequent descriptors of “praiseworthy” or “blameworthy” to be appropriately attributable to a person without the presence of *an ability to have done otherwise*.¹²

How, then, can we decide that we should hold two of these individuals responsible for what Robert Audi terms “an action that expresses a trait of one’s character,” while reserving judgment on the other two individuals? Audi offers an explanation, which I adopt as an accurate representation of the globalist position, that “by virtue of our capacity to affect our traits, our responsibility extends to our character.”¹³ By this, I take him to mean not necessarily that the

¹² Harry G. Frankfurt, “Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 66 no. 23 (December 4, 1969): 829. To those who have read any philosophy regarding freedom of the will, such a catch phrase may call to mind the “principle of alternate possibilities,” which Frankfurt summarizes as the stance that “a person is morally responsible for what he [or she] has done only if he could have done otherwise.” I intend not to draw this comparison, as the “choice” here is one of choosing to be alternately *disposed*, while the PAP refers to a choice to have alternately *acted*.

¹³ Robert Audi, “Responsible Action and Virtuous Character,” in *Ethics* 101, no. 2 (1991): 321.

character of those individuals are evaluable by their ability to have done something other than the single act of “donate” or “not donate,” but by their ability to *change their own character traits*. Because the miser *is capable of becoming more generous*, his decision to withhold any donation from the man in need is really an indicator of an ungenerous character behind an ungenerous act. And for that reason, both the character and the act that express it are fair game for being evaluated as “blameworthy” and generally reprehensible.

One might ask of the globalist: do you mean to say that the compulsive liar’s dishonesty is actually *not* a character trait? Is the compulsive liar *not* liable to blame? Though this obviously depends on whether the compulsive liar suffers from the treatable mental disease of compulsive lying, or is actually a knowingly and selfishly dishonest person, I assume the former, and answer on behalf of the globalist: yes, that is the claim. If an individual has a mental illness that causes chronic dishonesty, he or she will fall into the “Does not choose to lack honesty” sector of our responsibility matrix. The ill person is not responsible for his or her dishonest behavior, and thus deserves treatment, not blame.

In Review: The Definition of a Character Trait.

We have explored at length the contemporary intuition underlying everyday usage of character-talk. To summarize: a character trait is a morally relevant personality trait, the possession of which renders one liable to blame or praise. Furthermore, such an attribution of a character trait to a person will be correct if and only if it fulfills the following “twin” criteria:

1. Cross-situational consistency: the individual exhibits the trait across all situations.
2. Time-stability: the individual exhibits the trait reliably over time.

Lastly, the individual to whom the character trait is being attributed must be shown to be responsible for that trait, or that he or she *could choose to be otherwise morally disposed*. All of

these things taken together capture what the globalist means by “character trait.”

2.2 A Historical Account of Globalism

I undertake here the task of tracing what in the previous section I called the “contemporary intuition” underlying character-talk back through its historical roots. This task is important to any project regarding globalism, because I, like many of those referenced in this project, am of the conviction that globalism is first and foremost a *tradition*.¹⁴ I cannot see it as anything other than a vein of ethical thought which extends historically both backwards to the heroic cultures of the murky centuries before Aristotle and forwards well into the present day; it is this extraordinarily long-lived nature of the globalist tradition that forces a reasonable treatment of it to acknowledge the scale of such a position—especially when this reasonable treatment of the globalist stance is included in the project with the explicit intent of challenging it outright in the coming sections. It would behoove the challenger to get his facts right.

Aristotle as the Original Globalist.

One cannot talk about globalism without talking about Aristotle. So, to do so, I will explain who Aristotle was, describe the parts of his philosophical canon which concern globalism, and indicate the places in Aristotle’s thinking that mirror our modern intuitions about character.

Aristotle (384—322 BCE) was born in Chalcidice in northern Greece. He left home at the age of seventeen to study under Plato at the Academy for almost twenty years. Upon Plato’s death in 348/7 BCE, he was invited by Philip of Macedonia to tutor his son, Alexander—who would later be known more widely as Alexander the Great. He founded his own school in Athens, the Lyceum, in 335 BCE at the age of 49, and taught there for twelve years, until he was

¹⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press (1984): 146.

forced to flee Athens under charges of impiety. He escaped to Chalcis and died in 322 BCE at the age of 62.¹⁵

If we compare philosophers by the pervasiveness and influence of their ideas, Aristotle remains one of the greatest philosophers of all time. He “wrote on a wide range of subjects, including logic (which he founded as a science), metaphysics, biology, ethics, politics, and literature. [...] It would be difficult to exaggerate his influence on the development of Western culture.”¹⁶ On Time Magazine’s list of “The 100 Most Significant Figures in History” Aristotle ranks eighth—for reference, Muhammad ranks third, and Jesus comes in at number one.¹⁷

He remains influential not least for developing the framework of ethics that eventually became most of the globalist tradition we know today. That framework is now widely referred to as virtue ethics, a field of moral philosophy which I will try to outline here.

The gist of virtue ethics. Aristotelian virtue ethics “regards matters of right and wrong as unencapsulable in rules, and describes the virtuous individual as someone who perceive and fairly effortlessly acts upon situationally unique moral requirements.”¹⁸ Eventually opposed by the more recent but quite widely known types of Enlightenment-era moral theories like Kantian deontology or utilitarianism, virtue ethics nevertheless maintains its place as a distinct alternative to more modern moral theories in philosophy and ethics courses everywhere.

Derivation of the virtues. Fundamental to Aristotle’s project is discerning what is genuinely good for man. “What then is the good,” he inquires in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, “for

¹⁵ David Charles. "Aristotle," *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Ed. Ted Honderich, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2005): 54.

¹⁶ Aristotle, "Happiness and the Virtues: Aristotle," Trans. J. Thomson., in *Vice and Virtue In Everyday Life: Introductory Readings in Ethics*, Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth (2007): 196.

¹⁷ "Who's Biggest? The 100 Most Significant Figures in History, TIME.com."

¹⁸ Michael Slote. "Virtue," *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Ed. Ted Honderich, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2005): 947.

the sake of which other things are done?”¹⁹ He settles upon happiness as being the chief good, for it is “something complete and self-sufficient, in that it is the end of what is done.”²⁰

Aristotle proceeds with a definition of happiness: “functioning well.” All things have a function, or a special activity for which the thing is best equipped—a knife’s function, for instance, is to cut. Humans are surely more complex things than knives, but are fundamentally no different in our possessing a function. Ours, however, is the exercise of our capacity to reason.²¹

Happiness as Aristotle defines it is only achievable through the attainment of virtues which permit excellence in the fulfillment of our function. To return to the example of the knife with its given function of cutting well, the virtue of an object that is meant to cut is “sharpness.” For humans, attaining happiness as we go about our lives requires exercising our capacity for reason in the various *areas* of our lives and in the different circumstances we encounter. There will be times when fear will prevent us from accomplishing something, requiring courage—and courage is the management of fear through reason. There will be times when our appetites for pleasure threaten to run away with us, requiring temperance—and temperance is the management of these appetites through reason.²²

These ways in which reason may be exercised—in the exercise of courage and temperance, in the way that I just described—are the human virtues which permit us to function well. But they can only be learned and acquired with hard work. The virtues are these dispositions we acquire through practice that allow us to continue fulfilling our capacity to reason. The only way to acquire and strengthen the virtues was to repeatedly do the virtuous

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Trans. Roger Crisp, in Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000): 10.

²⁰ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 11.

²¹ Aristotle, in *Virtues and Vices in Everyday Life*, 196.

²² *Ibid.*

thing.

The doctrine of the mean. However, it is not good enough simply to preach the acquisition of the virtues as a guide to happiness. It is possible, Aristotle argued, for one to possess the virtues either too greatly or to an insufficient extent. Either is a harmful state in which to be. In recognition of this, he went on to develop the “doctrine of the mean.”²³ He calls our attention to the way that virtuous states are “naturally corrupted by deficiency and excess.”

The same goes, then, for temperance, courage and the other virtues: the person who avoids and fears everything, never standing his ground, becomes cowardly, while he who fears nothing, but confront every danger, becomes rash. In the same way, the person who enjoys every pleasure and never restrains himself becomes intemperate, while he who avoids all pleasure—as boors do—becomes, as it were, insensible. Temperance and courage, then, are ruined by excess and deficiency, and preserved by the mean.”²⁴

This “mean” he mentions becomes the “doctrine of the mean” or the “golden mean.” This is the ideal method of exercising the virtues: it entails the “virtuous agent” to be “responsive to the right extent, so as to choose to act on each motivation to the right degree, on the right occasions, for the right reasons, with reference to the right people,” as is best judged by “the educated judgment of the practically wise agent.”²⁵

The virtues themselves. The end result of Aristotle’s ethical project is the development of a list of virtues, accompanied by the names of their extremes of excess and deficiency. Though a variety of translations exist, I will offer the modern 2000 translation and organization of Roger Crisp.²⁶

(On next page).

²³ Aristotle, in *Virtues and Vices in Everyday Life*, 196.

²⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 25 (1104a).

²⁵ CCW Taylor. “Mean, Doctrine of,” *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Ed. Ted Honderich, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2005): 574-575.

²⁶ Roger Crisp, “Introduction,” *Nicomachean Ethics*, xviii.

<i>Virtue</i>	<i>Sphere</i>
Courage	Fear and confidence
Temperance	Bodily pleasure and pain
Generosity	Giving and retaining money
Magnificence	Giving and retaining money on a large scale
Greatness of soul	Honour on a large scale
[Nameless]	Honour on a small scale
Even temper	Anger
Friendliness	Social relations
Truthfulness	Honesty about oneself
Wit	Conversation
Justice	Distribution
Friendship	Personal relations

Seeds of modern globalism. I have done my best to outline briefly an ancient and revered philosophical system without jettisoning any critical content nor bastardizing it with too modern an interpretation. I anticipate that this once-over suffices in making the parts of virtue ethics which most closely resemble modern day globalism stand out as starkly familiar.

Aristotle's assumptions about character are more or less the same ones made by globalists today—that an individual can purportedly, through power of will, change his or her morally relevant dispositions in order develop virtues, for instance, correlates with the notion that one is morally responsible for one's character. Good character for Aristotle is “firm and unshakeable.”²⁷ Virtuous people will certainly endure hardship—but nevertheless “what is noble shines through, when a person calmly bears many great misfortunes, not through insensibility, but by being well bred and great-souled.”²⁸

Aristotelians and their Influence.

²⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 28 (1105b1).

²⁸ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 18 (1100b32-34).

I spoke only briefly of just how ubiquitous the work of Aristotle actually was; I wish to return to this statement and offer more evidence in its support, as I think capturing the history of Aristotelianism is in a large way capturing the heritage of globalism. I will do three things here: trace the percolation of Aristotelian thinking through two millennia of human institutions, identify in our modern life several ways in which the voice of Aristotle continues to echo, and conclude with a retrospective underlining of the exact same sort of character-talk we encounter today in the globalist position.

322 BCE to 600 CE. Aristotle's philosophical footprint covers the entirety of the time since his death until the present day. Immediately following his death, the Lyceum (the school he founded in Athens) remained a hub of scientific and philosophical academia, specifically in the studies of botany, physical theories, cosmology, mathematics, music and the histories of each of those fields. There were as many as 2,000 students in the Lyceum at this time. After 300 BCE, a split in post-Aristotelian lines of thought had occurred, and the new schools of philosophy became the Epicureans, the Stoics and the Skeptics, each of which modified Aristotle's thought, embracing parts of it while revising others. Although Emperor Justinian closed the Athenian schools of philosophy, in 529 AD, Aristotle remained a mainstay of any academic field in Constantinople for a lengthy period afterwards.²⁹

600 CE to 1200 CE. While Aristotle's teachings remained endemic in Europe and the Middle East for centuries after the closing of the Lyceum, it was 1100 CE that brought a revival of Aristotelianism in Western Europe—prompted by Syrian and Arabic scholars-philosophers Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) and Averröes (Ibn Rushd) preoccupied mainly with Aristotle's scientific

²⁹ David Charles. "Aristotelianism," *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Ed. Ted Honderich, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2005): 51-52.

and metaphysical writings.³⁰

Avicenna (980 CE—1037 CE) was a Persian scientist, philosopher and physician widely referred to as “The Supreme Mater” for his revered status in Islamic philosophy to this day—a position in the Islamic world not unlike the one occupied by Aquinas or Augustine in the Catholic one.³¹ Apart from his works on medicine and logic, his ethical philosophy is distinctly Aristotelian, clearly noticeable when he describes the “faculties of the rational soul” and how “it [the rational soul] is related to itself in that, along with the theoretical intellect, it generates the commonly held opinions, for example that lying is repugnant, injustice is repugnant, and similar premises...” but not quite so starkly as when he claims unequivocally that the rational soul “should be the one to dominate all the other bodily faculties [which] must be affected by the practical faculty and subjugated to it, to prevent the origination in it of [...] vicious character traits.” He continues, “Instead, the practical faculty must not be passive at all and must not be led but must dominate, thereby possessing virtuous character traits.”³²

Averröes (c. 1126 CE—1198 CE) was an Andalusian philosopher and is widely recognized as one of the greatest commentators on Aristotle. His express goals in the writings of the Aristotelian commentaries were first to “cleanse the Islamic philosophical corpus from Neoplatonist emanationist views”; second to “separate pure philosophy from theological arguments by al-Fārābī and Avicenna, among others” and third “to recover ‘pure’ Aristotelian thought.” He is another time capsule which helped preserve the integrity of the Aristotelian canon through the Middle Ages. Like Avicenna, he argues vehemently for the governance of the

³⁰ Charles, “Aristotelianism,” 52.

³¹ Hossein Ziai, “Avicenna,” *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 73.

³² Ibn Sīnā, *On the Soul*, in *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings* Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2005): 27-28.

body by the rational soul “which can reach a point whereby natural things are affected by it and subjugated to it. For example, when one of our souls conjures up an image of something, the bodily organs and the soul’s faculties come to its service, moving towards the imagined objective. If one imagines something tasty, one begins to salivate at the mouth...if a person imagines sexual intercourse the faculty responds by making his penis erect.”³³ He inquires rhetorically, albeit in passing, in *The Incoherence of Incoherence* “Does happiness exist? Do the virtues exist?” He answers “there is no route to acquiring knowledge except by way of acquiring virtue. Therefore, one must not subject to scrutiny the very principles that lead necessarily to virtue before the acquisition of virtue itself.”³⁴ Averröes, too, preserves the foundations of Aristotelian virtue ethics in his works—many of which, though gradually forgotten in the East, remained essential to a classical education in Western Europe, particularly in Spain, for centuries.³⁵

1200 CE to 2016 CE. More familiar to the English-speaking world is the Western European Aristotelian revival, inspired by Avicenna and Averröes, ushered in by the work of Catholic saint and theologian Thomas Aquinas. While in 1210 the Council of Parris had forbidden the study of Aristotle under pain of excommunication on the grounds that his naturalistic philosophy was a threat to Christian orthodoxy, the works remained popular despite mild persecution. The popularity of Aristotle soared when the Crusades’ discovered many of Aristotle’s manuscripts in Constantinople which were thus promptly translated into Latin for circulation. Before long, Aristotle was a “mainstay” of university life in Europe.³⁶

Thomas Aquinas (1224/5—1274 CE) was responsible for this Aristotelian revival in no

³³ Ibn Rushd, *The Incoherence of Incoherence*, in *Medieval Islamic Philosophical Writings*, 156-257.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 158.

³⁵ Hossein Ziai, “Averröes,” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 72.

³⁶ Charles, “Aristotleianism,” 52.

small way. He sought to systematically integrate Aristotle as far as was possible into the canon of contemporary science and codified Catholic theology.³⁷ He wrote at length on Aristotelian ethics in his *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*. He lists these thirteen “disputed” questions about the nature of the virtues at the beginning of the first chapter, entitled “On the Virtues in General.” As one can see, his list alone demonstrates the extent to which he had embraced Aristotle’s virtue ethics:

1. The first question is whether the virtues are dispositions.
2. The second question is whether the definition of virtue given by Augustine is appropriate.
3. The third is whether a capacity of the soul can be a possessor of virtue.
4. The fourth is whether the aggressive or the sensual parts of the soul can be the possessors of virtue.
5. The fifth is whether the will is a possessor of virtue.
6. The sixth is whether virtue is found in the practical intelligence as its possessor.
7. The seventh is whether virtue is found in the theoretical intelligence.
8. The eighth is whether the virtues are in us by nature.
9. The ninth is whether we acquire the virtues by our actions.
10. The tenth is whether some virtues are infused into us.
11. The eleventh is whether infused virtue may be increased.
12. The twelfth is about the distinctions between the virtues.
13. The thirteenth is whether virtue is found in a mid-point.³⁸

The aftermath of his Aquinas’s undertaking continues to play out today. He had accomplished his goal of marrying the Aristotelian philosophical system to the contemporary theological and scientific one:

The success of Aquinas’s synthesis ensured that for a time Aristotle held the pre-eminent position in Western philosophy. He was regarded for several centuries as the supreme philosopher, ‘the master of those who know’, as Dante called him. [...] After the thirteenth century Aristotle came to represent the status quo in philosophy and science....”³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*. Ed. E. Atkins and Thomas Williams. Trans. E. Atkins, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2005): 3.

³⁹ Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, 3.

Post-Aquinas, all philosophers had an opinion on Aristotle—by the fourteenth century, William of Ockham, Jean Buridan, and Albert of Saxony challenged his *Ethics*. Come the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Copernicus challenged his *Metaphysics*, and the seventeenth century showed Francis Bacon, Galileo and Boyle combating what they saw as “dogmatic” adherence to Aristotelianism. Hobbes “complained of Aristotle’s continuing influence with considerable vehemence,” and is quoted as saying “I believe that scarce anything can be more absurdly said in natural philosophy, than that which is now called Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*...nor ore ignorantly, than a great part of his *Ethics*.”⁴⁰

But it would seem that there is no such thing as bad press—criticism of Aristotle was, nevertheless, discussion of Aristotle. German educationalist Philip Melanchthon of the sixteenth century called the “Ethics” as a “seminal document, and made it essential reading in German universities.” Hegel and Marx adopted Aristotelian thinking passionately; Marx “was sometimes described as a left-wing Aristotelian.”⁴¹

In the twentieth century, a variety of philosophers, to include Austin, Anscombe, von Wright, and Davidson, once more brought Aristotle back to center-stage in Western analytic philosophy, where his thinking has more or less remained a popular topic, ever existing in opposition to both of the comparatively recent ethical frameworks: Kantian deontology and English utilitarianism, and ceding no ground to either.⁴²

In Review: Aristotelians and Their Influence. Earlier, I quoted J. A. K. Thomson as saying of Aristotle that “it would be difficult to exaggerate his influence on the development of Western culture.”⁴³ In fact, I find difficulty in even coming close to describing it accurately. I

⁴⁰ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, IV. Xlvi, quoted in Oxford Companion, “Aristotelianism”, 52.

⁴¹ David Charles, “Aristotelianism,” in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 52.

⁴² *Ibid*, 53.

⁴³ Aristotle, *Virtues and Vices in Everyday Life*, 196.

wanted to provide a reasonably complete account of the way that the Aristotelian view, particularly on virtue and character, has saturated through our social and cultural institutions, from the day of the distant past that he published the *Nicomachean Ethics*, through the very day I submit this undergraduate thesis for review.

From the days of the ancient Greek past, the notions of a rational soul which governs the body, which selects the virtues for itself that it deems expedient to happiness and fulfillment, which dispenses with the vices that seduce and betray that end, and which is ultimately responsible for its own virtuous or vicious nature, have been with the Western social consciousness. And they have survived through today because of Aristotle and the Aristotelians he inspired.

Sometimes the most eyebrow-raising evidence is the etymological kind. Aristotle created a staggering amount of the terminology of philosophy itself: “‘syllogism’, ‘premiss’, ‘conclusion’, ‘substance’, ‘essence’, ‘accident’, ‘metaphysics’, ‘species’, ‘genera’, ‘potentiality’, ‘categories’, ‘*akrasia*’, ‘dialectic’, and ‘analytic’ are all terms taken over from Aristotle.”⁴⁴

Make no mistake: globalism is a *paradigm* and *tradition*, and its heritage can be traced historically and philologically right back *through* Aristotle in its entirety. More importantly, Aristotelian globalism can be seen to proliferate from a peninsular region on the Mediterranean through the major world religions: through Averröes and Avicenna, who built notions of praiseworthy or blameworthy virtue into the foundations of a young and spreading Islamic tradition; through Aquinas, who at great length and personal risk reconciled Aristotle’s whole system of virtue ethics to the flourishing Catholic tradition hundreds of years *before* the Protestant Reformation, thus imbuing all of Christian thought for the literal *rest of history* with

⁴⁴ Charles, “Aristotelianism,” 51.

this concept of virtue, vice, moral character and one's responsibility for it.

Perhaps it is an illicit wave of the hand to assume that Aquinas is as universally known in the Western world as he is in the educated Catholic world. But I am comfortable in citing as common knowledge the unfathomable extent to which Aquinas's arguments for God, his work on character and virtue, and eventually the four cardinal virtues and the seven deadly sins remain *central* to the religious education not just of young Catholics but to all students of theology *worldwide*—first communion and confirmation classes for young Catholics, in private religious schools, in divinity colleges, and in philosophy courses. Consider the numbers: there are 1.1 billion Catholics in the world, accounting for approximately 15.9% of the entire world population. There are 74.5 million Catholics in the United States, accounting for 24.0% of the American population. Surely it is a significant statistic that roughly one in six people worldwide raise their children—as they have for a millennia—on the Aristotelian moral philosophy underlying Roman Catholicism. And this estimate excludes the Islamic brand of the character paradigm ignited by Averröes and Avicenna.

2.3 Section Conclusion

Globalism refers to all of the assumptions we have always made about moral character—that individuals are describable in terms of their character traits, which make correct and predictive claims about their behavior in any situation (cross-situational consistency) and at any time in the future (time-stability). Individuals “possess” these descriptors for which they are morally responsible and are thus able to be judged as a good or bad person. We are quite accustomed to the way that globalism permits us to discuss moral and immoral behavior, as well as attribute praise and blame, in terms of *character*, *virtues*, *vices*, and individual moral attributes, all of which “belong to” a singularly responsible moral agent.

More than a mere model for judging people, however, globalism can be shown to be an ancient and long-lived ethical paradigm that emanates from Aristotle and the culture that produced him through several world religions and innumerable world cultures. In light of this far-flung influence, I suggest here at the close of this section that these globalist intuitions are not simply the sort of assumptions one makes throughout the day—the assumption that my teacher will permit a belated paper submission, for instance, or the assumption that there is construction blocking my usual route to work. The globalist assumptions are so ingrained that they seem to be almost *instinctual*, and thus *beyond criticism*. We might have such a tough time challenging these very basic moral notions—that there *are* such things as “good people” and “bad people,” that I *can* be such a thing as a “good person” or an “evil person”—for the same reason that no fish will ever realize that it is wet. This “character-talk” is all we’ve ever known.

Which makes the challenge of showing globalism to be a fundamentally incorrect, as is the goal of my next section, a tremendous one, indeed. We have the full weight of 2,500 years of the Western individual’s self-concept set against us in our mission to bring to light the “theory correction” that is currently unfolding at the intersection of moral philosophy and social psychology.

Let’s get to it.

3

Situationism and the Evidence for It

A growing body of social psychological research is rendering the defense of a traditional conception of globalist character quite difficult. The collection of these comparatively recent studies combined with the reflective literature they inspired—and more importantly, the aggregate challenge they present to the commonplace presuppositions about character—is referred to under the interdisciplinary label “situationism.” In this section, I will explain the broad conceptual meaning of the term “situationism,” offer evidence in its support, and reflect on the sort of conclusions to which the studies lend and do not lend justification. Second, I will discuss the conclusions that we may safely draw in the wake of the evidence brought to light in these studies and others like them.

3.1 Situationism Defined Conceptually

Origin and Meaning of the Term “Situationism.”

The term “situationism” originated (as far as I can tell) in the field of social psychology during the late 1960’s with psychologist Walter Mischel. While it is unclear to me whether Mischel either coined the term himself or had it attributed to his work by another psychologist, it is evident that “situationism” was chosen as the moniker for Mischel’s work because it captured his belief that personality traits were in fact much less robust, and specifically from an empirical perspective, and that one’s behavior was much more significantly influenced by the circumstances—the situation—in which one found oneself than by internal dispositions toward a certain type of feeling or action. “Situationism” became one of the “sides” in the erupting personality debate—a dispute over the consistency of personality amid changing situations—for

which he was in part responsible for igniting with his 1968 book *Personality and Assessment*.⁴⁵

The debate has grown in size and scope in the past fifty years, but the definition of “situationism” remains roughly the same. The definition I espouse for the remainder of this project is the following:

Situationism is the claim that situational factors, oftentimes even those which seem contextually irrelevant, play a considerably more significant role in determining moral behavior than the widely held construction of personality theory is able to accommodate—at least, not without also forfeiting a degree of coherence.⁴⁶

A situationist is an individual who professes the belief that a holistic causal account of a person’s moral behavior must include not only that person’s occurrent thoughts and feelings, but also the circumstances in which the behavior occurred—whether those circumstances entered into the conscious experience of the person or not.

Character Traits and the “Fundamental Attribution Error.”

A useful way of categorizing the situationist objections to globalism comes from the abstract of a 1999 article by Gilbert Harman:

Ordinary moral thought often commits what social psychologists call ‘the fundamental attribution error.’ This is the error of ignoring situational factors and overconfidently assuming that distinctive behaviour or patterns of behaviour are due to an agent’s distinctive character traits. In fact, there is no evidence that people have character traits (virtues, vices, etc.) in the relevant sense. Since attribution of character traits leads to much evil, we should try to educate ourselves and other to stop doing it.⁴⁷

The fundamental attribution error is typically discussed as one of the most common and everyday cognitive biases. An individual who is highly susceptible to this cognitive pitfall will

⁴⁵ Walter Mischel and Yuichi Shoda, "A Cognitive-Affective System Theory of Probability: Reconceptualizing Situations, Dispositions, Dynamics and Invariance in Personality Structure," *Psychological Review*, 102, no. 2 (1995): 246-68.

⁴⁶ Doris, "Persons, Situations and Virtue Ethics," 504.

⁴⁷ Gilbert Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 99 (1999): 315.

attribute his or her own successes to their successful personality and habits, while his or her own failures are the result of extenuating situational circumstances for which he or she bears no responsibility. However, when it comes to explaining the behavior of others, the formula is reversed: he or she will chalk the success of another up to mere luck and advantageous circumstance, while he or she will attribute another's failures to a deficiency in personality or character.⁴⁸ We are loath to give others the benefit of the doubt, allowing for situational variables to soften our judgments about their conduct.

Though I think globalist thinking character reliability is something more than a single cognitive bias, I do appreciate the parallels. In a way, globalism and the assumption of reliable character is a sort of collectively institutionalized version of the fundamental attribution error—a cultural habit, you might say, of praising and blaming individuals for deeds while paying little attention to the circumstances in which their acts occurred. Another important point of parallel between the individual cognitive bias and the larger tradition of globalism is that the presence of disconfirming empirical evidence can usually help to mitigate our mistaken attributions.

3.2 Empirical Evidence Supporting Situationism

Situationism was born primarily out of social psychological research on personality and moral behavior. Several of those seminal studies I have selected and summarized here. I will hold off on any talk of implications until after all the studies have been reported.

Milgram 1963.

The Milgram experiment is officially titled a “Behavioral Study of Obedience,” but is more commonly referred to as the Milgram Shock Experiment. It was designed to research and

⁴⁸ Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology," 315.

quantify the extent to which the presence of an insistent authority figure will increase an individual's propensity to knowingly act in a "destructive" fashion.⁴⁹

According to the abstract, the experiment "consists of ordering a naïve [subject] to administer increasingly more severe punishment to a victim in the context of a learning experiment. Punishment is administered by means of a shock generator with 30 graded switches ranging from the Slight Shock to Danger: Severe Shock. The victim is a confederate of the [experimenter]. The primary dependent variable is the maximum shock the [subject] is willing to administer before he refuses to continue further"⁵⁰.

The cover story that was developed to convince the subject, referred to as the "teacher," was that the experimenters were engaged in a study of the effects that punishment by electric shock had on human learning performance. The "learner" would be seated on the other side of the shocking apparatus, strapped into a chair to prevent excessive movement, with the hand secured to the metal plate. The experimenter stated to the subject that "Although the shocks can be extremely painful, they cause no permanent tissue damage." At this point, the subject was instructed to read a series of word pairs to the learner, and after each word pair to read a list of four terms. For each pair, the "learner" would flip one of four switches in front of him to indicate which of the four words had been paired with the first word. If and when he answered incorrectly, the subject was instructed to administer a punitive shock to the learner, beginning at 15 volts and increasing by increments of 15 volts, to the deadly shock level of 450 volts.

If and when the subject became uncomfortable with the learner's shouts of pain and protest, the experimenter was permitted to urge the subject to continue with the use of one of

⁴⁹ Stanley Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67, no. 4 (1963): 374.

⁵⁰ Milgram, "A Behavioral Study of Obedience," 371.

four prods, to be made in sequence. If Prod 1 was ineffective, Prod 2 would be used, etc. They were:

Prod 1: Please continue. Or, Please go on.

Prod 2: The experiment requires that you continue.

Prod 3: It is absolutely essential that you continue.

Prod 4: You have no other choice, you must go on.

Initial hypotheses gathered by Milgram were drastically inaccurate. The surveys of fourteen undergraduate Yale psychology majors on their expectations for the experiment show that “the most pessimistic member of the class predicted that of 100 persons, 3 would continue through to the most potent shock available of the shock generator—450 volts.” The distribution of scores “deviated radically from the prediction.”⁵¹

Of the 40 subjects, 26 of them obeyed the experimenter’s orders through to the maximum voltage of 450 volts. At this point, the experimenter would call a halt to the experiment, and many of the subjects “heaved sighs of relief, mopped their brows, rubbed their fingers over their eyes, or nervously fumbled cigarettes.” The more disturbed ones “shook their heads, apparently in regret.” A few of the subjects “remained calm throughout the experiment, and displayed only minimal signs of tension from beginning to end.”⁵²

Many of the subjects showed signs of great tension and unease, and more so as the shocks of greater voltage were administered. They would “sear, tremble, stutter, bite their lips, groan, and dig their fingernails into their flesh.” There was even a “regular occurrence of nervous laughing fits” that “seemed out of place, even bizarre.” “Uncontrollable seizures were observed for 3 subjects.” One seizure was so severe that it was necessary to call a halt to the experiment.⁵³

⁵¹ Milgram, *A Behavioral Study of Obedience*, 375.

⁵² *Ibid*, 376.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 375.

Fourteen subjects defied the experimenter. At the 300-volt level, the learner kicks the wall and no longer presses any of the four buttons to answer the subject's question. Five subjects refused to administer shocks at this point. Four subjects administered one additional shock, at 315 volts, before refusing. Two of more subjects ceased to administer shocks at the 330-volt level, and one subject each refused at 345 volts, 360 volts and 375 volts.⁵⁴

The final percentages were: 65% of subjects administered all shocks, right up to the lethal 450-volt shock, meaning that 35% disobeyed. Because the first subjects to quit did so at the 300-volt level, 100% of the subjects administered two thirds of all the shocks.⁵⁵

Darley and Latané 1968.

Five years following the Milgram Shock Experiment, researchers John Darley and Bibb Latané designed a study to investigate the psychology of the "bystander effect," motivated by a desire to find an explanation of the horrific 1964 Kitty Genovese murder in New York City. Stabbed to death over the period of half an hour, Kitty Genovese lay dying in the middle of a residential street, in full view of 38 witnesses who had observed the crime from the safety of their apartments. Not one of them attempted to come out to assist her, nor even to call the police.⁵⁶

Darley and Latané hypothesized that the explanation for the staggering numbers of bystanders who did nothing to assist her was not the result of moral decay or modern apathy, but rather the result of a perceived "diffusion of responsibility" among the observers. To test this, they created an experiment wherein subjects would overhear an epileptic seizure. They would

⁵⁴ Milgram, *A Behavioral Study of Obedience*, 375.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 376.

⁵⁶ Martin Gansberg, "37 Who Saw Murder Didn't Call Police" *The New York Times* (New York) 1964.

believe either that they were the only person to hear the seizure, that they and one other person in the room heard the seizure, or that they and four other people heard the seizure.⁵⁷

The presence of other bystanders significantly lowered the subjects' speed of reacting to the perceived seizure. While alone, 85% of subjects came to the aid of the victim by the end of the fit. With one other person in the room, 62% of subjects came to the aid of the victim, but only after twice as much time hesitating. With three other people in the room, a mere 31% responded to the victim's seizure, and only after hesitating for three times as long as the single subject. These results led Darley and Latané to conclude that bystander intervention was less likely because of the individuals' perceived decrease in responsibility for the events occurring when among others.⁵⁸

Latané and Rodin 1969.

The following year, Latané partnered with Judith Rodin to illuminate further the "diffusion of responsibility" among bystanders. To do this, Latané and Rodin had male undergraduates remain in a waiting room alone, with a friend, or with a stranger; they would overhear a woman fall and cry out in pain.⁵⁹ Immediately following the fall, the woman would be heard saying things like "Oh, my God, my foot...I...I...can't move it. Oh...my ankle..." and "I...can't get this...thing...off me," continuing to cry and moan the entire time. After 130 seconds, she would pick herself up, hobble to the exit, and leave. All of this occurred within earshot of the subjects, but out of sight. The researchers recorded the numbers of individuals that came to her aid and when they did so.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ John M. Darley and Bibb Latané, "Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 8, no. 4 (1968): 377.

⁵⁸ Darley and Latané, Bystander Intervention in Emergencies: Diffusion of Responsibility, 380.

⁵⁹ Bibb Latané and Judith Rodin, "A Lady in Distress: Inhibiting Effects of Friends and Strangers on Bystander Intervention," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 5 (1969): 189.

⁶⁰ Latané and Rodin 192.

Groups of two were less likely to come to the aid of the injured woman. Friend pairs would help more much more readily while pairs of strangers were slower to do so. When the subjects were alone, 70% of them came to the woman's aid. When they were in the company of a stranger, only 9% came to her assistance.⁶¹ Latané and Rodin explained this by noting that it "each bystander may look to others for guidance before acting, misinterpret their apparent lack of concern, and decide the situation is not serious."⁶²

Bickman 1971.

Leonard Bickman conducted a study to investigate under natural conditions the effect a stimulus person's manner of dressing has upon the subject's willingness to help the stimulus person. The stimulus person, dressed either in business attire (suit and tie, dress coat) or in laborer's attire (work boots, lunch pail, toolbox), would enter the phone booth, place a dime on the shelf in front of the phone, and retreat to an observation position. When a subject entered the phone booth, they would notice the dime, and (for the most part) pocket it. After two minutes, the stimulus person would approach the individual making the call, tap on the phone booth door and say: "Excuse me, Sir/Miss, I think I might've forgot a dime in this phone booth a few minutes ago. Did you find it?" The stimulus person would record whether or not the dime was returned.⁶³

When the stimulus person appeared in business attire, 77% of the subjects returned the dime. However, when the stimulus person appeared to be of the working class, 38% of the subjects returned the dime. Despite the presence of other variables of race, sex and age, the only

⁶¹ Latané and Rodin, "A Lady in Distress: Inhibiting Effects of Friends and Strangers on Bystander Intervention," 193.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Leonard Bickman, "The Effect of Social Status on the Honesty of Others," *Journal of Social Psychology*, no. 85 (1971): 88.

statistically significant variable was the apparent social class of the individual requesting that the dime be returned.

Isen and Levin 1972.

The Isen and Levin studies were an attempt to test and quantify the effect that “feeling good” had on an individual’s likelihood of engaging in helping behaviors. To do this, they conducted two separate studies. In Study I, the “good feeling” was “induced by having received cookies while studying in a library,” while in Study II the good feeling was induced by the subject’s finding a dime in the coin return slot of a pay phone. Likelihood of engaging in helping behavior was tested in Study I by recording whether or not the subject volunteers to assist another student upon request and in Study II by recording whether or not the subject assisted a passerby to pick up papers that were dropped in front of them.⁶⁴

In Study I, subjects were under the impression that they were requested to be confederates in a larger study on distracted learning, in which a “subject,” (actually a confederate) would attempt to find “novel uses for ordinary objects.” If the *actual* subject volunteered to assist in the experiment, they were given the choice of assisting in the capacity of “distracter” or “helper.” Distracters would cause distracting noises within earshot of the supposed subject (actually a confederate), and would be warned by the experimenter that subjects might find the distractions irritating or annoying. Helpers would assist the subject in finding novel uses for objects by holding objects in different positions or arrangements, an activity that they were told the subjects would find quite helpful. Experimenters recorded how

⁶⁴ Alice Isen and Paula Levin, "Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and Kindness," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 21, no. 3 (1972): 384.

many individuals volunteered to help and for how long (number of twenty minute sessions) they would be willing to assist.⁶⁵

Subjects who received a cookie were more likely to volunteer to be a “helper,” and did so for an average of 69 minutes, while the remainder that volunteered to be a “distracter” did so for an average of only 20 minutes. Subjects who did not receive a cookie were more likely to be a distracter, and to do so for an average of 79 minutes, while that remainder volunteered to be a helper for an average of only 17 minutes.

In Study II, subjects who did and did not find a dime in the coin return of a pay phone were recorded by their decision to help or not to help pick up a stack of papers dropped just in front of them, following the completion of their phone call.⁶⁶

Of those subjects that found a dime in the coin return slot, 14 helped the confederate pick up their dropped papers, while 2 did not. Of those that did not find a dime, only 1 helped the confederate, while 24 did not help.

Darley and Batson 1973.

This study was designed to test which variables in a situation were most likely to influence a person to stop and provide assistance to a “shabbily dressed person slumped by the side of the road.” The chosen independent variables were: whether or not the subject was led to believe that he would be providing a talk on the parable of the Good Samaritan, the extent to which the subject was considered to be hurrying to give said talk, and the religious personality as evaluated by a short questionnaire provided to the subject.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Ibid 385.

⁶⁶ Isen and Levin 387.

⁶⁷ C. Daniel Batson, John M. Darley, and Jay S. Coke, "Altruism and Human Kindness: Internal and External Determinants of Helping Behavior," *Perspectives in Interactional Psychology*, (1978): 100.

Participants were 40 students from the Princeton Theological Seminary. They were asked to participate in “a study on religious education and vocations.” They were first administered a religious personality exam. At a later session, they began “experimental procedures” in one location on Princeton campus and were asked to report to another campus building to give a talk to a small group on either the parable of the Good Samaritan or on the “jobs in which seminary students would be most effective.” In addition to the variation on speech topic, subjects were told upon their departure that they were either ahead of schedule, right on time, or already late for the scheduled talk at the other side of campus. These three degrees of hurriedness are referred to as “low-hurry, intermediate-hurry and high-hurry.”⁶⁸

On the route to the building in which the speech was supposed to be given, every subject would pass by a poorly dressed person slumped over in the alley. The victim would be sitting in a doorway, head down, eyes closed, not moving. As the subject passed by, the victim “coughed twice and groaned, keeping his head down...If the subject stopped and asked if something was wrong or offered to help the victim, startled and somewhat groggy, said

‘Oh, thank you [cough]...No, it’s all right. [Pause] I’ve got this respiratory condition [cough]. ...The doctor’s given me these pills to take, and I just took one. ... If I just sit here and rest for a few minutes I’ll be O.K. ... Thanks very much for stopping though [smiles weakly].’” If the subject was insistent on helping, the victim would allow himself to be helped inside the building, and would thank the subject.⁶⁹

Of the entire 40 subjects, 16 (40%) offered help directly or indirectly to the victim and 24 (60%) did not. Of the low-hurry group, 63% offered help; of the intermediate-hurry group, 45%; of the high-hurry group, only 10%. As for the group that was tasked to give a talk on the Good Samaritan, 53% offered help, while of the group tasked to present on ideal career fields for

⁶⁸ Darley and Batson 102.

⁶⁹ Ibid 103.

theology students, 29%. However, the percent difference between the groups tasked with different speech topics was not found to be statistically significant; the percent difference between the three “hurry groups,” however, *was* found to be significant.⁷⁰

Zimbardo et. al. 1973.

In 1971, Philip Zimbardo and his research teammates Curtis Banks and Craig Haney carried out a simulation of a prison environment in the basement of a Stanford psychology building. Their goal was to study “the effect of playing the role of ‘guard’ or ‘prisoner’.”

The only independent variable was the random assignment of a subject either to the role of “guard” or “prisoner.” The experiment was carried out in an environment designed to resemble a prison, to include prison bars, guard uniforms and prisoner smocks. The subjects “coped in various ways” with the difficulties of life in prison. Zimbardo and his team observed the behavior of both groups. The dependent variables were of “two general types: transactions between and within each group of subjects, recorded on video and audio tape as well as directly observed; individual reactions on questionnaires, mood inventories, personality tests, daily guard shift reports, and post experimental interviews.”⁷¹

The 21 subjects were chosen from a pool of 75 respondents to a newspaper advertisement offering \$15 daily for participation in a two week study on prison psychology. They were all male undergraduate college students that were living in the Stanford area for the summer. The final subjects were chosen because they “were judged to be the most stable (physically and mentally), most mature, and least involved in anti-social behavior.” On a random basis, they were then assigned to the role of “guard” or “prisoner.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Ibid 105.

⁷¹ Craig Haney, Curtis Banks, and Philip Zimbardo, "Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison," *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*, 1 (1973): 73.

⁷² Ibid.

The environment was carefully designed to be as convincing as was reasonable, with attention paid to specific psychological triggers that would reinforce the divide between the two groups. The prison itself was built into the basement of a Stanford University psychology building. It consisted of three 6 x 9 foot cells converted from laboratory rooms, stripped of furniture, with the original doors replaced with steel barred, black doors. Each prisoner was provided only a cot with mattress, sheet and pillow. The small, unlit 2 x 2 foot closet across the hall served as the solitary confinement facility. The center of prison life was a long, narrow hallway used for various events of daily prison life, to include assemblies, exercise, and meals. At one end of this hallway was a plywood barrier with camera equipment behind it and space enough for several observers.⁷³

Prisoners remained in the “prison” for 24 hours a day. Guards worked in eight-hour shifts, three-man shifts. It was made explicit to the prisoners in the terms of their contract that they would be under 24 hour surveillance and have little to no privacy. They would willingly surrender some of their basic civil rights, with the exception of being subjected to physical abuse. At the beginning of the study, the research team enlisted the help of the Palo Alto Police Department to arrest, book and process the individuals selected to be prisoners.⁷⁴

Uniforms were designed to “promote feelings of anonymity in the subjects.” Guards wore khakis very similar to genuine guard uniforms and were each provided with nightsticks, whistles and mirrored sunglasses that “made eye contact impossible” in order to increase the image and feeling of authority and control. Prisoners wore cheap smocks with an identification number on front and back and ill-fitting socks with rubber sandals; they were naked otherwise. A chain with a lock was placed around the ankle and a nylon stocking was placed on the head.

⁷³ Haney, Banks and Zimbardo, 74.

⁷⁴ Ibid 74.

These outfits were constructed to “enhance group identity and reduce individual uniqueness within the two groups.” The guard uniforms were distinctly militaristic and authoritative in design, while the prisoners’ uniforms were meant “not only to deindividuate the prisoners but to be humiliating and serve as symbols of their dependence...the ankle chain was a constant reminder (even during their sleep when it hit the other ankle) and the oppressiveness of the environment. The stocking cap removed any distinctiveness...(as does shaving of heads in some “real” prisons and the military.” The uniforms were meant to make prisoners feel uncomfortable, and to force them to sit and stand differently in order to preserve modesty, “more like those of a woman than a man—another part of the emasculating process of becoming a prisoner.”⁷⁵

The prison environment “had great impact upon the affective states of both guards and prisoners as well as upon the interpersonal processes taking place between and within those role-groups.” The alteration of only one variable—the role assignment of either “guard” or “prisoner,” with the addition of relevant stimuli to reinforce the role, was sufficient to induce drastic differences in the mental states, physical and interpersonal behavior. Both groups “showed a marked tendency toward increased negativity of affect and their overall outlook became increasingly negative. Prisoners expressed intentions to do harm to others more frequently” and “self-evaluations were more deprecating as the experience of the prison environment became internalized.” Interestingly, despite the fact that the guards and prisoners were more or less free to interact however they wished, the “characteristic nature of their encounters tended to be negative, hostile, affrontive and dehumanizing.” Individual identity appeared to evaporate as time went on.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Haney, Banks and Zimbardo, 74-76.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 80.

Despite the knowledge on the part of both groups that the experimenters would not permit any physical violence between any of the subjects, threats of violence became increasingly prevalent. These effects were witnessed most dramatically “in the gross reactions of five prisoners who had to be released because of extreme emotional depression, crying, rage and acute anxiety.” Five prisoners were released on account of such symptoms—four of whom for displaying the aforementioned symptoms, and the fifth because, in addition to such signs of intense distress, the development of a psychosomatic rash that covered various portions of his body.⁷⁷

On the other hand, the guards appeared “distressed by the decision to stop the experiment and it appeared to us that had become sufficiently involved in their roles so that they now enjoyed the extreme control and power which they exercised and were reluctant to give it up.” However, one guard did report feelings of distress at the suffering of the prisoners, and even the intention at one point to request a role-switch, although he never did so. None of the guards were ever late for their shifts, and even at times remained on duty voluntarily without extra pay. These “extremely pathological reactions” were surprising to the experimenters and were not predicted by any of the personality tests—in the end, ethical concerns on the part of the experimenters resulted in a premature termination of the experiment, after only six days.⁷⁸

Helzer 2011.

Much more recently, Erik G. Helzer and David A. Pizarro conducted an almost amusing pair of studies on the subliminal associations of physical cleanliness with moral and political conservatism.

⁷⁷ Haney, Banks and Zimbardo, 81.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

In Study 1, 52 college students were approached after they entered an academic building through a set of doors in the center of a hallway. At one end of the hallway was a hand sanitizer dispenser; at the other end, there was “nothing of note.” Every ninth person who entered the building was asked to complete a one minute demographic survey, inquiring about the following information: age, academic major, and political attitudes in the “moral, social and fiscal domains” on a scale from 1 to 7, with 7 being “extremely liberal.” The control group completed the questionnaire on the empty side of the hallway. The experimental group completed the questionnaire on the side of the hall near the hand-sanitizer.⁷⁹

There was a positive and statistically significant correlation between the presence of the hand sanitizer and the conservatism of the subjects’ responses, with a slope of 0.65. Those that responded to the survey near the hand sanitizer averaged a 4.30 on the political opinion scale, while those that stood on the opposite end of the hallway averaged a 4.93. These averages remained the same for all domains of the survey: moral, social and fiscal.⁸⁰

In Study 2, 61 college students volunteered to fill out a survey regarding the rightness or wrongness of a series of statements related to sexual purity, political attitudes and moral behavior. Subjects were evaluated in three specific scenarios: sexual purity, nonsexual purity, and nonpurity. Such statements involved questions such as “While house sitting for his grandmother, a man and his girlfriend have sex on his grandmother’s bed,” “As a practical joke, a man unwraps his office mate’s lunch and places it in a sterilized bed pan.” Before responding to the survey, however, the experimental group received an overview of the study while the briefer stood in front of a sign that said “Experimenters: Help keep the lab clean by using hand

⁷⁹ Erik Helzer and David Pizarro, "Dirty Liberals!: Reminders of Physical Cleanliness Influence Moral and Political Attitudes," *A Journal of the Association for Psychological Science*, (2011): 2.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

wipes!” The experimenter would then provide the subject with a box of antiseptic wipes, gesture to the sign, and request that the subject help keep the lab clean. In the control condition, however, this sign was removed, and the subjects received no such request.⁸¹

There was once more a positive and statistically significant correlation between the presence of the reminder to sanitize one’s hands and the conservatism of the subjects’ responses, but only for the scenarios involving sexual purity. Opinions remained constant for the other scenarios of nonsexual purity and nonpurity. The experimental group averaged a 4.33 on the scale, while the control group averaged a 5.01.⁸²

The conclusion of both studies shows that “environmental reminders of physical cleanliness shifted participants’ attitudes toward the conservative end of the political spectrum (Study 1) and altered their specific attitudes toward various moral acts (Study 2). When the experimenters primed the participants towards more conservative attitudes with the reminder of physical sanitation, they judged “moral violations in the sexual domain more harshly, but their moral attitudes toward other behaviors remained intact.”⁸³

Ernest-Jones, et. al. 2011.

More recently, researchers at Newcastle University in the United Kingdom experimented with the effect of two types of posters on “littering behavior of customers in a self-clearing cafeteria.” One type of poster featured images of flowers, along with a message requesting either that the customer place their trays on the rack following their meal or that the customer “only consume food and drink purchased on these premises.” An experimenter sitting in the cafeteria would record the binary outcome: whether any items were or were not left on the table

⁸¹ Ibid, 3.

⁸² Helzer and Pizarro, 4.

⁸³ Ibid 4.

after the individual left.⁸⁴

The researchers found that “displaying posters featuring eye images caused people to be more likely to remove litter from their tables in a self-clearing cafeteria,” by a percent increase across the board of about 20%. This was the case irrespective of the message underneath the pair of eyes. The findings support the conclusion that the presence of a human pair of eyes has a significant, positive effect on cooperative behavior. The hypothesized explanation of this curious link was “that the psychological mechanisms controlling decisions about whether to behave cooperatively are specifically responsive to cues which usually indicate social scrutiny,” which in this case were the “watching” eyes.⁸⁵

3.3 Conclusions We Are Able to Draw from this Research

These studies lend themselves to more pessimistic conclusions that the average individual is probably comfortable making. Thinking productively about the evaluation of people, however, requires that we run neither to the extremes of *outright rejection* nor *excessive acceptance* of what Doris called “the beginnings of a suspicion that Aristotelian moral psychology may be more problematic than philosopher engaged in the ethics and character debate have thought.”⁸⁶ The former leads to little more than sticking one’s head in the sand to avoid the discussion; the latter ends in pessimism about human morality and even moral nihilism. I suggest—and the irony is not lost on me—a golden mean between these two positions, and to adopt precisely what Doris sought to create in readers: “the beginnings of a suspicion” of Aristotle’s model of character.

However, I think we must be nuanced and precise when discussing just what *exactly* it is

⁸⁴ Max Ernest-Jones, Daniel Nettle, and Melissa Bateson, “Effects of Eye Images on Everyday Cooperative Behavior: A Field Experiment,” *Evolution and Human Behavior* 32, no. 3 (2011): 172.

⁸⁵ Ernest-Jones et al, 176.

⁸⁶ Doris, “Persons, Situations and Virtue Ethics,” 504-505.

that we see these studies doing for the larger conversation on personal ethics. Structurally, these conclusions will match the claims of the globalist, status quo theory of reliable character as I outlined them in Section 2; in this sense, I hope that we can put situationism, as it were, “toe-to-toe” with the globalism.

Examine the following table: I place the fundamental globalist claims about character traits next to the relevant research which calls these aspects into question.

<i>Qualities of Globalist Character Traits</i>	<i>Relevant Challenging Research</i>
Cross-situational consistency of character traits.	Milgram 1963 (Cruelty) Darley and Latané 1968 (Compassion) Latané and Rodin 1969 (Compassion) Bickman 1971 (Helpfulness, Honesty) Isen and Levin 1972 (Helpfulness) Darley and Batson 1973 (Compassion) Zimbardo 1973 (Cruelty)
Time-stability consistency of character traits.	None.
Responsibility for one’s character traits.	Isen and Levin 1972 (Awareness) Helzer 2011 (Awareness) Ernest-Jones 2011 (Awareness)

As you can see, most of the psychological studies seem to challenge the notion that character traits are exhibited consistently from situation to situation. The dime-in-the-phone booth experiment and the two more recent studies offer a modicum of insight into the problem of *responsibility* for one’s character traits, because those studies deal specifically with the changing

of an individual's dispositions *without their knowledge*—certainly a unique and bothersome problem. But what is perhaps most important about the table is that the globalist claim that a character trait is stable over time seems to have no relevant research.

This realization is important. Because the studies I summarized and included in this report naturally lend themselves to one facet of a globalist trait, the discussion about what situationist research can really be said to *show* about the globalist paradigm becomes more narrowly focused. In acceptance of this, I will address the effect of the research on each specific globalist claim.

Cross-Situational Consistency under Fire.

As I said earlier, the situationist research seems to concern itself disproportionately with the notion that a character trait will be reliably exhibited from situation to situation. This is bad news for what is really a commonplace assumption that character traits endure the change of circumstance.

Milgram demonstrated that the vast majority of people, no matter how “kind” or “compassionate” they and their families think themselves to be, will cower before the imaginary authority of the man in the lab coat and oblige his polite urges to continue electrocuting a man to death. Darley and Latané showed that the majority of people, whether they see themselves as “compassionate” or not, will probably *not* screw up the courage to overcome the bystander effect and come to the aid of a seizing secretary in grave need of medical attention. Nor will those “compassionate” people overcome fear of social reprisal and ask a whimpering secretary with her broken ankle if she needs to go to the emergency room, as Latané and Rodin proved. No more than 10% of seminarians running late to a lecture on the *parable of the Good Samaritan* will exhibit kindness to a man clutching his chest on the side of the road. And Bickman showed

that the majority of people will lie to man's face if he appears to be working-class.

If there actually *are* people who reliably exhibit these purported character traits of *honesty, courage, compassion, kindness*, they either avoid participation in social psychological studies, cease to exhibit their traits when they do participate, or are actually far fewer than we had previously believed. I think that it is very likely that the last of these possibilities describes the reality.

When it comes to reconciling cross-situational consistency with the empirical evidence, we have two options. If we wish to maintain a definition of character traits that includes cross-situational consistency as an essential quality, then we will need to become comfortable with the notion that there are far fewer people with these character traits than we are wont to assume. Or, we may revise our definition of character to de-emphasize cross-situational consistency and to be more forgiving of behavioral variability and accepting of situational influences. But I suspect that few of the people that defend character in the first place will jump for this option.

Time-Stability Remains Unverified.

Curiously, none of these studies seem upon closer inspection to have any relevance for the second essential quality of a character trait: time-stability, or the endurance of an individual's disposition to exhibit that character trait over a period of years or decades. There are no studies to my knowledge which return to their subjects repeatedly over an extended period of time in an attempt to somehow creatively observe the endurance of their character traits. Thus, we are left with nothing to really say about the validity of time-stability as an attribute of a character trait, beyond a modest amount of speculation. I think, however, that drawing on the previous discussion of the problems with cross-situational consistency has something to offer.

Cross-situational consistency refers to character reliability in different situations at the

same time; time-stability refers to character reliability in the same situation at different times. This breakdown is clean enough. However, when in the course of *real life*, the two types of reliability seem to be almost the same thing. I might wake up one day and by nine o'clock in the morning find myself either in a "grocery store situation" or in a "traffic jam situation." Surely, these are different enough that a situationist that wishes to study my character trait of "kindness" would be on the lookout for examples of cross-situational consistency (e.g. he uses rude hand gestures in traffic, but helps senior citizens in the grocery store). But if the situationist wishes to study my character trait of "kindness" solely on the road, she would be on the lookout for examples of time-stability, and might compare yesterday's commute to today's commute and tomorrow's (e.g. he uses rude hand gestures infrequently; sometimes he is just in a bad mood). My point is that tomorrow's traffic jam seems to be a distinctly different situation than today's traffic jam. At the very least, I am bound to be angrier and more frustrated by the bad luck of having two traffic jams in a row. In this way, despite the appearance of identicalness between the traffic jam situations, we see that the concept of time-stability is really just another form of cross-situational consistency, where each new commute is its own situation, with its own backstory and morally relevant circumstances.

Thus, I am comfortable in concluding that the situationist research that damaged the credibility of cross-situational consistency *also* damages the credibility of time-stability. A situation is a situation, whether it occurs elsewhere in space but at the same time, or in the same space but at a different time. Cross-situational consistency's claim to character reliability in the former actually includes the latter's definition as well.

Responsibility for One's Character: Problematic and Unstudied.

This is by far the most interesting challenge to globalism. It seems possible for a

globalist (especially a virtue ethicist) with strong convictions to dodge the situationist's criticisms of cross-situational consistency by claiming, as Aristotle did, that there are very few instances of true character, and thus that the situationist's numbers report nothing truly surprising.

But Helzer's hand sanitizer experiment, Isen and Levin's dime-in-the-phone booth experiment, and the Ernest-Jones et al eyes-in-the-cafeteria experiment all affect the exhibition of character trait *without the knowledge of the individual*. This, for the staunch globalist, should produce genuine problems. Supposedly, my choice to be less than virtuous comes from my mistaken selection of an action that I think is good for me, but which is in reality not. Over-indulgence in alcohol, for instance. This is not the case for the three experiments in question. Helzer's hand sanitizer dispenser caused individuals to be more politically conservative and ethically severe. Isen and Levin demonstrated that the price of a person's "kindness" can be, at times, a mere ten cents. And Ernest-Jones et al managed to make people more considerate and civic-minded by posting a mere picture of human eyes in a cafeteria. In none of the experiments did any of the hundreds of subjects realize what had caused the shift in their moral disposition.

The globalist is prepared to blame the greedy, selfish person for being the way he or she is if that person is able to discern what the true virtues are, and still chooses otherwise. The globalist is *not*, however, prepared to blame someone for something that happens entirely outside their control. This is why Helzer, Isen and Levin, and Ernest-Jones et al pose a threat to the globalist position. Globalists assume that moral behavior is a product of rational choice, the way that Aristotle says it is. Clearly, this is not entirely true—to some extent, moral or immoral behavior lies beyond the control of the individual. And one cannot be held responsible for what lies outside one's control.

However, these studies few. While more could certainly be found with time, globalism's sense of one's responsibility for one's character will probably not face a truly significant challenge from the social psychological side of the house until someone spends the time researching specifically moral or immoral behavior that is determined outside the conscious experience of the agent. In the meantime, though, I am comfortable with the prediction that this aspect of globalism, like cross-situational consistency, will find little empirical traction in the end. It, too will need to be rolled back to accommodate the facts.

3.4 Section Conclusion

Situationism was born primarily out of social psychological research on personality and moral behavior. Thus, the majority of this section was devoted to a review of those seminal studies. Following the review of the social psychological literature, I explored the specific points of tension between traditional globalism and the emergent situationism, finding issues with the notion of cross-situational consistency, time-stability, and responsibility for one's character traits. I proceeded to handle as best I could the variety of counterarguments people often make to situationism and those who are caught supporting it.

The root of situationism is the word "situation." It is so named because it emphasizes the role played by the circumstantial variables in determining moral behavior, while challenging the notion that an individual's character traits—their reliable disposition to do the right thing at the right time—are the sole or even the primary cause of good conduct. Oftentimes even those situational factors which seem contextually irrelevant play a considerably more significant role in determining moral behavior than the widely held construction of personality theory is able to accommodate—at least, not without also forfeiting a degree of coherence. A reasonable case has been presented to take the thesis of situationism seriously and to doubt the globalist claims that

our internal moral dispositions are the only relevant topic. The final section will deal with that most important question: so what?

4

The Ethical Aftermath of Situationism's Truth

The thesis of situationism and the evidence that supports it gives the average person much to think about. Parts of the tradition of globalism and the assumption of character reliability no longer seem defensible; at the same time, our intuition tells us that it is nevertheless still useful to judge others in a moral regard and to describe them in terms of character traits. Following the collision of these two theories, globalism and situationism, which parts of each theory remain standing? When the dust settles, to what do we refer to orient ourselves once more?

That is the question this section will seek to answer. There are five parts to this section. First, I take a pause from the flow of the paper to acknowledge the struggle most of us undergo when we begin to take seriously the prospect of situationism's truth. Second, I reenter the fray to discuss which situationist tendencies we are able to resist and how we can do so. Third, I identify which situationist tendencies we need not or cannot fight. Fourth, I explain how these situationist revelations should push our discussion of moral conduct towards the topic of ethical participation in power structures. Fifth and finally, I explain how the conclusions of many situationist studies bear such resemblance to lines of thinking unique to feminist care ethics that we would be remiss not to make it a central topic in our modern moral discourse.

4.1 The Problem of Situationism: A Sympathetic Aside

"All suffering comes from not facing reality, exactly as it is."

-The Buddha

When I first began to study situationism in depth, I became simultaneously *repulsed* by its depressing implications for my sense of human morality and *attracted* by my own pessimistic

curiosity to know just how morally hopeless we really are as human beings. Many of my fellow students with whom I have shared the situationist research have such a reaction—a sort of disappointment with humanity but a deeper interest in knowing the truth, no matter how disheartening it might really be. We cannot help but notice the damage that situationist research has done to our sense of our own agency: things in our environment that should not have affected our moral compass *simply do*. It might not be a terrible consequence that a woman who dropped her papers in the hallway had to collect them without my help—but I *am* horrified by the notion that I am so beholden to my environment that I *would* have helped, had I only found a forgotten quarter in the coin return slot of the vending machine moments earlier. It is a small case of a human's susceptibility to his or her environment, but it opens up the nagging question: how many times a day do little situational variables like that one change the outcome of my moral behavior? How many times an hour? How many times a *minute*? The sinking uncertainty is palpable to the new situationist. We ask ourselves: Am I not the one and only determiner of my moral choices? Am I so fickle and morally weak, that my being ten cents richer is enough to change *who I am*, for better or for worse?

Such questions plague the person that reflects on situationist findings. It is quite unfortunate that we have become so inured to a sense of ultimate moral agency that the fascinating revelations of a few smart and energetic psychologists come to us with grim news for that reassuring sense of control we have never lived a day without. All of the troubled discussions among the philosophers about who can be morally responsible and to what extent fail to ever approach the depth of the very personal price that situationism has exacted of us: our self-respect.

Of course, it might very well be the case that situationism bothers you very little—and to those of you for whom that is true: congratulations. Perhaps you are a hard determinist and have made your peace with your knowledge of the illusory nature of free will. Or maybe you simply revel in the deflationary and humbling effect that situationism has on open-minded globalists. Whatever the case may be, it is narrow-minded to ignore just how much agency factors into most people's feeling of self-worth—that a sense of moral agency is the one feature that prevents us from being mere leaves floating on the wind. All I can offer the person that is less than comfortable with the prospect of situationism's truth is the Buddha quote I included at the outset of this section—I am of the conviction that the truth is always good, though often painful, and that we ought to do nothing other with the truth than accept it and learn to live with it. In time, it will be not so difficult.

My hope is that this aside was not overly sentimental, but useful in that it helps relieve us of at least some of the friction we experience as we push onward to a discussion of the implications that a true situationism has for the shifting territory of personal ethics in the modern world.

4.2 Accepting and Countering Situationism: How to Put Up a Fight

Fortunately for us, there are ways that we can learn to fend for ourselves and combat the subtle situationist forces at work in the backgrounds of our environments and our minds. Some of these techniques are quite intuitive, while some of them are a little odd. But it is important to remember that though our faith in ourselves to act reliably might be diminished in the wake of situationist findings, the dire importance of ethical conduct in a world like ours *is not*. Right conduct is still a worthy goal—and if we must adopt some guerilla tactics to overcome the situationist influence in our lives, so be it.

Treating Globalism as the Basket of Cognitive Biases.

At the beginning of Section 3, I included excerpts from Gilbert Harman, who titled his seminal situationist article “Moral Philosophy Meet Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error.” I found the name effective at conveying the situationist’s central problem with globalism—that the globalists are fundamentally *wrong* about what deserves the attribution of credit or fault for an action. For situationists, it is the environmental variables that go unconsidered in so many globalist appraisals of events and deserve much more attention than they currently receive in our daily lives.

Cognitive biases are “cases in which human cognition reliably produces representations that are systematically distorted compared to some aspect of objective reality.”⁸⁷ Given that definition, I favor the treatment of globalism as one such systematic flaw in reasoning. Cognitive biases are identifiable, recordable, and treatable. The question then become: how do we do that?

Daniel Kahneman wrote a recent New York Times Bestseller called *Thinking, Fast and Slow* in which he identifies the two types of thinking that humans employ: he calls them System 1 and System 2. System 1 is the fast, intuitive and evolutionarily older form of thinking and coming to conclusions. System 2 is the slower and more deliberate thought process, and was more recently developed in the human evolutionary history with the frontal lobe. “System 1,” he says, “is more influential than your experience tells you, and it is the secret author of many of the choices and judgments you make.”⁸⁸ System 1 is the system that accounts for all our cognitive biases—it values speed of conclusion more than accuracy of the outcome, and is thus a liability

⁸⁷ Martie Haselton, Daniel Nettle and Damian Murray, "The Evolution of Cognitive Bias," *UCLA College Social Sciences*, (2014): 2.

⁸⁸ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux (2011): 13.

to be mitigated. How can we accomplish such mitigation? Kahneman says this:

The way to block errors that originate in System 1 is simple in principle: recognize the signs that you are in a cognitive minefield, slow down, and ask for reinforcement from System 2. [...] Ultimately, a richer language is essential to the skill of constructive criticism. Much like medicine, the identification of judgment errors is a diagnostic task, which requires a precise vocabulary. The name of a disease is a hook to which all that is known about the disease is attached, including vulnerabilities, environmental factors, symptoms, prognosis, and care. Similarly, labels...bring together in memory everything we know about a bias, its causes, its effects, and what can be done about it.⁸⁹

In short, learning about the psychological biases gives you power over them. This, then, is the first way we can fight back against the situationist tendencies of the System 1 mode of thinking: learning about the biases, growing our vocabularies about the psychological biases, and using these to help us recognize when we are walking through “cognitive minefields.”

Resetting the “What-The-Hell” Effect.

Dan Ariely has conducted extensive research on the pervasiveness of lying in daily life. “Most of us think of ourselves as honest,” the back of his book *The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty* reads, “but in fact we all cheat.”⁹⁰ As you can probably imagine, the experiments he references are numerous, many of which he has conducted himself. In that process, however, he learned not just that we lie and cheat all the time, but how we convince ourselves that it is permissible. In the book, he names one type of human rationalization process the “what-the-hell” effect, so named because most of the little human acts of dishonesty come in the form of temptations—and when we lack a real justification for commission of dishonesty, we tell ourselves “Ah, what the hell...why not?” Much of our daily dishonestly happens under that banner.⁹¹ Ariely brings up some interesting considerations about the ways we can “reset” our

⁸⁹ Ibid 417-418.

⁹⁰ Dan Ariely, *The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty: How We Lie to Everyone--Especially Ourselves*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers (2012): back cover of book.

⁹¹ Ibid, 249.

moral habits and get back on track, so to speak.

Interestingly, we already have many social mechanisms in place that seem to be designed specifically for resetting our moral compass and overcoming the “what-the-hell” effect. Such resetting rituals ranging from the Catholic confession to Yom Kippur, and Ramadan to the weekly Sabbath—all present us with opportunities to collect ourselves, stop the deterioration, and turn a new page. (For the nonreligious, think of New Year’s resolutions, birthdays, changes of job, and romantic breakups as “resetting” opportunities.)⁹²

So what if we capitalize on the way this works socially, and put it to use to keep ourselves more honest? Ariely and his team already thought of this—they began carrying out experiments on the effectiveness of using a “nonreligious version of the Catholic confession” and testing to see if it swayed the average human back to a more ethical disposition, even temporarily. “So far,” he reports, “it seems that they can rather successfully reverse the what-the-hell effect.”⁹³

This becomes the second way that we can fight to keep some virtue for ourselves. Even if the situationist findings demonstrate that the majority of people have no consistent ethical dispositions, we can manufacture a genuine one—albeit temporarily—by telling someone else about the bad things we did over the past week, and then expressing an honest intent to refrain from it in the coming week. It is certainly not the sort of virtue that Aristotle sought—but we will take what we can get.

Self-Narration as a Means of Regaining Agency.

Peter Goldie offers us a third means we can add to our arsenal in the struggle to retain our agency: the “intimate connection between narrative and personality.” He writes in his book *On Personality*:

The idea is this. Quite generally, as we’ve seen throughout this book, our thoughts and feelings, and the things that we do, can express or reveal our personality and character: her kind thoughts and actions express her kindness; his

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ariely, 249.

thoughts and actions in the gym express his vanity. Similarly, the ways we tell the story of our and other people's lives reflect, and are expressive of, our individual personalities... what I'm suggesting here is that just this idea can be applied to the way in which we related, or think about, our own or other people's lives. Say last month I fell over and broke my leg, and not I'm telling you what happened to me. I could tell this story in all sorts of ways, each one of which could be true: I could tell it as a light-hearted ironic comedy, a tragedy, a bleak comedy in the Mike Leigh manner, and so on. My choice of genre (whether an intentional choice or not), as well as what I put in the story, what I leave out, my tone of voice, the way I tell it—all this is expressive of, and reveals, my character and personality,—just as my ostentatious way of dressing or my way of decorating my living room expresses my personality...⁹⁴

What I read in Goldie's suggestion is a strikingly wise and refreshingly unconventional way of flipping our usual conception of character on its head. While globalist might spend time combing through his thoughts in an attempt to control them in such a way that the vicious thoughts are not acted upon, that the virtuous ones are, focusing on developing internal character which will manifest itself in good action, etc., a more informed situationist might realize that we can much more easily move the other direction, and create the external life—or “narrative”—to which we aspire. In this way, we use situationism against itself; in taking control of the situational factors in our environment, we regain some of that precious control of our inner psychological lives that some of those situationist studies suggest we have lost entirely.

This becomes the third means of regaining a degree of moral agency in spite of our susceptibility to the myriad environmental factors exerting influence on our moral behavior every day. Between educating oneself about cognitive biases to diagnose faulty reasoning, using confession to conquer our what-the-hell tendencies, and actively controlling our situation through narrative and expression, we have a decent shot at holding some territory against the pressure of cold and unforgiving empirical research. And it seems to be enough territory on which we may live in relative comfort.

⁹⁴ Goldie, *On Personality*, 125-126.

4.3 Unmaintainable Ethical Assumptions: What We Cannot Fight

Unfortunately, the other foot must fall. There is undoubtedly territory that we *have* lost and will not be regaining from situationism. An accurate account of which assumptions we are no longer entitled to make is necessary to prevent ourselves from falling into moral traps. Though there are certainly other assumptions we can no longer make regarding character reliability, the one I take the time to outline here is the automatic faith we place in our own judgment of character.

Globalism as a Product of Human Evolutionary History.

Various studies on cognitive biases have sought to explain their existence and pervasiveness within the model of evolution by natural selection. Our immediate intuition about the cognitive bias is that the “reliable distortion” it produces of some objective reality seems harmful and in opposition to survival.⁹⁵ But by this line of reasoning, these cognitive biases—like the fundamental attribution error discussed earlier—ought to have been bred out of us long ago in evolutionary history.

As it turns out, those studies that sought an answer seem to have largely converged on the conclusion that “counterintuitively, biases in behavior or cognition can improve decision making” and “lead to mistakes in one direction but—in so doing—steer us away from more costly mistakes in the other direction.” The study shares as example the way that we sometimes mistakenly categorize a curved stick as a snake—the error generally shocks us as we jump away from the perceived threat. That incorrect categorization is a “false positive,” meaning you *falsely* thought the non-snake *was* a snake. However, making that error a thousand times is *in the long run* still less costly than the opposite type of error, the “false negative,” meaning you *falsely*

⁹⁵ Haselton et al, “The Evolution of Cognitive Bias,” 2.

thought the snake *was not* a snake. Such a false negative would lead me not to jump away from the snake because I mistakenly thought it was not dangerous—and perhaps suffer a venomous snake bite and die.⁹⁶ So ends my genetic line. On this view, the cognitive bias *towards* the mistaken categorization of sticks as snakes keeps you safe in the aggregate. Better have a thousand false positives than one false negative from an evolutionary standpoint—the former reproduces. The latter dies.

Consider not just the analogy of the fundamental attribution error to globalist thinking, but the possibility that globalist thinking *literally is* a cognitive bias designed to keep us safe. The hypothesis goes something like this: As human societies began collectivizing toward agrarian civilization, morality evolved with them. Because one had to have a good sense of who was trustworthy and who was not back in those dangerous and lawless days, evolution favored the individual that regularly categorized others as enemies that posed no real danger to him or his family.

In this sense, the favored individual had a cognitive bias *towards* categorizing someone as an enemy. When another man in the community is caught stealing something, our cognitively biased protagonist immediately attributes to the thief the label of “a bad man” with “wicked character” and “not trustworthy.” Even if the thief was an otherwise good man, who attempted to steal bread to feed his pregnant wife, our protagonist writes him off as a *globally* bad person, not to be trusted ever again and a risk to his safety and that of his family. Though his evaluation of the man’s character was no doubt the result of a cognitive bias, his high number of false positives kept his family safe and preserved his genetic material via natural selection. Thus, we

⁹⁶ Dominic Johnson, Daniel Blumstein, James Fowler, and Martie Haselton., "The Evolution of Error: Error Management, Cognitive Constraints, and Adaptive Decision-making Biases," *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 28, no. 8 (June 19, 2013): 474.

see the development of globalism as a cognitive bias and a distortion of reality, but one which “positively impacted fitness” and was thus not a flaw in design, but a feature of it.⁹⁷

Fortunately, many thousands of years down the line, we no longer have need for these biases. Our liberal morality permits us to participate more deeply in our communities. But we are not able to dispense with our biases, so ingrained are they in our evolutionary makeup. The lesson here is that *if the evolutionary account of globalism is true*—and I think that it is—we are always going to instinctually judge a person’s whole character with insufficient data. And oftentimes, we will be incorrect. This fact is, it would seem, ineradicable. If we wish to make correct and undistorted conclusions about other people, we must get used to second-guessing our “gut feelings” about people. Because they will often be wrong—and that is not going to change.⁹⁸

4.4 How Situationism Makes Power Structures a Critical Topic in Ethics

There is plenty that can be said about the implications that various situationist studies have for ethics. I have tried to pick out the two that I think are the most salient for our time. This is the first of those: the ethics of participation in power structures.

What is a power structure? I adopt for the purposes of this paper a slightly unusual definition of the term: a power structure is any hierarchy in which power is exerted downward to accomplish collective ends. I use it to refer to any human hierarchical organization in which the amount of influence one has varies with their position in that organization. More colloquially, I mean that a power structure is a “food chain,” a “totem pole,” a “pecking order,” “the establishment,” et cetera. For this project, it does not refer only to the leadership of an organization (as many people use the term today) but to *everyone* in an organization, be it a

⁹⁷ Haselton et al, 2.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

company, a police department, a political party, a non-profit organization, a sports team, and even the less rigid things like friend groups or neighborhoods.

Why discuss power structures? Everywhere we look in our modern, western and liberal civilization, we cannot help but notice the ubiquitous presence of hierarchy. Everyone has a boss, a manager, a supervisor, a sheriff, a chief, a commander, a teacher, a principal and so on. By necessity, it seems, we must organize ourselves into our various roles and find our place in the “food chain.” Philip Zimbardo, shocked into writing his 2008 book *The Lucifer Effect* when he became aware of detainee abuse at Abu Ghraib—and its striking resemblance to the experiment he himself terminated for humanitarian concerns three and a half decades previously—summarizes the impetus for discussing ethics in power structures:

The Stanford Prison Experiment began as a simple demonstration of the effects that a composite of situational variables has on the behavior of individuals role-playing prisoners and guards in a simulated prison environment...an institutional setting could override the internal dispositions of the actors in that environment...over time, this experiment has emerged as a powerful illustration of the potentially toxic impact of bad systems and bad situations in making good people behave in pathological ways that are alien to their nature.⁹⁹

After having spent a considerable amount of time reading through reports of and about the Milgram Shock Experiment and the Stanford Prison Experiment, I have developed an iron conviction that power structures are some of the most morally dangerous entities in our modern world—primarily because hierarchies are becoming so necessary in a capitalist system and a (mostly) free market economy that we are approaching a time when virtually no one exists outside of one. If we, as a society, are going to enter this era of omnipresent power structures, we must develop a sense of personal ethics tailored specifically to the needs of an individual seeking to preserve a degree of moral integrity—to not be forced by circumstances outside her

⁹⁹ Philip Zimbardo, *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, New York: Random House Publishing Group (2007): 195.

control to behave pathologically—as they navigate the hierarchical jungle of the modern era. A vigorous understanding of situationism and its conclusions are central to such an ethical discussion.

I break down the discussion into two halves: ethical followership in power structures and ethical leadership of structures. I aim to state the basic principles of a productive discussion about ethics in that environment and discuss it briefly.

Implications of Situationism on Ethical Followership.

There is a way of complimenting someone who is obedient and industrious in our society: we say “she can get stuff done,” “he’s my go-to guy” or “he’s a work horse.” All of these are the sort of compliments that a boss, manager, supervisor or otherwise is likely to say about their employee. While there is nothing inherently bad about those compliments, there are conditions in which they might be indicative of something more sinister.

Recall the Milgram Shock Experiment. For whatever reason, the only environmental variable that must be present for an ordinary person to shock an innocent man to death is a man in a lab coat politely prodding him or her to continue. During that experiment that man in the lab coat was limited to four prods:

Prod 1: Please continue. Or, Please go on.

Prod 2: The experiment requires that you continue.

Prod 3: It is absolutely essential that you continue.

Prod 4: You have no other choice, you must go on.

These four lines, combined with the symbolic authority of the desk, lab coat, and the feeling that some advancement in psychology depended on their willing participation, were sufficient to push dozens of average humans to do unthinkable things. I cannot shake the intuition that those subjects forced themselves to continue, with all of their nervous laughter,

gnashing of teeth, and profuse sweating because they had some desire to be “the go-to guy” that “can get stuff done.”

If anything in the power structures of our society ought to be kept in check, it is that impulse. The goal of a corporation is not ethical conduct, but profitable conduct. The goal of a police force is not justice, but order. The individual herself will be the only reliable line of defense against the unethical pressures inherent with hierarchies or power. A follower navigating a power structure like that must be prepared to identify in themselves the forces of *perceived* authority at work. Like Daniel Kahneman’s advice, if they have the vocabulary to name such a situation—perhaps a “Milgram Situation”—they have the power of diagnosis, and regain a certain power over that situational susceptibility that seems to exist in all humans.

Recall the Stanford Prison Experiment. The only variable correlated with the guard’s brutality was their arbitrary assignment to that role of “correctional officer.” With that assignment came a sharp uniform, sunglasses, and a nightstick. Those things alone seem to be responsible for how quickly what in any other setting would be called a “game of cops and robbers” spiraled into a humanitarian crisis that left lasting emotional scars upon the prisoners and the guilty guards.

So what do we do with this knowledge? If we can remember and internalize the knowledge that *the average human will do what he or she is told to do by a person in a perceived position of authority*, and remain on the lookout for those “Milgram Situations” where that fact is exhibited, then we can start to mitigate the effects of the perception of authority.

4.5 How Situationism Militates in Favor of Care Ethics

What is the Ethics of Care?

The ethics of care is “promising alternative to the dominant moral approaches that have

been invoked during the previous two centuries.” It is a new lens through which we can interpret moral problems, and is based on the “truly universal experience of care.”¹⁰⁰ The fundamental challenge care ethicists pose is that the moral paradigm which has dominated Western philosophical discourse for millennia is primarily a masculine evaluation of moral problems: psychologically, it appears, the tendency to view morality as an attempt to choose between competing goods through a process that is explicitly rational and truth-centered is fundamentally a male one. The alternate view, discovered and published widely by psychologist Carol Gilligan, is one that does not privilege truth and rationality so much as a preference for avoiding the hurting of others and taking seriously the way that people will feel.¹⁰¹ Rather than the cold moral calculus of utilitarianism, of doing the maximizing good or maximizing happiness, care ethics is fundamentally about resolving competing responsibilities to others in a way that minimizes the hurt another suffers.

Rather than view moral problems by abstracting to a viewpoint that is devoid of humanity—what some have called the view “from nowhere,” the attempt to resolve these responsibilities and to fulfill the needs of others are placed squarely in the first person. A care ethicist is justified in accounting for their own emotional sense of the situation—because unlike in older and more well-known moral theories, emotion is not looked down upon as something which interferes with “pure reason,” but as an equally valuable way of thinking about the world.

Some say the care ethics is simply an extended form of virtue ethics, which dispenses with outdated and highly masculinized virtues, and replaces them with the virtues of “care,” “consideration,” or “compassion.” Others hold that care ethics is an entirely new framework

¹⁰⁰ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2006): 3.

¹⁰¹ Carol Gilligan, *In A Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press (1982).

through which we view moral problems. I will remain silent on that debate.

How the Conclusions of Situationism Become the Assumptions of Care Ethics.

In the course of preparing for this undergraduate thesis, I delved into both the psychological reports from the studies themselves which generated the situationist movement but also into the wide body of reflective psychological and philosophical writings who are grappling still with the concept of a self that is subject to much more subconscious interference from the environment than we had previously believed—or want to believe currently. The one theme that seemed to arise from all of their writings was a recognition of *vulnerability*.

For many, this vulnerability was the problem. No one likes to think of themselves as weak and helpless—but that is how many former globalists and normal people felt when they caught wind of studies claiming that ten cents was enough to make one helpful, or that standing within ten feet of a hand sanitizer dispenser makes one more conservative.

If I had to condense into one sentence the gist of all the situationist studies, literature and discourse, it would be the following:

The average human is much more vulnerable to the circumstances and environments in which they find themselves than they would like to believe.

I have skirted care ethics for some time now as a student of philosophy. For whatever reason, I did not feel an urge to study it. It was not until I stumbled across it in conversation with a few classmates that a gradual dawn of understanding began to occur: the biggest lesson and conclusion of situationism is a reminder of human vulnerability—and a fundamental starting point for care ethics is that humans are dependent creatures. In this sense, care ethics begins where situational psychology ends.

This is fitting, too, as the ethics of care was generated largely (if not entirely) by the work of psychologist Carol Gilligan when she published her book *In a Different Voice*, a collection of

dialogues about morality with women of all ages and walks of life, with analyses that showed some fascinating discoveries, many of which became the tenets of care ethics I introduced earlier.

4.6 Section Conclusion

So, knowing now as we do that care ethics has the weight of decades of social psychology on its side, and that situationism can be said to justify it directly, I see there being several final takeaways from the whole project.

1. Human moral behavior is susceptible to situational variables.
2. This is contrary to our intuition, for both cultural and evolutionary reasons.
3. Widely held concepts of global Aristotelian virtue and character set too high a bar for the average human, and does more harm than good.
4. Acting ethically still matters, though it is now known to be more difficult than previously believed.
5. Acting ethically is possible if we accept our own vulnerability, take enlightened measures to mitigate against them, especially within power structures, and refrain from judging harshly the unethical behavior we observe.
6. Humans almost always deserve more compassion and less judgment for their moral failures.

5

Conclusion

For this project, I attempted to outline fully the status quo moral theory of globalism, to challenge it with the social psychological evidence of situationism, and to point the way to two specific areas that deserve the immediate attention of newly informed situationists: the topic of power structure ethics and the field of feminist care ethics.

It is also irresponsible to think that situationism's truth is a trivial matter—as the field grows and understanding about the effect situational variables have on the average human deepens, I have no doubt that the implications of a robust situationist theory will alter the way we feel about every part of our culture: from modern parenting to the civil court system, from marital infidelity to business school, from the education system to death row. I am certain that a new theory of personal morality will develop over time, in the language of care ethics and informed by situationist psychology, which surpasses globalist virtue ethics in its completeness, nuance and humanity.

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