

The Concept of Virtue after the Character-Situation Debate

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Abstract. The article focuses on a current debate in contemporary ethics between so-called situationists and the advocates of virtue ethics. The fundamental assumption made by virtue ethics is that developing and perfecting one's moral character or moral virtues warrants one's morally good action. Situationists claim that this assumption contradicts the results of the latest empirical studies. From this observation they conclude that virtue ethics is based on an empirically inadequate moral psychology. In the first part of the article, I present the conceptions of virtue and moral character developed in response to the situationist critique. I show to which degree these conceptions differ from the classical, so-called global approach in virtue ethics. In the second part, based on the latest empirical studies in social and cognitive psychology, I argue, against the situationist objection, that the classical notion of virtue meets the requirement of empirical adequacy. I mainly resort to the interactionist theory of personality by W. Mischel, R. Baumeister's studies over self-control, D. Kahneman's dual-processing theory of the mind, and the studies over automatized processes by J. Bargh.

Keywords: virtue; virtue ethics; situation; moral character; situationist objection.

Introduction

Contemporary virtue ethics is one of the most common ethical theories. Contrarily to utilitarianism and deontology, which are labeled act-centered ethics, virtue ethics does not focus on the moral act and moral principles that enable one to evaluate an act. Virtue ethics concentrates on the moral agent and building up his or her good character; on building it through shaping virtues which are to guarantee one's morally good action. Virtue ethicists maintain that a virtuous agent is someone who not only knows what he or she should do but is also sufficiently motivated to act according to this knowledge. Thus, in their research, virtue ethicists focus on the human person and her moral condition, her specific possibilities, and limitations. This also includes the interest in moral education, especially the process of acquiring ethical virtues, understood as cognitive-affective dispositions to a morally good action.

The turn of the 20th and the 21st century witnessed the height of its development as well as the moment of its most intense criticism. On the one hand, the strong position of virtue ethics has been confirmed by a considerable number of its applications. On the other hand, however, virtue ethics is facing the most fundamental criticism from the ethicists inspired by the empirical research results in social and cognitive psychology. The critics, John Doris, Gilbert Harman, Maria Merrit, Peter Vranas – so-called situationists – argue that virtue ethics is empirically inadequate because it is founded on moral psychology which has been falsified by the latest empirical data (Doris 1998, 2002; Harman 1999, 2000, 2003; Merritt 2000; Vranas 2005).

Situationists try to convince us that our mode of behavior is decisively under the influence of so-called situational factors, while virtues (personological factors) are at best of secondary importance. This view, according to its advocates, finds its confirmation in various historical and empirical data, which point at authority, social role, or mood (among others) as the factors determining our moral behavior. Some even deny the existence of practical wisdom (or *phronesis*), so central to virtue ethics. This denial is supported by the reference to the data in cognitive psy-

chology, which allegedly suggest that automatic mechanisms determine most human actions, and are subject to what is called *priming*,¹ *framing*,² or mere *exposure effects*.³ In many cases, the work of these mechanisms is incongruent with moral views and convictions of ordinary human agents. So, situationists conclude, if one is to mention any virtues at all, one could speak of them only locally, i.e., as particular modes of reacting or behaving in specific, narrow contexts (Merritt, Doris and Harman 2010).

Situationists characterize classical virtues as global – i.e., consisting of constant and integrated behavior congruent with the whole system of values. In this view, if someone has the virtue of honesty, such a person behaves honestly stably and consistently, regardless of fluctuating circumstances. Additionally, globally taken honesty is closely correlated with other virtues – truthfulness or justice, for example. It is so because one cannot be at the same time honest and tell lies or be biased (or partial). Situationists question the possibility of virtue globally understood, and offer its local account instead. As they argue, when it comes to influencing human behavior, the factor of utmost importance is the situation in which the behavior takes place. Thus one should explain the regularity of certain behaviors in terms of situational factors rather than by the reference to any psychological traits of the agent. If then one wants to speak

¹ The priming effect consists in enlarging the probability of use of a certain type of cognitive category through the repetitive exposure to a certain type of stimuli that are semantically and affectively related to a specific category (e.g., kindness or senility). Bargh and his colleagues carried out a series of experiments in which the subjects were supposed to make sentences out of word pieces. The subjects who made sentences with the words relating to unkindness showed a much lower level of patience than the subjects in the control group (using neutral words in the puzzles); the subjects who were making sentences with the words relating to senility were later on much more slow performing their tasks than the control group (Bargh, Chen and Burrows 1996).

² D. Kahneman points at this kind of influence. He gives an example of studies in which subjects were presented two choice options of the same logical value: “benefits will maintain on the level of 70%” and “losses will maintain on the level of 30%”. The subjects more often chose the former option, since it was more beneficial. What was decisive about their choice was the word used in the sentence: “benefit” or “loss”. The subjects automatically reacted in a positive way to the term “benefit” and in a negative way to the term “loss” (Kahneman 2011).

³ The pure exposure effect consists in the fact that we usually value more highly what we already know (Kahneman 2011).

of honesty, one can merely refer to honesty in a narrow sense, understood as a trait that manifests itself only in certain circumstances (Doris 2002).

The situationist critique of virtue ethics evoked a lively debate not only between virtue ethicists and situationists but also among virtue ethicists themselves. Although this debate primarily focuses on the existence and nature of virtues, it also touches on the issue of autonomy of ethics and the specificity of its categories. Most arguments used in it are not philosophical but based on empirical data gathered from experimental psychology. The advocates of the autonomy of ethics might then say that it makes no sense to debate with situationists because their accusations do not relate to normative virtue ethics. At best, they describe real human behavior, human morality, and as was already noticed by Hume, one cannot draw any normative conclusions out of purely descriptive statements (Hume 2008). However, virtue ethicists accepted the situationists' claim that any ethical theory should meet the condition of minimal psychological realism. If certain norms are to be obligatory, they must assume empirically adequate moral psychology; or in other words: "ought" must imply "can" (Flanagan 1993, 15–56; Doris 2002).

In my article I want to focus on the notion of virtue developed after the "person-situation debate." The local account of virtue offered by situationists has lately faced at least three fully developed responses. One, relatively more acceptable to situationists, has been provided by Robert Adams (2006). Another one was formulated by Christian Miller (2013, 2014), who defends character but doubts the empirical adequacy of global virtue. And the third one is the response that I consider to be the most convincing, offered by Nancy Snow (2008), Dan Russell (2009, 2013), Darcia Narvaez and Daniel Lapsey (2005), and others, who defend the compatibility of traditionally understood virtue with the empirical research in contemporary psychology. The questions I ask in my paper are the following: Are situationists right? Has their critique of virtue ethics convincingly rejected traditionally understood virtues and virtue ethics? To what extent has the situationist critique influenced the ethicists of virtue? Answering these questions, I will also show how normative ethics should use the results of empirical research in experimental psychology.

I will begin discussing two conceptions of virtue, one by Adams and one by Miller. Both are formulated in response to the situationist critique. I will show how much these two views of virtue depart from the classical, global, understanding of virtue, as well as how far they are from Doris' idea of local virtues. Then, I will pass on to the defense of virtue globally understood. I will present arguments showing that the concept of global virtue coheres with the latest findings in experimental psychology.

1. Robert Adams' conception of virtue and deflacionism

Let us start with the deflationist approach to virtue presented by Adams, the author of *A Theory of Virtue* (2006), whose deflationism was positively received by Doris, who praised the book for its respect to John Doris' principle of psychological realism (2010).

However, ascribing a deflationist view to Adams is debatable. On the one hand, he admits that empirical data show the impossibility of globally understood ethical virtues and that virtues should be at best understood as probabilistic and modular. By being probabilistic, he means that a person who has a given virtue, let us say honesty, will not necessarily always act honestly but only in such a way that the probability of her behaving honestly will be relatively high. By modularity of virtues, he means that there are numerous and independent dispositions. People acquire dispositions to specific types of behavior, related to separate domains of activity. One can understand these domains in various ways: narrowly, as related to one very particular kind of situation; or more widely, as associated with a specific social role (like being a father, mother, or husband). Such simple behavioral dispositions can be accumulated, and thus constitute a broader disposition, which will also manifest behaviorally in various domains of human life (2006, 123-126).

But on the other hand, Adams differentiates virtues from Virtue, which he defines as perfection in striving for goodness. Virtue (written with capital V) has no plural form. It is a kind of whole, just as the morally good character, the possession of which consists not only in the instantiation of many positive features but also in their being perfectly in-

tegrated. Although Adams is not an advocate of the doctrine of the unity of virtues, he does believe that some of the virtues – e.g., such cardinal virtues as courage, temperance, self-control, justice, or wisdom– are essential, and it is difficult to imagine a virtuous person without them. Besides, virtue is not composed of accidental and unrelated components. On the contrary, its components make an integrated whole which can be treated as a property of a person encompassing her convictions, attitudes, desires, values, and agency (2006, 201–209).

While the probabilistic and modular understanding of virtue is close to the situationist perspective, and, when compared to the traditional approach to virtues, it could be recognized as deflationist, it is hard to call Adams a deflationist once we take into account all the elements of his conception of virtue. Indeed, Adams does seem to «soften» the concept of virtue by accepting thinner criteria for a person to qualify as virtuous. However, when it comes to formulating the normative ideal and goal of life, he maintains the traditional «thick» (or inflated) understanding of virtue. Also, his approach to moral education, to its role and significance, is as far away as it can be from situationism. Adams is an advocate of moral education *via* perfection of ethical virtues. Although in his opinion, such education starts with acquiring modular and probabilistic virtues, it then expands them towards a holistically understood, morally good character. Besides, what Adams means by virtuous action is not so much just behavior as the proper motivation, which is questioned by situationists.

2. Christian Miller and mixed traits

The situationist critique of virtue ethics also led to the formulation by Christian Miller of the “mixed traits” concept, which in a way can be seen as a triumph of situationism (2013, 154–155). According to this approach, on the one hand, most people have traits that are neither virtues nor vices in the traditional sense. Human traits are something in between vice and virtue, which explains why most of human behavior is fragmented, being neither purely good nor purely evil. On the other hand, however, mixed traits are stable and cross-situationally consistent in certain ways (Miller

2013, 155–158). They can differ from one person to the next, vary in how specifically or how generally they can be individuated; they often carry out their psychological processing without conscious awareness, and so forth.

Contrary to what situationists claim, this means that there is something like moral character. And although one cannot evaluate it using simple categories of good and evil, particularly vice and virtue, one cannot say that there is nothing in a person that determines her behavior, or that it is not robust enough to manifest itself in consistent behavior. Even if these mixed traits merely play the role of media between situational *stimuli* and the behavior caused by them, the way a person reacts to the situation depends on her moral character, her traits and dispositions, e.g., her empathy, her ability to admire and respect certain things, her moral norms or convictions (Miller 2013, 3–12). Following the situationists' advice, Miller appreciates the significance of a situation; however he does not question the importance of personological traits and their influence on behavior.

Although they offer different strategies of converting locally understood virtues into something broader, Adams and Miller both question (and here situationists may triumph) the psychological realism of globally understood virtues.

3. In defense of virtue globalism

A theory of virtue and virtue ethics can satisfy the condition of psychological realism in two ways: factually and potentially. The former consists in finding the empirical proof that there are real people who exemplify global virtues; the latter would show the very possibility of global virtues and their consistency with how the human being behaves.

The quest of factually virtuous people is quite troublesome for various reasons: firstly, it is difficult to measure virtue in zero-one mode (either one is virtuous or one is not). Acquiring a virtue is a continuous and never-ending process. Thus it is gradual, and so must be the possession of virtue. One might focus on identifying a minimal threshold of virtue, e.g., inflicting pain or suffering to an innocent person. Also, total indifference to injustice would disqualify one as a virtuous person. However, identi-

fyng such attitudes during experiments is not easy: experiments rarely consist of observing a person for a long time in a series of situations; usually, subjects have only one opportunity to act, which does not necessarily unveil their actual moral character.

Does the scarcity of virtue and virtuous people undermine the psychological realism of virtue ethics? In some respects, it seems so. For example, there are not many people (if any) who could be seen as paragons of virtue. But do ideals have to be fully accomplished? The examples of morally good actions to follow may have various sources (heroic stories, and rare, but still real, examples of moral heroes). We do not find it difficult to tell apart people who deserve moral admiration from those who do not. The research shows that even children are able to identify behavior which is just, honest, or benevolent (Snow 2008, 26).

In defense of the empirical adequacy of virtues, it might be sufficient to focus on showing that perfecting virtue and virtuous action is (contrary to what situationists say) not inconsistent with the findings of contemporary psychology. A few examples are worth mentioning here: Cognitive-Affective Personality System (Mischel and Shoda), our knowledge about self-control, and self-regulation (Baumeister), as well as the role and significance of automatic processes in human life (Kahneman, Bargh). We now turn to them.

3.1. Cognitive-Affective Personality System [CAPS] (W. Mischel and Y. Shoda)

Moral character and virtues may have their psychological (i.e., empirical) foundation in the Cognitive-Affective Personality System (Mischel and Shoda), which assumes a social-cognitive approach to personality. The system is understood in terms of mediating nets of various processes thanks to which people interpret reality and adjust their behavior to it in a specific, individual way. According to this approach, every human being possesses a dynamic and individually defined personality, which could be described via their behavior profile. The patterns are laid out in the form of “if situation A occurs, then x behaves in B way.” A crucial element in

this description is the way *x* construes (perceives or interprets) situation A (Shoda, Mischel and Wright 1994).

People differ from each other by having different beliefs, desires, feelings, goals, values, memories, etc., in short, by everything that constitutes their identity. The way people react to various situations depends on them, on how they perceive and interpret their situations and events, either at the reflective level or at the level of automatized processes. Of course, the reactions are shaped by the net of various interactions between all these cognitive and affective elements. However, one can still speak here of individual traits of character, taken as complex sets of cognitive-affective processes that activate themselves in response to subjective construals of objective features of a given situation. These traits are relatively constant and show situational consistency (Shoda, Mischel and Wright 1994).

Every individual CAPS trait has a relatively constant and identifiable structure that differentiates it from other features of a person. The theoretical structure of traditionally understood virtue seems very similar to that of CAPS. Virtues, taken as dispositions of moral character, are understood as relatively constant configurations of such elements as moral beliefs, motivations, and affective reactions, which remain ready to be activated whenever a relevant situation occurs. One cannot define virtues, as situationists tend to do, exclusively in behavioral terms. Virtues are dispositions to respond appropriately to arising moral reasons. As such, they involve a specific way of perception, interpretation, and evaluation of a situation. An honest person perceives and evaluates frauds, lies, or overinterpretations of facts as something morally inappropriate, and she tries to react appropriately – for example by non-acceptance, or dissent. Someone ready to help when seeing another person in need does not see a potential danger but a situation requiring one to show support (Mischel and Shoda 1995; Shoda, Tiernan and Mischel 2002).

The difference between CAPS and ethical virtues is such that CAPS traits are understood (by Mischel and Shoda) merely as local, while traditional virtues have global character. There is an ongoing debate between the advocates and opponents of virtue ethics over the question of whether – and if so, then how and to which extent – CAPS traits could be wid-

ened (broadened) to achieve the form of global traits. Numerous participants in this debate, on both sides, are skeptical of such possibility (Doris 2002; Miller 2013, 2014).

Various authors give examples of such traits and character dispositions that show the tendency to be global – cover more and more domains of human life. For instance, Nancy Snow points at such a tendency in a negative disposition to get irritated. She also speaks of a method by which we can globalize a certain positive trait – e.g., the ability to show compassion– even if initially it is not global in itself (Snow 2008, 31–38). I want to draw attention to one such broad disposition that conditions the perfecting of all other virtues, namely self-control (Szutta 2020). There is no need to convince anyone of how disastrous the consequences of totally losing control over one’s emotions, feelings, or reactions could be.

3.2. Self-control as a broad disposition (R. Baumeister)

One of the most widely-known authorities on self-regulating processes is R. Baumeister, the psychologist who, based on an extensive empirical material, claims that humans have a very high level of ability to self-regulation. To a large extent they can control their thoughts (e.g., focusing on a chosen task), emotions (e.g., by trying to overcome bad moods), impulses (e.g., by resisting various temptations), and behavior (Baumeister, Heatherton and Tice 1994).

However, he notices that a person navigates a broad scope of activities and processes; therefore, a characteristic feature of self-regulation is that various processes overlap, interfering, suppressing, or replacing each other. The first condition of the activation of the self-regulation process is to define the goals and ideals which a given person wants to achieve. The goals set the standards and norms that, in turn, allow one to monitor one’s own thoughts and actions. The goals must be consistent and well-defined; otherwise self-regulation will be inefficient. Secondly, one needs to reflect on the current ways of reacting. If they are congruent with one’s standards, they will be maintained; if, however, there is some incongruence between these ways of reacting and one’s goals, the former need to be changed. Thirdly, one needs to know how to overcome set-

tled reactions and install new ones, as well as one needs to have enough power of will to install and strengthen the new ways of reacting. Meeting these three conditions guarantees efficient self-regulation. Self-regulation comes down to making the higher processes control the lower ones. The very process of overcoming some processes by others is often described as the struggle between various forces within us. Let us take an example from fighting obesity or other addictions. Two incongruent tendencies compete with each other: the drive to eat or smoke, on the one hand, and the desire to be fit or quit smoking, on the other. In the context of morality one may point at the example of choosing an easier way: lying, breaking a promise, or being lazy, instead of respecting relevant moral principles. It is a difficult struggle; however, psychologists know many motivational techniques of coping with unwanted psychological mechanisms (Baumeister and Tierney 2011).

Baumeister compares self-regulating skills to the power of the will as it is traditionally understood in ethics. He speaks of the will as a kind of muscle, which can be trained and strengthened through various techniques. The best way to do so is to set a sequence of goals, ordering them from easier to more and more difficult ones; this may yield outstanding results in the end. Baumeister gives the example of the American illusionist David Blaine, whose achievements are breathtaking. He was able to survive 63 hours locked in an ice-cube, he managed to spend six days in a nailed coffin with hardly any free space, and endured 44 days without food hanging in a black box over the River Thames (Baumeister and Tierney 2011). One need not resort to such extreme examples; it is enough to mention any well-known sportsman, scientist, or musician. Anyone who seriously trains within a given field knows that there is no success without hard daily work, which requires self-control. It is interesting that the research on self-control led to the observation that training the will in one domain – e.g., science, or non-violence – gives better results in self-control and in other areas. For example, subjects who trained in the field of their profession and also practiced some sport more often, controlled their expenditures better, smoked less or drank less alcohol. Moreover, their will became depleted more slowly. All this means that we, humans,

can broaden the narrow dispositions of character to guarantee morally good behavior in more and more domains of life (Megan Oaten 2006a, 2006b).

What is the mechanism of the ego (will)-depletion? The will, analogously to muscles, becomes tired when working for a long time. One cannot control oneself all the time without a break. The ego-depletion manifests itself in weaker self-control; hyphenated intensiveness of experienced emotions (positive ones, such as exaltation, euphoria, and negative ones, such as disappointment or despondency for trivial reasons); lowered level of decision-making (e.g., quickly giving up under the influence of external factors, moods, etc.) (Baumeister et al. 1998; Baumeister and Tierney 2011). Various historical facts (Rwanda, Abu Graib) or the cases of negatively evaluated behavior during psychological experiments (Milgram, Zimbardo) can be explained by reference to this phenomenon.

Such a phenomenon, it may seem, contradicts one of the central assumptions of virtue ethics, according to which a well-formed character should warrant a morally good action. Also, the inevitability of depleted ego seems to undermine this assumption. Various empirical data suggest, however, that the process of ego depleting is much slower, or is not observed at all if the agent is strongly motivated to a specific type of action (Rayan and Deci, 2004). Empirical data confirm the so-called *flow effect* that causes properly focused and internally motivated people can keep realizing their tasks with satisfaction and pleasure, without feeling tired (Csíkszentmihályi 1990). It is worth underlying that the advocates of virtue ethics emphasize the motivational dimension of a morally good action. A virtuous person is not only someone who acts in accordance with virtues (of honesty, justice, or benevolence) but also someone who enjoys them and identifies with them and with their requirements.

3.3. Kahneman and the dual-processing theory of the mind

However, ethicists should not forget about the mechanism of will depletion, which, according to the latest research in cognitive psychology, has its analogue in the domain of cognitive processes. According to Kahneman's dual-processing theory, the human mind works on two levels, or

by using two systems (Kahneman 2011). System 1 (the quick one) is responsible for automatized processes. It effortlessly produces impressions and emotions, which then become the source of our decisions and choices. System 2 (the slow one) requires conscious effort and is responsible for controlled thinking, monitoring its actions and tempering emotions. Both systems remain continuously active in our minds. Automatized system 1 restlessly generates various data (impressions, hunches, intentions, emotions, etc.). One cannot simply turn it off. Reflective system 2, lazy by nature, remains in a mode of low activity. It usually passively accepts what system 1 delivers. Only when encountering difficulties does system 2 become more active.

The dual-processing theory finds its support in various data, e.g., in cognitive illusions to which we repeatedly fall prey. Cognitive illusions are the effects of our passive giving in to system 1. Numerous cases of “priming effect,” “interpretation framing effect,” or “the effect of cognitive easiness” drew the attention of situationists as examples of factors other than our will determining our action. However, Kahneman does not claim that we are doomed to the workings of system 1. He encourages us to activate reflective system 2. Nonetheless similarly to Baumeister, he acknowledges that the process of ego depletion, the limited resources of the ego, and the human general tendency spontaneously delegate various activities on system 1.

The fact that the ego’s depletion results in the automatization of human cognition and action gives situationists a good argument against virtue ethics, because its advocates often emphasize the importance of practical wisdom for action (Merritt, Doris and Harman 2010).

But is this convincing as a criticism of virtue ethics?

3.4. John Bargh & mixed processes

Let us notice that virtue ethics seems to be the only ethical theory that answers the question of how to cope with the fact of ego depletion when our abilities to reflect and self-control are diminished. Virtues are dispositions that are partly habitual and partly deliberative. The approach to virtue, with its emphasis on the centrality of *phronesis*, does not exclude

the possibility of automatic responses as a constituent element of virtue. On the contrary, all the process of virtue formation aims at smooth and efficient acting, automatic but resulting from the experience gathered through earlier deliberations and practice and open to new deliberations when necessary (similarly to the acquisition of non-ethical skills, e.g., playing an instrument or medical expertise). These skills, although containing an element of automaticity, cannot be reduced to automatic habits alone.

John Bargh and his colleagues show in their experiments that seemingly automatic processes like those causing *priming* or *framing effects*, do not reduce totally to the unconscious. They show that there is no sharp borderline between controlled processes, often labeled as conscious and intentional, and those which are automatic, labeled as unintentional, involuntary, and effortless. A lot of processes we regard as automatic, like reading, typing, or driving a car, are also controlled and goal-dependent. While doing these things, we are rarely conscious of all the sequence of steps or movements taken, but all these elements are directed at the goal which we consciously choose. As Bargh and colleagues claim, the conscious and automatic are often very neatly interwoven, and therefore the traditional classification of mental processes as either mechanical or controlled is mistaken and does not reflect the facts (Bargh 1989, 3–7).

Bargh distinguishes three types of automatized mental processes. Let us take a look at three of them: preconscious processes (e.g., interpreting and evaluating situations through one's previously acquired construals), post-conscious process (e.g., helping behavior resulting from one's good mood, with no awareness of the influence of the latter on the former), and, most important for defending virtue, goal-dependent automatic processes (e.g., an experienced, skillful driver driving a car).

Mechanical processes of this type embrace a whole sequence of automatic steps or learned patterns (scripts) of reaction to various situations. These imprinted (memorized) and automatized processes direct attention and action with minimal control on the part of the agent. They cannot, however, be reduced to merely routine activities. As directed towards the realization of a definite goal, they must be flexible and continuously ad-

justed to the dynamically changing circumstances (just like when driving a car, even if one knows the route very well, and the activity is mostly automatic, one must stay conscious of the possible changes of the circumstances, e.g., when the traffic is high, and many unforeseen activities or events may occur). All this shows that automatic processes are strongly interwoven with consciously controlled ones (Bargh 1989, 10–28).

All the mentioned types of automatized processes are important for understanding the moral functioning of a human agent. They not only undermine the situationist claim that virtue or moral character are impossible, but also help us define virtues and moral character in a more precise way. Preconscious automatic processes (influence of subconscious constructs or evaluation schemes) define the identity of their possessor. How one unconsciously interprets or evaluates his or her given situation characterizes one as a certain type of person, and reveals one's typical pattern of thinking, motivation, or behavior. Thus, in a way, these unconscious interpretations reveal one's moral character. One can have a look at a weak, defenseless person and automatically see in her someone in need of help, or someone of whom one could take advantage (e.g., robe or steal). One may automatically perceive another person as someone deserving compassion or as someone deserving contempt (Narvaez and Lapsley 2005, 146). This preconscious way of perception and evaluation usually results from the accumulation of previous experiences, education, and various types of construals. The remaining two of the three abovementioned types of automatic processes also cohere with the perspective of virtue ethics, which not only emphasizes the importance of morally good actions but also pays special attention to the proper attitudes of moral agents.

Discovering how post-conscious automatic processes influence moral decisions may help us understand the role of moral perception and moral emotions, including their mutual interference. The *framing effect* may be successfully used in moral character education, for example, by exposing children to morally desirable traits of character, such as honesty or benevolence (and explaining children the role of those features in life). The constructs implanted this way in children's minds may become a source of their later moral insights, and influence their decisions at a non-con-

scious level (Narvaez and Lapsey 2005, 147). Also, knowledge about the *mood effect* should be helpful in building virtue. Learning about the role of small pleasures in life, we realize that we have to be good to ourselves to become more benevolent to others.

From the ethical point of view, the most essential automatic processes are those that are goal-oriented. Not without reason, ethical virtues are compared to various constant and acquired skills that require knowledge and experience. Although to a large extent they consist of automatized and routinized sub-processes, they are not reducible to such elements. As goal-oriented processes they must contain some level of conscious control, evaluation of current circumstances of action, and flexible adjustment to the changing factors. A skillful driver, even while driving “automatically,” must pay attention to changing circumstances. Similarly, a truthful person who usually openly says what she knows, on discovering that being truthful could have morally negative consequences, needs to consciously consider whether, for example, a person asking a question is entitled to the true answer. Someone who always automatically says the truth to anyone, regardless of circumstances, can hardly be considered an example of virtue. It is so because a virtuous person should also be prudent, have practical wisdom to grasp what “here and now” should be done. Such insights are the consequence of previous experiences and deliberations over moral matters. The greater moral experience is, the more intuitive (or automatic) the insights; the smaller it is, the greater the need of conscious deliberation.

The fact that these processes are to a large extent automatic does not exclude the possibility of making their formation one of the goals of virtue education. Proper formation of moral intuitions enables one to make the right decisions without having to spend a lot of time on moral deliberations. Although complex decision procedures might be sometimes helpful, especially in complex situations of conflict between important values (in which it is difficult to find an easy, quick solution), in everyday life it is more practical to use tested and reliable schemes of action.

The schemes of reasoning and moral perception are also automatized. An expert associates things faster and more efficiently, interprets situ-

ations more accurately than a beginner. All this is done in a more intuitive, non-inferential way. An expert uses automatic mechanisms not yet accessible to a beginner, who needs to achieve his decisions through the process of complicated and effortful deliberations (Narvaez and Lapsey 2005, 150–152; Narvaez and Bock 2014, 140–141). Let us take an example of an experienced medical doctor, and compare him to one who has just graduated. The former can read and interpret medical facts with ease, and reliably prescribe the best therapy; the latter needs much more effort to achieve results that will still be less reliable. This, of course, does not mean that the experienced doctor would never make a mistake; however, should he make one, this would not totally undermine the value of his expert intuitions. We can speak analogically of experienced teachers, musicians, lawyers, drivers, etc.

Virtue ethics, like no other ethical theory, is firmly consistent with empirical data within moral psychology and encompasses both consciously controlled and automatic processes. Both can be used in moral development. On the one hand, virtue ethicists encourage us to improve our behavior via enhancing our semi-automatized schemes of behavior and intuitions, and, on the other hand, this theory underlines the importance of conscious efforts that are necessary for the formation and enhancement of those mechanisms.

Conclusion

In spite of having no access to the tools of contemporary psychology, Aristotle, the father of virtue ethics, had very accurate intuitions. Virtue ethics, probably like no other ethical theory, emphasizes the significance of introducing and shaping automatic mechanisms that enhance morally good action. These mechanisms are especially important when the agent has either little time or a depleted will, as to be able to make the right decision on the basis of proper conscious deliberations. The person-situation debate, inspired by the situationist objection of the empirical inadequacy of virtue ethics, has paradoxically shown the realism of the virtue ethics approach. Neither utilitarianism nor deontological approaches use

the idea of automatized cognitive, affective and behavioral mechanisms to such an extent as virtue ethics does. This is also the opinion of those working in the field of neuroethics (Mróz 2018), a good example being P. Churchland. The winner in her ranking list is nobody else but Aristotle and his version of virtue ethics (Churchland 2012). The only worry here is whether neuroethics does not totally reduce virtue to its automatized element.

The character-situation debate was also inspiring to virtue ethicists. It showed them that normative ethics could not develop in total isolation from empirical studies; the results of normative deliberation should go along and be compatible with empirical findings about human nature and human agency. Because what is beyond the reach of human nature, what is impossible, cannot by any means oblige.

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