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Character and Concept: How Conceptual Blending Constrains Situationism

by

Brandon D.C. Fenton

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
through the Department of Philosophy
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Master of Arts at the
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Abstract

This thesis is an attempt to defend the notion of character from concerns raised recently by situationists (namely, John Doris & Gilbert Harman). Situationism attempts to undermine the concept of character used to support most versions of virtue ethics by appealing to research in the social sciences. More specifically, both John Doris and Gilbert Harman are global character trait eliminativists who take the social-psychological research to warrant the abandonment of the concept of character. This thesis draws heavily upon the mental space mapping theory known as conceptual blending developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner. I make use of the insights provided by conceptual blending theory in an attempt to disarm the situationists' character eliminativist position by showing how entrenched and useful is the notion of character to our common understandings and interpretations of ourselves and others.

DEDICATION

For my father William E. Fenton, and my mother Sabine G. Schenk

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1.0 Introduction

Perhaps one of the most well known cases in which we are likely to make ascriptions of character is when we are first introduced to someone we have never met before—an event so well recognized and generally treated as bearing such a great deal of importance that it has become commonly known as ‘the first impression’. Indeed, this catch phrase betrays our tendency to make such character ascriptions. The word ‘impression’, in the notion of ‘the first impression’, suggests that the fundamental aspects of a lasting image of the type of character or personality that one is believed to have are decided in the mind of the other in these moments. This is not to say that these rapid ascriptions based on limited and typically not altogether truthful personal information are always accurate. In fact, there are many reasons to think that such ascriptions are more often erroneous than not; people tend to want to emphasize their positive attributes and downplay their shortcomings when first being introduced to others—a tendency that has earned a couple of catch phrases of its own, such as, ‘putting your best foot forward,’ and ‘putting on your best face’. However, the tendency to make character attributions seems to persist, even in the face of what must often turn out to be false ascriptions. Indeed, it is not all that uncommon to hear statements like, “I got a bad vibe from him” or, “There’s something not quite right with that one,” in common parlance. What these kinds of generally vague statements are intended to imply is something more specific about the character of the person commented upon; for example, in reference to the two common statements above, what is implied is that the individual is untrustworthy, dishonest, or even dangerous.

We seem to rely upon these rapid character ascriptions to mediate our modes of interaction with one another. Positive ascriptions seem to allow for a sense of comfort when in the presence of the other, and they may encourage a continued interaction, while negative ascriptions, on the other hand, signal the need for caution in dealing with the individual and often seem to encourage a policy of avoidance.

We even make character ascriptions about people we have never actually met. Perhaps even more surprising is that such ascriptions are often based solely on appearances—and even these may be the handiwork of advertising and marketing firms. For example, we may come to see a candidate who is vying for office as having an indecisive type of character based solely on the suggestions of the political campaign messages of his or her challenger which state that the candidate has been known to ‘flip-flop’ on important issues. This is perhaps why political ‘smear’ campaigns are so pervasive; once the image we hold of a candidate’s character is created, or tarnished, it is hard to imagine that they would behave in any other way than what would typically be expected of someone with such a character. What this and the ‘first impression’ example have in common is a particular understanding of the notion of character. It is an understanding that character is relatively stable and consistent. In other words, once we make a character ascription, we assume that there will be little if any change in the characteristic behaviour we would expect to see from the person given the type of character that they were ascribed. That is to say, once we make a character judgment, it seems to stick. So the indecisive politician is still considered to have an indecisive kind of character, and is expected to remain unsure of his or her decisions, even when it is quite clear that he or she is resolutely

advocating a particular position on some issue, so long as our awareness of their decisiveness comes after the original character attribution of ‘indecisiveness’ was made. Also, one may continue to feel uncomfortable around another individual from whom they received a ‘bad vibe,’ regardless of whether or not any cogent reason for such uneasiness has been observed in subsequent interactions. What these two introductory examples were intended to convey is both that the attribution and assessment of character or personality is a very common practice, and that the concept of character most commonly employed in such processes is one that takes character to be a stable and enduring phenomenon. But, one might ask, “How did we come to think of character in this way?”

Our modern notions of personality and character have been deeply influenced by a tradition that dates back to the writings of Aristotle. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle developed a theory of morality in which the idea of virtue was intimately connected with a particular understanding of character—one not unlike the current common view. Indeed, in his ethical treatise, Aristotle (Kaplan [Ed.], 1958) suggested that, “[Virtuous] action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character” (p.187). However, there are certain other conditions of the agent that Aristotle thought also needed to be met in order for one’s action to be considered morally just or temperate—independently of whether or not the action issued from a ‘firm and unchanging character.’ These additional conditions were that the agent must have knowledge (presumably about what is the morally appropriate action to take), must choose the acts, and the acts must be chosen for their own sakes (p.187). These additional conditions can be considered deeply relevant to the notion of virtue, and as

such, they may pose a serious problem for the position I will argue against; however, since they are not crucial to the notion of the stability of character that I am currently attempting to illustrate, these considerations and other details of Aristotle's ethical theory will be postponed for the time being. What is important here is that it be recognized that Aristotle's view of character as something that is 'firm and unchanging' has come to be the dominant view of character in modern times.

The view that character is relatively stable and enduring has been responsible for many of the assumptions that underlie various psychological personality theories and research programs, as well as moral theorizing, and educational planning. For psychological personality theories, such as trait theory, and the Jungian typology, the notion of the relative stability of character or personality (treated as synonymous in this thesis), is central. In fact, without such a notion, these and similar theories would lack internal coherence. Also, in regards to moral theory, the idea of character and its stability can be seen to play an important role in virtually any theory of virtue ethics since the time of Aristotle. Moreover, ideas about how to develop virtuous character dispositions in children have played a significant role in shaping educational practices and policies. These practices and policies, had they not taken for granted that the types of character dispositions that they were designed to promote were enduring, would have likely diverted resources to more promising proposals for behavioural regulation. I mention these last three areas of human endeavour with the intent to convey just how deeply imbedded within our culture is the traditional Aristotelian notion of the stability and permanence of character; indeed, that this notion does not

only inform our modes of thinking about individuals, but that it also shapes important social practices as well.

Nevertheless, that a particular view may be widely held does not guarantee its accuracy. In at least some cases, neither how deeply a part of the common understanding a notion may be, nor how many practical activities are dependant upon or influenced by such a notion, can testify to the accuracy of the conception. For example, it was once believed that the Earth was flat, and this notion was widely accepted as being accurate since it was coherent with the general intuitions and assumptions derived from normal visual perception. Also, it is not difficult to imagine that the notion of the world's flatness likely influenced sailing and fishing practices, as one would not want to fall off the edge of the Earth. However, as time and scientific advancements would show, the world is in fact not flat—and no amount of people who continued to think that it was, nor sailor's who would avoid the supposed edge, could change that fact. In a similar vein, there are philosophers and psychologists in the present era who are beginning to think that the traditional notion of character, despite its common acceptance and cultural imbeddedness, will likely share the same fate as the notion of the flat Earth; that is, it will be shown to be obsolete.

Two of the more notable philosophers to take on the view that the traditional notions of character are inaccurate are John Doris and Gilbert Harman. According to Doris and Harman (D&H), recent experiments within social psychology undermine the traditional concept of character; consequently, they support the view that it is in fact the situational context that is most responsible for the types of behaviours that

people display. They suggest that the results obtained in experiments designed to study obedience and other forms of situationally contingent behaviour should encourage us not simply to re-evaluate the traditional Aristotelian view of character—one that they suggest is committed to robust and persistent personality or character traits¹—but to abandon it in favor of what they consider to be a more empirically informed understanding of the determinants of behaviour, namely, situational factors. Indeed, in regards to traditional notions of character, Doris claims, “I am—at least in some attenuated sense—advocating their elimination” (2002, p. 108). Echoing Doris, is Harman’s more spirited statement that, “We need to abandon all talk [and thought] of virtue and character, not find a way to save it by reinterpreting it” (2000b, p. 224).

The view endorsed by both D&H has come to be known as situationism. Although there may be varying degrees of commitment to the position that behaviour is primarily situationally motivated—for example, Doris’ account allows for what he calls ‘local character traits’, while Harman makes no such provision—they are at base united by the view that the traditional conception of character, in terms of global traits, is flawed and inaccurate, and that it ought to be replaced by an account of, and an appreciation for, the situational context. According to Doris, the global view of character traits is committed to idea that, “character and personality traits are reliably manifested [in a temporally stable manner] in trait-relevant behavior across a diversity of trait-relevant eliciting conditions that may vary widely in their

¹ According to G.W. Allport, a trait refers to “a certain definite conception of a generalized response-unit in which resides the distinctive quality of behavior that reflects personality” (1931, p. 368). He later, defines a trait as: “a neuropsychic structure having the capacity to render many stimuli functionally equivalent, and to initiate and guide equivalent (meaningfully consistent) forms of adaptive and expressive behaviour” (as cited in Hergenhahn, Olson & Cramer, p. 159). In short, a trait is responsible for an individual’s behaving in a similar manner when faced with similar situational contexts.

conduciveness to the manifestation of the trait in question” (2002, p. 22). He takes local traits, on the other hand, to refer to “closely circumscribed evaluative attributions” of behaviour that display predictive efficacy in only “narrowly specified domains”. In other words, for a trait to be considered global (or robust) it must motivate a certain type of behavioural response across various situations, while local traits need only to motivate a specific behavioural response in very specific contexts. For example, one might possess the local trait of “defends-family-and-friends courage” while being an utter coward when it comes to asking someone out on a date; whereas, if one were in possession of a global trait of courage, they would display the courage to defend their family and friends, ask a person out on a date, sky-dive, and a multitude of other character-relevant behaviours across a vast range of appropriate eliciting conditions.

For both D&H, the attempt to undermine character acts as the base from which they attempt to discredit virtue ethics. Since they suggest that the ethical theory they are challenging depends upon a robust notion of character, if they can successfully undermine the view of character that motivates the theory, they will, by extension, undermine the ethical theory as well. As a result, if left unchallenged, their work could have serious negative implications for, among other things, our notions of responsibility, praise and blame, the practice of law, and concepts of self. In response to the potential negative implications of their shared position, I will expose some of the weaknesses of their attempt to undermine global character, and I will also challenge the view that the concept of character ought to be abandoned. However, I will, for the most part, not argue in favour of any kind of virtue ethics. If I can

adequately defend the notion of character, then I should have also, at least indirectly, allowed for the possibility of some kind of theory of virtue. Not to mention, as will be seen in section 2.2 and 2.5, others have already argued fairly persuasively for the preservation of virtue based ethical theory.

However, before commenting upon my own position in any greater detail, I will first consider the position of both D&H, and examine some of the more impressive experiments that they have marshaled in support of their contentions. As will be shown, these social-psychological experiments have obtained some rather striking and, perhaps to some, counterintuitive results. That these results often appear to conflict with popular intuitions is a point that D&H consider to lend support to their position; that is, because D&H think that the standard view of character is false, for them, it makes sense that normal attempts to make character based predictions would not be borne out by the experimental data. This is why they both make mention of the psychological literature and experimental research on ‘the fundamental attribution error’² within their arguments; although these experiments do not straightforwardly count against the notion of character, what they do highlight is our implicit tendency to make character based ascriptions erroneously. That is, by typically undervaluing the situational context, they count against the usefulness and reliability of such character based behavioural ascriptions and predictions.

² The fundamental attribution error refers to the common tendency to explain an individual’s behaviour in terms of personality or dispositions as opposed to relying on situational explanations (especially where such behaviours can be shown to be due to the situation). For a more extensive treatment of the fundamental attribution error, see L. Ross (1977).

1.1 The Case for Situationism

Although there are various psychological experiments from which the results may be taken and construed as providing suggestive evidence against character, I will focus on several frequently employed and stirring examples found within the situationist literature. These examples, I suggest, should be sufficient to provide an understanding of the situationist argument, as well as some of the reasons motivating the development of such a position. These examples, perhaps unexpectedly, are separately composed of such diverse elements as finding a dime, seminary students, and the administration of electrical shocks. In what follows, I will present these creative experiments as well as D&H's interpretative appraisals of their results in as favourable a light as possible. And later, in chapter two, I will move to an examination of some of the responses and critiques of the position and interpretations provided by D&H. The presentation of the critical and alternative positions will be followed by (in chapter three) what I consider to be a novel approach to challenging the situationist position that I will develop by using the conceptual blending theory of Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner. To close (in chapter four), I will present some reflections upon the notion of character inspired by Daniel Dennett's views on the 'self', followed by the conclusion (chapter four) and suggestions for future theorizing and research.

1.2 Dispositions vs. Dimes

The first experiment to be reviewed is the Isen and Levin (1972) study regarding mood effects on prosocial (i.e. helping) behaviour. This study examined the differences in helping behaviour between two groups that were only experimentally differentiated by one of the group's oblivious participants having found a dime in the coin return slot of the telephone they had just used, while the other group did not find a coin. After an unwitting participant finished using the telephone (either finding a coin in the return slot or not), an experimental confederate would walk by and pretend to accidentally drop a folder filled with papers. Those participants who stopped to assist the confederate with the papers were considered to behave in a helpful way, while those who did not assist the confederate were considered not to have behaved in a helpful manner. Perhaps surprisingly, of those who found a dime prior to the confederate's mishap, fourteen stopped to help while two did not; and of those who did not find a dime, one individual helped and twenty-four did not. So, while we may think that the individual's likelihood to help gather the papers is based upon their character disposition to such behaviour (i.e. their helpful or compassionate character), the experimental data suggests that it would be more accurate to attribute such behaviours to an environmental (read: situational) factor as apparently trivial as having found a dime. That is to say that, though we may assume, in a thought experiment, that Jack, the self-absorbed, ego-centric male model would be highly unlikely to help; while Jill, the nursing home volunteer would almost certainly rush to lend a hand; what the experimental results reveal is that, in this case, not only do the

character conceptions evoked by such prototypes have negligible import in regards to predicting the relevant behaviour, but that something as seemingly inconsequential as finding a dime can actually make the difference between an individual's helping or not helping. So, if the Jack of our thought experiment finds the dime, the actual data suggests that he will be much more likely to help than Jill will be if she does not find a dime.

According to Doris, what makes these kinds of experiments so remarkable is, “that seemingly insubstantial situational factors have substantial effects on what people do” (2002, p. 28). Indeed, what is at issue is not, as many would concede, that forceful or demanding situational pressures influence behaviours, but that seemingly trivial aspects of one's day to day environment can have a significant impact upon what attitudes, behaviours, and actions one is likely to express. This has led Doris to claim that, “the disproportionate impact of these ‘insubstantial’ situational factors presses charges of empirical inadequacy against characterological moral psychology” (2002, p. 28). In other words, because, for Doris, character-based moral psychology is committed to a robust notion of character—one that requires that a relevant character trait (e.g. helpful, compassionate, or heroic behaviour), be displayed in the appropriate eliciting condition—and these types of experiments seem to more accurately reflect the motivational impact of either the presence or absence of a situational variable, then characterological moral psychology fails as a compelling way to explain the observed differences in behaviour.

For Isen and Levin (1972), what is happening here is that the experience of finding some change in the coin return slot of the telephone creates an elevated mood

effect—people feel good when they encounter what appears to be good luck—and this elevated mood effectively influences helping behaviour. For Doris, it is not the idea that one's mood may effect their behaviour that is compelling—he treats this notion as trivially true and obvious—but rather, that one's mood can be altered to produce such overt behaviour by something as trifling as finding a dime.

Nevertheless, he cautions against judging the non-helpers in this scenario too harshly; after all, helping to pick-up some dropped papers does not seem to rank as highly as saving a drowning child, in terms of its importance as a character relevant behaviour eliciting condition. Nonetheless, to rank helping to pick-up papers as being an eliciting condition of low importance does not change the results of the study—the data stands that the mere finding of a dime was enough to significantly influence what can reasonably be considered to be character relevant behaviour in a way that does not support characterological conceptions. However, in this experiment, the participants did not undergo any kind of personality assessment, which may undermine one's confidence that the results are not telling of personality or character dispositions. But for Doris, the odds that mostly compassionate or helpful character types found the dime, while unhelpful and non-compassionate types did not find a dime are slim and untroubling.

1.3 Bad Samaritans

The next experiment to be reviewed is derived from the Christian parable of the Good Samaritan. The parable recounts the story of a man who was robbed,

stripped, and beaten close to death while traveling from Jerusalem to Jericho. As he lay wounded, three individuals pass by him separately; the first was a priest, the next a Levite, and lastly, a Samaritan. Both the priest and the Levite, upon seeing the injured man, cross over to the other side of the road and continue on their way without stopping to offer their assistance. However, when the Samaritan saw the man, he approached him, dressed his wounds, and brought him to an inn. There he instructed the innkeeper to take care of the man and paid him accordingly. In this parable the Samaritan, it is preached, exemplifies the type of moral character (or action) that is appropriate to Christian aspirations.

Although one can imagine that the priest and the Levite had other pressing responsibilities to attend to, while perhaps the Samaritan did not, the standard reading of this parable tends to emphasize the differences in character³ rather than the differences in perceived time stress between the three passers by. That is to say, only the Samaritan is considered to be a compassionate kind of person, while the priest and Levite are portrayed as having less flattering character types. In an attempt to discern just what factors (be it time pressure, religiosity, or a certain moral disposition) may be relevant to helping behaviour in such a scenario, Darley and Batson (1973) conducted a study involving students from the Princeton Theological Seminary who were recruited to take part in what they were told would be a study of “religious education and vocations.” To begin, the students were to fill out questionnaires in one room before having to exit the building and pass through a courtyard on their way to a

³ Of course there are other ways to interpret the parable of the good Samaritan; for example, rather than placing the emphasis on differences in character, differences in perceived duty or moral judgment may be emphasized.

second location where they were told they would be required to give a short verbal presentation. The experiment consisted of three groups of students, each of which was assigned a different degree of temporal urgency. The first group was told upon leaving the initial site that they were running late, the second group that they were right on schedule, and the third that they would be a little early. These differing urgency indicators given to the groups prior to their leaving the initial site corresponded to how they would be classified in one of three experimental conditions: “high hurry”, “medium hurry”, and “low hurry” respectively.

While on their walk from the first site to the second, individual participants from each group would separately encounter a confederate playing the part of a distressed individual hunched over and apparently in need of some kind of assistance. Common intuitions would suggest that since these students were preparing for a life of service in the ministry, they would be highly likely to offer some kind of help or at least to ask whether or not the individual needed any assistance. In other words, we would expect that these individuals have the relevant type of character dispositions to want to be helpful based upon the professional trajectory (marked by an ethic of helping), that they had chosen. However, the results paint a different picture. Indeed, helping behaviour appeared to vary considerably with the degree of urgency of the experimental condition, with sixty-three percent of the students helping in the “low hurry” condition, forty-five percent helping in the “medium hurry” condition, and down to only ten percent helping in the final “high hurry” category. That these results conflict with what would be commonly expected from a group of seminary students (i.e. that there would be no difference in helping behaviour across conditions since

they should all share a similar disposition towards helping), leads Harman to conclude that, “standard interpretations of the Good Samaritan Parable commit the fundamental attribution error of overlooking the situational factors, in this case overlooking how much of a hurry the various agents might be in” (2000a, p. 173).

According to Doris, when faced with such results, “it is difficult to resist situationist conclusions” (2002, p. 34). Indeed, even if the hurried seminary students may have thought that their commitments to the experimenter were temporarily of a higher order of importance than their general obligation to inquire as to the wellbeing of the confederate, for Doris, it is not likely that such a consideration would be given much weight (p. 34). Again, he says, “there is the appearance of disproportion; in this case the demands of punctuality seem rather slight compared with the ethical demand to at least check on the condition of the confederate” (2002, p. 34). Thus again, it appears that character relevant behaviour was influenced by a situational factor of seemingly less importance than the moral imperative encountered. Indeed, in this case, as opposed to the ‘finding a dime’ example, the moral imperative appears to be of a much higher order; that is, it can hardly be argued that helping someone to pick up scattered papers is as morally compelling as the need to inquire into the wellbeing of someone who appears to be in significant physical distress. However, both instances would seem to be appropriate for eliciting the relevant behaviour associated with what one would expect from those with compassionate dispositions: namely, helping.

These last two examples made reference to what may be considered non-coercive situational forces; that is, situational factors that would not typically be

construed as having impending or forceful influence against one's ability to act in concert with their perceived (or ascribed) character dispositions. The next experiment to be reviewed, however, might be taken to be at least somewhat different in this regard. It makes use of what may be granted to be a fairly strong situational constraint upon behaviour, regardless of what are believed to be one's character based dispositions. That is to say, many people would likely agree that certain environmental and situational factors can have a great degree of control over what behaviours one is likely to display, independently of the type of character one may have. One such situation can be imagined wherein a subordinate is given orders by another who would be classified as an authority figure. This situation is not unlike the experiment that follows. However, what ought to be kept in mind throughout the next section is that the participants were told at the outset that they may quit the experiment at any time (which should somewhat offset the apparent forcefulness of the situation); and further, that people who were informed of the experimental procedure were no more reluctant to make character based predictions of behaviour—which would seem to signal a general belief that such conditions are not enough to override character based moral dispositions.

1.4 Authority vs. Autonomy – A Shocking Situation

Imagine if you will, the following scenario: you decide to respond to a newspaper add posted by a university that is seeking participants for a paid study involving memory and learning. Upon arrival you are greeted by an experimenter

wearing a lab coat who introduces you to another participant who will be taking part in the experiment with you. A draw is performed and you are chosen for the position of 'teacher' while the other participant is selected for the 'learner' role. The 'learner' is a friendly middle aged accountant who is strapped down to a chair to restrict his movement. An electrode is attached to his wrist which will be used to administer shocks; you are assured that these will cause no "permanent tissue damage", and you are given a stinging example of what such a shock feels like. In a separate room, you are seated before what is labeled a "shock generator" and instructed that you will be required to administer shocks of an increasing magnitude (in fifteen volt increments) to the other participant for each wrong answer (or non-answer) that he provides on a word association test. The shocks register between 'slight shock' starting at fifteen volts, and continue all the way to 'Danger: Severe shock' and 'XXX' with a final rating of four-hundred and fifty volts of electricity. Should you pause or express any trepidation about what is taking place you are repeatedly enjoined by the experimenter in a firm but polite manner to "Please continue," or that "The experiment requires that you continue," or that "It is absolutely essential that you continue," and finally that "You have no other choice, you must go on." How far do you envision would you be likely to go?

This scenario is exactly what happened in the famous series of experiments performed by Stanley Milgram at Yale University in the early nineteen-sixties. Of course the 'learner' in this experiment was actually a confederate who never really experienced any actual electric shocks. However, in some versions of the experiment, at a certain magnitude (seventy-five volts), a recording was played for each

increasing shock intensity that voiced the learner's growing distress mixed with complaints about a heart condition (which were clearly audible to the participant), before these would fall silent at the three-hundred and forty-five volt level. Of the people that Milgram surveyed (1974, p. 27-31) about the experiment, none of them said that they would continue shocking to the very end of the experiment if they had been participants. And when asked how many people they believed would continue to shock right through to the end of the experiment, the general prediction was two percent or less. However, and this is likely why Milgram's experiments stirred up such a controversy, throughout numerous replications and similar experiments, the general findings can be expressed as obtaining roughly two thirds complete obedience. That is to say that, on average, between sixty to seventy percent of participants "shocked" the learner all the way to the final four-hundred and fifty volt level. Such results are staggering and stand in marked contrast to what people would commonly assume to be the social behavioural norm. Indeed, Harman thinks that for most people who encounter these results, "it is hard not to think there is something terribly wrong with the subject [i.e. participant]" and that "it is extremely tempting to attribute the subject's performance to a character defect in the subject rather than to details of the situation" (2000a, p. 171). However, for Harman, such tendencies simply amount to being illustrations of the fundamental attribution error mentioned earlier—that is, the erroneous tendency to find fault with the individual rather than recognize the force the situation has upon behaviour. So how, according to situationists, is one to interpret such intuitively challenging results?

According to Doris, it is unlikely that these experiments tapped into a sinister segment of the normal population in America, or that people are generally cruel (2002, p. 42). Rather, he cautions that, “trait-contrary behaviour does not necessarily signal the possession of a contrary trait; even active failures of compassion do not necessarily imply sadism” (2002, p. 42). Instead, what these experiments suggest for Doris is that, once again, the situation has displayed a serious power to affect human behaviour. In this case, the mere presence and directions of an experimenter were enough to influence participants to commit very destructive behaviours.

Certainly, there are various reasons advanced by critics of these experiments to doubt that they reflect a ‘real-world’ phenomenon of destructive obedience. For example, at first glance, it appears absurd that anyone would be so powerfully influenced by such simple and non-threatening directives as those voiced by the experimenter; and thus, some have suggested that most of the participants must have known that the shocks were not real. However, for Doris, such situations are not without their analogs in other social and organizational contexts; for example, in the military, in fraternities, and in street gangs, various rituals (presumably hazings and the like), take place that maintain a similar dynamic, and these are taken very seriously by the people involved (2002, p. 43). Furthermore, Doris paraphrases Milgram’s observation that, “the best evidence for the experimental realism of [t]his paradigm is the extraordinary anxiety of the subjects, amply documented by experimental transcripts” (2002, p. 43). Indeed, according to Milgram, subjects were noted to “sweat, tremble, stutter, bite their lips, groan, and dig their fingernails into their flesh” (as cited in Doris, p.42-3). For Doris, this means that many subjects were

deeply conflicted about what they were doing. That is to say, many of them displayed an obvious discomfort with their required actions, but nevertheless, the majority continued to follow instructions though to the highest level of shock—a result that remains deeply telling about the overriding power of the situation.

Doris similarly rejects claims to the effect that the participants were assured of the safety of the experiment by an implicit confidence derived from the esteem they had for the institutional setting (2002, p. 44). That is to say, he does not believe that any internalized sense of trust in the prestige of the experimental locale, nor in the competence of the experimenter, were sufficient to alert the majority of the participants that the shocks were not real, especially since about a year after the study, eighty percent of six hundred former participants responded to a questionnaire that they were either certain or thought it likely that the shocks were real (p. 43). Furthermore, the institutional setting was shown not to have any notable influence, since at one point the experiment was moved off of the university campus to an apparently less prestigious locale and still maintained similar results. Moreover, in regards to the apparent competence of the experimenter (also advanced as a possible implicit clue to the experiment's deception), a modified version of the experiment was developed by another group who intentionally made the experimenter appear surprised with what was taking place—the results were ninety-one percent obedience (p. 44). Therefore, for Doris, the suggestion that the participants knew about the deception all along and were merely play-acting simply does not hold up to scrutiny. Rather, he claims, “there are numerous reasons to think that widespread obedience may obtain with credulous subjects” (2002, p. 45).

This obedience, according to Doris, rather than by appealing to differences in character, is best understood in terms of situational factors. And this is because, the degree to which participants were found to be obedient was highly similar across similarly structured experimental situations; however, where the experimental situation was changed, there was a corresponding change in the degree of obedience obtained. For example, when participants were allowed to decide for themselves just how intense a shock they were willing to administer, only three percent opted to shock to the highest level. And when the experimenter was removed from the room only to give instructions by phone, there was also a significant drop in obedience. These and other examples prompted Doris to claim that, “the variation in obedience across experimental conditions—from near negligible to near total—is powerful evidence that situational variation can swamp individual differences” (2002, p. 46). In other words, explanations of these kinds of experimental results that appeal to personality or character differences pale in comparison to situationist accounts, since the latter provide a much more informative and accurate account of the reasons for the noted variation in behaviour. However, Doris does admit that since the experiments did not obtain total behavioural conformity from all participants, “individual dispositional differences must be doing some of the work” (2002, p. 46). However, he considers attempts to relate personality measures to obedience scores to be generally unimpressive.

According to Doris, what may be more important to securing obedience than the presence of a perceived authority figure is the notion that it is the authority figure that bears responsibility for one’s actions in these kinds of instances. Indeed, in

Milgram's study, the experimenter was noted to provide assurances to that effect on occasion (Doris, 2002, p. 50). Furthermore, as cited by Doris, Milgram's later survey revealed that the obedient participants considered themselves less responsible than did the disobedient participants. However, such considerations cannot be taken as providing a complete account the behavioural obedience in question, since those who did obey still felt themselves at least partially responsible—as was evidenced by the physical signs of stress that were displayed.

Maybe it was the gradual nature of the experiment that was responsible for securing obedience since the decision to stop at any particular point is hindered by the previous decision to proceed at a shock level only one degree lower in severity. Others have noted that this creates a “justification problem” (Doris, 2002, p. 50); that is, if the participant eventually decides to stop, she is then faced with the issue of trying to justify what made the previous shock acceptable but not the one at which she stopped. This idea has some support in the sense that, the point at which most people became disobedient was when the learner first voiced their desire to withdraw from the experiment—this provides the justification to stop for the participant. However, Doris speculates that the varying degrees of shock intensity listed upon the shock device panel should have provided similar opportunities to justify stopping since it seems plausible that some could have used these labels to justify disobedience (for example, that they may be fine with administering a ‘strong shock’ but not a ‘very strong shock’) (p. 50). Therefore, for Doris, such an analysis must be treated carefully since, like the notion of the partial relief of responsibility mentioned

previously, it appears only capable of providing a partial account of the observed behaviour.

1.5 Situationist Motivations

For the situationist, what the types of experiments mentioned in this chapter reveal is the failure of characterological conceptions to adequately account for the observed differences in behaviour—especially where behaviours are shown to differ markedly in connection with differing situational variables (even where these situational variables' power to influence is not recognized by the participants themselves). Moreover, all three of the experiments reviewed can be seen to undermine the notion of the stability of character as it is expressed in the disposition of compassion. In other words, all three experimental settings appeared to have provided plausible and relevant eliciting conditions wherein one would expect people with compassionate characters to behave in very specific ways; namely, to be helpful, or not to cause harm. However, as was demonstrated, the tendency to help or to ignore and to harm or to not harm was powerfully influenced by differing aspects of the situation. Therefore, to appeal to differences in the character types of the participants (i.e. their compassionate dispositions) in order to explain their behaviour, would be to ignore the much more accurate and informative explanation that is provided by taking the power of the situational factors seriously.

In other words, one may attempt to explain the results of these experiments in a way that preserves character based conclusions; for example, one might suggest that

in the obedience experiments those who did not shock the learner to the full amount have more compassionate characters than those who did shock to the very limit. However, such a strategy, though it may preserve the notion of character, does not explain why the behaviour of the participants varied so drastically with changes in the experimental situation; for example, in the variants of the obedience studies wherein the experimenter gave instructions by phone or allowed the participants to choose the level of shock they would administer for themselves—characterological accounts cannot make sense of the resulting significant drop in harmful behaviour as compared with the experimental results of the original design. In these instances, the only answer that a characterological account can provide is to the effect that the different versions of the experiment just so happened to arrive at the specific distributions of compassionate and uncompassionate character types that they did by chance alone. However, the greater the number of experiments that share compatible findings among differing experimental contexts and their results, the less plausible such a view becomes. Furthermore, according to both D&H, there exists already a wealth of experimental evidence that confirms the situationist position and leaves characterological explanations seriously wanting.

Indeed, for D&H, it is not just the experimental designs reviewed in this paper that motivate situationism; rather, they argue that these experiments are “representative of established trends” in the experimental literature and that “situationism is motivated by a pattern of results, not the results of any particular study” (Doris, 2002, p. 35). Furthermore, according to Harman, “No one supposes that these [three] experiments, taken by themselves, show that there are no character

traits”; what they do show, however, is that when observers attribute the noted variations in behaviour to character dispositions, “the observers are wrong: that cannot be the explanation” (2003, p. 90-91). They are wrong because these sorts of attributions do not adequately explain the said behavioural variation, that is, across the varying experimental conditions.

The results of this large body of experimental data lead Doris to conclude that, “the empirical evidence indicates that compassion relevant behavior is far more situationally variable than the globalist theses [i.e. character based notions] of consistency and evaluative integration would have us believe” (2002, p. 61). So although we may think that an individual’s tendency to behave compassionately (or in a way that might suggest some other disposition), is a result of their particular character, such behaviours, on the situationist score, are more accurately the results of various situational factors. The preceding leads Doris to conclude that, “Globalism is an empirically inadequate account of human functioning” (2002, p. 61). And again more boldly for Harman that, “Since it is possible to explain our ordinary belief in character traits as deriving from certain illusions, we must conclude that there is no empirical basis for the existence of character traits” (2000a, p. 166). Thus we have the main thrust of the situationist argument—empirical results from a multitude of experiments do not support the traditional understanding of character, which leads situationists to suggest that it should be abandoned.

But it is not simply the experimental results that sustain situationism (although these are certainly keystone to the position); there are also indicators in more true to life contexts that betray the overwhelming power of the situation. For example, Doris

mentions the extraordinary internal conflict that must have been experienced by the doctors who worked in the Nazi concentration camps during World War Two (2002, p. 53-8). Many of these doctors, he claims, had the onerous task of deciding which of the arrivals would be forced to work in the camps but live, and which would be killed immediately (p. 54). These doctors originally made the choice to dedicate themselves to a profession that aims to save lives, and yet their death camp duties were in direct opposition to such aims. That people are capable of such acts can be mind boggling; however, there is reason to believe that various situational factors were responsible for facilitating such aberrant behaviour. Indeed, according Lifton (1986), as paraphrased by Doris,

The Auschwitz doctors underwent an intensive socialization process in order to effect their “adaptation” to life in the death-world of the camp. Doctors frequently drank heavily together and often expressed dissatisfaction with camp practices, but these protests eventuated in group rationalizations; the alcoholic therapy sessions were a means for the doctors to establish consensual validation for behaviours that were strongly dissonant with precamp values. (2002, p. 56)

None of this, for Doris, is to deny the facts: the doctors committed some monstrous acts, but it is not clear that they would have all behaved in such despicable ways had there been no situational facilitation of their conduct, for example, in the form of “alcoholic therapy sessions” and the like. Furthermore, previous to and outside of the camp life, there is little reason to think that these people were utterly evil. After all, they were doctors, some of whom had families to which they were

devoted and, according to Doris, “A plausible conjecture, just as with the Milgram obedients . . . , is that a very substantial percentage of perpetrators in the holocaust had previously led lives characterized by ordinary levels of compassion” (2002, p. 54). So once again, we are left with the image of the overwhelming power of the situational context to override individual dispositions and their presumed efficacy.

Harman warns that there are further negative consequences to thinking in terms of character based dispositions (though he does little by way of justifying his views on these points). For example, he believes that misattributions of character result in failures of political reasoning, and misjudgments of the actions of others. Moreover, he believes that, “in extreme cases, [these misjudgments] lead to ethnic warfare” (2003, p. 421), since they take the place of a rational understanding of the common struggle by various groups for limited resources (2000a, p. 177). He also thinks that programs for moral education are misguided where they rely upon the notion of character development, since, according to him, there is no evidence that character exists.

There are however, alternatives to the situationist interpretation of both the empirical research done in psychology and the underlying factors that motivate significant world events. In the next chapter, I will review the arguments of several philosophers who are in various ways critical of the situationist interpretations, most of whom argue against situationist conclusions and their prescription that the commonplace notion of character be abandoned. And later, in section 3.4, I will contribute an argument to the debate that I believe should persuade the situationists to

reevaluate their position, or at least, to recognize the limited scope of application as well as the limited realm of warranted inferences provided by the psychological data.

2.0 Situationism Scrutinized

Many of the philosophers who have taken issue with the situationist position have done so in an attempt to save traditional views of virtue ethics from falling out of favor and into obscurity. At the very least, it is certain that many of these philosophers acknowledge that, when understood in a particular way, the empirical studies referenced by the situationists may seem to be a serious problem for virtue ethics. Nevertheless, few agree that the results of these studies warrant that virtue ethics or notions of character be abandoned completely, and some even contend that they are no real threat to virtue ethics or character at all. Indeed, as was mentioned earlier, there are alternative interpretive accounts available of the implications of the empirical data. Furthermore, although some of these alternative readings may differ in their approach to formulating a response to situationism, most agree that, as it stands, the data upon which the situationists rely do not alone provide sufficient warrant for the abandonment of virtue ethics and character. Indeed, it seems that most who are critical of the situationist position would agree with John Sabini and Maury Silver that, in this case, the situationist “philosophers and psychologists have drawn wrong conclusions from psychological results...[and that,]...the lesson to be learned is substantially narrower than the movement seems to believe” (2005, p. 535).

Since many of the refutations of situationism have been motivated by attempts to defend virtue ethics, much of the talk about character is situated in the larger context of how character relates to virtue; and as such, though this chapter will primarily focus upon the defense of character, several of the arguments presented will

make reference to the implications of character for virtue ethics. But this should come as no surprise, nor should it confound the aim of this thesis, since the popular understanding of character has been derived from Aristotelian notions; and for Aristotle, the virtues are “states of character” (Kaplan [Ed.], 1958, p.188).

According to Christian Miller (2003, p.367)—a critic of the situationist interpretations of D&H—the situationist account of character falls short of providing a sufficiently detailed understanding of just what a character trait is. For Harman, character traits are broad-based, relatively stable and long-term dispositions or habits to act in specific ways, and these dispositions may be evoked to explain certain aspects of a person’s behaviour. However, as Miller notes, such a classification fails to exclude persistent behaviours such as smoking, alcoholism, bulimic purging, and many other stable dispositions that most would not count as character traits. The potential for ambiguity in regards to ‘trait-terms’ and their perceived relevance to the notion of character has also been recognized by Richard Brandt, who claims, “It may be objected that the suggested dichotomy of personality-trait-terms into those designating traits of moral character and others is questionable, and [that] there is no reasonably definite intuitively acceptable class of names of traits of moral character” (1970, p. 24). Nevertheless, Harman’s characterization is similar to the one provided by Doris. More importantly, both philosophers take the general expectation for the behavioural consistency of agents within the appropriate eliciting conditions to be one of the more central and distinguishing features of character. Indeed, according to Gopal Sreenivasan, “the mainstay of situationism’s critique consists in the claim that people’s behaviour is not cross-situationally consistent” (2002, p.51). Thus, it is in

regards to the preceding claim—and more importantly, what the research has to say about it—that the views of both D&H will be challenged in this chapter.

The challenge to character-eliminativist situationism will be advanced on several fronts: from alternative interpretations regarding the implications of the experimental data and arguments about character development and training, to the incompleteness of the situationist understanding of character. Furthermore, the importance of the perspective of the individual, both in terms of subjective self-appraisals and the practical reasoning aimed at the achievement of the good life, will be brought to light in order to expose some of the inadequacies of situationist theory and interpretations of research. Indeed, by the end of this chapter, the limitations of the situationist project for the elimination of character should be clear and obvious.

2.1 Non-Situationist Interpretations

In regards to Harman's interpretation of the results of the Milgram obedience experiments, Miller argues that, "it is not at all clear what implications they are supposed to have with respect to the issue of the existence of global [i.e. robust] character traits" (2003, p. 369). First, Harman does not mention what specific yet absent character trait should be relevant to the situation. Nor does he attempt to explain the behaviour of those participants who did disobey the directives. It would seem, according to Miller, that since all of the participants were in the same situational context, the disobedience of some of them must have been due to some internal disposition, for example, that they have more compassionate character types.

(See Doris' claim to the same effect in the previous chapter, section 1.4; and note his dismissive treatment of this point.) Thus, according to Miller, "the results that Harman takes to be a *reductio* of character-based explanations, may actually turn out to be precisely what one should expect on a sufficiently nuanced understanding of virtue ethics" (2003, p. 370). In other words, such an account of virtue ethics takes note of just how uncommon truly virtuous agents are thought to be. What this means for the idea of character, is that the findings of social psychological studies, like those of Milgram, may actually be interpreted as supportive of characterological conceptions, so long as the understanding of character one is working with is comparable to how it is conceived within a sufficiently sophisticated account of the virtues. Moreover, even if one is not attempting to explain the behaviour of the Milgram study participants in the context of a theory of virtue, one may simply conclude, according to Sabini and Silver, that, "people value obeying authority more than we thought they did" (2005, p. 547); and this remains a reasonable interpretive strategy of the results which poses no threat to the idea of character. Furthermore, that some individuals might 'value obeying authority' could in fact turn out to be due to their being in possession of a more general underlying character disposition: that they have obedient character types. And thus, far from dispelling the notion of character, in this case, situationist research seems to have brought to light a hitherto neglected aspect of it.

With respect to the previously illustrated Darley and Batson study, which focused in part on the effects of time-stress upon helping behaviour, Miller argues, "it seems reasonable to think that we should focus on the students' internal dispositions

in order to predict the outcome of this experiment only if we had strong antecedent reasons for believing that the majority of the test subjects possessed the relevant global character trait(s) to begin with” (2003, p. 371). However, for Miller, these reasons are not forthcoming, and the vocational trajectory of the students is not enough to warrant the assumption that they have all obtained the requisite character trait of compassion. Indeed, contrarily to what might be expected of those in religious professions—namely, that they be kind and compassionate—history stands as a record that is filled with anecdotes of cruel and cold-hearted nuns as well as criminally perverted pederast priests. Moreover, for other lines of work, we have no reason to suspect that particular character traits are related in any strong way to job choice; for instance, it would be unreasonable to think that all polygraph operators never lie (or take themselves to be perfectly honest), or that no police officers have ever stolen money from any of the criminals they placed in custody. So a person’s choice of profession does not alone guarantee that they would possess a given character trait. Thus, according to Miller, “it seems only natural that we would also want to take situational considerations into account” (2003, p. 371).

But even where we do have reason to believe that people possess the character trait in question, we have no reason to assume that such character traits might not on occasion be overridden by other concerns (or character traits), such as the urgency of the obligation to report to the second phase of a study for which one has made a commitment to attend. Indeed, as noted by Rachana Kamtekar, “the seminarians in the Darley and Batson experiment were faced with competing demands for help, from the experimenters and from the person in the doorway [i.e. the confederate]: it was in

the course of helping the experimenters that they were called upon to help the person in the doorway. Whomever they helped, they would also have been failing to help someone and so displaying inconsistently helpful behaviour” (2004, p. 473). Thus, a single character trait may be burdened by multiple demands; where this is the case we cannot reasonably assume that a failure to act on one of the demands counts as disconfirming evidence against the character trait in question.

It is in response to the same study by Darley and Batson that Sabini and Silver raise an important concern about how people rate the moral demands of the situations in which they find themselves. They ask, “shouldn’t the subjects see that one [moral obligation] is more important than the other” (2005, p. 558 footnote); namely, the obligation to help the person in distress over the obligation to report to the study? And perhaps they should. However, the general reluctance of participants in the ‘high hurry’ condition to stop and help the confederate is not necessarily a failure to act morally (since they are still ‘helpful’ to the experimenter), but rather, it is a failure to identify the most morally demanding feature of one’s environment; and as such, although they may experience difficulties in discerning which obligation to act upon, this does not necessarily mean that they are acting out of character or without regard for moral demands. Thus, although the ability to distinguish which moral action is most required remains an important concern, it is not a concern which directly challenges the idea that people have character types.

There are additional concerns, however, that are raised by experimental constructs like the one of Darley and Batson; namely, that the introduction of a time-stress variable may produce more than one character subverting effect, and some of

these effects may be taken to be quite reasonable conditions for, or even inevitably lead to, the absence of character relevant displays of behaviour. For example, time stress can have a varying degree of impact upon an individual's scope of attention and reflective capacity; for example, within the Darley and Batson study, failure to assist the confederate might have more to do with the fact that he was not well noticed, or his distress not accurately identified, than it does with a failure to act from a designated character disposition.

Attention may also be influenced by affective and mood states. For instance, according to Brandt, "character-traits are very like intellectual capacity; a person with a high I.Q. may, in a state of emotion, do very poorly on a standard test. And emotional disturbance may affect the influence any need/aversion may have on action" (1970, p. 35). So an individual who is dealing with turbulent emotions may occasionally fail to notice various aspects of morally demanding situations, or even that a situation is of moral concern. In cases where the moral failing is a minor one, we would normally excuse it on the grounds that the individual was emotionally disturbed, rather than judge an individual to be inconsistent in, for example, their regard for others. Mood states, like affective states, can similarly have a significant impact on attention, although as Sabini and Silver note, "being in a bad mood does not excuse the failure to notice screams of agony and the like, but it is the sort of thing that excuses the failure to notice some dropped pencils (or papers as in the Isen and Levin study)...[thus]...the fact that people are inconsistent in whether they pick up (or not) depending on their mood is not sufficient inconsistency to warrant abandoning virtue ethics" (2005, p. 540). Here the point is made powerfully clear: it

would take much more than the failure to act with courtesy to disconfirm the kind of character described by traditional virtue ethics, since this failure could be excused for the attentional reasons mentioned above. But we might not take these same reasons to excuse more powerfully demanding situational cues, for example, as in cases where people appear to be in significant physical danger or distress (e.g. the Milgram studies). Helping someone to pick-up some dropped papers hardly seems like a paradigm case of compassionate behaviour. Thus, where the intention is to challenge the existence of a particular trait of character, employing paradigm examples would appear necessary to secure more powerful and compelling results.

These arguments notwithstanding, Miller agrees with Harman that there is in fact persuasive experimental support for the view that people typically over-emphasize the internal dispositions of others at the cost of failing to acquire realistic appraisals of the behavioural influence of situational factors, otherwise known as the tendency to make the fundamental attribution error. However, this fact simply does not pose a threat to virtue ethics or the notion of character since, “nothing follows about the existence of character traits in general from the tendency of psychology test subjects...to fall prey to this error” (2003, p. 371). Or as Sreenivasan claims, “the fundamental attribution error is *irrelevant* to the question of whether anyone really has a character trait” (2002, p. 53-53). Indeed, Miller encourages philosophers to become familiar with the experimental literature since they may discover ways to counteract this tendency towards error. It is, after all, as Sreenivasan notes, a simple failure to, “appreciate...that the reliability of their predictions depends upon the

number [and *distribution*] of observations underlying their trait attribution” (2002, p. 52[53]). And such failures, it seems, ought to admit of correction.

But Harman does not merely cite the experimental evidence regarding the fundamental attribution error to lend support to his view, while maintaining that the social psychological research on things like helping behaviour and obedience confirms his position, he also suggests that there is no empirical support for the view that global character traits even exist. However, as noted by Miller (2003), even if one were to grant that Harman’s interpretations are correct, and that he could develop his argument that the findings do not support the idea of global character traits, his analysis remains restricted to an examination of the results from only the field of social psychology. What would be required to show that there is *no* empirical support for the idea of global character traits is that there is either no other source of empirical evidence that may be supportive of the idea, or that if any number of other sources of empirical evidence may be available, these must all fail to provide support for the notion of global traits (p. 372-3). However, Harman provides no such argument. Moreover, even within the psychological literature, Harman failed to notice at least one very promising method in character research that has been empirically validated; namely, the template-matching technique developed by Daryl Bem and David Funder (1983, p. 203). Indeed, according to Bem, “the standard template-matching procedure has proven to be versatile and *empirically successful* [italics added] both as a tool of verification and of exploration” (1983, p. 208). In other words, the template matching procedure is successful with respect to its ability to predict character relevant behaviours across situations and for personality theory testing respectively. So, in

short, it would appear that Harman's statement regarding the lacking of empirical support for character is simply false.

2.2 Consistency and Character Development

Perhaps one of the most powerful objections (and maybe even most obvious) to the situationist position is that, even if one is committed to the view that there are such things as global character traits, it does not follow that one accepts that these traits must be behaviourally evidenced in every single instance in which one might possibly expect them to arise. In other words, the experimental evidence gathered by situationists is really only threatening, if it is threatening at all, to those who hold a very strong view regarding the required consistency of an agent's behaviour in order for the agent to be thought to possess a certain type of character. Miller (2003) captures this point well:

[The current social psychological findings] will count against the virtue ethicist [or characterological conceptions] only if her view is committed to an extremely strong account of character traits according to which an agent has a particular global trait *T* only if he attempts to perform the relevant *T*-sortal act in *every T*-eliciting circumstance. But I can see no reason why any virtue ethical theory [or conception of character] should be saddled with such an implausible account. For it has rarely been part of the view that possession of a virtue [or character trait] is an all or nothing phenomenon; rather, it comes in degrees. In addition, acquiring a particular virtue [or

character type] is typically thought to be a very gradual process full of numerous setbacks. (p. 378)

Allow me to draw an informative analogy: learning to be virtuous or to have a robust kind of character is, in a sense, like learning to swim. Situational factors may affect both. For example, just as certain conditions (e.g. high waves, very cold water, and complete darkness) can have a serious impact upon an individual's ability to swim well, especially if they are still learning how to swim, so too can various situational conditions (e.g. time stress, the presence of an authority figure, *et cetera*) impair character relevant behaviours while the character type is still developing. But just as the frantic splashing that results from placing someone who is just learning to swim into a freezing cold pool of high waves in utter darkness does not mean that the person cannot swim (or learn to swim under more favorable early conditions), neither can the influence of the various situational factors mentioned be taken to prove that an individual has no character (or that the individual would be incapable of developing one in more conducive early settings).

Indeed, most would agree that the formation of a character type or trait involves a learned and sustained process of development, and that throughout this process an agent may occasionally fail to express the appropriate character trait for a number of different reasons. But this shift in understanding from a situationist perspective to a more realistic and more widely accepted view of character—one in which it is seen as a developmental process that allows for some error or inconsistency—highlights another serious problem for situationist interpretations: namely, that the experimental research upon which they commonly rely does not

address the issue of the development of character. That is to say, that the experimental programs cited by situationists are not longitudinal studies, and as such, they cannot begin to address the question of whether or not ‘global’ character traits exist since the experiments cited do not attempt to track repetitions or patterns of specific behaviours, but rather, only deal with isolated instances of behaviour. This point is crucial, and it creates a serious counter problem for the situationist view that there is no empirical reason to assume that global character traits exist and that, therefore, the traditional conception of character ought to be abandoned. In the first place, this counter problem shows that the empirical research cited by situationists is not up to the task of showing whether or not global character traits exist—to do this would require that longitudinal studies be done. Thus, it is no wonder that Harman finds no empirical support for global character traits since he is not even looking in the right place for it. Secondly, it shows that the experimental research employed by the situationists is insufficient to warrant the abandonment of characterological conceptions since the studies cited do not directly challenge the general notion of character.

As noted by Miller, even the most generous appraisal of the situationist argument from empirical research should only result in the view that most of the individuals studied in the cited experiments did not possess fully cultivated character traits; and according to him, “virtue ethicists can readily agree that some experiments in social psychology confirm that there currently is not widespread full possession of global character traits” (2003, p. 379). They can concede this point without worry since most virtue ethical theories take the virtues (and the character types associated

with them), to be rarely achieved, and difficult to fully acquire. Thus, they are not committed to the expectation that their manifestations be unfalteringly observable in the actions of the average person. Or as Sreenivasan puts it, “if a theory of virtue only applies in the first instance to ‘some people’, then its empirical presuppositions are *not* falsified [by the data put forward by situationists] unless it is really true that next to no one’s (virtue) traits are cross-situationally consistent” (2002, p. 57). So even if the people who display the appropriate kind of behavioural consistency are in the minority, traditional virtue theory and conceptions of character can still withstand the situationist challenge.

What this means, for Miller, is that, “rather than disconfirming virtue ethics, social psychologists have to some extent provided supporting evidence for certain traditionally prominent features of the view” (2003, p. 379). One prominent feature being just how unlikely it is to encounter an individual who has obtained full virtue, or a fully developed character type. Moreover, as Nafsika Athanassoulis (2000) argues, that a virtuous character type be fully developed by anyone may be exceedingly rare or even unnecessary for sustaining virtue ethical theory—since, in so far as an ethical theory is intended to guide moral action, it may still succeed in this by employing the individual of virtuous character as an ideal from which to guide one’s actions in uncertain yet morally demanding situations, regardless of whether or not such a fully virtuous individual actually exists (p. 217).

2.3 Empirical Considerations

Even without reference to the virtues, many would likely allow that an individual may act ‘out of character’ on a given occasion without such an admission necessarily leading to the suspicion that the person’s typical behaviours are widely inconsistent or telling against a more settled disposition. As noted by Miller, “in some cases of character trait attribution, individuals with those traits might fail to meet certain expectations in particularly demanding circumstances. Nonetheless, character traits could still be important causal factors in an explanation for why those people behave the way they do in *most ordinary* [italics added] situations” (2003, p. 380-381). So it would seem that the experimental results cited by situationists (e.g. the Milgram studies), need not be considered to be radically counterintuitive in regards to the generally held views on character. Rather, where intuitions regarding the expected behaviour of participants in experimental contexts have been recorded, they seem more likely to signal instances of the fundamental attribution error or unjustified character attributions than the inadequacy of characterological conceptions to make sense of human action. After all, characterological conceptions of action are widely held to allow for some flexibility in the face of various pressures.

Although allowing the concept of character such flexibility may appear to render it irrefutable, this is in fact not the case. The question may still be settled on empirical grounds. However, this can only be reasonably accomplished by way of longitudinal research, since such a method allows individuals and their behaviours to be tracked over time, and thus may provide a ‘global’ image of character or its

absence. If such a method reveals that there is little to no consistency in the average individual's reactions to various deeply similar situations that would generally be predicted to elicit character relevant behaviour of a certain type, then the case against character is bolstered considerably. However, and this point is a serious concern for situationists, such behavioural inconsistency across *very similar* eliciting situations is also telling against situationism, since the situation, in this case, would be unable to achieve behavioural conformity as well. In other words, if participants are reacting inconsistently to very similar situational cues, then the view that a 'situational force' is responsible for motivating behaviour is undermined. This is because, in order for a situational factor to be considered responsible for motivating certain behaviours, it must produce the same behavioural effect in a highly reliable manner. This is not to say that acquiring compelling empirical support for situationism is not possible, but rather, that it requires carefully developed research programs. For example, as was noted with the variants of the Milgram study, intentionally slight situational variations across generally similar experimental conditions did have significant effects. However, what would be required to render such results more convincing (and supportive of the situationist position), would be for such experiments to employ the same group of subjects across the various trials in order to track the behavioural effects of the subtle situational manipulations against the presumed efficacy of their individual characters.

Should such refined forms of longitudinal research on character occur, I am inclined to expect reasonably high levels of individual consistency ratings across multiple and similar character eliciting situations for at least some participants—since

even the demanding pressures of the Milgram studies did not obtain total obedience—and this is all that the standard views on character or virtue would require. However, even if the experimental designs reached the stage of refinement previously mentioned, one would still need to retain a critical attitude in regards to the ‘slight’ situational manipulations involved. The reason is that in some cases, one might encounter an experimental condition commonly taken to be capable of overriding character that is masquerading as a subtle manipulation that character should be able to withstand. In other words, just what renders an experimental manipulation a ‘slight’ one would need to be given serious attention; that is, how these potential slight manipulations are characterized and interpreted must be the object of careful scrutiny. Otherwise some of the experimental results may be taken to count against character where in fact they ought not to. With these measures in place, however, it seems reasonable to think that the suggested form of experimental design could be capable of bringing the debate over character closer to a realistic resolution.

2.4 Character Training

Another important response to the situationist position remains: namely, that even if most people are found lacking in regards to a longitudinally testable global personality or character trait, this finding alone does not mean that people are incapable of developing the traits in question through the appropriate training. Indeed the descriptive ‘is’ of the results of social psychological research need not necessarily

dictate the normative limits of human potential. For example, with respect to the Isen and Levin study that dealt with mood effects on helping behaviour, Miller argues,

Someone who defends the existence of global character traits need only argue that most of the test subjects did not receive an adequate moral education which habituated them into both recognizing and responding to the demands of the situation. If they had received such a training, then their activation thresholds would have been lower; they would not have needed the event of finding a dime to trigger an internal feedback mechanism which disposed them to helping behavior. (2003, p.385)

Indeed, where individuals fail to meet the requisite experimental expectations for trait consistency, the question of previous training and the adequacy of the method of character inculcation remains a non-trivial one; this is largely due to the fact that the achievement of a fully developed character type is considered by many to be quite difficult to attain, and that it requires much effort and conviction. So the absence of trait-relevant behaviour has yet another alternative assessment available: namely, a lacking or poorly implemented program of character inculcation. Thus, even if truly disconfirming evidence were produced, defenders of character and virtue would retain the ability to stave off the findings of empirical research, at least until such research is performed on well trained subjects.

2.5 An Incomplete Account of Character

Another important argument against situationism reveals that the kinds of experiments typically employed against character and virtue do not adequately capture the richness of the concept of character as it is normally understood within virtue ethical theories. Indeed, such a position is taken by Kamtekar, who argues that, “traditional virtue ethics offers a conception of character far superior to the one under attack from situationism...the conception of character in virtue ethics is holistic and inclusive of how we reason: it is a person’s character as a whole (rather than isolated character traits), that explains her actions, and this character is a more or less consistent, more or less integrated, set of motivations, including the person’s desires, beliefs about the world, and ultimate goals and values” (2004, p. 460). Kamtekar’s recognition that a more dynamic process of practical reason is involved in motivating the actions of the virtuous agent is consistent with Aristotle’s additional conditions, mentioned in the introduction of this thesis (section 1.0), concerning knowledge and choice. Moreover, not only does it obtain a more comprehensive compatibility with Aristotelian views on virtue, but Kamtekar’s position allows for a conceptually richer understanding of character, one that involves much more than is captured by the notions of character provided within standard situationist accounts. For example, where situationists see some behaviours as simply counting against their limited concept of character, views like Kamtekar’s allow for those behaviours to be assessed in light of the processes of reasoning proper to the individuals in question—and they are not taken to undermine character in any way. Indeed, according to Kamtekar,

“traditional virtue ethics explains behavioural inconsistency as a result of the cognitive and motivational obstacles to th[e] achievement of practical reason rather than as the result of the absence of character traits” (2004, p. 460).

But what is meant by the term ‘practical reason’, and how is it impeded? According to Gary Weaver, practical wisdom (i.e. excellence of a special kind of practical reasoning) is, “an actor’s ability to balance successfully the varied requirements of virtue encountered in the different venues of life—work, home, community, etc...[it] involves skillful adjudication among th[e] virtues in light of a general sense of ‘who I am’ as a moral agent” (2006, p.358). So the kind of practical reason that we are concerned with demands that some deliberative effort be put into one’s choices regarding opportunities to act virtuously and how these relate to one’s self-concept—especially as concerns those opportunities that the agent immediately faces. And as with normal deliberation, there are multiple factors that may serve to aggravate the process; for example, time stress, an emotional disturbance, the presence of others, what one is attending to, *et cetera*.

Kamtekar’s understanding of traditional virtue ethics leads to a very different interpretation of the current experimental results than the one provided by situationists. For example, rather than taking the actions of the participants in the Darley and Batson experiment as evidence against character, a person who sees things as Kamtekar does, would be much more likely to interpret the behaviour of those who did not help to be the result of the motivational impediment created by the time stress variable; this is not to say that the situational pressures did not play a role, but rather, that their impact upon behaviour does not directly disconfirm the existence

of character. Notice that this actually allows for a much more comprehensive explanation of behaviour—since, for situationists, the fact that some people (statistical outliers) do help cannot be accounted for in terms of situational factors yet, on Kamtekar’s view, the behaviour of both helpers and non-helpers can be explained in reference to the degree of impact that cognitive and motivational impediments have on particular participants. Miller develops a similar position which he suggests, “avoids the extremes of crude situationism and naïve trait dispositionalism [i.e. naïve endorsement of character based explanations of action],” by taking the view that, “it is not situations alone which dictate action, but rather the ways in which we selectively focus on and characterize various aspects of them given our relatively fixed personality structures” (2003, p. 384). So what we are seeing with both Kamtekar and Miller is that there is a way in which the traditional notions of character and virtue can co-exist with the situation-sensitive findings from social psychology. Therefore, one need not assume that the two perspectives are necessarily incompatible.

A similar hybrid position known as ‘interactionism’ is also available in the field of psychology proper. As Bem perhaps too optimistically claims, “The apparent contradiction between the personological view that behavior is person-determined and transsituationally consistent and the situationist view that behavior is situation-determined and context specific has now been resolved: We are all now ‘interactionists’” (1983, p. 203). Regardless of whether or not this position has truly been widely adopted among researchers in psychology (based on my research this seems doubtful), it nevertheless represents a more balanced approach to the study of

personality or character in reference to situational demands, and thus, it is a useful theoretical starting point for investigation into these matters.

The kind of broader conceptual framework conceived of by Kamtekar allows for a significant contribution to be made by situationism, since situationist research may help to identify the cognitive and motivational barriers to virtuous behaviour and the development and support of moral character types. Indeed as Kamtekar notes, “virtue ethics can benefit from considering the particular situational factors that social psychology suggests have a profound influence on behaviour...[especially as concerns those]...situations that do not wear their moral relevance on their sleeve but nevertheless seem to constrain how we act” (2004, p. 461). In other words, situationist research may help identify the influence upon behaviour of various factors not typically recognized by the individual. Moreover, such research would help to secure predictions about group behavioural norms for various circumstances and, if accepting of an account of character and virtue like the one advanced by Kamtekar, it would retain the advantage of being able to explain the exceptions to those statistical norms as well.

Nonetheless, to remain prudent with regards to examining the findings of situationist research is advisable, since the popularly cited studies on helping behaviour recounted in the first section of this paper (i.e. the Darley & Batson and Isen & Levin studies), as noted by Kamtekar, “were only carried out on about forty subjects, groups small enough to raise a question about how significant information could be distinguished from noise” (2004, p. 466 footnote). So researchers need to be sure to obtain adequate sample sizes, as well as have their studies replicated by other

researchers before the results of any particular study can be taken as representative of established truths about behaviour, or be evaluated and weighted as such. Also, philosophers and theoreticians need to be aware of the experimental findings that lay in opposition to, or seem to contradict their findings and pet theories (e.g. Bem's template-matching technique), since, as Miller argues, "it turns out that there is actually a great deal of experimental evidence that...local traits not only exist but are in fact widely possessed" (2003, p. 382). These 'local' traits that Miller mentions may not meet what situationists take to be the needs of traditional virtue theories—that is, they are not the robust characterological dispositions that might be expected—but, they nevertheless provide evidence in support of the consistency of certain aspects of character (albeit, in a more restricted sense). As such, they should act as a caution against hasty claims (like Harman's), to the effect that there is *no* empirical support for character. Indeed, regardless of their limited scope, such findings ought to encourage further research and more refined methodologies rather than simply be ignored or not recognized for what they in fact are: namely, character indexed examples of behavioural consistency.

2.6 Situationist Social Psychology Forgets the Individual

Another important personal dimension that seems to be given little if any attention by situationists, and the research programs that they reference, are the individual differences in the subjective construal of the situation made by participants. Indeed, as Sreenivasan notes, "it is one of the hallmarks of situationism

to privilege objective behavioural measures in the assessment of character traits, at the expense of various forms of subjective assessment favoured by traditional theorists of personality—for example, self-reports, peer evaluations, and personality assessment scales” (2002, p.50). Of course, this appears reasonable at first glance, since the latter measures may not be the most reliable for predictive purposes, but it nevertheless results in a failure to account for the participant’s own interpretation of events. Thus, it would appear that social psychological researchers and situationists generally assume that simply because they identify the relevant features of an experimental setting in a certain way, that the participants will uniformly take the same interpretive perspective that they do. That is, that the participants will weigh various objective aspects of the situation in exactly the same manner as the researchers. It would seem far more likely, however, that the participants—with their varying background knowledge and perceptual acuities—in fact do not always perceive the experimental context in the situationists’ desired fashion. Thus, as Kamtekar points out, “supposed inconsistencies in behavior may not be [subjectively] inconsistent at all” (2004, p.470). The following excerpt from Bem adds to the picture:

The more important conceptual point to be made here is that social-psychological theories...are, in fact, theories of situations, typically formulated without reference to individual differences. If personological theories have not lived up to expectations because they have limited themselves to person effects in a world populated by person-situation interactions, then we should be no more sanguine about theories that limit themselves to situation effects. (1983, p.207)

So, just as the situationist may criticize the adequacy of traditional personality constructs for finding behavioural consistency across situations, the personality theorist (i.e. advocate of personality or character consistency), may challenge the adequacy of social psychological research methods to identify and incorporate concerns related to individual differences and to take personality and character seriously.

In connection with these last points lies a related concern; namely, it is unclear just what are the situational forces deemed responsible by situationists for overpowering the internal dispositions (i.e. character) of individuals. Indeed, as noted by Sabini & Silver, “the notion of “situational forces” as an explanation...is not so much wrong as it is vague” (2005, p. 558). Before much sense can be made about the implications of these situational forces their content needs to be precisely defined (and Bem [1983] boasts that template-matching could serve such an end).

To illustrate the problem that this vagueness creates for situationists, take for example the Isen and Levin study. For this study, the subjects who did help may not have been in any way influenced by the presence of the dime in the payphone return slot, nor the presumed ‘good mood’ that the dime was taken to instill in them. Indeed, for a study construed as involving mood effects, surprisingly, nothing was known about the actual mood states of the participants, since these were not reported nor recorded in any way. Yet the mere finding of a dime was all that was required by the experimenters to justify the attribution of a ‘good mood’ to a participant. Obviously, such attributions are highly suspect, since it could have been that those who did help

were in bad moods, or neutral ones, regardless of their petty good fortune in finding the dime. Perhaps the phone call they had just made ended in an argument or conferred information about some other displeasing event; and yet, they may have helped not because finding a dime lightened their mood, but simply because they were taught good manners, or they so happened to have more compassionate character types than those who did not help. Indeed, it might even have been the case that those who did not help were in better moods than those who did help, since none of the participants were subsequently asked to comment on what kind of mood they were in prior to being involved in the experiment.

That such a serious oversight might occur in a study that is used as a prominent example of the need for situationist views to replace traditional notions of character inspires little confidence in the soundness of the situationist position. Rather, it seems to highlight the importance of Miller's suggestion that, "philosophers should exercise a great deal of care when employing data from social psychology as independent evidence for their ethical claims...[and that the analysis of such claims]...should be carried out on a case-by-case basis" (2003, p. 392). Moreover, if these are the kinds of studies that situationists take to be representative of established trends in research, we have good reason to be skeptical that the body of data upon which situationism relies raises any real concerns for character and virtue.

Indeed, even though there is good reason (a) to be cautious about making claims about character and virtue based upon the experimental results of current studies in social psychology and (b) good reason to think that these research programs and the propositions regarding character which they motivate ought to be assessed on

an individual basis, it would seem that most of the experiments popularly cited by situationists suffer from a single overarching weakness. This weakness is that they rely almost exclusively upon the classification of the observed behaviour of participants as a whole, and typically ignore a wealth of other potentially explanatorily powerful information from the individuals themselves. As noted by Kamtekar, such a singular focus produces an exclusionary effect wherein, “the character trait will [be taken to] determine behaviour in isolation from other character traits, thoughts, concerns, and so forth a person might have in a given situation” (2003, p. 474).

But this approach to research is wrong headed since it proposes that, “people who possess a given trait are expected, to the extent that they possess the trait, to behave spontaneously and unreflectively in ways that manifest it on every occasion” (Kamtekar, 2003, p.474). What is important to this last quote is not, as was earlier noted, the situationists’ unreasonable expectation for a perfect behavioural record, but rather, that they also expect that the behaviours in question be accomplished without reference to the thinking individual. However, people are not simple automata: they each enter a situation with a particular set of background beliefs, attitudes, values, and assumptions. And these factors shape in part how a person construes and evaluates a given situation, as well as how they may behave within it. So for an experiment to reveal that a majority of participants may behave in a certain way for a particular situation says nothing about the internal cognitive processes of the individuals who produced the results. Part of the problem, as Sreenivasan sees it, is that, “the results of the [social] psychological research are reported at the level of the population

aggregate” (2002, p. 56). They fail to provide specifics about individual participants. Thus, it could be the case that, what appears to be the result of a single situational variable is actually the result of numerous other factors unique to the varying experience and thoughts of the individual participants. And further, such behaviours may even prove to be consistent with a particular character type when looked at from the perspective of the individuals themselves, where the individuals actually value the type of consistency in question for themselves.

The lacking detail allowed by such oversights in the experimental designs of studies often cited by situationists has prompted Kamtekar to suggest that, “rather than isolating character variables and testing for their manifestations in behaviour, social psychologists need to engage in more painstaking research that takes into account how the considerations experimental subjects have in mind might involve various character traits and how these might interact” (2003, p. 476). That is to say that, researchers should engage in dialogue with the individual participants with the aim of understanding both the cognitive and motivational factors that may be at work in guiding their behaviours; and further, that such communication should be analyzed for signs of character-relevant thought processes. Perhaps more importantly, as Kamtekar points out, for the most part⁴ “we should only expect people to behave consistently with traits which they deem important to have, or in areas in which consistent behaviour matters to them” (2003, p. 476). Otherwise, it seems that the situationists are guilty of operating within the kind of error that they claim to be

⁴ This method has its limits as well. In cases like pathological lying, someone could have the character trait of being a liar, yet they may deceive themselves about it and not report reliably about the trait even though the trait is present.

trying to remedy—that is, the fundamental attribution error—since the experiments and interpretations that they employ rely upon the assumption that the participants should have the character traits in question before the results can confirm (on their account), that they in fact do not possess these traits. Indeed, it would appear much more cogent for the presumed characterological dispositions to be avowed by the participants to begin with, instead of operating under the assumption that people generally think they ought to have them, since the later track renders the current popular studies nothing more than examples of the fundamental attribution error at work. As we have already seen in section 2.1, this specific tendency toward error cannot be taken to count against the existence of character directly.

For Kamtekar, it is only when, “we have identified the particular traits and behaviours relevant to particular individuals, [that] we may [meaningfully] test for consistency correlations between traits and behaviours and among behaviors across situations” (2003, p. 477). And again, to acquire data for or against these kinds of correlations would require a more longitudinal type of research program; that is, one that tracks the progress of the same subjects across multiple trials. If these considerations were to be taken to heart in new research programs, then we would obtain much more compelling results, since not only would the tests track particular individuals to obtain global ratings; but these would be sensitive to the goals, values, and reasoning strategies of each unique individual. Furthermore, according to Kamtekar, “if one’s purpose is to evaluate virtue ethics, then the standard will have to be different [than the folk psychological one] and to take account of the fact that we are thinking, goal-oriented creatures” (2003, p. 485). Indeed, where conceptions of

character are operationally defined by psychologists, mere behavioural observations may satisfy their demands; however, when considering the richer concept of character derived from Aristotelian thought, the background knowledge and reasoning of the individual remain integral components to making sense of character.

There is more that is left to be said, however, about the social psychologists' almost exclusive focus upon behaviour. One area of warranted concern, as noted by Sreenivasan, is whether or not the, "behavioural measures [developed by psychologists] properly operationalize the character trait[s]" in question (2002, p. 57); for in some cases, the ways that traits are defined may have more to do with distinctions proper to the profession, than they do with distinctions that are relevant to virtue or common understandings of character. Thus, the rule of thumb should be—where the research is done with situationist concerns in mind—to stick as closely as possible to specifications of character identified by the individual participants themselves. Moreover, according to Athanassoulis, "empirical evidence about outward behaviour alone, is not sufficient in order to draw inferences about the precise state of character of the agent" (2000, p.218). This is because, as Aristotle's theory of virtue suggests, agents may act similarly but from different motives and thoughts.

2.7 The Good Life and the Role of Practical Reason

It is important also to recognize that the virtues Aristotle spoke of in the *Nicomachean Ethics* were an attempt to emphasize a certain manner of orientation

towards living that was thought to contribute to the ultimate goal of attaining a good life. Thus, as Joel Kupperman sees it, “character can be viewed in terms of control mechanisms, which promote reliability in areas of life in which reliability matters, and which would appear indispensable to a good life” (2001, p. 250). So the importance of behavioural consistency is established by the individual in relation to their assessment of its value in regards to living a good life. Therefore, where the consistency of behaviour is seen to be of no great importance to one’s living the good life, an individual may opt to disregard such demands. This is perfectly consistent with the aims of virtue theory; since, as Maria Merritt suggests, “when virtue ethics does deal with problems of how to act, it has arrived at them from the starting point of how one should live, and returns from them to that point” (2000, p. 370). However, to understand what makes a life a good one involves contemplation and reasoning; that is, one must come to understand, through deliberation and reflection, that one ought to value the virtues because, being virtuous contributes to having a good life. Moreover, Aristotle himself took the virtues to be, “modes of choice or [to] involve choice” (Kaplan, 1958, p 188), and thus, to act virtuously involves not only the decision to value a virtuous way of life, but to be able to understand (i.e. have knowledge about) how one’s choices relate to virtue.

Understood in a certain light, these last considerations could seriously undermine the kinds of situationist critiques of virtue that are derived from studies like the ones on obedience developed by Milgram. For example, suppose that some of the subjects of the Milgram experiments took themselves to be compassionate, and believed themselves in possession of this trait in a fairly robust sense (which is to say

that they value consistently behaving compassionately). It is hard to imagine that anyone who would identify themselves to have such a trait would be willing to participate in a similar study ever again, much less so to grant full compliance if they were expected to (unless perhaps they also believe themselves to be overwhelmingly disposed toward obedience). And this is at least in part because they would have a cognitive frame of reference to guide their moral reasoning and behaviour for future instances of a similar type; and with an adequate opportunity for reflection, such individuals could reason about their prior moral failings and resolve not to allow them to happen again. Indeed, if the confederates in such experiments had really been shocked, it is exceedingly difficult to imagine that upon debriefing, participants who truly thought themselves compassionate, but failed to disobey in the first instance, would be inclined to repeat their actions in another set of trials. And this is another reason for inspiring confidence in the likelihood that the appropriate types of longitudinal studies would find in favour of behavioural consistency given the necessary trial repetitions.

However, when the situationist position is fully elaborated, it is revealed that situationist conclusions are not only a threat to virtue and the notion of character, but also to common perceptions regarding the efficacy of practical reason. Nonetheless, they remain a threat that, so far, seriously lacks warrant. Kamtekar surmises the point well:

Perhaps, if situationism is true, then the answer to the practical question “what can I do to take charge of my situation?” is “nothing”—the features of situations that determine behaviour are so subtle and surprising that no ordinary rational strategies could enable

us to be masters of our situations. But such pessimism is premature, and if it were ever to become warranted, then it is not only virtue ethics and the notion of character that we would have to jettison, but the power of practical reasoning. (2003, p. 491)

Indeed, it would appear that the situationists have a much greater task at hand in dispelling the efficacy of practical reason than they do in regards to challenging the adequacy of personality constructs for determining behaviour. Surely, most would agree that they have not begun to touch upon the ways in which practical reasoning may be involved in directing behaviour. Moreover, without allowing room for reasoned responses to situations, it is difficult to imagine that the average individual has much to gain from situationist warnings—since it is unlikely that people caught in the trappings of the current social reality could avoid things like being subjected to the demands of higher-ups (i.e. authority figures: a boss, the police, *et cetera*), or finding themselves pulled in different directions by competing moral demands. For example, one might pass a stranded person on the highway but be conflicted about whether they should stop to help since they are already running late for a shift volunteering at a soup kitchen. Indeed, as Kamtekar notes, “as individual agents, we can’t just rig our situations or wait for our situations to be changed, we often have to act in and upon the situations we find ourselves in” (2003, p. 489). So the situationist suggestion to avoid situations within which we have little or no control over our behaviour—especially such situations as those derived from the experimental examples they provide—appears to be unrealistic since in many cases, we may truly be capable of doing no such thing.

Furthermore, as was noted earlier, it is not always clear exactly what aspects of the situation are responsible for influencing behaviour; therefore, Sabini and Silver suggest that, “the advice the situationist gives—be sensitive to situational features that may affect your behavior in subtle ways—is [in regards to helping with ethical reflection,] useless, for the same reason that warnings about heightened terrorism threats are useless: they are unfocused; they warn people to be suspicious of everything... without any hint as to what those [subtle situational] variables are” (2005, p. 561-562). So not only are people unlikely to be able to avoid certain situations but, when in those situations, they face the further difficulty of not necessarily being able to identify the exact sources of influence upon their behaviour; and thus, the prospect for mounting any kind of adequate strategy of defense against these influences appears dismally bleak—and likewise, the situationist warnings appear empty (i.e. lacking any real content).

2.8 Some Remarks on Situationist Thought and Characterological Thinking

Though it may be that the views expressed in this chapter raise serious concerns for the situationist stance, and challenge situationism on multiple fronts, this does not mean that the situationists are not picking up on something interesting or important. Indeed, as was noted earlier, situationist research may have implications for ethical theory—however doubtful be their position for the elimination of character based views on virtue—in that it might help to identify subtle cognitive and motivational barriers to acting in step with what one takes to be their type of

character. Nevertheless, the findings which motivate the situationists' eliminativist project simply do not warrant views as bold as the ones they are advancing. Rather, it seems that the situationists have been over eager in extending their conclusions about the implications of research for classical views on character and virtue, and have hastily generated claims far beyond what the limited range of behavioural data should allow.

In the next chapter, I intend to broaden the scope of the debate by venturing beyond behavioural research and into the more private realm of what goes on cognitively when we think about character, the self, and others. This is done in the hopes of expanding any reasonable perspective or treatment of character to include such mentations. The next section relies heavily upon the mental space mapping theory known as 'conceptual blending', developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner—and it is, in the first place, an exposition of their theoretical framework, by way of some examples that I have developed. After laying the groundwork of their system, I will explore what it tells us about how we think in terms of character and identity. Before elaborating in any greater detail, however, I will simply opt to transition into the next chapter of this thesis. But first, I call to the reader's attention that, although it may not be apparent at the outset of the next chapter just how the conceptual blending model addresses the problem of the existence of character, one should, by the latter half of section 3.3, be able to appreciate the kinds of contributions that such a model can make in regards to identifying the essential ways in which we make use of and understand the notion of character. Also, in section 3.4, I will explicitly state my personal views regarding the indispensability of character

concepts and the importance of conceptual blending to revealing just how valuable and important such concepts are.

3.0 Integrating Conceptual Integration

Behind the seamless and effortless flow of experienced mental phenomena lie some very intricate and complex cognitive processes. The mental space (i.e. “cohesive packet of conceptual information” Rohrer, 2005, p. 1690) theory dubbed *conceptual blending* (developed by Fauconnier and Turner [F&T]), attempts to explain some of these more elaborate and integrative cognitive processes. In this section, I will outline and explain what F&T consider to be the basic components of conceptual blending. I will also explain some of the core types of blends and their differences as well as illustrate what is involved in the process of performing a conceptual blend. I will then explore the role of conceptual blending as it relates to our conceptions of self and others in terms of character and personality. Unless otherwise identified, all of the examples used to highlight the ideas of F&T are my own, and each of the examples I have developed for this thesis are thoroughly compatible with the conceptual blending paradigm of F&T. Later, in section 3.4, I will use the insights regarding the ways we think about character and personality provided by blend theory to challenge the situationist view that the concept of character ought to be abandoned.

Indeed, in addition to the rather compelling critiques of situationism identified in the last chapter, there remains another way to challenge situationist suggestions by, in a sense, reshaping the problem of character. That is to say, perhaps instead of asking the question, “does character exist?” as the situationists seem to propose, what we should be asking, in regards to whether the concept of character should be

retained or rejected, is rather: “does the concept of character prove useful?” I think most would agree, after an examination of the ideas and insights regarding how we think about character provided within this chapter, that the latter question should be answered with a resounding “yes!” As a result, contrary to the character eliminativist campaign of the situationists, I will argue that the notion of character should be retained, since it is useful for behavioural predictions or classifications, as well as having many positive implications for a number of human practices, relations, and cognitive processes. But before getting into the reasons why we should not abandon the concept of character, we need to develop a deeper appreciation for what goes on cognitively when we think in terms of character.

3.1 The Components of Conceptual Blends

Conceptual blending is a mental space mapping theory. A mental space, as was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, denotes a unified conceptual bundle of information. According to F&T, such information bundles are, “constructed as we think and talk, for purposes of local understanding and action” (2002, p. 40). That is, they allow us to make sense of and react to our immediate perceptions and cognitions. The information within these mental spaces is connected with long term memory; it can be connected both generally, in terms of ‘schematic frames’ (e.g. eating, talking, *et cetera*), and specifically. For example, the first time you tried sushi, or the conversation you had with Sally about politics several weeks ago. Mental spaces, according to F&T, contain various incomplete elements and are typically organized

by general schematic frames. Various diagrams will be used to help clarify what is involved in conceptual blending in this thesis. Within these diagrams, mental spaces will be displayed as ellipses or circles; the elements of mental spaces will either be listed or displayed as icons within the ellipses or circles; and the connection between elements will be shown as lines. The lines represent what F&T call ‘cross-space mappings’ which essentially denote connections between counterparts from various mental spaces. Shown in figure 3.1 are a mental space, and some possible elements of a mental space, both specific elements and general schematic elements.

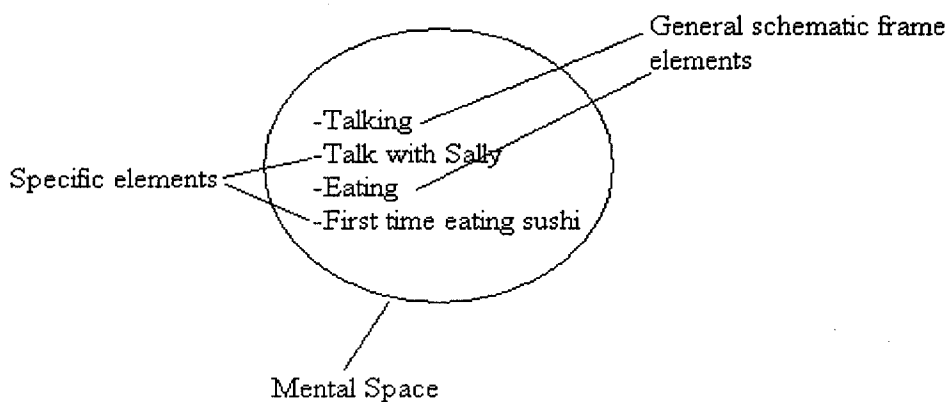


Figure 3.1 Mental Space and Elements

A conceptual blend is composed of two or more input structures, a generic space, and a fourth blended space. The input structures are simply mental spaces, and the generic space is a sort of schematic frame responsible for the initial partial

mapping of input structures. That is to say, the generic space contains those features or elements that are common among the input structures. Imagine, for example, a veteran champion figure skater responding, “I think I’m really only competing against myself out there,” after having been asked by a reporter, following a win at the World Championships competition, whether or not she was nervous about the strong performances of some of her competitors. The statement made by the figure skater may certainly evoke a conceptual blend; however, we will first examine how this statement relates to the blend components described so far. First, there may be two or more mental spaces evoked by such a statement (for the sake of simplicity we will assume only two), perhaps, the skater’s winning performance at the World Championships on May 2nd of 2005, and her recently earned win at the same competition on May 4th of the following year. The generic space, as shown in figure 3.2, would contain the elements ‘figure skater’, ‘World Championships competition’, an unspecified ‘routine’, and a non-descript ‘day of competition’, since these elements are common to both input structures.

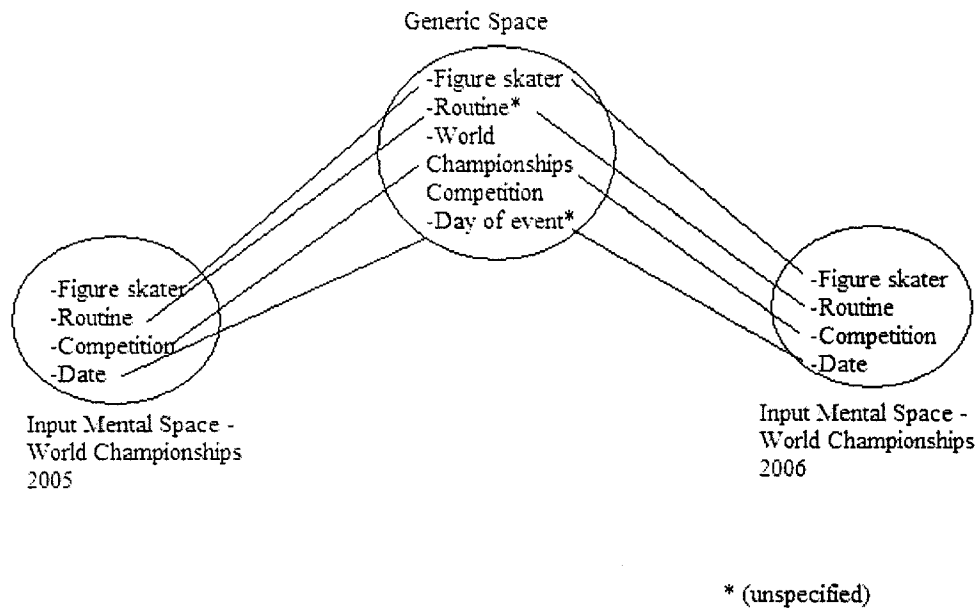


Figure 3.2 Input Mental Spaces, Generic Space and Connections

The blend is the result of partial projections from the input structures into a fourth space. This fourth space is the blended space. Of this novel, fourth, blended space, Fauconnier claims, “Through pattern completion and dynamic elaboration, it develops an emergent organization of its own” (2001, p. 256). In other words, the blend becomes a unique conceptual entity that contains greater content than that provided by either of the input structures. Take for example, the blend that may be constructed in the mind of a spectator who heard the statement made by the figure skater. For the spectator, the notion of her ‘competing against herself’ may prompt a blend wherein the figure skater’s performance is evaluated against her performance from the same competition a year prior—and not only that, the blend allows the spectator to mentally create an impossible situation wherein the same figure skater

from a year prior is conceived of as having literally competed against her more recent self. In the blend, the respective days of the competition are mapped onto a single non-descript day and so become fused; the locations of the event, if different for both inputs, are mapped onto a generic ‘arena of competition’, and are therefore compressed into a single place; the competition venue, because it is the same event, is fused, and becomes simply ‘The World Championships’; and the figure skater input elements resist being fused because the blend is made in reference to two separate performances, and thus, the unique performances and separation between figure skaters is preserved (even though we are actually only concerned with a single skater). The emergent structure of the figure skater competing against herself occurs within the blended space and is shown in figure 3.3.

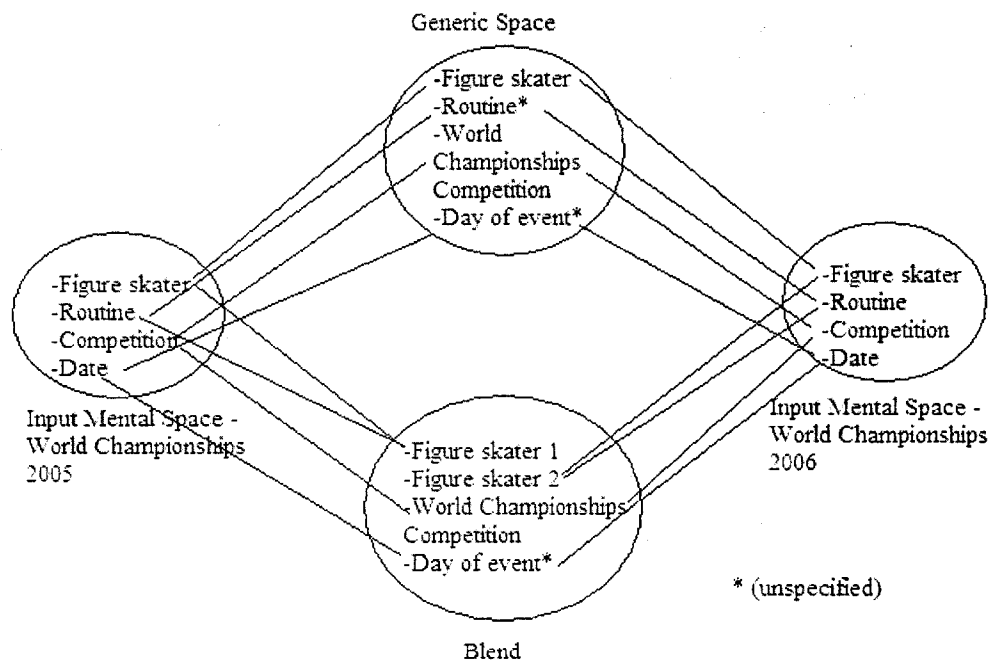


Figure 3.3 The Figure Skater Blend

According to F&T, there are three main processes responsible for the emergent structure found within blends: composition, completion, and elaboration. Composition allows the blend to acquire additional structure that is not present in either of the separate input spaces. It allows for this additional structure by establishing relationships between the input structures. For example, in neither of the input spaces for the 'Figure Skater' blend do we find two performances by the same figure skater; however, within the blend there are two separate performances by the same skater (although within the blend the notion of two skaters competing against each other is preserved because each version of the skater is distinguished by her actual performance, and thus, as already stated, they resist being fused into a single person). It is the composition of input structures that generates two distinct performances consisting of two different routines at the same event on the same day. Completion, on the other hand, helps to generate emergent structure by organizing the blend elements along familiar schematic patterns (i.e. frames). For example, completion is responsible for importing the general 'competition' schema into the blend, and renders the separate 'performance' elements of the blend meaningful. In other words, completion, in part, establishes the appropriate relational context between blend elements that is necessary for the blend to make sense. Moreover, it is because of the organization of elements provided by completion that we are able to have the blend play itself out: in the blend, the figure skater is competing against herself. F&T call this the "running of the blend" and it is what is meant by the term 'elaboration'. Elaboration is a dynamic imaginative process that produces emergent structure based upon the configuration of the blend generated by completion. In

neither of the input spaces is the figure skater competing against herself, but when we run the blend, this is exactly what happens (i.e. it is what we envision).

Fauconnier also claims that, “The blend can be used to provide inferences, emotional content, rhetorical force, and novel conceptualization” (2001, p. 256). These various additional abilities afforded by conceptual blending go beyond what may be achieved by a simple comparison between input structures. In the ‘Figure Skater’ blend, the skater competing against herself is the ‘novel conceptualization’, and the blend allows one to infer which performance is superior regardless of the judges’ scores for either of the original events comprised within the input spaces. Within the blend, the actual judges’ scores for each of the separate competitions do not matter because in neither case (i.e. in neither of the actual events represented by the input spaces) did the judges’ rankings make reference to two separate performances by the same individual—if they had, we may expect the scores to have been different since such an occurrence could have changed the competition considerably. Therefore, it is not by simply comparing the two input spaces that we make sense of the figure skater’s statement. Rather, it is by way of performing a conceptual blend that we come to understand the meaning behind her stating that she was ‘competing against herself’ (i.e. trying to surpass her previous performance). In addition to the features of conceptual blends just mentioned, Fauconnier considers the blended space to have, “A dynamic, coherent, life of its own that is integrated and autonomous in ways that a mere alignment between structures is not” (2001, p. 278). Moreover, the ability of conceptual blends to generate novel total conceptions is what

distinguishes them as dynamic creative processes, and for F&T, such creative ways of thinking pervade human cognitive functioning.

3.2 Types of Conceptual Blends

There are four main types of conceptual integration networks referred to by F&T: simplex, mirror, single-scope, and double-scope. An analysis of these blends, by way of elaborating some of the practical examples I have developed, will help to elucidate conceptual blend theory and its structure mapping approach to understanding human thought. Also, such an analysis will reveal the way in which conceptual blends provide a comprehensive framework for understanding some complex cognitive processes—as will be shown later on in this thesis (section 3.3 & 3.4), especially with respect to those processes involved in the ways that we think of character and personality.

Because simplex networks are not as involved in our conceptions of personality and character as are the more elaborate kinds of blends, we will begin our analysis by taking a look at what F&T call a mirror network. Within mirror networks, the inputs, generic space, and blended space all have the same organizing frame. The organizing frame serves to specify what is central to the activity, event, or subjects comprised in the blend. Within this type of network, the inputs are seen as mirroring each other because they all share the same organizing frame. Although the generic space and the blended space share the same organizing frame along with the inputs, there is often a sense in which the blend contains a richer, more developed structure

than any of the other constituents of the blend. For example, take the blend of, ‘the Kata’, wherein a karate student is performing a series of physical strikes against a field of imaginary opponents. Within this blend, the common organizing frame is that of a physical fight between people. The inputs are the karate student and several imaginary attackers. The more elaborate frame presented in the blend is that of a karate student fighting off several attackers. The organizing frame provides a configuration for the elements of the blend. If the inputs have the same organizing frame, they must also share a certain configuration that facilitates their connection. However, while the inputs of a mirror network share a certain configuration, there may be important differences between them on a more specific level. In the Kata example, several inputs meet the role of ‘combatant’ or ‘fighter’ in terms of the organizing frame, and they thus share a certain configuration. However, in a more specific way, one of the inputs fits the frame of, ‘the karate student fighting off several attackers’ and the other inputs more specifically fit the frame, ‘attackers of the karate student’.

Mirror networks are capable of blending a variety of inputs, so long as the said inputs have the same organizing frame. At the level of the organizing frame, there is no discordance found between inputs. However, at a more specific level below the organizing frame, the incongruence of the projected input spaces becomes clear. The karate student and the attackers differ in regards to their actual existence—the karate student being an actually existing individual, while the various attackers are fictions. There are two basic ways that blends dissolve incongruence between inputs according to F&T. The first way is to project only one of the incongruous

elements into the blend. For example, in the Kata blend, the karate student and the attackers fit the frame, 'fighting people' and these projected elements are fused within the blend. However, on a more specific level, there is incongruence between the inputs with respect to the element of 'actual existence', and only actual existence is projected into the blend. Another way to resolve the specific level incongruence between elements is to incorporate them within the blend. For example, in the Kata, the inputs share the same frame element 'person' or 'fighter', but there is an important way in which the inputs resist being fused within the blend. Rather than being fused into a single unity, as shown in figure 3.4, the more specific elements of 'attacker' and 'karate student' are both incorporated into the blend to yield, 'people' or, 'fighters' of different types.

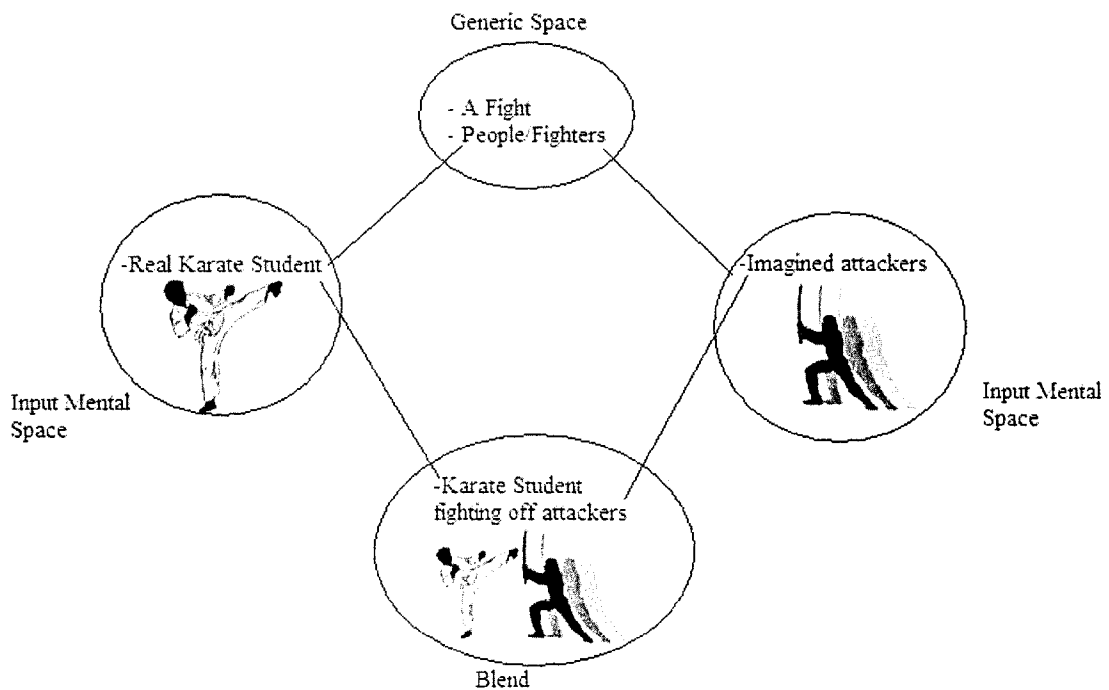


Figure 3.4 Mirror Network: The Kata Blend

For F&T, mirror networks (as well as other types of blends), may perform what they label ‘compressions’ upon various components of a blend, such as time, space, identity, role, cause-effect, change, intentionality, and representation (i.e. what they call, ‘vital relations’). A compression is a sort of combination of apparently remote cognitive elements which results in the object of the compression being understood as a distinct unit. Or as Seana Coulson and Todd Oakley describe it, “the term compression is used to describe an entity in a blended space that has distinct counterparts in multiple input spaces, and, moreover, those counterparts are related to one another via a *vital relation*...the relationship that allows us to draw mappings between elements in different mental spaces can be “compressed” so that a single element in a blended space simultaneously represents all of its counterparts in the various input spaces in the network” (2005, p. 1533). For example, within the Kata blend, the vital relation of ‘space’ is compressed, from an actual space where the Kata is taking place and an imagined space where attackers are advancing on the student, to a single space wherein the student is visualizing and reacting as if fighting off actual attackers.

Mirror networks render compressions especially easy due to the agreement between organizing frames; but compression remains a central activity to blends in general, according to Joseph Grady, who claims that, “one of the most fundamental principles guiding the creation of new, figurative conceptualizations is the ‘compression’ of relations holding across input spaces (i.e. ‘outer space relations’), into simpler configurations in the blend” (2005, p. 1603). In addition to this process so typical of blends in general, one may also decompress the frames or input elements

to regain a perspective of the constituent spaces of the blend. Moreover, decompression, or ‘disintegration’, is just as important as compression is to the blending process—since, as Anders Hougaard (2005, p 1653-1685), and Carl Bache (2005, p. 1615-1635), suggest: before the various combinatorial processes of blends become active, the extraction of various cognitive elements from other conceptual unities must first occur. Thus, compression and decompression/disintegration appear to be equally involved in, and equally invaluable component processes of conceptual blending in general.

For F&T, there is an important reason why such processes occur—to achieve what they call ‘human scale’. For F&T, we are, “evolved and culturally supported to deal with reality at [a] human scale” (2002, p. 322); that is, we have developed to “have direct perception and action in familiar frames that are easily apprehended by human beings...[which] typically have very few participants, direct intentionality, and immediate bodily effect and are immediately apprehended as coherent” (2002, p. 312). In short, human scale can be understood as a designator for an instantaneously clear and uncomplicated grasp of various elements. Some of the benefits of attaining human scale, according to F&T, include: the acquisition of global insight, the reinforcement of vital relations, the combination of numerous elements into a single representative, and the ability to understand narrative cohesiveness (p. 312). As will be seen in section 3.4, these last points are deeply related and important to how we think about character.

A further type of conceptual blend is a single-scope network. What defines a single-scope network is that the input spaces contain two different organizing frames

yet only one of the organizing frames is projected into the blend. The idea of completing a puzzle provides a lucid frame for our understanding the work of a detective. Indeed, when engaged in working upon a certain case we might say the detective is putting together the pieces of a puzzle. To assume this type of perspective is to perform a conceptual blend wherein an alignment takes place between the inputs but only one of the input frames is projected into the blend, in this case the frame, 'completing a puzzle'. The input, 'detective working on a case' and the, 'person solving a puzzle' input are connected along the lines of, the puzzle solver to the detective, the assembly and organization of the puzzle pieces to the assembly and arrangement of evidence and clues within the case, and the completion of the puzzle to the solving of the case. In this example, the 'completing a puzzle' frame provides the configuration for the elements of the blend, and there is only one person focused upon resolving a problem.

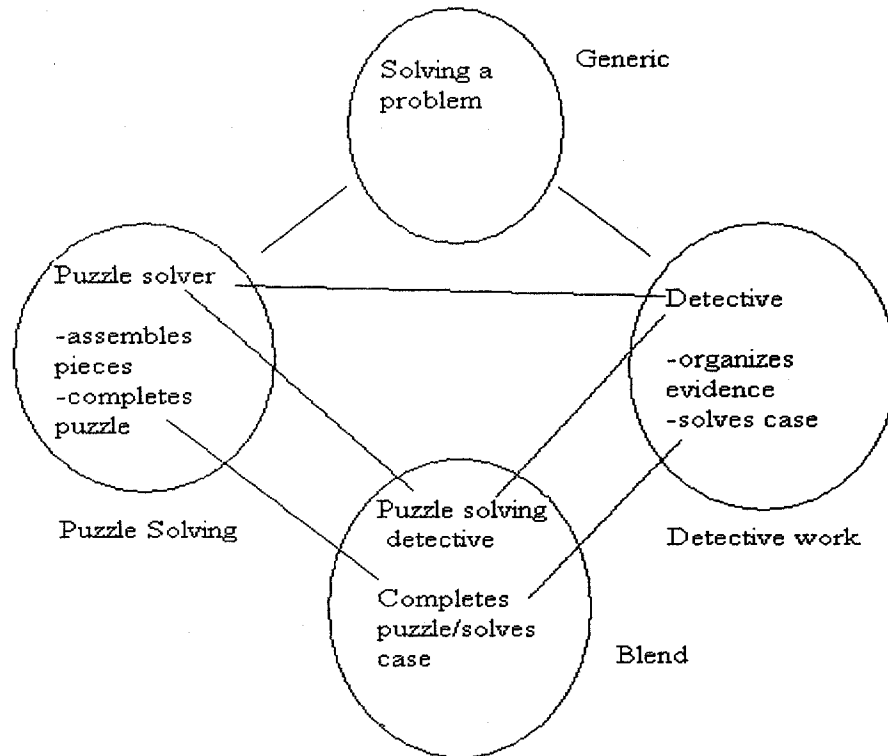


Figure 3.5 Single Scope Network: Puzzle Solving Detective Blend

Double-scope networks differ from single-scope networks primarily in the sense that, for double scope networks, the inputs not only commonly have incongruous frames, but also, two of the organizing frames provide important structural elements to the frame of the blend. However, the frame of the blend will have some additional structure of its own. The incongruity of the input frames allows for some imaginative work to be done in the construction of the blend and may thus result in some highly creative and novel conceptualizations. A simple example of a double-scope blend would be, 'talking over dinner'. Such a blend involves two distinct conceptual frames that are partially integrated in an appropriate way to make sense of the scenario. One of the input frames is 'talking' and the other is 'eating'.

These two frames are structurally incongruous, and they designate normally non-overlapping functional roles. However, as shown in figure 3.6, within the blend we can imagine individuals engaged in a discussion throughout a meal, thanks in part to the characteristics provided by each of the frame inputs, along with the additional provisions of etiquette as emergent structures of the blended frame. If the dinner discussion took place while watching television, it is perhaps not too difficult to imagine how this combined set of activities could be used as a prompt for the formulation of a multiple blend. Multiple blends may contain several different frames and generic spaces, some of which may even be partial blends themselves.

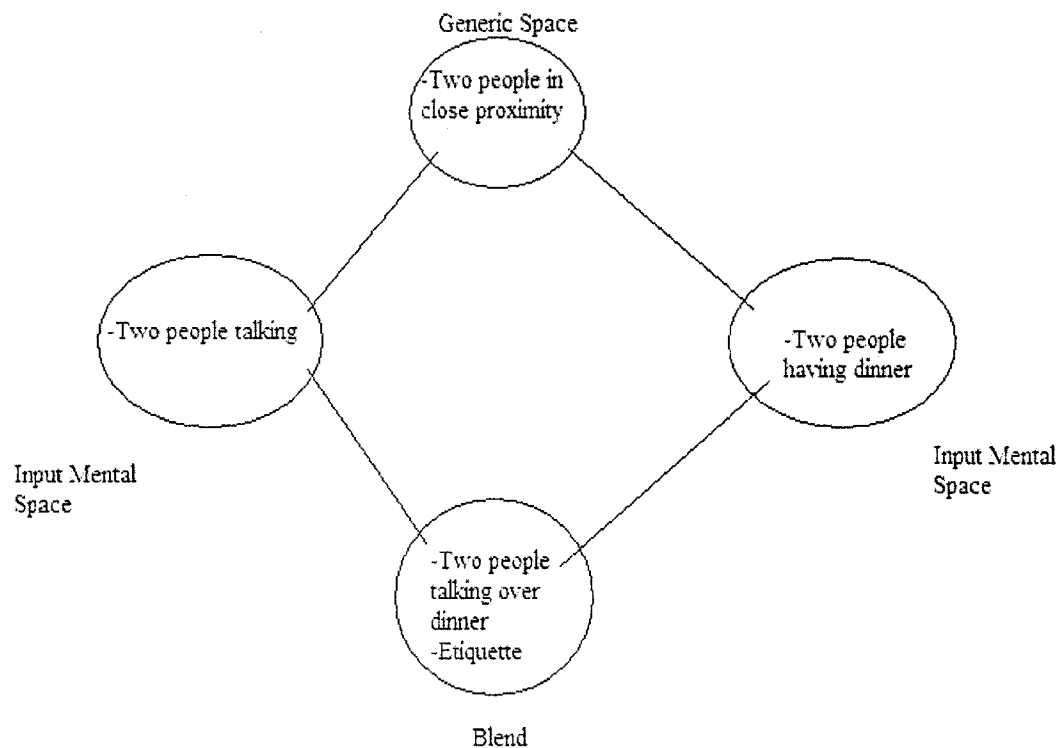


Figure 3.6 Double Scope Network: Talking over Dinner

The examples I have used to illustrate the three main types of conceptual blends mentioned above should provide a general idea of how multiple blends may work. For this reason, and because a deep understanding of multiple blends is not crucial to the aim of this thesis, I would like to shift the focus towards the implications of conceptual blending theory as it relates to character and identity in the following section.

3.3 Characters and Blends

There are many examples to be found in popular literature and film that provide a global image of a given character's predictable dispositions and behaviours within various situations. Most any lead role in a modern film will serve as an example that provides viewers with a general conceptual construct of that character's typical forms of behaviour. When one of these characters is faced with a novel situation, we may be left thinking that their behaviour was so typical of them. Moreover, such characterological conceptual entities have the ability to remain recognizable regardless of the organizing frame they are a part of. In other words, we can imagine how a certain character may react in a given context regardless of whether or not we have ever witnessed their behaviour in such a situation. Restated, just as an organizing frame may remain intact regardless of the characters that it encompasses, character identity may remain conceptually intact regardless of the frame that organizes it.

In many blends, it is important that a complete conception of a certain character be imported into the blend. For example, a detective may imagine that she is an infamous serial killer such as Jeffrey Dahmer in order to attempt to understand the mind of a serial killer with similar characteristics, perhaps a copy-cat killer, that she is currently engaged in pursuing. The detective does not simply import what is known about Jeffrey Dahmer's character but she also projects into the blend what he would do next if he were responsible for the crimes she is investigating. Indeed, 'getting into the mind,' understood as assuming the identity of whomever or whatever one is pursuing or confronting, is a common practice to many different activities, from hunting to the game of chess, that allows for various predictions to be made. The mere fact that appeals to character in common parlance are understandable suggests a general acceptance of the existence of such an underlying character. Indeed, F&T claim, "Characters, like frames, are basic cognitive cultural instruments. We may dispute every aspect of their accuracy or legitimacy or invariance, or even their very existence, but cognitively we cannot do without them" (2002, p.250). In other words, characterological conceptualizations are indispensable features of human cognitive processes; and they are deeply relevant to a myriad of different ways in which we construct and perceive meaning. More will be said about what this means for situationism later on (in section 3.4).

Inherent to the development of the three core types of conceptual blends addressed in this paper is a focus upon the organizing frames. Indeed, the three main types of blends were essentially defined in terms of frame relations across inputs, the generic space, and the blended space. However, for F&T, character and identity are

just as important as frames are to our ways of thinking. For example, take a teenager who was humiliated by a prank in front of his peers. In conveying the story to an older sister who was not present at the time of the occurrence, the older sister may react by responding, "If I were you, I'd get them all back double." In this blend, we have the organizing frame of, 'repaying a prank' along with a blended concept of the person who is to repay the prank. In the blend, the person has the identity of the teenage boy and his characteristic anger for having been humiliated, but also has the vengeful disposition of the older sister. In this last example, the blend has a single organizing frame; however, as stated earlier, character may remain intact even when transported into different frames. For example, the statement, "Would you trust him to pack your parachute?" may serve to highlight an individual's character in a novel frame. In this scenario it is irrelevant that neither the person addressed, nor the person referred to, have ever gone parachuting. What is important is that casting this particular character into this blended frame provides a compression of external features that allows for a global perspective of the character's reliability and trustworthiness that is not dependent upon the organizational frame that the character is placed within. This example serves to show how conceptual blending plays a key role in the development of notions of the cross situational stability of character, since it provides the means for a global conception of an individual's character that is unmarred by the specifics of context.

One of the ways that conceptual blending contributes to the development of a coherent construct for an individual character is by producing a generic space for that individual. By observing a character's reactions within different settings, we are able

to obtain a unified view of that character's standard behaviour. Notice that this kind of aggregation of behavioural observations from diverse situations is precisely what was recognized in the second chapter (section 2.1) of this thesis to be important to making more confident and warranted ascriptions of character. Here, this unified view of a character is manifested within the generic space delegated to the character. It is also possible, according to F&T, to create a generic space for a type of person; for example, the liar, the proud, or the credulous individual. Such a generic space is built up from regularities across the behaviours of people who fit the classification. Moreover, it would appear that, when people commit the fundamental attribution error, what is happening is that those committing the error are conceptualizing another in terms of such generic classifications, and that this is occurring with insufficient observational cues to warrant such attributions. Thus, a reasonable response to such a problem is not to abandon the notion of character as the situationist would suggest, but rather, to emphasize that the degree of confidence which can be accorded to a character attribution is directly proportional to the amount and distribution of previous behavioural observations made of the individual in question.

From an analysis of some of the ways that blends relate to conceptions of character, F&T have derived a set of three principles, "To clarify a single frame, fill it with different essential characters; to clarify the relationship between frames, fill them with the same essential character; and to clarify essential character, transport it across different frames." (2002, p. 252). These principles serve to show how different blends can be used to emphasize central features of either organizing frames or character. However, there is a further aspect of conceptual blending that allows

blends between characters or the blending of a character with a frame. In the, 'Detective Dahmer' example mentioned earlier, the character spaces for both the detective and Jeffrey Dahmer are fused into a single conceptual entity. Such a blend may be prompted by the detective asking herself, "If I were Dahmer, what would I do next?" The detective's projection into the blend of Dahmer's character, derived from a deep knowledge of his history, need not be perfectly accurate. Rather, what is important to the blend is that it grants the detective certain relevant and valuable insights into her current problem. Performing such a character blend has the remarkable ability to actually generate novel and useful ideas, or render apparent various ways of approaching a certain problem not available to the subject outside of the blend. This blend is a mirror network, if understood in terms of the organizing frame. However, if understood in terms of the characters, it is a double-scope blend, due to the radically different character components associated in the blend. Blends of the, 'If I were you,...' sort, such as the one provided in the, 'Embarrassed Teenager' example, provide a common and obvious portrayal of integration between characters.

There is a further sense in which conceptual blends may provide insight into one's own typical dispositions. Such blends can act as a means of redemption, achieving vengeance, and redeeming honor. For example, imagine a mother hearing that her adult son is being pushed around by a boss at work and replying,

"Do you remember when you were in primary school and the bullies pushed you around? Do you remember submitting to their commands? That's exactly what you are allowing to happen with your boss. You've recounted all the ways that he has

taken advantage of your unquestioning obedience, but you've failed to realize that he is bullying you. Once again, you are cowering to a bully.”

In this blend, the input, ‘cowering to bullies’ is imported from the character’s childhood and it provides the organizing frame for the blend. The, ‘cowering to bullies’ frame provides the configuration for the relationship between the character and his boss. However, there remains a deeper more subtle psychological richness and unity to the character within the blend. In fact, this psychological unity is part of the point of the mother’s statements. Furthermore, the mother’s comments are directed at the adult son who is being bullied, and thus, he is required to perform a double-scope blend that integrates his identity from two different time periods. The adult being pushed around by a boss is blended to the child being pushed around by schoolyard bullies. The blend is a way of getting at a characterological behavioural disposition that is only evidenced within actual situations. Cowering to a boss and cowering to bullies are clear examples of manifested behaviour. Such blends, for F&T, provide us with a general psychological principle, “Outer-space vital relations, often connecting a person in one space to himself in another, can be compressed into inner-space character traits understood to be part of the essence of the person” (2002, p. 259). In other words, one’s typical behaviours across situations are conceptually unified as a core aspect of the individual’s character.

The way that such a blend provides an opportunity for redemption is by drawing a parallel between situations and treating them as equivalent. Understood in terms of the organizing frame, the ‘Bully Boss’ example just recounted is a mirror

network. The 'son' character in this blend is presented with an opportunity to stand up for himself within the new workplace situation. Success in the new workplace situation has the effect of shaping the character to have overcome his former cowardice; that is to say, it allows the individual to conceive of himself as having undergone noticeable character development (development that situationism would likely misapprehend as merely behavioural inconsistency). In terms of the original inputs, no changes have taken place. However, within the blend, the two situations are fused, and because the core character projection is derived from the adult son, his successful negotiation of the workplace scenario redeems his character from the earlier cowardice. From the perspective of his new success in standing up to his boss at the workplace, motivated by the blend, his earlier cowardice seems merely an interruption to the newly formed character trait of courage. It may appear awkward that the success in one setting should redeem the failure to take positive action in another. The input spaces remain objectively unchanged; however, his new successful action restores his integrity and allows him to conceive himself as having overcome his childhood inadequacies. Indeed, F&T claim, "No one is deluded: The old failure stands as unchangeable history. But in the integration network, the psychological context and weight of that failure are completely changed" (2002, p. 260). Moreover, it seems that this is precisely the kind of reevaluative mental process one might expect to see involved in the gradual progression of the average individual towards a more firmly fixed virtuous disposition—in this case, as concerns the trait of courage—as has been described by virtue theory proponents. Note well: the Bully Boss example is not so much about predictive success as it is about self-

transformation grounded in a character based interpretation of past events. Moreover, even if longitudinal studies called into question the existence of global character traits, local character traits used in blends would be sufficient for the type of redemption and transformation considered in this example.

Fauconnier and Turner argue that, although we can construe a blend in terms of either the frames or the characters, there is no perfect formula as to how to assemble these components for any particular blend. For them, though language may provide some terms for the neat compartmentalization of concepts, there is no sense in which characters and frames are ever completely dissociated. In other words, character identities are always somewhat related to certain frames, and frames are always somewhat connected to certain types of characters. For example, the Dahmer character of the earlier blend is not someone easily dissociated from the, 'murder' frame. There is a sense in which the blend transforms him partially into a detective; however, he could never be fully divorced from the 'murder' frame. Similarly, the 'murder' frame is connected to various individuals who have committed such acts. Indeed, F&T suggest that, "There is no limit to the amount of detail in frames or identities, and at the neurocognitive level of activations, frames and characters are always intertwined" (2002, p.262). In other words, the spaces that compose the blend are structurally diffuse and they intermingle.

Conceptual blends are not restricted to character manipulations of only living or present people. Indeed, there are many possible material anchors that may evoke a sense of communion with lost ones and the departed, such as, pictures, letters, and gravesites. These and other items may prompt an individual to create a blend wherein

a missing or dead person is conceived of as being fully present and alive, and intentionally interacting with the individual. One may create a blend when visiting a tombstone that invokes the advice or encouragement of a deceased grandparent, or allows the individual to relay an expression of sadness for their absence. According to F&T, there is nothing spooky about such a mentation. When an appreciation of the psychological aspects of such mental acts is achieved, it becomes clear that the absent character is imported into the blend from long-term memory and connected to a current situation. F&T consider these, 'nonpeople' (i.e. absent or deceased people), to be capable of occupying a blend with equal richness and complexity to familiar characters that are still breathing.

As one may gather from the examples provided within this section, conceptual blending is a process that is deeply involved in our thinking about ourselves and others. In the next section, I will use the insights gathered from what conceptual blend theory has to say about the way we understand character to challenge the eliminativist situationist position, a position I will also refer to as strong-situationism.

3.4 Situationism in Light of Conceptual Blending

According to Harman, we should abandon the notion of character; doubtless, his *Business Ethics Quarterly* journal entry entitled, "No Character or Personality", is a telling enough sign in regards to the reasons why he thinks we ought to do so. But, beyond the inadequate support he has provided for his position lies an even more suspicious set of speculative claims. Indeed, he has gone so far as to suggest that our

conceptions of character are responsible for, “disastrous effects on people’s understanding of each other, on [our] understandings of what social programs are reasonable to support, and [on our] understandings of international affairs.” (2000b, p. 224). Interestingly, he does not hold himself to a similar standard of empirical support for these claims as he demands for character based notions, even though they appear to be far more incendiary and controversial. Moreover, he does not do much by way of elaborating as to just how, or in what sense, possessing a concept of character is responsible for these supposed calamities. Rather, it seems his argument is more centrally concerned with the errors we incur when we make character attributions with insufficient warrant.

With regards to his aforementioned belief (section 1.5) that characterological thinking has negative consequences for political deliberations, the problem is not that we think in terms of character, but simply, that we often make faulty or irrelevant character attributions. Since, for example, the ‘French Bill Clinton’ blend of Coulson and Oakley (2005, p.1514), shows the former President’s political loss of grace (in regards to the Lewinski affair), to be due to cultural taboo’s more than an inability to lead (i.e. his having an incompetent type of character). But to say that we make hasty or faulty character judgments is not to say that the underlying conceptual basis of our judgments is ultimately false. Indeed, the ‘French Bill Clinton’ blend (prompted by the statement: “In France, the Lewinsky affair wouldn’t have hurt Clinton” (2005, p. 1514)) can be seen as a positive example of how to isolate the kinds of irrelevant cultural biases from our thoughts on character that confound rational assessments of

an individual's ability. And so, even within the political sphere, character conceptions can be useful.

That is not to say that Harman is completely off track, and that all kinds of thoughts on character are beneficial to political reasoning—as was noted at the outset of this thesis they most certainly are not—but neither do all characterological ideations regarding political matters end in negative results. Thus, the more reasonable course of action appears to be not to abandon the concept of character, but instead, to work towards developing measures for guarding against hasty, faulty, and irrelevant attributions of character. Indeed, rather than the question of whether or not character exists, it is these specific error laden tendencies regarding the attribution of character that appear to be most central to the concerns raised by Harman. And more broadly, it is these tendencies that are of concern to the warranted attribution of character in general.

My primary objection to Harman's views (and to any situationally motivated view for character eliminativism, including Doris' slightly less brash approach), is the idea that we ought to abandon all talk and thought of character—what I call the strong-situationist stance—and the notion that any such talk or thought holds only negative consequences for human interactions and decision making. Indeed, I think, along with F&T, that our understanding of character is a rich and deep process—one that is partially responsible for many positive outcomes and is essential to how we make sense of both ourselves and others; and further, that it is an indispensable aspect of how we think.

Contrary to Harman's ominous warning that character based thoughts have "disastrous" effects upon how we think about each other, it seems that it is the concept of character that, in part, allows us to develop an understanding of ourselves and others, and to envision individual people as having coherent personal identities. Of course, we may make faulty predictions about an individual's trustworthiness or reliability (or some other character trait), in certain circumstances, due to the fact that we were either too quick to attribute a certain virtuous character type to the individual, or because we failed to notice the kinds of pressures involved in the situational context which the individual faced, or even because certain characterological conceptions may ultimately fail as predictive tools for behaviour. Nevertheless, characterological thinking remains an indispensable tool for making sense of individual people, as well as their goals and values, and the actions relevant to them. It remains indispensable even if our understanding of character only makes sense retrospectively and not projectively; and this is so because character types, like people in general, change and grow, and develop and disintegrate over the course of a lifespan; therefore, we should never approach the task of making character based predictions without some reservations. But in order to extract some kind of personal meaning from an individual's existence, there needs to be some way of unifying the elements of their life into a coherent structure—one not unlike what may be achievable through the process of compression to human scale found in conceptual integration networks (i.e. conceptual blends). Indeed, although the insights afforded by such compressions may appear to be of value only retrospectively, they do provide a global image of character. As such, they are likely (and reasonably so) to confer

increased predictive confidence in regards to a given individual's behaviour, even if such predictions remain an imperfect empirical endeavour.

Consider the Detective Dahmer blend example provided earlier. Within the blend, the detective draws upon a wealth of character data in order to gain some fresh insight as to what some of the potential next moves of the suspect might be. It is unclear that any appreciation of the situational context prior to the murder could provide fruitful leads as to the murderer's next move (barring of course ordinary forensic details), since, presumably, many people have been in similar or identical situations and have not murdered anyone. Indeed, in this scenario, we are not dealing with an isolated behaviour evoked by a specific situational factor. Rather, it seems quite clear, both intuitively, and based upon past case details, that a serial killer is in some way disposed to continue killing regardless of the subtle specifics of the pre-murder situation. Thus, the Detective Dahmer blend (i.e. an example of characterological thinking), appears to be a useful and beneficial way of conceptualizing events, one that may provide some very original and rewarding leads, and assist in the capture of a serial killer. Others have also commented upon the practical value of character blends; for example, Coulson and Oakley claim that, "even though cognitive models in blended spaces are occasionally bizarre, the inferences generated inside them are often useful and lead to productive changes in the conceptualizer's knowledge base and inferencing capacity" (2005, p.1515). Indeed, as in the Detective Dahmer example just mentioned, this kind of character blend allows for greater insight into the mind of a serial killer, and it also allows for some creative inferences to be drawn regarding some of the potential next moves of

the suspect. Moreover, many of these blend generated inferences may not be available from outside of the blended mental space. Thus, we have good reason to retain the notion of character, regardless of how some situationists might construe the results from various social psychological studies. In the examples considered, the research employed for situationist ends does not address the issue at hand (i.e. how best to proceed), and thinking in terms of character in such cases can prove to be exceedingly valuable.

Consider next, the Embarrassed Teenager blend example mentioned earlier. For this blend, the situational specifics are not central to the vengeful sister's thoughts on behalf of her brother (other than the obvious fact that a prank was executed at his expense), nor does it seem likely that explaining the event in terms of situational factors would reduce the sympathetic thoughts and feelings of the sister to null. Furthermore, there is no mention of any specific behaviour on the part of the embarrassed teenage brother that requires a situation based explanation. And even if one wanted to construe his embarrassment as a type of behaviour, in some tortured attempt to bring situational concerns back into the picture, it would be of negligible value, since his embarrassment is only a trivial and subsidiary component of the conceptual blend (i.e. what is going on cognitively). The sister's claim that, "If I were you I'd get them all back double!", betrays an aspect of her character, and possibly something about the kind of personality her brother has as well. Perhaps the statement was motivated by, and the blend partially composed of, the sister's knowledge of her brother's typically passive disposition; thus, the statement could be meant as a rallying cry to motivate her brother to do something about what had happened to him.

Otherwise, the assertion may have been about what is typically more defining of her own character or personality—namely, to seek vengeance. Regardless of what may be the underlying motivation for the blend, it involves both character spaces as inputs. So by bringing to mind such types of character thoughts, one is also evoking some rather detailed background information about the individuals involved, for example, as concerns their typical behavioural, attitudinal, and interpretational characteristics.

These kinds of blends play a vital role in supporting and promoting social cohesion as well as providing an outlet for deeper insight into the self. Indeed, as evidenced by the Embarrassed Teenager example, blends of the “If I were you...” type seem inevitably to involve an appreciation of either the character of the one for whom the blend is invoked, or of the person invoking the blend (i.e. one’s self). Such character dependent cognitions (i.e. character blends), appear vitally important to establishing bonds of empathy, sympathy, and understanding between individuals, since they are essentially a way of getting at what it is like to ‘walk a mile in someone else’s shoes’ (i.e. assume the perspective of another). This may be done both in terms of developing a sort of cognitive appreciation of the circumstances another finds themselves within, as well as getting a sense of what may be their emotional status in response to the said circumstances. Thus, contrary to Harman’s suggestion that character conceptions ought to be abandoned due to their widespread negative consequences; it seems that here, rather, we have reason to be quite optimistic about thinking in terms of character, since the kind of blends just mentioned show how beneficial such ways of thinking can be. Indeed, such examples seem to support the

idea that characterological conceptualizations are indispensable features of our thought as well as deeply implicated in many positive aspects of social cohesion.

One may imagine many other positive examples wherein character forms an important aspect of our thought—thoughts which may lead to beneficial and useful consequences. Indeed, the other examples of blends I've developed in the earlier sections of this chapter could serve just such an end. For example, within the 'Bully Boss' blend explained earlier, the son (victim/employee) was provided with a remarkable means of achieving a sense of accomplishment—a sense of having overcome former inadequacies in the establishment of a newfound positive personal quality. Both in terms of social appraisal and as pertains to the individual himself, such an achievement is seen as a kind of redemption. But the notion of redemption only makes sense in reference to some sort of continuous unity—a unity that, in this case, was achieved by way of an appreciation for the *characteristic* reactions to certain kinds of events (i.e. those wherein the son was 'pushed around' by others), that the individual seemed to find himself faced with time and again; and it is only by way of internalizing these common experiences and reactions as a part of his character that the individual is capable of understanding both his mother's concern and the effect that standing up for himself would have upon his confidence, self-esteem, and self-image (i.e. the kind of character he takes himself to have).

It is crucially important, in this last example, for the son to be able to understand himself as a coherent whole; that is, as having an identity (or character) that persists through time. Otherwise, his pattern of past reactions may be unrecognized by him, and if he reacts differently in one instance it may have no real

bearing on his understanding of himself. In other words, for him to change his behaviour from passive to self-assertive would be just that—a change in his behaviour—and it would bear no relevance to his growth or progress as an individual. This change would be as a mere blip on the screen, indistinguishable from any other but simply different. And although the situationist project may be primarily a descriptive one, it is unclear that any benefit would come from the prescriptions that situationism could make in regards to his predicament. Should he take Harman's advice and, "head the situationist slogan, 'People! Places! Things!'" (2003, p. 90)? Such advice merely amounts to the suggestion to stay away from bullies and to stay away from one's boss. Surely, this would be no great comfort since bullies are not always easy to avoid, even less so when one works for them. Are things therefore hopeless for the son, since the situational forcefulness of being in the presence of bullies seems to have always rendered him a coward? It seems to me that all hope is not lost, and rather, the son may develop the appropriate behavioural tools for handling confrontations, or merely identify his own shortcomings and make a firm decision not to cower to bullies any longer. But as was already stated, such a self-identification requires that one understand oneself as a coherent unity. So again it appears, contrary to Harman's speculations, that thinking in terms of character can have a positive role to play for the individual; and more than that, in this last example, it appears to be of much greater use and value than any situationist take on things (by providing normative guidance). In this case, the situationist warnings appear not only out of place, but utterly useless.

Character blends involving ‘nonpeople’, a type that was mentioned earlier, provide another example of how thinking in terms of character can end in positive results. For example, similar to Athanassoulis’ (2000) notion of the ideal virtuous person, an individual facing a moral dilemma may invoke the advice of a lost loved one whom they took to be a moral exemplar through a blend in order to help them resolve the difficulty. Evoking character blends of deceased loved ones may also help to provide comfort and relief throughout the grieving process by providing, in a sense, another opportunity at saying a final farewell, or simply by providing a sense of continued closeness preserved by the memory of the person and their typical dispositions. It is not at all clear that situationism can provide such emotionally important kinds of relief. Indeed, it appears that here, as in the last example, situationist concerns are entirely out of place, while character styled thought processes remain positively meaningful and importantly involved in helping individuals to navigate through the trials and tribulations of life in general.

No doubt, there remain a multitude of examples that could be developed wherein character thoughts are shown to be of great importance, to be highly valued, and to be also very useful to people generally. However, I think that the examples provided so far are sufficient to both encourage further exploration of such potential examples, and more importantly, they are sufficient enough to raise serious doubts about both the reach of application of the social psychological data, as well as the soundness of the situationist suggestion to abandon the notion of character. Therefore, I will end my development of such examples here. However, there remain some suggestions I would like to make to those who endorse a strong-situationist stance:

primarily, it seems that the character eliminativist situationist ought to look more closely at just what exactly is involved in our conceptions of character before making blanket statements to the effect that they should be abandoned. Indeed, the insights provided by conceptual blending theory seem to allow a far more comprehensive understanding in regards to the ways we think about character and employ character terms, than the mere behavioural data gathered by the social psychological experiments referenced by situationists—data that ultimately is of limited relevance to the ways in which we employ the concept of character.

Moreover, what seems to be commonly overlooked by situationists, when it comes to character, is both that it is a process of development—one that, to study honestly, would require a comprehensive assessment of many behaviours over a long period of time; and further, that it is, in many important ways, thoroughly entrenched in our modes of thinking about ourselves and others. Furthermore, many of these types of character thoughts do lead to positive and useful results; that is, they are not, as Harman seems to think, all predicated on error. Perhaps, instead of characterological thinking being the result of a certain confirmation bias (as Harman suggests), it is the strong-situationist position that is guilty of resulting from such a bias, since obvious examples of the value and usefulness of character thoughts can be found in the daily lives of almost anyone; and more importantly, there does exist empirical data to support the idea that certain aspects of character are in fact quite consistent (e.g. Bem's [1983] template matching research).

The next section of this thesis is an attempt to address the sense in which character might be said to be real or to exist. By drawing on ideas from Daniel

Dennett, it will be shown that while character may not have the kind of possessed by a physical object, the ascription of character is grounded in reality. Character can be defined in many different ways. The message to be drawn from the next section is that character conceptions should be understood as useful, empirically grounded interpretations of behaviour, and that to argue that one kind of conceptualization of character is problematic (i.e. not supported by the evidence), is by no means to argue that they must therefore all suffer from the same weaknesses.

4.0 The Construct of Character: A Direction for Future Work

Daniel Dennett, in his “The Self as a Center of Narrative Gravity,” draws the analogy that a ‘self’ is a lot like the concept of the centre of gravity of an object within Newtonian physics. Just as a centre of gravity is not identical with any particular atom of an object, neither is a self identical with any particular neuron (or packet of neurons), in the brain. Rather, they are both concepts that can prove to be quite useful in their respective domains of interest and application. It appears to me, that understanding character in a similar light would prove informative and helpful with respect to addressing an underlying issue within the debate over personality and character—mainly, as concerns how character is defined in particular cases and studies, and the adequacy of such definitions to capture the multifarious ways in which the concept of character is understood and employed generally. However, in order to appreciate what implications Dennett’s ideas may have for character, one must first understand his analogical reasoning.

According to Dennett, a centre of gravity, “has a nicely defined, well delineated and well behaved role within physics” (1992, p. 103). And although a self may be far more complex than a centre of gravity, both concepts are commonly known and deeply involved in how we live our day-to-day lives. With respect to our everyday recognition and dealings with the centres of gravity of various objects, for example, we place dinner plates near the middle of tables rather than leave them hanging off of their edges because we know that if the centre of gravity of the plate is not fully supported by the table then the plate will fall over and we will have a mess

to clean. We make book shelves level in order to properly support books and keep them from sliding off based upon our understanding of their centres of gravity, and we stay upright while riding a bicycle by keeping our centre of gravity adjusted to the appropriate position over the middle of the seat. We can manipulate an object's centre of gravity as well as our own, for example, by holding a weighted pole as a tightrope walker does—which has the effect of lowering one's centre of gravity to make one's balance more sure footed. But when we change the centre of gravity of an object, the centre of gravity itself does not traverse all of the intermediate positions between its initial position and its modified one. Rather, because it is an abstraction and not a tangible physical entity, it only represents one exact location at any point in time, and its shifting from one position to another is not restricted by ordinary physical means, for example, as a falling air borne rock's movement would be restricted by landing in a tar pit. Indeed, the only properties that a centre of gravity shares with other objects in the physical world is that it has a “spatio-temporal location”, but as was mentioned, it can never be identical to the material object that shares it's location, for to think so would be, as Dennett points out, to make a category mistake. To say that the centre of gravity is not identical to the physical object is not to say that it is not empirically grounded, for it figures in predictions and explanations. The concept of the centre of gravity of an object is a widely employed, robust, and deeply useful—not unlike the notion of the self, as Dennett understands it.

For Dennett, while a self is real, it does not possess the same type of reality as say, a person's body (1992, p. 105). And in a manner similar to how a physicist posits a centre of gravity to explain and predict the behaviour of certain objects, so too for

the psychologist and philosopher is it, “theoretically perspicuous to organize the interpretation” around the central idea of the self of a human being (1992, p. 105). It is this kind of unified focal point regarding a person that bears a resemblance to how we understand the individual in terms of character types. Moreover, it would seem, as Dennett asserts regarding centres of gravity and selves, that conceptions of character, “have only the properties that the theory that constitutes them endowed them with” (1992, p. 106). That is to say that, for example, within a given theory or study of character or personality, there exists a specific set of operational definitions—and these should act to constrain how theorists (including situationists) extrapolate from the data in order to make more broad generalizations concerning character. In other words, one’s freedom to make inferences about character in general should be deeply modeled on and shaped by the limits and allowances of the theory one is drawing from. Athanassoulis (2000) seems to have picked up on this line of thought by assessing the actual aims and ambitions of several of the studies often cited by situationists, and by arguing that their experimental designs typically do not warrant the kinds of extrapolations and generalizations commonly made by situationists. So what philosophers and other researchers need to keep in mind is that character and personality may be operationally defined in a number of different ways, and that not all operational definitions provide the same license to generalize, or warrant, for situationist conclusions.

4.1 Experimental Constructs and Common Understandings

Operational definitions of character need to be checked against common understandings of character, since incompatibility at this level may seriously restrict the application of findings to a more general class. For example, according to Bem, “a sample of individuals is [deemed] inconsistent to the degree that their behaviors do not sort into the equivalence class that the investigator necessarily imposes when he or she selects the behaviors and situations to sample” (1982, p. 213-214). The selected behaviours and situations to be studied play an important role in shaping how character or personality is understood and defined within the experimental context. But all too often, these selections, and the experimental designs that encompass them, result in a sort of bottleneck effect wherein the operational understanding of what it takes to have a consistent character is seriously restricted, and fails to incorporate the multiple bits of information that typically go into common character descriptions—that is, where the individuals providing the descriptions of others know them sufficiently well. Moreover, it seems that within most of the studies cited by situationists, only group dimensions seem to be given any regard. These and other reasons have led Bem to suggest that, “consistency and inconsistency are not intrinsic properties of behavior, but are judgments by an observer about the match between the behaviors and his or her category system.” (1982, p. 214). And these categories, for the most part, fail to do justice to the kinds of individual patterns of behaviour that are relevant to robust character types. Whether we recognize cross-situational consistencies in behaviour will depend on both (a) the patterns of behaviour in the

world and (b) the background theory applied to the interpretation of that behaviour. Failing empirically to recognize a coherent, relatively stable pattern in an individual's actions—particularly those that are relevant to a certain character type—does not necessarily signal the individual's lack of such behavioural regularities. Rather, it may simply be the case that our general theoretical constructions are inadequate to the task of revealing that idiosyncratic regularities are at work in real world behaviour. Thus, our research designs and operational definitions of character should take their lead from the patterns of behaviour we might observe someone to display in less controlled environments. And these research programs should be tailored more closely to individual assessments as opposed to group scores.

According to Bem, in contrast to the pre-established criteria of character typically devised by researchers, it is personal observances within natural contexts, rather, that guide our normal descriptions of those we know well. He suggests that when describing a friend, “we do not evoke some a priori set of fixed dimensions that we apply to everyone. [But] rather, we peek at the data first. That is, we first review the individual's behavior and then select a small subset of descriptors that strike us as pertinent precisely because they seem to conform to the patterning of the individual's behaviour” (1982, p. 214). So normally, we do not evaluate those we know well by generating a strictly defined trait term and then disqualifying the person from such a class for having failed to behave accordingly in various circumstances. Rather, we seek out the regularities that we are aware of in the individual's behaviour and only then do we attempt to relate these findings to a particular type of character—the one that fits most effortlessly with the identified regularities.

Moreover, according to Bem, there are various conceptual ‘prototypes’ of character that serve to remedy apparent incongruities in observed behaviour—that is, once the right prototype has been aligned with the person in the appropriate way. (Notice the similarity between these prototypes and the generic spaces for types of people in blend theory mentioned in section 3.3). For example, after having been invited backstage at a concert, one may come to find out that the members of one’s favorite rock band, while uninhibited and full of energy during performances, are actually quite reserved while not on stage. And though this may at first seem bizarre, once one constructs or identifies the appropriate conceptual prototype to make sense of these observations, one’s confusion subsides. Or according to Bem, “When that prototype occurs to them, then the concept-attainment task has been solved, and their initial, provisional verdict of inconsistency evaporates” (1982, p. 215). So it seems that in general, we first look for patterns and prototypes to explain the behaviours of others; we do this before we are willing to admit that a person is unpredictable or behaviourally inconsistent—and we will only admit that they are inconsistent after attempts to find a suitable pattern or prototype have failed us. That is not to say that we should resist concluding that an individual is behaviourally inconsistent—on the contrary, where encountered, the evidence should be acknowledged—but rather, that we generally look for patterns before admitting a person’s behaviour to be disordered. And furthermore, we should keep in mind that in some cases where conclusions of inconsistency are made, the result may be due to a theoretical construct’s having allotted too narrow a range of pattern recognition. Therefore, in some cases, even

where we seem to arrive at the result of inconsistency, there may actually be present a more broad underlying consistency that we have simply yet to notice.

To reiterate the core points of this section: character, like Dennett's understanding of the self, is an empirically grounded way of interpreting a being or entity. And because theorists and researchers employ specific operational definitions of character or personality within their work, we would do well to understand just what these definitions are—and perhaps more importantly, what they seem to leave out of the evaluation. Granted, the situationist perspective relies primarily upon the notion that character relevant displays of behaviour must follow the appropriate eliciting conditions, and such a demand at first glance appears reasonable. However, what remains unreasonable about the situationist position is that an aggregate of single instances of behaviour (i.e. the results of separate single experiments with different participants) is treated as confirming the view that an individual is typically behaviourally inconsistent. Indeed, upon closer inspection of the primary experimental examples employed by situationists (those discussed within this thesis), we find no reason to accept the situationist suggestion for the elimination of character, since they have not taken pains to even attempt to observe any individual's character relevant behaviours over time (be they consistent or not), but instead, have merely evaluated behaviours from a number of single and separate instances against far too strict and unforgiving a definition of character. What is yet to be done, and what is necessary in order to conclude with confidence that character (at least the situationist version of it) either exists empirically or does not, as has been said, is to study the same individuals over repeated trials. This suggestion is of primary concern

to the resolution of the debate on character, and any future research would do well to take notice of its importance to both moral character theory and personality psychology.

4.2 Summary

In this thesis, I have attempted to cast doubt upon situationism's character eliminativist project by both reviewing several powerful challenges to the situationist position and by contributing a challenge of my own. The first set of challenges to situationism (chapter two) provided several direct critiques of the situationist project, while my own contribution (chapter three) shifted the focus of the debate from the question of the existence of character to an examination of the usefulness of the concept.

In chapter one, I provided a detailed review of three popularly cited experiments from social psychology. Situationists take these three experiments to be a compelling reason to adopt the situationist stance as well as to be representative of trends detected in a much larger body of experimental research. These experiments were: the Isen and Levin study concerning mood effects on helping behaviour; the Darley and Batson study regarding time-stress effects on helping behaviour, and the Milgram study on obedience. Both Doris and Harman took these experiments to suggest that people are typically inconsistent in their behaviours across situations. This is a finding that they believe seriously undermines the traditional Aristotelian notion of character (as well as many versions of virtue theory) since it does not agree

with the idea of ‘robust’ or ‘global’ character traits. Moreover, they believe that situationism can better explain certain (disturbing) world events, such as, the behaviour of many German (Nazi) doctors during the Second World War (why they killed instead of cured), and other group struggles for superiority. It was also revealed that in some cases, situationist interpretations can be more explanatorily powerful than characterological conceptions. For example, with respect to the variants of the Milgram experiment—wherein slight changes to the experimental setting or mode of interaction between the participant and the experimenter produced striking differences in the degree of obedience obtained—the situationist approach appears to provide a plausible explanation. Character conceptions are more or less at a loss to explain the behavioural variation.

Nonetheless, in chapter two, it was argued that the situationists had drawn conclusions about character that extended far beyond what was warranted by the social psychological data. Indeed, not only did the situationist interpretations appear to motivate far too ambitious a view of the elimination of character, but other interpretations of the social psychological data were shown to be available, and many of these seemed to provide a much more reasonable view in regards to the reach of the implications of the experimental results. These alternative views and critiques of the situationist position revealed several of the stance’s inadequacies and erroneous assumptions. One of the false assumptions of the situationist position was that virtue theory takes the virtuous character type to be very common, when this is, in fact, not the case. Therefore, even if a majority of the people studied appeared to be behaviourally inconsistent across situations, this finding alone would not necessarily

weigh very heavily against virtue theory, so long as there are some people who remained relatively consistent. Furthermore, with respect to behavioural consistency, it was argued that it is unreasonable for situationists to assume that there must be a perfect record of conformity between the eliciting conditions deemed appropriate to certain character types (or traits), and the kinds of behaviours they are supposed to evoke. The reason such an argument was raised is that neither virtue theory nor common understandings of character adopt such a strict view. Moreover, even though under the pressure of the experimental setting some might fail to produce the desired behaviour, character notions could still be important factors in explaining the more ordinary daily behaviours of people.

In chapter two it was also revealed that the conception of character that the situationists employed did not adequately capture the richness of the concept as it is understood in virtue theory (or commonly for that matter). The situationist view failed to account for the practical reasoning of the individual and her subjective construal or perception of the situation. Clearly, the type of research employed by situationists would need to be much more sophisticated if they wished to address the more complete image of character (i.e. one that includes the capacity for reason) described by Aristotle, and more recently argued for by philosophers like Kamtekar and Sreenivasan. Also, in chapter two, it was shown that situationist concerns could be easily absorbed by current character and virtue theories by way of understanding the situational pressures as mere motivational impediments for the thinking individual. Understood in such a light, situationist pressures would no longer pose a

threat to the global notion of character; rather, they would simply be treated as additions to the domain of known constraints upon character motivated action.

Nonetheless, the research employed by situationists was considered to be insufficient to warrant claims for the elimination of the notion of character. The main deficiency of the studies cited by situationists is that they did not track the behaviours of participants over long periods of time but merely studied single instances of behaviour. This flaw—that none of the popularly cited studies were longitudinal—was shown to be a major concern for situationists, since without such research their claims about the nonexistence of character remain, in an important way, unsupported. Furthermore, it was noted, that even if such research existed (and was supportive of situationist views), virtue theorists and character advocates could still argue that the participants were not well trained in how to be virtuous or how to develop the appropriate character types or traits. Thus, it was argued that the general descriptive findings of social psychological research do not define the upper limit of human potential. It could well be the case that proper character training is all that is required to increase a person's behavioural consistency rating across situations.

It was also shown (in chapter two) that there is in fact some empirical support for the notion of character. Both locally in terms of fairly specific traits, and globally, as was seen with regards to Bem's template matching technique. Furthermore, it was argued that the debate over the existence of global character traits could be brought closer to a reasonable resolution if more carefully designed studies were produced, and further, that if such studies are going to prove more useful than those currently available, they must adopt a longitudinal methodology. It is only with reference to

such work that the situationist position could directly challenge the notion of global character traits. However, as argued in chapter three, even if the situationists were to take the necessary pains to acquire the appropriate support for their eliminativist position with respect to global character traits (assuming the relevant research turns out to be in their favour), I argued, that we may still want to retain the notion of character for the many benefits it offers to individuals (both as a collective and as concerns the individual proper).

Chapter three began with an introduction to Fauconnier and Turner's mental space mapping theory, known as conceptual blending. It was suggested that reframing the problem of the existence of global character to one in which its retention depended upon its usefulness in contexts where prediction was not the only concern was a novel way in which to challenge the situationist position. First, I described the component parts and different types of conceptual blends, before explaining how such blends are involved in the ways that we think about ourselves and others. Through an analysis of how blends are related to our thoughts about character and identity, I was able to show that the concept of character is much more than a tool for behavioural predictions. Indeed, I argued that there are many important ways in which character type thoughts are deeply useful in promoting things like social cohesion through empathy, a greater understanding of self and personal growth by way of providing a coherent unity to one's sense of identity, and emotional relief in times of grieving (among other advantages the character thoughts may provide). Furthermore, it was shown (in chapter three) that situationist concerns or warnings were, for the most part, either out of place or irrelevant to the processes and products of most of the

examples of blends involving character thoughts. Therefore, the limited scope of application of situationist views was partially conveyed.

Finally, I suggested (in chapter four) that Daniel Dennett's views on the self were important to how we should understand the notion of character. It was argued that the concept of character may be defined in many different ways and that these definitions did not all provide the same warrant for situationist conclusions. Indeed, how one extrapolates from the social psychological data to more general views about character and virtue was shown to be an area of concern for both situationists and advocates of character and virtue alike. In other words, to make the leap from the social psychological data to generating inferences about character in general requires both a careful scrutiny of the data and a carefully reasoned argument about the implications of that data. Moreover, these inferential leaps ought to be given greater attention by theorists on both sides of the debate. Ultimately, I agreed with Dennett's treatment of the self and suggested that character be understood in a similar way.

Again, the situationists have argued beyond the reach of the experimental data. What they need to obtain greater support for their position is longitudinal research with favorable findings (however unlikely that may be). However, even if such research found in favour of situationism with respect to global traits, we may still want to retain the notion of character for the many ways in which it remains useful to us and beneficial to many cognitive processes and social relationships.

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