

# On the Efficacy of Character Education for Cultivating Virtue

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## Abstract

This dissertation serves to support deliberate attempts to cultivate moral character. Character education faces criticism, some of which are inherited from its grounding in virtue theory. The aim of this dissertation is to confront these particular critiques and show that they can be answered in an effort to vindicate the prospects of character education.

When philosophers question whether character traits are stable and robust in the way that virtue theory posits them to be, a similar problem holds for character education: is there any point to character education if character does not exist in the way we traditionally think about it? I appropriate Christian Miller's Mixed Traits framework to show that character education can handle standard situationist challenges that maintain that our environments are better predictors of our behaviors than our characters. Another problem concerns the possibility of developing the kinds of character traits that character education dictates. I defend the possibility, motivated in part by the work of Michael Slote, Nancy Snow, and others.

I argue that active cultivation is not only the most promising method for character development, it is also necessary for becoming virtuous. I defend a two-tier approach to character and virtue acquisition that is skill-based, and involves teaching and fostering skills of self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness. My account faces opposition on grounds that various influences can interfere in the process of cultivation. Eric Schwitzgebel and Jennifer Saul raise skepticism regarding the extent to which we can rely on our mental faculties, and Heather Battaly challenges the role environment can play in virtue development. I recognize the call for strategies to overcome both internal and external influences and respond by drawing on contemporary empirical research. Teaching skills of self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness, and offering opportunities to practice these skills will enable students to become virtuous.

This project is grounded in and motivated by philosophical, psychological, and educational research. It proposes a realistic and empirically supported approach to character development. I am optimistic that a skill-based approach will enable students to become virtuous, and hopeful that it will be implemented in curriculum in the future.

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## **Introduction**

Character development is not something we can continue to debate with comfort. Its practical implications are of such importance that devising empirically grounded strategies must be pushed to the forefront of discussion. The questions of how we can improve our moral character and how we can become virtuous (assuming it is possible) solicit philosophers, psychologists, and educators alike. The philosophical perspective grounds the debate regarding the nature of moral character. The psychological perspective collates speculative routes for improvement and informs the discussion. It is then left to educators to implement the philosophical and psychological findings into curriculum. The problem is that actualizing the theoretical and practical requires coordination and cooperation among the three disciplines, which is seriously lacking. It is thus that I attempt to bring forth an account of how to enable students to become virtuous for those in education policy and development, with hopes that the account not only offers practical strategies and outlook for moral education, but that it also is a catalyst for change.

This project begins (Chapter 1) by laying the foundation for the realism challenge: the longstanding criticism against virtue ethics that demands an account of how people can become virtuous that is both empirically and psychologically grounded. In Chapter 2 I offer a response that lies in active cultivation. In order for people to improve their moral characters, they must change their dispositions that give rise to certain kinds of desires and beliefs. Through self-awareness, perception and responsiveness, self-cultivation facilitates the change of dispositions that enables agents to become virtuous.

In Chapter 3 I acknowledge that there are various reasons to be skeptical that agents can successfully engage in self-cultivation. First, my account requires agents to engage in self-reflection and self-awareness throughout the process of self-cultivation. Psychological literature indicates that our perception and introspection is flawed, and thereby suggests that we are unable to aptly meet these requirements. Our internal faculties are not the only obstacle for becoming virtuous; our environments can also interfere with virtue acquisition. In Chapter 4 I contend that we can come up with strategies to tackle both the internal and external variables that may negatively affect our moral development. The three primary strategies I advocate for are fostering awareness, situating ourselves in environments that are conducive to virtue development, and developing certain skills. Finally, although there is debate regarding whether the classroom is the appropriate setting for moral development, I contend that it is the ideal setting in Chapter 5. The aforementioned strategies can and ought to be implemented in the classroom, and specifically in the context of character education. The effectiveness of character education has been repeatedly called into question, but I argue that by centralizing active cultivation and incorporating

defensive and offensive strategies, character education not only can foster character development, it can enable students to become virtuous in empirically and psychologically grounded ways.

## Chapter One: Laying The Foundation: The Character Debate Today

### Section I: Character education

“Schools cannot avoid influencing the moral development of their students, though they can certainly avoid thinking through what they actually do and the impact that they have. The question [...] is [...] ‘how can schools ensure that their (inevitable) influence on their students’ moral development is both positive and effective?’”<sup>1</sup> I believe the answer is found in character education.

Broadly construed, character education can be characterized as

an umbrella term used to describe many aspects of teaching and learning for personal development. Some areas under this umbrella are ‘moral reasoning/cognitive development’; ‘social and emotional learning’; ‘moral education/virtue’; ‘life skills education’; ‘caring community’; ‘health education’; ‘violence prevention’; ‘conflict resolution/peer mediation’ and ‘ethic/moral philosophy’.<sup>2</sup>

More narrow characterizations hinge on some variation of a sentiment that relays the attempt to imbue students with good character. “Put most simply, character education advocates want their programs to promote positive ethical behavior among young people and reduce or eliminate socially and personally destructive behavior.”<sup>3</sup> Character education has had a longstanding tradition in the American public school system; “[v]irtually every school in the US in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was responding in some implicit way to the educational goal of developing character.”<sup>4</sup> While different approaches challenged one another through the years, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, character education re-emerged as the leading approach for moral education. Increased juvenile delinquency further justified its existence. “Contemporary character education advocates are appalled at reported high rates of personally and socially destructive behavior among youth. Advocates claim that such behavior is a result of poor character. [...] [P]eople with bad character hold bad values and produce bad behavior. People with good character hold good values and engage in good behavior.”<sup>5</sup>

While character education has had a longstanding tradition in schools, it hasn’t been made clear yet that it should be part of curriculum. To start, its effectiveness has been repeatedly called into question. Character education advocates justify the approach on grounds that it will mitigate juvenile delinquency, but it has not been yet proven to do this. Alfie Kohn, for one, has also questioned the level at which problems

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Sprod, *Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education: The Community of Ethical Inquiry* (London: Routledge, 2001), 1.

<sup>2</sup> E. H. Otten, “Character Education,” ERIC Digest, accessed November 22, 2014, <https://www.ericdigests.org/2001-2/character.html>

<sup>3</sup> Alan L. Lockwood, *The Case for Character Education: A Developmental Approach* (New York: Teacher’s College Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>4</sup> James Arthur, “Traditional Approaches to Character Education in Britain and America,” in *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*, ed. Larry P. Nucci and Darcia Narvaez (New York: Routledge, 2008), 86.

<sup>5</sup> Lockwood, xiii.

are addressed (why not “transform the structure of the classroom rather than try to remake the students themselves”); the theory of human nature that underlies the approach (a somewhat pessimistic view); what the ultimate goals are (why reactionary rather than proactive?); which values are promoted (an exhaustive list?); and how learning is thought to take place (i.e., indoctrination).<sup>6</sup> Others criticize character education for failing to recognize the psychological and developmental differences of students of varying ages.<sup>7</sup> And some argue that moral education has no place in schools.<sup>8</sup> To add insult to injury, character education carries with it the same kinds of problems virtue theory faces, given that character education has been shaped and influenced by virtue theory.

“While taking various forms, most versions [of character education] trace their roots back to Aristotle and stress the development of dispositions and habits among students.”<sup>9</sup> Thomas Lickona, a leader in the character education movement, acknowledges virtue theory as the core of character education, but does not adequately establish the importance of virtue theory. David Carr and Jan Steutel lay out some of the ways of conceiving of a virtue approach to moral education.<sup>10</sup> They argue, for one, that “a virtue approach to moral education would at the very least be one which entertained the promotion of the virtues and their constituents as the goal of moral education.”<sup>11</sup> While their project is to distinguish a virtue approach to moral education from other approaches, their discussion lends itself as support to show that character education derives from virtue theory. James Arthur further explicates the Greek origins of character education.<sup>12</sup> Establishing the relation between character education and virtue theory is useful so that we can see that the benefits and burdens that are associated with virtue theory are generally applicable to character education.

In the recent past, a serious challenge has been brought against virtue theory, and consequently, character education, too. The challenge comes from the philosophers who look to the implications of research in social and personality psychology for the study of ethics. “The spirit of this movement is that ethics should be founded on a realistic conception of human nature and that social and personality psychology have important things to say about these matters.”<sup>13</sup> One such argument is that “the

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<sup>6</sup> Alfie Kohn, “How Not to Teach Values,” in *Character and Moral Education: A Reader*, eds. Joseph L. DeVitis and Tianlong Yu (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011), 129-146.

<sup>7</sup> Lockwood, *Character Education*.

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Fish, “Aim Low,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://chronicle.com/article/AimLow/45210>.

<sup>9</sup> Paul A. Lewis, “Contemporary Character Education in Context,” in *Toward Human Flourishing: Character, Practical Wisdom, and Professional Formation*, eds. Mark L. Jones, Paul A. Lewis, and Kelly E. Reffitt (Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2013), 19.

<sup>10</sup> David Carr and Jan Steutel, “Virtue Ethics and the Virtue Approach to Moral Education,” in *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education*, eds. David Carr and Jan Steutel (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Carr and Steutel, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Arthur, 80-82.

<sup>13</sup> John Sabini and Maury Silver, “Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued,” *Ethics* 115 (2005): 535.



psychological data show that people do not have characters, in the sense required by virtue ethics, and this undermines virtue ethics.”<sup>14</sup> If people are not able to become the kind of people that they are supposed to become, then not only does this undermine the normative theory that issues the standard, but it also undermines any attempt that seeks to help people become the kind of people that they supposedly cannot become. In short, if there is no such thing as character, then character education is otiose.

## **Section II: The situationist critique and responses to it**

Since the re-emergence of virtue ethics into the normative-ethical landscape in the 1950’s, a number of objections have been raised against the theory. One of the challenges is based upon a charge that the moral psychological claims grounding Aristotle’s theory were “not informed by rigorous, scientific methodology.”<sup>15</sup> Opponents therefore solicit empirical evidence to support the development of character traits and that shows that there are virtuous people. However, research seems to suggest otherwise, and as a result, has called the concept of character into question. The associated movement has been labeled as “situationism.”

Virtue theory has long rested on an assumption that virtues are robust traits; “if a person has a robust trait, they can be confidently expected to display trait-relevant behavior across a wide variety of trait-relevant situations, even where some or all of these situations are not optimally conducive to such behavior.”<sup>16</sup> However, John Doris and others, most notably Gilbert Harman, argue that there is no empirical support for robust traits, let alone character traits. Harman infers that “it may even be the case that there is no such thing as character, no ordinary character traits of the sort people think there are, none of the usual moral virtues and vices.”<sup>17</sup> It is thereby incorrect to attribute character or character traits as an explanation for why people act the way they do. “The explanatory and predictive power of such traits is commonly much weaker than that of certain features of situations in which agents find themselves.”<sup>18</sup> Hence, the name situationism.

While there is not one single definition of situationism, the “general thesis of situationism is that in reality, personal dispositions are highly situation-specific, with the consequence that we are in error to interpret behavioral consistencies in terms of robust traits.”<sup>19</sup> If there were consistency in behavior, it would be due to consistencies across situational factors, not because of personality traits or character. Situational

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<sup>14</sup> Sabini and Silver, 536.

<sup>15</sup> Candace L. Upton, “Virtue Ethics and Moral Psychology: The Situationism Debate,” *The Journal of Ethics* 13 (2009), 104.

<sup>16</sup> John M. Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behavior* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 18.

<sup>17</sup> Gilbert Harman, “Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 99 (1999), 316.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Adams, *A Theory of Virtue* (New York: Oxford, 2006), 117.

<sup>19</sup> Maria Merritt, “Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3 (2001): 366.

factors explain behavior better than character traits. Situationism “emphasizes the contribution that differences in social situation make to the explanation of human behavior, in comparison with the contribution made by differences in personal qualities.”<sup>20</sup>

The position has been supported by way of various experimental studies in social psychology. Most situationist literature appeals to four psychological experiments: the *Honesty Experiment*, the *Dime Experiment*, the *Good Samaritans Experiment*, and the *Milgram Experiment*.<sup>21</sup> I’ll assume that most readers have already been introduced to these experiments, so the following conclusions will serve only to refresh our memories. In the *Honesty Experiment*, there was not a significant enough level of correlation across various kinds of cheating behavior to conclude that cross-situational honesty existed, and consequently, no evidence to support the existence of consistent character. In the *Dime Experiment*, more helping behavior was exhibited after subjects found a dime in a phone booth compared to those who did not. In the *Good Samaritans Experiment*, more helping behavior was exhibited by people who had time to spare than by people who were running late on their way to give a talk (interestingly enough, about the importance of helping others). In the *Milgram Experiment*, harming behavior was exhibited at a strong enough degree and by enough subjects to conclude that even if subjects possess a non-malevolent character trait, it is not robust. The four experiments ultimately all serve to show that non-morally relevant situational factors affect virtuous behavior and are far more predictive than any notion of character or character traits.<sup>22</sup>

As a result of experiments like these and others, philosophers and supporters of the situationist movement have concluded that people do not possess widespread, global traits, such as honesty or compassion. Rather, people possess local versions of these traits in the forms of “honesty in test-taking” or “compassion in the workplace”. If people do not have the widespread and robust character traits that virtue theory requires them to have, then this becomes a problem that virtue theory will have to address.

It would be neither necessary nor appropriate to address all of the responses to the situationist critique, but it is worthwhile to note that there have been many objections raised to the position.<sup>23</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson highlights the main lines of arguments by distinguishing the Aristotelian responses from those that are not; of those that are not specifically Aristotelian, they can be categorized into one of two camps: ‘the methodological objection’ and ‘the moral dilemma objection’. According to the former, “there is something individually wrong with the way in which each of the situationism-supporting experiments has been conducted and/or interpreted.”<sup>24</sup> The methodological objection points specifically to the *Honesty*

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<sup>20</sup> Adams, 115.

<sup>21</sup> For a brief survey of the four experiments, see Kristjánsson, 57-59. For more detail, see Sabini & Silver (2005).

<sup>22</sup> It is worth noting that some critics reject this interpretation.

<sup>23</sup> For variations on these replies to the situationists, see Kupperman (2001), Kamtekar (2004), Radcliffe (2007), Sabini and Silver (2005), Sreenivasan (2013).

<sup>24</sup> Kristján Kristjánsson, “An Aristotelian Critique of Situationism.” *Philosophy* 83 (2008): 62.

*Experiment*, the *Dime Experiment*, and the *Milgram Experiment*. Kristjánsson points out that in the *Honesty Experiment*, it is children whose characters are being tested, and it is generally accepted that the character of children is fluid and not yet established. For children to behave inconsistently is not a mark against stable and robust character traits, as such character traits take time to develop. Moreover, “from the perspective of current child psychology, the experimenters committed pedestrian errors.”<sup>25</sup>

Kristjánsson’s discussion of the *Dime Experiment* is brief and echoes John Sabini and Maury Silver’s remarks on the experiment. They do not believe “picking up or not picking up your papers is a very important manifestation of a moral trait” and moreover, that “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.”<sup>26</sup>

The *Milgram Experiment* also raises questions in its methodology, including the “unpreparedness of the subjects, the relentless pressure exerted on them by the experimenter, the fast pace of the experiment... and the stepwise, slippery slope nature of the subjects’ decisions.”<sup>27</sup> Sabini and Silver address the facets of the experiment in depth, and ultimately conclude that “the disturbance it may cause to our conception of character will at most be ‘local’, not ‘global’.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, it is possible that people do not possess robust, stable (global) character traits, but instead, have more narrow (local) traits such as ‘courage in the classroom’ or ‘honesty in taking tests’.<sup>29</sup> The *Milgram Experiment* would challenge a local virtue such as ‘non-malevolence in situation X’, but not non-malevolence in its entirety. I will say more about global and local traits in the next section.

The *Good Samaritans Experiment* has not been objected to on methodological grounds, but it has on moral grounds. According to the moral dilemma objection, “the psychological experiments in question do not place subjects in our typical day-to-day choice situations in which the imperatives of a virtue compete with those of a vice or of a neutral state. Rather, they place subjects in situations in which they face the pressure of competing virtue imperatives.”<sup>30</sup> This is true of the other experiments, too. For example,

In the *Honesty Experiment*... it may have been the children’s pride, loyalty and helpfulness rather than their dishonesty that they pitted against honesty and which, in the end, eclipsed it. In the *Good Samaritans Experiment*, attending to the virtue of appropriate punctuality is at least a mitigating concern. And in the *Milgram Experiment*, one must bear in mind that cooperativeness in group enterprises and certain deference to appropriate authority are virtuous up to a point. That the subjects took those virtues too far is, in retrospect, not to be doubted, but let us not forget that they were the

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<sup>25</sup> Kristjánsson, 63 (referring to W. Damon, *The Moral Child: Nurturing Children’s Natural Moral Growth* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 6-9).

<sup>26</sup> Sabini and Silver, 540.

<sup>27</sup> Kristjánsson, 63.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>29</sup> Doris, *Lack of Character*.

<sup>30</sup> Kristjánsson, 64.

hapless victims of an artificially created situation which was always likely to overstrain human nature or at least bring it close to tipping point.<sup>31</sup>

Situationist critiques would be less questionable if they were looking at behavior over long periods of time, in ordinary situations.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, Kristjánsson divides situationist critiques into the Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian critiques. Having explored the latter, let us move on the former. This camp separates into two different kinds of objections: “the bullet-biting objection” and “the anti-behaviouristic objection”. The former objection essentially holds that situationist findings are not a challenge to virtue theory, but rather a reflection of the theory. To observe that most people are not virtuous is expected; “it is precisely because so few people are truly virtuous that we see the results that we do.”<sup>32</sup> Citing Harman, Kristjánsson notes that the latter objection finds fault with the running conception of an Aristotelian character trait as a “relatively long-term stable disposition to act in distinctive ways.”<sup>33</sup> Some critics find this understanding that is unlike both Aristotelian and contemporary virtue theoretical conceptions of character. Another criticism holds that situationist findings might end up conflating incontinent behavior with vicious behavior and continent behavior with virtuous behavior. To do so would be a serious error, considering that the behavior stems from distinct motivations.

While there are a host of other responses to the situationist critique, it seems that there is agreement within the philosophical community that the situationism debate is over. Or, at least it seemed that way until Christian Miller revived the discussion. We’ll turn to this “post-situationist” position now.

### **Section III: Christian Miller and the Mixed Traits framework**

#### Part 1: The Case for Mixed Traits

Despite what seemed like a cessation to the situationist dialogue, Christian Miller’s extensive research in psychology has opened the door to additional discussion regarding the nature of character. He claims that “when it comes to moral character we should agree with the main negative claim being made by situationists in psychology, namely that there is significant evidence against the widespread possession of folk character traits.”<sup>34</sup> At the same time, he suggests that “we should be hesitant in accepting some of the positive claims that are often made by situationists, such as that behavior is largely driven by situational

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<sup>31</sup> Kristjánsson, 64.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>34</sup> Christian Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 107.

forces.”<sup>35</sup> This leads him to advocate for a view that holds that most people have neither the virtues nor the vices, but rather what he calls “Mixed Traits”.

If most people do not have the virtues or the vices, then what do they have? According to Miller, they have Mixed Character Traits. In order to understand what Mixed Traits are, we need first to understand what traits are, broadly. Traits are “features or properties of things.” Traits can be divided into personality traits and non-personality traits. For Miller, a personality trait is “A disposition to form beliefs and/or desires of a certain sort and (in many cases) to act in a certain way, when in conditions relevant to that disposition.”<sup>36</sup> Character traits are a subset of personality traits, as are non-character traits. The distinction lies in the idea of normative standards. “A character trait is a personality trait for which a person who has it is, in that respect, an appropriate object of normative assessment by the relevant norms.”<sup>37</sup> This means that if a person has a character trait, not only does it dispose a person to form certain kinds of beliefs and desires, but it also can be judged as admirable or deficient (relative to the normative standards for that trait).

Miller attends to the complicated nature of dispositions, and what we can take from his analysis is that “A character trait disposition which is had by Jones *consists of* some cluster of Jones’s relevant interrelated mental state dispositions such that necessarily, if Jones had this cluster of dispositions, then Jones instantiates that character trait as well.”<sup>38</sup> Miller explains that the mental state dispositions that ground a character trait such as compassion could include a disposition to recognize suffering, to want to alleviate suffering, and to consider different strategies for doing so.

The virtues and vices are distinguished as a subset of character traits, but as we will see, they are not the only kinds of character traits. “The virtues are all and only those good traits of character which are such that, other things being equal, when they directly lead to action (whether mental or bodily), the action is (typically) a good action and is performed for the appropriate reasons.”<sup>39</sup> Since virtues are character traits, and character traits “are grounded in specific mental state dispositions, then one cannot count as having a virtue like honesty without first having the specific dispositions to form beliefs and desires relevant to honesty, and also not having the specific dispositions to form beliefs and desires relevant to dishonesty.”<sup>40</sup> Based on extensive empirical research, Miller finds that most people do not even qualify as weakly virtuous, let alone truly virtuous. The *Milgram Experiment* lends itself to this conclusion, as does a study by Wim Meeus and Quinten Raaijmakers (1986). The virtue/vice pairing of non-malevolence and cruelty was the focus of the study, and they found that “participants behaved in a particular situation in a way that is

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<sup>35</sup> Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 107.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

incompatible with the requirements for possessing the virtue of non-malevolence”.<sup>41</sup> This study was similar to the Milgram study, except instead of administering shocks, participants delivered stressful and berating remarks to a confederate who was taking a test in the next room. Miller appropriately recognizes that he cannot draw a serious conclusion based on one study, but can “using this study together with many more like it”.<sup>42</sup> (We’ll have to take his word here, since he does not provide us with any idea as to which studies he is referring.)

Miller makes a similar conclusion with the vice of cruelty, insofar as “we can formulate various standards in minimum threshold that a character trait has to meet in order to qualify as a vice.”<sup>43</sup> Based on a variation in the Meeus and Raaijmakers study, in which there was no authority figure pressuring the participant to provide stressful remarks, it was found that participants nonetheless issued making the stress remarks even though they “intensely disliked” doing so.<sup>44</sup> From this study and dozens of other relevant studies on aggression, Miller concludes that “Most people do not have the vice of cruelty to any degree, although a few might possess it” and from studies in other moral domains, extends this claim to apply to any of the vices.<sup>45</sup>

If most people do not have the virtues or the vices, then they have something else, and this is what Miller refers to as “Mixed Traits.” Someone with a Mixed Aggression Trait will in some cases harm another when there is an opportunity to do so, and in other cases where the opportunity is present, will not harm another. When he does harm another, the harm will be of varying degrees of aggressiveness. When he doesn’t, there could be a “variety of factors which play a role in why a person refrains from harming in these cases – guilt avoidance, empathy for the other person, or shame might, for instance, be holding him back.”<sup>46</sup> These factors, Miller explains, are specific psychological variables which can trigger the trait and serve as “enhancers” – such as anger, frustration, shame, or threatened self-esteem – or “inhibitors” – such as guilt, empathy, negative affect, or activated moral norms – for aggressive behavior. Enhancers and inhibitors can influence, in the case, the aggression trait, in such a way that they increase motivation to act aggressively and not act aggressively, respectively. So, for each Mixed Trait, “there are certain enhancers and inhibitors which can influence motivation to act in trait-relevant ways, relative to what those levels would be were they not present. What the enhancers and inhibitors are for any given Mixed Trait is a function of the mental state dispositions which ground the trait.”<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 52.

## Part 2: The Realism Challenge

“It is important to appreciate again just how stark the contrast is between the Mixed Traits most people actually have, and the virtuous character traits they should have.”<sup>48</sup> If most of us have Mixed Traits, and virtuous traits are far away from the traits we possess, then it is not clear whether it is reasonable – given the stark contrast between the Mixed Traits we have and the virtuous traits we are supposed to have – for virtue theory to ask us to become virtuous. This sentiment is echoed in a more serious problem, which we see in Miller’s rendition of the realism challenge<sup>49</sup>:

- (1) The central ethical goal according to Aristotelian virtue ethics is to become a virtuous person.
- (2) Four important features of being a virtuous person are outlined in (a) through (b) below:
  - a. A person who is virtuous, when acting in character, will typically attempt to perform virtuous actions when, at the very least, the need to do so is obvious and the effort involved is very minimal.
  - b. A person’s virtuous trait will not be dependent on the presence (or absence) of certain morally problematic enhancers or inhibitors in leading him to perform virtuous actions, such that if they were or were not present, then his frequency of acting virtuously would significantly increase or decrease in the same nominal situations.
  - c. A person’s virtuous trait will typically lead to virtuous behavior that is done at least primarily for motivating reasons which are morally admirable and deserving of moral praise, and not primarily for motivating reasons which are either morally problematic or morally neutral.
  - d. A virtuous person, when acting in character, does not regularly act from egoistic motives which are often powerful enough that, were they not present, he would not continue to reliably act virtuously, as his virtuous motives are not strong enough to motivate such behavior by themselves.
- (3) But most of us have Mixed Traits of character and not the virtues, and because of this we fall far short of being virtuous people in the ways outline in (a) through (d) below, among others.
  - a. Most people have Mixed Traits and so, when acting in character, will sometimes not attempt to perform virtuous actions even when the need to do so is obvious and the effort involved is very minimal.
  - b. Most people have Mixed Traits which will be dependent on the presence (or absence) of certain morally problematic enhancers or inhibitors in leading him to perform virtuous actions, such that if they were or were not present, then his frequency of acting virtuously would significantly increase or decrease in the same nominal situations.
  - c. Most people have Mixed Traits which will often lead to morally relevant behavior that is done primarily for motivating reasons that are either morally problematic or morally neutral, and not primarily for motivating reasons which are morally admirable and deserving of moral praise.
  - d. Most people have Mixed Traits which can regularly lead them to act from egoistic motives which are often powerful enough that, were they not present, the person would not continue to reliably act virtuously, as his virtuous motives are not strong enough to motivate such behavior by themselves.
- (4) Hence advocates of Aristotelian virtue ethics need to outline realistic and empirically informed ways for most human beings to not develop Mixed Traits in the first place, or if they have already developed these Traits, to improve them so that they are transformed into virtues. So far they have not provided such an account.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>49</sup> Miller notes, “there is not *one* realism challenge, but a variety of different challenges depending upon what feature(s) of the virtues is in question,” 213, fn. 76.

<sup>50</sup> The original premise reads “Hence advocates of Aristotelian virtue ethics need to outline realistic and empirically informed ways for most human beings to improve their Mixed Traits, and so far they have not done so.” Julia Annas pointed out a problem

(5) Therefore the view faces an important challenge that it needs to address.

Miller emphasizes that this is not an objection, but a challenge, and that will have to be met not only by virtue ethicists. “Most leading ethical theories would accept a modified version of (1) which claims that at least *one* central ethical goal is to become a virtuous person.”<sup>51</sup> He proposes two options for responding to the realism challenge. The first option is to reject premise (1). “The idea would be to take seriously the distinction between a moral criterion and a way of life, and to argue that virtue ethics should only be understood as invoking the virtues to ground a criterion for morally right action.”<sup>52</sup> As Miller himself notes, this is not a very promising option, in that there is something “very odd about claiming that a fully virtuous person is the basis for a central part of morality, but at the same time is not the kind of person whom we should strive to become in our own lives.”<sup>53</sup>

The second option tries to respond to premise (4). Miller holds that while “the most promising strategy to use in addressing the realism challenge is to focus on what it takes to cultivate each virtue individually,” there may be various strategies which could be useful for generally fostering the virtues.<sup>54</sup> These include having models of moral behavior, making moral expectations more clear and explicit in specific environments, informing people about processes that can influence moral behavior (e.g., subconscious forces and biases), seeking and avoiding certain kinds of situations, being exposed to literature on stereotypes (specifically, activation and control), and devising strategies that extend local virtues to global virtues. Miller’s aforementioned suggestions are plausible and could be useful, but alone, are incomplete. We are left unclear as to how to actually go about implementing such strategies, and whether these methods are as empirically stable as would be required to meet the realism challenge.<sup>55</sup>

While I’m not entirely convinced that premise (4) necessarily follows, I will grant that it is helpful to have empirically informed ways to become virtuous, especially if that is what we should ultimately be striving for. In the next chapters, I will build the foundation of what will serve as a response to Miller’s challenge by putting forth an account of moral development by way of what I call “active cultivation”. Before I lay out the steps to becoming virtuous, I will first establish that we can liberate ourselves from our Mixed Traits. Active cultivation reveals that it is possible to change our character traits. However, the process requires that we engage certain skills that must be learned through practice. The ideal setting for

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with this. Miller offered the restated version above in a footnote. I find the revision to be more coherent and accurate, and so have opted for it in lieu of the original (210, fn. 73).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 230.

<sup>55</sup> Miller has recently written more about the strategy of getting the word out: Christian Miller, “Virtue Cultivation in Light of Situationism,” in *Developing the Virtues: Integrating Perspectives*, eds. Julia Annas, Darcia Narvaez, and Nancy E. Snow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 157-183.



this to take place is in the classroom. Character education serves as an ideal setting for young moral agents to learn, practice, and acquire the skills that underlie active cultivation. Active cultivation enables students to become virtuous, and therefore, reinforces the idea that our behavior is not driven by situational forces, but also that changing our character is a complex craft which most of us can only master through education.

## Chapter Two: A Two-Tier Approach to Character Development

Christian Miller's account of Mixed Traits reveals that most of us are not virtuous and as a result invites virtue theorists to map the realistic road to becoming virtuous. I take the important implication of his account to be that there is room for moral improvement to the extent that it is possible to transform Mixed Traits into virtues. I propose self-cultivation as a promising and realistic method for becoming virtuous. Drawing upon theoretical and empirical data not only supports the possibility of transitioning away from Mixed Traits, but also supports the wherewithal of self-cultivation for enabling us to become virtuous.

Before providing my account of self-cultivation for virtue acquisition, I begin by explicating that I do not take character and virtue traits to be synonymous, and that changing character traits is a precursor to becoming virtuous. Except in unusual cases, character trait change is involved in becoming virtuous.<sup>56</sup> However, we can improve our character traits without necessarily becoming virtuous. There are more conditions in place for having a virtuous trait than there are for having desirable character traits, but what is necessary for acquiring desirable character traits is also necessary for virtue. This chapter provides an account of acquiring virtues by way of character traits first, in a two-tier model where character traits are on the first tier, and virtues are on the second tier. Regardless of whether we are seeking to reach the first tier or the second, we must engage in active, agent-driven cultivation.<sup>57</sup>

Active cultivation is a complex process that involves the use of skills an agent ought to have mastery over in order to ensure success. Success is marked by reaching the first tier (character) or second tier (virtue), depending on the goal(s). I hold that the goal of character education should ultimately be to *enable* students to become virtuous, partly because I am skeptical that young students *can* become virtuous.<sup>58</sup> Character education programs should simultaneously aim for students to acquire the kinds of character traits morally responsible individuals have (e.g., compassion, integrity, etc.).

I see moral character improvement and virtue acquisition as two distinct, but overlapping concepts. When an agent becomes virtuous, he has necessarily improved his moral character. However, when an agent improves his moral character, he has not necessarily become virtuous. Consider an example of a business tycoon who has been recently criticized for her lack of involvement with her community. In an

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<sup>56</sup> Unusual cases include those in which an agent already has the trait of compassion but fails to meet at least one of the conditions of virtue. I explicate these conditions later in the paper.

<sup>57</sup> It may be interesting to note that there is opposition to the idea that virtue traits are personality traits. See Lorraine L. Besser, "Virtue Traits and Personality Traits," in *Moral Psychology: Virtue and Character*, eds. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong and Christian B. Miller (Massachusetts Institute of Technology: The MIT Press, 2017), 105-112.

<sup>58</sup> For an opposing perspective, see Christine Swanton, "Developmental Virtue Ethics," in *Developing the Virtues: Integrating Perspectives*, eds. Julia Annas, Darcia Narvaez, and Nancy E. Snow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). 116-134.

effort to appear more sympathetic, over time, she makes appearances at community events, donates large sums of money to various outreach efforts, and hires local businesses to provide their services for a company picnic. I would be willing to identify these all as praiseworthy or formidable actions, but would not say the same about the motivation behind the actions. If the tycoon continues to act in this way to the extent that she improves her trait of sympathy, I think we should be willing to grant that some kind of character development has occurred. However, I also think it would be too much to say that she has acquired the virtue of sympathy, specifically because of her motivation. She was not trying to sympathize with her community for the sake of the trait itself or because her community believed her support was important. Rather, her motivation was merely to appear sympathetic so that she would no longer be subject to criticism. I maintain that her improvement was preferable to no change in behavior whatsoever, and that we should not overlook the importance of character improvement, even if it does not entail virtue acquisition.

I distinguish character development into a two-tier framework, where virtue acquisition is the top tier and character trait acquisition or general moral improvement falls directly below. Accepting a two-tier approach to character development means that there will be various ways to bring about success because what success looks like will differ depending on the goals. Goals are determined by the tier.

There is reason to accept the plausibility and legitimacy of a two-tier approach. First, in the concept itself, and second, in practice. Recall that prior to introducing the Mixed Traits framework, Miller characterizes different kinds of traits and makes a distinction between character traits and virtue traits, although he considers virtues as a subset of character traits. He maintains that “The virtues are all and only those good traits of character which are such that, other things being equal, when they directly lead to action (whether mental or bodily), the action is (typically) a good action and is performed for the appropriate reasons.”<sup>59</sup> If character traits and virtues are not identical, then it should follow that the way in which an agent acquires these different kinds of traits will not be identical either. However, because there is overlap between character traits and virtues, the way in which an agent acquires these different kinds of traits will also have overlap – thus, a two-tier approach. While the method for acquiring a particular virtue may look similar to the method for acquiring a character trait, the methods will also in at least some way set themselves apart from one another. Illustrating the methods and explicating the similarities and differences between the methods is the focus of Chapter 2.

Another form of support for the two-tier approach can be found in Miller’s hints at possible ways to respond to the realism challenge. Recall that this included having models of moral behavior, making moral expectations more clear and explicit in specific environments, informing people about processes that

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<sup>59</sup> Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 34.

can influence moral behavior (e.g., subconscious forces and biases), and being exposed to literature on stereotypes (specifically, activation and control). I think some of these suggestions are better suited for one tier over another. Take for example having models of moral behavior. Models are plausible ways to get people to behave in desirable ways, but they likely fail to address the emotional and cognitive features that are essential to becoming virtuous. The same could be said about making moral expectations more clear. I interpret this suggestion as devising and implementing ways to get people to follow and adhere to moral rules. Again, this may bring about the desired behavioral change, but I doubt that it will affect the deeper faculties that must be engaged to become virtuous. These two strategies may plausibly affect character development, but I think they are better suited for tier-1. The other two strategies included above (informing people about processes that can influence moral behavior and being exposed to literature on stereotypes) seem better suited for tier-2. They reflect the more complex and nuanced requirements for becoming virtuous.

I therefore endorse a two-tier approach to character development. The advantage to this approach is that it provides students with the opportunity to foster specific skills that will eventually serve to enable them to become virtuous, and affords them to still find success. Virtue theory has long been criticized for having such high standards, arguably unattainable for most of us. Identifying a platform that lies below virtue makes character development more accessible and likely better suited for younger students. This view finds some positive change in character to be greatly preferable to no change at all, even if the positive change falls short of virtue. What follows is a two-tier account of self-cultivation. I propose that students will be able to meet the first tier, which then puts them in a better position to meet the second tier given that the distance between the first and second tier is far smaller than the distance between the ground level and the second tier.

### **Section I: (Moral) Self-Cultivation**

This section illustrates my account of moral self-cultivation for reaching tier 1, i.e., acquiring desirable character traits. By desirable, I mean the kinds of character traits morally responsible individuals have, e.g., integrity, compassion, etc. From here on, I use the term “self-cultivation” in lieu of “moral self-cultivation”. If I am referring to self-cultivation for the purpose of reaching tier 2, i.e., becoming virtuous, I will make it clear by using the term “virtue self-cultivation”.

My account of self-cultivation rejects passive attempts towards moral development. I insist that agents must play an active role in the cultivation process. An example of ‘passive cultivation’ may manifest in the form of an agent who surrounds himself with certain kinds of people in hopes that their traits will

“rub off” on him. In such an example, the agent puts forth no more effort than finding and keeping himself in the company of people with a desirable trait. If this is the extent of his cultivation, it is unlikely that he will create reliable dispositions to form certain kinds of desires and beliefs that give rise to the desired trait. Not only is passive cultivation unlikely to successfully occur, it is additionally plausible that it would backfire and result in the acquisition of unfavorable traits.<sup>60</sup> This is the central reason why cultivation must be active. When we are not actively attending to our character, we put ourselves in a position to backslide. This means that we may unknowingly acquire certain kinds of unfavorable beliefs and desires that give rise to negative character traits. Moreover, when we dissect the components of moral development and bring to light the various required skills that underlie the process as well as the necessity of repetition and habituation (both in mental and behavioral perception and responses), we see the unlikelihood that actualization of a trait could indeed occur passively.<sup>61</sup>

I now introduce a working model of self-cultivation. I present self-cultivation as a project one undertakes for the purpose of improving her moral character. It is a process, in that it takes time and it requires certain kinds of repeated and intentional efforts on the agent’s part. It is entirely independent, in that the agent is wholly responsible for the process. The agent makes and carries out the decisions, and any success or failure in improvement rests on the shoulders of the agent. Self-cultivation is the self-driven process of improving a moral character trait by way of self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness. It requires awareness and both mental and physical responsiveness. This cashes out to an agent being aware of a faulty character trait, desiring to change this character trait, reflecting and making plans for how to improve, and continuously and deliberately seeing these plans through. All of these features of the process are engineered and carried out by the agent alone. The agent’s direction, discipline, and determination are integral to the process. The process of self-cultivation ideally continues until the agent has acquired the desired character trait.<sup>62</sup> The acquisition of a character trait is determined by the way in which the new behavior is no longer done with conscious effort; when the trait is second-nature to the agent, the agent has acquired the desired trait. The amalgamation of these features renders a form of active cultivation. Self-cultivation is one of two forms of active cultivation I advocate for the purpose of moral character improvement. I will speak to the other form after I have built my account and defense of self-cultivation.

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<sup>60</sup> We could imagine a relatively amicable agent who is having difficulty improving his trait of friendliness and becomes so frustrated with his lack of success that he turns into a jerk.

<sup>61</sup> Even in the rare cases where someone can passively acquire favorable traits, I think most of us would be disinclined to give the agent credit for his traits. Traits should not be something that someone comes by as a result of luck, but I do not want to pursue this line of argument because it would be tangential.

<sup>62</sup> As we will see, this is one of the main differences between moral self-cultivation and virtue self-cultivation.

While there are certain necessary features that must be present in order for a process of moral improvement to count as self-cultivation, the process can look quite different. Here are some admittedly simplistic examples:

*The Driver:* One day Jane is driving on the K-10 freeway and finds herself behind someone who is driving 55 MPH in a 65 MPH zone. Unable to pass due to a steady flow of oncoming traffic, she finds herself getting angrier and begins tailgating the driver ahead. Finally, the other driver exits the freeway, and Jane is relieved. As much as she wishes others wouldn't drive so slowly, she also wishes she wouldn't get herself so worked up in these kinds of circumstances. As a result, she practices patience while driving (refraining from tailgating), and eventually, she becomes a patient driver.

*The Argument:* One day, Auggie and Mary are having an argument. At its peak, Auggie tells Mary she's being overly-sensitive, to which Mary exclaims, "You're the least sympathetic person I know!" She leaves the room, and Auggie ruminates over her outcry. Upon reflection, he recalls a vast array of instances in which he was unsympathetic. With a desire to prove her wrong, Auggie deliberates over how to make himself appear more sympathetic. He determines that refraining from name-calling, offering more emotional support, and putting himself in Mary's shoes are various ways a sympathetic person would act. He successfully acts in these ways and begins to exhibit a more sympathetic character.

*The Fortune Cookie:* One evening, Frank orders Chinese food for dinner. After he is done eating his meal, he opens his fortune cookie, and the message inside reads, "Life gives lemonade to those whose pantry overfloweth." He interprets the text as call to be friendlier amongst his colleagues, which he realizes is something he could do. The next day on, he practices being friendlier by greeting each colleague he sees with a beaming smile and saying, "And how are you on this beautiful day?"

There are several important differences between the cases that I will speak to later on, but at this point, what is essential to see is that Jane, Auggie, and Frank all engage in the process of self-cultivation: each of them acknowledge their respective faulty character trait, desire to improve the particular trait, and deliberately carry out plans in order to improve. The process is entirely independent and self-driven for all three agents; none of them receive assistance in cultivation. Implicit (if not present) in these cases is also a change in beliefs. Recall Miller's explanation that character is bound up in dispositions to form beliefs and desires, and these give rise to certain kinds of behaviors that are part and parcel of character. This indicates that character development requires a change in beliefs and desires. The desire to improve is not sufficient; agents must also change their mental states which consists of perceptions and reactions to circumstances. Changing dispositions is essential to character development, and for that reason, is a necessary feature of self-cultivation. The three agents in the above examples each undergo a change in their mental states that yield the disposition to form beliefs and desires with respect to their desired traits by way of their engaging in the process of self-cultivation. While it may be unclear in these examples whether the agents successfully acquired their respective desired character traits, they nonetheless employed the necessary skills for moral character improvement: self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness.

Allow me to clarify what I take the skills of self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness to include. By self-awareness, I refer to awareness of oneself – as the sum of mental states – that is typically brought about through the process of reflection. Objects of reflection may include thinking about one’s goals, beliefs, or desires.<sup>63</sup> This process results in conscious beliefs one may not have had before reflecting. Observation of others and thinking about oneself in relation to others is additionally important for self-awareness. It is a useful tool insofar as it provides a barometer for comparison. An agent could likely come to a greater sense of self-awareness specifically because he observed Subject S perform Action A, which is contrary to his typically response of Action B.

For example, when John stands in the cereal aisle staring at the display, trying to make a selection, he employs self-awareness when he observes another person make her selection much quicker and realizes how long he is taking to make such a relatively trivial decision. He reflects whether there are other occasions when he takes a long time to make other trivial decisions, and realizes he does this frequently. He wonders why he has a habit of acting in this way, and concludes that he does not want to make mistakes or come to regret what could have been prevented had he taken extra time in his decision making. Upon this realization, he determines that he so often is overly-painstaking in his decision-making that it is part of his character. He sees this as a flaw about himself and decides that he wants to try to change this behavior. Coming to these conclusions is a result of self-reflection, with the objects of his reflection being his belief, desires, and perceptions. Self-awareness operates in a similar fashion during the process of self-cultivation and does so necessarily.

The process of self-cultivation requires that one changes their behavior. To do this, an agent’s dispositions to form certain kinds of beliefs and desires that give rise to corresponding behaviors must change. Forming certain kinds of beliefs and desires ought to be a conscious process that the agent is continuously monitoring and evaluating, at the very least until she has acquired the desired trait, but ideally is continuously aware of so that she does not potentially relapse.<sup>64</sup> Consider an agent, Jim, who wants to improve his trait of humility. For Jim to have this desire in the first place, he has to employ self-awareness to know that he is not a humble person. Once he makes plans for how to practice humility, he should monitor whether he is carrying out his plans successfully or whether they need to be modified. Observing humility or a lack thereof in others could also help him gauge the extent to which he has improved or the standing of his humility. As Miller explains, character traits are clusters of dispositions. Being aware of our

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<sup>63</sup> Another way to frame the idea of ‘objections of reflection’ is by way of ‘mental states’, which would also include perceptions, imaginings, and thoughts as such. See David Pitt, “Mental Representation,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed January 23, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mental-representation>.

<sup>64</sup> As I’ll discuss in greater length later, it is possible for an agent’s beliefs and desires to change unknowingly and thereby acquire a new trait. It is thus that if an agent is not attuned to her traits it would be within the realm of possibility that she backslide into her old ways.

dispositions as well as unique beliefs and desires is a key feature of character development. Being aware of our behavior, our individual standing in relation to others, and our progress in the process of cultivation itself are other key ways self-awareness is exhibited in self-cultivation. Given the importance of self-awareness to self-cultivation, and the way in which self-awareness is a complex and multi-faceted skill, I will later argue that self-awareness must be taught and practiced in any character education program.

Perception and responsiveness go hand in hand with self-awareness and must also be employed during the process of self-cultivation. Graham Haydon explains that there must be some kind of processing going on in moral circumstances, and this is the perception and responsiveness to which I refer.

We are perceiving, to a greater or lesser degree, more or less accurately, the ethically salient features of a situation. These are real features of a situation (they may include, for instance, the qualities displayed in other people's actions: this person is being tactful, that person is well-meaning but clumsy, and so on)....<sup>65</sup>

It is not merely employing our perceptual faculties that is important, but what we do with these perceptions. Haydon is one of many who characterize virtue and the virtuous agent in terms of perceiving particular features of moral situations and responding to these situations appropriately. Nancy Snow echoes this sentiment in an example of how someone with compassion that is limited towards adorable animals can extend the trait to compassion towards humans and thereby cultivate the virtue of compassion:

I can attempt to generalize my compassion through self-scrutiny and practical reason. I begin to monitor and evaluate my compassionate reactions, examining them with the plan of self-development. First, I ask myself why I show compassion only toward small animals... I then ask myself why I do not perceive the vulnerabilities of fellow humans... I work to become more aware of common human vulnerabilities. Perhaps through imaginative dwelling on the plights of those in need, I try to generate feelings of compassion... I educate myself to become more aware of compassion-eliciting circumstances, to pick up on cues from others that might reveal distress. I try to habituate myself to perceive these cues and react compassionately... this or a similar process of self-regulation could in principle be used to cultivate virtues and extend them across domains. In this way, persons whose virtues may initially be manifested solely in narrow behavioral regularities that are keyed to perceived meanings of certain kinds of objective situation-types can attempt to extend their virtues across objectively different types of situations.<sup>66</sup>

The role of self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness are brought to light in Snow's illustration. While her example is specific to cultivating virtue, I hold that these features will also be present for cultivating character traits given that I endorse a two-tier approach to becoming virtuous where character trait acquisition is a stepping stone to virtue.

Having put forth an account of self-cultivation, I now move to speak to its importance. I think self-cultivation is a valuable tool for moral improvement, and specifically for becoming virtuous. Miller shows us that we are not perfectly virtuous beings, which I assume most of us would have been ready to accept

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<sup>65</sup> Graham Haydon, *Education, Philosophy and the Ethical Environment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 65.

<sup>66</sup> Nancy E. Snow, *Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 34.



without argument. I submit the Mixed Traits framework implies room for improvement, but the matter of whether we can become perfectly virtuous, or at least how we can draw closer and become better moral individuals remains open. I believe that self-cultivation is not only a promising strategy, but it is also one of only two viable strategies for acquiring virtues.<sup>67</sup> Discussion of virtue acquisition will be held off until later; for now, my goal is to defend self-cultivation as the best method for moral improvement.

I think it is important to be able to take on the project of moral improvement without requiring or relying on the assistance of others. In order to build my defense of the importance of self-cultivation, I need to lay out the premises and notions that serve as the foundation. First, individuals are responsible for their actions. This premise is not unique to my perspective; it is already part of our moral schema. Except in rare cases, if an agent intentionally harms another person, it is the agent we blame. Praiseworthiness operates similarly to blameworthiness. Neither seems appropriate to attribute to an agent when an action is unintentional. Next, our moral character is the vehicle for our moral behavior. With the exception of misfirings, our moral actions are predictable because they are embedded in our character. We can predict that our stingy uncle will not donate to charity because he has displayed a pattern of not giving repeatedly in the past. For him to break out of this routine would require change at a deeper level, i.e., a change of character. Given that moral character largely determines our moral behavior, and given that moral behavior is bound up in individual responsibility, individuals should have the means to exercise autonomy over their moral character. By autonomy, I borrow Haydon's characterization of autonomy being "a matter of an individual doing her own thinking and deciding her own action independently of the surrounding environment".<sup>68</sup> Self-cultivation is the process that drives moral improvement and is in itself an exercise of autonomy. The process is not innate, but rather learned, and therefore needs to be taught. Character education is already present in curricula across the United States<sup>69</sup>. Incorporating self-cultivation and the skills that underwrite it into the lesson plan is the next step.

Self-cultivation is a process that employs many different skills. As previously explained, it requires reflection and self-awareness, perception and responsiveness, and commitment. I do not take these skills to be innate; they need to be learned and practiced in order for allow for successful self-cultivation to occur. Haydon reinforces this idea:

How do we come to be able to perceive such features? The answer has to be that we have been inducted into a way of perceiving, and that must be through being inducted into a way of life in

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<sup>67</sup> This account rests on the view that that virtues are distinct from one another. A person can have the virtue of patience while having the vice of stinginess. This agent could engage in the process of self-cultivation in order to become generous.

<sup>68</sup> Haydon, 61.

<sup>69</sup> The U.S. Department of Education lists nine resources as 'Editor's Picks' (<https://www2.ed.gov/teachers/how/character/edpicks.jhtml>). The Association of American Educators endorses seven different character education programs (<https://www.aeteachers.org/index.php/character-education-programs>). Other programs include – but are not limited to – Project Wisdom (<https://www.projectwisdom.com>) and Character Counts! (<https://charactercounts.org>).

which that way of seeing plays a part. Our sensibilities, such as they are, have developed within an ethical culture (Lovibond 2002). Exposure to this culture, then, is vital; sufficient exposure for a person to build up a stock of experience necessarily takes time.<sup>70</sup>

After individuals acquire the kinds of skills that are integral to the process, then the formal training can begin to occur. Drawing a sketch of the lesson plans is not the focus of my project; I leave this up to character education administrators. The takeaway here is that we cannot teach self-cultivation without fostering specific skills. Even then, it may take time and practice before an individual is able to engage in self-cultivation successfully. The key is to explicitly provide individuals with the means to take control of their moral character. Character education is an appropriate avenue for teaching self-cultivation for the purpose of enabling agents to improve their moral characters, and eventually, become virtuous.

## Section II: Objections from Slote

While I am committed to centralizing self-cultivation in moral education, some criticize the process. One such opponent is Michael Slote, who claims that self-cultivation is “psychologically unrealistic and questionable.”<sup>71</sup> In this section, I will lay out the potential problems he raises against the tenability of the process, but then later show how my account can handle these challenges.

Slote and I have a similar conception of self-cultivation. While he does not provide an explicit definition for term, he explains that

“The idea of (deliberate) moral self-cultivation entails a process that an individual can take charge of and accomplish largely through his or her own efforts... the individual who improves morally has to engage in a certain amount of (*self-*)*reflection*... Moral self-cultivation is something one deliberately sets out to do.”<sup>72</sup>

I interpret this presentation of moral self-cultivation as an individual’s deliberate effort to improve his character; the process is predominantly an individual effort and will involve self-reflection. He provides two examples to showcase one in which moral self-cultivation does not occur, and one in which it does. In the first example, there is a factory owner who is consistently insensitive toward his employees. His employees always hide their feelings from him and have successfully done so up until one day when he happens to see the face of an employee conveying fear, obviously directed at him. This prompts him to reflect on this and come to realize that given that his behavior was no different than usual, he has hurt the feelings of many of his employees over time.

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<sup>70</sup> Haydon, 65.

<sup>71</sup> Michael Slote, “Moral Self-Cultivation East and West: A Critique,” *Journal of Moral Education* 45, no. 2 (2016), 192.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

Such reflection will quite possibly lead the factory owner to become more sensitive to the feelings of his employees and of others as well.... But although the case of the factory owner... does involve a certain amount of self-reflection... [Slote doesn't] think we yet have an example of moral self-cultivation. Moral self-cultivation is something one deliberately sets out to do, and this factory owner had no intention of becoming a better person as a result of his trip to his own factory on a given morning.<sup>73</sup>

In Slote's second example, an American man has a Korean-American wife whose family he finds weird and unattractive. He has tried to hide this, but has failed to do so, as he comes to know when his wife tells him that her brother has picked up on this. The husband feels bad, and upon reflection, decides to learn about Korean history in order to become more sympathetic. "...If he carries out this resolution, it will be an example of very deliberate moral self-cultivation."<sup>74</sup>

Slote points to the feature of deliberateness as being that which distinguishes the two cases from one another. In his account, the case of the factory owner does not qualify as self-cultivation because he did not have the intention to become a better person, unlike the unsympathetic husband who makes a deliberate effort to improve his behavior. While I grant that this is a significant difference between the two cases, I think this misses a key facet of self-cultivation that further distinguishes the two cases. What ultimately separates the factory owner and the unsympathetic husband are their mental states following their perception and responsiveness. Recall that Miller explains if an agent is seeking to improve their character, and character is constituted in the disposition to form certain kinds of beliefs and desires that give rise to corresponding behaviors, then it will be necessary that the agent change their dispositions. The unsympathetic husband perceived that he was unpleasant to be around, and when he became aware of this, took initiative to change his behavior. In order to change his behavior, he had to change his disposition to form certain kinds of beliefs and desires. His beliefs were changed in the process of reading Korean history and literature, and as a result, his dispositions – and thereby, his character – changed. The factory owner, however, did not change his beliefs or desires. He did perceive his employees' faces and was made aware through self-reflection how his behavior had negatively affected them, but did not as a result change his beliefs or desires. We may decide that the factory owner's awareness of his behavior was not strong enough to trigger a change in beliefs and desires that would give rise to a change in character. This emphasizes the way in which character change is not purely behavioral, and that certain mental states must be activated in order to render change of character. While deliberate action is an important facet of self-cultivation, it must not be overshadowed by the importance of the mental change that must occur in the process.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 196.

Slote's account makes explicit at least one important feature of moral self-cultivation, specifically, the deliberate effort involved in an agent's improvement. Any attempt at establishing a rigorous account of self-cultivation must portray it as an agent-driven, agent-directed process. While I see this explication as an asset of Slote's account, he sets these features up as platforms for critique.

Following the example of the unsympathetic husband, Slote directs us to

Notice two things about this example. It depends, in the first instance, on the intervention or input of others. He doesn't on his own think of cultivating his empathic sensitivity to Korean people, but rather decides to do that in response to what his wife tells him. Second, this is a very unusual example. Maybe people *should* go around reading series of books in order to become more empathic with others, but it doesn't often happen, and it is unrealistic to expect it to start happening more often. The event that led the husband to undertake a course of readings in Korean history and literature is a fairly rare and unpredictable one. To be sure, such events do happen to people, but it doesn't seem reasonable to expect such events to occur often enough to help everyone become more sensitive and altruistic.<sup>75</sup>

Here we are faced with two criticisms against self-cultivation. First, the husband's self-cultivation depends on his wife. While Slote does not explicitly tell us why this is problematic, it calls us to deliberate over what initiates self-cultivation, and the extent to which self-cultivation is an individual effort. Recall that Slote characterizes self-cultivation as a process that can be largely accomplished through individual efforts. If the properties of being agent-driven and agent-directed are part and parcel of self-cultivation, then it is antithetical to the process when anyone other than the agent initiates the process. In this case, the husband would likely have not engaged in the process of self-cultivation if it were not for his wife. Therefore, self-cultivation should not be considered an entirely independent project when another person is the catalyst for improvement. It could also be ruled peculiar that the person who deliberately tries to become better does not have the idea to do so on their own. Regardless, relying on another to initiate the process means that either self-cultivation is unlikely to occur if the agent must be responsible for his own trigger event, or that self-cultivation is not actually an independent project. These considerations require us to take pause at the plausibility of an entirely self-driven process.

The second point in the above passage raises another interesting consideration. Slote describes the case of the unsympathetic husband as unusual, but doesn't offer a clear explanation for why he holds this. What might be unusual is the strategy the husband chose for moral improvement, i.e., reading literature. This perhaps is not the intuitive or instinctive strategy for character development. To expect or require this kind of activity we want people to engage in for the purpose of moral improvement would not only be unusual, it would be unreasonable. It is not just the husband's strategy that Slote takes issue with, but also the events that led up to the process. Slote finds the trigger event not only problematic for the conception of self-cultivation, but also for the practicality of it. Even if we allowed the process of self-cultivation to be

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 196.

initiated by others, it would be such a rare occurrence that it would render self-cultivation itself rare. Even if self-cultivation is effective, it relies on such specific and rare events that ultimately undermine the method. A method that has such a narrow reach does not give us a promising method for becoming virtuous. In this way, Slote's charge that self-cultivation is unrealistic and questionable is valid and thereby forces us to reconsider efforts to situate it in plans for moral development.

### **Section III: Responding to Slote: Collaborative Cultivation**

Slote provides a two-fold critique against self-cultivation that gives us reason to not only question the concept of self-cultivation as a whole, but also recognize the peculiar conditions that give rise to self-cultivation and the way in which they undermine the legitimacy of the process. His criticism presents enough hurdles on the trek to virtue, that it seems only reasonable to abandon the process. However, I would argue that further consideration of these hurdles will cause them to collapse. I will show how my account can handle the potential problems from the previous section, specifically, that the events that initiate self-cultivation aren't as rare or unusual as Slote maintains that it is, and that even if we rely on others to initiate self-cultivation, doing so doesn't coerce us into abandonment. Moreover, it might not seem reasonable to expect such events to occur at this point in time, but that doesn't mean that we can't or shouldn't construct an environment that would allow and encourage such events to occur more frequently.

If it is the unsympathetic husband's strategy for moral improvement that we should interpret as 'unusual', then I would contend that this is mistaken. In fact, reading is precisely the kind of exercise that would positively contribute to character development. Leaning on Miller's framework in which dispositions to form certain beliefs and desires give rise to traits reorients our reaction to the husband's strategy. The husband has a desire to change his behavior. In order for this to occur, his beliefs will have to change. Reading historical non-fiction and literature is a means to change of mental states, as he will become aware of affairs that he was not prior to reading. This awareness will shape his beliefs, which in turn will enable him to change his character. Reading books, watching movies, and taking classes are examples of activities that people do precisely to expose themselves to different perspectives and challenge their current system of beliefs, and such activities are far from 'unusual'.

Next, I grant that Slote's account importantly calls attention to the trigger event that initiates self-cultivation. The trigger event may be an important factor in our understanding or conception of self-cultivation. It may be important that if we choose to advocate self-cultivation for purposes of moral improvement, we also are aware of its potential drawbacks, including the ways in which it may not be a realistic method due to its inability to be an entirely independent project.

However, in the case of the unsympathetic husband, the trigger event is not as rare or unusual as Slote claims. It occurs regularly and it is therefore realistic to expect that some cases of self-cultivation will come about as a result of another's prodding. One place we can find these kinds of examples is in discussion of virtue cultivation. Nany Snow offers an example similar to that of the American husband:

Suppose that one day [an] irritable woman is told by a friend, "You really have become an angry person. You don't like anything or anyone." Reflecting on these comments, the irritable one realizes their truth. She does not like this fact about herself. She resolves to change, begins observing when she becomes irritable, and starts asking herself why... With work, she can try to change, by reinterpreting the situational cues that generate her irritability and acknowledging and controlling her prickly impulses. She can work to develop a different perspective on the things that annoy her, changing her outlook in order to modulate her reactions.<sup>76</sup>

In this example, it is a conversation with a friend that leads the woman to change her behavior. While Snow does not refer to this as an example of self-cultivation, we see that it aligns with Slote's definition given that her resolve to improve is deliberate, provided that it is carried out and accomplished through her own efforts, and I see no reason to think that it wouldn't be. In both Snow and Slote's examples, there is an event that initiated the process of self-cultivation, and in both cases, the event is a conversation with another person. I'd go one step further to characterize the event as one in which another person makes the agent aware of their undesirable behavior by calling them out for the undesirable behavior. This kind of event occurs quite frequently. Among the three different examples of self-cultivation I offered earlier in the paper, "*The Argument*" illustrates this point. Mary does not tell Auggie to improve his character, but rather makes a remark that triggers self-cultivation. It could also be argued that Frank's fortune cookie also initiates self-cultivation. Anecdotally, I could point to countless instances in which I have called out another, or have been called out by another, for undesirable behavior. I'm sure that this happens for others as well. Finding frequency in the initiation of self-cultivation through input or intervention of another shows that we shouldn't be concerned with having opportunities for self-cultivation.

Being made aware of our faulty behavior by another is not the only way moral self-cultivation can be initiated. It can be initiated indirectly, through individual reflection. With minor modification, the case of the factory owner could serve as an example of moral self-cultivation. After seeing the faces of his employees and reflecting on his behavior, if instead the owner had a desire to change his behavior, then it could have initiated self-cultivation. The desire would account for the missing deliberateness that was precluding it as an example of self-cultivation. The effort to improve did not depend on the input or intervention of another.

Even if the above case seems rare, I would contend that there are similar kinds of cases that occur regularly. For example, Jones could observe Smith behave in such a way that is different than the way Jones

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<sup>76</sup> Snow, *Social Intelligence*, 34.

would normally behave, and without any kind of communication whatsoever, Jones could begin to reflect on Smith's behavior and determine that his behavior was more appropriate or desirable than the way Jones typically behaves in such a situation. Imagine that Smith and Jones are in line at Starbucks. "Hello, sir, what can I get started for you today?" the barista asks. Jones flatly says, "Tall drip, room for cream," swipes his credit card, takes his drink, and heads over to the end of the bar to add cream and sugar to his coffee. While doing so, he notices Smith's interaction with the barista. "Hi, may I please have a venti decaf?" "Room for cream?" the barista asks. "No, thank you." Smith swipes his credit card, and wishes the barista a pleasant afternoon while putting change from his pocket into the tip jar. Jones could easily reflect on the way in which the two interactions differ, and surmise that Smith's behavior was more correct than Jones'. The next day, Jones heads to Starbucks, and upon recalling his earlier reflections, deliberately includes "please", "thank you", and "have a nice day" in his interaction with the barista, in an effort to be more polite. It is perception and awareness alone that triggered Jones' self-cultivation. I will elaborate upon the features of perception and awareness later on in the paper.

I seriously doubt that examples similar to the one I illustrated above don't occur on a regular basis. If Slote counts this or catching sight of employee's faces as a kind of input or intervention, then he is working with too broad a conception of the terms. It is thus that self-cultivation does not always depend on the input or intervention of another to be initiated, which thereby waves off the "unusual and unrealistic" challenge. Even if it comes about in this way, it in no way undermines the validity of the individual effort that self-cultivation requires. Under my account, what is essential for self-cultivation is that the process is self-driven; the trigger event does not take away from the individual efforts that the agent must continuously put forth in order to improve her character trait. I grant that others may put effort toward another agent's moral improvement and make it such that the process is not carried out by the agent alone. This does not require us to alter our conception of self-cultivation. Rather, I attribute a different name to the instance of cultivation with the assistance of others: collaborative-cultivation.

Collaborative-cultivation occurs when an individual undergoes moral improvement and acquires a character trait *with help from another*. Collaborative-cultivation can occur in various ways since efforts can be exercised at various degrees. Others can make small contributions in the form of assisting in the planning. Consider an agent who wants to become friendly, but does not know how to. She could avail herself of another to come up with ideas for opportunities to exemplify friendliness. On a larger scale, another person could support the agent throughout the process, like an 'accountabilabuddy', or alternatively, bring the agent to change the beliefs or desires necessary for change.

A slightly modified version of Slote's case of the unsympathetic husband could serve as an example of collaborative cultivation. Suppose instead that once the husband realizes he wants to be more sympathetic

towards his wife's family, he and his wife work together to make plans for improvement. She suggests reading historical novels and he decides to read editorials by interracial authors. He relies on her for subtle cues when he deviates from sympathetic behavior, but eventually successfully changes his character by changing the dispositions that give rise to certain kinds of beliefs and desires. This is an example of collaborative cultivation because his wife participated in her husband's moral improvement.

While Slote's original version of the unsympathetic husband presents itself as an example of self-cultivation, this variation serves as a case of collaborative cultivation. The relevant factor that differentiates the two examples is the contributions of the wife, and the extent to which they facilitate in bringing about the new character trait. In Slote's version, the wife does not assist in her husband's moral cultivation. In the variation, however, the wife plays an active role in the reflection and responsiveness components of the cultivation process by brainstorming ideas for how to improve and by drawing his attention to instances of unsympathetic behavior he may unintentionally display, respectively. The variation does not count as self-cultivation on my interpretation because the husband has help from another person, even if it is only minimal help. Once moral cultivation is no longer an independent project, it is no longer a form of self-cultivation. What distinguishes self-cultivation from collaborative cultivation is whether the agent comes to acquire a new character trait entirely by his own efforts or whether he has been aided in the process.

Recall that I described Slote's criticism against self-cultivation as two-fold; it suggested that either such a process is unusual because it is contingent upon others' to initiate it, and if initiation depends on others, then we should not be entitled to think of the process as independent as it is thought to be. My comments above allow me to dismiss the first fold because we can point to many ways in which others can, and do, initiate another's self-cultivation. Moreover, it is highly likely and reasonable to anticipate that agents can initiate their own self-cultivation by way of self-reflection. Sometimes self-cultivation only occurs because of another's intervention, but the trigger event does not put direct pressure on my account. It does, however, bring to light that moral cultivation is not always an independent project. It is not apt to refer to such instances as self-cultivation, but rather *collaborative cultivation*. The distinction lies in whether an agent whose moral character is under construction receives contributions from another. Both forms of cultivation are forms of *active cultivation*. Although I advocate self-cultivation as the route to virtue acquisition, I think allowing others to play a role in our character development and accept that others do play a role in our character development facilitates agents to reach tier 1. It is at this point that I turn our attention to the space between tier 1 and tier 2.



#### Section IV: Active Virtue Cultivation

To reiterate, the above account of active cultivation in the forms of self-cultivation and collaborative-cultivation are methods for – what I refer to as “tier 1” – character improvement and acquisition of desirable moral character traits (which are the kinds that we find among responsible moral agents). The above account of active cultivation, however, will not be sufficient for – what I refer to as “tier 2” – becoming virtuous. Active cultivation enables moral improvement of specific character traits, and can therefore lend itself to virtue acquisition, although it will require higher standards. The higher standards will mirror the higher standards of virtue theory. What follows is an explanation of what distinguishes active moral cultivation from active virtue cultivation.

Active virtue cultivation requires the same kinds of skills and efforts on the part of the moral agent that is required by active moral cultivation. An agent must engage in self-reflection and self-awareness, must engage her perception and responsiveness, and must put forth deliberate and continuous effort toward her improvement. The differences become apparent when we appeal to the traditional requirements of virtue. The additional conditions that separate virtue from character fuel the additional facets of virtue development compared to character development.

In order for an agent to be virtuous, she must (i) do the right thing in a given situation, (ii) know what the right thing to do is, (iii) do it for the right reasons, and (iv) feel a particular way while doing it.<sup>77</sup> Active moral cultivation (Tier 1) only requires (i): that the agent do the right thing in a given situation. Ideally, the agent would also (ii) know what the right thing to do is, but I think ignorance should not preclude an agent from having a character trait. Surely we could imagine an agent who is humble but does not know that he is humble, perhaps because he has never reflected on the nature of humility and to what extent he exhibits it. His self-awareness would be limited to not recognize this, but it is nonetheless possible and plausible. I do not want to deprive him of his humble character trait simply because he does not know his behavior is what he should be doing. I do, however, think that these are rare cases, and that generally recognition of the right course of action will be present when an agent has a given character trait.

Reaching Tier 1 additionally does not require (iii): that an agent perform the right action for the right reasons. It is not rare for celebrities to donate large sums of money toward humanitarian efforts but be criticized that their actions are publicity stunts. Even if they only donate for attention or to enhance their profiles, repeated donations cannot be trivialized as miserly. Rather, we would accept that these people are generous. Character traits are not determined by motivations, and this marks a distinction between tier 1

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<sup>77</sup> Rosalind Hursthouse and Glen Pettigrove, "Virtue Ethics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed November 14, 2017, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/ethics-virtue>.

and tier 2. Virtuous agents must perform right actions for the right reasons, and failure to do so would preclude possession of virtue.

Finally, the possession of a character trait does not require (iv): that an agent have a particular emotion or attitude that accompanies her actions, although the possession of a virtue does require this. This condition is perhaps the most striking distinction between character and virtue. While I find (ii) and (iii) are not *necessary* for character, I think that they will probably be present. Having dispositions to form certain kinds of beliefs and desires that give rise to particular actions is essential to character traits, and so certain mental activity will be present. I suspect that activity of determining the right course of action and doing it for the right reasons will be present, but because there are rare cases in which it is not, I do not take these criteria to be necessary for character development. Having the right kind of emotion or attitude that accompanies behavior is far less likely to occur. Nevertheless, I maintain that these facets ought to be encouraged during explicit character education because they are essential to virtue development.

Having differentiated character from virtue, we now can see the additional requirements for active virtue cultivation compared to active moral cultivation. An agent must engage her self-awareness to a greater extent for virtue cultivation. She must be aware of the reasons for her actions so that she is performing her actions for the right reasons. She must also be aware that it is the right course of action in a given situation. Virtue cultivation will require that her actions are accompanied by the right kind of attitude or emotion. This means that she must be additionally aware of her attitudes and emotions as she acts.

Recall that my account of self-cultivation is a self-driven process that requires self-awareness, perception and appropriate responsiveness, and (continuously) deliberate effort. If an agent is engaged in the process in order to develop a virtuous trait, she will also need to do these things, but catered specifically towards virtue. This means that the subject of her reflection and deliberation will be for the purpose of determining the right course of action, the reason(s) why the action is correct, and the appropriate attitude that ought to accompany her behavior. Her continuous deliberate effort will emerge as she does the right thing for the right reasons and has the right attitude when she does the right thing. Ultimately, developing certain kinds of character traits lies not only in changing behaviors, but also changing mental states. Developing certain kinds of virtues, insofar as virtues are types of character traits, requires that an agent not only act and think in particular ways, but also feel particular ways. An agent who seeks to acquire the character trait of compassion need not feel compassion when acting, but the agent who seeks to acquire the virtue of compassion will.

In the previous chapter, I put forth several examples of self-cultivation. None of these examples necessarily serve as paradigm examples for virtue development because the mindset of the agents was not stipulated in the examples. In fact, it could be argued that in *The Argument*, Auggie is not on the path to

acquiring the virtue of sympathy because he is doing it for the wrong reason: namely, to prove Mary wrong. In *The Driver*, however, we see the possibility that Jane not only changes her character to become more patient, but that she could acquire the virtue of patience. In accord with the four aforementioned requirements, and she knows what the right action is (to not tailgate the driver ahead and to be more patient), she does the right action (refrains from tailgating and practices patience). If she does it for the right reasons, and has the appropriate emotion when acting, then the example lends itself to virtue self-cultivation. I continue to emphasize this cultivation is the independent form (self-cultivation) because I find my account of collaborative cultivation to also enable virtue acquisition. The primary distinction between moral self-cultivation and collaborative cultivation is that the former is an entirely independent project, while the latter is influenced by the contributions of others. As long as the agent is meeting the requirements of virtue, it is irrelevant whether she had assistance in arriving to the actualization of the behaviors. That is to say, Jane could just as well acquire the virtue of patience if someone were next to her telling her not to tailgate, or more preferably, engaging in a discussion regarding why her behavior is undesirable and how she ought to behave instead. Similarly, Slote's example of the unsympathetic husband, which I characterized as a form of collaborative cultivation, could also lead to virtue acquisition, again, provided that the husband knows he is doing the right action for the right reason, with the right attitude.

Active cultivation – whether in the form of self-cultivation or collaborative cultivation – is essential for character development. This process requires moral agents to activate certain skills that they must become proficient in, which gives us reason to create opportunities for agents to learn and foster these skills. I believe that character education is the ideal context for teaching active cultivation, but must centralize skills of self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness. Enabling students to improve their character traits and equipping them with the means to become virtuous should be the ultimate goal of any program that promotes moral responsibility.

### **Chapter Three: Skepticism about Self-awareness**

In the previous chapter, I put forth a two-tier account of character development that distinguishes acquiring a character trait (tier 1) from acquiring a virtue (tier 2). I advocated active, agent-driven cultivation as a promising method for reaching these tiers. Self-cultivation and collaborative-cultivation both require a moral agent to actualize skills of awareness, perception, and responsiveness. These skills must be practiced and refined and therefore ought to be central to character education. Chapter 2 emphasizes the importance of self-awareness for moral development, but there is reason to take pause over whether the self-awareness – and the degree to which I call for it – is psychologically plausible. Skepticism has been raised about whether we can ever really have a clear picture of the operational factors in our actions. This chapter outlines some of the specific criticism regarding self-awareness and, in doing so, raises and responds to significant questions an account of character development that emphasizes self-awareness so heavily must address. In this chapter, I shift the discussion of self-awareness from its role in moral development to the process itself and its objects. The presence of enhancers and inhibitors arguably requires agents to attend to too many various factors that may influence their behavior.

#### **Section I: Enhancers and inhibitors as objects of self-awareness**

As already discussed, active moral cultivation – and therefore, active virtue cultivation – require a moral agent to engage her faculty of self-awareness in at least several different ways. Most significantly, she must be aware of trait-relevant beliefs and desires she has the disposition to form, as these give rise to behaviors that either work in favor or against the target trait. Christian Miller’s Mixed Trait framework presents an extra layer of self-awareness that would seemingly be required in any attempt of trait-improvement by way of “enhancers” and “inhibitors”. Recall that these are psychological variables that can influence a trait in such a way that they increase motivation to act in accord and in opposition with this trait. Enhancers include anger, frustration, shame, or threatened self-esteem, while inhibitors include guilt, empathy, negative affect, or activated moral norms. Miller claims that “these should be intuitive enough even apart from the psychological evidence; naturally a strong feeling of anger is going to make it more likely that someone behaves aggressively than he otherwise might in the same situation.”<sup>78</sup> If it is the case that enhancers and inhibitors can influence us to act contrary to the way we would were they not present, then it would be additionally important to be familiar not only with the concepts, but with the extent to

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<sup>78</sup> Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 50.

which they affect us as these are variables that could potentially spoil our efforts toward character and virtue acquisition.

Suppose Jack is one who behaves aggressively in situations when he is angry, but he is unaware of this fact. If he desires to have the trait of friendliness, then it would behoove him to be cognizant that anger influences his behavior, and to recognize when his anger has been triggered because otherwise his anger will unknowingly impede his moral cultivation efforts. In the process of self-cultivation, agents then need not only to be aware of external stimuli that could activate particular dispositions, but also be aware of internal psychological components that could influence the motivation for enacting that trait. This extra layer of self-awareness, however, arguably requires too much from moral agents to successfully engage in self-cultivation. Miller explicates the problem:

a person would have to keep track of an *enormous* amount of information. First, she would need to be educated about the existence and influence of dozens and dozens of unconscious Surprising Dispositions. Second, she would need to be mindful enough to check to see whether, when behaving a certain way, she might be influenced by one of them in a morally problematic respect. So the information needs to be stored, and then it needs to be available for recall and application in real-life situations. And this all needs to be done quickly enough before the moment – the emergency, the dropped papers, the opportunity to stand up for the right thing – passes by.<sup>79</sup>

Requiring an agent to attend to so many various operations would seem to fluster an agent's attempt to behave in the right way in a given moment, let alone behave consistently in the right way over time, let alone become virtuous. Snow speaks to this phenomenon in what she calls the 'paradox of striving'. "The paradox, a common phenomenon, occurs when we try too hard to act well and thereby spoil our efforts."<sup>80</sup> She identifies four different forms of striving that cause us to fall short of becoming virtuous: forcing, impulsivity, overthinking, and holding oneself to too high a standard. While her characterization of overthinking is illustrated in terms of asking oneself too many questions while trying to make a decision, one could argue that trying to be consciously aware of so many internal and external factors is akin to overthinking and thereby will spoil our efforts to acquire morally responsible character traits or virtues.

I would argue, however, that coming to familiarity with our enhancers and inhibitors is a large project initially, but that with practice, we will not have to consciously attend to all potential internal and external variables, as introspection paves the way to automaticity. I find it plausible that we can come to learn that we have certain triggers when we take time to understand what possible triggers are, and how they may appear by thinking about the kinds of circumstances we regularly find ourselves in through the process of introspection. I suggest that agents begin this process by surveying how they behave in situations in which they regularly find themselves. Imagine Joe frequents the same donut shop every morning before

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<sup>79</sup> Miller, "Virtue Cultivation," 171.

<sup>80</sup> Nancy E. Snow, "Virtue Acquisition: The Paradox of Striving," *Journal of Moral Education* 45, no. 2 (2016): 179.

work. He can engage in introspection from the moment he sets foot into the shop by discerning whether he behaves in the same way each time he goes in and what kinds of things he is thinking about when he is there, e.g., whether he is attending to his circumstances or he is distracted thinking about work. Knowing that anger, guilt, shame, and other psychological factors can influence his motivation and behavior, he studies whether he ever feels these things in the donut shop and how this influences his behavior. Through introspection, he discovers that he is more motivated to tip when there are more people in line, but less motivated to tip when the shop does not have any fresh jelly-filled donuts (despite the fact that he only ever orders glazed donuts). While the work he has put in seems limited in application to other aspects of his life, I argue that this provides him with an object of reflection in other environments.

Joe's realization that his tipping habits coincide with the presence of people and lack of jelly donuts is useful beyond the jelly shop. Having this belief means that he does not have to walk into a different environment with a blank slate each time, hyper-attentive to his behavior and thoughts. Rather, he can enter an environment with more sensitivity to specific enhancers and inhibitors. Joe reflects on his proclivities and concludes that the presence of people increases his motivation to tip because he wants to look good in front of them, or because he is trying to set a good example for others, or out of consideration to the employees – he knows they are working hard to please the customers and wants to show his appreciation. Alternately, his motivation to tip decreases when there are no jelly-filled donuts – not because he cares specifically about the donuts – but because he sees the absence of a customer favorite as an indication of a lack of preparedness. His favorite donut shop has failed to meet his expectations, which triggers disappointment and resentment, and results in less generosity. In the course of engaging in introspection, Joe discovers that crowds trigger empathy and preservation of self-image, while not having expectations met triggers anger and frustration. Becoming aware of certain enhancers and inhibitors means that Joe has less to focus his attention to each time he enters a new environment, and thereby minimizes the amount to which he has to consciously attend.

While I think that self-reflection could likely help us see whether – and to what extent – we are affected by psychological variables like anger, shame, guilt, and empathy, it would require a great deal of self-awareness to know how they motivate us. With deliberate and continuous effort, it is possible to come to know what our enhancers and inhibitors are. To say that self-cultivation is overly demanding because we have too many factors to attend to when we have to also consider internal factors in addition to external factors is taking the cake. I find this line of reasoning to be faulty and it appears as such when we stack it against a skill such as driving. Driving requires agents to attend to more factors than we are likely able to explicate precisely because they have become something we can attend to non-consciously. I concede that my account of self-cultivation requires agents to engage their faculty of self-awareness to a greater degree

than they do in typical circumstances, but with practice, moral agents can gain the proficiency to not have to overexert themselves and ultimately spoil their efforts.

Miller provides a similar response regarding the concern that self-awareness asks too much of what can be reasonably expected from moral agents:

The advocate of this educational strategy could simply concede that there will be practical difficulties in the short run, but insist that over time this process of self-monitoring can become routine and habitual. At first I might not help someone, and only when it is too late recognize that fear of embarrassment was holding me back. The next time when a similar opportunity arises, I might find myself again inclined not to do anything, but this time I check my feeling of aversion and wonder whether it has any legitimate basis. Concluding that it does not, I consciously will myself to help in this case. Over time, the opposition to helping might go away entirely and helping in this situation becomes more automatic. Of course a lot of details would have to be filled in, but perhaps there is something promising to be said along these lines.<sup>81</sup>

While I am not able to fill in the details he speaks of, I can point to Snow's discussion of automaticity as a form of support. As will be discussed more in Chapter 5, people can come to have virtuous dispositions through repeatedly performing virtuous actions for the purpose of achieving virtue-relevant goals. Automaticity not only accounts for how virtuous actions can become effortless and habitual, i.e., performed without deliberation and deliberative effort, but also for how regularly performed actions can become habitual, and also performed without deliberation and deliberative effort. "Dual process theory in cognitive and social psychology maintains that the mind's workings can be explained in terms of two basic kinds of cognitive processes: controlled and automatic," Snow explains.<sup>82</sup> She cites Bargh to point out that the criteria for automatic processes include that

they are intentional in the sense that they can occur even in the absence of explicit intentions or goals, involuntary, occurring outside of conscious awareness, autonomous or capable of running to completion without conscious intervention, not initiated by the conscious choice or will of the agent, and effortless in the sense that they will operate even when attentional resources are limited (Bargh 1989, 3, 5).<sup>83</sup>

In this way, self-awareness that begins as deliberate and intentional can eventually become habitual and an automatic process.

## Section II: The process of self-awareness and its limitations

The potential influence of enhancers and inhibitors gives us at least one more variable that we need to attend to while making moral decisions and engaging in the process of self-cultivation. Even if we were able to successfully attend – whether conscious or non-consciously – to all relevant variables in moral

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<sup>81</sup> Miller, "Virtue Cultivation," 171-172.

<sup>82</sup> Snow, *Social Intelligence*, 40.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

situations, skepticism has been raised with respect to self-awareness itself. This section moves away from examining the objects of self-awareness and moves toward examining the process of self-awareness.

Eric Schwitzgebel holds that “the introspection of current conscious experience is both (i) possible, important... and (ii) highly untrustworthy.”<sup>84</sup> By introspection, he means the method we primarily use to reach judgments in certain kinds of cases. He claims that “most people are poor introspectors of their own ongoing conscious experience” because people are ignorant and prone to error.<sup>85</sup> He provides an example in which he is accused by his wife of being angry but denies it. He even reflects, and although he continues to believe that he is not angry, he comes to admit that he is wrong and that he in fact is angry. This example intends to reveal that we can be infallible judges of not only our own emotional experience, but other aspects of our phenomenology as well. “People reach vastly different introspective judgments about their conscious experience, their emotional experience, their imagery, their visual experience, their thought.”<sup>86</sup>

If Schwitzgebel is right in that our ability to reach precise and accurate judgments regarding our phenomenology is lacking, then it raises a serious problem for my account of self-cultivation with respect to self-awareness. As already discussed, self-awareness is especially important in the process of moral development so that one is able to determine whether she is successfully improving her character or not. When Jane decides that she wants to exemplify more humility, she has to be able to reflect on whether her actions exhibit humility, whether she is exhibiting humility in the appropriate kinds of circumstances, and whether her beliefs and desires are such that her dispositions will give rise to humility. If we are bad at introspection, then efforts to become virtuous or develop certain character traits are very likely to be foiled. Suppose Jane believes that she is exemplifying humility by being an active listener during a department meeting. She allows others to speak and when she is asked to voice her opinion on an issue, she compliments the ideas others have given before her. Jane earnestly believes she is successfully practicing and exhibiting humility and if she continues in this manner will acquire the character trait of humility. According to Schwitzgebel, however, Jane is ignorant and prone to error with respect to her phenomenology, and so she fails to judge herself correctly. In fact, Jane is presenting herself to her colleagues as both smug and self-deprecating. Her poor introspection draws her away from reaching her goal of humility. This picture illustrates a substantial problem for moral development: if self-awareness and introspection play such a significant role in character trait acquisition, and we are bad at introspection, then it becomes dubious whether we can successfully change our traits.

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<sup>84</sup> Eric Schwitzgebel, “The Unreliability of Naïve Introspection,” *Philosophical Review* 117 (2008), 246.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.



Ultimately, Schwitzgebel finds that “Our judgments about the world to a large extent drive our judgments about our experience.” (268) If he is right, then we have reason to be skeptical about the range or capacity of our self-awareness. Jennifer Saul further motivates skepticism of self-conception asserting that “what we know about implicit biases shows us that we have very good reason to believe that we cannot properly trust our knowledge-seeking faculties.”<sup>87</sup> She cites research that reveals that even perception – something I take to be instrumental to moral development – can be influenced by implicit bias. These studies show “that the very same ambiguous object is far more likely to be perceived as a gun when held by a young black man and something innocent (like a phone) when held like by a young white man... In some of these experiments, the subjects’ task is to shoot in a video game if and only if they see an image of a person carrying a gun. Subjects’ ‘shooting’ is just as you’d expect given their perceptions.” Saul concludes that these studies reveal that implicit bias is affecting our perception even before we have the opportunity to make active and conscious reflections, and that we have reason to be concerned about the way implicit bias is influencing our perceptions. “The studies of shooter bias show us that as humans in the world, we are making errors in perception due to implicit bias. The very data from which we begin in thinking about the world – our perceptions – cannot be relied upon to be free of bias.”<sup>88</sup>

If Saul is right that implicit bias has the potential to influence our judgments whenever we’re in a situation where we’re either perceiving or interacting with a person whose social group is apparent, then there is another serious concern stacked up against the self-awareness requirement for self-cultivation. It seems highly probable if not inevitable that we will find ourselves in situations where the social group of the person with whom we are interacting or perceiving is apparent, which therefore means that it is highly probable if not inevitable that implicit bias will influence our perceptions and judgments. This then raises the question of how accurate our perceptions are if they are being influenced in an unfair way. Saul’s account reveals that the problem of implicit bias extends beyond perception to reflection as well. One might be tempted to think, “If we knew that we were about to enter a situation in which implicit biases might impair our thinking, and we knew exactly which biases would be relevant, we could formulate appropriate implementation intentions, like ‘If I see black person, I will think ‘safe’...’”<sup>89</sup> But Saul asserts that this isn’t something we usually know, and we don’t know what sorts of cognitive task might be relevant. Reflection will not be a promising method because our reflection “takes wholly inappropriate routes: we are not only failing to assess claims or arguments by methods that we endorse but we are instead assessing them by methods that we actively oppose.”<sup>90</sup> Saul instead suggests combatting influence of implicit biases will

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<sup>87</sup> Jennifer Saul, “Scepticism and Implicit Bias,” *Disputatio* 37 (2013), 243.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

require us to re-shape our social world, and this is not something that can be brought about by individual self-reflection.

### Section III: Downplaying challenges

#### Part One: Introspection Deficiency

Schwitzgebel tells us that we are poor introspectors and that our introspection of current conscious experience is untrustworthy. I think the takeaway is not to feel defeated by the process, but rather to read this with optimism. To be bad at introspection arguably implies that there is room for improvement. Consider his report regarding a stack of papers:

The teetering stacks of paper around me, I'm quite sure of. My *visual experience* as I look at those papers, my *emotional experience* as I contemplate the mess, my *cognitive phenomenology* as I drift in thought, staring at them—of these, I'm much less certain. My experiences flee and scatter as I reflect. I feel unpracticed, poorly equipped with the tools, categories, and skills that might help me dissect them. They are gelatinous, disjointed, swift, shy, changeable. They are at once familiar and alien.<sup>91</sup>

This passage, to me, suggests that with practice and certain skills, he could draw closer to certainty with respect to the aforementioned experiences. I leave the task of building an account for how to equip people with the tools to be able to hold their experiences steady as they reflect and to be better in general at introspection to the experts. My goal here is simply to show that Schwitzgebel's thesis is not dooming; even if he is right and we are bad at introspection, it does not mean that there is not room for improvement.

Given that I do not have an explicit account of how to improve our introspection mechanics at this time, it would be apt to propose a temporary solution. I refer back to Schwitzgebel for the solution. He uses the example of his anger about doing the dishes as a way to support his faulty introspection:

Or consider this: My wife mentions that I seem to be angry about being stuck with the dishes again (despite the fact that doing the dishes makes me happy?). I deny it. I reflect; I sincerely attempt to discover whether I'm angry—I don't just reflexively defend myself but try to be the good self-psychologist my wife would like me to be—and still I don't see it. I don't think I'm angry. But I'm wrong, of course, as I usually am in such situations: My wife reads my face better than I introspect. Maybe I'm not quite boiling inside, but there's plenty of angry phenomenology to be discovered if I knew better how to look.<sup>92</sup>

With a closer read, we see that his wife plays an integral role in his coming to awareness of his anger. I argue that this is a callback to collaborative cultivation and offers us more reason to accept and promote it. If it is the case that the method we use to reach judgments is faulty, and reaching judgments is essential to self-cultivation, then we either need to improve that mechanism (as I earlier suggested), or we need to find

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<sup>91</sup> Schwitzgebel, 267.

<sup>92</sup> Schwitzgebel, 252.

an alternative method. Schwitzgebel's wife serves as the alternative method in the above case, which lends itself to the idea that others can reach judgments on our behalf. I interpret the claim about his wife reading his face better as a nod to the virtue of 'collaborative introspection'.

Strictly speaking, introspection need not be something that is entirely internal to an agent. I am not claiming that Schwitzgebel's wife could come to know her husband's mental states, but rather, that with her help, he can come to know his own mental states. She is not using the process of introspection to generate knowledge of his mind, but rather, she is *contributing* to him generating knowledge of his own mind. Collaborative introspection could include redirection of an agent's attention to specific features of his phenomenological experiences. When Schwitzgebel believes he is not angry, perhaps in his reflection he is attending to the cognitive features rather than the emotional features. His wife could direct him to the salient features that help him recognize that he is angry and what mental states are indicative of this.

My response here is twofold: even if we are bad at introspection, it does not mean that we are not able to improve at this endeavor. Schwitzgebel himself nods to this by the use of the phrase knowing 'better how to look' (from excerpt above). Secondly, I argue that we could improve our introspection through the help of another, and that we could come to self-knowledge of our mental states through what I call 'collaborative introspection'. If it turns out that self-knowledge need not only be an independent project, then I think this puts Schwitzgebel's skepticism to rest (or at least tones it down). It moreover validates collaborative cultivation as a promising method for moral development.

## Part Two: Implicit Bias

Saul proposes re-shaping our social world as a remedy for overcoming implicit bias. She claims that stereotypes "can only fully be broken down by creating more integrated neighborhoods and workplaces; by having women, people of colour and disabled people in positions of power; by having men in nurturing roles; and so on."<sup>93</sup> Abandoning the stereotypes that influence our judgments so greatly and eschewing the social regularities that sustain these stereotypes is the most promising route for tackling implicit bias. She notes that it is not clear whether these things can even be accomplished, but nonetheless maintains that "a sweeping and radical transformation of our social world" is the answer.<sup>94</sup>

While I believe that such a transformation would yield desirable results, I think there are other less radical alternatives that are interesting and worth highlighting. First, I take Saul's conception of implicit bias to be akin to stereotype activation as the latter designates that "certain features of a target, such as

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<sup>93</sup> Saul, 261.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

gender characteristics or skin color, can activate a stereotype and influence behavior without our knowing it.”<sup>95</sup> Nancy Snow draws our attention to the possibility of the prevention, interruption, and inhibition of stereotype activation:

Devine and Monteith (1999) describe a model of self-regulatory control by means of which stereotype activation can be repeatedly interrupted, and the stereotype eventually replaced with nonprejudiced patterns of responding. They introduce the model of Paula, who has a stereotypic response to a fellow shopper in a grocery store. The discrepancy between her response and her internalized standards rejecting prejudice causes Paula to feel guilty about her lapse (Monteith 1993, 470; Devine, Plant, and Buswell 2000, 192). According to Devine and Monteith (1999, 351), the fact that Paula has felt guilty and has considered her response for even a few seconds is important for decreasing the likelihood that she will make the same kind of prejudiced response in the future. Paula’s experience builds an association between the store environment, her stereotypic inference, and her experienced guilt. Because of these associations, Devine and Monteith (1999, 351-352) predict that Paula should think twice the next time a stereotypic response is possible.<sup>96</sup>

This illustrates the plausibility of subduing implicit bias without having to re-shape our social world.<sup>97</sup> “Devine likens the process of stereotype inhibition to that of breaking a bad habit – of trying to replace negative responses with self-controlled, positive reactions that accord with an agent’s personal standards and beliefs.”<sup>98</sup> The process requires that the agent desire and commit to breaking the bad habit, and deliberately decide and attempt to break the habit. New attitudes and beliefs will have to form in order to motivate the agent to break the habit. Guilt will be triggered when responses fall short of the new standards, and then awareness will play the final significant role; “awareness of the discrepancy not only causes self-directed negative affect, it also elicits heighten self-focused attention and subsequent efforts to control unwanted responses.”<sup>99</sup> This gives us reason to believe that there is a way to overcome implicit bias without requiring social reform. Through deliberate and conscious effort, individuals can change their beliefs and desires to give rise to new sets of actions, in a similar fashion to the process of character development.

At this point, I think we have reason to believe that while implicit bias can potentially affect our perception to the point where our perceptions become untrustworthy, and thereby compromise the integrity of self-awareness for its contribution to active cultivation, there is at least one additional way to respond. This consideration was presented earlier among Miller’s discussions for transforming Mixed Traits into virtue: by informing people about the processes that can influence moral behavior, e.g., subconscious forces and biases. There is reason to think education may play a supporting role in stereotype inhibition. Miller cites a study from Steven Samuels and William Casebeer in which they “contacted students from a social

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<sup>95</sup> Snow, *Social Intelligence*, 34-35.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>97</sup> The example of Paula challenges Saul’s point of view by offering an alternative way to overcome implicit bias. However, it remains unclear whether the example invalidates Saul’s concern, as Saul’s perspective directly opposes the idea that we could know or anticipate the kinds of contexts in which implicit bias is activated.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 35-36.

<sup>99</sup> Snow continues to support the view with additional research and more detail of the psychological processes that occur with respect to automatically generated responses. Snow, *Social Intelligence*, 36.

psychology class up to two years later, and for the question, “Did learning about helping behaviour lead you to help in any situation in which you believe you would not have otherwise helped?,” 72% answered positively.”<sup>100</sup> If learning about helping behavior could lead to helping action, it seems possible that learning about implicit bias and stereotype inhibition could lead to taking action to combat it.<sup>101</sup> This admittedly is not strong enough evidence to support education efforts; Miller notes that the question of whether experimental evidence will support the educational strategy remains, “since right now we have hardly any evidence with which to test it.”<sup>102</sup> In fact, it should be noted that strong criticism against this approach exists. Graham Haydon questions whether education could successfully equip us with this kind of awareness. He claims that “we need to recognise the importance of situational and environmental factors. Situational factors may... be unpredictable and uncontrollable; at least we should not be over-sanguine that if only we could properly educate people they would be immune to such factors.”<sup>103</sup> Despite the limited research and skepticism that surround the efficacy of educating people about subconscious forces and biases, Snow provides the research that supports the plausibility of overcoming such processes.

#### **Section IV: Additional considerations**

This chapter has put the spotlight on self-awareness. My account of self-cultivation centralizes self-awareness as integral to the process of moral development. For that reason, it is essential to raise and respond to any potential skepticism or criticism, especially with respect to the psychological processes that motivate the process.

I delineate the concerns regarding the psychological considerations of self-awareness in two parts: the objects of self-awareness and the process itself. Self-cultivation already requires awareness of external factors that may influence our behavior. Enhancers and inhibitors as psychological variables that influence our motivation make up an extra layer of objects of self-awareness in the form of internal factors. Requiring moral agents to be aware of these additional factors runs the risk of compromising moral cultivation efforts. In this way, the presence of enhancers and inhibitors and the need for moral agents to be aware of them manifest a demandingness objection against self-awareness. I find that this objection can be mitigated when we view enhancers and inhibitors as something that we can study and with which we can familiarize ourselves. Enhancers and inhibitors need not be surprises; through introspection we can come to expect, and eventually, subdue them.

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<sup>100</sup> Miller, “Virtue Cultivation,” 169.

<sup>101</sup> The same remarks from fn. 94 apply here as well. Even if we were to learn about implicit bias, learning has its limitations and would not be able to override our deficiency in judging situations as ones that activate our bias.

<sup>102</sup> Miller, “Virtue Cultivation,” 172.

<sup>103</sup> Haydon, 69.

Psychologically-motivated skepticism comes full-force against the process of self-awareness and introspection. Schwitzgebel's account questions the trustworthiness of introspection and reveals that people are generally bad at introspection. Saul's account casts additional doubt on our faculties of perception due to the influence of implicit bias. If we are not able to trust our perception or introspection, and the corresponding processes are so integral to self-awareness, it raises the question of whether self-awareness can contribute to active cultivation in the way my account requires. I acknowledge these as two serious concerns, but I think there are at least two reasonable ways to respond to them. First, we should view introspection as a skill; if we are bad at it, then we should practice and improve in order to procure trustworthy self-knowledge. In the meantime, we can rely on others to assist us in coming to know our mental states and phenomenological experiences through 'collaborative introspection', in the same way that we can rely on others to assist us in moral development, i.e., 'collaborative cultivation'. Secondly, overcoming implicit bias will not require us to re-shape the social world as Saul suggests. Snow's integration of empirical research reveals that stereotype inhibition can jettison implicit bias, in the likes of breaking a bad habit.

Although I think there are plausible strategies for tackling poor introspection and implicit bias, these strategies will take time to get us to the point where we can overcome them. In the meantime, I do not think we should allow a cloud to sit over self-awareness. Miller cites research from Daniel Batson, a leading psychologist working on empathy, that reveals self-awareness as one variable for "supporting the role of activated moral norms as enhancers of helping".<sup>104</sup> The addition of the presence of a mirror facing participants in an experiment

ended up making a significant difference... What is the best explanation for the contribution made by the mirror? Batson appeals to research on psychology of self-awareness, in which objects like mirrors can, 'heighten awareness of discrepancies between behavior and salient personal standards, creating pressure to act in accord with standards.' In this case, the mirror served to highlight to the person the difference between what he believed was morally correct in this situation, and opposing temptation to act out of self-interest. The heightened awareness seemed to either create extra motivation to comply with the moral norm or lessen motivation to do the self-interested thing (or perhaps both).<sup>105</sup>

This research supports the idea that self-awareness plays an important role in moral behavior, and would therefore also play an important role in moral cultivation. I think we could infer from this experiment that self-awareness need not only be brought forth by objects like mirrors, but could also be present from the get-go by the agent himself. If self-awareness has potentially positive outcomes like adhering to moral norms or avoiding acting in accordance with self-interest, then we have reason to teach, foster, and nurture self-awareness. Character education programs are arguably the most fitting setting for this endeavor,

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<sup>104</sup> Miller, *Moral Character*, 94.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

provided that programs centralize teaching specific skills for the purpose of enabling students to become virtuous. Self-awareness is one of the integral skills for character and virtue acquisition. Skepticism over self-awareness forces us to take pause over whether most of us have the capacity to be aware of all salient internal and external stimuli in a given scenario, and whether our self-awareness is in a position to provide us with trustworthy results. These potential limitations call into question the appropriateness as well as the worthwhileness of teaching an inherently flawed process.

I contend that while the skeptics arm us with considerations that ought to be recognized since they have the potential to obstruct our path to virtue, we also have the wherewithal to minimize the effect of the potential hurdles. Enabling students to become virtuous by way of teaching skills such as self-awareness might be more demanding than we initially thought, but it does not mean that it is not possible, nor that we do not have good reasons to foster self-awareness. The potential limitations simply reinforce the importance of having explicit opportunities to practice, to learn, and to acquire strategies for combatting the potential setbacks.

## **Chapter Four: Character, Virtue, and Environment**

The previous section served to bring light on potential ways our efforts to becoming virtuous can be foiled due to our faulty internal processes. In Chapter 2 I argued that self-awareness plays a significant role in self-cultivation, but Chapter 3 raised doubts about the reliability of our faculty of self-awareness. While I suggested possible ways to overcome or at least address the underpinnings, they nonetheless importantly call attention to internal variables that may interfere with character development. This chapter pivots the previous discussion to explore the role and relation of one external variable to character development. Heather Battaly offers an alternative route to virtue acquisition by way of environment, but I reject her account, maintaining that virtue acquisition must be an active, agent-driven process. Nonetheless, recognizing environment as a primary external variable that can – and in some cases does – influence character and virtue acquisition is important when we are trying to determine viable and promising routes to becoming virtuous.

### **Section I: Environmental influence on character and virtue development**

#### **Part One: Alternative Accounts for Becoming Virtuous?**

Allow me to remind my audience that the primary goal of this project is to respond to Miller’s challenge of how it is that people become virtuous. While I strongly advocate for self-cultivation, I do not claim that it is the only method because one can become virtuous with the assistance of another, i.e., through collaborative cultivation. I bind these two methods together under the name of ‘active cultivation’ and present this mode in two-tier framework where reaching tier-1 is contingent upon acquiring a particular character trait, and reaching tier-2 is contingent upon acquiring a particular virtue. I claim that active virtue cultivation (either self-cultivation or collaborative cultivation) is not only the most promising path to virtue (tier-2), it is the only way to become virtuous.

My position is met with pressure from two opposing directions. Linda Zagzebski’s account of virtue acquisition directly challenges my allowance of two routes to virtue acquisition on grounds that only self-cultivation can lead to virtue. Heather Battaly, on the other hand, allows for our environment to equip us with virtue. “In short, Zagzebski argues that the qualities an agent comes to possess will not count as virtues or vices unless self-cultivation plays a role in their development,”<sup>106</sup> Battaly explains. There are several conditions that must be met in order for a trait to count as a virtue. Virtues are the kinds of things that a

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<sup>106</sup> Heather Battaly, “Developing Virtue and Rehabilitating Vice: Worries about Self-Cultivation and Self-Reform,” *Journal of Moral Education* 45, no. 2 (2016), 210.



person can be praised for having, but she can only be praised if she played an active role in developing them. Agents are responsible for their virtues, and to be responsible for a virtue means that one has played an active role in acquiring it: “for a trait to count as a virtue, the agent herself must be praiseworthy for coming to possess it.”<sup>107</sup> Therefore, Zagzebski argues, self-cultivation is necessary for developing virtues, and if self-cultivation did not play a role in acquiring the trait, then the trait is not a virtue.

Both Battaly and I criticize Zagzebski’s argument on the basis that there is at least one other way an agent can come to have a virtue, although we disagree on the alternative options. I have already laid out my account of an alternative to self-cultivation for virtue development: collaborative cultivation. Even under the collaborative cultivation schema, an agent has an active role in developing her virtuous trait. The point of contention would be whether the agent is praiseworthy if she had help. I think that she would be due to the amount of effort she has to put in to acquire the virtue. She has to continuously make deliberate efforts to do the right thing for the right reasons. She has to engage in introspection for the purpose of generating knowledge about her own mental states, which must be a first-person project.<sup>108</sup> Even if she has help with deliberation, introspection, and habituation, she is ultimately responsible for the trait that comes as a result of engaging in the process of active cultivation. I’d be inclined to denote the agent who acquires a virtue as a result of self-cultivation as more praiseworthy than the one who acquires it as a result of collaborative cultivation, but this is not a point that I will entertain. The main point here is that while I agree with Zagzebski that the moral agent who engages in virtue cultivation plays an active role in her moral improvement and is – at least to some extent - praiseworthy for acquiring a virtuous trait, I distinguish myself by allowing active virtue cultivation to be an independent or collaborative project.

To only allow for self-cultivation to lead to virtue development is too restrictive. Zagzebski’s account is valuable insofar as it emphasizes the active role the agent must play in her development of virtue. However, she fails to recognize that an agent can still play an active role while being assisted by others. As previously outlined, it is not apt to call this self-cultivation. Given that collaborative cultivation can also serve as a vehicle to virtue acquisition, self-cultivation is not the only way to become virtuous. Battaly agrees with this latter claim but offers an alternative strategy that is too far-reaching and based on an unorthodox interpretation of virtue. Her central thesis is that environments can equip us with virtues. I contend that virtue can only be a product of active cultivation, and therefore environments cannot contribute to the process given that they lack agency.

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<sup>107</sup> Battaly, 211.

<sup>108</sup> Eric Schwitzgebel, "Introspection," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed January 17, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/introspection>.

Battaly's rebuke of Zagzebski's account seems to hinge on the view that the virtues and vices do not have to be the kinds of things that one can be praised or blamed for, respectively. This is not a point I will spend much time with, since it serves more so as a condition for virtue, and more significantly, does not in any apparent way affect the process of either self-cultivation or collaborative cultivation. My issue with Battaly's account is that she holds it is possible "for us to unwittingly acquire virtues and vices from our environment, bypassing self-cultivation."<sup>109</sup> While I think our environments can have a strong influence on our characters, I reject the possibility of virtue acquisition to occur 'unwittingly'.

In order to motivate her argument, Battaly attempts to put forth a counter example to Zagzebski's claim that "self-cultivation is necessary for the development of virtues and vices."<sup>110</sup> Battaly interprets this claim to mean that any trait that has been acquired through any means other than self-cultivation is neither a virtue nor a vice. For this claim to be undermined, we need an example of a virtue or vice that has not been acquired through self-cultivation. Battaly provides several examples in which agents have acquired their vices through their environment, thereby demonstrating that self-cultivation is not necessary for vice acquisition.

The first example is that of Robert Harris, a man convicted of murder in the 1970s. As a child, he was abused, rarely touched, and abandoned by his parents. At age 22, he beat a man to death, and at age 25, he murdered two people. It is argued that Harris and others like him end up with the vice of cruelty as a product of their circumstances. In another example, our attention is called to children "who were 'raised' by the Hitler *Jugend*, or who are today 'raised' by the KKK, the Taliban, or ISIS," who acquire epistemic vices, as well as moral vices, from their environments.<sup>111</sup> Battaly flags two points from these examples. First, that none of the above agents were responsible for possessing their traits and therefore "weren't blameworthy... for possessing their traits, since they lacked control over them."<sup>112</sup> Secondly, it seems that the traits they did end up acquiring were in fact vices. "In short, Harris and the Hitler youth came to possess personal traits that made them bad as people and bad as thinkers. But this is just what vices are! They are dispositions of bad action and bad motivations that are grounded in bad conceptions of value."<sup>113</sup>

Battaly's examples depict agents, with vices, who have acquired them by way of something other than self-cultivation. In these cases, it was the agent's environments that equipped them with their vices. This falsifies Zagzebski's claim that self-cultivation is necessary for virtues and vices. Or, at the minimum,

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<sup>109</sup> Battaly, 212.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 213.

it demonstrates that self-cultivation is not necessary for developing the vices. While Battaly focuses on the vices, she maintains that the same argument applies to virtue.

Suppose that C and D both consistently consider alternative ideas. They do so because they value true beliefs, are motivated to get them, and correctly believe that considering alternatives will get them closer to the truth. I submit that both C and D have the intellectual virtues of open-mindedness, whether or not they are praiseworthy for coming to possess it. Even if we discovered that only C put in work to cultivate the trait, whereas D's trait was largely the result of his environment (suppose D was from a privileged family, and was lucky enough to be educated by enlightened institutions), we should not withdraw our judgment that D is intellectually virtuous. After all, D's psychology is just like C's – both care about and pursue truth and alternative ideas. Like C, D has the intellectual virtue of open-mindedness, even if he didn't self-cultivate it and wasn't praiseworthy for coming to possess it. In short, if C and D have identical dispositions of good action and good motivation that are grounded in correct conceptions of value, then the different etiologies of their dispositions shouldn't matter. Contra Zagzebski and Roberts, if a person's dispositions are indistinguishable from those of a saint, then we would count her as virtuous, even if she didn't cultivate those traits and they were produced by her environment.<sup>114</sup>

Battaly must believe that this provides us with the additional support needed in order to fully negate the necessity of self-cultivation for virtue development, as she does not offer further elaboration or explanation on how our environments can equip us with virtue. She takes the possibility of environments equipping us with virtues for granted, and I move to tear into this oversight.

## Part 2: Character Traits, Not Virtues

I agree with Battaly that self-cultivation is not the only way we can become virtuous, and I think that her account raises interesting and insightful considerations for the story of moral cultivation, but I find several missteps that expose the flaw in her position that virtue can be a product of environment. The first problem is that the account is incomplete, insofar as it is unclear how exactly environment equips people unknowingly with virtues. Battaly's account would suggest that our environment can equip us with virtues in the same way that it can equip us with vices, but I am not convinced of this due to the aggressive nature of vice acquisition.

The cases Battaly presents to motivate her argument are extreme cases. Suppose Miller is wrong and most people do have either the virtues or the vices or a combination of both. I strongly doubt that most people have acquired their vices in such extreme ways. Most people, especially in the United States, do not live in extremist environments, such as under the KKK or ISIS. In extremist cultures, we may point to inculcation as the grounds for vicious behavior; agents are instilled with specific kinds of beliefs and desires that will give rise to correspondingly vicious behavior. But is this what is happening in most cases in the U.S.? Even if inculcation occurs to some degree, I'd say that inculcation has to be relatively strong to cash

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 213.

out into virtue and vice, and it's not clear that such strong inculcation is occurring as regularly as Battaly's account implies. Failure to discuss everyday cases and the general population underscores the limited scope and incompleteness of Battaly's thesis.

If Miller is right that most people do not have either the virtues or vices, then Battaly's thesis is further under fire. If environment can equip us with virtue, but most of us do not have the virtues, then we cannot and should not see Battaly's account as a method for virtue development. Relying on our environment is not a promising or practical strategy. Even if environment can equip us with virtues, then environment is not effectively bringing enough people to virtue, given how few people truly are virtuous according to Miller. Even if all virtuous people acquired their traits through their environment, the rarity of virtuous people is enough to not support it as a promising mode for becoming virtuous. Battaly's account raises the question then for why some people would be able to be influenced by their environment to the point of becoming virtuous, but why most people are not. It seems, at best, that her account allows for rare cases.

Regardless of the shortcomings, I ultimately reject Battaly's account on grounds that it is based on a liberal interpretation of virtue theory. I stand by the interpretation of virtue theory that characterizes it as an active process. Virtue is something an agent actively works towards, rather than something that comes by happenstance. For an agent to become virtuous, she must know what the right course of action is, do the right thing, do it for the right reasons, and have the right attitude while doing it. She must engage her faculties of perception, awareness, and responsiveness, which, even if these could eventually become non-conscious processes, must at some point be conscious processes. This would then invalidate the possibility of an agent becoming virtuous without knowing it. It seems that she and I stand behind different readings of virtue theory, and this leaves us at a standstill.

To move past the standstill, I draw out two important points for argument: (1) we cannot become virtuous "unwittingly", and (2) our environment alone cannot instill us with virtues. Having spoken to the former, I turn to the latter. I reject the possibility of our environment equipping us with virtues, but do not dismiss the idea of environmental influence altogether. Battaly's notion that our environments have influential power is interesting and important for virtue theory, but I suggest weakening her account to where our environment can only go so far as equipping us with character traits. Under my two-tier framework of virtue development, environment can only get us as far as tier-1; to reach tier-2 requires moral agency that environments lack. The impasse lies in the mental states that distinguish virtues from traits: namely, motivations, goals, and conceptions of the good. I submit that our environments could shape us to behave in particular ways over time. For example, the culture of New York City is reputedly colder than that of cities in the Midwest. Assuming reputations hold, it is plausible that someone who lives in New

York City is consistently more uncompassionate towards homeless people than someone in Lawrence, Kansas. Battaly might argue that New York City has equipped the latter agent with the accompanying mental states to constitute an uncompassionate vice, but I am not willing to accept this without good reason because the discord may be simply behavioral. While it's possible that this agent has a disposition to form beliefs and desires that give rise to uncompassionate behavior, it is not necessarily the case that these beliefs and desires are of the vicious sort. The same could be said about the seemingly virtuous Kansan. Although he consistently acts compassionately towards the homeless, it is not necessarily the case that his behavior is motivated by virtuous mental states. It could be the case that he consistently gives change to the homeless, but it pains him to do so every time; this would indicate that he does not have the virtue of compassion.<sup>115</sup>

Moreover, we could imagine that these two agents switch locations for one reason or another. Let us suppose that the New Yorker moves to Kansas because his mother has become terminally ill and asked her son to be close to him in her time of need. The Kansan moves to New York to pursue a career on Broadway. At the beginning of his transition, he gives spare change to anyone who asks for it. But after some time of unemployment and experiencing consistent rudeness from others, he adapts to his environment and no longer even acknowledges those who ask him for money. The difference for him was neither an intentional or conscious process; it occurred without realizing precisely because he was not attending to his character. The New Yorker, undergoes a similar non-conscious transformation, but he develops patience as a result of a slower-paced environment and compassion as a result of being surrounded by strangers' warmth for his mother. Neither his patience nor his compassion is performed for virtuous reasons, and if his attention were brought to his actions, he would likely not have an adequate explanation for the change in his behavior.

It seems plausible, and likely, that without conscious commitment to their characters, both agents take on the behaviors of their surroundings. But again, without the appropriate motivations and attitudes accompanying their actions, they do not acquire virtuous traits. In this way, environment can unknowingly equip us with character traits, but it cannot equip us with virtues. Virtue acquisition is an agent-driven, active process that requires agents to be engaged with their experiences and aware of the mental states that influence moral progress. Character trait acquisition can occur passively, but I caution against this.

So far, I have responded to the idea of environment being the sole contributor to our moral development, especially in conditions when we are not actively attending to or participating in our development. Environment alone cannot get us past tier-1, but it is possible that it plays a role in getting us to tier-2. This role, however, will not be an active role, unless we conceive of environment in a narrow

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<sup>115</sup> Graham Haydon, citing research led by Robert Levine, indicates that people are less helpful in cities with faster paces of life, but a stronger indicator of helpfulness is constituted in population density. Haydon, 18.

sense. Understanding environment as the people around us or a specific group or institution allows us to identify the environment qua one of these groups as the other-agent in collaborative cultivation. In this way, environment could positively contribute to virtue development. For example, a board of administrators designing curriculum in such a way that it fosters moral development could count as an environment since they have agency and can contribute to an agent becoming virtuous, and the contribution could be sufficient to meet the minimum threshold of collaborative cultivation. But this only follows with a conception of ‘environment’ that is far too narrow. I think most conceptions of ‘environment’ are broader in that they go beyond groups of persons and include non-person entities, such our physical surrounding. A board of administrators is, strictly speaking, not an environment; it is a group of people. The administrators in conjunction with their immediate surroundings, e.g., the office in which they work, could qualify as an environment. The broader (and typical) understanding of environment could not qualify as a form of collaborative cultivation due to a lack of agency, and therefore reveals that environment cannot be thought of as actively aiding us in virtue acquisition. However, as we will see in the next section, environment can play a passive but significant role in virtue acquisition.

### Part Three: Environmental Influence

Modifying Battaly’s account to allow our environments to equip us with character traits, but not virtues, renders it especially meaningful for my account. Despite the fact that I do not fully endorse Battaly’s original thesis, her position is valuable and important to the discussion of moral development. Environment can influence both character and virtue development for better or for worse.

Although environments cannot make active contributions to one’s moral development, they can nonetheless interfere with moral development in several ways. First, it could be the case that an environment is unintentionally set up to defeat moral cultivation efforts. This could cash out in forms of the constituents of environments not caring about the moral character of those in their environment or not knowing how to make their environment conducive to moral development. Secondly, an environment can intentionally be structured to equip its constituents with negative character traits, albeit the wrong ones. By this, we can look to Battaly’s examples of the KKK or ISIS, or unaffiliated mindsets that promote nationalist or bigoted ideals, for example. Moreover, an environment can fail its constituents by taking on a value-neutral approach to moral education and not being involved in moral development because doing so would thought to be wrong. I speak to this line of argument in the next chapter. These examples indicate some of the different ways – whether intentional or not – that environment at the societal level can negatively affect virtue development.

Similarly, when we consider our environment at the societal level, we can also come up with ways – whether intentionally or not – that it can positively affect virtue development. It can care for its constituents’ moral well-being and be intentionally structured to equip them with positive character traits. This idea is the focus of the next chapter. I think it is additionally important to find other ways to support initiatives for character improvement at the societal level, but this is not something I will explore further since it is not the primary focus of this project.

I suggest that one way our environments can influence character is at a higher level, understood in terms of societal structure. This influence can manifest in both positive and negative ways. Environment can also play an influential role at a lower level, by way of variables that we encounter within our environment. Some of these variables we can control, others we cannot. The primary example of this latter kind of variable would be other persons. We rarely have control over how other people will behave when, say, standing ahead of us in line at the grocery store. This is to be expected as most of our fellow shoppers are autonomous beings, and we generally believe in reverence for autonomy (even if sometimes we wish they would step out of line in order to reduce our own time spent in line). The people ahead of us in line can influence our moral behavior in ways illustrated throughout this paper; their politeness or rudeness can trigger us to behave in similar ways. For example, suppose in the case of Smith and Jones, a third customer, Anderson, stands immediately behind Smith. Anderson notices Smith’s politeness and mirrors his behavior. Mere perception of Smith’s behavior results in Anderson’s similar behavior.<sup>116</sup> Studies suggest that “one’s behavior passively and unintentionally changes to match that of others in one’s social environment.”<sup>117</sup> If this is the case, then we have good reason to believe that the people who surround us can inadvertently influence our moral development.

However, this finding should not leave us feeling hopeless or defeated about our ability to improve. Recall that Smith did not mirror Jones’ behavior. This reminds us that behavior will not always be determined by those around us. There are several plausible explanations for why Smith exhibited polite behavior despite perceiving Jones’ lack thereof. First, Smith could have been deliberately trying to be polite, and deliberate focus on behavior overrides non-conscious mirroring. Smith could have, upon perceiving Jones’ behavior, been reminded of his own goals to create a stable character trait of politeness and intentionally behaved politely out of self-interest, or alternately, to try to make up for Jones’ behavior. Secondly, if Smith were not actively cultivating his politeness trait but already had it, then it should follow that he behaves politely regardless of how others behave. Neither of the above readings is rooted in psychological research, so we may have reason to be skeptical about their legitimacy. However, a

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<sup>116</sup> T.L. Chartrand and J.A. Bargh, “The Chameleon Effect: The Perception–Behavior Link and Social Interaction.” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 76, no. 6 (1999), 893-910.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 893.

psychologically-informed read could hold that Smith did not mirror Jones' behavior because the effects of mimicry "are more likely than not to have positive, desirable effects for the individual and for the groups to which he or she belongs."<sup>118</sup> This indicates that it would not behoove Smith to mirror Jones' behavior and therefore does not.<sup>119</sup>

Admitting the existence of such significant variables within our environment that can affect moral development (in addition to the environment itself) can leave us feeling more skeptical than ever before as to whether character development can occur, whether its occurrence is within our control, and if it is within our control, how it could successfully occur. I argue that there are at least some variables in our environment that we can control. The following section points to different strategies for confronting environmental influence.

## **Section II: Strategies for resisting and capitalizing on environmental influence**

I believe that there are a variety of strategies we can develop and implement for the purpose of resisting negative environmental influence as well as for taking advantage of positive environmental influence. I offer four suggestions that I direct toward individuals, but think they would have the most success if they were implemented and carried out at the environmental level. I flag the following four strategies: awareness of environmental influence, creating and situating ourselves in certain kinds of environments, and arming ourselves with certain skills.

In order to be able to control certain environmental factors, we have to be aware of these factors, which further emphasizes the importance of awareness. As I argued in Chapter 3, awareness of variables is crucial so that we can figure out how to best position ourselves to override – or at least not be as susceptible – to these variables. We can attend more to the factors that enter our periphery by forcing ourselves to be more attentive to stimuli in our environment. This may require practice to know what to look for, but as Snow demonstrates, it is possible to train ourselves to become more aware.

Let me paint a picture: Jane takes a coffee break immediately before the daily morning staff meeting. This is a popular time for coffee breaks, as the break room is typically busy and rowdy. She begrudgingly goes to the staff meeting, which she abhors because she finds her colleagues to be incredibly unpleasant. Jane is usually so off-put by the meeting that she is unproductive until after she returns from lunch. One day, however, she is tied up on a phone call and is unable to take her coffee break before the

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<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 907.

<sup>119</sup> The extent to which non-conscious mirroring is bound up in moral and non-moral societal norms remains unclear, but it seems we have reason to believe that norms play a significant role in our moral behavior, and therefore, our moral development.



staff meeting. The meeting goes surprisingly smoothly and she is productive immediately upon returning to her desk. What Jane doesn't realize is that going to a busy coffee room before the staff meeting causes her to be cranky; the break room is always messy, there tends to be less than a full cup of coffee in the pot, and her colleagues are loud and inconsiderate. She doesn't attend to these variables and therefore doesn't realize that there is a reason why staff meetings tend to be unpleasant. I argue that if she were aware of the influence of the break room on her interactions and productivity, that she would be able to take steps to mitigate the hostility. She could take her coffee break elsewhere or earlier in the morning, and consequently have more pleasant interactions and productive mid-mornings. Again, the point is not that she clean the break room or make sure there is a full coffee pot before she takes her break, but rather that being aware of the variables that influence her behavior allows her to be proactive in a way that she would not have been had she not been aware of the variables.

Once we are aware of the various features within our environment that affect our moral behavior, we can set ourselves up to withstand their influence. One way to do this is by equipping ourselves with a certain kind of skill set. The skills that underlie active cultivation are arguably most important. Once steadfast character in place, our dispositions and behaviors become reliable and withstand opposing forces, but to have character of this sort will require that we have acquired certain skills already. This further emphasizes the importance of previously identified skills of introspection, perception, and responsiveness, and also the less highlighted ones of perseverance and something akin to 'practical wisdom', or knowing how to live well.<sup>120</sup> Dedication, tenacity, and resolve are all important during the process of character and virtue development because it is inevitable that challenges will arise and agents need to be able to stay committed to reaching tier-1 or tier-2. Practical wisdom proves especially useful when an agent is aware of the presence of a negative environmental influence. Recall the case of Jane the Driver from Chapter 2: she knows that slow drivers trigger frustration and impatience. Without the skill or know-how for how to navigate and counter situations like this, she is susceptible to her environment. Just as successfully engaging in character or virtue development requires one to make plans, successfully resisting negative environmental influence also requires one to make plans, even though these plans might need to be derived and executed far quicker.

A final, two-fold suggestion for taking account of environmental influences while engaging in virtue development is to both create and situate ourselves in environments that are conducive to virtue development. In order do this, we first need to identify the salient factors that distinguish conducive

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<sup>120</sup> Sharon Ryan, "Wisdom," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed January 29, 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/wisdom>.

environments from those that are not. I will highlight several of these features. As discussed earlier, environmental influence can manifest on a large scale through the way society itself is set up or at a smaller level by way of the persons who exist within our environments. Both levels contribute to the conduciveness of virtue development. We might not be able to situate ourselves in environments that promote virtue at the societal level. To do so might require agents to move to a new city, state, or country, and I acknowledge that it would be unreasonable to suggest this as a strategy for fostering virtue. Therefore, I focus primarily on the smaller-scale.

We could imagine these environments as being ones that consist of positive role models, moral exemplars, or paradigms of virtue. It seems more likely that we would find these people in organizations like Habitat for Humanity or Big Brothers Big Sisters than we would to find them in a bar or brothel. We might even be able to identify them on social media and bring their presence into our environments. One might contend such environments to be so rare that situating ourselves in them is unreasonably demanding. I would respond that even if this is the case, we can and should nonetheless try. Constructing more environments that are conducive to virtue development will minimize the demandingness objection. One might also argue that environments are too dynamic to be able to designate as conducive or non-conducive to virtue. This is a point I take up in further discussion in the next chapter. Part of situating ourselves in the right kinds of environments will require avoiding other kinds. Miller notes that it would be “overly simplistic to think that we are going to be even remotely successful in avoiding all the subtle situational influences that can translate into significant effects on behavior... these environmental variables can include hot weather, pleasant smells, using hand wipes, a room cleaned with Windex, someone’s camera breaking, coming out of the bathroom, and so forth.”<sup>121</sup> Nonetheless, he also suggests developing strategies in order to be able to regulate them. There are some kinds of influences that are more obvious than others, as in the case of a flirtatious colleague.

The natural-follow up question then is how we can exert any autonomy on our environments given that they are imbued with such subtle situational influences. Miller points to psychologist Paul Wachtel who claims that we have a role in the way situations present themselves to us. The upshot of Wachtel’s view is that we can manipulate our environment by “mindfully selecting morally positive cues [that] might help call forth positive responses in others, which in turn can be reflected back on ourselves, leading to their joint reinforcement.”<sup>122</sup> Stimuli in some sense are created by oneself, and should be understood as responses to one’s own behavior and the events one has participated in bringing about. Miller notes the lack of research to corroborate these findings, but he seems optimistic.

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<sup>121</sup> Miller, *Moral Character*, 29-152.

<sup>122</sup> Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 237.

### Section III: Concluding remarks

Chapter 3 calls attention to internal factors that could interfere with the virtue cultivation process and raises skepticism about whether we could overcome these factors. In a similar way, Chapter 4 lays out another potential challenge by way of the external influence of environment. Battaly argues that our environments can equip us with virtues. If she is right, it forces us to take pause as to whether virtue cultivation must be agent-driven as I claim. I reject her conclusion and contend that her account instead supports the idea that our environments can instill us with *character traits* rather than virtues. In terms of my account of becoming virtuous, this means that environment can get us to tier-1, but not tier-2.

There are two significant implications to note: first, it reinforces the idea that virtue cultivation is an active process. To become virtuous, an agent must be engaged in the process and cannot rely on external influences to equip her with virtues. Likewise, it additionally reveals that even if we were able to find or create a perfect environment, it would still not be enough to transform agents into virtuous beings. However, it also underscores that environment can get us to tier-1, which validates the significant role environment has in character development. This means that although environment cannot equip us with virtue, it can facilitate our journey to virtue. Acquiring certain character traits (namely, the ones that morally responsible individuals have) is a stepping stone to virtue.

Although environment can play a positive role in virtue development, environment could negatively affect virtue development. This chapter focuses on the potential negative influences primarily because it serves as another potential challenge against my account of virtue cultivation. Even though I maintain that environment cannot instill us with virtues, it can nonetheless unknowingly instill us with traits, which means that if we are not attentive, we could find ourselves with undesirable character traits. I therefore propose four strategies for resisting negative environmental influence, but I also see these as being able to be used for taking advantage of positive environmental influence.

While I focus largely on combatting negative influences, we should not take the environment to be an impediment to virtue development. The same strategies I propose can – and should – motivate us to take advantage of the positive influence environment can have on character development. Environment can equip us with desirable character traits, which is an essential feature of virtue development since it means an agent has reached the first of two tiers under my two-tier approach. Given the potential positive influence of environment on character and virtue development, there is then an interesting and important question of whether we can maximize positive environmental influence, and if so, how we would go about doing this. The next chapter explores the idea of designing a specific environment in such a way that it sets itself up to foster virtue development.

## **Chapter Five: The Impetus for Character Education**

So far in this project I have argued for the stability of character traits in order to show that character traits are the kinds of things that we have control over. Our imperfect characters indicate that most of us do not have the virtues. This raises the question of whether it is possible to become virtuous, and if so, how we would go about doing this. I argue that the most promising method for acquiring the virtues is self-driven, active cultivation. It is important that people are able to take control of their characters and improve them, whether on their own or through the help of others. What is essential is that the process is active rather than passive.

My account of active cultivation has also been met with skepticism about whether our efforts can prove successful given various internal mental processes and external environmental components that are likely to interfere. While I believe that I can downplay the severity of these challenges, I nonetheless acknowledge that they present themselves as additional hurdles that we will have to develop strategies for overcoming. In the previous chapter, I suggested three key components that ought to be integrated in these strategies: being aware of the kinds of variables that may influence our behavior, situating ourselves in the right kinds of environments, and equipping ourselves with certain kinds of skills.

The natural question that follows is where do we go from here? I argue that we should not only mastermind the process of virtue development itself, but also the environment in which it occurs. Environment can affect virtue development, and so if it is our goal to acquire virtuous traits, then we should set ourselves up in the best position possible. This means not only engaging in active cultivation and situating ourselves in certain kinds of environments, but also creating environments that are conducive to virtue development.

This chapter pivots the project directly toward character education advocates. In presenting a viable method for becoming virtuous, I reveal that there are certain skills that underlie the method, that these skills need to be taught, and that character education is not only the appropriate setting for this, it is the ideal setting for virtue cultivation. It is thus that character education needs to be teaching particular sets of skills to enable students to become virtuous in an intentionally and specifically designed environment. This chapter provides a framework for what the ideal environment for virtue development might look like, with particular focus on the way to incorporate the essential features for virtue development.

The previous chapter indicated that while environment can affect character development and, in turn, virtue development, it offered several strategies for resisting environmental factors that can negatively influence development. I suggested that being aware of the variables is the first step, followed by creating and situating ourselves in the right kind of environment, and equipping ourselves with the means to combat

these influences. One question that follows is how to implement and incorporate these strategies. I argue that the classroom lends itself as the ideal setting for virtue development. Not only can these strategies be incorporated into course design, but it serves as an appropriate avenue for teaching the skills that underlie active cultivation and affords students with opportunities to practice these skills.

### **Section I: Comparing environments**

Virtue development is an active process with which an agent must be consciously and deliberately engaged. The level of difficulty of this process is bound to vary across agents, not only because of the agents themselves, but also because of the environments in which they find themselves. A supportive environment that lends itself to collaborative cultivation is far less likely to interfere with virtue development than an environment that combats or violates standards of virtues. Character trait acquisition is also subject to environmental influence, but unlike virtue acquisition, it can be an active or passive process. When it is a passive process, the work is being done by the environment. When it is an active process, environment can help or hinder. Given that environment affects character development, we can wage that some environments are more conducive to virtue development than others. This section sheds light on various features that distinguish environments conducive to virtue development from those that are not. When we aim to become virtuous, we should set ourselves up for success by situating ourselves in environments that are conducive to virtue development.

What does conduciveness of virtue development lie in? On a small scale, we can imagine environments that consist of people with unfavorable traits. Alternately, it is easy to be influenced by people who do not care to try to do the right thing, or blatantly disrespect the norms.<sup>123</sup> Consider seating distribution in a classroom with unassigned seating: from my experience, quite often, the students who sit in the front try to actively engage with the learning process, while those in the back tend to goof off or preoccupy themselves with something other than the class itself and thereby avoid engaging with the learning process. In this case, sitting in the front of the classroom is more conducive to learning than sitting in the back. A similar picture can be drawn in terms of moral development. Being in an environment that consists of people who actively attend to their character – and the character of others – is more likely to support virtue development than the environment that consists of those who do not or who disregard moral norms.<sup>124</sup>

If we return to the Starbucks case where Smith's polite behavior triggers Jones to improve his own trait of politeness, we can see the way in which the ideal environment can more specifically affect Jones'

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<sup>123</sup> Chapter 4 already alluded to this via the “chameleon effect”.

<sup>124</sup> I think coming to care about one's character and the character of others could have a role in character education, but I do not explore this possibility in this project. Others advocate cultivating care in education, e.g., Michael Slote, *Education and Human Values: Reconciling Talent with an Ethics of Care*, (New York: Routledge, 2012).

character development. The next time Jones goes to Starbucks, he finds a line at the register. Typically, this would generate a frustrated response, but with the new desire to be more polite, he realizes that the appropriate response is instead to follow suit with those ahead of him in the queue and wait quietly without staring down the baristas. However, so focused on his behavior in line, when he arrives to the register and the barista asks, “What can we get for you today?”, and he blurts out his usual order. The barista maintains a pleasant demeanor, which reminds Jones that he himself failed to be polite. Jones apologizes to the barista, the barista smiles and says, “Oh, no worries at all!” Rather than feeling defeated about his failure, Jones focuses on being polite in his next interaction. These kinds of failures do not impede one’s cultivation efforts, as we might see in an unideal environment.<sup>125</sup>

Let us imagine that at the same time as the above incident occurs, Anderson is across town at the other Starbucks. There, he finds people in the queue ahead of him, conversing with one another about how slow the baristas are and how they should never have to wait for their coffee. The baristas hear this and begin to chat amongst themselves about how entitled customers are on this particular day. Feeling as if the counter forced a dividing line, Anderson finds himself siding with the other customers and absorbs their attitudes of anger and frustration. When he reaches the register, the barista asks, “What can we get for you today?”, and Anderson barks his order. He recognizes that he failed to be polite, but with the fleeting thought that he is in fact entitled to coffee on demand, he does not believe the situation warrants an apology. Anderson’s progress to becoming polite is seriously impeded and possibly even set back due to the environment.

There are at least two important details to draw out from the above examples. First, the extent to which people attend to their traits as well as the traits of their compatriots and how attention to individual traits is exhibited among people varies between the two cases. The way other people perceive and respond to one another plays a significant role in both Jones’ and Anderson’s behaviors and thereby have a bearing on whether an environment is conducive to virtue development or not. Environments can influence character development because people are constituents of our environment, and the attitudes and behaviors of people are generally unpredictable variables. However, this does not imply that because people qua constituents of our environment are unpredictable that environments conducive to virtue development are unpredictable as well. It would also be wrong to conclude that the conducive environment is contingent upon how others behave because this would fail to consider other salient features of our environment that

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<sup>125</sup> We could also manipulate the case so that Jones does give his order to the barista politely as a result of seeing those ahead of him do the same. My hesitancy with using this variation in the contrast of the cases is that it could be argued that Jones is not engaging in active cultivation and that he is letting others’ behavior determine his own.

influence virtue development. I contend that conducive environments are not always unpredictable and spontaneous, but rather something that we can regulate and exert influence over. I will return to this shortly.

Another important detail to call attention to is the way in which Jones and Anderson exercise their moral faculties. Environments conducive to virtue development will afford people opportunities to develop, engage, and exercise the necessary faculties in the appropriate way. In both above examples, the moral agents engage their faculties of perception, self-reflection, and responsiveness. In the ‘conducive environment’ example, Jones *perceives* a queue and the patience that those ahead of him exhibit. He *recognizes* that he should follow suit, and he *responds* accordingly. However, in the ‘unconducive environment’ example, Anderson *perceives* a queue and the impatience that those ahead of him exhibit. He *concludes* that their behavior is warranted and *responds* accordingly. He also recognizes that he failed to behave politely, but he determines that an apology is not an appropriate response. However, their mental processes lead them to two different conclusions and correspondingly different behavior. I think the right way to explain this is by appealing to skill competence: had Anderson reflected properly in the latter case, he would have concluded that the behavior was not warranted and acted differently. A lack of proper reflection suggests that he did not reflect on the right kinds of things (such as his beliefs and desires), or that he did not recognize all of the relevant stimuli (such as the rudeness of the customers in line). If Anderson were to have had opportunities to develop these faculties, he likely would have responded differently.

Ideal environments will consist of people who are attentive to their characters and the characters of others. I recognize that we will probably not find ourselves in the ideal environment regularly, and we are more likely to find ourselves in environments that test our characters. Less than ideal environments may inadvertently cause us to absorb the behaviors of others, but this is not an end-all be-all because we have a way to resist the intrusion. While stimuli vary across environments, we have the means to control the way we respond to the stimuli. It is the mastery of certain skills that ensures that our character traits are enduring and longstanding and are not subject to environmental influence. With certain skills in hand, we can combat variables such as those that Jones encounters. This accounts for individual maintenance of patience even among an impatient crowd, and why environment does not actually dictate our own behavior. Therefore, it is essential that we are equipped with the right kinds of skills and that we have mastered those skills.

An environment that consists of morally responsible individuals is more conducive to virtue development than one that does not. This is not to say that we should rely on our environment to equip us with the virtues, but rather that since others can influence our characters and that other people are major constituents of our environment, then, given a choice, we should prefer an environment that consists of certain kinds of people, or environments that positively influence others’ traits. If we do not have a choice

in our environments, then we need a means for combatting any negative influence that may compromise our character traits. The means to do so lies in the mastery of self-awareness, perception, responsiveness, and related skills. Given that these skills are not innate, but rather learned, we need explicit opportunity to foster these skills.

However, while we may have little control over environments like Starbucks, I argue that there are some environments we are able to manipulate.<sup>126</sup> The possible control over certain environments does not downplay the importance of fostering skills for moral development. Rather, it reinforces the way in which environments can influence our behaviors and how important it is to be equipped with tools to resist negative influence. With the mastery of moral-development-relevant skills, we can exercise more autonomy and thereby be more in control of our moral character. This chapter provides an example of an ideal environment for virtue development, as designated by its conduciveness to fostering skills.

## **Section II: Creating and situating ourselves in the ideal environment (the classroom)**

Whether rare or not, the ideal environment for virtue development would consist of people who care about their characters and others' characters, and who actively improve or maintain desirable character traits. It would afford opportunities for moral agents to engage morally-relevant skills and to practice behaving in the right ways. Becoming virtuous is already an uphill battle; if we can remove hurdles or employ strategies to facilitate the process, then we should. I argue that the best way to do this is to construct or design environments conducive to virtue development, which will include equipping agents with essential skills.

The classroom is an example of an intentionally designed environment and should be structured to be conducive to virtue development. This happens by abandoning expectations for students to improve their moral character traits by imitating their teachers and for teachers to passively equip students with ideal character traits. "Ethical and character formation does not happen by chance. It cannot be fostered by indifference to ethical questions in the classroom. It must embrace a deliberate and planned-for pedagogy."<sup>127</sup> This pedagogy ought to include explicitly teaching the process of active cultivation which involves teaching the skills that underlie active cultivation. This will look at least to some extent different

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<sup>126</sup> We might not have control, but there is control at the overhead level. I would argue that any place of business like Starbucks sets itself up to be conducive to virtue development. In my experiences, I have seen anywhere from four to seven baristas behind the counter. If corporations like Starbucks mandated certain kinds of behaviors from their employees, we could imagine these behaviors affecting customers positively, whether the behaviors were fake or genuine would be irrelevant.

<sup>127</sup> James Arthur et. al., *Teaching Character and Virtue in Schools* (Oxon and NY: Routledge, 2017), 9.



depending on the age or maturity of the classroom's constituents (i.e., its students) because some skills may require certain capacities that are reliant upon development and maturity of other skills.<sup>128</sup>

The salient skills can be categorized to those of mental, emotional, and physical capacities, and further reduced to perception and responsiveness, self-reflection, and repeated performance. These are the key skills that enable an agent to engage in active cultivation, and therefore classrooms ought to be actively teaching such skills. It is essential that these skills are fostered. As previously argued, acquiring virtues – and thereby changing character traits – lies not only in behavioral change but cognitive and emotional changes as well. Agents must acquire dispositions that give rise to certain kinds of beliefs and desires. This is actualized in perception and responsiveness. For an agent to change her beliefs or desires requires that she encounters beliefs or desires contrary to her own, reflects on the discord and her own proclivities, and comes to accept new beliefs or desires. It is essential that an agent is able to self-reflect in order to understand her position in relation to those around her. Once aware of any differences, she must commit to certain beliefs and desires and act upon these in order to develop the dispositions that will give rise to corresponding behaviors. These are the skills and stages that have been emphasized throughout this project. This is a complex process and will likely not be able to be successfully carried out by someone who is in the learning stages; therefore, opportunities for practicing the skills and the process itself ought to have a place in the classroom.

The ideal environment need not only foster certain kinds of skills, it also must provide opportunities for students to practice these skills. Active cultivation is a process. Skills are not acquired in the same way that pieces of information are; a teacher can explain what a skill is and show a demonstration of it, but students do not have the skill the first time they perform the action. The skills that underlie active cultivation operate similarly to skills required in playing a sport. An athlete can see his coach kick a soccer ball into a net, and by chance, do it once on his own, but this does not mean the athlete has acquired the skill of scoring. He must repeat the action, and over time, must be presented with obstacles to increase his skill level. There is a significant difference between kicking a ball from five feet out on an empty net compared to outrunning defenders and scoring on a keeper. This example appears throughout competitive sports. The analogy furthermore serves to illustrate that there is a significant difference between practicing a skill in an isolated, controlled environment compared to an unpredictable chance encounter. Moreover, building dispositions lies in repetition. When Jones behaves politely once in Starbucks, he does not have a disposition to behave politely. He must repeat the behavior with the corresponding mental states repeatedly. When it comes to the classroom, teachers can demonstrate a trait such as honesty, engage students in a discussion of honesty,

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<sup>128</sup> I leave up to developmental psychologists to determine where the differences lie and its implications for moral development.

ask them to demonstrate it, etc.<sup>129</sup> It will also be necessary for students to repeat the appropriate behaviors with the corresponding mental states.

Earlier I emphasized the importance of attending to one's character and others' characters in the ideal environment. This indicates that care is something that also needs to be encouraged and supported. Care need not be cashed out in terms of engaging certain emotions, but can rather be a commitment to engaging morally relevant skills for virtue development and maintenance. It can be fostered through empathy cultivation. Although my account of active cultivation for becoming virtuous has not yet explicitly discussed empathy, I would not reject initiatives to support empathy cultivation in the classroom, as there are reasons to support such initiatives.<sup>130</sup>

Ideally, with skills in hand, students become moral agents that can face moral adversity. Had Jones been a product of the kind of classroom described above, it is likely that his encounter with impatient customers in Starbucks would have transpired differently. Instead of concluding that impatient behavior was warranted, reflection of standards of patience would have resulted in a response of patience. Even if he failed to exhibit patience, he would have nonetheless apologized because the stimuli present would trigger the response apology.

The goal of this chapter so far has been to identify facets of environments that are conducive to virtue development, and to present the classroom as the ideal setting for virtue development. The nature of the classroom lends itself to intentional design, which means that it can be structured in such a way that it becomes conducive to character and virtue acquisition. As we become more informed about moral development, we can incorporate new strategies into classroom design. For example, if new empirical research reveals a new method for making ourselves more attuned to specific enhancers and inhibitors, classroom design could be altered to integrate the method into lesson plans. The following section presents and responds to challenges specific to character education. These charges speak to the problems of indoctrination, moral motivation, and moral neutrality. What we will come to see is that the skills-based approach to character development I advocate is able to resist these charges.

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<sup>129</sup> It may turn out that the key to successful performance by way of repetition lies in a gradation of opportunities. This means that the first performances may be simple but over time will become increasingly more complex. The timeline for complexity likely hinges upon child development. Again, I turn to developmental psychologists to determine what would be appropriate.

<sup>130</sup> Lauren Owen, "Empathy in the Classroom: Why Should I Care?", Edutopia, accessed February 5, 2018, <https://www.edutopia.org/blog/empathy-classroom-why-should-i-care-lauren-owen>.

## Section II: Objections and replies

### Part One: Indoctrination

As iterated throughout this project, character and virtue development requires an agent to have certain kinds of beliefs and desires. It seems unlikely that students will come to have the right kinds of beliefs and desires on their own, which then means that either character education attempts will likely be unsuccessful, or character education will have to instill these beliefs and desires into their students. Both scenarios are unfavorable, but the latter has additional negative consequences attached. As mentioned in Chapter 1, one of the most common and arguably significant criticisms against character education is that of indoctrination (even though there is a lack of consensus on how to properly define ‘indoctrination’).<sup>131</sup> I propose Eamonn Callan and Dylan Arena’s characterization of indoctrination as being “some kind of distortion in teaching that produces belief, a distortion liable to induce some corresponding failure in students’ understanding of the relevant subject matter, and the practice is prompted, at least characteristically, by a misplaced or excessive concern on the part of the teacher to inculcate particular beliefs.”<sup>132</sup> Current installments of character education are criticized in various ways; the most common (and perhaps significant) criticism is that “the preferred method of instruction is tantamount to indoctrination.”<sup>133</sup> Instilling specific kind of beliefs and desires will cause character education to fall prey to the charge, and would additionally violate core values of education such as autonomy, reasonableness, and open-mindedness.

Reasonableness is also compromised when instruction is operating under the guise of indoctrination. Reasonableness “places a premium on supporting one’s beliefs and actions with reasons”.<sup>134</sup> If instructors are telling students what to believe without providing reasons, students may internalize this strategy and view supporting reasons as unnecessary or possibly not understand why one would give reasons for his beliefs. This disrupts the facilitation of reasonableness, which in turn disrupts “the calculative, the imaginative, the affective, the situated and the kinaesthetic aspects of thinking.”<sup>135</sup> More significantly, autonomy requires reasonableness, and so if indoctrination impedes reasonableness, it will also impede autonomy.<sup>136</sup> Autonomy by its very conception requires the ability to make one’s own decisions, or “the

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<sup>131</sup> Haydon, 106.

<sup>132</sup> Eamonn Callan and Dylan Arena, “Indoctrination,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, ed. Harvey Siegel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 105.

<sup>133</sup> Kohn, 130.

<sup>134</sup> Michael S. Pritchard, *Reasonable Children: Moral Education and Moral Learning* (Kansas, University of Kansas Press: 1996), 3.

<sup>135</sup> Sprod, 14.

<sup>136</sup> Sprod, 46.

ability to choose reasonably which action to take.”<sup>137</sup> For Tim Sprod, reasonableness and autonomy are intimately related, but as they are distinct concepts, indoctrination compromises both components that have a place in the education process. “To the extent that one’s educational aim is to promote the rational autonomy of one’s pupils, one is not trying to impose ideas on them, but to enable them (*empower them*, as current jargon inelegantly expresses it) to deal with ideas themselves.”<sup>138</sup> Additionally, lessons that students learn may not endure beyond the classroom. This interferes with another ideal of education, namely that of “enduring” understanding.<sup>139</sup>

The question then becomes one of how we can successfully enable students to become virtuous without committing indoctrination. I argue that by teaching skills, rather than beliefs, we can avoid the problem altogether. “Charges of indoctrination do not ordinarily apply to the teaching of skills or know-how: driver education is no doubt a practice in which wrong can be done, but teaching people how to steer a car or brake safely is not a context in which indoctrination can intelligibly occur.”<sup>140</sup> If virtue is like a skill, as Julia Annas suggests, then we can see that the charge loses force.

Annas claims that “the way in which the acquisition and exercise of virtue can be seen to be in many ways like the acquisition and exercise of more mundane activities, such as farming, building, or playing the piano.”<sup>141</sup> This is similar to the view I have been endorsing: that enabling students to become virtuous lies in equipping them with certain skills. If virtue is a skill, then for character education to be effective, it would need to be teaching skills rather than particular ideas. Doing this, as I have advocated in previous chapters, is key because skills cannot be indoctrinated, and thus the charge of indoctrination would lose its grounding.

Ultimately, the way to avoid the charge of indoctrination is to orient character education toward the cultivation and refinement of skills, rather than the acquisition of information. “The aim, then, is to develop just those capacities and dispositions that would be antithetical to indoctrination.”<sup>142</sup> It is in this way that my defense of a skill-based approach to character development triumphs. The skills of self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness are necessary for becoming virtuous, but they are skills that must be practiced and mastered. The environment of the classroom is the ideal setting for fostering these skills, and this method, rather than imbuing students with particular kinds of beliefs or desires, is not liable to a charge of indoctrination.

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<sup>137</sup> Sprod, 46.

<sup>138</sup> Jim Mackenzie, “Rational Autonomy as an Educational Aim,” in *Values Education and Lifelong Learning*, eds. David N. Aspin and Judith D. Chapman (Netherlands: Springer, 2007), 93.

<sup>139</sup> Grant Wiggins and Jay McTighe, *Understanding by Design* (Virginia: ASCD, 2005).

<sup>140</sup> Callan and Arena, 105.

<sup>141</sup> Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (New York: Oxford, 2011), 1.

<sup>142</sup> Haydon, 109.

## Part Two: Neutralism

Even if character education can avoid indoctrination by teaching skills, the question of whether it is even appropriate to support such endeavors – in virtue of their endorsing a particular conception of the good – remains. Centralizing active cultivation for the purpose of virtue development by way of character development in schools removes the government from a neutral stance on the good. The question of the government’s relation to the good life is still up in the air: one school of thought is that government exists to bring its citizens to the good life, while another vies for the state to exercise moral deference by not interfering in its citizens’ moral lives and to exist without binding itself to any conception or consideration of the good life. The latter is the more popular camp. It additionally maintains that schools must refrain from teaching particular values or trying to make citizens morally responsible individuals.

Despite its popularity, this view is not free from criticism. Alfie Kohn and others find that whether we “deliberately adopt a character or moral education program [or not], we are always teaching values.”<sup>143</sup> George Sher rejects neutralism of this sort, arguing that citizens are more likely to lead a good life when government promotes a correct conception of the good rather than refraining from promoting any conception of the good altogether. “There is... a strong case for the traditionalist perfectionist view that, for example, knowledge, excellence, and virtue make people’s lives better, and that the best lives contain them in abundance. The obvious conclusion... is that governments and individual political agents often have ample reason to promote such lives.”<sup>144</sup> This view would seem to support character education efforts – whether in their traditional approaches or in the kind I endorse. However, we should favor a skill-based approach to character development because it need not rely on perfectionism, and it can at least to some extent lend itself to neutrality about conceptions of the good.

For one, the skills that are being taught in a skill-based approach to character development are inherently valuable. The importance of self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness are not merely limited to moral improvement. Consider, for example, the process of learning. Some students learn better by hearing, others learn better by seeing. Knowing what kind of learner someone is requires self-awareness. It also requires that one can identify when she is not being engaged audially or visually (perception) and takes initiative to either ask the teacher for different kinds of opportunities or to engage in the material in one’s preferred way (responsiveness). A similar picture can be drawn for teachers: it is important that teachers are able to reflect on their styles to determine whether they are teaching effectively (self-awareness), and if not, identify and implement new strategies for their students (perception and

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<sup>143</sup> Kohn, 134.

<sup>144</sup> George Sher, *Beyond Neutrality: Perfectionism and Politics* (UK: Cambridge, 1997), 245.

responsiveness). Not only are these skills valuable in amoral situations, they also lend themselves to any conception of the good. These skills are presumably valuable for utilitarianism, Kantianism, and other ethical positions. Teaching self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness does not require schools to commit to a particular conception of the good, and thereby positions itself away from neutralist and perfectionist critiques.

### Part Three: Motivation

Character education in the classroom aims to equip students with the skills of self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness, which are skills that are engaged during the process of active cultivation. This puts students in a position to successfully improve their moral characters. The classroom will not necessarily imbue students with virtue, but it will provide them with the skills that enable them to engage in active cultivation. While I see this as a strength, others may see it as a shortcoming; a skill-based approach to character development may avoid overarching charges of indoctrination and neutrality, but it is questionable whether a skill-based approach will be comprehensive enough to account for essential moral features such as motivation. One could argue that we should ultimately be striving to equip students with virtues, which includes equipping them with moral motivation, and if our method of moral education is not successfully meeting this goal, then it is an inadequate approach.

A skill-based approach to character development is built on the idea that certain skills are essential for moral improvement, and moreover, necessary for becoming virtuous. If certain skills are necessary for becoming virtuous, then it follows that one cannot become virtuous without these skills. At first glance, that may seem to indicate that teaching these skills is the only important part of moral education, but this quickly becomes dubious when we realize that skills alone do not yield virtue. This is because skills themselves do not generate action. There are ample occasions we can point to where an agent has a skill but does not use it. Take, for example, skills such as (i) speaking foreign languages, (ii) organizing, (iii) troubleshooting technological issues, and (iv) cooking. These are all skills I possess but rarely use. It is then worth questioning what the value of these skills are and whether they were even worth fostering in the first place, given how rarely they are used. The same kinds of questions can be directed toward the skills of introspection, perception, responsiveness, and perseverance. It could be argued that they are not worth fostering in the classroom because these skills run a risk of not being utilized outside of the classroom.

One may object that even if we are able to successfully imbue students with particular skills and they happen to use these skills outside of the classroom, it does not mean that the skills will give rise to virtues. It seems possible that a student could learn these skills in the classroom and then become virtuous

without utilizing these skills, or a student could acquire virtues only partially due to the skills she learned. Weakening the relationship between learned skills and acquired virtues then indicates that learned skills may not be sufficient for virtue and that virtue acquisition will depend on other variables. A skill-based approach arguably does not account for the missing link between virtue-relevant skills and virtues themselves. We need something else in addition to skills if we want to produce virtuous agents.

Slote identifies the missing link between skills and action as moral motivation, by which he seems to mean, “the desire actually to do what... moral injunctions and principles tells us we ought to do”.<sup>145</sup> A trait or virtue can only come about if the agent has motivation for moral change.

When I practice the piano and become more adept at playing, my nervous system cooperates, but no change of motivation need occur; however, if I copy the actions of some exemplar, I can become virtuously like them only if some motivational change occurs within me as a result of such ‘practice’. It is difficult in psychological terms to see how the practice or repetition can serve to implement this kind of motivational/moral change.<sup>146</sup>

Slote’s criticism suggests that even if we have a controlled environment in which we can teach students skills and in which they can practice these skills, this alone will not necessarily produce virtuous students. Students will have to undergo mental changes in their desires or beliefs in order to become virtuous. The kind of motivation that virtue theory requires will not come from practice or repetition alone, so we will need to rely on some other kind of training or teaching method in supplementation.

Ultimately, our opponents give us reason to believe that any attempt to cultivate character indirectly by way of teaching skills is inadequate. There is no guarantee that students will use the taught skills outside of the classroom, and even if they do, the skills alone will not give rise to virtues. David Carr claims that “there can be little doubt that, from a moral or any other point of view, obligations provide agents with genuine reason for action.”<sup>147</sup> However, this seems to miss the mark; students will need something – arguably moral motivation – in addition to certain skills in the first place to activate the skills, and secondly, to become virtuous. This makes it seem that teaching skills alone is a fruitless endeavor and undermines the notion that the ideal or conducive environment for virtue development is one which fosters morally-relevant skills. Rather, an environment conducive to virtue development must be one that provides momentum for moral action, specifically, by way of moral motivation.

I first aim to weaken the idea that the kinds of skills taught in the classroom for the purpose of moral improvement would be the kinds of skills that go unutilized. I cited the skills of (i) speaking foreign languages, (ii) organizing, (iii) troubleshooting technological issues, and (iv) cooking as ones that an agent

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<sup>145</sup> Slote, “Moral Self-Cultivation,” 192-193.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>147</sup> David Carr, *Educating the Virtues: An Essay on The Philosophical Psychology of Moral Development and Education* (London: Routledge, 2001), 210.

can have but go without using. There is an important difference between these skills and the skills of perception, self-reflection, and responsiveness. First, skills (i-iv) are context-sensitive. This means that there are only certain contexts in which it is appropriate to speak a foreign language, primarily, contexts in which other speakers also speak the language. It would be inappropriate for a math teacher in the U.S. to lecture in French.<sup>148</sup> It would be inappropriate for someone to organize displays in a retail store for which they are not an employee. Secondly, skills are sometimes not utilized out of distraction or forgetfulness. Additionally, some skills are not used because they can be outsourced; I can cook, but I leave the task to my husband. The morally relevant skills listed above are rarely context-sensitive, in that it seems unlikely for it to ever be inappropriate to engage the skills. To not utilize the skills out of distraction or forgetfulness does not undermine the importance of the skills, but rather emphasizes the need to practice them so they become second-nature and routine. Finally, we cannot rely on someone else to do these things for us for the same reasons I cited in defense of active cultivation over passive cultivation. There are various reasons why people have skills but fail to use them, but to use this as an objection against teaching morally-relevant skills is toothless.

I move to address the objection that skills alone will not lead to virtue and that they need something in addition. Slote suggests that motivation, or the desire to do what we ought to do, accounts for the missing piece. I agree with Slote that desire of this form is essential to virtue development. As previously argued, virtues are not simply behaviors, but rather require particular kinds of mental and emotional states to accompany the behaviors. This then brings us back to the problem of how to bring students to have these kinds of desires without indoctrination. As already explained, my account avoids these kinds of problems because a skill-based approach does not in fact require teachers to instill specific beliefs or desires in the students. In fact, it is engaging these skills that will bring about moral motivation. Part of the process of self-reflection and self-awareness involves coming to conclusions about what kinds of aims and goals one has for oneself. Virtue-relevant goals will provide the momentum necessary for skills to make way for virtue. Moral motivation is not to be thought of as separate from skills like self-reflection, awareness, and perception, but rather, as a product of the skills. To ask for more than skills is to fail the neutrality challenge noted earlier, but that maintaining neutrality and requiring these skills paves the road for students to develop some consistent set of beliefs and desires. Thus, it is the students themselves, through the practice of self-reflection, that generate the kinds of beliefs and desires that contribute to becoming virtuous.

Snow's account of habitual virtuous action for virtue cultivation reveals the way agents can pick up moral motivation in the process of skill development.<sup>149</sup> One can understand habitual virtuous actions

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<sup>148</sup> The obvious counter-examples include French-immersion programs or relevance to the material itself.

<sup>149</sup> Snow's account serves to support a form of indirect virtue acquisition. I have already rejected this and do not think it is necessary at this point to re-hash the argument.



as “rational actions that are directed to achieving virtue-relevant goals... such as being a good parent, or promoting peace.”<sup>150</sup> A virtue-relevant goal “is a goal which, if the agent had it, would, under the appropriate conditions, result in the agent’s performing virtue-expressive, that is, virtuous, actions.”<sup>151</sup> Snow argues that by repeatedly acting in ways that promote virtue-relevant goals, one can acquire the virtues.

Repeated encounters with situational cues trigger an agent’s virtue-relevant goals outside of her conscious awareness, resulting in her habitual performance of virtuous actions in those circumstances. Because virtue-relevant goals can be activated in many objectively different situation-types, habitual virtuous actions need not be narrowly confined behavioral regularities, but are flexible and intelligent actions that can cross objectively different types of situations. Truly virtuous actions, it should be noted, not only express virtuous motivations, but incorporate practical wisdom, which can become routinized, thereby allowing agents to regularly hit the targets of virtuous action. Virtue-relevant goals not only provide motivating reasons for habitual virtuous actions, but can justify those actions by their incorporation into a justificatory narrative that the agent does or would reflectively endorse.<sup>152</sup>

Snow claims that most people are not “deliberately or consciously engaged in becoming kind, generous, compassionate, and so on, whether for the sake of becoming better in a role, or in order to become virtuous for its own sake.”<sup>153</sup> Nonetheless, she maintains that “many people do become virtuous, and work to cultivate virtue in their lives. They do this in ways similar to those in which monks, soldiers, and police officers inculcate virtue, though not as consciously.”<sup>154</sup> This is because many people have virtue-relevant goals, such as becoming a good professional in her field, a good colleague, or to promote tolerance. Virtues are required to achieve these goals. Good doctors, for example, care about their patients and are attentive to their patients’ needs; there are host of virtues that contribute to one’s being a good doctor. However, doctors generally do not seek to become virtuous, nor do they receive explicit training in how to become virtuous. Rather, they follow instruction from others or follow the ways of a role model, but these do not translate as deliberate attempts to become virtuous.

Yet, in aspiring to a goal, adopting a role by imitating another, or following received wisdom, they perform actions that, arguably, express virtue, and do so repeatedly. In this way – through the repeated performance of virtuous actions associated with roles or needed for the attainment of desired goals – they can develop virtuous dispositions, though much of this happens outside of conscious awareness.<sup>155</sup>

This suggests that someone can “repeatedly and habitually [perform] virtue-expressive actions in the course of pursuing goals or fulfilling role expectations”<sup>156</sup>

Recall that Slote presented a challenge against a skill-based approach to virtue development on grounds that skills alone do not bring about virtues; agents need reason to do what is required of them, and

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<sup>150</sup> Snow, *Social Intelligence*, 39.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>153</sup> Nancy E. Snow, “How Habits Make Us Virtuous,” in *Developing the Virtues: Integrating Perspectives*, eds. Julia Annas, Darcia Narvaez, and Nancy E. Snow (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 138.

<sup>154</sup> Snow, *Habits*, 138.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 138-139.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

moral motivation serves as the bridge between action and virtue. I suggest looking at moral motivation in an alternative way. Rather than thinking of motivation as something external to skill development, I take it to be a product of skill development. “Virtue-relevant goals... provide motivating reasons for habitual virtuous actions.”<sup>157</sup> We are motivated to repeatedly perform rational actions directed to achieving virtue-relevant goals precisely because we have the goals in the first place. The origin of virtue-relevant goals is self-reflection and self-awareness. I think we are entitled to assume that most people have virtue-relevant goals, even if they have not consciously engaged in the process of self-reflection and self-awareness. This seems to be an assumption that Miller makes, insofar as his account rests on people having beliefs and desires (and dispositions to form these beliefs and desires); Snow’s account of virtue cultivation through habitual virtuous action rests of people having goals. Given, again, that Snow conceives of goals as “Virtue-relevant goals are easily analyzable in terms of an agent’s beliefs and desires,” I would argue that we can attribute the same fundamental starting point to both Miller and Snow’s accounts.<sup>158</sup>

Admittedly, the examples Snow cites of virtue-relevant goals are complex goals and not the kinds that students are likely to procure for themselves. Nonetheless, it seems plausible that we can make virtue-relevant goals accessible to students.<sup>159</sup> If students can have virtue-relevant goals, then they will have motivating reasons for habitual virtuous actions, and are thereby in a position to eventually acquire the virtues. It is in this way that I use Snow’s account of virtue-relevant goals to respond to a Slote-ian objection of a skill-oriented approach to character education. Moral motivation originates through the process of self-reflection, which is precisely what a skill-oriented approach to character education seeks to foster and cultivate.

### **Section III: Concluding remarks**

This section has advocated the classroom as an ideal setting for character development. It is an environment that is actively designed, and so we can construct it to teach character education by centralizing the process of active cultivation and the skills that underlie the process, and affording students opportunities to practice and master these skills. It is in this way that character education enables students to become virtuous.

The skills-based approach to character and virtue development that I have argued for manages three major objections that character education has faced. By resisting the charge of indoctrination, it preserves

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<sup>157</sup> Snow, *Social Intelligence*, 61.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>159</sup> For example, they could become aware of their standing in their family, e.g., brother/sister/son/daughter, and what it means to be a “good [family member]”, or their standing in the classroom, e.g., classmate/friend, and what it means to be a “good [class member]”. It is not the purpose of this paper to list examples of virtue-relevant goals young persons may have, but showing that they may have virtue-relevant goals helps motivate the compatibility of Snow’s account with mine.

values of education and is thereby suitable for curriculum. By resisting the charge of neutrality (or the lack thereof), it avoids concerns of the state overstepping its bounds. By resisting the charge of incompleteness, it reinforces its assets and additionally showcases itself as genuinely promising. In managing multiple objections, a skill-based approach to character and virtue development revives the viability of prioritizing character education. It signals that not only is enabling students to become virtuous possible, it is probable!

Popular alternative strategies for moral development include teaching particular values or specific moral rules. These strategies are short-sighted and ineffective. They do not equip student with anything that translates beyond the classroom. A student might know that integrity is a value and should therefore act in ways that reflect integrity, but belief alone is a non-starter. Belief alone does not provide students with motivation to act in this way outside of the classroom, and it does not offer guidance as to when or how to exhibit integrity. Teaching specific moral rules is also limited. A student may believe that “*You should not cheat*” but this rule alone does not give one the means to navigate situations where it is not clear whether committing a particular action would be a form of cheating or not. At best, these kinds of strategies can prompt students to behave in particular ways, but likely not consistently enough for the behavior to become part of their characters. These kinds of strategies may instill students with particular beliefs and desires, but it is not clear that they will become the dispositions that character is built upon.

Teaching skills for the purpose of character development, on the other hand, offers students with something they can take outside of the classroom and utilize on their own. The skills of self-awareness, perception, and responsiveness afford students with the ability to reason through moral dilemmas and engage with their characters in a meaningful way. This kind of approach uniquely supports both individual and collaborative cultivation efforts and both preserves and promotes moral autonomy. Ultimately, a skill-based approach is not only valuable for putting students in a position to successfully become virtuous agents, but also to endure as virtuous agents.

## Conclusion

This project has set to establish active, agent-driven cultivation as necessary for becoming virtuous and to advocate centralizing this process and the skills that underwrite it in character education programs. Active cultivation is a two-tier process in which acquiring a character trait precedes and distinguishes itself from acquiring a virtue, and can be carried out entirely through independent efforts (self-cultivation) or through the help of another (collaborative cultivation). Moral agents engage in the process by actualizing skills of introspection, perception, and responsiveness. While students will not be able to become virtuous in the confines of a character education program, they will have the opportunity to acquire and practice the skills that enable them to become virtuous with continued efforts. The key skills that underlie self-cultivation and therefore need to explicitly be taught are self-reflection, perception and responsiveness, and habitual performance.

I used Christian Miller's Mixed Traits framework to kick-start my account. It gave me the grounding that I needed to show that character traits are dynamic in that we can exert control over them, but in doing so, it revealed that most people are not virtuous and raised challenge of how it is that we can replace our Mixed Traits with virtues. I answered this challenge by appealing to the process of self-cultivation. I presented a rigorous account of self-cultivation that emphasized moral development as an active, self-driven process. I incorporated Michael Slote's critique of self-cultivation as being unusual and unrealistic to further bolster my account by demonstrating that his objections do not hold but rather reveal that moral development can also occur with the assistance of another. Such cases are designated as 'collaborative cultivation'. Self-cultivation and collaborative cultivation constitute the two forms of active cultivation that are the only viable routes to virtue.

Mental processes of introspection, perception, and responsiveness play an integral role in character and virtue development. Research from psychology indicates that we have reason to be skeptical about our faculties and their reliability. If our own perception is flawed and influenced by phenomena like implicit bias, then we have reason to question whether we can successfully meet the requirements of active cultivation. While I acknowledge the potential problems, I maintain that we can develop strategies to overcome these setbacks.

Internal processes are not the only potential hurdles we have to overcome during active cultivation. There are also external variables that can negatively affect us in our process. I build my account of environmental influence on Heather Battaly's response to Linda Zagzebski, in which she rejects that self-cultivation is necessary for virtue because our environments can unknowingly equip us with virtue. I reject this, but see environmental influence worthy of discussion. Environment alone cannot equip us with virtues,

but it can equip us with character traits. It can also negatively influence us, but with certain strategies in place, we can resist negative influence. I suggest the strategies of increasing awareness, creating and situating ourselves in environments conducive to virtue development, and equipping ourselves with the right kinds of skills.

I take the classroom to be the kind of environment we can control and design to be conducive to virtue development. Centralizing active cultivation in character education allows us to teach the process and the skills that underlie it, and offer students opportunities to practice and master these skills. In this way, character education enables students to become virtuous.

Before active cultivation can be implemented and introduced into the classroom, there are several tasks that must be accomplished, such as determining how to teach the skills essential to active cultivation. I presume that the lessons will have to be designed and implemented with developmental differences in mind. Lessons in self-awareness ought to reach new levels of depth and sophistication as the students become older and have had opportunities to refine the skills they were first introduced to at a younger age. But how exactly this pans out is a task I leave to the developmental psychologists.

Prior to implementation, we will also have to clearly establish the goals for each developmental stage. While the ultimate goal would be to equip students with the skills necessary to engage in self-cultivation and thereby become virtuous, this goal will likely manifest in different ways depending on the developmental stages of the students. It may be the case that there are introductory goals such as exposure (simply explaining to students what self-reflection is and what it looks like), intermediate goals such as identification (asking students to explain and demonstrate examples of self-reflection), and advanced goals such as creation and analysis (have students provide examples of self-reflection and analyze the concept in classroom discussion). These goals reflect the kind of advancement of skills in Bloom's taxonomy, so are likely to reflect reasonable developmentally differentiated goals, but again, determining concrete goals is necessary in order to construct opportunities (e.g., appropriate assignments) that will act in service of achieving these goals.

Moreover, to set the classroom up as an environment conducive to virtue development, we will have gather relevant research regarding specific factors that may interfere with learning. For example, based on my experience as an instructor, in a classroom with unassigned seating, students who sit in the front care about the learning process, while those in the back tend to goof off or preoccupy themselves with something other than the class itself and thereby avoid engaging with the learning process. In this case, sitting in the front of the classroom is more conducive to learning than sitting in the back, and so it might prove worthwhile to use assigned seating. It is not merely the students who can interfere with the learning process, but also material objects in the classroom. Research suggests that the presence of laptops distracted users

as well as fellow students who were not using laptops.<sup>160</sup> This suggests that there may be other items in classrooms that could interfere with the learning process. Additional research should be conducted so that we can eliminate distractions and maximize conduciveness to learning, and specifically, character development.

A great deal of research has already been set in motion with respect to prosocial behavior and virtue development in infants and children in Early Head Start.<sup>161</sup> If it is the case, as the research suggests, that character development begins in early childhood, then it might follow that we ought to begin character education before children begin school. While it is not clear how this would be carried out, it seems apparent that the onus will not only be on primary care providers, but secondary care providers as well.<sup>162</sup> The research has indicated that infancy and early childhood is a critical period in terms of moral development, but we need some sort of guidance for what we should be doing (or not doing) to positively influence (or at least not negatively influence) our future moral agents. I therefore put pressure on developmental psychologists and contemporary empirical researchers to develop strategies that can be directed to State Departments and authors of baby books.

There are additional considerations that extend beyond the classroom. For example, is my account transitive outside of the U.S.? In other words, are the normative properties of self-cultivation different in foreign environments? Are methods for moral improvement and virtue development context-sensitive, and specifically, culturally sensitive? These kinds of questions will be especially important to answer for those who are engaged in the process of character or virtue development and find themselves aboard, as well as for English-speaking schools in other countries. My initial belief is that my account would work globally, given that virtues are not subjective, but I think it is worthwhile to explore how various cultural norms influence character and virtue development.

Although I point to additional areas of research that should be done, I take these to be invitations to enhance and refine my project as need be rather than as possible setbacks or areas of incompleteness. My presentation of active virtue cultivation is not only arguably ready to be integrated into classrooms, but that we are nearing the eleventh hour. Given the climate within our country, it is particularly important that we prioritize character development not only for individuals, but the whole of our society. I urge those in education and curriculum to take this project seriously and implement this skill-based, two-tier approach for enabling students to becoming virtuous posthaste.

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<sup>160</sup> C. B. Fried, "In-class Laptop Use and Its Effects on Student Learning," *Computers & Education* 50, no. 3 (2007).

<sup>161</sup> See Emde (2016), McAdams (2015), Narvaez (2015), Slote (2016), Thompson (2015), Thompson and Lavine (2016),

<sup>162</sup> Given how many two-parent households require that both parents work full-time, many children spend full days under the care of another, e.g., daycare providers. I refer to these as 'secondary care providers'.

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