

Problems with Situationism and First-Person Deliberation

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That there is such a thing as character is a central tenet of folk morality. We all know people we take to be honest, compassionate, or something of the sort. And there is little doubt that notions of character are useful when explaining and predicting the behavior of others, or when deliberating about one's moral choices. We explain that the stranger who returned our lost wallet did so because she is honest, we predict that our compassionate friend will help others in times of distress, and when tempted to boast at a dinner party, we don't lambaste our friends about the head with talk of our accomplishments because we want to be humble.¹ As most of us see things, our characters are like our educations: good or bad, we all have one.

Yet this folk conception of character has recently been challenged by John Doris's situationism.² The situationist thesis has its nascence in the social and personality psychologies and can be taken as an adherence to the following:

Broad Situationist Project:

(RC) We should resist ascriptions of *robust* (cross-situational) *character traits*, the kind that we use when saying things like "She is an honest woman" or "He is a kind man" when explaining or predicting moral behavior.

(GP) We should resist ascriptions of *global* (maximal-scope) *personality judgments* like, "He is a terrible human being," or "She is a great gal" when explaining or predicting moral behavior.

and yet,

(LP) We can retain ascriptions of *local* (similar-situational) *personality traits* like, "She is honest when asked to cheat on tests," or "He is brave when his home is being burglarized" when explaining or predicting moral behavior.

Prescriptive Situationist Project:

(PD) If I desire moral success, I should seek to place myself in those situations I am warranted in taking to be conducive to moral behavior and avoid those situations I am warranted in taking to be morally threatening.

I will say more by way of explanation of these two projects below but let me initially

¹ For studies showing our widespread predilection to use character traits see Kunda and Nisbett (1986)

² (1998) and (2002), cf. Harman, who advocates a much more austere version of the situationist thesis (1999).

state that my main goal in this paper is to show that the implications of the broad and prescriptive projects result in a *mutual inconsistency*. In Section II I will briefly sketch a backdrop for these two projects, in Section III I hope to show that these two projects cannot be consistently held in concert, and in Section IV I will briefly explain why I think that the situationist project fails and offer an alternative explanation of the empirical literature.

II. Broad and Prescriptive Situationism

What I am calling the broad situationist project arises from a trend in the empirical literature: that when observing moral behavior, there is strong evidence for trait-stability, but not trait consistency.³ In other words there is good evidence for thinking that people like us exhibit a trait like honesty when faced with *similar* kinds of situations (like whenever our spouse asks us if we paid the bills), but not honesty across *diverse* kinds of trait-relevant situations (like when we find a wallet or are given the opportunity to cheat on our taxes). The implication seems to be that people like us really do not have the kinds of robust character traits that we are so accustomed to use when predicting or explaining moral behavior. Jim, my jovial mailman, may be kind when delivering mail on 6th Street, but this does not mean that he is *cross-situationally* kind (when at home with his family, or even on 7th Street), for the evidence tells us that, most likely, he is not *that* kind.

The prescriptive project arises from another trend in the psychological literature: that situational features figure prominently in our moral behavior.⁴ The empirical evidence (and much our everyday experience) reveals that for almost all of us, the situational features of our environment are more determinative of our moral behavior than any putative robust character traits that we take ourselves to possess. If this is the case, Doris suggests that we can experience greater moral success if we redirect our moral attention.⁵ Instead of concerning myself with inculcating a certain kind of character, I should attend to the features of my environment. I should direct my ethical gaze, so to speak, away from *myself* and towards my *environments*. If I am in those environments that influence my behavior positively, I will be more likely to enjoy

³ In Hartshorne and May's study, elementary and secondary school children were observed in a broad range of classroom and non-classroom situations for their honesty. Three honesty-related behavioral measures were tested: willingness to steal loose change from a table in an empty classroom, willingness to lie so as to avert getting another student into trouble, and willingness to cheat on a test when getting caught appeared highly improbable. Although correlations between behavior in similar situations were extremely high (.79), the correlations between the diverse-situational measures were low enough (.23) so as to render impotent the kind of predictive power one might expect from genuinely robust instances of dishonesty (1928). Cf. Newcomb (1929) and Sears (1963).

⁴ Experimenters interested in the effects of mood upon helping behavior engaged a confederate to drop a stack of papers as individuals concluded using a pay phone in a public setting. For one group of subjects a dime was placed in the return slot; for the other group, the coin slot was empty. Now conventional wisdom might suggest that we should find kind-hearted Scott helping the frantic paper-dropper recollect her stack of stuff whether he is endowed with an extra dime or not. Surely such peripheral features of our environment bear little upon the behavior of those who are 'kind' or, alternatively, 'self-absorbed'. Not so: of those subjects who did not find the dime, only *four percent* helped; of those who found the dime, almost *four-fifths* stopped to offer their services. What accounts for this discrepancy does not seem to be the person, but the *situation* (Isen and Levin: 1972). Cf. Latané and Darley (1970); Darley and Bateson (1973); Zimbardo (1973); and Milgram (1974).

⁵ "Rather than striving to develop characters that will determine our behavior in way significantly independent of circumstance, we should invest more of our energies in attending to the features of our environment that impart behavior outcomes." (Doris 1998: 146)

moral success.⁶

So the picture painted for us by Doris is that people like us have a situationist, rather than a characterological, psychology. And because we do not exhibit robust character traits, and neither are our psychologies “built” to house them, it is best to not use robust traits as explanations, predictors or goals in moral behavior or deliberation. We will be much more successful if we attend to our situations. And when I become good at choosing healthy situations, conjoining diverse sets of morally-conducive situations, my behavioral outcomes may even look and feel as if they are coming from *me*, or some robust character trait that *I* have. But they are not; they are the result of my choice in situation, from whence my local traits “take over,” helping to promote moral success where characterological approaches have faltered.

III. Problems with Consistency

Now that the set-up work has been done, I will try to show why these two projects are mutually inconsistent. Now, let me clarify: I am not claiming any kind of logical inconsistency on the part of situationist,⁷ rather, my claim is that one cannot hold both projects very faithfully. What I mean by this will hopefully become clear below. I will be focusing my attention upon (RC)/(GP) and (PD) above, results of the broad and prescriptive projects, respectively. What I intend to show is that the implications of (PD) undermine the viability of (RC)/(GP) which will therefore cause the situationist to either give up (RC)/(GP) to salvage (PD), or, in the hopes of keeping (RC)/(GP), revise (PD) in a way that will not do violence to (RC)/(GP). It is my suspicion that no revision of (PD) will allow us to keep (RC)/(GP), which I take to be a grave problem for the situationist.

I begin by asking a seemingly innocuous question: how are we to describe someone who becomes adept at (PD)? In other words, in what ways would we evaluate the person who takes Doris’s advice to heart and becomes very reliable in choosing morally-conducive situations and avoiding morally-threatening ones?

It will be beneficial if we flesh out what kind of person I have in mind here, someone we’ll call Gwenda. Gwenda has read Doris’s work and has become convinced that she should try to give up using robust character traits not only as an *explanation* and *predictor* of people’s behavior, but also as a *goal* of moral improvement.⁸ Gwenda is also persuaded that she will have increased moral success if she starts paying more attention to her environment: avoiding those

⁶ This seems tame. If I receive two invitations for company on Friday evening, one to study with a lady-friend at the library, another to cruise onto Rush St. in Chicago with a hard-drinking group of co-workers, the morally-conducive situation seems obvious enough. As Doris sees things, if I apply this prescription for deliberation (PD) when faced with moral choices, I have greater chances for success than if I had banked on my strong character, but found myself bombarded with pressures to vice the whole evening, one which climaxes with a dazed and confused taxi ride back to DeKalb.

⁷ Although I think something like this could be done, at present I have neither the expertise nor patience to do so.

⁸ If we, as moral agents, really do not have a characterological moral psychology and should therefore abstain from using characterological terms when predicting and explaining moral behavior, I take it to follow that we should not take character traits to be a *goal* for the moral agent. In fact, Doris says as much: “Rather than striving to develop characters that will determine our behavior in ways substantially independent of our circumstances, we should invest more of our energies in attending to the features of our environment that influence behavior outcomes” (2002: 146).

situations that seem morally dangerous and entering into those that she sees as morally conducive. After years of practice and experience, Gwenda has become very reliable at successfully appropriating (PD). In other words, she consistently *thinks* in terms of situations, assessing their “moral threat level” and, moreover, she properly *acts* by entering into only those situations she sees as morally healthy. She is not infallible at this. Once in a while she forgets to think in terms of situations or doesn’t act properly with respect to them, but this only means that she’s not perfect. She is however, *very* reliable at choosing and avoiding certain situations.⁹

Furthermore, Gwenda chooses well *cross-situationally*. This will mean that (I), she chooses well when *in* a variety of different circumstances; and (F), she chooses well when *faced* with diverse kinds of moral choices. (I) tells us that she picks the right situations while at the gym, work or home, with her friends, family, or strangers. In other words, she reliably chooses well in whatever kinds of environments in which she finds herself, even those that are new or virgin to her.¹⁰ (F) tells us that she chooses well when faced with situations that span the variegated moral terrain. Gwenda reliably avoids a vast assortment of threatening situations, whether they present temptation to commit adultery, steal, lie, or be mean.

I think it is also important to note that one could both *predict* and *explain* Gwenda’s behavior in terms of her ability to choose good situations. When we stand witness to Gwenda as she engages in compassionate, generous behavior at work and at home, and are asked *why* she acts in such ways, it will be both appropriate and accurate to say that Gwenda does so *because* she chooses good situations and exhibits positive trait-stability in those situations. And if I know that she is a good situation-chooser (let’s say she tells me she is, and I have little reason to doubt her due to her past moral successes¹¹), I will also be able to reliably *predict* her behavior in the future. I will know that she chooses morally conducive situations more often than not and will therefore be able to accurately predict that she will not engage in less than professional behavior with her colleagues because I suspect that she will not attend the infamous staff Christmas party.

Now the question is not whether a person like Gwenda *could* exist. Surely, Doris believes that someone could reliably appropriate (PD) into their moral life, for he contends that such an approach “might effect a considerable reliability in ethical behavior.”¹² In fact, I think Doris seriously believes that a great number of people could join the ranks of Gwenda as they forsake the misguided aims of character development and concentrate on situations. So my detractors cannot claim that I am simply constructing a piece of science fiction in thinking about someone like Gwenda who successfully follows (PD).

So what is the problem? Well, as I have presented things, it appears as if Gwenda will possess the very thing from which the situationist has attempted to distance herself: the *robust*

⁹ I take reliability here to mean only something quite modest, maybe something like: Gwenda is a reliable situation-chooser if she deliberates about moral choices in terms of situations more often than not, and chooses the more morally conducive situation more often than not.

¹⁰ It has been suggested to me that it borders on question-begging to suppose that Gwenda could do this. I disagree: if Gwenda is unable to carry out (I) then what is the point in giving the normative prescription anyway (doesn’t ought still imply can?)

¹¹ Unless, of course, she avoids me because she sees me as a moral threat. I would like to think this wouldn’t be the case, but then this might be an error resulting from undue reliance upon my character.

¹² Doris (1998: 517)

character trait or *virtue* of being a “good situation-chooser” (henceforth: Chooser). Historically, a virtue has been understood as: being “firm and unchangeable,” silencing “temptations to vice,” causing quite consistent and predictable behavior in “ever-various and novel situations,” and being “substantially resistant to contrary situational pressures, in their behavioral manifestations.”¹³ But doesn’t this sound a great deal like Gwenda and her mastery at Choosing? Doesn’t Gwenda “carry around with her,” so to speak, a robust trait that she employs reliably, across the spectrum of situations she faces, which predictably trumps situational pressures to vice?

Yet, remember that (RC) prohibits us from using robust traits as either an explanation, predictor of moral behavior or as a goal in Gwenda’s moral decision-making. But Gwenda possesses what seems to be the *robust trait* of being a Chooser, a trait that *does* accurately explain and predict Gwenda’s moral behavior. Moreover it is the *sine qua non* goal of moral behavior: Gwenda will enjoy moral success just in case her goal is to become adept at (PD). At first glance, the problem appears to be that the situationist has prescribed the very thing she set out to remove from our moral theory and practice: robust character traits.

But this is not all. If Gwenda and others like her are reliable at (PD), wouldn’t they also be “good” or “virtuous?” For Doris, what is a good person if not someone like Gwenda who reliably engages in morally successful behavior in a variety of circumstances across the variegated moral terrain due to her own will and desire for moral success? Or at the very least, wouldn’t Doris be happy with Gwenda for becoming “good” at his *moral* prescriptions? So it seems that Gwenda would not only have the robust character trait of being a Chooser but it is also likely that she would possess the global personality trait of being a “good” or “virtuous” person. And this runs contrary to (GP), the other horn of the broad situationist project, for it would be only appropriate to ascribe to such a person (or an entire community of them) the global judgment of being “good.”

Now let’s step back and keep in mind why the situationist arrives at (RC)/(GP) in the first place; Doris contends that we should dispense with notions of robust character traits because that is “just not how we humans are;” we really do not have a characterological moral psychology. But if I am right, and (PD) has the above implications, then the situationist encounters a serious dilemma: in providing us with (PD) they have set out for us a picture that eerily resembles a robust character trait, that of being a Chooser. The motivation for giving us (PD) is to allow those of us who desire moral success escape the shackles of character and the kinds of putative problems we have in making moral decisions in terms of character. And yet (PD) gives rise to something very much like a robust character trait.¹⁴ In fact, I believe that because Doris has given us (PD) he cannot escape a characterological psychology. As much as she would like to dismiss robust character and its annoying bedfellow, virtue, the situationist who prescribes (PD) is ultimately committed to a view of moral psychology which sees humans as being the kind of

¹³ Ibid., 506.

¹⁴ It has been suggested to me that Doris could account for Gwenda using only good choices and trait-stability. But this is incorrect. Gwenda’s act of choosing, itself, is *cross-situational* and only robust character traits exhibit this kind of consistency. Doris cannot account for Choosing if it is cross-situational; this is the heart of the problem. The befuddlement increases when we read Doris: “the situationist moral psychology may help ground desirable *habits* (italics mine) of ethical deliberation.” (1998:519). What are these habits if they are not cross-situationally indexed?

creatures that *can* and *should* successfully exhibit at least one robust character trait, that of being a Chooser. I contend that the implications of someone actually following through with (PD) undermine the viability of both (RC) and (GP).

Towards seeing this, I would like to return to the question I posed above, that is, what exactly does it mean to be a Chooser? How should the situationist describe that thing, whatever it is, that allows someone to, in a variety of situations, reliably choose morally conducive situations across the variegated moral terrain, which explains, predicts, and serves as a goal in moral behavior? As I see things, the situationist has two options. The first option is to understand Choosing as issuing forth from a robust character trait, that of being a Chooser. Choosing, then, is like the character trait of honesty *qua* robust trait; much like consistently telling the truth is a function of being honest, Choosing is also a function of being a Chooser. Someone who has become adept at (PD) has developed the trait of being a good situation-chooser. But why would the situationist take this route? If the situationist admits that Choosing is a robust character trait we should possess, she also tacitly admits that we should possess a characterological, rather than a situationist psychology. But doesn't situationism arise out of the "discovery" that the reason we experience very little moral success is because we have been acting as if we have a characterological psychology, and erringly focusing on developing our character? But if the situationist takes Choosing to be a robust trait, this would have the additional function of prescribing for the moral agent a change in moral psychology, but this not in the situationist's bill of goods. I take the situationist project to be an attempt to work *within* our (alleged) existing situationist psychology, not reform it so that we will be able to successfully appropriate (PD). So unless the situationist is content with prescribing a characterological psychology, I do not think that taking Choosing as a trait is an option for the situationist.

The other tack open to the situationist, however, is to take (PD) as prescribing a *skill*. Here, becoming good at choosing morally conducive situations is much like becoming good at picking flavorful cantaloupes at the supermarket. Choosing good situations is not a part of *me* that I carry around with me as I enter into various life situations, rather, it is a skill, an ability to carry out a task in those situations where carrying out the task is appropriate. The task I am carrying out in being a Chooser is simply the result of having learned what features of situations to look for, knowing how to choose these situations and having the intention to do so. This is no different than being a "good cantaloupe-picker" (Picker), a skill which is comprised of a knowledge of what features to look for in good cantaloupes (texture, smell, malleability, internal echo, etc.), an ability to correctly assess the virtues of each cantaloupe, and a desire to bring home delicious fruit and to do so reliably in a variety of fruit-buying situations. Being a Chooser, then, is similar to being a Picker, and surely no one would want to claim that being able to pick good fruit is a robust character trait. Therefore, we are remiss to understand (PD) as prescribing a character trait. Rather, it is telling us to become good at a skill which we can use reliably in a variety of situations, safely avoiding any messy dealings with traits or virtues.

But is being good at picking cantaloupes really that much like being good at choosing situations? Is the skill route one that the situationist will want to take? There seems to be something about being a Chooser that would suggest that it is not a mere skill; making choices about moral situations doesn't seem to be your garden variety skill. Playing the game of whether one should go to the pool hall seems much different than playing the game of ping-pong. As I

see things, the reason that Choosing and Picking appear to be intuitively different is because they *are* quite different. In fact, for whatever ways these two activities are similar, they differ in ways so significant that the situationist would be erring if she takes Choosing as a mere skill.

To show this, let's take Picking as a token mere skill. Other mere skills are things like typing quickly, translating Greek, and pitching a wicked curveball, but picking quality cantaloupes will do here. Now each of these mere skills shares at least two things in common, what I will call *mere skill requirements* MSR. A skill is a mere skill just in case it meets both of these requirements. MSR1 is the *detachment requirement*; MSR2 is the *independence requirement*.¹⁵ A skill meets MSR1 if it is devoted to bringing about ends from which we can detach ourselves if we cease to want those ends without doing violence to any final end we might take for ourselves. In other words, I can detach myself from picking quality cantaloupes because I desire to do so without raining down ruin upon my *raison d'être*. Secretaries might stop using a computer for a month, I might cease practicing my Greek, and many a professional baseball players have given up pitching, but none of this means that they have, by detaching themselves from these mere skills, inflicted injury upon what gives meaning to their lives. The most broad, over-arching ends to which I devote myself (e.g. the good of my community, loving my family and friends, leaving a legacy for my children, and loving God are but a few) are unaffected by my ceasing to pick flavorful fruit.¹⁶

A skill meets MSR2, on the other hand, if it can be carried out “relatively independent of emotion and feeling.”¹⁷ My ability to sort through the vast array of fresh produce is largely unaffected by my emotions or states of mind. I can reasonably expect to bring home good fruit whether I am tired, lonely, exuberant, mildly distressed or grouchy. Expedient typing, translation and pitching are no different.¹⁸

Now we need not quibble over whether these two requirements are sufficient conditions for what I've called a mere skill; that is not the issue at hand. The purpose served by the MSRs is to show that Choosing, if conceived of as a skill by the situationist, is of a *significantly* different variety than that of picking cantaloupes, because clearly, Choosing fails both MSRs. With respect to MSR1, assume the broad project is correct and consider a person who (1) desires the greatest degree of moral success in her life but, (2) decides, for whatever reason, to cease Choosing. Could this happen? Keep in mind that for Doris, the best, if not the only, route to moral success is through (PD). Now if (PD) were a mere skill should I not be able to cease Choosing and yet maintain a devotion to achieving my final end (assuming, of course, that some kind of moral success like those mentioned above is my final end)? Can I detach myself from the skill of Choosing without also detaching myself from my *raison d'être*? This doesn't appear

¹⁵ I take my cues here from a very helpful discussion by Julia Annas, “Virtue Ethics,” (2004) yet unpublished.

¹⁶ Granted, for some, the ceasing of some mere skill *does* bring great distress because that skill has *become* their final end. We might think of athletes, whose greatest aim in life is to become the best at some mere skill. But we would also think of such persons as having *misguided* aims in life. If one's ultimate end in life is to sink a little white ball into a hole in the ground in the fewest amount of strokes, one's most pressing problem is not having lost this skill, but having set one's ultimate goals in having such skill. Such a person is not a counterexample to this requirement; rather, such a person serves to show how silly it is to live one's life with a view to mere skill.

¹⁷ Annas (2004: 3).

¹⁸ In fact, it was recently discovered that one prominent major league pitcher threw a perfect game while suffering the effects from an entire night on the town and a terrible hangover.

to hold with (PD); I cannot just cease Choosing because I don't have time for it, or because it is no longer a hobby, or part of my profession. It is intimately connected to why I get up in the morning, what drives me to do good, why I resist the flirtatious advances of a married co-worker; it is tied to my intentions, my will, *me*.

Choosing also fails to meet MSR2. If following (PD) is like other mere skills, then we should reasonably expect to be able to do so relatively consistently independent of emotion or feeling. Is this right? Can I appropriate (PD) to the same degree of success when I am happy as when I am terribly lonely? This doesn't seem to be an accurate picture of how we make moral choices; our moral lapses often flow from emotional states like anger, loneliness, rage, jealousy and the like. I am able to type around forty-five words per minute whether I am lonely or angry, but I strongly suspect (in fact, I know!) that my ability to avoid inappropriate flirtatious advances will not be as immune to my loneliness. Here again we find that Choosing, if a skill, is not a *mere* skill, or at least the kind of thing the situationist might take it to be.¹⁹

The situationist can of course demur to my notion of mere skill. They may grant that it fails to meet either MSR, and therefore may not be a skill like Picking, but that it is still *some* kind of skill. But here the situationist encounters another hurdle. If the situationist wants to take Choosing as a skill they must show how it is a skill distinct from the skill involved in the virtues. Keep in mind that even virtues, or character traits, are acquired skills to think and act in certain ways. Virtue ethicists do not believe that these putative traits magically appear in the lives of persons as they go about their lives. They are acquired and practiced as they become a part of me. Even Aristotle understands virtue (*aretē*) as “skillful living” or “excellence of function.” It is a practiced ability to act: “excellences develop in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature, but because we are naturally able to receive them and are brought to completion by habituation...we acquire the excellences through having first engaged in the activities, as is also the case with the various sorts of expert knowledge—for the way we learn the things we should do, knowing how to do them, is by doing them.”²⁰ So even robust character traits, or virtues, are kinds of skills, things that we learn, practice, improve upon, and execute as we live our lives. The burden, then, is upon the situationist to provide for us a non-*ad hoc* definition of Choosing that is, on the one hand, not a mere skill but, on the other, is qualitatively distinct from the kind of skill which comprises virtue.²¹ This is a very narrow rope to walk, and as far as I can tell, I'm not quite sure what this kind of skill would look like.

The challenge I have posed to the situationist is to proffer a conception of what it means to reliably choose morally conducive situations in diverse sets of circumstances with an end to moral success. The challenge is a live one because it appears at first glance that the person, like Gwenda, who successfully appropriates (PD) would have something that very much resembles a robust character trait for reasons outlined above. But in defining what it means to Choose, the situationist is barred from taking Choosing as a mere skill because, as we have seen, Choosing

¹⁹ It has been suggested that something like learning how to perform a certain medical procedure on a sick family member or learning certain anger management skills in order to avoid becoming an abusive parent seem to be skills but that they look to be on all fours with Choosing with respect to the MSRs. Granted, actions like the above are surely skills, but they do not look like *mere* skills. There appears to be an aspect of virtue in both of them, at least, that is how they intuitively strike me. If so, they fail to be counterexamples.

²⁰ Aristotle (2002: II.1.1103a20, 1103a30).

²¹ For a full treatment of the kind of skill involved in virtue, see Annas (2004).

differs significantly from other pedestrian mere skills. Yet the situationist must be careful to avoid taking Choosing to be a skill like those involved in virtues like honesty, courage, and being wise about choosing friends with whom I spend time.

Unless such a definition is forthcoming I contend that the situationist must either give up (RC)/(GP) to salvage (PD) or, instead, revise (PD) so as to retain the hub of the situationist project, (RC)/(GP). The situationist faces this dilemma because the implications of appropriating (PD) suggest the inculcation of at least one robust character trait, that of being a Chooser, which is an inconsistent prescription in light of the broad project. Now I have no problem with the situationist giving up (RC)/(GP) so as to rescue (PD), if this is the route chosen by the situationist. In fact, something like (PD) is what I think many people who strive for moral success take to be an important goal. No person seriously devoted to moral success would arbitrarily choose situations where vice is prevalent over those that are healthier. This just seems to be good sense. But without the broad project, what is it about the situationist that makes her a *situationist*? (RC)/(GP) is the heart of situationism, without it we are left with a very philosophically uninteresting moral prescription. So I don't take this to be an option for the situationist.

But what if we revise (PD) so that it does not imply anything that is inconsistent with the broad project? Unfortunately for the situationist, it is my suspicion that no revision of (PD) will allow us to keep the broad project as Doris has presented it. To see this, assume that the broad project is largely correct and consider what kinds of moral prescriptions would *not* be inconsistent with (RC)/(GP). In other words, what would a moral prescription look like that, when successfully appropriated would (a) not explain, predict or serve as a goal of moral behavior, (b) meet both (MSRs) (or is some other kind of mysterious non-virtue-like skill), (c) serve as a reliable guide to moral success, and (d) be something we humans can reasonably expect to do like light of our alleged situationist psychology (in other words the prescription is indexed to situations for, as the situationist sees things, if our moral practice and deliberation is to be successful, it should reflect how we really are)? What revision would not have the same kinds of implications that are problematic for (PD) itself? I am persuaded to think that no revision can be consistent with the broad project for the same reasons that (PD) is inconsistent with (RC)/(GP). Of course, the situationist can respond that they can keep the broad project and offer *no* prescriptions for moral behavior, but this would only renege upon Doris' admitted intention to ensure the practical nature of ethics, his rationale for (PD) in the first place.²² Without such a prescription, situationism is merely an interesting observation of how many people go about making moral choices.

If I am right, then Doris cannot escape a characterological psychology if he maintains something like (PD). The prescription implies that people like us can and should instantiate at least one robust character trait, that of being wise about our choice in moral situations. Situationism, then, as presented by Doris, is a deeply inconsistent moral theory that relies on a veiled characterological psychology. Although she has dressed (PD) in a very fine situationist tweed, the situationist has only masked something that, when appropriated, is a robust character trait; that of being wise about situations.

²² "In my view, ethical reflection is a largely practical endeavor, aimed at helping to secure ethically desirable behavior." (2002:110)

IV. Alternative Responses

So where has the situationist project gone awry? As I see things, the problem is that the situationist has too high a view of human nature. What good reason does the situationist have for *expecting* to find evidence of robust traits in the empirical studies? Why should we think that our moral behavior is *not* fundamentally inconsistent? Surely our high rates of addiction, divorce and violence betray our moral inconsistency. Even those of us who live more pedestrian lifestyles are aware of our own inconsistencies, though we often turn a blind eye. If we keep in mind the utter *wrongness* of much of what goes on in our world, it comes, then, as no surprise, that we should find ourselves to be not quite as good as we might think. The error of situationism, then, is to infer from these findings that we *can't* attain moral consistency through the virtues and their inculcation.

Of course, then the question becomes why we haven't been able to climb out of this moral morass. Although this isn't the place to defend these claims, I contend that the reason that so few of us exhibit moral consistency is because: (1) as humans we are fundamentally flawed in this respect; and (2) very few of us have undergone a serious program of character *reformation*. Just as our characters have been formed through various means to be inconsistent, if they are to become consistent, they must be *reformed*. In light of the problematic situationist project, I take this to be a more plausible diagnosis.²³

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²³ Thanks are in order to Jamin Asay, Michael Bishop, Matt Carey, Kyle Craft, Pete Nichols and Craig Warmke for helping me through some of these issues.

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