Character, Narcissism, and the Rarity Thesis

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Abstract

The Rarity Thesis (RT) states that on the basis of evidence from psychological research we are justified in believing that possession of the Aristotelian virtues is very rare. The major concern is that RT then strips virtue ethics of its egalitarianism, explanatory power, and predictive power. These are serious charges. I will focus on Christian Miller's endorsement of RT as it pertains to *vice*. Working with Miller's criteria, and as a case study, I will argue that persons with narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) possess traits which can be understood as character traits and, more specifically, *vices*. Armed with this information I will question the force of Miller's statement 'most people do not have any of the vices to any degree' and suggest that vices are not comparatively rare and may not even be rare *simpliciter*. While I cannot speak for virtue, the existence of vicious traits (exemplified at least in NPD) weakens the force of RT and, in this form, RT is not a serious threat to virtue ethics.

Statement of Candidate

I certify that this thesis entitled 'Character, Narcissism, and the Rarity Thesis' has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institutions other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that this thesis is an original piece of research and has been written by me. Any assistance I have received in the preparation of the thesis has been appropriately acknowledged.

Finally, I certify that all information sources and literature used have been indicated in the thesis.

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

It is almost on a daily basis that we use talk about character traits to explain and predict behaviour. 'John is a reliable guy, I'm sure he will help us move on the weekend,' or 'Anna is shy, I doubt she will come out for karaoke'. We say that the *reason* Gary insulted my daring haircut is that he is rude. We choose a brave man to go on the dangerous mission. We need a friendly person to work at our new shop. And when gentle Sarah suddenly snaps at her boss, we might say she acted 'out of character' in order to maintain a continued understanding of her and an ability to predict future behaviour. Character attributions underwrite both our explanation of a person and justify our prediction of their future actions.

This view of character fits with what has come to be called the 'folk view' of traits.[1] The folk view is not a systematic doctrine, but seems to be fairly representative of an understanding held by many in everyday discussions of character. The account states that traits are both stable over time, that there is a 'core of consistency', defining the true nature of a person, and that behaviour is primarily explained and motivated by character traits.[2]

However, arising most notably with the psychologist Walter Mischel and followed more recently by the philosophers Gilbert Harman and John Doris, an alternative view rejecting the explanatory role of character has gained traction. This alternative view argues that it is overwhelmingly situational factors which account for our behaviour. Character traits play almost no causal role. This account is known as *situationism* for its emphasis on situational factors over character traits for the explanation and prediction of behaviour.

One philosophical position has borne the main brunt of the situationist attack. A significant number of situationists have found a ready target in Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (VE) makes 'essential reference' to a conception of

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[1] See, G. Matthews and I. J. Deary, *Personality Traits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2-3. In 1802 the German poet Novalis (von Hardenberg) captured the folk view poetically, writing, 'I often feel, and ever more deeply I realize, that *fate* and *character* are the same conception.' Novalis, *Heinrich Von Ofterdingen*, vol. 2 (Wien: Ludwig Tieck un Fr. Schegel, 1827), 214. 'Oft fühl ich jetzt…[und] je tiefer ich einsehe, daß Schicksal und Gemüt Namen Eines Begriffs sind.' George Eliot relays the aphorism with the pithy 'character is destiny'. G. Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (London: Ward, Lock and Co. Limited, 1860), 394.
[2] Matthews and Deary, *Personality Traits*, 3.

stable and robust character traits.[3] According to VE, traits are both *consistent*, allowing us to explain and predict behaviour, and *efficacious*, causing trait-relevant (virtuous) behaviour even in new and novel trait-relevant situations and even when these situations are not encouraging of such behaviour.[4] Merritt calls this notion the *motivational self-sufficiency of character*, clarifying that the motivational structure of character is (to varying degrees) 'independent of factors outside oneself'.[5]

In stark contrast to this, situationism argues on the basis of empirical work undertaken by experimental psychology, that character traits are *not* consistent or efficacious. The evidence offered by situationists presents a significant challenge to VE as it would appear that the acquisition of virtuous character traits does not in fact lead to virtuous behaviour and VE cannot retain its central tenets with much confidence.

Interestingly, at this point, both sides of the debate have moved to claim an argument known as the Rarity Thesis (RT). RT states that on the basis of evidence from psychological research we are justified in believing that possession of the Aristotelian virtues (and vices) is very rare.[6] Situationists employ RT as the next (or final) nail in the coffin while VE sees it as a legitimate reply to the situationist challenge. Some virtue ethicists have explained that since the days of Aristotle VE has affirmed virtue as a rare ideal.[7] Because of this, the findings of situationism present no serious problems for them.[8] Situationists, on the other hand, argue that this concession of rarity strips VE of its *explanatory power*, *predictive power*, and its *egalitarianism*.[9] Regarding the latter charge (egalitarianism), if virtue is merely possible but very rare (and indeed shown only in anecdotal as opposed to empirical ways), the 'burden of argument has importantly shifted: The advocate of virtue ethics can *no longer assume that virtue is psychologically possible* [emphasis added]'.[10]

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[3] D. Fleming, "The Character of Virtue: Answering the Situationist Challenge to Virtue Ethics," *Ratio* 19, no. 1 (2006): 24.

[4] N. J. H. Dent, "Virtues and Actions," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 25, no. 101 (1975): 328; J. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," in *Virtue Ethics*, ed. Stephen Darwall (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 122.

[5] M. Merritt, "Virtue Ethics and Situationist Personality Psychology," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 3, no. 4 (2000): 374.

[6] M. Lott, "Situationism, Skill, and the Rarity of Virtue," *Journal of Value Inquiry* 48 (2014): 387.

[7] See, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. T. Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), 1179b11-16.

[8] N. Athanassoulis, "A Response to Harman: Virtue Ethics and Character Traits," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series* 100, no. 1 (2000): 217.

[9] M. Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 63.

[10] J. Doris and S. Stich, "As a Matter of Fact: Empirical Perspectives on Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy*, ed. M. Smith F. Jackson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 121.

In two fascinating and significant works, [11] Christian Miller has developed an account of character traits which, unlike the situationist, holds them to be both *consistent* add *efficacious*. Is this good news for VE? Not entirely. Miller makes two claims, and the examination of these will form the basis of this thesis. First, though he does not deny the consistency and efficacy of character traits, he believes, in line with RT, that most people do not possess virtues and vices.[12] Second, Miller refocuses RT, stating that VE must outline empirically informed ways for most human beings to improve their character traits and, so far, this has not been done. While we have methods of strengthening our wills against the temptation to, for example, eat excessively, the true challenge will be in the regulation of 'subtle and subconscious influences on our moral behavior'.[13] This he calls the *realism challenge* (RC) and it states that VE loses much of its practicability as a normative theory if it cannot delineate ways to improve our existing traits and so to guide morality.

Because of the lack of empirical studies on good behaviour and the countless available for negative behaviour, I will limit my discussion and reply more specifically to Miller's endorsement of RT as it relates to *vice*.[14] On this he writes, 'Most people do not have *any of the vices* to any degree, although a few might have one or more of them'.[15] Focussing on *vicious* character traits, and following Miller's criteria for vicious character traits, I will argue that, as one example, persons with narcissistic personality disorder possess a character trait (or collection of traits) with the correct psychology to be understood to constitute vice.

Armed with this information, I will question the force of Miller's first claim regarding RT and attempt to discover what Miller means by 'most people'. I suggest that the possession of vicious traits is *not comparatively rare*. Vicious traits have a population spread comparable to many or most other traits. RT loses its rhetorical force if vicious character traits, while perhaps rare, are only as rare as the majority of other traits. Further,

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[11] C. B. Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); *Character and Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). In what follows I will mainly refer to *Character and Moral Psychology* as it is the more recent of the two works.
[12] *Character and Moral Psychology*, 195.
[13] Ibid., 211. The challenge is also the main thrust of "Russell on Acquiring Virtue," in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, ed. M. Alfano (New York: Routledge, 2015).
[14] Compared to virtue, there is a surprising lack of discussion surrounding *vice* in the philosophical literature. In an issue of *Metaphilosophy* focussed on virtue and vice, Heather Battaly, in her opening essay, writes that vice has received comparably little attention. See, H. Battaly, "Introduction: Virtue and Vice," *Metaphilosophy* 41, no. 1-2 (2010): 5.
[15] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 42.

since vice is a *category* of traits, the sum of vicious traits once established, could end up being a larger group than originally supposed and may not even be rare *simpliciter*. This being the case, Miller's criteria for vice does not support his version of RT. If I am right, RT does not weaken VE in the ways suggested and virtue ethicists need not worry about it. Regarding Miller's second claim, RC, I make two replies. First, though character traits may play a causal role in behaviour to some degree, it does not mean they are entirely immune from situational factors and my thesis makes no argument otherwise. Second, contrary to RC, I suggest our characters are malleable through our own actions in the ways required by Miller and that moral traits (at least in the form of vices) can be acquired. The same principles may then apply to virtue.

To do all this I will first sketch the debate between situationism and virtue ethics (**I**) in order to show where Miller's account has come from. In **II** I will briefly outline Miller's Mixed Trait theory, focussing on vice, and make some comments upon the account. After this I will (**III**) use narcissistic personality disorder as a case study to show that narcissism can be understood as a (1) personality trait, (2) a character trait, and (3) a vice. And finally, in **IV** I will return to Miller's endorsement of RT, arguing that vice is not comparatively rare (and may in fact not even be rare *simpliciter*) and addressing Miller's RC.

Chapter I: The Debate

1.1 Introduction

In order to explain the origins of Miller's position, this initial chapter takes a look at the situationist challenge to VE. First, I will briefly outline the psychological beginnings of situationism. Second, I will sketch the situationist challenge focussing on John Doris' work. Third, I will show how virtue ethicists have replied to the situationist challenge. This will make clear how and where Miller's account differs from the situationist in **Chapter II**.

1.2 Beginnings in Psychology

The research which provided fuel for an attack on VE began in the late 1960s. Miller recounts the war-like nature of that early exploration,[16] described as a 'paradigm crisis',[17] a 'surprisingly devastating force',[18] 'a blitzkrieg, so to speak, that defined and destroyed the enemy almost simultaneously',[19] and as 'heated but futile battles'.[20] But from where did this attack originate?

The research had its beginnings with a number of psychologists examining the nature of personality traits and their relationship to behaviour. That human behaviour is often influenced by situational factors has long been known to psychology. Seminal attacks on the folk concept of traits came in the 1960s with Walter Mischel's *Personality and Assessment*.[21] Drawing on scattered research from the previous three decades,[22]

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[16] Ibid., 86.

[17] Y. Shoda, "Behavioral Expressions of a Personality System: Generation and Perception of Behavioral Signatures," in *The Coherence of Personality: Social-Cognitive Bases of Consistency, Variability, and Organization*, ed. D. Cervone and Y. Shoda (New York: Guildford Press, 1999), 156.

[18] D. C. Funder, *The Personality Puzzle*, 4 ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007), 103.

[19] J. Wiggins, "In Defense of Traits," in *The Handbook of Personality Psychology*, ed. J. Johnson R. Hogan, S. Briggs (San Diego: Academic Press, 1997), 96.

[20] W. Mischel, "Personality Coherence and Dispositions in a Cognitive-Affective Personality System (Caps) Approach," in *The Coherence of Personality: Social-Cognitive Bases of Consistency, Variability, and Organization*, ed. Y. Shoda D. Cervone (New York: Guildford Press, 1999), 39.

[21] *Personality and Assessment* (New York: John J. Wiley, 1968). Personality psychology, of course, is an ancient puzzle beginning with the pre-Socratics. I am only focussing on a particular aspect for which Mischel is a significant forerunner. For a brief history of personality psychology, see F. Dumont, *A History of Personality Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1-34.

[22] Notably Hartshorne and May's significant study of schoolchildren. H. Hartshorne and M. A. May, *Studies in the Nature of Character* (London: Macmillan, 1928).

Mischel made a strong case against trait theory. Among other things, a major source of evidence consisted in the low correlations between objective measures of the same trait.[23] In other words, the behavioural consistency needed to justify VE's conception of global traits was not empirically demonstrated. Mischel found that the modal correlation between a person's results on a personality test and their actual behaviour in a specific situation was about $r = .30$ and showed that traits accounted for only around 10% of a person's behavioural variance.[24] This result he called the 'personality coefficient'. Later studies give credence to this thesis, demonstrating that mood elevators (for example, finding money),[25] mood depressors (embarrassment),[26] the presence of bystanders, [27]ambient noise,[28] ambient smell,[29] and light,[30] all influence behaviour whether the subject is aware of them or not. If our conduct is significantly influenced by these trivial matters, how much more will it bend under more substantial temptation?

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[23] See Epstein and O'Brien for a history of the debate. Seymour Epstein and Edward J. O'Brien, "The Person-Situation Debate in Historical and Current Perspective," *Psychological Bulletin* 98, no. 3 (1985).

[24] Mark Alfano's explanation of the statistical analysis of behavioural variance is relatively concise: 'When it comes to explaining variance in behavior, the basic idea is that the statistical analysis of experimental results yields a correlation between a personality variable (such as extroversion) and a behavioral variable (such as an act of helping). Correlations range from −1 to +1. A correlation of 0 means that the individual variable is of literally no use in predicting the behavioral outcome; a correlation of 1 means that the individual variable is a perfect positive predictor; a correlation of −1 means that the individual variable is a perfect negative predictor. Actual correlations tend to be between −.3 and +.3. The amount of variance explained by a given predictor variable is the square of the correlation between that variable and the behavior in question. So, for instance, if extroversion is correlated with helping behavior at .25, then extroversion explains 6.25% of the variance in helping behavior.' See M. Alfano and D. Loeb, "Experimental Moral Philosophy," http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2014/entries/experimental-moral/.

[25] A. Isen, "Positive Affect, Cognitive Processes, and Social Behavior.," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. L. Berkowitz (San Diego: Academic Press, 1987); A. Isen, M. Clark, and M. Schwartz, "Duration of the Effect of Good Mood on Helping: Footprints on the Sands of Time," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 34 (1976); A. Isen and P. Levin, "The Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and Kindness," ibid.21 (1972).

[26] R. Apsler, "Effects of Embarrassment on Behavior toward Others," ibid.32 (1975).

[27] B. Latané and J. Darley, "Group Inhibition of Bystander Intervention in Emergencies," ibid.10 (1968); B. Latané and J. Rodin, "A Lady in Distress: Inhibiting Effects of Friends and Strangers on Bystander Intervention," *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 5 (1969); L. Bickman, "The Effect of Another Bystander's Ability to Help on Bystander Intervention in an Emergency," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 7, no. 3 (1971).

[28] E. Donnerstein and D. Wilson, "Effects of Noise and Perceived Control on Ongoing and Subsequent Aggressive Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 34 (1976); D. F. Juang et al., "Noise Pollution and Its Effects on Medical Care Workers and Patients in Hospitals " *International Journal of Environmental Science & Technology* 7, no. 4 (2010); C.-B. Zhong, V. Bohns, and F. Gino, "Good Lamps Are the Best Police: Darkness Increases Dishonesty and Self-Interested Behavior," *Psychological Science* 21, no. 3 (2010).

[29] R. Baron, "The Sweet Smell of…Helping: Effects of Pleasant Ambient Fragrance on Prosocial Behavior in Shopping Malls," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23 (1997); N. Guéguen, "The Sweet Smell of…Implicit Helping: Effects of Pleasant Ambient Fragrance on Spontaneous Help in Shopping Malls," *The Journal of Social Psychology* 154, no. 4 (2012).

[30] V. Bohns C.-B. Zhong, F. Gino, "Good Lamps Are the Best Police: Darkness Increases Dishonesty and Self-Interested Behavior," *Psychological Science* 21, no. 3 (2010).

Two main problems were apparent in Mischel's initial approach. First, he did not take into account the value of aggregated behaviour over a longer period of time. Second, he failed to see that intelligence tests, working with similarly low levels of correlation, were considerably accurate and stable. Further, it has been noted that dispositional and situational influences are usually not measured in the same terms.[31] Nonetheless, Mischel's research asked important questions about the nature of traits and the way they were talked about. For one thing, character traits were shown to have none of their supposed immunity to situational features. The burden of proof had shifted. And the person-situation debate was in full swing.

The person-situation debate refers to whether 'persons' or 'situations' play a larger role in the variation of *behaviour*. It is, primarily, a thesis about behaviour and its causes. Batting for the person account, formative trait theorist Gordon Allport wrote, 'Whatever tendencies exist reside in a person, for a person is the *sole possessor of the energy that leads to action* [emphasis added]'.[32] The opposing view sees the 'situation' in which a person finds themselves as more significant in the determination of behaviour. The situationist states that personality is astonishingly sensitive to even small and seemingly irrelevant situational factors and is, in fact, largely determined by these. Where the folk theory may call a *person* 'honest', the situationist will say that 'telling the truth is under the control of the *circumstances* in which it occurs [emphasis added]'.[33]

This debate soon reached philosophy departments.[34] Virtue ethics and the emerging character scepticism were always 'bound to clash'.[35] The first wave of contact came from Flanagan, Kupperman, and Badwhar who noted the lessons which virtue ethics might learn from recent psychological data.[36] The floodgates opened for philosophers with articles from Gilbert Harman and John Doris, followed by Doris' more

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[31] D. C. Funder and D. J. Ozer, "Behavior as a Function of the Situation," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 44, no. 1 (1983): 107. Mischel's later *Introduction to Personality* has a detailed discussion of problems in the measuring of differences. See, W. Mischel and R. Plomin, *Introduction to Personality* (Orlando: Hardcourt College Publishers, 1999), 165-99.

[32] G. W. Allport, "Traits Revisited," *American Psychologist* 21 (1966): 2.

[33] K. S. Bowers, "Situationism in Psychology: An Analysis and Critique," *Psychological Review* 80, no. 5 (1973): 309.

[34] Candace Upton gives a very clear overview of the philosophical history in C. L. Upton, "Virtue Ethics and Moral Psychology: The Situationism Debate," *The Journal of Ethics* 13 no. 2/3, Virtue Ethics and Moral Psychology: The Situationism Debate (2009).

[35] J. Prinz, "The Normativity Challenge: Cultural Psychology Provides the Real Threat to Virtue Ethics," ibid.13: 118.

[36] Owen Flanagan, *Varieties of Moral Personality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991); J. Kupperman, *Character* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); N. Badhwar, "The Limited Unity of Virtue," *Nous* 30 (1996).

comprehensive book *Lack of Character* in 2002.[37] In line with the psychologist Ziva Kunda,[38] Harman does not distinguish between global and local traits and appears to question both.[39] I will reconstruct a general situationist account mainly informed by the work of John Doris and Jesse Prinz.

1.3 Situationism in Philosophy

The situationist's main thesis states that *behavioural variation* across a population has more to do with *situational* differences than *dispositional* differences among people.[40] Reconstructing this account, the situationist levels three charges against the notion of character said to be held by VE. I will first outline the charges and then survey the evidence that situationists take to support them.

(1) *Consistency*. Systematic observation of people does not provide evidence of consistent traits.[41] VE (according to the situationist) postulates 'global' character traits such as 'kind' or 'cruel' which are consistent across a wide range of situations and over time. Doris argues that the experimental evidence he outlines does not give support to this view. Rather, behavioural variation across a given population is due mainly to situational differences rather than dispositional differences among individuals. Where there *is* any significant consistency, this is explained by the continued similarity of the situation rather than through any work done by the trait. At this point Doris allows for *local* trait attribution (as opposed to 'global' attribution). While global labels such as

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[37] G. Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series* 99 (1999); "The Nonexistence of Character Traits," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series* 100 (2000); J. Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics," *Nous* 32, no. 4 (1998); *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behaviour* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002). See also, P. B. M. Vranas, "The Indeterminacy Paradox: Character Evaluations and Human Psychology," *Noûs* 39, no. 1 (2005); "Against Moral Character Evaluations: The Undetectability of Virtue and Vice," *The Journal of Ethics* 13, no. 2/3, Virtue Ethics and Moral Psychology: The Situationism Debate (2009); N. Badhwar, "The Milgram Experiments, Learned Helplessness, and Character Traits," ibid.; J. Prinz, "The Normativity Challenge: Cultural Psychology Provides the Real Threat to Virtue Ethics," ibid. Badhwar, though, is more optimistic about the possibility of global vice.
[38] Z. Kunda, *Social Cognition: Making Sense of People* (Massachuetts: MIT Press, 1999), 395, 443, 99.
[39] Harman, "Moral Philosophy Meets Social Psychology: Virtue Ethics and the Fundamental Attribution Error," 316; "Skepticism About Character Traits," *The Journal of Ethics* 13, no. 2/3 Virtue Ethics and Moral Psychology: The Situationism Debate (2009): 238.
[40] [T]here is reason to doubt that behavioural regularity is as substantial as casual observation may suggest […] since social observation is piecemeal and unsystematic. At bottom, the question is whether the behavioural regularity we observe is to be primarily explained by reference to robust dispositional structures or situational regularity […] I insist that the striking variability of behaviour with situational variation favours the latter hypothesis', Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behaviour*, 26.
[41] Ibid., 24.

'compassionate' or 'honest' are unsubstantiated by the evidence, people may behave consistently in 'iterated trials of the same situation'.[42] For example, a child may have 'exam-honesty' but lie happily to his parents. Doris also offers 'sailing-in-rough-weather-with-one's-friends courageous' and admits that local trait attributions are 'unlikely to make for elegant literature'.[43] These local traits are situation-specific and, thus, fundamentally governed by the situation.

(2) *Efficacy*. Traits are not causally efficacious. Behaviour is more regularly dictated by situational factors.[44] Some virtue ethicists hold that traits are efficacious and play a role in explaining behaviour independently of external influences.[45] Such traits would ensure trait-relevant behaviour even in new and novel trait-relevant situations and even when such situations are not encouraging of such behaviour. For example, the virtuous person who is both in a hurry *and* due to give a lecture will still be motivated by their compassionate character trait and assist the beggar in need. According to this version of VE, virtuous character overrides the situational factors of hurry and pressure. Doris rejects the idea, writing that traits which lead to trait-relevant behaviour across a wide variety of trait-relevant situations are 'radically empirically undersupported'.[46] Prinz also writes that the many experiments show that 'relatively minor situation manipulation with no obvious moral significance exerts a major influence on people's moral behavior, and, importantly, no personality variable seems to exert such influence'.[47]

(3) The *Rarity Thesis*. As stated earlier, the Rarity Thesis (RT) claims that on the basis of evidence from psychological research we are justified in believing that possession of the Aristotelian virtues is very rare.[48] While VE uses RT as a defence, arguing that virtue is allowed to be a rare ideal, Doris believes it creates a number of problems for the virtue ethicist though it does not, it should be said, prove that the tenets of virtue ethics are *false*. The problems Doris foresees pertain to the supposed advantages of virtue ethics over its normative rivals (Kantianism, utilitarianism, etc.) as 'virtue theory

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[42] Ibid., 25.
[43] Ibid., 115.
[44] Ibid., 24. Doris uses the term 'robust,' ibid., 18. 'Efficacious' is used throughout Prinz, "The Normativity Challenge: Cultural Psychology Provides the Real Threat to Virtue Ethics."
[45] Dent, "Virtues and Actions," 328; McDowell, "Virtue and Reason."
[46] Doris and Stich, "As a Matter of Fact: Empirical Perspectives on Ethics," 119. See also Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics," 506.
[47] Prinz, "The Normativity Challenge: Cultural Psychology Provides the Real Threat to Virtue Ethics," 119. Prinz admits that some narrow (local) traits might be efficacious but makes clear that these are not the sorts of traits Aristotelians assert. He states that there is a significant lack of empirical support for the efficacy of broad traits such as compassion, cruelty, or honesty.
[48] Lott, "Situationism, Skill, and the Rarity of Virtue," 387.

no longer has the selling point of a compelling descriptive psychology'.[49] Three implications stem from this. First, virtue theory can no longer claim to emphasise 'the sort of character agents may inculcate'.[50] In light of experimental evidence it does not appear that people can secure consistent or efficacious virtuous traits as VE claims. Second, it is no longer an account which allows us appeal to the virtues for the ordinary 'explanation of behavior'.[51] Behaviour, according to the situationist, is primarily influenced by situational factors which we are usually unaware of. Third, it does not avoid the problems associated with 'theoretical meditation'.[52] According to Doris, a great benefit of VE is its supposed ability to appeal to 'familiar, unproblematic' motivations such as 'because I love him' rather than 'because it would maximise utility' or 'because duty requires it'.[53] That is, VE claims that the ideally habituated person would act in a naturally virtuous way without the need to rely on the 'creepiness' of theory-driven moral reflection. However, in the absence of widespread virtue and the need to appeal to a virtuous ideal instead of simply acting from virtuous dispositions, Doris suggests that 'worries about theoretical meditation may recur'.[54] RT strips virtue theory of its egalitarianism, explanatory power, and predictive power.[55] These are serious concerns.

From where does Doris find the evidence to make his claims? The situationist position relies quite heavily on four key and now familiar experiments.[56]

The first is Hartshorne and May's 1928 study of close to 11,000 schoolchildren.[57] Across 33 domains where honest behaviour could be exhibited, there was almost no correlation (0.2). A child might cheat on a spelling test and not a mathematics test. About this, Prinz writes that 'a person who doesn't steal may nevertheless cheat, which undermines the application of broad labels such as "honest" or "dishonest"'.[58] This is said to destabilise the concept of global traits. Second, Darley and Batson watched students at Princeton Theological Seminary who were due to give a lecture on the Good Samaritan

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[49] Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics," 520.
[50] Ibid., 512.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid., 520.
[53] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 205-06.
[54] Doris, "Persons, Situations, and Virtue Ethics." The concern regarding alienating forms of motivation is articulated in M. Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," *The Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976).
[55] Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*, 63.
[56] These four are used by Doris along with others. Doris also provides examples outside of the confines of experimental conditions, including the Holocaust and the Vietnam War. See Doris, *Lack of Character: Personality and Moral Behaviour*, 53-61.
[57] Hartshorne and May, *Studies in the Nature of Character*.
[58] Prinz, "The Normativity Challenge: Cultural Psychology Provides the Real Threat to Virtue Ethics," 120.

- a classic tale of helping those in need. Along the way they encountered a man in need of help.[59] 63% of subjects stopped to help in a no-hurry condition. Only 10% of those in a great hurry stopped. Here a morally irrelevant situational factor (hurry) is the primary factor influencing behaviour. Third, Isen and Levin's study showed that subjects who found a dime in a phone booth were likely to help a stranger who had dropped their papers (84%) while subjects who did not find the dime were unlikely to help (4%).[60] Once again, a non-moral factor is determining behaviour. It is not 'honesty' or 'goodness' which motivates, but whether a person finds a coin or not. Finally, commentators reference the infamous Milgram experiment. Subjects were directed to shock a colleague (the 'learner) of the experimenter at up to 450 volts with the purported aim of determining the effects of punishment on learning.[61] Unbeknownst to the subjects, the shocks were not real. As the experiment progresses, the shocks increase in voltage, and, despite the colleague's 'intensely agonised screams', sixty-five percent of both male and female subjects continued to shock the victim until the experimenter allowed them to stop.[62] Not *one* of the thousand or so subjects came directly to the victim's aid. It appears that the majority of the subjects' 'characters were not adequate to the task of preventing this brutality'.[63]

In summary, the situationist claims that trivial situational matters override whatever traits that are supposedly intrinsic to the person and it is these situational factors which determine *behaviour* in most instances. Any apparent consistency in behaviour that we do observe is simply the result of our observing people in similar circumstances. In light of this we should conclude that virtues which help persons act in noble ways regardless of situational pressures are either incredibly rare or non-existent and, as stated, this is a problem for VE.

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[59] J. Darley and C. Batson, "From Jerusalem to Jericho: A Study of Situational and Dispositional Variables in Helping Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 27, no. 100-108 (1973).

[60] A. Isen and P. Levin, "The Effect of Feeling Good on Helping: Cookies and Kindness," ibid.21 (1972).

[61] S. Milgram, "Behavioral Study of Obedience," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 67 (1963); *Obedience to Authority* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974).

[62] This figure of 65% was, quite remarkably and consistently, seen again in repeated experiments (experiments 1, 2, 5, 8). Experiments 6 and 10 saw 50% and 47.7% *full* obedience. See *Obedience to Authority*, 170-71.

[63] J. Sabini and M. Silver, "Lack of Character? Situationism Critiqued," *Ethics* 115 (2005): 545.

1.4 Virtue Ethics Responds

Situationism has not gone unchallenged. Prinz writes that virtue ethicists have been 'lining up' to respond and indeed they have, with varying degrees of success.[64] For the sake of brevity, I will structure the replies as following the three charges laid by Doris.

(1) *Consistency*. Jayawickreme et al. suggest that the situationist critique focusses mistakenly on individual psychological experiments rather than the correlations of an individual's behaviour across situations. What is needed, they argue, is to measure the stability of the *same* person from situation to situation. Their density-distribution model takes into account distributed behaviour and concludes, 'Although each individual varies considerably in his or her behavior, each individual also has a central point or tendency around which he or she varies'.[65] They provide an example of a *moderately compassionate* person. A graph depicts a person's compassion-relevant behaviours over many occasions of a week. The person is sometimes callous and sometimes saintly, but 'on the majority of occasions, he or she was *moderately compassionate*; that is, this person has a tendency to enact a particular degree of compassion [emphasis added]'.[66] Of course, we could reply by saying that distributed behaviour is not *all* that matters for character. The claim that character traits only need to cluster around a certain point fails to take into account serious exceptions that disprove the claim to have a particular character. For example, a man does not have the trait of fidelity if he is faithful to his wife only six days a week, and he still counts as a murderer if he refrains from murder most of the time. Jayawickreme et al. concede that in some rare cases a character trait may be of the all-or-nothing variety, nevertheless they conclude that the argument makes 'a lot of hay' out of some rather extreme examples.[67]

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[64] Prinz, "The Normativity Challenge: Cultural Psychology Provides the Real Threat to Virtue Ethics," 120.
[65] E. Jayawickreme et al., "Virtuous States and Virtuous Traits: How the Empirical Evidence Regarding the Existence of Broad Traits Saves Virtue Ethics from the Situationist Critique," *Theory and Research in Education* 12, no. 3 (2014): 302. Also noted here is the significant overlap between observer-target and observer-observer agreement about trait possession, meaning that the way we see ourselves and the way others see us is remarkably similar even over long periods of time, ibid., 291. On this, see also, J. Kurtz and J. Sherker, "Relationship Quality, Trait Similarity, and Self-Other Agreement on Personality Ratings in College Roommates," *Journal of Personality* 71 (2003): 42; B. W. Roberts and W. F. DelVecchio, "The Rank-Order Consistency of Personality Traits from Childhood to Old Age: A Quantitative Review of Longitudinal Studies," *Psychological Bulletin* 126 (2000).
[66] Jayawickreme et al., "Virtuous States and Virtuous Traits: How the Empirical Evidence Regarding the Existence of Broad Traits Saves Virtue Ethics from the Situationist Critique," 295.
[67] Ibid., 300-01.

However even if we accept the aggregate account - or think it is satisfied in some cases - for a person who is purported to have a *virtuous* trait, we might reasonably set the bar a little higher. That is, a person who is skilled in kindness should be more aware of situations where such behaviour is appropriate than the average person and more inclined to act kindly across a wider range of situations. Here is an instance where we should note the difference between a defence of *general* character traits and *virtuous* character traits. Jayawickreme et al. may be correct in arguing that aggregate behaviour provides evidence of consistent character or, at least, consistent behaviour. But virtuous character might require something more than this. The virtuous have been said to be those 'acute in detecting cases in which the virtue is at issue'.[68] 'In addition to doing what the virtuous person would do,' writes Alfano, 'one needs to notice what the virtuous person would notice'.[69] Virtue is bound up in moral attentiveness and the virtuous person is expected to be skilled in this. A finger slip from a concert pianist means more than a mistake from a child in their weekly lesson. For the purportedly virtuous, then, a slip is more serious and may lead to doubts over their possession of the trait. And remember this ominous consideration from the situationist: if virtue cannot stand up to relatively subtle situational forces (for example, hurry), how much less will it stand under greater temptations?[70]

(2) *Efficacy*. Some virtue ethicists believe this part of the situationist attack in its current form poses no threat to them. They argue that the conception of character attacked by situationists is not really the same conception offered by virtue ethicists and, thus, their notion of efficacy is something slightly different.[71] Kamtekar believes that the

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[68] D. Copp and D. Sobel, "Morality and Virtue: An Assessment of Some Recent Work in Virtue Ethics," *Ethics* 114, no. 514-554 (2004): 516.

[69] Alfano, *Character as Moral Fiction*, 76.

[70] Of course, Russell points out that there is no guarantee that situational forces will make us act *wrongly*. They might in the same way push us to do the *right* thing and so perhaps there is less need to worry. See L. Russell, "Is Situationism All Bad News?," *Utilitas* 21, no. 4 (2009): 452.

[71] In fact it has also been said that the conception of character under attack has little to do with *Aristotle*. See A. M. Croom, "Vindicating Virtue: A Critical Analysis of the Situationist Challenge against Aristotelian Moral Psychology," *Integrative Psychological and Behavioral Science* 48 (2014): 35-42; K. Kristjánsson, "An Aristotelian Critique of Situationism," *Philosophy* 83, no. 1 (2008). Annas charges the situationists with selective quotation of Aristotle, J. Annas, "Comments on John Doris's Lack of Character," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 71, no. 3 (2005): 637. But virtue ethicists like Darwall freely admit that Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics owes more to, for example, Elizabeth Anscombe, Phillipa Foot, John McDowell, Alisdair MacIntyre, Annette Baier, Rosalind Hursthouse, and Michael Slote, among others, S. Darwall, "Introduction," in *Vitue Ethics*, ed. Stephen Darwall (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing), 2. Coope goes so far as to say our modern understanding of virtue ethics is 'more or less' thanks to the work of Anscombe and Foote, 'The Somerville Two', C. M. Coope, "Modern Virtue Ethics," in *Values and Virtues: Aristotelianism in Contemporary Ethics*, ed. T. Chappell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2006), 21. Thus, while a better exegesis of Aristotle might be polite, it may not have an enormous effect on the situationist critique.

situationist creates a caricature of character, reducing its efficacy essentially to actions.[72] VE does not understand character traits as mere behaviour but rather as *disposition* to act upon reasons.[73] The dispositional view requires that we identify virtuous character outside of acts and feelings alone. Without doing this our account of the latter will be circular.[74] While virtuous dispositions do often issue in virtuous acts, this is not what defines them. Efficacy of traits, then, is not about failsafe behaviour but rather the disposition to do X in circumstances C. If traits are understood as dispositions, it is said that the experimental evidence does not disprove the existence or potential efficacy of these dispositions. This appears to be Levy's point when he states that a disposition does not vanish simply because it is not triggered.[75] A vase has the disposition to break upon contact with a concrete floor. Wrapping this vase in a thick blanket does not mean it no longer retains this disposition or potential efficacy.

But, remember, the situationist thesis is one about *behaviour* and not about the existence or *potential* efficacy of character traits/dispositions. The situationist can agree that dispositions can continue to exist and have potential efficacy even when they are regularly blanketed by situational factors. There may be circumstances whereby traits can be 'blanketed' by the situation (e.g. a vase in a blanket or a compassionate man in far too great a hurry to assist another in need). The situationist, however, is arguing that most of life, or, at least, a great deal more of life than is initially supposed, is just one of these innumerable circumstances and we are mostly unaware of them. To put it another way, the vase is almost always wrapped in the blanket; while it does indeed retain its fragile disposition, it will very rarely break. This is problematic for VE. Surely it is the task of the virtuous to act in accordance with character in precisely those situations where the non-virtuous would fail to do so.[76] Virtue is not the kind of thing that should be blocked by irrelevant situational factors.

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[72] R. Kamtekar, "Situationism and Virtue Ethics on the Content of Our Character," *Ethics* 114, no. 3 (2004): 460. Webber makes a similar case in J. Webber, "Character, Global and Local," *Utilitas* 19, no. 4 (2007). Similarly, Kupperman also believes the situationist conception of virtue is unrealistic, maintaining that there need not be one sole appropriate response in a given situation for the virtuous person. Virtuous people have diverse goals, temperaments, and histories, and so may reasonably act differently in a given situation. See, Kupperman, *Character*, 240. It might be said, however, that in an experiment such as Darley and Batson's, of the few virtuous options available to the subjects, *not* helping the stranger is hardly one of them.

[73] Annas, "Comments on John Doris's Lack of Character," 642.

[74] T. Hurka, "Virtuous Act, Virtuous Dispositions," *Analysis* 66, no. 1 (2006): 70.

[75] N. Levy, "Moral Character: An Empirical Theory, by Christian Miller, Review by Neil Levy," *Ethics* 124, no. 3 (2014): 643. In fact, he writes, it may trigger and not result in behaviour.

[76] I am sure that Annas would be in agreement with this sentiment.

Some virtue ethicists do understand 'efficacy' in the same way as the situationist and argue for the efficacy of certain traits by their statistical link to certain outcomes. There is, write Jayawickreme et al., no better indicator of happiness than extraversion.[77] Some studies appear to indicate a vast range of domains in which a person's life is affected by personality. These have concluded that personality effects are 'ubiquitous' and 'routinely consequential'.[78] A statement such as 'hostility […] predicts poorer physical health',[79] though, is not exactly the same as saying that personality traits are efficacious. While hostility and poor health may be *linked* (as evidence suggests), it is not identical to saying, for example, that the trait of compassion is causing compassionate behaviour; correlation is not cause. Again, extraversion may indeed statistically *indicate* happiness. What is missing in this response is evidence to show that, for example, shyness as a trait *effectively causes* shy behaviour or whatever else is the predicted outcome.

(3) *Rarity*. VE claims RT in its own defence, stating that the rarity of virtue as shown by experimental psychology does not count against its *existence* but only its *prevalence*. Indeed, Aristotle himself held virtue to be considerably rare and difficult to attain. Athanassoulis follows this line, writing that the possession of virtuous character traits is a possibility rather than an actuality for most people. The virtuous agent, she writes, is an ideal and one we may never fully reach. This is an acceptable, if disappointing, reality.[80]

Micah Lott distinguishes between two ways of understanding the phrase 'anyone can be virtuous' and likens it to a teacher who says 'almost anyone can play the piano'. It is not the case that anyone can *right now* play the piano, but rather the case that all can *learn* to play the piano, and then to play it with the proper training.[81] Lott concludes by saying, 'if the egalitarian claim is about what people can become, or how they can be brought to act, then it does not conflict with the Rarity Thesis'.[82] But simply understanding virtue as a skill does not mean that everyone can acquire the skills to become more than a poor player. Prinz further argues that the empirical evidence gives no indication that we possess the kind of psychology which would allow for this.[83]

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[77] Jayawickreme et al., "Virtuous States and Virtuous Traits: How the Empirical Evidence Regarding the Existence of Broad Traits Saves Virtue Ethics from the Situationist Critique," 291.
[78] D. Ozer and V. Benet-Martinez, "Personality and the Prediction of Consequential Outcomes," *Annual Review of Psychology* 57 (2006): 416.
[79] Ibid., 406.
[80] Athanassoulis, "A Response to Harman: Virtue Ethics and Character Traits," 217.
[81] Lott, "Situationism, Skill, and the Rarity of Virtue," 401.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Prinz, "The Normativity Challenge: Cultural Psychology Provides the Real Threat to Virtue Ethics," 125.

Understanding virtue as a skill does not mean we possess the means to overcome subtle and subconscious influences which direct our behaviour.

1.5 Conclusion

Some authors believe the person-situation debate to be over.[84] With Kenrick, Funder has written that the truth is not so black and white and instead exists somewhere in the grey.[85] Traits and situations both play their part and the dispute is based on a false binary; persons and situations are as linked as genetics and environment.[86] Even if situationists can show that situational features are doing a considerable, even overwhelming, amount of work in producing behavioural variance, it is perhaps too great a burden of proof to show incontrovertibly that character traits are doing *no* work whatsoever. After all, it is the mix of character traits with situational features which produces the behaviour.[87] Situational features do not operate in a vacuum. Behaviour, to varying degrees, is a reaction of two elements: person and situation.

Owen Flanagan, who first opened up this area of debate for philosophers, here wishes to 'make amends' and argues in similar fashion.[88] In reply to the 'mischievous hyperbolists' (Harman and Doris), Flanagan offers a linguistic turn of sorts. Instead of battling the impasse, he rebrands 'person' and 'situation' as two types of causes, writing:

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[84] D. C. Funder, "Persons, Behaviors and Situations: An Agenda for Personality Psychology in the Postwar Era," *Journal of Research in Personality* 43, no. Personality and Assessment at Age 40: Reflections on the Past Person–Situation Debate and Emerging Directions of Future Person-Situation Integration- Personality and Assessment at Age 40, Edited By M. Brent Donnellan, Richard E. Lucas and William Fleeson (2009). Fleeson and Noftle also give an overview of the current state of synthesis and note the need for both sides to work together. See, E. Noftle W. Fleeson, "The End of the Person-Situation Debate: An Emerging Synthesis in the Answer to the Consistency Question," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 2, no. 4 (2008).

[85] D. T. Kenrick and D. C. Funder, "Profiting from Controversy Lessons from the Person-Situation Debate," *American Psychologist* 43, no. 1 (1988): 31. D. C. Funder, *Personality Judgment: A Realistic Approach to Person Perception* (San Diego: Academic Press, 1999), 37.

[86] "Persons, Behaviors and Situations: An Agenda for Personality Psychology in the Postwar Era," 121, 23. In the same issue Mischel is optimistic about the relationship between person and situation but, on the subject of genetics, cautions, 'Just as it makes no sense to talk about the functions of a gene without its specific context (different context, different function; no context, no function), it also may be time to stop thinking about personality traits as if they were autonomous entities whose main effects can be isolated.' See W. Mischel, "From *Personality and Assessment* (1968) to Personality Science, 2009," ibid.49, no. Personality and Assessment at Age 40: Reflections on the Past Person–Situation Debate and Emerging Directions of Future Person-Situation Integration Personality and Assessment at Age 40, Edited by M. Brent Donnellan, Richard E. Lucas and William Fleeson.

[87] See, for example, a discussion of Interactionism in K. S. Bowers, "Situationism in Psychology: Analysis and a Critique," *Psychological Review* 80 (1973).

[88] O. Flanagan, "Moral Science? Still Metaphysical after All These Years," in *Personality, Identity, and Character: Explorations in Moral Psychology*, ed. D. K. Lapsley D. Narvaez (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 55.

The upshot is that debates about the relative causal efficacy of traits versus situations is a discussion about the relative causal power of two kinds of causes, where both exist. There are traits, and there are situations. They interact. End of story. Any questions about the phenomenology, robustness, globality, and causal efficacy of character traits are empirical questions that ought to be discussed and evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Such questions are not questions about which philosophers' opinions carry any weight. The upshot is this: The argument about the nonexistence of character traits is much ado about nothing. It fills a niche that (still) deserves to remain empty.[89]

However, while we might agree that there are two interacting causes influencing behaviour, it does not resolve the issue as to whether *virtue* requires a kind of immunity to situational features and, if so, if there is a way of obtaining these kinds of traits with our current and potentially inadequate psychology.

In the next chapter I will examine Miller's response to the issues raised thus far. Miller develops an impressive account of character making unique claims about the sorts of character traits we actually possess. We will see that these character traits, according to Miller, can be both consistent and efficacious, and are also not to be understood as virtues or vices in most cases.

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[89] Ibid., 64.

Chapter II: Miller's Account of Character

2.1 Introduction

This thesis is concerned with RT. RT states that on the basis of evidence from psychological research we are justified in believing that possession of the Aristotelian virtues (and vices) is very rare. Situationists like John Doris arrive at this position by aiming to show that most people do not have consistent or efficacious traits such as those postulated by VE. Because of this, virtuous character traits which can guarantee trait-relevant behaviour in new and novel situations are very rare indeed and VE is a less competitive normative ethical theory.

Christian Miller, against the situationist, does not deny that character traits have both *consistency* and *efficacy*. Against VE, he also supports a version of RT. How does Miller arrive at RT without denying the consistency and efficacy of character traits? This chapter will be devoted to answering that question and to examining Miller's account of character.

First, I will explain Miller's tripartite distinction between personality, character, and virtue. Second, I will examine Miller's Mixed Trait theory in more detail, exploring how it allows consistency and efficacy. Here I will also highlight Miller's high standards for virtue and vice. Third, I will turn to Miller's RT and his refocussed challenge to VE.

2.2 Miller's Tripartite Distinction

The situationist, argues Miller, is actually too quick to discount evidence *in favour* of the existence of consistent and efficacious character traits. However, Miller accepts that experimental evidence does not give support to the existence of widespread virtue or vice (RT). How can these two claims be reconciled? Miller solves this problem by making a tripartite distinction between, *personality*, *character*, and *virtue*. The situationist makes the mistake of lumping them all together and so claims too much.

Let us begin with Miller's tripartite distinction between personality traits, character traits, and virtues and vices. Here he begins to make important divisions which will help him to reach RT without dependence on the denial of the consistency and efficacy of character traits.

2.2.1 Traits and Personality Traits
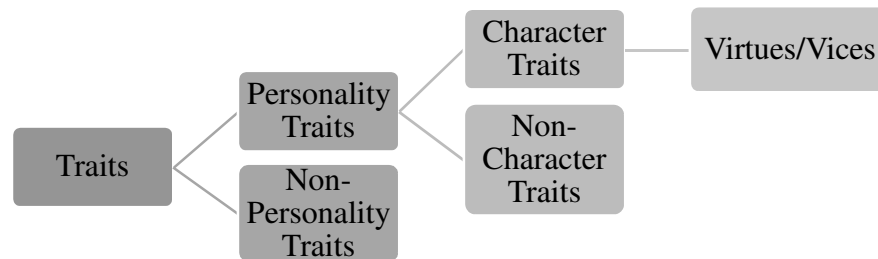
Figure 1.

Broadly speaking, a *trait* is a distinguishing characteristic or quality and can therefore belong to anything. A tree can be tall. A ball can be bouncy. A towel can be rough. In reference to people we often speak of personality traits (shy, clever, outgoing, etc.). The desire to explain and categorise people is widespread and nothing new. Aristotle's fourth-century project concerned character traits and offered terms such as vanity, modesty, and cowardice. Theophrastus, his student, delineated thirty personality types.[90] In 1936 Allport and Odbert identified around 18,000 English words relevant to describing personality in some way.[91]

Miller writes that personality traits are used to describe the 'mental life of a creature' which can and often does influence behaviour.[92] For example, a shy person *wants* (mental state) to avoid public speaking and so avoids some social situations (behaviour). Being *traits* they are relatively stable and more than just fleeting states of mind. A person who avoids one party may not count as shy. Personality traits, then, are ways of describing individuals in terms of relatively stable and enduring patterns of thought and behaviour.

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[90] Matthews and Deary, *Personality Traits*, 1.
[91] G. Allport and H. Odbert, "Trait Names: A Psycho-Lexical Study," *Psychological Monographs* 47 (1936).
[92] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 4.

Miller understands personality traits as *dispositions* of a certain kind. Here he rejects the 'summary view' whereby traits are just those mental states and actions that a person has exhibited over time.[93] For example, on the summary view, the statement 'Mary is arrogant' just means that over time Mary has displayed a high frequency of arrogant acts.[94] This has been Mischel's position; traits are 'summary labels' attributed to 'observed behavior'.[95] Intuitively, the summary view appears quite plausible. Michele Moody-Adams writes, 'In denying the connection between character and its outward expression in behavior, [one] severs the very connection that makes talk about the character of real human beings possible and intelligible'.[96] She concludes: 'A moral assessment of what a person is *really like* cannot rightfully be detached from what a person *really does*'.[97]

There are, according to Miller, two problems with this view, to which we might add a third. First, a person may very well have the trait of heroism but never have an opportunity to show it. This situation is 'unintelligible' on the summary view.[98] Second, imagine a person has been witty in the past but has been given no subsequent opportunities. The summary view does not allow us to be sure as to whether such a person has the trait or not without further behaviours. Third, the summary view appears to conflate trait *possession* with trait *attribution*. Attribution depends on another to pronounce the label through, in Mishel's words, 'observed behavior'. Moody-Adams is also concerned with making 'moral *assessment* [emphasis added]' intelligible and not simply trait *possession*. But if there were no one else on earth save the courageous man, would he cease to be courageous simply because there was nobody to attribute courage to him? He either possesses the trait or he does not. The summary view, however, requires

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[93] This is also known as the 'aggregative account'. For more on this, Russell aims offer the 'strongest possible' version of this 'comparatively neglected' account, though he himself favours a dispositional view. See L. Russell, *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation [Kindle Edition]* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 133ff.

[94] D. Buss and K. Craik, "The Act Frequency Approach to Personality," *Psychological Review* 90 (1983): 106.

[95] W. Mischel, "Toward a Cognitive Social Learning Reconceptualization of Personality," ibid.80 (1973): 264.

[96] M. Moody-Adams, "On the Old Saw That Character Is Destiny," in *Identity, Character, and Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Amélie Oskenberg Rorty Owen Flanagan (London: The MIT Press, 1990), 115.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 19.

a spectator to confirm trait possession via trait attribution through 'observed behaviour'. The summary view requires an extra and perhaps unnecessary step.[99]

Miller instead favours the dispositional view. Dispositions, he writes, 'are sensitive to certain stimulus events or stimulus conditions specific to the given disposition'.[100] A vase, being fragile, is sensitive to being hit by a baseball but not to the colour of the baseball. Stimulus events trigger manifestations of dispositions. For example, writes Miller, my belief that 2 + 7 = 9 is latent most of the day but given the right kind of stimulus, for example, a maths test, the disposition is activated in the form of a belief that 2 + 7 = 9.

Traits, being dispositions, are activated in the same way. The trait of compassion is triggered by 'what the person sees as ongoing suffering, and can lead directly to compassionate *thoughts* and ultimately to compassionate *behavior* aimed at relieving that suffering [emphasis added]'.[101] Importantly, Miller writes that the stimuli need not be actual features of the situation but only (or, at least) a person's impressions of those features.

2.2.2 Character Traits

Miller understands personality traits as stable mental state dispositions which can and do influence behaviour. But since this thesis is concerned with RT we must define character traits and, ultimately, virtuous and vicious character traits. We will begin here with character traits.

The graph above (figure 1) shows that personality traits can be further divided into character traits and non-character traits. Though he admits there are probably no distinct mental states which would neatly separate character from non-character traits,[102] Miller initially suggests that a character trait is a 'personality trait for which a person who has it is (at least to some degree) normatively responsible for doing so'.[103] The focus is on normative responsibility.

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[99] The summary view may have something important to say where virtue is concerned. Virtue character is a kind of excellence in practice and to some degree requires performance for attribution. Perhaps this is what Moody-Adams is getting at where she writes concerning *moral* assessment. Of course, if there is no opportunity to be compassionate it need not be the case that a person does *not* have the trait.
[100] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 20.
[101] Ibid., 21. Compassion is not a personality trait but the principle can be applied to explain them.
[102] Ibid., 11.
[103] Ibid.

To clarify this, Miller offers two examples of persons with personality traits which he would *not*, on this view, call character traits. The first is of infants. We would, he writes, be hesitant to attribute character traits to them such as wit or ambition. The traits they possess, then, are personality traits and not (yet) character traits. The second example is of a person whose traits are genetically acquired and completely resistant to her own efforts at modification. Though Miller does not give an example at this point, we might think here of a person who has severe anxiety and, even though she has tried medication and training, cannot change this. Again, writes Miller, these are personality traits and not character traits.

But there is a difference between the two examples. Infants do not possess character traits because such traits require appropriate mental states or, in Annas' words, the disposition to act for *reasons*. We do not call a tiger *cruel* for eating the hunter. A person with genetically given traits, however, is a rather different case. There are two points to be made here. First, such a person, unlike the infant, may well be acting upon reasons when they exhibit the relevant trait.

Second, the genetic acquisition of traits is, as I understand it, another way of saying that the trait is outside of the agent's control. Discussion of responsibility is difficult and Miller admits as much.[104] However, let us follow Trianosky here in distinguishing between responsibility for character and responsibility for actions or responsibility in general. 'Character', writes Trianosky, 'is the product not only of voluntary action but also of the activity of temperament, along with upbringing, childhood experiences, social environment, peer expectations, and pure happenstance'.[105] We might add to that list genetics. We do not bear normative responsibility for most of these inputs to our traits. Excluding traits that are largely or wholly the product of non-voluntary inputs would mean that almost none of what we would ordinarily call character traits would meet Miller's criteria. This path may lead to a thoroughgoing scepticism about character. Instead, the point of character trait ascriptions is:

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[104] Ibid., 13. See the appendix for a further discussion of responsibility and character.
[105] G. Trianosky, "Natural Affection and Responsibility for Character: A Critique of Kantian Views of the Virtues," in *Identity, Character, Morality: Essays in Moral Psychology*, ed. Amélie Oskenberg Rorty Owen Flanagan (London: The MIT Press, 1990), 104. Schopenhauer makes a similar point about the inborn nature of character. See A. Schopenhauer, *Essay on the Freedom on the Will*, trans. Konstantin Kolenda (New York: Dover Publications, 2005), 49ff. This is reminiscent of Strawson's Basic Argument. See G. Strawson, "The Impossibility of Moral Responsibility," *Philosophical Studies* 75, no. 1/2, Free Will, Determinism, and Moral Responsibility (1994).

[T]o establish that of the various persons who might have authored your character, you were the one who did and not someone else. The content of your character is to be explained by the activity of your agency, and not by the activity of some other agent.[106]

The statement, 'He has a gloomy character, though it's not his fault,' poses no problem for common usage. In such instances we acknowledge both the gloomy character and its involuntary nature without contradiction. It seems here is a clear difference between possession of a character trait and responsibility for it. Miller's example of the person with traits outside of their control, then, might not be such an unusual case. It is the situation in which many (or most) people find themselves to varying degrees.[107] Making normative responsibility a criteria for the possession of a character trait would seem to commit one to a kind of scepticism about character, though of a very different kind from Doris.[108] Hingeing the definition on normative responsibility will rule out an enormous number of character traits for which we are not truly responsible

Recognising that issues of responsibility are controversial, Miller also develops a second formulation for the determination of a character trait: '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'.[109] This proposal does not depend on issues of responsibility and control.[110] While he does not reject the first formulation entirely,[111] he thinks that his second formulation of the criterion for somethings being a character trait can be taken independently from the first.

In line with this second formulation, Miller offers the following test to discover whether a trait is a personality trait or a character trait: 'Vary the degree to which the person possesses the trait, and see whether the normative assessment of the person in this regard alone also changes'.[112] Take, for example, a woman with a moderate degree of wit. Miller asks if our normative assessment of her would change if she has it to a greater or lesser degree and concludes that we would. On the other hand, we may not consider

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[106] Trianosky, "Natural Affection and Responsibility for Character: A Critique of Kantian Views of the Virtues."

[107] Nagel writes, 'Eventually nothing remains which can be ascribed to the responsible self', T. Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 37.

[108] Thanks to Jeanette Kennett for pointing this out to me.

[109] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 15.

[110] Miller does, however, think combining the first and second proposals is 'the right way to go', ibid., 17.

[111] In fact Miller thinks a combination of the two formulations is 'the way to go', ibid.

[112] Ibid., 117.

an infant with more or less anxiety, for example, any better or worse normatively speaking.[113]

2.2.3 Virtues and Vices

We now know how Miller understands the difference between personality traits and character traits. Character traits are subject to normative assessment. But character traits can be split again into moral and non-moral character traits. It is this distinction which will assist us in defining (and ultimately defending) virtues and vices.

Recall that Miller argues that character traits have an evaluative dimension. But there is a difference between these character traits and the virtues which we understand to have a *moral* sense. To call someone 'witty' is both to describe and assess. Even a term like 'ugly' betrays negative evaluation, but the evaluation is not moral. While he accepts that that there are no extant necessary and sufficient conditions for what is moral or otherwise, Miller offers the following test, reminiscent of the earlier one: 'Vary the degree to which the person possesses the trait, and see whether our *moral assessment* of the person in this regard alone also changes [emphasis added]'.[114] Miller's first requirement for virtue and vice is that the relevant traits are susceptible to moral evaluation.

Second, the virtues, for Miller, are 'all and only those good traits of character which are such that, other things being equal, when they directly lead to action (whether mentally or bodily), the action is (typically) a good action and is performed for the appropriate reasons'.[115] '[P]arallel remarks' apply to the vices.[116] Importantly, then, a character trait must meet certain psychological requirements to be called a virtue or a vice. A character trait may be called a virtue, writes Miller, if the 'underlying mental state dispositions are of the particular virtuous kind themselves'.[117] Thus, Miller's conception of virtue and vice requires a certain kind of psychology. Like VE, Miller is interested in an agent's mental states and not mere behaviour. Let us take a look at these mental states in greater detail.

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[113] Miller admits that 'intuitions may diverge here'.
[114] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 34.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., 35.
[117] Ibid., 38.

Miller suggests that beneath traits-as-dispositions are further dispositions (mental states) which ground them. The causal base of a disposition is the disposition to form trait-specific beliefs and desires. While this initially sounds like a kind of doublespeak, Miller explains these further dispositions as 'the dispositions to form one or more occurrent mental states which are relevant to that character trait'.[118] Another way of saying this is that character trait dispositions *consist* of relevant interrelated mental state dispositions such that, if a person has these dispositions, they will also instantiate that character trait in virtue of possessing these dispositions.[119] Miller writes that 'having the relevant mental state dispositions *enables* a person to have the corresponding character trait'. This is an important point for the appreciation of Miller's project and an example may serve to clarify.

Jones' compassion, for example, is grounded in underlying mental state dispositions appropriate to the virtue of compassion. He may have a disposition to recognise suffering people, to want to help regardless of benefit to himself, to consider different ways of helping, etc. When Jones encounters someone in need his trait can be activated. These underlying dispositions will have their own stimulus conditions, for example, perception of need. Such dispositions (or, at least, 'something like them') are 'prerequisites' for Jones to be eligible for the virtue of compassion.[120] This notion of underlying mental states has the added benefit of explaining the trait of compassion without relying wholly on compassionate actions. Explanation of the trait in terms of dispositions to form relevant beliefs and desires is argued by Miller to be 'deeper and more psychologically satisfying'.[121]

Taking all that together, and as the scope of this thesis is narrowed to examine *vice*, we can state Miller's conception of vice as a character trait susceptible to *moral* evaluation, which directly leads to typically bad action, and with a psychology susceptible to negative moral evaluation.[122] However, and importantly, going by this

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[118] Ibid., 26.

[119] C. B. Miller and A. Knobel, "Foundational Questions," in *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, ed. C. B. Miller, et al. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 26.

[120] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*.

[121] Ibid., 27-28. It could be asked what underlies these more specific mental states? It may, writes Miller, come down to something at the neural or atomic level. But dispositions to form occurrent mental states are a 'familiar' notion. Miller is then content to leave the discussion of levels at 'only one underlying level', ibid., 28.

[122] Aristotle's conception of vice requires a blameworthy psychology. See VII, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*. Taylor notes that the term vice can be used broadly. He, with Aristotle, takes it to mean a defect of action and thought, C. Taylor, *Moralism: A Study of a Vice* (Durham: Acumen, 2012), 2. Hurka's account of vice is recursive, stating that 'the moral vices are those attitudes to goods and evils that are intrinsically

criteria, Miller believes that most people do *not* have single traits that constitute vices. He writes:

> On the basis of the available psychological research, most people do not have the appropriate clusters of interrelated mental state dispositions which enable them to qualify as possessing either any of the moral virtues or any of the moral vices to any degree, although a few people may so qualify.[123]

To see why this is the case, let us take a well-known vice, *cruelty*, and unpack Miller's criteria for vice a bit further. Miller offers three 'plausible' criteria for the cruel person. This criteria takes into account Miller's more general criteria for vice (mental and physical actions paired with a specific kind of psychology) but tailors the requirements more specifically to cruelty:

> A cruel person, when acting in character, will reliably attempt to harm others when in situations where opportunities to harm present themselves, at least when those opportunities are not thought to involve significant inconvenience to him and he believes he will not get punished or be otherwise affected by others for doing so.
>
> A cruel person, when acting in character, will not first experience significant internal conflict about whether to act cruelly before in fact performing cruel actions as a result of his trait of cruelty.
>
> A cruel person, when acting in character, will not regularly experience (significant) feelings of moral guilt when harming others, nor will his harming others be influenced in a significant way by avoiding anticipated guilt.[124]

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evil', and are further determined by the intensity of the vice and the value of the attitude's object. See T. Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 20, 58. Cassam's definition of epistemic vice as an intellectual character trait which impedes effective and responsible inquiry might be applied to explain moral vice as those character traits which impede morality or virtue. See Q. Cassam, "Vice Epistemology," *Forthcoming* (2015). Battaly offers four conceptions of vice: Conception 1: A vice produces harms; Conception 1*: A vice *fails* to produce goods (anything less than a virtue); Conception 2: A vice requires one to have a blameworthy psychology (either objectively bad motives or a false conception of the good); Conception 2*: A vice *fails* to possess a praiseworthy psychology. Miller's conception has explicit elements of 1 and 2, and may imply 1* and 2*. See, H. Battaly, "Varieties of Epistemic Vice," in *The Ethics of Belief*, ed. J. Matheson and R. Vitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 60-65.

[123] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 43.
[124] These are taken from ibid., 41-42.

For a person to have the vicious trait of cruelty they would need to satisfy the above requirements. Empirical evidence, however, shows that most people do not reliably behave in these ways. To quote one example, an experiment by Meeus and Raaijmakers saw an 'unemployed' confederate taking a test which was crucial to his getting a job.[125] A participant (volunteer) watches the confederate take the test and is directed to make certain negative remarks of increasing severity which intensify the stress levels of the confederate. 'After stress remarks 14 and 15 [the confederate's] response was one of despair'.[126] Now, *under instruction*, the participants used on average 14.81 of the remarks. 97% used all 15 remarks and thus spoke remarks 14 and 15 'even after they had seen that the applicant had failed the test'. However, when there was no pressure from an authority, that is, when participants could choose how many remarks to give, nobody gave all 15 and the average was 6.75.[127] It also turns out that in the original experiment, under duress, the participants 'intensely disliked making the stress remarks'. Miller suggests this shows 'internal conflict' rather than a 'wholehearted desire to inflict harm'.[128] Working with Miller's above criteria, the vicious trait of cruelty is, as seen here at least, is not widespread.

Taking this into account, along with a great many other studies,[129] Miller concludes that, 'Most people do not have the vice of cruelty to any degree, although a few might possess it'.[130] He then goes on to make the stronger claim that most people do not have *any of the vices to any degree*, though a few might possess one or more. This is a very strong claim. At the end of the next section we will be able to see why Miller believes that most people do not possess vices to *any degree*.

2.3 Mixed Traits

Miller argues that empirical evidence shows that most people do not have any of the virtues or vices to any degree. We do, however, possess character traits with consistency

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[125] Q. Raaijmakers W. Meeus, "Administrative Obedience: Carrying out Orders to Use Psychological-Administrative Violence," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 16 (1986).

[126] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 40.

[127] W. Meeus, "Administrative Obedience: Carrying out Orders to Use Psychological-Administrative Violence," 317.

[128] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 42.

[129] See *Moral Character* for a more detailed review of the empirical evidence, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, 245ff.

[130] *Character and Moral Psychology*.

and efficacy. He believes that our character (in a broad sense) consists of a variety of what he calls 'Mixed Traits'. Mixed Traits are traits made up of mental state dispositions which we would not entirely positively or entirely negatively evaluate. They are, thus, *mixed*. To examine this notion in more detail, let us turn to another example given by Miller: aggression.

On the basis of the work by Meeus and Raaijmakers and others, Miller infers what some of the mental state dispositions might be which play a role in bringing about aggressive behaviour. For Miller, it is these mental state dispositions (psychology) which will make the attribution of vice appropriate or not. Significant examples of relevant mental states are as follows:[131]

Beliefs and desires concerned with harming the offender in order to retaliate for his offence, or to get even with him, or to get revenge.

Beliefs and desires concerned with harming others in order to maintain a positive opinion of myself.

Beliefs and desires concerned with harming others in order to obey instructions from a legitimate authority.

Beliefs and desires concerned with not harming others when they are similar to me in important ways.

Beliefs and desires concerned with not harming others when I am thought to bear a significant degree of personal responsibility for the harm and would be blamed if I did.[132]

For Miller, if a trait is to qualify as a virtue or a vice its underlying mental states must be of that same virtuous (or vicious, as the case may be) state themselves. The determination of this requires moral assessment. Of course, the virtuous person need not think of his own behaviour in terms of virtues or kindness. 'It is enough,' writes McDowell, 'if he thinks of what he does when […] he shows himself to be kind, under some such

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[131] In *Moral Character*, Miller recognises the difference between reactive and proactive aggression, but notes that the research still has implications for aggression 'in general'. He defines aggression as behaviour carried out with the immediate intent to cause harm to another individual where that individual does not wish to be so harmed. See, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, 233.

[132] *Character and Moral Psychology*, 271. Elsewhere he writes, 'For each of these, the claim is not that the beliefs and desires have precisely these propositional contents (say, with respect to "harming" or "personal responsibility"), but that they have contents which function in these particular ways', "Lack of Virtue and Vice: Studies of Aggression and Their Implications for the Empirical Adequacy of Character," in *Oxford Studies in Normative Ethics, Volume 4*, ed. Mark Timmons (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 90.

description as "the thing to do"'.[133] *Attribution* of virtue, then, can be imposed by a 'possibly more articulate' or 'theoretically oriented' observer.[134] In fact, as Bernard Williams has pointed out, on some occasions, over-awareness of a particular virtue appears incongruent with the possession of it.[135] The humble person who incessantly considers their humility and acts explicitly out of humility rather than, say, the rightness of the act, appears to be less humble because of it. Such introspection really does seem to be 'a misdirection of the ethical attention'.[136]

How do the above beliefs and desires fare in regards to moral evaluation? Some of the mental state dispositions above would, on their own, earn a negative moral evaluation. The first three belief and desire pairs certainly fit this category. The last might actually trigger something more like a positive evaluation. But for Miller character traits do not rest upon *single* beliefs and/or desires. A character trait is made up of *all* relevant beliefs and desires. That is, in regards to the trait of aggression, a person will have a range of underlying beliefs and desires (mental state dispositions) and it is the *combination* of these which together make up the trait. Regarding this trait Miller writes, 'This trait which most adult human beings possess [based on the empirical evidence] does not correspond to any of the words or concepts which ordinary people have for traits associated with harming'.[137] It is not the virtue of kindness or non-malevolence but neither is it the vice of cruelty or hostility. 'So what is it?' asks Miller. Since an appropriate term does not exist, he constructs one. It is, in this instance, a 'Mixed Aggression Trait'.[138] It is 'mixed' because the psychology is not one that we could confidently attribute to a virtue or a vice, and 'aggression' is the domain of morality to which the trait pertains. An advantage of Mixed Traits is that they can explain our disposition to act in cruel ways without labelling us wholly cruel. Evidence suggests that most of us would shock a subject if an authority directed us to do so (for example in the Milgram experiments). If we possess this disposition, are we then cruel people? Miller's theory accepts that we have these dispositions but also takes into account our many other beliefs and desires concerning cruelty/aggression/malevolence.[139] For the current example, the trait is a Mixed

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[133] McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 122.
[134] Ibid.
[135] B. A. O. Williams, "Utilitarianism and Moral Self-Indulgence," in *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers 1973-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 49.
[136] *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Oxon: Routledge Classics, 2011), 12.
[137] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 44.
[138] Ibid.
[139] One may worry that, for example, even Hitler could not be called cruel by these standards. After all, he was kind to his dogs. Russell, albeit in a discussion of evil, provides an analogy in discussion of this. A

Aggression Trait instead of the vice of cruelty. These 'Mixed Traits' can be applied widely (e.g. Mixed Honesty Trait, Mixed Courage Trait, etc.) and more accurately describe the variety of mental states that people possess in the trait-relevant situations.

2.3.1 Consistency.

Now that we know more about Mixed Traits, we are in a position to understand how Miller argues for their consistency and efficacy. Miller admits that Mixed Traits can reveal themselves in behaviour which, to an outside observer, can appear very fragmented.[140] In some instances a person will exhibit aggressive behaviour without force or compulsion. Other times the same person will refrain even though an aggressive action could be performed without punishment. This fragmentation can still coincide with consistency in behaviour.

The first possible kind of stability is similar to Doris' conception of local traits and is called Single-Situation Trait Stability by Miller. Larry, for example, may be typically calm at the bar where he drinks. When Larry is cut-off in traffic, his tailgating response is consistent with the level of aggression in the same situation on different days. Seen through these two examples, there is variability *across* situations but stability *within* one situation.[141] The second kind of stability offered by Miller, and now against the situationist account, is a kind of stability across situations. This construal requires first-person knowledge and takes into account psychologically salient features of a situation which have significance or meaning for the individual.[142] An observer may see Larry hit a man outside a pub on Friday night and refrain from a fight on Saturday. How is the variation to be explained? The following are a set of Larry's beliefs and desires concerned with harm and aggression:

> B1. Beliefs and desires concerned with harming others who threaten his wife

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good tennis player has mastered many parts of the game: serving, returning, volleying, etc. A bad player need not be bad at every one of these activities; they might be good at some bad at others but still easily beaten. While *full* virtue is an 'exacting ideal', a person might be 'morally a very bad person without being bad at every activity required in the game of virtue', L. Russell, "Dispositional Accounts of Evil Personhood," *Philosophical Studies* 149 (2010): 241-42. Perhaps this is another example of asymmetry between virtue and vice. See Russell's continuing discussion on the mirror thesis, the qualitative difference thesis, and the fixity of the disposition, ibid., 42ff.

[140] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 46-49.
[141] Ibid., 53.
[142] Ibid., 55.

B2. Beliefs and desires concerned with not harming those too intoxicated to know what they are saying.

To Larry, the hit on Friday taking into consideration (B1) and the refrain from such activity on Saturday taking into consideration (B2) are in keeping with his set of beliefs and desires pertaining to harm and aggression. Both actions are determined by features of the situation which are psychologically salient to him.[143] Miller summarises that a person with a Mixed Trait can show *inconsistency* when only the nominal features of a situation are taken into account, and *consistency* if psychologically salient features are taken into account.[144] While the vice of aggression should reliably manifest in aggressive behaviour, a Mixed Trait produces a range of behaviour consistent with a person's relevant beliefs and desires.

Gopal Sreenivasan also makes the case that the subject's own understanding of the situation must be taken into account in judging consistency. Perhaps one child believes that pocketing loose change is not stealing but merely 'finders keepers'.[145] While this may very well be in line with their internal conception of themselves, whether or not the label of *virtuous* would be bestowed here is not for them to say. Here we have an instance where we see dissimilarities between character traits and *virtuous* character traits; the subject's own understanding is not essential for the ascription of virtue. History is full of evil people under illusion. The ability to prove consistency, then, is quite different to the normative and *moral* assessment requisite for the attribution of character traits, virtue, or vice respectively. Nevertheless, if it does not perfectly show that virtuous character is possible, it does show consistency in behaviour, internally understood.

2.3.2 Efficacy.

Miller holds that character traits do in fact cause and explain behaviour. Miller imagines two men, Jones and Frank. Jones does reliably compassionate things for compassionate reasons. Frank encounters the same people but does nothing for them. Such inactivity is not due to some other compassionate project which Frank has. He is simply more

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[143] In similar fashion, those taking part in the Milgram experiment may have possessed '[b]eliefs and desires concerned with harming others in order to obey instructions from a legitimate authority' and so were acting with complete consistency, ibid., 56.

[144] Ibid., 57.

[145] G. Sreenivasan, "Errors About Errors: Virtue Theory and Trait Attribution," *Mind* 111 (2002): 58.

interested in himself. Perhaps his Mixed Compassion Trait consists of a much smaller number of beliefs and desires. Perhaps none of them pertain to those outside a very small group of people.[146] A vital *difference* between Jones and Frank, then, is possession of this property of compassion. It is a difference in possession of a disposition which plays a causal role in effecting compassionate thoughts and action. The disposition causally mediates between stimuli and manifestation events (for example, 'wanting to help and believing that I (Jones) can help by donating money'[147]). It is this causal role that allows us to hold expectations about a person's likely behaviour in various situations. It justifies *prediction* and *explanation*.[148] Luke Russell helps us to see that this kind of reasoning does not have to be circular. In answer to the question, 'Why did Jones perform a compassionate act?' the answer, 'Because he is compassionate' would be admittedly uninformative.[149] But Russell points out this need not be the question.[150] Rather, we are asking why Jones performed a compassionate act *rather* than an alternative non-compassionate act, or why it was Jones and *not* Frank who committed the compassionate act? In response to these questions, the reply 'Because he is compassionate' is an informative alternative to other possible explanations such as 'He performed the act because the beggar was singing a song by Taylor Swift' or 'He performed the act because he mistook the beggar for his sister'.

Miller is not unrealistic in his expectations for the power of traits. They can be interfered with in all sorts of ways.[151] But when we say that Lincoln is honest or George Washington courageous, we can reasonably predict how they will behave in different circumstances.[152] This is because, writes Miller, traits can effectively account for behavioural differences between persons.

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[146] Miller writes that Frank does not have the trait of compassion but surely this is not correct. Would Frank possess no beliefs and desires relevant to compassion? It is more likely that the difference between the two men is the strength of this property.

[147] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 23.

[148] Ibid.

[149] It is, to borrow Eve Garrard's phrase, the paradigmatic case of 'non-explanatoriness', E. Garrard, "Evil as an Explanatory Concept," *The Monist* 85 (2002): 332.

[150] L. Russell, "He Did It Because He Was Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 46, no. 3 (2009): 271-72. Russell's discussion and examples obviously pertain to evil rather than compassion.

[151] In 1.4 I said that this is more a problem for virtue as virtue must be able to overcome irrelevant situational factors. Miller does not run into the problem here as he is not defending virtue.

[152] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 22.

2.3.3 Mixed Traits, Virtue, and High Standards

Mixed Traits can be both consistent and efficacious but, by definition, are not virtues or vices. Many people, however, would have no trouble in calling a person cruel if, even while possessing a set of mixed beliefs and desires about the circumstances that call for aggression, such a person dependably harmed kittens. The word 'cruel', we might say regarding such a case, is perfectly fitting. Miller does not explore this possibility in great detail, but to discover his response to the concern we turn to an early distinction of his between traits and actions to fill out his response.[153] Smith gives a large donation to charity. We would have no trouble in calling this a compassionate action. But we also have no idea of the underlying mental states behind such an act. Smith may have made the donation to impress a date and thus the act has arisen via rather selfish motives. A compassionate act does not entail a compassionate state of mind and therefore does not entail the virtue of compassion. First, then, we can see that Miller is making a distinction between actions and traits.[154] We do not know enough about the man who harms kittens to call him cruel solely by his actions. Second, even if we could infer his mental state in that moment and the harming of the kitten was done for bad reasons (for his pleasure perhaps), Miller does not define character traits by single beliefs and/or desires. Character traits, virtues, and vices consist of *all* relevant beliefs and desires pertaining to a given domain of morality. In the kitten-harmers case, presumably he will have a range of beliefs and desires which pertain to the moral domain of cruelty, some which would earn a negative moral evaluation and some which would earn a positive moral evaluation. While the *act* is morally bad, the *trait* will not express itself as good or bad consistently across the whole range of situations in which the man has relevant beliefs. Perhaps the man has beliefs and desires about not harming dogs. Thus, the *overall* trait is a Mixed Aggression Trait. Importantly, these traits are *not* virtues in some situations and vices in others. They are not entirely morally good or entirely morally bad in any contexts as the entire range of relevant beliefs and desires are always pertinent for the determination of virtue, vice, or Mixed Trait. They often lead to actions which are not performed for morally

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[153] Ibid., 5.

[154] Miller's distinction between action and character is not in itself controversial. Russell writes, '[M]any of us believe that not every evildoer is an evil person'. See Russell, *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation [Kindle Edition]*, 33, 31ff.

praiseworthy or blameworthy reasons in the same way as virtues and vices.[155] 'Instead,' writes Miller, 'a Mixed Aggression Trait is neither a virtue nor a vice, neither entirely good nor bad in every situation or context in which a person possesses it'.[156] Thus, most people have a Mixed Aggression Trait as described and not the virtue of non-malevolence or the vice of cruelty.

Miller obviously has a high standard for virtue and applies the very same standard to vice. Where the label of virtue is not bestowed on anyone who simply does a good deed, the label of vice is similarly reserved for those who meet a higher standard. It might be objected that virtue and vice are not analogous at this point. Perhaps even a single atrocious action with the fitting mental states (e.g. harming kittens for pleasure) should qualify for the label of 'cruel'. This may seem particularly the case as virtues and vices are determined by moral *assessment* and many people would have no trouble in applying the label. Nevertheless, Miller's criteria maintain a very high threshold and it is Miller's criteria with which I am concerned.

As we are looking at Miller's high standards for virtue and vice, we are now in a position to try and understand why Miller makes the strong claim that most people do not possess any of the vices to *any degree*. Miller explains that Mixed Traits can manifest in *degrees*, writing that 'it is a mistake to think that a person must either lack a Mixed […] Trait, or have it in its entirety or completely'.[157] Two people may have a Mixed Honesty Trait and express it very differently. Miller suggests two reasons why this could be the case. First, Jones and Frank might have the very same dispositions making up their Mixed Honesty Traits, but still have differences in the 'strength of their desires or the confidence of their beliefs'.[158] This will impact their readiness to act in a given situation. Second, a Mixed Honesty Trait can be very *broad* or very *narrow* depending on the number and variety of beliefs and desires (mental state dispositions) of which it consists. For example, Frank's Honesty Aggression trait may have a small number of beliefs and desires pertaining to his home life and not much more than this. He may then be honest at home (but not at parties or at the office) or with those he trusts (but not otherwise). Jones' Mixed Aggression Trait, however, includes a vast number and variety of beliefs and desires

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[155] Miller, *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, 211. Though we do not have time to discuss it here, Mixed Traits are also subject to what Miller calls 'enhancers' and 'inhibitors' for motivation in a way that virtue is not. See *Character and Moral Psychology*, 49ff.
[156] *Character and Moral Psychology*, 44.
[157] *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, 174.
[158] Ibid., 179.

pertaining to many situations and so manifests in a broader, more global sense. Jones has the trait 'at a very high level of generality that pertains to all situations relevant to truth-telling'.[159]

Through this discussion of degrees we can see why Miller believes that most people do not have any of the vices to any degree. Let us take the domain of aggression as our example. Empirical evidence shows that most people have a wide range of beliefs and desires pertaining to this domain. Further, we would not evaluate that list of beliefs and desires in a wholly positive or negative way. Most people, then, have a Mixed Aggression Trait. For someone to have the *vice* of aggression they would need to possess beliefs and desires which we would evaluate in a wholly morally negative way. For someone to have a *broad* vice of aggression they would possess a large range of beliefs and desires pertaining to aggression which we would evaluate in a wholly morally negative way. For someone to have a *narrow* vice of aggression they would possess a small range of beliefs and desires pertaining to aggression which we would evaluate in a wholly morally negative way, perhaps related to being aggressive at the pub and nowhere else. These are the degrees. But Miller is not only interested in theoretical examples. Instead he looks to the *empirical* evidence (the title of his first book is 'Moral Character: An Empirical Theory'). And the empirical evidence shows that most people have a wide range of beliefs and desires pertaining to aggression that we would not evaluate in a wholly positive or negative way. Thus, they do not have the vice of cruelty in a broad or narrow sense (to any degree) but rather a Mixed Aggression Trait. Most people, concludes Miller, do not have any of the vices to any degree.

2.4 Miller and RT

It is clear now that Miller's Mixed Trait theory reaches RT. Further, though Miller concurs with the situationists in finding little empirical evidence to assert the widespread existence of traditional virtues and vices, he does believe that basing the argument upon cross-situational consistency is problematic. Even with a *low* correlation there may still be a small but significant minority who are cross-situationally consistent in their virtuous traits regardless of the majority. (This fact, he writes, is lost when using correlation

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[159] Ibid., 180ff.

coefficients concerning a group).[160] Indeed, in many of the experiments a small minority *do* appear to do the right thing in spite of the large minority acting otherwise. 10% of students in the Darley and Batson experiment a high hurry stopped to help. 4% of those who did not find a coin still helped a stranger pick up papers. Similar kinds of results will always appear.

Miller's endorsement of RT is based upon different considerations. As we have seen, he attempts to determine what mental state dispositions would 'qualify as components of virtues or vices'.[161] These mental state dispositions, he argues, are not what most people have, as shown by the empirical evidence. Thus, most people do not have virtues or vices.

Miller's account of RT then attempts to refocus Doris' criticism concerning the rarity of virtue, formulating what he calls the *realism challenge* (RC). Miller introduces RC as the most significant problem posed by RT. RC is concerned with virtue cultivation and states that VE must outline empirically informed ways for most human beings to *improve* their Mixed Traits and that, so far, this has not been done. While we have methods of strengthening our wills against the temptation to, for example, eat excessively, the true challenge will be in the regulation of 'subtle and subconscious influences on our moral behavior' such as a coin in a phone booth or the smell of cookies flowing through a shopping mall.[162] The empirical evidence shows that we have 'surprising dispositions' to act in certain ways which we might never have supposed.[163] For example, we might shock somebody quite severely because we are instructed to do so by an authority figure. These 'surprising dispositions' are drawn out by certain situational features. Miller states that no matter how much we improve our mistaken moral beliefs, weakness of will, strong emotion responses, lethargy, and whatever else, we will fall short of being even 'weakly virtuous' in the face of these surprising dispositions which appear to play such a prominent causal role.[164] VE, he writes, has given us no good response to this problem. We are in need of realistic and empirically informed ways to cultivate virtue in the face of situationism. Further, in the case of

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[160] *Character and Moral Psychology*, 97. Miller also suggests that the 10% of participants who stopped to help though they were in a high-hurry scenario should be submitted to further testing. If they continue to exhibit helping behaviour, perhaps it is truly a part of their character. See, "Social Psychology and Virtue Ethics," *The Journal of Ethics* 7 (2003): 389.

[161] *Character and Moral Psychology*, 97.

[162] Ibid., 211. The challenge is also the main thrust of "Russell on Acquiring Virtue."

[163] "Russell on Acquiring Virtue," 112.

[164] Ibid.

persons who have already fallen short of virtue by the time of reaching adulthood (i.e. most people), tools must be given to enable the development of virtuous traits outside of upbringing. Once again, VE has not provided this.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have showed how Miller reaches RT without denying the consistency and efficacy of character traits. For a trait to qualify as a virtue or a vice its underlying mental state dispositions must be of that same virtuous of vicious kind. However, empirical evidence shows that most people do not meet these requirements. Instead, most people possess a variety of Mixed Traits, that is, traits with underlying mental state dispositions which we would not wholly evaluate in a morally negative or morally positive way.

For vice, in particular, Miller sets the bar very high. A man who harms kittens for pleasure does not necessarily have the trait of cruelty as his *combined* mental state dispositions relevant to the moral domain of cruelty would probably not earn an entirely morally negative evaluation and it is this *total* of mental state dispositions which together make up the trait. If such a person cannot be labelled 'cruel', who could be? It seems possible that with such a high bar vicious traits really are incredibly rare and perhaps may not exist at all.

In the next chapter I will provide one example of persons who do not *only* possess Mixed Traits. In line with Miller's stringent criteria, I suggest persons with narcissistic personality disorder possess a collection of *vices*.

Chapter III: Case Study - Narcissistic Personality Disorder

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will begin my argument against RT by demonstrating with a real example, that some collections of traits are not Mixed Traits and do count as vicious. To do this I will, first, give a brief account of narcissistic personality disorder and, second, demonstrate that narcissistic personality disorder can be understood as a collection of personality traits. Third, taking into account Miller's strict criteria for vice, I will attempt to show that narcissistic personality disorder can be further understood as a vice or a collection of vicious character traits.[165]

3.2 Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Narcissistic personality disorder, as the name suggests, is a personality disorder. Personality disorders are enduring patterns of thinking and feeling about oneself (or others) in a way that negatively affects one's ability to function in various ways.[166] These enduring patterns of thought regularly lead to behaviour significantly different from societal expectations. Expressions of the disorders are relatively stable across time and situations, are not better understood as part of an individual's developmental stage or socio-cultural environment, and are not solely due to substance abuse or a general medical condition.[167] The precise cause is unknown but has been linked to a mix of biological, psychological, and adverse environmental factors (sexual abuse, for example).[168] For the purpose of this thesis, I will focus on *narcissistic personality disorder*.

Our familiarity with the term comes from Ovid's story of the shepherd-boy Narcissus who, after falling in love with his own reflection in the water, gradually wastes

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[165] For those who are unsettled by the idea of using a personality disorder for the current purposes, in the appendix I have attempted to respond to five potential questions surrounding this.

[166] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fifth Ed.)* (Arlington: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 646-49.

[167] Ibid.

[168] W. H. J. Martens, "Antisocial and Psychopathic Personality Disorders: Causes, Course, and Remission- a Review Article," *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* 44, no. 4 (2000): 410ff; S. R. Beach et al., "Impact of Child Sex Abuse on Adult Psychopathology: A Genetically and Epigenetically Informed Investigation," *Journal of Family Psychology* 27, no. 1 (2013); F. Leichsenring et al., "Borderline Personality Disorder," *The Lancet* 377 (2011): 75-76.

away like Echo, the nymph he initially scorned.[169] Clinical presentation of the disorder, however, is more complex than mere love of self. DSM-V describes narcissistic personality disorder (NPD) as, 'a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy'. In order to make a diagnosis, psychologists look for the following: (a) a grandiose sense of self-importance; (b) fantasies of limitless success, power, intelligence, beauty, or love; (c) beliefs of being special and unique; (d) demanding of excessive admiration; (e) a sense of entitlement; (f) exploitation of and superficial relationships; (g) lack of empathy; (h) envy; and (i) arrogance.[170] Ironically, but perhaps not surprisingly, persons with NPD often suffer from low self-esteem and the grandiose behaviour can be an attempt at to overcome or regulate that.[171] Because of this, NPD can also manifest in shame, fear, doubts, and self-directed aggression.[172] Psychologists speak of the 'two faces' of narcissism.[173] 'Grandiose narcissism' includes exhibitionism, a need for the admiration of others, and a focus on self-image. 'Vulnerable narcissism' can present with 'grandiose fantasies, oscillation between feelings of superiority and inferiority, and fragile self-confidence'.[174] Often these 'two faces' converge in individuals, one kind of narcissism often initially forming as a cover for the other.[175]

In order to get a flavour of the moral character of the disorder, I would like to provide some rather interesting anecdotal evidence in the form of an interview with a 'twice-diagnosed' clinical narcissist. The man in question is author, Sam Vaknin, who has himself written prolifically on the subject, with sixteen (self-published by Narcissus Publications) books (over five thousand pages worth) and content-heavy website (over sixteen hours of video lectures).[176] As NPD and self-report comes with its own inherent

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[169] Simon Blackburn offers a nice analysis of the myth. See, S. Blackburn, *Mirror, Mirror: The Uses and Abuses of Self-Love* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 35-43.

[170] A. E. Skodol and D. S. Bender, "Narcissistic Personality Disorder in Dsm-5," *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment* 5, no. 4 (2014): 422.

[171] Ibid., 424.

[172] E. Ronningstam, "An Update on Narcissistic Personality Disorder," *Current Opinion in Psychology* 26, no. 1 (2013): 104.

[173] P. Wink, "Two Faces of Narcissism," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 61, no. 4 (1991): 90-91.

[174] E. Rohmann et al., "Grandiose and Vulnerable Narcissism: Self-Construal, Attachment, and Love in Romantic Relationships," *European Psychologist* 17, no. 4 (2012): 279.

[175] A. Vater et al., "When Grandiosity and Vulnerability Collide: Implicit and Explicit Self-Esteem in Patients with Narcissistic Personality Disorder," *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry* 44, no. 1 (2013). See also, A. L. Pincus, N. M. Cain, and A. G. C. Wright, "Narcissistic Grandiosity and Narcissistic Vulnerability in Psychotherapy," *Personality Disorders: Theory, Research, and Treatment* 5, no. 4 (2014): 440.

[176] S. Vaknin, "Malignant Self-Love: Narcissism Revisited," Narcissus Publications, http://samvak.tripod.com/thebook.html#ebooks.

difficulties and even contradictions,[177] this should be read anecdotally but nevertheless as a window into the world of the narcissist. The following is taken from an interview conducted by clinical psychologist, Samantha Rodman.[178]

Born in Israel in 1961, Sam Vaknin attributes his narcissism to childhood trauma (physical and psychological abuse). He claims to have experienced violence at the hands of both parents as well as pampering and smothering due to his very gifted nature (a self-proclaimed IQ of 180).[179] In his case NPD was a defence mechanism used to deflect all this. Vaknin explains, 'The victim's "True Self" turns into a "False Self" which is omnipotent, invulnerable, and omniscient'. Rodman asks if Vaknin engages in 'gaslighting',[180] a 'pernicious' form of indirect abuse. 'When I abuse,' replies Vaknin, 'I never hide. I would like any pain and damage I inflict to be attributed to me and to inspire shock, awe, and fear in my victims and adversaries. In other words, I am a sadistic bully: I feel elated when my self-imputed omnipotence is affirmed by my ability to intimidate, unsettle, and terrify'. Describing his relationships, Vaknin admits:

> I am a throwback to the men of the 18th or 19th century: patriarchal and transactional. I have had several serious relationships, including one engagement to be married and three marriages. The pattern had always been the same: having selected a woman far inferior to my position in life […] and following a brief period of rampant sex (to demonstrate to her that I am 'normal' and to make her look forward to years of great physical and emotional intimacy - false advertising, I admit), I subside into this recluse, interested only in my studies, reading, writing, and the universe of the mind.

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[177] J. L. Maples et al., "Narcissistic Personality Disorder and Self-Esteem: An Examination of Differential Relations with Self-Report and Laboratory-Based Aggression," *Journal of Research in Personality 44 (2010) 559–563* 44 (2010); R. A. Ackerman and M. B. Donnellan, "Evaluating Self-Report Measures of Narcissistic Entitlement," *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment* 35, no. 4 (2013).

[178] S. Rodman, "Interview with a Narcissist and His Wife! The Dr. Sam Vaknin and Lidija Rangelovska," Dr. Psych Mom, http://www.drpsychmom.com/2014/09/08/interview-narcissist-dr-sam-vaknin-deigns-interviewed/#.

[179] Y. Roberts, "The Monster in the Mirror," Times Newspapers Ltd, http://web.archive.org/web/20110615170145/http://women.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/women/relationships/article2439812.ece.

[180] Abramson explains gaslighting as 'a form of emotional manipulation in which the gaslighter tries (consciously or not) to induce in someone the sense that her reactions, perceptions, memories and/or beliefs are not just mistaken, but utterly without grounds—paradigmatically, so unfounded as to qualify as crazy', K. Abramson, "Turning up the Lights on Gaslighting," *Philosphical Perspectives* 28, no. 1 (2014): 2.

Zero sex, no love, no intimacy, physical or emotional, no children, no home (always lived in rented flats), and no family.

On Vaknin's own website, he presents the therapy session notes of a patient named 'Sam V.' who was diagnosed with NPD.[181] Sam V. complains of an inability to enjoy life and, because of his 'intellectual superiority', bemoans everyone else's stupidity. No matter how hard he tries, he is perpetually victimised, attracting hostility even after good deeds. People are 'out to get' him. Throughout this he is, apparently, never openly obnoxious.

He is not properly appreciated at work, doubtless because he will not 'dumb down' his writing which aims to bring people 'up to his level'. Sex bores him (it is a 'low-level' activity not worth his limited time) and he gives 'little or no thought to the needs, wishes, fears, hopes, priorities, and choices of his nearest and dearest'. He is hyper-vigilant and anxious, bragging about his achievements but feels deprived and deserving of much more. When he lists his faults it is often to elicit compliments or pre-empt genuine scrutiny. When others exert their own autonomy (setting boundaries, for example) he is surprised, and feels 'martyred' and 'superior' when he is punished. A typical response to this kind of scenario is sulking and raging. The world (a 'cosmic conspiracy') is responsible for his failures, defeats and 'bad luck'.

Vaknin may be an extreme case (and indeed an interview situation has the potential to elicit the exhibitionist streak in a narcissist). However, Pincus et al. also provide case studies of patients who met the criteria for NPD, sought clinical attention, and present with problems remarkably similar to Vaknin's. These subjects report chronic grandiosity, resentment, depression, disappointment in others, high expectations, and a greatly inflated sense of self-importance.[182].

Given all this, we might now stop and ask whether NPD, or its central features, constitute a personality trait or group of personality traits? Let us move to the second task for this chapter and examine the evidence for understanding NPD as a personality trait or group of personality traits.

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[181] Vaknin, "Malignant Self-Love: Narcissism Revisited".

[182] Pincus, Cain, and Wright, "Narcissistic Grandiosity and Narcissistic Vulnerability in Psychotherapy," 440-42. Corbitt's example of a patient named Patricia also has very close similarities, E. M. Corbitt, "Narcissism from the Perspective of the Five-Factor Model," in *Personality Disorders and the Five-Factor Model of Personality*, ed. Jr. P. T. Costa, T. A. Widiger. (Washington: American Psychological Association, 1994), 200-03.

3.3 NPD as a Personality Trait

Personality traits are habitual patterns of thought and behaviour said to constitute one's personality. Character traits are personality traits which have an evaluative dimension. Later, I aim to show that NPD is a character trait (or collection of traits) and, more than this, a vice even on Miller's terms. First, however, we need to ask whether NPD, a personality disorder, can be properly understood as a personality trait.

The move to recognise personality disorders as variants of normal personality is becoming mainstream. A recent survey of the International Society for the Study of Personality Disorders and the Association for Research on Personality Disorders showed 80% of respondents indicate that 'personality disorders are better understood as variants of normal personality than as categorical disease entities'.[183] Thomas Widiger writes that the Five-Factor Model of personality disorder is the most empirically supported and clinically useful, explaining personality disorders in terms of a dimensional model that recognises them on a continuum with normal personality functioning.[184]

The Five-Factor Model of personality disorders (FFM-PD) is based upon the Five-Factor Model (FFM) of personality. The FFM (or 'the Big Five') consists of five broad dimensions used to describe personality. The FFM begins by having participants fill out self-report questionnaires. McCrae and Costa's NEO-PI-R is the probably most popular among these and has received wide acceptance among psychologists.[185] Participants respond to statements on a 1 to 5 scale ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Comparisons have been made between results from self-report, close associates, and experts,[186] and the data has been reliably replicated across a large number of countries verifying its ability to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers.[187] The net result of this points to five basic dimensions of personality:

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[183] D. P. Bernstein, C. Iscan, and J. Maser, "Opinions of Personality Disorder Experts Regerding Dsm-Iv Personality Disorders Classification System," *Journal of Personality Disorders* 21 (2007): 542.

[184] T. A. Widiger and P. T. Costa Jr., "Integrating Normal and Abnormal Personality Structure: The Five-Factor Model," *Journal of Personality* 80, no. 6 (2012): 1481.

[185] P. T. Costa and R. R. McCrae, *The Neo Personality Inventory Manual* (Odessa: Psychological Assessment Resources, 1985); *Revised Neo Personality Inventory (Neo-Pi-R) and Neo Five-Factor Inventory (Neo-Ffi) Professional Manual* (Odessa: Psychological Assessment Resources, 1992).

[186] R. R. McCrae, "Consensual Validation of Personality Traits: Evidence from Self-Reports and Ratings," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 43 (1982); J. D. Miller, R. M. Bagby, and P. A. Pilkonis, "A Comparison of the Validity of the Five-Factor Model (Ffm) Personality Disorder Prototypes Using Ffm Self-Report and Interview Measures," *Psychological Assessment* 17, no. 4 (2005).

[187] R. R. McCrae and P. T. Costa, "Personality Trait Structure as a Human Universal," *American Psychologist*, no. 52 (1997).

Extraversion

Agreeableness

Conscientiousness

Neuroticism

Openness

Persons are rated variously on each of the dimensions which are believed to 'correlate with certain patterns of thought and actual behavior'.[188] Beneath these broad labels are subdivisions, referring to more specific traits said to offer increased accuracy.[189] While there is no unanimity regarding the subdivisions (the names of the sub-traits), McCrae and Costa offer 30 based on their model:

Neuroticism:
Anxiety, Angry Hostility, Depression, Self-Consciousness, Impulsiveness, Vulnerability

Extraversion:
Warmth, Gregariousness, Assertiveness, Activity, Excitement-Seeking, Positive Emotions

Openness to Experience:
Fantasy, Aesthetics, Feelings, Actions, Ideas, Values

Agreeableness:
Trust, Straightforwardness, Altruism, Compliance, Modesty, Tender-Mindedness

Conscientiousness:
Competence, Order, Dutifulness, Achievement-Striving, Self-Discipline, Deliberation[190]

The FFM can be readily applied to the diagnosis of personality disorders. FFM-PD suggests that the most useful way to describe, assess, and diagnose the various traits

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[188] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 132.

[189] For a discussion of trait hierarchy see, S. V. Paunonen, "Hierarchical Organization of Personality and Prediction of Behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 74, no. 2 (1998).

[190] P. T. Costa and R. R. McCrae, "Domains and Facets: Hierarchical Personality Assessment Using the Revised Neo Personality Inventory," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 64 (1995).

associated with personality disorders is with a dimensional model, understanding that they are on a continuum with regular personality function. DSM-V has recently switched to this dimensional model based on the 'robust empirical findings suggesting that PD is fundamentally dimensional in nature.'[191] The model does not suggest that DSM-IV-TR personality disorders are normal personality traits, but that they are maladaptive variants of normal personality traits.[192]

In the FFM-PD there is both an adaptive and maladaptive variant of each factor of the FFM. For example, let us take *neuroticism*, and below this, the subdivision of *anxiety*. The maladaptive high is *fearful*, the normal high is *vigilant*, neutral, the normal low is *relaxed*, and the maladaptive low is *obliviousness to threat*.[193] Take another example, *conscientiousness*, and below this, the subdivision of *competence*. The maladaptive high is *perfectionistic*, the normal high is *efficient*, *neutral*, the normal low is *casual*, and the maladaptive low is *disinclined*.[194] While these maladaptive variants are not normal, they are still personality traits on the one continuum. FFM-PD utilises a scoring system for this. A score of 71 or above on the global assessment is normal. 60 or below represents clinically significant impairment.[195] Once levels are determined (clinical or otherwise), if one still wishes for a single diagnostic term (e.g. borderline) an FFM profile can be matched to an FFM description of a specific case. We will see below that the FFM description of NPD has received a significant amount of study and is now well-suited for this kind of diagnosis.

FFM-PD can appreciate *adaptive* elements in a person even in the presence of a personality disorder.[196] This makes good sense of the many people who are not officially diagnosed with a personality disorder while still exhibiting some similar traits. Features of parliamentary life (e.g. sexual and financial corruption and routine truth-massaging), some sports (e.g. boxing and hunting), and some sexual activities (e.g. consensual

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[191] A. G. C. Wright, A. L. Pincus, and M. F. Lenzenweger, "An Empirical Examination of Distributional Assumptions Underlying the Relationship between Personality Disorder Symptoms and Personality Traits," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 121, no. 3 (2012): 700.

[192] Widiger and Jr., "Integrating Normal and Abnormal Personality Structure: The Five-Factor Model," 1487.

[193] Ibid., 1480.

[194] Virtue theorists may recognise something of Aristotle amidst all this talk of adaptive and maladaptive variants. FFM-PD hints back to the often-maligned 'golden mean'. See N. Hartmann, "Ethics Volume 2," (London: Routledge, 2014), 254ff.

[195] For more details on this, see T. A. Widiger and J. R. Lowe, "Five-Factor Model Assessment of Personality Disorder," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 89, no. 1 (2007): 1486.

[196] Widiger and Jr., "Integrating Normal and Abnormal Personality Structure: The Five-Factor Model," 1492.

sadomasochism) overlap strongly with DSM criteria for variants of personality disorder.[197] We also know that some business managers and others in similar positions of corporate power exhibit traits concurrent with NPD and psychopathy.[198] Traits associated with personality disorders are therefore not uncommon in the non-clinical population.

On the basis that the FFM-PD is suitably reliable and discriminating I will use this model and apply it to the case of NPD. The FFM-PD recognises NPD to be made up of a stable group of personality traits. Such an understanding of NPD is vital if I am later to argue that the personality traits housed under the banner of NPD are character traits and, more specifically, vicious character traits.

A more precise diagnostic tool has been developed specifically for NPD using lower level facets as well as the five broad FFM categories. Fifteen FFM narcissism trait scales were developed by Glover et al. to adequately cover the heterogeneity of the construct (both vulnerable and grandiose forms). The development of these scales was done taking into account the opinions of experts as well as empirical data,[199] and tested with respect to eight established measures of narcissism (including measures of both grandiose and vulnerable narcissism) and the corresponding facets of the FFM. This measure aims to show that the trait profile of NPD is mostly consistent across different measures of NPD and that the trait profile itself can be used as an assessment of NPD, yielding the same findings as other non-trait-based measures.

The resulting measure is known as the Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory (FFNI). FFNI is a 148-item self-report inventory of fifteen traits related to vulnerable and grandiose narcissism. Subjects rate themselves on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) in reaction to statements such as, 'I believe I am entitled to special accommodations', 'I only associate with people of my calibre', 'If people are ignorant

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[197] D. Pilgrim, "Personality Disorder," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 181, no. 1 (2002): 77.

[198] B. J. Board and K. Fritzon, "Disordered Personalities at Work," *Psychology, Crime & Law* 11, no. 1 (2005); A. D. Pardue, M. B. Robinson, and B. A. Arrigo, "Psychopathy and Corporate Crime: A Preliminary Examination, Part 2," *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice* 13, no. 2 (2013); A. Rijsenbilt and H. Commandeur, "Narcissus Enters the Courtroom: Ceo Narcissism and Fraud," *Journal of Business Ethics* 117, no. 2 (2013). David Owen's study of Bush and Blair is also enlightening, D. Owen, *The Hubris Syndrome: Bush, Blair and the Intoxication of Power* (London: Politico's Publishing, 2007).

[199] D. R. Lynam and T. A. Widiger, "Using the Five-Factor Model to Represent the Dsm-Iv Personality Disorders: An Expert Consensus Approach," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 110 (2001); D. B. Samuel and T. A. Widiger, "Convergence of Narcissism Measures from the Perspective of General Personality Functioning," *Assessment* 15 (2008); "A Meta-Analytic Review of the Relationships between the Five-Factor Model and Dsm-Iv-Tr Personality Disorders: A Facet-Level Analysis," *Clinical Psychology Review* 28 (2008).

enough to let me take advantage of them, so be it'.[200] After long study, expert opinion, and countless clinical presentations, the relevant traits are as follows:[201]

Trait	FFM Variant	Description
Reactive Anger	Angry Hostility	Concerning anger and rage in response to perceived slights, criticism, failure, or rebuke.
Shame	High FFM Self-Consciousness),	Concerning shame or humiliation in response to perceived slights, criticism, failure, or rebuke
Indifference	Low FFM Self-Consciousness	Concerning indifference in response to perceived slights, criticism, failure, or rebuke
Need for Admiration	FFM Vulnerability	Involving a sense of inner weakness, uncertainty, and insecurity with respect to a desired or perceived greatness.
Exhibitionism	FFM Gregariousness	A seeking of constant admiration, showing off when in the presence of others, and attention-seeking, without reference to feelings of insecurity.
Thrill-Seeking	FFM Excitement Seeking	Assessing a tendency to engage in high-risk behaviour for the sake of thrills and excitement

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[200] N. Glover et al., "The Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory: A Five-Factor Measure of Narcissistic Personality Traits," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 94, no. 5: 503.
[201] From ibid.

Authoritativeness	FFM Assertiveness	Assessing a tendency to take charge of situations, to authoritatively take responsibility for making decisions, and to perceive oneself as a leader
Grandiose Fantasies	FFM Fantasy	Assessing fantasies of grandeur and success, preoccupation with fantasies of future glory, and a tendency to distort reality to achieve an overly positive view of past, current, or future accomplishments
Cynicism/Distrust	Low FFM trust	Assessing a sense of cynicism and mistrust concerning the motives, intentions, and reliability of others.
Manipulativeness	Low FFM Straightforwardness	Assessing a tendency to skilfully and characteristically manipulate, ply, shape, beguile, machinate, or manoeuvre the feelings or opinions of others
Exploitativeness	Low FFM Altruism	Assessing a tendency to exploit, take advantage of, and use others for his or her own gain
Entitlement	Low FFM Altruism	Involving feelings and actions of entitlement, presumptuousness, not being satisfied until he or she gets what is perceived to be

		deserved, or expectation of favourable treatment
Arrogance	Low FFM Modesty	Assessing haughty, snobbish, imperious, pretentious, conceited, pompous, and disdainful beliefs and behaviours
Lack of Empathy	Low FFM Tender-Mindedness	Assessing the extent to which the person fails to be aware of, appreciate, or acknowledge the feelings of others, displaying attitudes that are generally uncaring and unsympathetic
Acclaim-Seeking	FFM Achievement-Striving	Assessing narcissistic aspirations, working toward acclaim, and an excessive driving ambition to achieve

Glover et al. and Mill et al. conclude that the FFNI is an accurate diagnostic tool, but, what results do the FFNI provide that would allow us to use the language of personality traits to describe NPD? Of course, 'narcissistic' is not the trait label we are really after. Except in very general usage where 'narcissistic' often functions as a byword for 'self-involved' or 'conceited',[202] NPD is a complex construct with a variety of manifestations. Once again, then, does the FFNI offer results which can confirm our understanding of NPD as a personality trait?

The FFNI does not suggest that narcissism is *a* 'trait'. Instead, it argues from a FFM perspective that the traits specified in the fifteen scales *together make up* NPD.[203]

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[202] The OED has, 'Having or showing an excessive interest in or admiration of oneself and one's physical appearance, Oxford Dictionaries, "'Narcissistic'," Oxford University Press, http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/narcissistic.
[203] I would like to thank Donald Lynam for kindly helping me to clarify this point.

Individuals can be rated higher or lower in respect to each of the traits and some will be more or less dominant depending on a given situation. Because the diagnosis of NPD through FFNI involves the completion of a comprehensive survey and clinical assessment, a positive result (that is, diagnosis of NPD) actually *requires* the presence of these consistent traits. Without these traits negatively affecting an individual's ability to function in a broad sense (i.e. not in one narrow and isolated scenario), the diagnosis would not be made. Thus, while each individual will have a different profile (the more traits they are *high* (or low) on, or the higher they are on these traits, the more narcissistic they can be said to be), an individual with NPD will have a mixture of the following maladaptive variants of personality traits: reactive anger, shame, indifference, need for admiration, exhibitionism, thrill-seeking, authoritativeness, grandiose fantasies, cynicism/distrust, manipulativeness, exploitativeness, entitlement, arrogance, lack of empathy, and acclaim-seeking.[204] In answer to our original question in this section, NPD *is* a complex collection of interrelated personality traits. These personality traits will manifest most clearly in situations pertaining to self-image and the perception of others.

3.4 NPD as a Vice

From the above, I believe we have grounds to understand NPD as an assemblage of stable and consistent personality traits. Let us return to Miller's criteria to discover whether we have further grounds to view NPD as a character trait and, more specifically, a *vice*.

3.4.1 NPD as Character and Vice

Once NPD can be understood as a collection of personality traits, it is not difficult to understand this collection of personality traits as character traits.[205] The traits exhibited by persons with NPD are certainly subject to *evaluation* over and above mere *description* and this is Miller's primary benchmark. One need only look to the list of adjectives provided by Wink from the spouses of persons with NPD to see negative (moral)

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[204] These many not be the precise words used by an associate to describe such a person. In ordinary life, summary terms such as 'self-involved' may serve to capture several of these traits in one. Nonetheless, these descriptors still fit based on the statistical and professional evidence.

[205] Many psychologists would make no distinction between the two. Hume himself fits into this camp, E. S. Radcliffe, "Moral Naturalism and the Possibility of Making Ourselves Better," in *Moral Cultivation: Essays on the Development of Character and Virtue*, ed. B. K. Wilburn (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007), 109-10.

evaluation in full swing (bossy, intolerant, cruel, argumentative, opportunistic, rebellious, conceited, arrogant, demanding, temperamental, and loud, to name a few).[206] These are not simply descriptive labels. However, while the term 'character trait' might now be apt, Miller will argue for the label 'Mixed Trait' over 'vice'. Let us remind ourselves of the reasons for this, taking for our example the cruel person. According to Miller:

> A cruel person, when acting in character, will reliably attempt to harm others when in situations where opportunities to harm present themselves, at least when those opportunities are not thought to involve significant inconvenience to him and he believes he will not get punished or be otherwise affected by others for doing so.
> A cruel person, when acting in character, will not first experience significant internal conflict about whether to act cruelly before in fact performing cruel actions as a result of his trait of cruelty.
> A cruel person, when acting in character, will not regularly experience (significant) feelings of moral guilt when harming others, nor will his harming others be influenced in a significant way by avoiding anticipated guilt.[207]

This criteria takes into account both mental and physical actions as well as requiring that the 'underlying mental state dispositions are of the particular [vicious] kind themselves'.[208] In Miller's study of cruel behaviour, it appears that the underlying mental states of most people are *not* necessarily vicious (based on Miller's cited empirical evidence) and this is the *negative* argument. The *positive* argument suggests that people *do* have Mixed Traits. With regard to aggression, the mental state dispositions given by Miller as examples are such that we not would evaluate them either wholly in a negative or positive way.[209] They are, thus he argues, morally mixed and neither virtues nor vices.

So, the evidence cited by Miller suggests that most, if not all, *cruel* behaviour is not the product of a vice but rather of a Mixed Trait. In this, however, we are made aware of the difficulty of defending against a multitude of empirical examples. It will always be

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[206] Wink, "Two Faces of Narcissism," 595.
[207] These are taken from Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 41-42.
[208] Ibid., 38.
[209] Ibid., 43.

an issue for philosophers building theories on data. As science progresses and new interpretations of data are offered, Neil Levy has warned that '[d]ata-driven philosophical work is peculiarly risky and provisional'.[210] While the evidence Miller cites may well cast doubts upon most cruel behaviour being the result of a vicious trait, NPD and its own empirical particularities will require an entirely new discussion. Using the above information concerning NPD, then, we are in a position to see how NPD fares as a vice according to Miller's criteria. Mirroring Miller's criteria for cruelty, the initial criteria for NPD could be formulated as follows:

> A person with NPD, when acting in character, will reliably manifest a grandiose sense of self-importance, entertain fantasies of limitless success, power, intelligence, beauty, or love, possess beliefs of being special and unique (mental actions), demand excessive admiration, exude a sense of entitlement, maintain exploitative and superficial relationships, display low empathy, high envy, and arrogance when in situations where opportunities to do so present themselves, at least when those opportunities are not thought to involve significant inconvenience to him and he believes he will not get punished or be otherwise affected by others for doing so.
>
> A person with NPD, when acting in character, will not first experience significant internal conflict about whether to act in a manner consistent with NPD before in fact performing actions consistent with NPD as a result of his trait of NPD.
>
> A person with NPD, when acting in character, will not regularly experience (significant) feelings of moral guilt when behaving in a narcissistic way, nor will his behaviour be influenced in a significant way by avoiding anticipated guilt.

How do persons with NPD fare against these initial criteria? The benefit of working with negative behaviours like personality disorders is that psychologists have established plausible thresholds which must be met in order for a diagnosis to be made. Interestingly, the above philosophical criteria for a person with NPD are in fact remarkably close to the

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[210] N. Levy, "Psychopathy, Responsibility, and the Moral/Conventional Distinction," in *Responsibility and Psychopathy: Interfacing Law, Psychiatry and Philosophy*, ed. J. McMillan L. Malatesti (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 213.

clinical criteria (*DSM-5*): 'a *pervasive pattern* of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy [emphasis added]'.[211] That being the case, persons with NPD meet the above criteria almost by definition. Further, the traits which together make up NPD (reactive anger, shame, indifference, need for admiration, exhibitionism, etc.) certainly sound morally questionable. But semantics are not enough for Miller.

Miller is very specific about the mental state dispositions required, which must also be of a particularly vicious kind. Zooming in on these for the present case, in what sense do the mental state dispositions of persons with NPD count as vicious? On the basis of work done by the psychologists and interviews already cited, I will suggest here some plausible beliefs and desires pertaining to self-image and the perception of others for a person with NPD:[212]

Beliefs that others are 'out to get me' and responsible for my failures[213]

Beliefs that others do not properly appreciate me due to my obvious superiority in various domains[214]

Beliefs that my rage is a legitimate response to being treated badly by others[215]

Beliefs and desires that I should not have to do any task which is 'below me'[216]

Beliefs that my regular disappointment in others is due to their incompetence[217]

Belief and desires that I should receive extra appreciation and special treatment from others without providing evidence for such attention[218]

Beliefs that others can be exploited for my benefit and are deserving of such treatment if they are too senseless to realise it happening[219]

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[211] Skodol and Bender, "Narcissistic Personality Disorder in Dsm-5," 422.

[212] All persons with NPD need not exhibit all these beliefs and desires and will believe and desire some more strongly than others as well as other beliefs and desires not listed here. This is a representative sample.

[213] Vaknin, "Malignant Self-Love: Narcissism Revisited"; Corbitt, "Narcissism from the Perspective of the Five-Factor Model."

[214] Vaknin, "Malignant Self-Love: Narcissism Revisited".

[215] Corbitt, "Narcissism from the Perspective of the Five-Factor Model," 201.

[216] Pincus, Cain, and Wright, "Narcissistic Grandiosity and Narcissistic Vulnerability in Psychotherapy," 441; Corbitt, "Narcissism from the Perspective of the Five-Factor Model," 201.

[217] Pincus, Cain, and Wright, "Narcissistic Grandiosity and Narcissistic Vulnerability in Psychotherapy," 441.

[218] Ibid., 442.

[219] Glover et al., "The Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory: A Five-Factor Measure of Narcissistic Personality Traits," 503.

Beliefs that failed and lack of close relationships are acceptable or due to the faults of others[220]

Beliefs and desires that I deserve limitless power, success, fame, and love[221]

Beliefs that when my mistakes are identified it is really an excuse for others to bring me down[222]

Beliefs and desires that I must look out for myself as no one else will[223]

In an obvious sense, these beliefs and desires do seem morally questionable. But a proper examination of this requires us to return to the *virtuous* case.

According to a common story in virtue ethics, the virtuous person, as well as producing good *effects* where possible, also and more importantly has virtuous *motives*.[224] Hursthouse writes, 'there is more to the possession of virtue than being disposed to act in certain sorts of ways; at the very least one has to act in those ways for certain sort of reasons'.[225] Take for example the businessman who gives a large donation to a charity. If his sole reason for action is free publicity, although good has been done, it does not issue from an appropriately virtuous motive. His *reasons* for acting are not virtuous reasons. Instead, the man who offers a large donation because he believes it is the right thing to do in the given situation acts from right motives. How does this principle relate to vice? The answer is more complicated.

Miller requires that the vicious person's mental states be of a particularly vicious kind. Precisely what does this vicious psychology consist of? First, I suggest that in many instances the vicious person believes they are not doing the wrong thing and thus possesses a *false conception of the good* rather than valuing vice under the heading of vice.[226] Suppose someone believes immigrants have a poor work ethic and do not deserve

[220] T. A. Widiger and J. R. Lowe, "Five-Factor Model Assessment of Personality Disorder," ibid.89, no. 1 (2007): 25.

[221] Skodol and Bender, "Narcissistic Personality Disorder in Dsm-5," 422; Glover et al., "The Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory: A Five-Factor Measure of Narcissistic Personality Traits," 503.

[222] Corbitt, "Narcissism from the Perspective of the Five-Factor Model," 202.

[223] Glover et al., "The Five-Factor Narcissism Inventory: A Five-Factor Measure of Narcissistic Personality Traits," 503.

[224] H. Battaly, "A Pluralist Theory of Virtue," in *Current Controversies in Virtue Theory*, ed. Mark Alfano (New York: Routledge, 2015), 15. Battaly lists Aristotle, Hursthouse, Zazgzebski, Montmarquet, and Slote as those advocating for the importance of motives for virtue.

[225] R. Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 11.

[226] Arendt famously argued for a thin conception of *evil* where not all actions are the product of a certain kind of psychology. See H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking, 1963), 253. I will not go any deeper here into the difference between vicious and evil actions or persons. For the purpose of this discussion, then, I take the terms 'evil' and 'vicious' to be distinct. For a clear and brief definition of evil actions and evil persons See Russell, *Evil: A Philosophical Investigation*

equal opportunity in the workplace. They will probably not call this belief racism but rather patriotism or honesty or something similar. While they might value their behaviour, they do not value it under the heading of vice (or racism). More than simply not knowing what is wrong, it is possible that such persons (falsely) believe their actions to be *right*. It would not be strange to discover that Hemingway's Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* did not *value* cowardice under the heading of cowardice and, in fact, did not view his desertion from the army in such a light. Similarly, O'Brien in Orwell's *1984* almost certainly understands his bullying and blind obedience to Big Brother as great loyalty and diligence. Making a controversial reappearance in *Go Set a Watchman*, Atticus Finch would not take himself to be a racist but rather a patriot or, at the very least, a realist. Even Captain Hook, educated through Eton and Oxford, sees Peter Pan as the 'cocky' boy who maimed him and, consequently, is quite deserving of his one-handed wrath. Vonnegut told his father that he never wrote a novel with a villain.[227] The villain's reasons for action are, to the villain, of the same kind and quality as the hero's. This was something Vonnegut learnt through the war.

But a false conception of the good alone is not *sufficient* for vice. Suppose I believe that God exists and that praying to Him is a good thing. If God does not exist my belief is a false one. But this does not serve to make my prayers vicious. Thus, falsity alone does is not sufficient for vice. Imagine instead that I believe that immigrants do not deserve equal opportunity at work and, *further*, that this belief gives me the right to treat these workers in highly demeaning ways. Even if the first belief is supposedly justified (under the heading of patriotism or whatever else), it does not justify the second belief (that I may treat immigrants in demeaning ways). Not all who believe that immigrants do not deserve equal opportunity in the workplace would then feel entitled to treat them abusively. Thus a false conception of the good must be accompanied by a secondary vicious belief which is supposedly justified by the first.

To undergird this, Cassam makes a significant point that such persons believe what they believe because of their character traits (vices) and not solely because of the reasons

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[Kindle Edition], 195-96. I am, however, not making a distinction here between moral and intellectual vices as both require beliefs. For further discussion on the intellectual vices, see J. Baehr, "Epistemic Malevolence," *Metaphilosophy* 41, no. 1-2 (2010).

This false conception of the good can be the result of ignorance and justification. See J. Kennett, *Agency and Responsibility: A Common-Sense Moral Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 206-08.

[227] T. F. Marvin, *Kurt Vonnegut: A Critical Companion* (Conneticut: Greenwood Press, 2002), 53. This conception of good writing is reminiscent of Hemingway's dictum, '[A] character is a caricature', E. Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 153.

they offer in support of their views. Cassam writes that reason explanations only get us so far.[228] For example, why do these people believe that whites are superior? Because other races are inferior (reason). Why do they believe *that*? And so on and so forth. Cassam suggests a character-based explanation instead of a purely rationalising explanation. But the two are not unrelated. The reasons the racist person gives for their views are reasons to them *because* of their racist character, that is, their habitual way of thinking, feeling, and acting in racist ways. Thus, underneath the beliefs is a vicious character trait and the two feed into one another.

Returning to our case study of NPD, persons with the disorder need not *themselves* view their actions (mental and physical) and mental state dispositions (beliefs and desires) as vicious. While *virtuous* people might often understand their actions as the *right* thing to do it does not seem that *vicious* people should necessarily understand their actions as the *wrong* thing to do.[229] Further, if vice attribution was wholly dependent on the agent's own consent to the label, the term should cease to exist. From the psychological literature, it appears that persons with NPD really do believe they are deserving of special attention and that others are not. Their actions, in their own minds, are completely justified. This is a *false conception of the good*, then, and not a conscious valuing of wrongdoing under the heading of wrongdoing. Further, their understanding of themselves as deserving special attention leads them to behave in ways which secure this attention, often to the (at times significant) detriment of others. Here again we have a false conception of the good accompanied by vicious acts and beliefs supposedly justified by that initial conception. If the vicious person, however falsely, believes their actions to be acceptable, what gives us grounds to call them vicious?

In the case of virtue and vice it is not self-assessment that matters most. The use of the term 'mixed' in Miller's Mixed Trait theory is due to the *moral evaluation* of a trait containing a mix of both morally positive and morally negative components. Therefore, if we examine the earlier listed beliefs and desires typical of a person with NPD, we only need to morally evaluate them to discover if these warrant a moral evaluation similar to the actions of persons with NPD.

Now, it is almost certainly the case that not every single belief and desire held by every narcissist in every relevant situation would be evaluated in a morally negative light.

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[228] Cassam, "Vice Epistemology," 6-7.
[229] In such cases it is possible we are dealing with incontinence or akrasia (weakness of will) rather than vice. See Kennett, *Agency and Responsibility: A Common-Sense Moral Psychology* 159ff.

They may in fact possess some true beliefs which are in and of themselves morally neutral but may contribute to narcissistic behaviour, especially when paired with their other beliefs and desires. I think, therefore, that such an absolute standard would be unrealistic. That being the case, I am unsure as to what, for Miller, would constitute the tipping point between a virtue or vice, and a Mixed Trait. If one was able to quantify all their beliefs and desires concerning a certain moral domain would a 90% rate of virtue count as virtuous or would it be a Mixed Trait? I suggest that to call a trait mixed if it is not *entirely* (100%) one way or the other seems unnecessary at a moral evaluative level. Looking over the above beliefs and desires characteristic of persons with NPD, I suggest that the moral evaluation of such beliefs and desires by the average person would be *overwhelmingly negative*.[230] If we compare the beliefs and desires listed here with Miller's earlier example of cruelty, there is not the same mix of positive and negative beliefs and desires. The beliefs and desires pertaining to NPD (that is, pertaining to and undergirding the traits of reactive anger, shame, indifference, need for admiration, exhibitionism, etc.) could not be called morally 'mixed'.[231] Therefore, in light of the fact that persons with NPD have a stable collection of traits founded upon beliefs and desires which are subject to overwhelmingly negative moral evaluation and reliably lead to vicious thoughts and acts, the collection of character traits which comprise NPD are in fact vices.

3.4.2 Response from Miller

How might Miller respond at this point? While he believes that the FFM approach to personality is valid in many respects, he does not see a link between the FFM and the virtues, stating that the traits given by the FFM are not the same as the traditional virtues like 'altruism' or 'modesty'.[232] Further, the FFM questionnaire, he writes, has nothing to

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[230] I will not here defend why these beliefs and desires should be seen as negative but assume that ordinary moral evaluation would agree. With similar sentiments Jonathan Bennett writes, 'When I call a morality bad, I cannot prove that mine is better; but when I here call any morality bad, I think you will agree with me that it is bad; and that is all I need', J. Bennett, "The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn," *Philosophy* 49, no. 188 (1974): 123-24. Even if one does not believe in the universalizability of moral judgments, one can still assert that a person's moral judgment is wrong. For a discussion of this see C. Taylor, "Moral Cognitivism and Character," *Philosophical Investigations 28:3 July 2005* 28, no. 3 (2005): 257. It seems very plausible that persons with NPD would, to meet Taylor's criteria, fail to consider a morally significant feature of a given situation.
[231] These traits may indeed be morally mixed in other instances. But in the case of persons with NPD, the beliefs and desires (mental states) which undergird these traits would be subject to negative moral evaluation.
[232] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 150.

do with *behaviour* but only self-perception and the perception of others. The concern here is that virtuous dispositions cannot be appropriately identified through self-report, without any behavioural evidence, and without proper understanding of motives.[233] Let me address this latter fear first. I agree with Miller that a self-report questionnaire may not go very far in discovering whether one is virtuous or not. The FFNI, however, is not the sole tool used in the diagnosis of NPD. For adequate diagnosis, the FFNI provides initial data which is used in conjunction with a more holistic discussion of social and occupational impairments, personal distress, the determination of clinically significant levels of maladaptive trait variants, and, finally, profile matching to clinical constructs by an expert.[234] Clinical diagnosis, then, in concert with the FFNI, is well-equipped to identify behaviours and motivations required to justify the usage of terms like virtue and vice.

Second, we come to Miller's point about the FFM not being understood as traditional virtues or vices. Once again, I agree with Miller that the broad-level FFM domains of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness do not immediately strike one as virtues and vices (though it would not be impossible to massage them to fit).[235] However, the FFNI uses lower-level facets (inspired by the broad-level domains), identifying more specific maladaptive traits which comprise the presentation of NPD. Thus, while the broad domains may not strike us as particularly vicious, the FFNI's reactive anger, shame,[236] indifference, need for admiration, exhibitionism, thrill-seeking, authoritativeness, grandiose fantasies, cynicism/distrust, manipulativeness, exploitativeness, entitlement, arrogance, lack of empathy, and acclaim-seeking can be *in the case of NPD* readily understood as vices.[237]

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[233] Ibid., 143-44.

[234] Widiger and Lowe, "Five-Factor Model Assessment of Personality Disorder," 20-23.

[235] If Miller is concerned that these vices do not have a semantic resemblance to, say, the original Thomistic or Aristotelian virtues and vices, MacIntyre shows how history requires different virtues at different times. Though the lists may change, the consistent strain is society's ability to recognise these virtues and vices for what they are. See, A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (London: Bristol Classic Press, 2011), 181-203.

[236] Perhaps not readily understood as a vice though it may be so in the context of NPD and its outworking. This would require further discussion.

[237] Cynicism/distrust, for example, need not be a vice for every person. Police officers might require a healthy sense of distrust in some situations. In the case of NPD, though, the beliefs and desires associated with distrust are subject to negative moral evaluation. Their reasons for distrust are not good ones.

3.4.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued, using Miller's criteria, that a person with NPD *does* reliably manifest their traits in relevant situations, does *not* experience (significant) internal conflict and does *not* experience (significant) moral guilt. Unlike the virtuous person, however, the vicious person does not have a psychology that matches their actions in quite the same way; they do not *value* vice as such.[238] Instead, the *moral evaluation* of their psychology is overwhelmingly negative. Taken together, in the case of persons with NPD we have one example of a cluster of personality traits which can be understood as *vices*. These vices manifest most often in situations pertaining to self-image and the perception of others.

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[238] They also do not clearly value virtue.

Chapter IV: Return to the Rarity Thesis

4.1 Introduction

Miller believes that most people do possess a character that is efficacious and secures consistency but that we must understand these character traits according to his Mixed Trait thesis. Character traits understood this way do not secure virtue; they are, by definition, 'mixed'. In fact, Miller writes that most people do not have any of the virtues or vices to any degree. But I suggest his account does not secure the Rarity Thesis (RT) in its current form or with its current force. Once again, the formulation of RT to which I am responding is Miller's as it pertains to *vice*: 'Most people do not have *any of the vices* to any degree, although a few might have one or more of them.'[239] I will argue, first, that vice is not *comparatively* rare and may not even be rare *simpliciter*. It is now clear that persons with NPD have a collection of vicious traits and that traits of other conditions could also fit the criteria for vice. Miller's formulation of RT will at the least require modification if not abandonment. Finally I address the realism challenge. Though I cannot rebut the challenge here entirely, I provide some reasons for thinking that it, too, may be overstated; at least in the case of vices, our characters are malleable through our own actions in the ways required by Miller. If this is also the case for virtue this would mean that VE does in fact offer ways of strengthening Mixed Traits to become virtues and RC receives a partial answer.

4.2 'Most people do not have any of the vices to any degree'

In what follows, my weaker conclusion will argue that this statement does not have the rhetorical force with which it first appears. A stronger conclusion suggests that RT in this form is false and vice is not even rare *simpliciter*. Before I offer an illustration to unpack this, it will be helpful to distinguish between two common ways of understanding the word 'most'.[240] In one sense we might mean (M1) most of the *total*. This would be the

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[239] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 42.
[240] I will quote here in full what Miller writes on the term 'most'. It is in line with the definitions I offer, perhaps closest to M1. He writes, 'Of course what counts as "most" is difficult to make precise, and will likely vary by time period, geographical location, and social/cultural influences. Nevertheless, this is intended to be a robust factual claim—the vast majority of people today possess such a trait which plays the five functional roles from chapter one, and specifically can play a significant role in explaining why

case if Sarah ate most of the cake, that is, the majority of the *total - 51%*. A second way of speaking takes 'most' to mean (M2) the *largest portion* in a relative sense. This would be the case if Alex had the most shares in a company out of all his friends (even if Alex's shares constituted, say, 25%). By way of illustration, imagine now an admittedly musical kindergarten class of thirty children. Here is a graph to show the various instruments and number of players for each:

Instrument	*Number of Players*
Violin	5
Guitar	7
Flute	4
Piano	8
Drums	4
Trumpet	2

Now we hear somebody make the claim, 'Most children do not play drums'. This statement is quite true. Only 13% of children play drums. Going by M1, in fact *no* instrument is played by most of the children. Going by M2, the instrument with the most number of players compared to the others is piano (26%). So, while the veracity of the statement 'Most children do not plays drums', is still unchanged, we might very well question the *force* of such a statement. Going by M1, *no* instruments are played by *most* of the children. Going by M2, while most children are not drummers (*only* piano can make this claim), violin, guitar, flute, and trumpet are also not played by *most* children, and so the rarity of drummers is comparable to that of the majority of other instruments.

Returning to the case of vice, let us examine how M1 and M2 can be applied. Compiling a list of character traits by population spread is very difficult. Little work of

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people act as they do and in predicting their future helping. This includes many of our friends, colleagues, and family members. Let me qualify this claim right away. Rather than talking about the vast majority of people in general today, I should limit this to the vast majority of people in Western industrial societies. This is simply because the studies that were reviewed in Part II were almost always conducted using participants from either North American or European populations. My picture of character and helping *may* apply more universally than this, but clearly a lot more research would need to be done first before I would feel comfortable making such a claim. So in the remainder of this book, whenever I make claims about "most people" or "our" character traits, they should be assumed to be qualified in this way', *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*, 154.

this kind has been done on good behaviour. This is not surprising. Good behaviour poses no threat to our communities and so research in these areas is not a pressing need.[241] Empirical evidence on behaviour and traits, then, is largely focussed on negative behaviours. Purely by way of example, I will provide estimates of NPD, Avoidant Personality Disorder (AvPD), Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder (OCPD), and psychopathy in the general population.

As with NPD, researchers have identified a consistent collection of traits in persons with AvPD and OCPD and it is the presence of these traits which aid and allow diagnosis. AvPD is described in DSM-IV as a 'pervasive pattern of social inhibition, feelings of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to negative evaluation'.[242] Lynam et al. devised a Five-Factor model of AvPD similar to the scales developed for NPD. The team found ten specific maladaptive variants with which to assess persons with AvPD: evaluation apprehension, despair, mortified, overcome, social dread, shrinking, risk averse, joyless, rigidity, and timorous.[243] OCPD is a condition which manifests in 'perfectionism; devotion to work to the exclusion of other important activities; preoccupation with the details, order, and organization of activities and tasks; rigidity; and difficulty expressing warmth or affection'.[244] Samuel et al. devised a Five-Factor model of twelve maladaptive variants of traits for OCDP: perfectionism, fastidiousness, punctiliousness, workaholism, doggedness, ruminative deliberation, detached coldness, risk aversion, excessive worry, constricted, inflexibility, and dogmatism.[245] Concerning psychopathy, though researchers have warned against a one-sized-fits-all diagnosis, Hare's checklist provides items such as pathological lying, lack of remorse, impulsivity, and poor behavioural controls. [246]

The table below shows the prevalence of these four constructs in the general population.

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[241] It is in this sense that Cassam writes that the vices may be even more important than the virtues, Cassam, "Vice Epistemology," 1.
[242] American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th ed. (Washington: American Psychiatric Association, 2000).
[243] D. R. Lynam et al., "A Five-Factor Measure of Avoidant Personality: The Ffava," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 94, no. 5 (2012): 469.
[244] D. B. Samuel et al., "A Five-Factor Measure of Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Traits," ibid.: 456.
[245] Ibid., 460.
[246] J. L. Skeem et al., "Psychopathic Personality: Bridging the Gap between Scientific Evidence and Public Policy," *Psychological Science in the Public Interest* 12, no. 3 (2011): 101.

Personality Disorder	% in Population
NPD	1-6%[247]
AvPD	2-3%[248]
OCPD	2-8%[249]
Psychopathy	1-2%[250]

We can see again that personality disorders (AvPD, OCPD, and also the example of psychopathy) make for good examples since we have accurate clinical thresholds for diagnosis and population estimates. If more exact estimates for virtuous traits (honesty, compassion, etc.) were available, our table could be added to.

Remember that NPD is the only collection of traits which I have shown to be vices and so represents vice in this discussion. Going by my table, we do not know if any trait is the M1 most in this instance as the empirical research has not yet shown it. OCPD has the highest prevalence with a possible 8% and that is not even close to the M1 most. If there was such a thing as an M1 most, every *other* trait - virtue, vice, or character trait - would not be the M1 most. So while it may be true to say that (M1) most people do not have any *particular* vice, the statement is not a problem only for vice (exemplified at least in NPD) as it is also the situation in which all other traits find themselves save for the *one* trait which is the M1 most. This is the weaker claim. (Of course, it may also be the case that *no* trait is the M1 most and so vice is doubly protected in such an instance.) Since vice is a *category* of traits and not a single trait, however, it is also possible that a combination of all the traits counted as vices would in fact be the M1 most. This is the stronger claim. And if this is not the case, the weaker claim still applies.

Concerning M2, in any given list of traits one trait will be the most common and so the M2 most. Going by the upper estimate in the above list, OCPD is the M2 most (potentially around 8%). Again, every other trait will not be the M2 most and so once more this is not a problem for vice (exemplified at least in NPD) in particular. Further,

[247] N. Dhawan et al., "Prevalence and Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorder in the Community: A Systematic Review," *Comprehensive Psychiatry* 51 (2010).
[248] B. F. Grant et al., "Prevalence, Correlates, and Disability of Personality Disorders in the United States," *The Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 65, no. 7 (2004).
[249] N. M. Cain et al., "Interpersonal Functioning in Obsessive–Compulsive Personality Disorder," *Journal of Personality Assessment* 97, no. 1 (2015): 90.
[250] C. S. Neumann and R. D. Hare, "Psychopathic Traits in a Large Community Sample: Links to Violence, Alcohol Use, and Intelligence," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 76, no. 5 (2008): 895.

since vice is a category and not an individual trait, it is also possible that vice is the M2 most.[251] Even if it is not, though, the weaker claim here still applies. Thus, either vice is protected from the charge of singular rarity by virtue of the fact that all traits but one are not the M2 most or by the fact that vice itself is in fact the M2 most.

Without a great deal more empirical evidence it is impossible to come to a definitive conclusion regarding the exact population spread of vice. But, even by the weaker claims, vice will at least not be the M1 most and so be equal in this regard to every other trait which is not the M1 most (which may in fact be all of them if no trait qualifies as the M1 most), or vice will not be the M2 most and so be equal in this regard to every other trait which not the M2 most. In both these cases the statement that most people do not have any of the vices to any degree is true, but the same could be said for most (and possibly *all* in an M1 sense) other traits and so vice is not comparatively rare.

Further, it is possible that a combined total of vicious traits may in fact see vice become the M1 most and/or M2 most and is in that instance not even rare *simpliciter*. It would instead be quite common. And these ordinary ways of understanding the term 'most' require rather large numbers ('most of the total' or 'the largest share') when compared with a medical understanding of 'rare' and 'common'. The NHS understands a *rare* side effect to be between 1 in 1,000 and 1 in 10,000 people affected.[252] In personality terms, this means a trait with a prevalence of 0.1% or 0.01% would be rare. NPD, however, could be as high as 6%. A *common* side effect according to the NHS affects between 1 in 10 and 1 in 100 people are affected. NPD is actually *common* by these standards and is not rare *simpliciter*. But ordinary usage probably does not understand 'rare' and 'common' in these terms and even by the standards of ordinary usage (e.g. M1 and M2) the combined total of vicious traits may not be rare *simpliciter*.

Though I cannot speak definitely for virtuous traits without a great deal more empirical evidence, I believe in light of the above distinctions, in principle, the same could be said for virtue and it, like vice, may not be comparatively rare.[253] Miller might respond by reminding us that he is not interested in theoretical possibilities but rather

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[251] It is possible that AvPD, OCPD, and psychopathy could be counted as vices on Miller's criteria and so contribute to that total.

[252] NHS, "What Are Side Effects?," Gov.UK, http://www.nhs.uk/chq/pages/997.aspx?categoryid=73&subcategoryid=108.

[253] We see hints of this in the 10% of students in the Darley and Batson experiment a high hurry stopped to help. Likewise, 4% of those who did not find a coin still helped a stranger pick up papers. Though these traits have not been quantified or categorised, there may be some evidence for the existence of virtuous traits.

empirical evidence. And the empirical evidence shows that most people do not have virtues and instead possess Mixed Traits. Miller might further reply that it would be highly unlikely for a person to possess an *overwhelming* number of beliefs and desires pertaining to compassion, for example, which we would positively evaluate in the same way that we negatively evaluated the person with NPD. I would reply first by saying again that good behaviour has not received the same amount of empirical scrutiny as bad behaviour. While there have been studies on helping and honesty etc., we do not possess population estimates and clinical thresholds for assessing large numbers of people. Second, I do admit that it appears to be much more difficult to possess the correct mental states required for *virtue* and much easier to possess them for *vice*. I have provided empirical evidence where we see these necessary mental states in the case of vice. Thus, Miller's RT as it pertains to *vice* requires amendment and, with more empirical work, the same may one day be said for virtue. If not, perhaps it is an unhappy comment on human nature and our inability to be consistently virtuous. My arguments concerning vice will still apply.

To conclude this point, contrary to what the situationists have argued, vicious traits are not so rare as to be impractical for the explanation and prediction of behaviour and with more empirical evidence the same might be said for virtuous traits. With the *weak* conclusion this first clause loses rhetorical force, and with the stronger conclusion this clause is *false*.

4.3 'although a few might have one or more of them.'

Vice exists. Further, NDP is only one case study.[254] The same methods could be applied elsewhere and yield similar results. Obvious *possible* candidates for this are the other two members of the 'Dark Triad', Machiavellianism and psychopathy.[255] If we added the stable traits associated with diagnosis of these PDs we might have even more reason to say that a significant number of people possess vicious traits in relation to specific moral domains. We could also increase that number with the people who do not reach a clinical

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[254] This, too, is going by Miller's stringent criteria. If less rigorous criteria were used, the prevalence of agreed-upon vice would significantly increase.

[255] S. Jakobwitz and V. Egan, "The Dark Triad and Normal Personality Traits," *Personality and Individual Differences* 40, no. 2 (2006). Because of the similarities between the disorders, Jonason and Webster developed a 12-item checklist measuring all three. See, P. K. Jonason and G. D. Webster, "The Dirty Dozen: A Concise Measure of the Dark Triad," *Psychological Assessment* 22, no. 2 (2010).

threshold but still meet the criteria for the possession of vicious traits and are reliably selfish, manipulative, etc. It is now probably unclear if it is still a small minority who possess vicious traits and not only Mixed Traits. Perhaps it is a much larger group than is implied by Miller's RT. At any rate, whether we only include persons with NPD or we also include the many other potentially viable candidates, the subordinate clause should now read, 'although a significant minority *do* have one or more of them'. A more cynical reading of Miller's RT could take this subordinate clause to function as the fine print in a contract, ensuring that all bases are covered in the highly unlikely event that there is trouble, in this case, a counterexample to the claim that *most* people do not have *any* of the vices to *any* degree. In such a case one might point to the fine print and be covered by this caveat, surprised by its necessity but relieved by its existence. Of course, it may also be the case that Miller is genuinely open to the possibility of vice but has not yet found empirical support for it. In this instance the stipulation is sincere. Whichever way the phrase is interpreted, the existence of vice at least in the case of NPD means that this provision is no longer valid in the current form.

4.4 The Realism Challenge

Finally, we turn to Miller's realism challenge (RC). Once again, RC states that Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics must outline empirically informed ways for most human beings to improve their mixed traits and that, so far, this has not been done. While we have methods of strengthening our wills against the temptation to, for example, eat excessively, the true challenge will be in the regulation of 'subtle and subconscious influences on our moral behavior'.[256] RC is Miller's refocused way of questioning VE as a viable normative ethical theory. The challenge in RC is a two-step process. First, Miller argues that most people have Mixed Traits and therefore most people do not have any of the virtues or vices to any degree. Second, and because of that, VE should outline ways of improving these Mixed Traits to become the virtues which we do not have. VE, he writes, has not offered suitable ways of doing this and thus loses its edge as a normative ethical theory. I will end by making two comments on RC.

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[256] Miller, *Character and Moral Psychology*, 211. The challenge is also the main thrust of "Russell on Acquiring Virtue."

First, behaviour is often at the mercy of situational features and for this my thesis provides no cure. Miller states that VE offers no remedy for regulating subconscious influences on our moral behaviour. He charges that while character traits do possess a measure of efficacy, they can still be overcome by some situational features. This is not a problem for his account of character as it makes no claims on behavioural standards. VE, however, does make claims regarding the ability to acquire virtue and behave in such a manner in new and novel trait-relevant situations. This becomes a problem as the virtuous person must then be able to overcome various subconscious situational factors. VE, says Miller, has not presented suitable methods for achieving this. I make no claims to the contrary and admit that this part of RC remains an open question.

Second, we may, however, have ways of developing and acquiring *vicious* traits although the subject probably does not construe the situation in these terms. Once again, in the case of virtue and vice it is not self-assessment that matters most but rather *attribution*. The journalist Edwin Lyngar wrote of 'losing' his father to Fox News.[257] He describes how by consuming a 'daily diet' of nothing except Fox News for the last decade or so, with no email account and with no time for watching sports, his father had been soundly captured by the hysteria of Fox News and his outlook on life has changed considerably. His father despises 'liberal bullshit', believes science is a political plot (we did not evolve from 'fucking monkeys'), that 'Christians are America's most persecuted minority, and Barack Obama is a full-blown communist. He supports the use of force without question, as long as it's aimed at foreigners'. We might call these character traits paranoia, bigotry, hostility.[258] Lyngar's father would surely call them patriotism, loyalty, honesty, etc. The point is that Lyngar's father is, if not explicitly, at least willingly developing them. He watches nothing but Fox News, speaks only with people who hold similar views, and constantly meditates upon the impending disasters to be brought about by immigrants, science, and liberals. Cassam writes that vices are not acquired in this sense as virtues might be: '[One] doesn't *work* at being gullible, cynical or prejudiced, and time and effort don't come into it [emphasis added]'.[259] While he need not use these

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[257] I would like to thank Jeanette Kennett for bringing this example to me and for helping to clarify this point. E. Lyngar, "I Lost My Dad to Fox News: How a Generation Was Captured by Thrashing Hysteria," Salon Media Group, http://www.salon.com/2014/02/27/i_lost_my_dad_to_fox_news_how_a_generation_was_captured_by_thrashing_hysteria/.

[258] On this idea, Cassam's discussion of paranoia and conspiracy theories is very good. See, Cassam, "Vice Epistemology."

[259] Ibid., 7.

headings (virtue, vice, etc.) in his own mind, Lyngar's father is nonetheless 'working' on his bigotry. That is, he is actively feeding it day by day. In this way, vices can be developed and acquired.[260] These are clear ways in which to go about nurturing and developing vicious traits. Though Miller would probably not cede this to be an 'improvement' on Lyngar's father's former collection of more Mixed Traits, it is, nevertheless, representative of the process of acquiring *stable moral* traits. The same *principles* could be then applied to virtuous ones. Though a person may not use the headings of 'virtue' or 'vice' in describing what they are doing it does appear that significant and stable changes to character can be made by habitual exercise. It is a sad comment on human nature that the development of vicious traits is probably easier, but our psychology makes no formal limitation on the development of virtue. Though it may indeed be more difficult to develop virtue, the same principles of acquisition apply.

4.5 Final Conclusion

The aim of this thesis has been to question the force of Miller's endorsement of RT. Like a thorn in the lion's paw, something very small can work larger effects. In this case the existence of vicious traits at least in persons with NPD shows that some people *do* have vices and using this one example we are able to see how the force of RT is lessened. If vice (exemplified in this instance by persons with NPD) is not the M1 most it will be equal in this regard to every other trait which is not the M1 most and so not be comparatively rare in such a case. If vice is not the M2 most it will be equal in this regard to every other trait which is not the M2 most and so not be comparatively rare in such a case. Of course, it may be that vice, as an unfortunately rather large category of behaviours in this world (clinical and otherwise), is in fact the M1 most and/or M2 most. In such an event vice is not even rare *simpliciter* and Miller's RT in its current form is not only rhetorically weakened but false. However, even if vice is not the M1 most or M2 most, it will not be comparatively rare. Though I cannot speak for virtue, the existence and prevalence of vicious traits (exemplified *at least* in NPD) weakens the rhetorical force of RT. Further, if the stronger claim is correct and vice is shown to be the M1 or M2 most, RT in its current form would be false.

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[260] We would of course need to assess whether the mental states beneath such a trait qualify as a vice by Miller's standards.

There are indeed vices in existence and such traits could be as commonplace as many others. Thus, while VE has viewed RT as tolerably compatible with their claims, and situationists have seen it as a significant challenge to VE's normative viability, I suggest that RT is not nearly as serious as either side of the debate first believed. Vicious traits are not comparatively rare and may not even be rare *simpliciter*. And with more empirical evidence we might one day discover similar rates of prevalence for virtuous traits. Further, at least in the case of vices, our characters are malleable through our own actions in the ways required by Miller. If this is also the case for virtue it would mean that VE might in fact offer ways of strengthening Mixed Traits to become virtues. In light of this, Miller's formulation of RT with RC will at the least require modification if not abandonment.

Appendix

There may be some who are unsettled by the idea of using a personality disorder for the current purpose. That being the case, I would like to briefly respond to five potential questions in the hope of assuaging some of that fear.

a. Why choose a personality disorder for a case study? The empirical work on negative behaviours is a much larger pool from which to draw compared to similar work on positive behaviours. Ostensibly this is because positive behaviours pose little threat to our societies and the drive to understand them is far less pressing. In the end, my search for a case study, dependant as it is on ample empirical work, had a better chance of success in negative behaviours.

b. Are people responsible for such behaviours? Though I touched on this earlier, allow me to add a further word on responsibility. It is, after all, very likely that a person with narcissistic personality disorder has little control over it and, moreover, may even wish to be rid of it. Heather Battaly explains that the 'basic accounts' of virtue and vice do not distinguish between moral and intellectual, or voluntary and involuntary traits.[261] She points to Hume as a guide here as Hume recognises that those traits we call intellectual often have a bearing on moral conduct.[262] Further, he sees that some *involuntary* abilities are beneficial to the possessor and we would not think of excluding them as traits.[263] Hume, therefore, does not make a distinction and neither does the basic account. If kindness is shown to have a genetic basis, the character label might still be applied without problem.[264] It is also the case the environmental factors over which we have no control, also form and modify our characters. One thinks of Camus' landlord who, after the suicide of his daughter, changed dramatically and was said to be 'undermined' by the experience.[265] Through no fault of his own, his character has dramatically altered. Regarding negative character traits, we might even assume that all such traits have their basis in factors outside the possessor's control.[266] Who would

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[261] Battaly, "A Pluralist Theory of Virtue," 8.
[262] D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Thte Principles of Morals* (Illinois: Open Court, 1966), 156.
[263] *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 610.
[264] This may be close to the truth. See, A. Kogana et al., "Thin-Slicing Study of the Oxytocin Receptor (Oxtr) Gene and the Evaluation and Expression of the Prosocial Disposition," *PNAS* 108, no. 48 (2011).
[265] A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (London: Penguin Books, 1955), 12.
[266] Levy makes a convincing case for this, N. Levy, "Are We Responsible for Our Characters?," *Ethic@* 1, no. 2 (2002).

choose them freely? Following Battaly and Hume, then, I will not discriminate between voluntary and involuntary character traits.

c. Does narcissistic personality disorder impair moral rationality and, thus, make moral evaluation inappropriate? In a study of senior-level undergraduates, Traiser and Eighmy found no correlation between narcissistic personality traits and level of moral reasoning.[267] Mania associated with narcissism is different to that of bipolar disorder though there are thought to be links between the causes of each.[268] Further, it has been suggested that only the most severe forms of dissociation would mitigate responsibility and not mild cases.[269]

d. Does the usage of a moral label suggest a moral cure? Louis C. Charland has famously argued that Cluster B personality disorders 'may in fact be moral *rather* than clinical conditions [emphasis added]' and, elsewhere, that they are 'really moral, and *not* medical, conditions [emphasis added]'.[270] This, he goes on to say, has 'serious impacts' for treatment including the need for moral treatment.[271] The discussion is beyond the scope of the present thesis but Martin is helpful here, writing, '[Charland's] emphasis on how both psychiatric and moral techniques enter into treating cluster B disorders should open, rather than slam shut, the door to an integrated moral-medical perspective'.[272] Again, the usage of moral labels does *not* preclude pharmacological treatment.

e. Does the application of moral labels add to the existing stigma surrounding personality disorders? Society being what it is, I believe it may well do so. In fact, all negative character labels should be considered in this way, taking into account possible

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[267] S. Traiser and M. A. Eighmy, "Moral Development and Narcissism of Private and Public University Business Students," *Journal of Business Ethics* 99 (2011): 331.

[268] D. Fulford, S. L. Johnson, and C. S. Carver, "Commonalities and Differences in Characteristics of Persons at Risk for Narcissism and Mania," *Journal of Research in Personality* 42, no. 6 (2008).

[269] A. Bray, "Moral Responsibility and Borderline Personality Disorder," *Australasian Psychiatry* 37, no. 3 (2003): 275. Kennett is correct in saying that the answer to this question turns on our understanding of the term 'moral judgment' and whether rational or sentimental faculties are required in order for a person to make such judgments. Like Kennett's work on psychopathy, similar studies are needed for persons with NPD, focusing on moral feelings, susceptibility to reasons, and sense of cognitive dissonance when one's desires or actions are at odds with one's values or judgments. See J. Kennett, "Reasons, Emotion, and Moral Judgment in the Psychopath," in *Responsibility and Psychopathy: Interfacing Law, Psychiatry, and Philosophy*, ed. L. Malatesti and J. McMillan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[270] L. C. Charland, "Moral Nature of the Dsm-Iv Cluster B Personality Disorders," *Journal of Personality Disorders* 20, no. 2 (2006): 124-25; "Moral Treatment and the Personality Disorders," in *The Philosophy of Psychiatry: A Companion*, ed. J. Radden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 64. Zachar and Potter provide a helpful discussion of these ideas in relation to NPD, P. Zachar and N. N. Potter, "Personality Disorders: Moral or Medical Kinds- or Both?," *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 17, no. 2 (2010).

[271] Charland, "Moral Nature of the Dsm-Iv Cluster B Personality Disorders."

[272] M. W. Martin, "Personality Disorders and Moral Responsibility," *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology* 17, no. 2 (2010): 127.

effects on the possessor. Taylor writes that moral judgments can be unreasonable even if the judgment is true.[273] He warns that such moralism very often reduces people to caricatures and does not take into account the real demands of human life.[274] How and if such labels should be *used* is an important conversation for another time. The current discussion, however, is interested in whether personality disorders *fit the criteria* for vicious character traits.

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[273] Taylor, *Moralism: A Study of a Vice*, 2.
[274] "Moralism and Morally Accountable Beings," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 22, no. 2 (2005): 157. See also *Moralism: A Study of a Vice*, 23-26, 87. Taylor is right to say that the moralist can be excessively interested in labelling others at the expense of properly understanding them. This is obviously an issue concerning the usage of 'vice' labels. The ability to categorise may be outweighed by the damage done by such categorisation in many cases.

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