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## ***Understanding Virtue: Theory and Measurement***

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### **I. Project Rationale and Statement of Aims**

The last thirty years has seen a resurgence of interest in virtue among philosophers, psychologists, and educators. In philosophy, virtue ethics, an approach to normative theory that focuses on the character of the agent, has established itself as a legitimate alternative to other ethical theories, such as consequentialism and deontology (e.g., Zagzebski 1996; Hursthouse 1999; Slote 2001; Swanton 2003; Russell 2009). Central to most virtue ethical approaches is the idea that virtues are robust or global traits—that is, traits that are enduring, manifested in mental states and behaviors across many different types of situations. A courageous person, for example, can be expected to show courage on the battlefield, when combating serious illness, when defending the weak, and so on. Some philosophers, calling themselves “situationists,” adduce evidence from empirical psychology to contest the idea that people have robust or global character traits, thus challenging the empirical viability of virtue ethics at its core (e.g., Merritt, Doris, & Harman 2010; Doris 2002, 1998; Merritt 2000; Harman 1999). This has prompted a robust literature in response, some of which defends virtue on empirical grounds (Snow 2010; Russell 2009; Miller 2003). Also as a response to situationism, work has been done on conceptions of virtue within the Humean and utilitarian traditions (Merritt 2000; Driver 2001).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘Humean’ tradition is inspired by the philosopher David Hume, who thought that virtues are qualities of character that are useful or agreeable to oneself or to others. The utilitarian tradition is inspired by thinkers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, who thought that we should strive to maximize utility, by which they meant pleasure (Bentham) or happiness (Mill). Utilitarian virtue theorists, such as the philosopher Julia Driver, think that virtues are traits that typically maximize happiness.

The situationist critique has prompted a lively interest in work at the intersection of philosophy and psychology, as evidenced by the interdisciplinary approaches to the study of virtue and character that have been funded by the John Templeton Foundation and the Templeton Religion Trust. The Science of Virtues Project, administered by the late Dr. Jean Bethke Elshtain at the University of Chicago, The Character Project, administered by Dr. Christian Miller and The Beacon Project, administered by Dr. Will Fleeson, both at Wake Forest University, and The Self, Motivation, and Virtue Project, administered by Dr. Darcia Narvaez at the University of Notre Dame and Dr. Nancy Snow at the University of Oklahoma, and the Institute for the Study of Human Flourishing, directed by Dr. Nancy Snow at the University of Oklahoma, are cases in point.

Educators, too, are interested in virtue and character development. Many books have been written about the development of character, why it is important, and the perils of bad character for our children and our future (see, e.g., Tough 2011, Bazelon 2013, Kristjansson 2015, White 2011). A brief perusal of the web will show that many organizations, projects, centers, and institutes are dedicated to character development in our youth (see, e.g., [www.viacharacter.org](http://www.viacharacter.org); [www.mcc.gse.harvard.edu](http://www.mcc.gse.harvard.edu)). In short, there is currently a wave of interest in cultivating character in elementary, middle, and high schools, and in some Universities (see [www.ou.edu/flourish](http://www.ou.edu/flourish)).

In the spirit of this interdisciplinary interest, our objective for this volume is twofold. First, we will offer an account of virtue and character that is both philosophically sound and psychologically realistic—and thus, able to be meaningfully operationalized into empirically measurable variables. Second, we will offer a range of strategies for how virtue and character (so conceived) can be systematically measured, relying on the insights from the latest research in personality, as well as social and developmental, psychology.

## **II. Chapter-by-Chapter Précis**

### **Introduction: Why Care About Measuring Virtue?**

In the introduction, we will do two things: first, explain why our target audience of philosophers, psychologists, and character education theorists should care about measuring virtue; and second, outline the plan of the book.

(1) We will motivate the case for our book to our target audience by expanding on the following remarks.

Let us start with the most obvious group who should find this topic, and this book, of interest – character education theorists. As noted above, this group has been concerned with cultivating virtue and character. For these efforts to succeed, however, two things are necessary: (1) a conception of virtue and character that is both theoretically sound and empirically measurable; and (2) strategies for measuring virtue and character development. Simply put, we cannot know whether efforts to cultivate virtue and character in young people will succeed unless educators have a clear conception of what they're doing, have ways of assessing where children are in terms of the virtues have before starting their interventions, and have ways of measuring how successful their interventions in fact are. Only then can educators have a reliable basis for knowing which interventions work and which don't, where adjustments are needed, etc. Given this state of affairs, we think the measurable conceptions of virtue and character we advance in this book, as well as the measurement strategies we suggest, will interest character education theorists and practitioners.

Second, we think many psychologists will be interested in what this book has to offer. For moral psychologists in particular, to the extent that they are interested in understanding how, when, and why people behave morally (or not), a virtue-oriented framework provides a comprehensive and integrated model for how various moral capacities work together to consistently generate right action. In other words, virtues are powerfully predictive of individual differences across a wide range of behaviors that moral psychologists care about. Thus, having a theoretically sound conception of virtue and the means to measure it (and/or discrete elements of it) provides moral psychologists with an important set of tools for more fully understanding how individual human beings make better or worse moral choices in the context of their daily lives. Of course, we expect that the book will appeal to more than just moral psychologists. Since virtue is about becoming good people who live good lives, it contributes significantly to our overall wellbeing, both individually and collectively. This means that understanding and studying virtue is of direct

relevance to a variety of other psychologists—positive psychologists, clinical and counseling psychologists, as well as educational psychologists (just to name a few).

Finally, we believe philosophers, at least those interested in virtue ethics and virtue theory, will be interested in this book. The question of whether virtue is measurable (and, if so, how to measure it) cannot be dismissed out of hand. Indeed, philosophers should take it seriously. This is true for theoretical as well as practical reasons. Philosophers interested in purely theoretical questions about virtue have had to respond to the situationist challenge, discussed above. As noted, some philosophers responded to this challenge by defending virtue on empirical grounds (see Snow 2010; Russell 2009; Miller 2003). Philosophers concerned about the empirical viability of virtue should, therefore, be interested in the question of whether virtue and character can be measured, and, if so, how. Many ethicists who are not especially concerned with defending the empirical viability of robust and global virtues are nonetheless interested in empirical questions (see Doris and The Moral Psychology Research Group 2010). They, too, could be interested in questions of the measurement of virtue and character as arising from their generally empirically-oriented outlook, even if they are not motivated by the desire to see virtue empirically validated.

From a practical standpoint, too, philosophers should pay attention to virtue measurement. This is so for two reasons. First, applied virtue ethics – the notion that virtue ethics can be applied to fields such as medical ethics, business ethics, communications ethics, sexual ethics, and other practical areas of ethical concern – has taken off in recent years, and now boasts lively literatures (see Snow ed., forthcoming). Questions of virtue measurement should be of interest to those who tout the practical applicability of virtue in these various spheres. Second, there is a general “empirical” trend in philosophy that seems to be emerging from the confines of the “Ivory Tower,” as many areas of philosophical endeavor have become increasingly engaged with practical disciplines. For example, philosophers of mind now study cognitive science and neuroscience; philosophers of language now immerse themselves in linguistics; epistemologists now flirt with cognitive psychology. Interest in the measurement of virtue and character is consistent with this larger trend of philosophical engagement with more practical disciplines.

(2) We will outline the plan of the book by expanding upon the following brief chapter abstracts and explaining the interconnections between chapters.

Chapter 1: The present work offers an ecumenical account of virtue to anchor proposals about measurement. By ‘ecumenical,’ we mean that the account should be appealing to a large number of virtue ethicists and virtue theorists. We will draw on Will Fleeson’s “Whole Trait Theory” to develop this account, and will defend it on philosophical and pragmatic grounds.

Chapter 2: We review and evaluate work that has been and is currently being done on virtue measurement. Our evaluation will discuss ways in which current efforts are either capturing or missing important aspects of virtue – demonstrating the need for the more thorough and theoretically framed approach offered here.

Chapter 3: The aim of chapter 3 is to provide measurement strategies for the theoretical account given in chapter 1. This will proceed in two ways. The first way will enumerate the central elements of virtue, e.g., perception, cognition, affect, motivation, and their manifestations in dispositions, and review measurement strategies (some of which are already in place) for each discrete element. This provides an inclusive overview of the elements of virtue and the strategies that are or could be used to measure them. The payoff of this approach is that work on virtue measurement can proceed in a relatively piecemeal fashion; i.e., researchers interested in affect could exclusively study that element of virtue yet see how their work can inform and be informed by a virtue-oriented framework. The second way we will proceed is by presenting strategies for the holistic measurement of virtuous mental states—i.e., ways of measuring aggregations of the key elements of virtue, mentioned above, as they appear in unified mental states. Our target audience here is researchers specifically interested in virtue measurement, and not just in its constitutive elements. We will also offer strategies for measuring virtuous dispositions. Thus, we hope to move beyond piecemeal attempts to measure the elements of virtuous mental states to offer strategies for measuring virtue as a whole.

Chapter 4: In chapter 4, we will argue for what we call the “integration of virtues” thesis, which maintains that virtues can be integrated into a reasonably coherent character as maturation into virtue takes place. We will revise our account to rely less heavily on McDowell, which we hope will assuage Reviewer 2’s concern about our commitment to a “unity of virtues” thesis. Consistently with our commitment to an ecumenical theoretical framework, we will take into consideration philosophical and psychological views on moral identity, integrating those that are amenable to our framework into our account. We will further clarify roles for practical reasoning, and discuss more explicitly nonconscious roles it can have.

Chapter 5: In chapter 5, we will offer ideas for measuring the extent to which virtues are integrated into a coherent character. Specifically, we discuss two topics: (1) ways of measuring people’s unique constellations of virtues; and (2) ways of measuring people’s awareness of the virtues in their constellation and their outputs.

Conclusion: To conclude, we’ll review the central claims and contributions of each chapter, and suggest possible areas for future development, especially ways of measuring the development of the integration of character, and ways of measuring character disintegration.

## **Chapter 1—Introducing our Working Model of Virtue**

Our working model of virtue traits has been inspired by a recent attempt to incorporate social-cognitive mechanisms (e.g., Mischel & Shoda 1995) into a trait-friendly theory of personality (referred to as “Whole Trait Theory,” see Fleeson & Jayawickreme 2014).<sup>2</sup> Our aim in this chapter is to utilize the “whole trait” approach to flesh out our

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<sup>2</sup> Specifically, Whole Trait Theory unites the situational variability and flexibility given to us by social-cognitive theories of personality (such as CAPS, Mischel & Shoda 1995) with the predictive power generated by traits as individual difference variables (i.e., that people can be meaningfully said to vary in their possession of a trait, such as extraversion or conscientiousness). It does so by wedding what they call the “descriptive side” of a trait, represented by the distribution of trait-appropriate responses (“states”) across situations over time and the “explanatory side”, which is the underlying social-cognitive mechanisms that produce these distributions. Thus,

working conception of virtue, on the one hand, and an empirically measurable operational definition of virtue, on the other.

According to Whole Trait Theory (Fleeson & Gallagher 2009; Fleeson & Jayawickreme 2014), a personality trait is composed of a set of situation-specific trait-appropriate responses (typically involving a combination of mental states and behaviors), which are produced when certain “social-cognitive” mechanisms (i.e., cognitive, affective, motivational processes, structures, and dispositions)<sup>3</sup> are triggered by the perception of trait-relevant stimuli<sup>4</sup> in the person’s external and/or internal environment.<sup>5</sup> The degree to which a person possesses a trait is determined by the “density” of that set of responses—i.e., the range of situations under which trait-appropriate responses are produced and the frequency (and consistency) with which those situations produce them.

For example, the shyness of a person can be measured as the distribution of her “shy” responses (i.e., thoughts, desires, emotions, motivations, and actions that exemplify *shyness*) to a variety of shy-relevant stimuli presented across a wide range of situations over time. The more frequently (and consistently) a person responds to shy-relevant stimuli—and the wider range of shy-relevant stimuli she responds to—in ways typically considered to be shy, the more strongly she possesses the trait of shyness.

We argue that virtues can also function like this.<sup>6</sup> For example, a person’s honesty can similarly be measured as the distribution of her “honest” responses (i.e., thoughts, desires, emotions, motivations, and actions that exemplify *honesty*) to a variety of honesty-

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this theory allows us to accommodate the potential for situationally-induced variability in a person’s trait-appropriate responses (she is honest with her friends, but not her family; friendly when she’s in a good mood, but not when she is under stress; etc.), while at the same time being able to meaningfully say that one person can be more honest or more friendly—i.e., possess the trait of honesty or friendliness to a greater degree—than another.

<sup>3</sup> Referred to also as “personality scaffolding” in Snow (2013).

<sup>4</sup> By “trait-relevant stimuli” we mean two things: First, the objective features of the situation to which the person is responding (features that “call for” a trait-appropriate response, such as in the case of seeing a person slumped over and moaning—a person in apparent need—as requiring a compassionate, helpful response) and second, the subjective interpretation that the person gives to those objective features. The person herself must *see the situation as* being trait-relevant and being a reason for a trait-appropriate response (though she does not necessarily have to be consciously aware at the time that she does so).

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note here that while people can merely respond to trait-relevant stimuli, they can also take control of their environment and alter it or features within it in trait-appropriate ways. In other words, possessors of traits are not merely passive reactors, but active constructors of their internal and external environments. In philosophical language, people are *agents*.

<sup>6</sup> This is similar in some respects to the view put forward in Snow (2010).

relevant stimuli presented across a wide range of situations over time. The more frequently (and consistently) a person responds to honesty-relevant stimuli—and the wider range of honesty-relevant stimuli she responds to—in ways typically considered to be honest, the more strongly she possesses the trait of honesty. Once a person has become disposed to consistently respond in an honesty-appropriate fashion to a wide range of honesty-relevant stimuli, she can be said to possess the robust or global trait of honesty.

While people vary in the degree to which they possess various virtues, in the ideal case mature virtuous agents fully possess them—which means they possess mental states consisting of a network of interrelated cognitive, affective, and motivational elements which have become linked up with their perceptual, rational, and behavioral capacities in such a way as to result in a robust disposition to *accurately perceive* and *appropriately respond* to the full range of trait-relevant stimuli (hence, the notion of a robust or global trait). Importantly, such dispositions develop over time as a result of repeated activation and feedback. An important aspect of these dispositional responses is that they can become largely automatic (not unlike various forms of expertise), such that trait-relevant stimuli are often perceived and appropriately responded to without the need for deliberation, or even conscious awareness.

According to the whole trait theory of personality traits (see also Fleeson 2001; Fleeson & Jayawickreme 2014; McCabe & Fleeson 2012), at the core of trait activation are motivational states (e.g., trait-relevant desires, values, goals, commitments, etc.). Consider again the personality trait of shyness. Arguably, this trait involves the activation of certain shy-relevant desires/values/goals (e.g., the desire to avoid social embarrassment, the value of privacy, the goal of protecting herself from social awkwardness), among other factors. As such, a person will produce shy-appropriate responses when shy-relevant stimuli from her environment (e.g., a group of peers approaching her; being subjected to intrusive personal questions; being asked by a teacher to address the class) activate those motivational states.

However, while all personality traits may have motivational states that are trait-relevant, it would make sense of only *some* of those traits (i.e., the virtues), that those motivational states include goals/values that are not just trait-relevant, but also “trait-oriented”—i.e., *directed at the development/instantiation of the trait itself*. According to our account of virtue, the presence of these sorts of virtue-oriented motivational states—e.g.,



the identification of virtue development as a goal worth striving toward, the desire to respond virtuously, etc.—is an essential feature of fully possessing a virtue. Indeed, these states play a central role in providing the underlying motivational structure necessary for virtues to become robust, global traits.

To see this, consider the difference in the density distribution of honesty-appropriate responses between the virtue “novice” and the maturely virtuous agent. We would expect the novice’s distribution to be sporadic (as opposed to consistent) and narrow (as opposed to broad), while the mature virtuous agent’s would be the opposite. For example, in the case of honesty, the novice would be more likely than the virtuous agent to miss occasion for which honesty is called for, so her responses would be more sporadic. Similarly, her responses would likely be narrower—e.g., if she is only inclined to respond honestly when she sees that it would benefit her.

Arguably, the most important explanatory factor for this difference will be their underlying motivations. Specifically, the novice is likely to largely lack virtue-oriented motivation—being motivated instead by practical, prudential, or just plain egoistical considerations—while the mature virtuous agent will be motivated by virtue-oriented motivations, such as “it is important to always give people the straight story” or “honesty is the best policy.”

It is important to note that motivations such as those mentioned above are not only virtue-oriented, but are also what we might call *context-general*—in the sense that, in the fully virtuous agent, they will be activated across a wider range of situations than other motivations. Such context generality helps to provide the situational stability necessary for robust or global traits to emerge.

In short, you cannot be considered fully virtuous without possessing motivational states (i.e., desires/values/goals) oriented towards the development or instantiation of the relevant virtues. Indeed, we will argue that mature virtue requires that its possessor have ongoing virtue-oriented motivational states, as well as a virtue-oriented identity. That is, the truly virtuous person must have goals and values that help her to become, be, and stay virtuous, such as the goal of being a good parent, and she should see herself in virtue-relevant terms, such as a peacemaker or someone concerned about truth or justice.

It is important to be clear here about two things: First, though these virtue-oriented motivational states, as we are defining them, require the virtuous agent to have desires, values, goals, and identity attributes that are *self-indexed*—i.e., they have to do with what *she* is motivated to be, instantiate, and bring about in the world—they are not *self-oriented* (or “egoistic”). That is, they are motivational states possessed by the agent that are aimed *at developing and/or instantiating the virtue*, not at her—except insofar as she, as a virtuous agent, is responsible for developing/maintaining her own virtue.<sup>7</sup>

Second, we are not saying that these virtue-oriented motivational states must be *occurrent* at the time of the response or even immediately consciously accessible after the fact. Just as a person can *believe that x*, even though they may have never actually *formed the belief “that x”*, someone can value or otherwise desire to bring about something, even if they may never have explicitly formed any values/goals about it. In this case, we can be said to have non-occurrent virtue-oriented motivational states if, upon being presented with them, we *recognize* them as representing values/goals we are indeed “moved by”—even if we only realize this after the fact.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hence, we do not believe that the charge brought against virtue ethics that it results in “moral self-indulgence” (Hurka 2001) gets off the ground.

<sup>8</sup> This relates directly to a problem for virtue ethics (especially those of the Aristotelian persuasion) sometimes referred to as the “over-intellectualization” worry. For example, recently Miller (2014) considered the view that what distinguishes virtues from other personality traits is that they involve some sort of “normative judgment.” A person possesses the virtue of honesty, on this view, when her honest response in any given situation is accompanied by, or includes, a virtue-oriented belief/value/goal, such as “it is morally appropriate to tell the truth,” “telling the truth is a good thing,” or “I want to be the sort of person who tells the truth,” etc. Miller dismisses this view as “too intellectual,” since it seems completely plausible that a person could respond to virtue-relevant stimuli in a virtue-appropriate way without forming any particular normative (or, in our words, virtue-oriented) judgment, either about her response or about herself. Alternatively, he states, “...The person could simply be moved by the thought that, ‘He asked me a question,’ or ‘She needed the information’” (p. 10). While we appreciate this worry, we think it fails to accommodate the psychological complexity of our internal motivational structures. To see this, consider again the person who gives truthful information to someone who asks for it. It may indeed be that if we asked her why she did it she would respond with something simple like: “Well... he asked.” But then imagine that we encouraged her to say more—after all, just because someone asked for information isn’t necessarily a good reason (by itself) to respond truthfully, and it doesn’t seem like it is likely to be the whole story in any case. If she is a genuinely honest person, then it seems reasonable to assume that, when asked to say more, she would start to say things like, “Well, I think it is generally a good idea to give people accurate information when they ask for it,” “It would be wrong for me to lie, unless I had a good reason to do so,” “I think it is important for us to be honest in our dealings with others, generally speaking,” “The world would just be a better place if people wouldn’t lie and try to deceive one another,” and so on. Or, even if she did not say these things, she would assent to them as being reasons that she would endorse. Thus, while it is certainly the case that virtuous people answer questions about why they responded virtuously with statements that do not seem particularly virtue-oriented (e.g., “I had no choice,” “I don’t know...it just seemed like the thing to do,” etc.), we maintain that underneath such responses lies this sort of virtue-oriented motivational structure.

In addition to developing these ideas from Whole Trait theory in chapter 2, we will also discuss some roles for practical reasoning in our account of virtue. Practical reasoning has two main roles in our account. First, it helps to guide specific virtues so as to “hit the mark” in terms of successful virtuous action. At present, we regard practical reasoning in its performance in this role as the host of inter-related perceptual, cognitive, and affective capacities<sup>9</sup> that link everything together so that the presence of trait-relevant stimuli will be responded to in a trait-appropriate manner that is aligned and consistent with the person’s trait-relevant motivational states. It helps to attune us to the virtue-relevant stimuli, ignore the irrelevant stimuli, and adjudicate between various options in order to determine the most appropriate response and the best way to enact that response in order to satisfy our virtue-oriented goals/values. We will develop this conception more fully in chapter 2.

Second, practical reasoning helps to integrate various virtuous within a personality. For example, it weighs and balances the potentially contradictory or enhancing influence of stimuli relevant to different virtues (e.g., stimuli calling for an honest—yet compassionate—response), as is often the case in the complex situations we encounter in daily life. We will discuss such integrative roles for practical reasoning issue in chapter 4.

One of the challenges we will face in chapter 2 is that of integrating our adaptation of Whole Trait theory with roles for practical reasoning. We will approach this challenge in three stages. The first will be to canvass and draw on the large literature on practical reasoning in philosophy. The second will be to shape our own conception, drawing on those resources, and integrating it with our other claims about virtue. The third will be to ensure that the account of practical reasoning is measurable. We realize that this third stage presents a formidable task, but we will do our best to remain faithful to the philosophical complexities of practical reasoning while respecting psychologists’ need for measurable constructs.

## **Chapter 2—Review of Existing Work**

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<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Russell (2009) explains that “phronesis” involves multiple related and intertwined capacities—e.g., comprehension (*sunesis*), sense (*gnōmē*), intelligence (*nous*), deliberative excellence (*euboulia*), and cleverness (*deinotēs*).

An initial perusal of current research on virtue and character measurement reveals that it is as yet largely unexplored territory. What little work has been done has been mainly in the area of positive psychology, i.e. work on the VIA Inventory (see, e.g., Banicki 2014, Ruch, Martínez-Martí, Proyer, & Harzer 2014, Park & Peterson 2006, and Peterson & Seligman 2004). A few other articles dot the psychological field (see, e.g., Hardy, Imose, & Day 2014, Thompson & Riggio 2010).

Additionally, the John Templeton Foundation has funded a competition (titled *The Character Project*) on virtue, resulting in a variety of interesting research projects with implications for measurement. Some of these projects examine the function of specific virtues—such as “guilt proneness” (Cohen, Panter, & Turan 2012), giving/volunteering (Konrath & Brown 2012; Konrath 2013a), empathy (Konrath 2013b; Swain, Konrath, Dayton, Finegood, & Ho in press; Konrath, Corneille, Bushman, & Luminet in press), and fairness (Sommerville, Schmidt, Yun, & Burns 2013)—while others examine more broadly the function of “moral character” (Cohen & Morse in press; Cohen, Panter, Turan, Morse, & Kim 2014; Fleeson, Furr, Jayawickreme, Meindl, 2014; Goodwin, Piazza, & Rozin 2014; Jayawickreme & DiStefano, 2012; Piazza, Goodwin, Rozin, & Royzman 2014). A collection of these projects are reported in the recently released book, *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*. These research projects, as well as any others we discover, will be discussed and evaluated in light of our theoretical account in this chapter.

### **Chapter 3—Strategies for Virtue Measurement**

In this chapter we discuss ways of measuring virtue. Our first question is then, “What are we measuring?” According to the ecumenical account we put forth in chapter 1 (inspired by Whole Trait Theory as presented in Fleeson & Gallagher 2009; Fleeson & Jayawickreme 2014), a personality trait is composed of a set of situation-specific trait-appropriate responses (typically involving a combination of mental states and behaviors), which are produced when certain “social-cognitive” mechanisms (i.e., cognitive, affective, motivational processes, structures, and dispositions) are triggered by the perception of trait-relevant stimuli in the person’s external and/or internal environment. The degree to which a person possesses a trait is determined by the “density” of that set of responses—

i.e., the range of situations under which trait-appropriate responses are produced and the frequency (and consistency) with which those situations produce them.

This means that to measure virtue, we need to be able to measure several things: To use the language of Whole Trait Theory for a moment (Fleeson & Jayawickreme 2014), we need to measure how (1) “inputs” (i.e., presence of trait-relevant stimuli) trigger the activation of (2) “intermediates” (i.e., various social-cognitive mechanisms) to produce (3) “outputs” (i.e., trait-appropriate mental states and behaviors). We also need to measure (4) the density-distribution of those outputs in order to determine strength (or dispositionality) of the trait.

Or, to translate this into the measurement of virtue, we need to:

**First, measure *the ability to attend to, perceive, identify, and imagine virtue-relevant (external/internal) stimuli*.** For example, consider a student who is clearly expressing distress at the end of class, as she packs up her materials to leave. Would the instructor notice that her student was upset, on the verge of tears—i.e., would this capture her attention? And would she perceive it as worthy of her attention? If so, would she then be able to identify the situation as one that called for concern, for a compassionate response? Further, would she be able to imagine the types of distress that would call for expressions of concern/compassion, even if she has not yet encountered them? And finally, would she be able to provide good reasons for why she considers these things she observes to be virtue-relevant stimuli?

In our discussion of strategies for measuring each of these, we will touch upon several issues—one of the most important being the issue of *accuracy*. This issue is two-pronged: the first prong being the assumption that there is a right answer about what is/is not virtue-relevant stimuli; the second being the assumption that we can know what that right answer is, thereby enabling a comparison of researchers’ and participants’ list of virtue-relevant stimuli to determine the accuracy of the latter. These are exactly the worries that bedevil the social psychological studies on which the situationist critique of virtue ethics relies. Consequently, addressing them is essential for any successful account of virtue measurement—which we will do introducing the notion of *paradigmaticity*.

**Second, measure *the ability to generate virtue-appropriate (hereafter “virtuous”) responses to those stimuli and/or recognize such responses as virtuous once generated.*** As mentioned above, virtuous responses generally involve a combination of two things—*the mental states of the virtuous agent* (which are composed of cognitive, affective, and motivational elements) and *virtuous behavior*. Returning to our example, suppose the instructor does notice her student’s distress—would she be able to generate a virtuous response? Would she experience the appropriate concern and compassion for the student? Does she believe that a good instructor is someone who cares for her students as people (not merely as grades) and would she be motivated to be such an instructor? Or would she feel inconvenienced and annoyed, believing that students should keep their personal problems to themselves—perhaps ignoring the student’s distress entirely, or acknowledging it with a brusque or patronizing response?

Further, would the instructor be able to appropriately balance between competing needs, desires, and obligations—e.g., wanting to respond compassionately to the needs of the student vs. wanting to join her colleagues for lunch—in order to appropriately respond? Would she be able to modulate her response according to her “reading” of the student’s distress? And finally, would she recognize another’s caring response to the student’s distress as appropriate? And would she be able to recognize differing degrees of appropriateness in a variety of different potential responses?

At the heart of our discussion of strategies for measuring the generation and recognition of virtuous responses will be a discussion of the motivational elements that guide their production. Specifically, we will touch upon the chronic accessibility (i.e., easy activatability) and motivational “weight” (which can be either explicitly or implicitly determined) of both *virtue-oriented values/goals*— e.g., the goal to become, be, or remain a person who possesses virtue—and *virtue-relevant identity attributes*—e.g., attributes that identify one as a person who actually or ideally possesses and can or could appropriately exercise virtue.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> By an “ideal” identity attribute we mean that for which someone voluntarily strives. We do not mean an ideal imposed from the outside, nor one that a person is not motivated to pursue.

**Third, measure the social-cognitive mechanisms that link these virtue-relevant “inputs” and virtue-appropriate “outputs” together.** Here, we take our lead from Snow’s (2013) discussion of “personality scaffolding”—which itself garners insight from Cervone’s (2004) “knowledge and appraisal personality architecture” (KAPA). As is true of other personality traits, virtues are not developed, maintained, and expressed in a vacuum. As Snow (2013) states, “they co-exist with a constellation of other personality structures and processes [what Whole Trait Theory refers to as “social-cognitive mechanisms] that can help or hinder the development, sustenance, and exercise of virtue” (p. 132). Thus, in addition to measuring the “inputs” and “outputs” of virtue, we must measure the “intermediaries” that link them together.

In our discussion of this third measurement strategy, we will lay out suggestions for measuring the most important social-cognitive mechanisms, such as: (1) underlying personality structures (e.g., Big 5) and temperament, (2) underlying belief (or knowledge) structures and schemas about self, others, and the world more generally, (3) underlying motivational structures—i.e., stable values/goals, both virtue-relevant and not, (4) underlying behavioral structures, such as action scripts and habitual patterns.

**Fourth, measure the dispositionality of all of these components, as they work together to produce virtuous responding.** Here we are interested in a person’s density distributions of virtue-appropriate cognitive/affective/ motivational states and behaviors—i.e., the frequency and consistency of the connection between a person’s ability to attend to, perceive, identify, and imagine virtue-relevant stimuli and their ability to recognize and generate virtue-appropriate responses. For example, does the instructor typically have a compassionate response towards her students’ (or, more globally, other people’s) distress, or is it relatively rare? How many different types of distress does she frequently respond compassionately toward—and do those frequency levels change as a function of the type of distress (e.g., responding very frequently to some, but less frequently to others)? And how often and how flexibly does she adapt her responses to be appropriate for the situation? The greater the dispositionality—the more frequently and consistently people respond appropriately to virtue-relevant stimuli and the broader the range of virtue-relevant stimuli they respond to—the more global the virtue.

In our discussion of dispositionality, we will touch upon both *consistency* and *habituality*. “Consistency” is a matter of the frequency with which a person has virtue-appropriate responses to virtue-relevant stimuli and can be measured along two distinct dimensions: 1) *depth*—that is, how frequently people have virtue-appropriate responses to the same or similar virtue-relevant stimuli, and 2) *breadth*—that is, the number of different virtue-relevant stimuli to which people have virtue-appropriate responses. The latter in particular indicates how global the trait can be considered to be. It can also serve as a useful gauge of people’s practical reasoning, insofar as their responses to different virtue-relevant stimuli will have to be adaptive to those differences in order to be appropriate. “Habituality” is the extent to which the response has become a *dynamically automatic* response to virtue-relevant stimuli—which, while largely non-conscious, is nonetheless appropriately sensitive to the often rapidly changing stimuli of the environment.

In chapter 3, we will discuss a range of measurement strategies for each of these measurement objectives. The inspiration for many of these strategies is drawn from Mehl and Conner’s (2012) *Handbook of Research Methods for Studying Daily Life* (especially Chs. 4-5, 7-15, and 29)—though the focus of their volume is not the study of virtue, many of the conceptual and methodological tools presented there are potentially useful for virtue measurement. We will revisit and evaluate the usefulness of these methods, making suggestions for adapting them if need be, in light of our theoretical account.

In addition to discussing measurement strategies in the relatively piecemeal way listed here, we will offer suggestions as to how to measure them in aggregate form, i.e., as they are instantiated in the actual mental states and behaviors of research participants. For example, we will offer ideas for how to create streamlined measurement “packages” that include what we view to be the most essential elements of each of the four measurement objectives in order to create a manageable empirical project for those interested in virtue as a whole. As an example, we append a proposal for a holistic virtue measurement project submitted to, but not funded by, Marquette University.

#### **Chapter 4—Integrating Virtues: The Development of Character**

In this chapter, we will move beyond analyzing the measurement of individual virtues to sketch a conception of character. We use ‘character’ to refer to the integration of



a constellation of virtues within the virtuous person's personality. Broadly speaking, personality (for example, a person's level of extraversion, openness to experience, etc.), extends beyond and influences character—at times interfering with, at other times supporting, its development and expression.

Our account of character includes, but is not limited to, the relation of individual virtues to each other. How do we come to be people who are predominantly kind, but also capable of justice; highly courageous, while also frequently inclined towards generosity? How does having virtue-relevant goals and developing a virtue-oriented identity contribute to and sustain one's character? What self-regulative mechanisms are in play? What other personality constituents—such as, for example, temperament—shape the characters we come to have?

Here we advance the “integration of virtues” thesis. This is the thesis that, ideally, the fully virtuous person will display “character” – an integrated constellation of virtues that has developed over the course of her life. This development of character will likely rely, in large part, on the person's own reflective input into her moral identity. In other words, virtuous people are highly likely to be self-reflective, and actively shape their characters according to their virtue-oriented values/goals and identity. We do not think that this self-reflection necessarily takes the form of “strong evaluation,” as advanced by Charles Taylor (1989)—that is, we do not think that virtuous agents' values, goals, etc. need to be fully self-transparent. That said, we do think that some reflection on who one is and who one wants to become has roles to play in integrating and shaping the coherent characters of virtuous people.

We note that some philosophers, such as John McDowell (1998), hold to a strong “unity of virtues” thesis. McDowell view makes clear that the virtuous cannot have one virtue without all the rest—a person cannot be adequately sensitive to the requirements of justice without also being sensitive to the courage needed to act justly, and so on. The unity of virtues so conceived is a strong requirement that we do not endorse—we are all aware of people who excel in one virtue while just a clearly lacking others. We view our “integration thesis” as charting middle ground between the strong “unity of virtues” thesis on one hand, and a fragmented view of character, such as that endorsed by John Doris (2002), on the other. Unlike McDowell, we do not think that one cannot have any virtue

unless one has all the rest. Unlike Doris, we do not think that character is fragmented—rather, virtues (and other traits) cluster together in ways that explain individual differences in personality, character, and behavior. By the “integration thesis,” we mean that the distinctiveness of individual characters can be explained by investigating the unique clusters of virtues that people display. In chapter 4, we seek to investigate how coherent, integrated characters are developed, and to do so in ways amenable to the project of character measurement.

We believe that practical reason, at both the conscious and nonconscious levels, has roles to play in developing and maintaining coherent characters. In chapter 2, we describe the roles that practical reasoning play that are intrinsic to each virtue – that aid people, for example, in knowing when and how to act when a specific virtue, such as benevolence, is called for. Here we discuss roles for practical reasoning at a higher level – as integrating the cooperative activities of virtues or adjudicating amongst them in cases of potential conflict. Practical reason thus functions as a way of “checking and balancing” the operation of the individual virtues in the psychological economy of the virtuous person. Accordingly, the virtuous person can evaluate when justice is called for, as opposed to mercy, or when generosity must be tempered with firmness; in other words, she is able to adjudicate amongst the virtues in the course of living a life that is her own unique expression of a life well-lived. Though the virtuous person might need to consciously adjudicate amongst the virtues, this is by no means always necessary—as her character develops, the self-regulation of the virtues can often flow as a seamless part of her everyday activities without the need for conscious reasoning.

Our account of integrative roles for practical reasoning will be developmental. The advantage of taking a developmental perspective is that it will enable us to describe both conscious and nonconscious roles for practical reasoning in the development of integrated characters. In people of well-developed (mature) virtue, we expect nonconscious roles for practical reason to be doing the lion’s share of the work, both in acting and responding virtuously, and in sustaining virtuous character. In taking this stance, we indemnify ourselves against the charge that our account “over intellectualizes” virtue (see note 7), and position ourselves in opposition to those who adopt a “grand end” or “blueprint” view – i.e., the position that we need to be able to access, either overtly or indirectly, an overall

blueprint of our lives in order to develop and sustain truly virtuous characters (see, e.g., Kristjansson 2015, 99-101). We believe that virtuous character develops as part of life histories. Even if one eventually develops an idea of where one's life is going and how one will, in the main, live it (as might happen in mid-adulthood, for example), one needs to be flexible in the ends one's has, and to realize that not all of one's activities will seamlessly contribute to them.

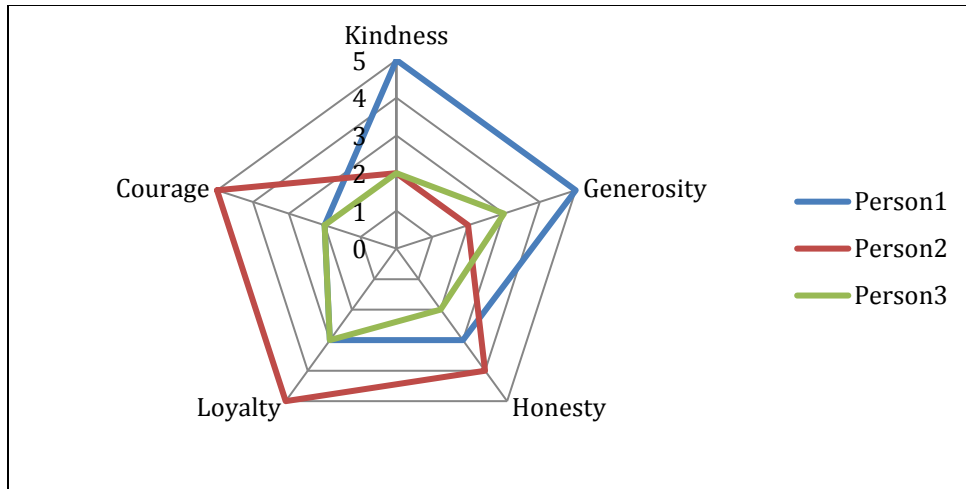
To fully develop our account, we will consult literature on moral identity from both psychology and philosophy. We will, for example, consult scholars like Aquino, Frankfurt Lapsley, Nucci, and Taylor, who have all done important work on this topic.

## **Chapter 5—Strategies for Character Measurement**

In chapter three, we discussed ways of measuring virtue. In chapter four, we sketched an account of character, which we are viewing as a constellation of virtues “governed,” if you will, by a meta-cognitive capacity to monitor and process the (potentially competing and interacting) “outputs” of virtue, i.e., responses and actions.

This means that to measure people's character, we need to measure at least two things.

**First, measure *people's unique constellations of virtue*.** As we've already mentioned, we expect the development of virtue to be different for each person—which means that each virtuous person will have her own unique constellation of virtues. Using the techniques identified in chapter two, we should be able to measure the dispositional sensitivity of people to virtue-relevant stimuli and their ability to recognize/generate virtue-appropriate responses for a wide variety of virtues. This would allow us to create multi-dimensional diagrams which illustrate individual differences in the distribution of the virtues being measured (see Fig. 1). Such a visual representation of people's strengths and weaknesses with respect to specific virtues helps us to envision the various constellations of virtues that make up people's character.



**Figure 1. Illustration of individual differences in the robustness of specific virtues.**

Figure 1 illustrates one way of representing people’s performance on the measures of individual virtues discussed in chapter two. Through the range of different measures of virtues discussed, we can develop a metric for how robust people are on different virtue traits. This might involve a simple “tallying” (or averaging) of the scores obtained from different measures into one indicator score. Or it may turn out that certain measures must be weighed more heavily when it comes to representing where people fall on the continuum of specific virtues, resulting in a more complex algorithm. Figure 1 represents a hypothetical (and simplified) construction of how people might fare with respect to the robustness of individual virtues—the higher the number, the more robust the virtue. Plotting these scores for several virtues yields a potentially useful approximation of the constellation of virtues that comprise their character.

***Second, measure people’s meta-cognitive awareness of the virtues in their constellation and their outputs.***

This breaks down further into the measurement of four factors.

The first is *people’s sensitivity to the “virtue complexity” involved in specific situations.* Sometimes situations call for the virtue-appropriate responses of only one virtue. More typically, the situations we encounter call for a mixture of responses—e.g., we have reason to be honest with a co-worker, but compassionate and generous as well; we have reason to

be brave in the defense of someone being treated unkindly, but also compassionate and loyal to the friend who is being unkind, given that we understand the lapse in judgment that has led to bad behavior.

To measure people's sensitivity to this complexity, they could be asked to evaluate situations (e.g., moral dilemmas) in which the virtue-relevant stimuli of more than one virtue are present. One goal of this measurement would be to see how many relevant virtues could be identified. Another would be to ascertain the degree to which their preferred response was "informed" by sensitivity to the fact that multiple virtues could be called for—that is, the degree to which people successfully displayed meta-cognitive awareness (e.g., practical reasoning) in selecting a virtue-appropriate response, given the highly complex nature of the situation.

The second is *people's ability to monitor, regulate, and adjudicate between (potentially conflicting) virtue-appropriate responses*. For example, Adam Smith recounts an example in which we see another person being beaten.<sup>11</sup> This fact might provide a reason for a compassionate response, yet the information that this is a just punishment provides reasons for not intervening on the person's behalf. Using Smith's example, for instance, to what degree can someone modulate her compassionate response for another person's suffering in the face of information that it was a just punishment? Or, vice versa, to what degree can someone recognize the appropriateness of a compassionate response in the face of her righteous indignation toward a wrongdoer? Here we would be examining the complexity of people's virtue-appropriate responses to situations in which virtues potentially conflict. This could be done using self-report measures, where participants are asked to explain the strategies they use to adjudicate among conflicting virtues. Also interesting would be the use of reaction-time paradigms, where the speed with which certain mental states or responses are reported helps to gauge how chronically accessible these states are and the degree to which conflicting information is interfering. Once again, this would provide insight into people's employment of meta-cognitive awareness in monitoring, regulating, and adjudicating between virtue-appropriate responses in situations where a mixture of potentially conflicting virtue-relevant stimuli are present.

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<sup>11</sup> For general discussion, see Smith (1979, 71-73). Note that Smith discusses "sympathy;" the point holds, we think, for compassion as well.

More broadly, it would provide insight into the role that different cognitive, affective, and motivational states play in the successful generation and execution of virtue-appropriate responses in such situations.

The third factor is *the complexity of the virtue constellations expressed in people's self-reported values, goals, and identities*. How many virtues does a person list when they are asked what sort of person they are and/or strive to be? Of those virtues, which take priority? People reveal answers to these questions in a variety of ways—for example, through free-form writing about themselves, responses to lists of attributes (e.g., “how central are the following attributes to who you are/strive to be?”), and daily dairies in which the events most salient to people reveal the underlying chronic accessibility of particular virtues. There are also third person reports that reveal the degree to which other people witness constellations of virtues expressed by a person's cognitive/affective/motivational states and behaviors.

Also of interest is the degree to which the constellation of virtues expressed by people's self-reported values, goals, and identities are instantiated in their daily actions and activities. To get at this we could once again employ explicit and implicit measures or virtue-relevant identity attributes in order to ascertain the degree to which people's explicitly stated values/goals and identities are motivationally linked to their actions and chosen activities in their daily lives.

The fourth factor is *the development of virtue constellations in individuals over time*. To the extent that we can administer the same battery of measurement techniques over the course of people's lives, we would be able to track patterns of character development. Though a logistically and financially daunting task, longitudinally tracking the development of constellations of virtue in individuals will provide tremendously valuable insight into several things—for example, whether certain virtues cluster together, developing alongside one another at the same time, whether the development of certain virtues are necessary preconditions for others, and so forth. This would also allow us to track changes in people's meta-cognitive awareness over time.

## **Conclusion**

As noted in our outline of the plan of the book (see earlier section on “Introduction”), we will review the central claims and contributions of each chapter, and suggest possible areas for future development, especially ways of measuring the development of the integration of character, and ways of measuring character disintegration.

## **Bibliography**

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### **III. Schedule, Length, Tables, Charts**

We expect the book to be completed approximately one and one half years from the date of issuance of a contract. We envision the volume length to be approximately 65,000 words total. Tables and charts will likely be included in discussions of psychological data.

### **IV. The Target Market**

As mentioned in the “Introduction,” the target market is philosophers, psychologists, and character education theorists and practitioners. However, the book should also be of interest to others concerned about the development of virtue, a topic that has recently commanded attention in fields as disparate as philosophy, psychology, sociology, theology, anthropology, education, and political science. Though the volume is intended primarily for practicing professionals, it should also be of interest to graduate students in those fields.

The book would appeal to the following journals: *Ethics*, *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, *The Journal of Moral Philosophy*, *The Journal of Ethics*, *The Journal of Value Inquiry*, *Philosophical Psychology*, *The Journal of Moral Education*, *The Notre Dame Psychological Review*, *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Psychological Bulletin*, and *Psychological Review*. It would be of interest to the following groups: the American Philosophical Association, the American Psychological Association, the Association for Psychological Science, the American Society for Value Inquiry, the Society for Philosophy and Psychology, the Society for Empirical Ethics, and the Experimental Philosophy Society.

The book would be appropriate as a supplementary text for graduate courses in virtue ethics, moral psychology, and character education theory.

The book should have both national and international appeal, as both co-authors are well-known in the U.S. and abroad.

## **V. Main Competing Books**

We know of no other directly competing volumes, though the newly released *Character: New Directions from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology* (2015; Eds. Miller, Furr, Knobel, and Flession) has a few chapters addressing empirical research projects focusing on specific virtues and character more generally. Some of these will be the subject of our evaluation in chapter 2.

## **VI. Product Category**

This is a research monograph, aimed at postgraduates, researchers, and academics. As noted above, it could be a supplementary text in some graduate-level courses.

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