Perspectives on Character

Volume Editor
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Project Rationale

Character is of interest to philosophers with different theoretical orientations as well as to scholars from other fields – psychologists, historians, and legal theorists, to mention but some. Thus, a moral philosopher may ask what it means to have a virtuous character or whether people have the kind of control over character that furnishes grounds for responsibility. A Kant scholar may want to know what conception of virtue, if any, underwrites Kantian ethics. A philosopher of art, on the other hand, may be interested in whether the normative standards applicable to the evaluation of a fictional character's character, for instance, to the character of Dostoyevsky’s Raskolnikov, are the same as those we apply in evaluating real people. A psychologist, for his part, may seek to determine whether people’s characters remain stable in the face of situational pressures, or else whether there is a clear boundary between traits and mental disorders, for instance, between shyness and social anxiety disorder. A legal scholar may inquire whether it is appropriate to use character as evidence in the determination of guilt, for example, to appeal to a witness’s testimony that a defendant is known to be irascible in order to support the conclusion that the defendant in question must have shot the victim. And a historian may ask what an explanation such as, “The Empire fell because of the Queen’s vanity” means, and in what sense the vanity of a queen – a character trait – can be said to explain the fall of an empire.

These different lines of inquiry are typically pursued in isolation from each other. While there has certainly been some fruitful interdisciplinary dialogue on issues concerning character recently, particularly between empirically-minded philosophers and social psychologists, such dialogue remains the exception and division of scholarly labor the rule.

There is a good explanation for this. Scholars in one field, even when they discuss the same phenomenon as that discussed by scholars in another field, are likely to see that phenomenon in connection to other phenomena studied by their own discipline rather than in relation to discussions of the same phenomenon in other fields. For instance, a historian interested in the role of character in historical explanation is likely to see the problem of character’s role in historical explanation as part of the bigger issue of historical explanation, rather than as part of the problem of the role of character in human action. Similarly, a legal scholar who studies the role of character in the determination of guilt will tend to see the problem under the rubric “psychological issues in law,” rather than under “character from a legal perspective,” etc.

For the most part, there is a good reason for this division of labor: after all, the primary purpose of the historian interested in character is not to understand character, but to understand historical explanation. Similarly, the main goal of the legal scholar who inquires about the role of character in the determination of guilt is not to understand character but to offer a defensible model of judicial practice. One may say that the interest in character on the part of a historian or a legal scholar is merely derivative: it is based on a prior interest in something else. Yet, there are at least two reasons
to see work on character in different sub-fields of a given discipline as well as in different disciplines as aspects of a single inquiry into the nature of human character. First, even if one’s interest in character is merely derivative, it may be a good idea to inform oneself of work on character in other fields. Thus, the historian who says, “The Empire fell because of the Queen’s vanity” is making a claim about a historical event that relies on an assumption about character, namely, that there are traits, or at least, that there is the trait of vanity. But what if there aren’t any traits, as some social psychologists have argued? Surely, this is of relevance to the historian. Second, it is important to ask what character, in general, is and how it explains action, where these questions are not meant to help us illuminate some other phenomenon but, rather, to enable us to make sense of who we are.

Such questions are likely to be of interest to any philosophically-minded person, obviously to a philosopher, but not only. Character is so central to our sense of identity, to our moral and social practices, and to our view of ourselves and others, that perhaps every thoughtful person can be presumed to be interested in the topic. Thus, if I ask you to describe what someone is like, you will probably respond by listing character traits. You may say, for instance, “She is shy but dependable,” or, “He is fun to be around but a little vain,” or, “My son is so timid, I am afraid it may be pathological.” You may also appeal to common dispositions of character in an attempt to make sense of large-scale behavioral patterns, as in, “The housing bubble was due to our herd instincts, to our propensity to buy just because everyone else is buying.” Or you may appeal to character in order to predict what someone will do. For instance, if I tell you that I have accidentally revealed a secret to Kate, you may assure me that she is unlikely to share my secret with anyone, because she is trustworthy. And if you learn that a person has done something you would not have expected him to, for instance, you find out that Martin Luther King has plagiarized large portions of his doctoral dissertation, you may conclude that you were wrong about what kind of person he was and what kind of character he had.

Once it is recognized that character is ubiquitous in moral and social practices, and paramount in our conceptions of ourselves and others, it is only natural to ask what character is, and what we can learn about it from the different disciplines that have studied it, albeit each for its own purpose.

This volume offers ideas and insights regarding such questions. It brings together first-rate philosophers with a variety of backgrounds as well as scholars from a number of other fields in order to deliver a collection that enables the reader to appreciate the complexity and the multifaceted nature of the phenomenon of human character, with the hope of providing a stimulus for further thought, discussion, and inquiry.

Most of the volume’s contributors have been invited to address specific questions, aimed at breaking some new ground. All of the contributors are distinguished scholars, some senior and some junior, whose work combines originality, theoretical rigor, and an elegant writing style. The ultimate aim is to produce a collection that is informative and thought-provoking as well as engaging to read.

**Audience and Uses**

Undergraduate students, graduate students, and academic researchers

The volume will be of interest to a fairly large academic audience – one can easily see it quickly becoming a must read for philosophers and psychologists working on character, but anyone else whose main research focus lies elsewhere but who is interested in the themes covered will find the
anthology difficult to pass up on. The collection will be an excellent teaching resource as well. The combination of highest academic quality and reader-friendly style will make the volume particularly suitable for use in both graduate and advanced undergraduate seminars, for instance, seminars on moral psychology, ethics, topical courses on character, experimental philosophy, various courses in psychology, etc. Specific sections and essays will be of interest to instructors teaching such interdisciplinary courses as law and morality or ethics and economics.

Format

The collection will include a total of 25 essays. Contributors have been urged to exercise restraint and to communicate their insights clearly and succinctly. Essays will approximate 5,000 words in length.

Overview of the Chapters

The volume will begin with an introductory essay by the editor. The essay will offer a brief history of theoretical work on character, starting with the Greek physician Hippocrates who, in the 4th century BC, proposed a “Four Humors” typology of temperaments and ending with the aftermath of the person-situation debate, followed by a short discussion of the contemporary trends in the study of character. The second part of the survey essay will provide an overview of the contributions and the ways in which the different chapters may be seen as connected.

The essays will be organized thematically and grouped under 5 headings. Part One, “Character in Ethics,” will contain six essays discussing character in relation to a number of different moral philosophers and philosophies: Aristotle (Leunissen), Kant (Hill & Cureton), Hume (Abramson), Nietzsche (Alfano), consequentialism (Bradley), and the connection between Ancient and modern conceptions of character (Wolfisdorf). All essays defend original ideas. For instance, Leunissen develops a novel interpretation of the Aristotelian view of character, drawing on Aristotle’s biology, rather than his ethics, while Alfano’s empirically-informed take on Nietzsche offers an argument to the effect that Nietzsche’s conception of character is not vulnerable to situationist critiques.

Part Two, “Character in Psychology and X-phi,” contains five essays on character informed by different psychological traditions – social psychology and personality theory (Fleeson & Furr, Miller, Hogan & Hayes), psychopathology (Sinnott-Armstrong & Summers), and psychoanalysis (Stolorow). The essays truly push the frontier of interdisciplinary work on character by offering a number of interesting and important new ideas. For instance, Miller develops a novel approach to traits he dubs the “Mixed Traits” approach, aimed at avoiding the pitfalls of both situationist and personality theory conceptions. Fleeson & Furr re-interpret the social psychology experiments that lead to the situationist attack on character by exposing a problematic assumption in the traditional interpretation, namely, that averages matter more than individual differences, and Sinnott-Armstrong & Summers offer a new answer to the question what distinguishes character traits from mental disorders.

The essays in Part Three, “Character, Autonomy, and the Explanation of Action,” constitute thoughtful attempts to illuminate the connections between being an autonomous agent and having character (Katsafanas, Flanagan), the conative and cognitive aspects of virtue (Sinhababu, Hills), the
explanatory role of traits, and the connections between traits and reasons explanations of action (Fileva, Mele).

Part Four, “Character and Society,” includes an essay co-authored by two economists on the question whether there is any tension between virtue and free market values (Couyoumdjian & Munger), two interesting essays by legal scholars on the role of character in the legal system (Yaffe, Schauer), and a paper by a philosopher of history on the role of character in history and historical explanation (Little).

Finally, Part Five, “Character and Art,” offers an essay on the ways in which characters from artistic works become models for prototypical personality syndromes, which audiences can then apply to actual persons (Carroll), an essay on character in film (MagUidhir), character in theater (Feagin), and character in opera (Davies).

Abstracts

Part I: Character in Ethics

1) Mariska Leunissen (UNC-Chapel Hill): “Aristotle on the Person-Situation Debate: The Fragility of Natural Character”

Studies of Aristotle’s conception of character traditionally focus on his ethical works (Annas, 1993; Nussbaum, 1986; and Sherman, 1989). In this context, character is discussed mainly in its role as the bearer of morality: it is a virtuous state of character that disposes one to perform actions that hit the mean and that are therefore praiseworthy. Aristotle emphasizes that these states of character – and not just our actions – are ‘up to us and voluntary’ (see, e.g., NE III 5, 1114a4-31 and b28-9). Provided that we receive the appropriate moral education from childhood and are raised in a properly organized city, we can shape our character by performing right and just actions. The moral character that results from this kind of habituation is stable across time and robust across situations, and therefore reliably predicts and guides virtuous actions. It is this ‘global’, ‘personality’ view of character that has continued to inspire virtue-ethicists and moral psychologists to the present day, but which – more recently – also has attracted considerable criticism as being unempirical and as taking insufficiently into account how much our behavior is influenced by situational factors (see Doris 2002, especially 1-27; Merritt, 2000: 365-366; and Merritt, Doris & Harman, 2010: 356-360).

In this paper, I will argue that Aristotle’s mostly neglected biological views about ‘natural’ (as opposed to ‘moral’) character offer a third, alternative view of character that accommodates the personality perspective about the importance of traits in explaining our actions but also the situationist thesis about the influence of our environment. For, in his biological works, Aristotle defines character as a natural capacity of the soul that predisposes an animal’s – non-moral – feelings or actions related to survival and procreation. And while these natural character traits reliably predict and guide all kinds of behaviors, Aristotle believes that those traits themselves are determined by the organism’s physiological make-up or what he calls its ‘material nature’ and that they are easily changed by external efficient causes that are not up to that organism, such as climate, aging, and disease. In other words, although Aristotle never denies that the shaping of our moral character is ‘up to us’ or that character – whether moral or natural – guides our actions, his
biological views indicate that natural character traits are not robust, but highly local and (sometimes literally) situation specific. After a consideration of the biological evidence concerning Aristotle's views about character, I conclude by laying out some ethical consequences of these views, especially with regard to the extent to which one’s natural character matters for moral development.

(2) Thomas Hill (UNC-Chapel Hill) & Adam Cureton (University of Tennessee, Knoxville): “Principle and Character in Kant’s Ethics”

This essay will explore the role of character in Kant’s ethical theory. Recent progress has been made correcting misconceptions about the role of virtue in Kant and highlighting aspects of his view that are amenable to virtue ethicists. But some have gone too far in making Kant into a virtue ethicist who leaves deontology behind. We will explain the prominent and complicated role of rules and principles at various stages in Kant’s theory and emphasize, within this framework, distinctive and appealing aspects of Kant’s conception of virtue as compared to Aristotelian accounts. For example, Kant is opposed to moral luck, he endorses personal prerogatives to pursue our own projects, he offers greater unity and structure to morality, and offers an interesting account of moral education and development.

(3) Ben Bradley (Syracuse University): “Character and Consequences”

What role does virtue play in moral theory? Many answers to this question have been proposed: some think that a right act is what a virtuous person would characteristically do; some think that virtue is intrinsically good; some think that virtue is a constituent of well-being; and some think that virtue is a basis for desert of well-being. The truth of any of these suggestions, however, depends on what virtue actually is. On one plausible account of virtue, virtues are character traits that have good consequences, and vices are character traits that have bad consequences. This is virtue consequentialism. Versions of this view can be found in the work of Driver, Foot, and Hursthouse. Virtue consequentialism is not only prima facie plausible, it also promises to explain some features of virtue that trip up other theories – for example, how it can be that a character trait (such as chastity) can be a virtue at one time but not at a later time. What I would like to do here is argue that if virtue consequentialism in its best version is true, we have a reason to doubt all of the above claims regarding the role of virtue in moral theory.

I will begin by suggesting that the best version of a consequentialist theory of virtue is contrastivism about virtue. On a contrastivist view, virtue is a character trait that makes a positive difference to the world – which involves a comparison between how the world is when people have that character trait and how it would be if they didn’t. But there are many ways to lack a character trait. So there is no absolute fact of the matter concerning how instrumentally good some character trait is, and no such thing as a virtue simpliciter; rather, the fundamental virtue facts are of the form it is a virtue (i.e. it is instrumentally good) to have character trait C1 rather than C2. If contrastivism about virtue thus understood is true, virtue is neither essentially linked to rightness as frequently supposed, nor intrinsically good, nor is it an adequate basis for either well-being or desert.

(4) Kate Abramson (Indiana University): “On the Complexity of Humean Character”

In everyday life, we sometimes condemn people tempted to bad behavior, even if they don’t act on those temptations. For instance, we will be relieved if a person who feels tempted to act out of prejudice refrains from doing so. But it is a mark of bad character to feel drawn to bigoted conduct in the first place. We hold it against such folks, partly because we expect that one can over time come not to even be tempted to act in such appalling ways. To make sense of this aspect of our
moral practices, I contend, one must hold that a virtuous agent’s moral commitments can play a very particular kind of practical role in her character. It must be possible, I argue, for an agent’s moral commitments to alter the very structure of an agent’s desires and passions in specific ways, and to inform the place of those desires within her larger motivational psychology. Hume’s conception of character and of morality’s practical influence upon it is complex in just this way. But to see this, I argue, we need to pay attention not only to Hume's writings on ethics in his *Treatise* and *Enquiries*, but also the rather more neglected *Essays*.


I argue that Nietzsche's conception of character development is the most empirically adequate of any historical view. Character trait attributions – whether they target oneself or others – tend to function as self-fulfilling prophecies. The structure of the paper is as follows.

In section 1, I sketch the Aristotelian, Humean, and Kantian conceptions of character development. For Aristotle, one becomes virtuous through habituation and the cultivation of practical wisdom. According to Hume, one becomes virtuous through the joint influences of sympathy, (dis)approbation, and natural development. The Kantian view has two levels. At the noumenal level, one becomes virtuous by choosing a universalizable supreme maxim over self-love; at the phenomenal level, this choice is manifested as a disposition to do one’s duty, even and especially when it conflicts with narrow self-interest. As I spell out in more detail in section 3, none of these theories enjoys as much empirical support as the Nietzschean conception of character.

In section 2, I lay out the Nietzschean conception of character development, which is aptly condensed in the formula, “how one becomes what one is.” A crucial feature of this view is that the dispositions a person ends up with are the ones that she is taken to have – either by herself, if she exhibits an active, masterly, creative tendency, or by others, if she exhibits a reactive, slavish, mimetic tendency. Someone who thinks she is honest will tend to behave in honest ways; someone whom others consider dishonest will tend to behave in dishonest ways. This view can be found throughout Nietzsche’s writings, but especially in *Human, All Too Human* 51 (“If someone obstinately and for a long time wants to appear something it is in the end hard for him to be anything else”), *The Gay Science* 58 (“The reputation, name, and appearance […] of a thing […] nearly always becomes its essence and effectively acts as its essence”), and throughout the first essay of *The Genealogy of Morals*.

In section 3, I argue that the Nietzschean view is the best empirically supported conception of character. The basis for this argument is my own theory of factitious virtue, which I develop in *Character as Moral Fiction* (Cambridge UP 2013) and elsewhere. On this view, character trait attributions tend to function as self-fulfilling prophecies through the mechanisms of self-concept and social expectations.

(6) David Wolfsdorf (Temple University): “On Character and Moral Character”

The phrase "aretê êthikê" expresses one of the central concepts in Aristotle's ethical writings. It is often rendered as "moral virtue." A more literal and arguably much better rendition is "character excellence" or "excellence of character." To what extent, then, is Aristotelian character excellence moral? My aim in this paper is to make progress toward answering this question. Advancing an answer evidently requires clarification of two things: the nature of Aristotelian character excellence
and the nature of morality. The task of defining morality is enormous. Less so, but nonetheless a tall order, is articulating a satisfactory account of Aristotelian character excellence. So how should one proceed? I proceed in a circumscribed and imperfect way by engaging some familiar and important contributions to the following broader question: Is Aristotle's ethical theory a moral theory? I use these contributions to cast light on my narrower question and to shape it into a more manageable form. Precisely, I draw out of the works of Bernard Williams, Terence Irwin, Christine Korsgaard, and Julia Annas seven supposed conditions of morality, six positive and one negative. I then assess these conditions with respect to Aristotelian character excellence. My basic conclusion is that Aristotelian character excellence is for the most part non-moral. Instead, Aristotelian character excellence is a sort of civic category. Character excellence is required for flourishing within a city-state, more precisely, within the best kind of city-state, an aristocracy. Still more precisely, given Aristotle's non-egalitarian views about the characterological capacities of various kinds of human being and accordingly about the correct socio-political structure of the city-state, Aristotelian character excellence qua civic excellence is the excellence of the free male Greek aristocratic citizen.

Part II: Character in Psychology and X-phi

(7) William Fleeson (Wake Forest University) & Michael Furr (Wake Forest University): “Do Broad Character Traits Exist? When Individual Differences Matter More than the Average of People”

When considering the implications of psychological research for ethical philosophy, many conclusions have been drawn on the basis of results describing averages and average people. Some of these results for the average person include that average people are more likely to help a stranger when they find a dime in a phone booth, or that average people are more likely to help a stranger when they are not in a hurry, or that average people are more likely to help a stranger when they recently smelled something pleasant. These results are striking, in that slight changes in situational characteristics appear to lead to large changes in virtuous behavior. Because situations appear to be so powerful in their average effects, it seems that traits cannot be very powerful in determining people’s actions, that broad traits of virtue either do not exist or are inconsequential, and that people are not virtuous. Although the results for the average person may matter for some conclusions, we argue that the results for the average person do not justify many of these conclusions because individual differences matter more than such averages do for many of the most important questions. In particular, two centrally important questions are “What is the nature and determining power of the character traits that exist, if any exist?” and “What are people as constituted capable of?”

Individual differences matter more for the first question because the question of the nature, power, and existence of broad character traits (i.e., virtues) cannot be answered by looking at average effects; the effects for the average person do not address how much people differ from each other, how much those differences determine their behavior, nor the ways in which people differ from each other. For example, the fact that the average person helps more in a good mood than in a bad mood does not address whether people differ in how much they help or the determinative power of those differences in various helping situations.
Individual differences matter more than averages for the second question because average effects reveal what people are capable of on average, but do not reveal what people are capable of in peak performance. Just as it would be incorrect to make conclusions about what people as constituted are capable of mathematically from the mathematical mistakes people make on average, it would be incorrect to make conclusions about what people as constituted are capable of ethically from the ethical mistakes people make on average.

In this essay, we (1) distinguish between results describing average effects and those describing individual differences; (2) explain why we believe that individual differences are what matter for these two questions; and (3) argue that these two questions are centrally important ones. We also consider potential exception cases in which averages for people may matter more than do individual differences. We conclude that clearer understanding of individual differences would make a substantial difference in the use of empirical results for understanding character.

(8) Christian Miller (Wake Forest University): “A New Approach to Character Traits in Light of Psychology”

According to one position in the contemporary literature on character, every single person has all of the moral virtues, such as modesty and compassion, although to varying degrees. Versions of this idea can be found in the Big Five model which dominates personality psychology today. Yet according to another position, no one has any character traits as all since they are simply illusions and do not exist. Hence there is not one person who is honest or compassionate or courageous. Between these extremes, there are plenty of intermediate views, such as the local trait approach advocated by John Doris.

However, I think that all of these positions are not supported by the available evidence coming from psychology. In this paper, I outline a novel theory of what I call ‘Mixed Traits.’ On my view, most people do not have the moral virtues, and most people also do not have the moral vices. They also do not have local virtues or vices like ‘honesty in test taking situations.’ But at the same time, most people do have robust character traits that play a central role in giving rise to morally relevant thoughts and actions. How can all these claims hang together consistently?

The short answer is that these Mixed Traits are indeed causally active mental dispositions, but from a moral perspective they have both significant morally positive aspects (hence precluding them from counting as vices) alongside significant morally negative aspects (hence precluding them from counting as virtues). They can, for instance, give rise to powerful feelings of selfless empathy for the suffering of another person which leads to altruistic helping, while also disposing us to kill an innocent person in a matter of minutes under pressure from an authority figure. In order to illustrate the approach, I will focus in particular on Mixed Traits associated with harming motivation and behavior.


We praise agents for their moral character, especially for paying close attention to moral requirements even in small matters. Yet some of those who pay the closest attention to moral requirements raise a problem. Patients with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, particularly those with ethical or religious obsessions, illustrate that a single-minded pursuit of morality is not always so clearly praiseworthy. The question is why.
One attempt to distinguish praiseworthy traits from pathological obsessions—which draws from the literature on moral fetishization—is that pathological obsessions do not focus on those features of a situation that actually make the situation right or wrong, and focus instead on the value of morality or purity itself. A genuinely moral person, on the contrary, focuses on the “right-making” or “wrong-making” features of a situation. We suggest that this distinction, while useful, overlooks the importance of rationalization in the OCD patient: the OCD patient may focus on genuinely moral features of a situation, but she does so to the exclusion of all other features. However, she also greatly exaggerates the importance of her own thoughts to her moral goodness. Together, these two traits suggest that what genuinely distinguishes the moral and pathological cases is that the pathological case is characteristically motivated by an anxiety about wrongdoing that then prompts the person to pay excessive attention to putatively moral features of a situation—which are often genuinely moral features, but needn’t be—rather than taking a more direct interest in those moral features themselves.

(10) Robert Hogan (Tulsa University & Hogan Assessment Systems) and Theodore Hayes (George Washington University): “The Meaning of Character”

This paper analyzes the concept of character from a psychological perspective in order to make four points.

Our first point is that philosophers since Aristotle tend to define character in terms of traits, and traits are the core of modern personality psychology. Traits are recurring patterns of behavior that can be observed, subjected to statistical analysis, and used to predict other peoples' behavior. A very large body of empirical evidence suggests that trait analysis is an indispensable tool for predicting how others are likely to behave.

Second, modern personality psychology defines traits as “neuro-psychic” structures that actually exist somewhere inside people, and the activities of these structures are expressed in behavior. The authors regard this version of trait theory as metaphysics, as unverifiable in principle. In contrast, we believe that “traits exist in the behavior of actors and in the eyes of the beholders”; we believe that people use trait terms: (1) to label observed consistencies in the behavior of other people; and (2) to predict the behavior of other people. Attributions about character are a special class of trait attributions.

Third, we believe character attributions refer to four classes of behavior. The first, which we call “Integrity”, concerns following the accepted codes of conduct in one’s culture or profession; Wall Street Bankers who seek to avoid banking regulations appear to lack of integrity, as do spouses who cheat. The second, which we call “Humanity”, refers to behavior that reflects compassion for life’s victims; Mother Teresa or Martin Luther King often displayed this kind of behavior. The third class, which we call “Principled”, concerns behavior that reflects strict adherence to a set of core beliefs, regardless of the consequences; examples here include Christian martyrs and Al Qaeda. The final class of behavior, which we call “Endurance”, concerns enduring immense hardships in pursuit of ostensibly noble goals; the Nobel Laureates Aung San Suu Kyi and Nelson Mandela might be examples of this category of behavior.

Our final point is drawn from Nietzsche: trait attributions ostensibly concern the behavior of others, but are ultimately self-serving. An individual’s character may be lauded by one group and denounced by another even when the same behaviors are in evidence. When we ascribe character to another person, what we mean is that their behavior is likely to be good for us; conversely, when we
denounce another person’s character, we are describing behavior that is likely to be bad for us. Because people are, at their core, fundamentally ambivalent, we mostly approve (or disapprove) of two kinds of behavior: (a) behavior that is likely to serve our personal self-interests; and (b) behavior that is likely to serve the interests of the groups with which we identify.

Character is a pragmatic attribution.

(11) Robert Stolorow (Contemporary Institute for Psychoanalysis, Los Angeles): “Character and Emotional Phenomenology: Psychotherapeutic and Ethical Implications”

Traditionally, in psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis, the term character has been used to refer to constellations or configurations of behavioral traits: “Anal characters” are said to be compulsive and perfectionistic; “hysterical characters” are described as histrionic; and so on. This chapter conceptualizes character from a perspective that takes worlds of emotional experiencing as its principal focus. Such organizations of emotional experiencing always take form in contexts of human interrelatedness. Developmentally, recurring patterns of emotional interaction within the child-caregiver system give rise to principles (themes, meanings, cognitive-emotional schemas) that recurrently shape subsequent emotional experiences, especially experiences of significant relationships. Such organizing principles are unconscious, not in the sense of being repressed, but in being pre-reflective. The totality of a person’s pre-reflective organizing principles constitutes his or her character. Of particular importance are those organizing principles formed in contexts of emotional trauma, relational contexts characterized by massive malattunement to significant emotional pain. Some therapeutic and ethical implications of this formulation will be explored.

Part III: Character, Autonomy, and Action Explanation

(12) Owen Flanagan (Duke University): “Performing Oneself and Creating One's Character”

I explore the ancient idea that life is some kind of dramatic or artistic performance. How seriously and literally ought we to take this idea that life is like a dramatic performance, even that it is one? There are metaphysical and logical questions about whether and how self-creation and self-constitution are possible, especially how it is possible to engage in the sort of self-construction that might yield what we call "character."

(13) Paul Katsafanas (Boston University): “Autonomy, Character, and Self-Understanding”

Autonomy, traditionally conceived, is the capacity to direct one’s actions in light of self-given principles or values. Character, traditionally conceived, is the set of unchosen, relatively rigid traits and proclivities that influence, constrain, or determine one’s actions. It’s natural to think that autonomy and character will be in tension with one another, for two reasons. First, autonomy is defined in terms of self-chosen principles, character in terms of constraints on choice. Second, when we attribute an action to an agent’s capacity for autonomy, we treat it as issuing from exercises of reflective, self-conscious choice; when we attribute it to the agent’s character, we treat it as caused by potentially unreflective motives, emotions, and dispositions.

How deep does this tension run? Of course, the answer depends on which conception of autonomy and character we accept. For example, if we construe autonomy as authenticity—as acting in a way that’s true to one’s deep character—then there may be no tension whatsoever. On the other hand,
if we conceive of autonomy as libertarian freedom—as the capacity to choose in a way that’s wholly
undetermined by factors external to the will—then there may indeed be a conflict. So, to answer
our question, we need to render it more determinate. We need to fix a conception of autonomy and
ask how character comports with it.

I want to work with the broadest possible account of autonomy. Thus, I’ll begin, in Section One, by
discussing core components that are shared by most accounts of autonomy. I suggest that autonomy
requires the capacity to engage in causally efficacious, content-restricted choices that are not
determined by the motives upon which one is reflecting. Section Two briefly clarifies the notion of
character. With this groundwork in place, Section Three considers the ways in which character can
limit the scope of choice and influence the reasons upon which one acts. I argue that these
limitations and influences present no problem for autonomy. However, Section Four articulates a
different and more problematic way in which character affects choice. There, I argue that character
can limit autonomy when it operates in a certain manner. As a first approximation, character limits
autonomy when it influences the agent’s choice in a way that were she aware of it, (1) she would
disavow the influence, and (2) the influence could no longer operate in the same way. Put a bit
differently, I argue that character undermines autonomy when it generates reflectively unstable
perceptions of warrant. Section Five considers the way in which the effects of character are
sometimes dissolved by self-understanding.

In short: I’ll argue that the mere fact that character constraints and influences choice is
unproblematic. What matters is a particular kind of surreptitious influence that character can
generate.

(14) Alison Hills (Oxford University): “The Cognitive Aspects of Virtue”
One of the distinctive features of the virtuous person, it is natural to think, is that she has a grasp of
her situation, and of the morally relevant features of it, which a non-virtuous person may lack. Some
of this may be explained, in part, by distinctive non-cognitive aspects of the virtuous, but it appears
that there is also something special about the cognition of the virtuous. How is this to be
understood? It is sometimes said that the virtuous person has knowledge of what to do. In this
paper, I use a distinction I have drawn elsewhere between moral understanding and moral
knowledge. I argue that the virtuous have a distinctive way of making moral judgements: they have
and use moral understanding.

(15) Alfred Mele (Florida State University): “Character in Action”
If traits of character have some influence on action, how do they influence action? That is this
chapter’s guiding question. The chapter focuses on a single trait — temperance — as a case study of
sorts. The first section develops an account of temperance that takes its lead from Aristotle. On this
account, temperance is a supranormal disposition to pursue appetitive pleasures in moderation as a
consequence of a tendency to desire them in accordance with one’s assessment of their value. The
second section presents background on how actions are explained. And the third and final section
explores the influence that temperance may have on a temperate person’s actions.

(16) Neil Sinhababu (National University of Singapore): “Virtue and Desire”
What happens when virtuous agents recognize moral reasons for action? I claim that they recognize
considerations that promote the satisfaction of their virtuous desires. John McDowell and Sophia
Moreau argue that this view poorly fits the phenomenology of deliberation. They hold that virtuous
agents perceive the world in a distinctive way which reveals objective reasons. I respond that the desire view better explains the phenomenology. In "Virtue and Reason", McDowell argues that the salience of moral considerations to virtuous agents “resist[s] decomposition into pure awareness together with appetitive states.” I respond that moral reasons are salient because desire directs a virtuous agent's attention towards them, just as the desires of the hungry direct their attention towards food. McDowell also describes how good reasons silence bad ones in moral deliberation, treating this as part of the distinctive way virtuous agents see their reasons. This phenomenon can be explained in terms of the agents' self-knowledge that they won't act for bad reasons, rather than any distinctive capacity for seeing reasons.

Second, I consider the hedonic phenomenology of practical deliberation. Good people are generally pleased when they vividly imagine acting rightly or bringing about morally better states of affairs. Desire nicely explains this, as people are generally pleased when they imagine what they desire.

Third, I address two puzzles raised by Moreau in “Reasons and Character.” The first concerns how we can participate in our dispositions of character even though they're beyond our voluntary control. Regarding these dispositions as desires solves this puzzle. Desires are mental states that we cannot voluntarily choose, but whose motivational, attention-directing, and hedonic effects constitute much of our agency. Her second puzzle concerns why explanations of action in terms of the agent's psychological states typically can't be used by the agents themselves in describing their reasons. While this is a problem for views on which desires themselves are reasons, it is no problem for the view that desires make things that promote their satisfaction into reasons, following Mark Schroeder's Hypotheticalism.

Fourth, I consider a consequence of my view, criticized by McDowell: that animals could have virtuous character if they had the appropriate desires. I embrace this consequence. It's the right conclusion to draw from the similarities between human and animal deliberation, and it fits how we admire animals whose desires motivate them to help others.

(17) Iskra Fileva (UNC-Chapel Hill): “Two senses of ‘why’: Traits and Reasons in the Explanation of Action”

In ordinary practice, character traits are often cited in an attempt to explain why an action was done. Thus, we say, “Young Abraham Lincoln walked through a storm to give the correct change to a customer because he is honest” or “James Tyrone refuses to pay for his wife’s medical treatment because he is miserly.” But how exactly do traits explain actions? In what sense of “why” does Lincoln's honesty or the stinginess of Eugene O'Neill’s Tyrone tell us why Lincoln or Tyrone acted as each did?

We do not have a satisfactory answer to this question, and surprisingly few proposals are on offer. While there is voluminous literature on action explanation, philosophers interested in the explanation of action have tended to focus exclusively on reasons explanations. Traits, on the other hand, especially morally-laden traits, are discussed almost exclusively in relation to action evaluation. But traits, as evidenced by ordinary discourse, are relevant to the explanation, not just to the evaluation, of actions. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the former role.

I begin by noting that traits and reasons explanations of action are systematically connected and in two ways. First, traits require motivation by reasons. Actions due to mental disorders and phobias cannot be explained by an appeal to traits (thus, we cannot say about the compulsive hand-washer that she washes her hands 20 times a day because she is overly clean.) Second, traits typically require
motivation by particular kinds of reasons. Thus, if we know that young Lincoln walked through the storm to give back the correct change because he is honest, we can infer that, in acting as he did, he was motivated by certain kinds of reasons and not others (e.g., by reasons which have to do with rightness or sense of duty rather than by fear of punishment).

I then ask whether it follows from these systematic links that traits and reasons explanations of action are equivalent – though, perhaps, offered from different points of view – or whether, by contrast, they differ in important and interesting ways.

I argue that the differences are interesting and important: traits and reasons explanations differ in that they answer different “why” questions regarding action: while both traits and reasons can be cited in explaining why an action was done, a reasons explanation tells us what reasons have motivated the agent acting; a traits explanation, by contrast, while it indicates something about the agent's reasons, tells us something else in addition, namely, why the agent acted on the reasons she acted on rather than on other available reasons.

Part IV: Character and Society

(18) Gideon Yaffe (Yale University): “The Character of the Reasonable Person”

When a defendant commits a crime in response to a threat, we grant a defense if the threat was such that a reasonable person also would have committed the crime rather than suffer the consequence. If a reasonable timid person would have complied with the threat, that does not help the defendant; we expect people not to be too timid. But nor does it hurt the defendant if a reasonable brave person would have resisted; we don't expect people to be very brave. Rather, we implicitly assume that the reasonable person occupies some middle ground between a flawed character and a virtuous one, and we hold the defendant to that standard. The same phenomenon arises in many other places in the law in which the reasonable person is invoked. This paper explains the conception of character and its role in the explanation of action, and the conception of virtuous character, underlying our application of the reasonable person standard in the law. It is argued that the law accepts an implicit theory of the nature of character that is importantly different from the conception that we find in ordinary morality. National University of Singapore

(19) Frederick Schauer (University of Virginia & Columbia Law School): “Can Character Be Evidence?”

One of the firm principles of the American law of evidence and proof is that a person's character cannot be offered as evidence of his having engaged in an act consistent with that character. There are numerous exceptions to this rule, to be sure, but the basic rule expresses the longstanding view that allegedly direct evidence of particular acts is to be preferred to evidence about the likelihood of those acts in light of the character of the actor. This contribution will review the current state of the law, explain its origins in policy, in legal theory, and in the epistemology of evidence, and then offer an evaluation of this principle -- the so-called propensity rule -- in light of modern findings in social psychology, contemporary theories of epistemology, and various concerns of legal policy.

(20) Daniel Little (University of Michigan-Dearborn): “Character in History”

This paper addresses an aspect of an old question in philosophy of history, the role of actors in history. Specifically, how do features of character play into the fabric of history? The first subject has
to do with psychology, motives, and agency; the second has to do with large events and processes. So how might a better understanding of the domain of individual character contribute to better historical understanding?

What is "character"? When we talk about a person's character, we are usually thinking of a set of fairly durable characteristics of thinking and acting that go beyond the choices of a minute. So character is a feature of agency that is more fundamental than motives or purposes. It is an embedded disposition of behavior, a way of looking at the world of action and choice. There is also a suggestion of moral valuation involved in making assessments of character. We often describe people who act according to principle or who act out of virtue as having "good" character, whereas people who lie, betray, break commitments, or act viciously are thought to have bad character.

Here we explore several ways in which character might be important in history. There are several possible reasons. (1) It might be held that a key actor's choices were crucial for a turning point in a historical sequence, and those choices were influenced or determined by his/her character. (2) We might observe that a large population acted collectively in a critical moment -- say, the Solidarity struggles in Poland or ordinary African-American people in Montgomery during the boycott -- and their decisiveness was influenced or determined by a widespread feature of character -- courage, obstinacy, perseverance. (3) It is possible that important features of character are historically conditioned or instigated by key historical experiences -- the Great Famine in China creating widespread fearfulness about the future, the 1960s anti-war movement creating optimism about collective action. In this respect "character" is historically conditioned and collective rather than purely individual. (4) We might look at some historical events or episodes as being particularly important because they embody or exemplify certain features of character that we want to valorize -- the defense of Stalingrad or the protection of Jewish children in Le Chambon, for example.

A reasonable answer to the opening question comes down to this: History is composed of and propelled by socially embedded actors whose behaviors are themselves complex outcomes of an internally embodied system of reasoning, feeling, and acting. We do not have particularly good theories of the actor on the basis of which to analyze them. It is reasonable to hypothesize that the features of individual thinking and behavior to which we refer with the concept of "character" are indeed important aspects of agency. So "character" is relevant to history because it is a constituent of agency and a potentially insightful component of our theory of the actor.

(21) Juan Pablo Couyoumdjian (The Fund for American Studies) and Michael Munger (Duke University): "A Desert Theory of Profit and Loss: The Entrepreneurial Virtues"

The concept of a moral mean is an apt description of the art of entrepreneurship. Aristotle's virtue of "liberality" lies between the shortcoming of meanness (taking too much, spending and investing too little) and the excess of prodigality (overspending, failing to take care to watch costs, and so on). The real question that faces the researcher who wishes to adapt the concept of virtue to fit the character of the entrepreneur is the roles of intention and consequence. Must the entrepreneur consciously intend to improve the welfare of his customers? Or is it sufficient that an honest entrepreneur, even one intending only to increase his own profits, cultivates the habits of awareness and alertness to opportunities to correct "mistakes" in resource allocation in the world around him? To the extent that entrepreneurs improve the allocation of resources, they reduce waste and ensure that people use only their "fair" share. Is this virtue?
Part V: Character in Art

(22) Noël Carroll (CUNY, Graduate Center): “Character and Concept in the Arts”

“Character and Concept in the Arts” will explore the ways in which characters function as concepts in the arts. I will especially look at the ways in which characters represent emerging social types. Characters become ways of identifying certain prototypical personality syndromes which audiences can apply metaphorically to actual persons. Thus, we can classify certain monomaniacal people as Ahad-like. I will argue that one of the ways that fictions can have transfer value to the world is through the use of character descriptions as a way of organizing our social world.

(23) Christy MagUidhir (Houston University), “Miscasting the Actual, Misrepresenting the Fictional”

I argue that for a film-fiction to miscast an actor in the role of a character of that fiction is for facts about the actor in the actual world to preclude or substantially interfere with that fictional character being portrayed as minimally specified by that fiction. I claim these actual-world facts not only preclude audiences from imaginatively engaging with that fiction so as to receive its prescribed uptake but do so independently of whether that fiction itself otherwise specified facilitates or likewise precludes such audience engagement. I then identify and discuss three principal categories of miscasting: performative, sensible, and recognitional. My aim is to show how such distinctions can be substantially informative (both descriptively and evaluatively) for enquiry into the nature of and our engagements with narrative fiction as well as to provide a philosophically productive framework for further relevant enquiry into ostensibly character-related issues standard within the (visual) narrative arts such as character roles, character acting, and character works.

(24) Susan Feagin (Temple University): “Fictional Characters and their Characters”

Much attention has been given to emotional responses to fictional characters and their “situation”—whether such responses are the same in important respects to the responses we have to actual people of that sort in real life, and to what extent they are constituents of appreciating a literary work. Particular attention has been given to empathizing with fictional characters, especially in relation to recent work in the cognitive neurosciences that appears to explain why we have such responses even when reading fictional literature.

Very often when we respond to what a fiction character says, does, or undergoes, it is in part because of assumptions we have made or conclusions we have reached about their underlying character traits. Character and character traits are highly problematic notions, but for the purposes of this paper, I construe a character trait as a set of behavioral dispositions. Selfish people (tend to) think first of themselves and (tend to) act in ways that further their own self interest even when others have equal claim on their effort. Honest people (tend to) think first of telling the truth and (tend to) do so even when they or those they care about might benefit from not doing so.

I wish to draw attention to the variety of importantly different ways that assumptions or conclusions about character traits can account for a reader’s affective state or feeling in relation to a work. Affect can permeate the process of reading in many ways and not just in an emotional response that occurs at a certain point in time to what a character does or undergoes. For example, the affective state itself—how one feels about the character—may change one’s cognitive and affective orientation or attitude towards what one reads in a way that an (affectless) belief would not. In addition, much of what goes under the description of “sympathizing with” or “caring about” a fictional character can
be illuminated by how we feel about them insofar as they possess certain character traits. Finally, it helps to undermine the position advocated by, e.g., Peter Lamarque, that emotional and other affective responses to a work are not relevant to literary criticism by showing how appreciation can depend on affective orientation.

(25) Stephen Davies (University of Auckland, New Zealand): “Così and Character”

Mozart’s opera Così fan tutte (Thus do all women) has often been characterized as a silly or immoral farce with flat characters in mirroring pairs. I argue that the opera has a moral seriousness that is missed if one is not aware of differences between the characters established in the libretto and above all in the music. In particular, Fiordiligi is a round character who suffers moral anguish at her own actions. As a result, it is not a matter of indifference who marries whom at the opera’s close, as is sometimes maintained.