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可要求個人為品格負責嗎？道德運氣 對於個體品格責任的挑戰

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摘要

道德品格的建構向來被視為個體的責任，但在主體有意識地選擇成為什麼樣子的人以前，其道德品格似已受習慣養成、道德教養的影響，而大致成形。就此而言，我們如何能夠主張個體應為自身的道德品格負責？究竟在何種程度上，個體可為自身的道德品格承擔責任？本文即以「道德運氣」這個概念來指稱諸如外在環境、道德教養、個人稟賦等對道德品格的型塑具有實質影響力，但卻屬於個人自主控制能力以外的因素。道德運氣對於「品格建構之個體責任」的挑戰，當有助於釐清個體可為自身的道德品格負責的真正意涵與限度。明確而言，品格的建構既非為主體所能全然掌控，也非絲毫不受任何條件所圍限；品格建構本質上就是一種協同合作的事業，無法由主體單獨完成。最後，透過Aristotle關於自主性與責任的發展性觀點，可明確說明個體是如何擔負起品格建構的責任。

關鍵詞：品格建構、品格責任、道德運氣

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Can an Individual Be Held Responsible for His/Her Own Personal (Moral) Character: How Moral Luck Challenges the Notion that Individuals Are Responsible for Their Own (Moral) Character

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Abstract

It has long been an unwritten rule that individuals are responsible for the development of their personal moral character. However, the way in which people typically develop moral character is often the result of habits and moral upbringing, which are imposed before individuals start to shape their moral character by conscious effort. If this is the case, an individual should not be held completely responsible for his or her own moral character. This paper draws on the idea of “moral luck” to designate non-voluntary variables such as one’s background, circumstances, upbringing, temperament, and other similar factors, which one cannot control but which can have substantial influence on the formation of moral character. Moral luck and its challenge to the notion that one must always be responsible for his or her own moral character helps to clarify the degree to which one should be held responsible for his or her own

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moral character. This paper concludes that the formation of moral character is not entirely under the control of an individual. Instead, it can be impacted by a wide variety of conditions; the formation of one's character cannot be solely accomplished by the nature of one's individual actions, but is rather a collaborative process. Lastly, this paper specifies how one can take responsibility for his or her own character based on an Aristotelian developmental conception of voluntariness and personal responsibility.

Keywords: character development, responsibility for character, moral luck

Introduction

It is widely accepted that character is not innate but created, and that one is destined to take authorship of his/her character. However, is it not true that one has already had a character before one is mature enough to take responsibility for it? If so, how can one be held responsible for one's character? This doubt is expressed as follows (Kupperman, 1991, p. 48):

If people typically have developed character before they are in a position to make mature, reflective decisions about what they want them to be, are they responsible for their characters?

Since habituation is indispensable to the formation of moral character, and since it is largely directed by people other than the moral agent, it is doubtful whether an individual's character is really voluntarily constructed. Put differently, if the enterprise of character construction is mainly out of one's control, how can one be held responsible for it? For that matter, character development seems incompatible with the notion of moral responsibility (Brickhouse, 1991, pp. 137, 143). Moreover, when other non-voluntary factors which more or less exert influence on the development of character are taken into account, such as one's background, circumstances, upbringing, temperament and the like (Jacob, 2001, p. 11), this misgiving is intensified. In the main, the aforementioned variables can be placed under the general heading of "moral luck," which falls on the agent without his/her consent. To sum up, "since our character has a history that begins with things that merely happened to us," the question arises, "how could we come to be responsible for our character, having begun with no responsibility at all (Russell, 2009, pp. 381, 386)?"

This paper was aimed to draw on the idea of "moral luck" to highlight the fact that some non-voluntary factors are unavoidably involved in the construction of character.

Character building, for instance, is conditioned by temperament and upbringing of necessity. However, the extant discourse on the construction of moral character, for the most part, lays emphasis on one's agency and responsibility for it at the expense of these inescapable influences which are out of one's control. The case will be made that moral luck helps to clarify the notion of responsibility for character. For one thing, the construction of character is not completely within the agent's control, nor is it unrestricted by any conditions. For another, it cannot be solely accomplished by the agent, but is rather a collaborative enterprise by nature. Despite these caveats, one is not deprived of responsibility for one's character. To argue for this, an Aristotelian developmental conception of voluntariness and responsibility will be elaborated to specify how one can take on the responsibility for one's character.

Moral luck and its challenge to moral responsibility

The popular belief that one is the author of his/her character may give a false impression that character can be constructed as whatever one wants it to be, and is entirely within one's control. This ignores the important fact that "no one can be wholly responsible for their character in the sense that they build it up from nothing (McKinnon, 1999, p. 75)." In fact, the development of character is necessarily conditioned by some provisions. As indicated by Glover's metaphor, "self-creation is... more like building a medieval town than a planned garden city (Kupperman, 1991, p. 55)." Given this, Trianosky (1993, p. 104) remarks that any realistic account of the nature and origin of character has to accept the conclusion:

Character is the product not only of voluntary action but also of the activity of temperament, along with upbringing, childhood experiences, social environment, peer expectations, and pure happenstance.

Articulating the influence that moral luck exerts on shaping character can act as a useful counterforce to the exaggerated view that character is fully under the control

of the agent. Also, the idea of one's responsibility for character can be more fully and appropriately understood.

The concept of moral luck¹

At first sight, moral luck appears contradictory, since morality is assumed to be within one's control, and one is held responsible for this aspect, whereas luck is out of anyone's control, and it is absurd to hold a person responsible for his/her good or bad luck. Besides, in the domain of morality, it is widely accepted that everyone is thought equally able to become worthy, irrespective of his/her birth and circumstances (Andre, 1983). In short, morality is supposed to be immune from the influence of luck. Indeed, the phrase, "moral luck," is intended to highlight the tension between morality and luck, which is to say that morality is associated with control, choice, responsibility, and praise and blame, while luck is about chance, unpredictability, lack of control, and the inappropriateness of praise and blame (Athanasoulis, 2005a, p. 1). Moral luck is meant to express an obscure dimension of morality.

What exactly is moral luck? According to Nagel, "where a significant aspect of what someone does depends on factors beyond his control, yet we continue to treat him in that respect as an object of moral judgment, it can be called moral luck (1979, p. 26)". Moral luck indicates a subtle relationship between morality and luck, namely, some crucial elements of morality are recognised to be outside the control of

¹ The topic of moral luck is introduced to modern philosophy mainly by Nagel (1979) and Williams (1981) (Athanasoulis, 2005a, p. 20). Nussbaum's study of moral luck, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, indicates that this subject is a central theme of ancient Greek ethical thought (Walker, 1991, p. 16). In this paper, the idea of moral luck is introduced to suggest that individual responsibility for character should be considered in a more sophisticated way. It must be noted that my concern is the role of luck in the formation of virtue and moral character, and not the broader issue of the role luck plays in the gap between being a virtuous person and leading a flourishing human life. That is Nussbaum's primary concern, and her central contention is "the vulnerability or fragility of flourishing". (Nussbaum, 2001, pp. xiii, xv)

the agent. However, we still want to hold the person responsible for his/her actions (Athanasoulis, 2005a, p. 1). Put differently, “where we realize that a significant aspect of a person’s character or conduct is due to factors beyond that person’s control, and we nevertheless continue to treat the relevant character traits or conduct as an object of moral assessment, then we are forced to acknowledge that luck plays a constitutive role in our moral evaluations. (Enoch & Marmor, 2007, p. 406).” In summary, when a person is held responsible for his/her character or moral actions, it should be borne in mind that some aspects of his/her character or actions are subject to luck. Moral luck is invented to describe this phenomenon.

In general, moral luck can be classified into three kinds, namely, “constitutive luck,” “situational luck (or “circumstantial luck” or “developmental luck”²)” and “resultant luck” (or “consequential luck”) (Athanasoulis, 2005a, p. 23, 2005b, p. 266; Enoch & Marmor, 2007, p. 406; Nagel, 1979, p. 28). Resultant luck refers to luck in terms of the way in which one’s actions or projects turn out (Nagel, 1979, p. 28). A typical example is two equally negligent drunk drivers, one of whom is unlucky enough to strike and kill a pedestrian, while the other is lucky enough to drive home safely. As a result, the former is accused of manslaughter, while the latter is convicted of reckless driving. Since resultant luck concerns the outcome of actions or projects, it has less to do with my concern, which is character. Constitutive luck signifies “what kind of person you are, where this is not just a question of what you deliberately do, but of your inclinations, capacities, and temperament (Nagel, 1979, p. 28).” Since this relates directly to one’s being, and temperament has a central role to play in the construction of character, as already mentioned, it is the focus of later discussion. Finally, situational luck refers to luck in the circumstances one happens to encounter, which provide opportunities for excellence or disgrace (Walker, 1991, p. 14).

² Athanasoulis (2005a, pp. 21, 173) coins the term “developmental luck” to encompass “all the factors which influence an agent’s moral development and which are subject to luck” including the circumstances of varying degrees of temptation and difficulty one comes across.

Moral luck poses a challenge to personal moral responsibility

In practice, moral assessment is generally accompanied by the attribution of moral responsibility. Further, people are held responsible for what is assessed, with the tacit assumption that it is within their control. That is, our intuitive notions link moral responsibility to the control condition (Walker, 1991, p. 15). The problem of moral luck is that the intuitive belief about the condition of moral responsibility is at odds with our common practice of moral assessment in cases involving an element of luck (Walker, 1991, p. 15). Since luck is involved in the object of moral evaluation, the attribution of moral responsibility becomes questionable. It can be said that moral luck captures a deep unease about responsibility and luck, and “luck has ‘captured’ agency in a tangled web of factors outside our control (Athanasoulis, 2005a, pp. 2, 4).” If luck is pervasive in the object of moral assessment, it is doubtful whether people can really be held responsible for their characters. Briefly, the recognition of moral luck seems to imperil the received conception of moral responsibility (Zimmerman, 1987, p. 374). According to Zimmerman (1987, p. 374), the challenge presented by moral luck to moral responsibility can be expressed in the form of a puzzle:

1. A person P is morally responsible for an event e’s occurring only if e’s occurring was not a matter of luck.
 2. No event is such that its occurring is not a matter of luck.
- Therefore
3. No event is such that P is morally responsible for its occurring.

This formulation appears to be paradoxical, since the premises seem true, while the conclusion appears to be false (Zimmerman, 1987, p. 374). In this regard, some suggest that our ordinary conception of moral responsibility should be abandoned or revised. In contrast, Zimmerman aims to defend the notion of moral responsibility by clarifying its meaning. His strategy is to distinguish two subtle ways in which something may be said to be within someone’s control. Firstly one may enjoy “restricted

control” over some event which one can bring about, or prevent its occurrence. Secondly, one is said to enjoy “unrestricted or complete control” over some event which one enjoys, or enjoyed restricted control both of it and all the events on which its occurrence is contingent. Having rejected the idea that one can enjoy complete control over an event, Zimmerman seems to imply that what is precisely pre-supposed by our received conception of moral responsibility is the condition of restricted control. Following Zimmerman, I shall argue that people can only enjoy restricted control of their characters. That is, they can bring about or prevent the occurrence of a particular kind of moral character, even though they are not in control of those events or conditions upon which its coming into being is contingent, such as temperament and upbringing.

Some factors of luck with respect to the construction of character

Since my concern is the construction of moral character, two sorts of moral luck are most relevant, i.e. constitutive luck and situational luck. Basically, the challenge moral luck poses to one’s responsibility for character can be understood in this way: if luck plays a substantial role in determining one’s character, it is feasible to wonder whether or not it is legitimate to evaluate a person morally in terms of his/her character (Latus, 2003, p. 461).

Temperament as constitutive luck

It has been argued elsewhere that temperament acts as an unavoidable starting

point which performs as the background against which character is constructed.³ Since temperament is mainly innate, and therefore beyond anyone's control, it constitutes an important factor of constitutive luck which determines the kind of person one is, say, irascible, gloomy, or cheerful. In what follows, the case will be made that people can be held responsible for their characters in two senses, which correspond to two different ways in which temperament and character are interrelated to each other.

In the first place, temperament itself can be seen to be a constitutive ingredient of character. Temperament as such is utterly out of the agent's control, and is simply a matter of luck. There is nothing one can do to bring it about or eliminate it, and people are rather purely passive recipients of it. In this regard, it is unreasonable to hold people responsible for the presence or absence of particular temperamental dispositions, and senseless to praise or blame people for possessing good or bad ones. However, although we cannot be held directly responsible for this sole aspect of character because of the sheer fact that it is beyond our control, it does not mean that there is nothing we can do

³ The substantial influence that one's temperament exerts on the formation of character has been noticed by both philosophers and psychologists. In the case of the latter, there has accumulated a large body of relevant empirical literature, particularly flowering in personality psychology, expounding the way personality traits (and temperament) help to shape behaviour and character. Among others, the Five-Factor Model of personality traits (FFM, for short) which explains an individual's personality in terms of the five broad personality factors-Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness-is often cited and considered to represent "the culmination of a decade-long search for an adequate taxonomy of personality traits (McCrae, 2011, p. 196)." According to the FFM, personality traits at issue are exclusively biologically/genetically-based, and hence they are quite insulated from direct input from the social environment and not amenable to the usual interventions, and furthermore, they have a pervasive influence on characteristic adaptations, behaviour, and experience (McCrae, 2011, p. 198). In this respect, personality traits in FFM are closer to temperament in meaning, and their influence on the formation of character is obvious. For that matter, it is said that people who are concerned with the cultivation of virtues and moral character "may not be as pleased to realize that moral traits are also likely to be stable and heritable, perhaps as difficult to mold or reform as temperamental traits are (McCrae, 2011, p. 197)."

about it. Quite the contrary, since there are still various possibilities of how a particular temperament is directed or integrated within one's life or character (Kupperman, 1991, p. 55), part of the task of moral habituation is to appropriately manage one's temperament (Jacob, 2001, p. 26). For example, parents may make efforts to habituate their naturally irascible boy to express anger in a proper manner. Also, after recognising his possession of this unfavourable constitutive characteristic, the child may endeavour to find the proper channels to release his irascibility. In short, although temperament cannot be rooted out, it is amenable to management to some extent, especially in the ways it is exhibited. For that matter, temperament as constitutive luck does not deprive people of responsibility for character.

In the next place, since it is moral character which is under consideration rather than character generally, it is more pertinent to investigate how temperament may affect the construction of moral character, particularly the inculcation of virtues. The general idea is that, firstly, favourable temperamental dispositions are natural virtues at best, and a great deal of work still needs to be done to convert them into moral virtues. At this point, one's responsibility for moral character is premised on one's restricted control of the transformation of natural virtue into moral virtue. Secondly, a real constraint exerted by temperament on the inculcation of virtues is that, if an individual is born with an irritable temper, this makes it harder, if not impossible, to acquire the Aristotelian virtue of good-temper. He/she is destined to be gappy in that respect, since he/she cannot develop that virtue to an ideal degree. In a nutshell, although temperament sets some limits on the inculcation of virtues, it does not preclude one's responsibility for character altogether.

At this point, one's restricted control of character, and therefore, responsibility for character, can be analyzed both in terms of the management of temperament and the cultivation of virtues. A substantial difference in the nature of the two tasks must be correctly recognized (Jacob, 2001, p. 19):

That responsibility for character is to be ascribed to agents is not to say that they

can be fully or equally responsible for all of their characteristics. The efforts one makes to be more honest, for example, are different from the efforts one makes to be less prone to fear or pessimism. It is a different sort of undertaking. The reasons for this have to do with the different ‘materials’ that are being worked with and on.

Basically, the difference concerns the different materials of temperament and moral virtues in that temperament is inborn, ingrained, and relatively resistant to change, while virtues are reason-responsive, and come about mainly as a result of habituation. Despite this difference, both in cases of temperament and virtue, “across that range and the various degrees of plasticity there is a significant role for the agent’s own voluntariness and responsibility (Jacob, 2001, p. 19).” In this respect, the challenge of moral luck to moral responsibility is somewhat illusory. That is, “we tend to think that whatever comes from a lucky event must itself be considered a matter of luck. The initial lucky event seems to ‘infect’ the ones that follow, making them, too, matters of luck (Latus, 2003, p. 472).” The fact is that, some results may appear to be beyond our control at first sight, but “we have more control over the kind of person we are than we sometimes think (Andre, 1983, p. 207).”

Upbringing as situational luck

Another line of argument which casts doubt on one’s responsibility for one’s character indicates that character, is not voluntarily constructed by its owner for the most part, but is mainly a result of upbringing and habituation. More specifically, since the kind of family into which one is born, the kind of upbringing one receives, and the way in which one is brought up, are all beyond one’s control, they constitute a typical form of situational luck with respect to character formation. That is, how one is brought up and the way in which one’s character is shaped, is a matter of luck (van Hooft, 2006, p. 96). The nature of one’s character so far formed is subject to situational luck (Zimmerman, 1987, p. 376). This is explicitly expressed by Andre (1983, p. 204):

Virtues, as Aristotle describes them, are possible only to those who have been reared in a moral community; a fortunate childhood fosters adults who feel rightly as well as acting rightly. But people cannot choose their own upbringing.

Notwithstanding the real effects situational luck exerts on the formation of character, I shall argue that this does not preclude one's responsibility for one's character, since the moral agent is voluntarily involved in constructing his/her character in different ways at different developmental stages. An attempt to argue for this will be made later by resorting to an Aristotelian developmental conception of voluntariness and responsibility.

The essentiality of habituation to the construction of character doesn't negate personal responsibility for character

It is generally acknowledged that moral habituation is essential to the acquisition of moral virtues, and this is impeccably articulated by Aristotle (1998, p. 29):

Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities...It makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth; it makes a very great difference, or rather all the difference.

Given the fact that how one is brought up is beyond one's control, it is doubtful whether one can be said to voluntarily construct one's character. Put simply, if my character is mainly subject to other people's direction, it is unclear in what sense I can be held responsible for my character, except for the bare fact that that character is mine. This scepticism is clearly demonstrated in Williams's doubt about whether Aristotle's supreme emphasis on habituation is compatible with one's responsibility for character (2007, p. 38):

Aristotle should not have believed that in the most basic respects, at least, people were responsible for their characters. He gives an account of moral development in terms of habituation and internalization that leaves little room for practical reason to alter radically the objectives that a grown-up person has acquired.

Even though Williams is not explicit, his reasoning can be roughly formulated as follows: before one is sufficiently mature to deliberately exercise practical reason to decide how to develop one's character, one has already become a certain kind of person through habituation. That is, one's character is formed without one being voluntarily involved in it. Williams's remarks reveal his presumption that, since habituation is not voluntary for the person who is being habituated, the indispensability of habituation to the cultivation of virtues contradicts the notion of one's responsibility for character. The following passages aim to reject this assumption by clarifying the nature of habituation.

It is a commonplace for responsible parents to deliberately mould their children's characters by bringing them up properly. Although it is implausible to think that parents may purposely transmit bad values to their children, it cannot be denied that some parents may instill morally dubious, or even bad, values in the younger generation, given their wrong beliefs about values. Suppose an individual is taught to be sexist, and treated that way from his very youth, it is to be expected that it will take great effort and much time to rid himself of the influence of that doctrine, whereas his lucky counterparts need not spend extra time and effort on it. Clearly, this unlucky person has a more difficult task in respect of cultivating the related virtues, such as respect and justice. As a result, we are forced to accept the cruel fact that good luck is really an advantage, and bad luck is not easy to overcome (Jacob, 2001, p. 14).

This line of thinking is also shown in the different attitudes we take toward a person who has been badly habituated and another who has not been subjected to bad influence when both end up with the same bad character (Jacob, 2001, p. 24):

With respect to the former, we might say of the agent “It was to be expected,” whereas with respect to the latter, we might say “How could this happen?” or “What went wrong?”...In one case the agent turned out badly, and in the other, the agent allowed himself to go wrong or even cultivated bad habits.

Our blame for the latter tends to be harsher than for the former, for we are inclined to think that “in the former, the agent’s range of opportunity, examples, and practical vision are narrow in a way that they are not in the latter (Jacob, 2001, p. 24).” The recognition that it is bad situational luck which has fallen on that unlucky individual enables us to evaluate his character with sympathetic understanding, but the unlucky person is still subject to reproach, and we do not stop holding him responsible for his mature character.⁴ This implies that, although unhealthy or harmful habituation really makes it harder for the unfortunate person to have a good character, bad upbringing by itself does not revoke his responsibility for character altogether. Situational luck per se does not eliminate one’s responsibility for character. No matter whether the habituation one receives is ethically sound or not, it is sensible to ascribe responsibility to the agent (Jacob, 2001, pp. 18, 25).

Another point to make is that it is improper, even ridiculous, to deny one’s responsibility for character simply on the grounds of the involvement of moral habituation as a factor of situational luck in the formation of character. It should be said that, if habituation per se is sufficient to negate one’s responsibility for character, it appears that almost no one can be held responsible for his/her character, given that moral habituation is essential for the acquisition of virtues (Aristotle, 1998). Character is constructed in a social context of necessity, and it is in this inter-subjective

⁴ This may not apply to extreme cases. For instance, in Jacob’s (2001, p. 17) untypical example based on a news report, a young child is confined in a room alone for three years, fed on a minimal diet and minimal social interaction. In this case, it is doubtful whether there is any prospect for him to develop character, given his lack of normal social interactions and proper moral habituation.

context that human voluntariness is exercised in the formation of moral character, and responsibility is taken (Jacob, 2001, p. 21).

Developmental conception of voluntariness and responsibility

To illustrate that character is voluntarily constructed, and being habituated is not involuntary, I suggest that a developmental conception of voluntariness and responsibility should be adopted. For this purpose, two conceptions of voluntariness and responsibility respectively suitable for explaining action and character will be compared, and the case will be made that responsibility for character should be adequately understood from a developmental perspective.

Two conceptions of voluntariness and responsibility: “snapshot” vs. “developmental”

As stated, the notion of responsibility presupposes a control condition to the effect that something for which one is held responsible must be done voluntarily and under one's control. People are not held responsible for actions taken under compulsion, or as an outcome of hypnosis (Kupperman, 1991, p. 58), because they are neither voluntary, nor are they under their control. It should be noted that this conception of responsibility is mainly derived from the paradigm of actions, whereby people are held responsible only for actions under their direct control. Under the influence of this predominant conception, we tend to think that we can take responsibility for our characters if, and only if, they are within our direct and immediate control. However, this likelihood, and the plausibility of this interpretation are rejected by the prevalence of moral luck. I shall argue that, while moral luck exposes the fallacy of conceiving one's responsibility for actions and character in the same way, it leaves room for another way in which one can be held responsible for one's character.

The great influence of the paradigmatic conception of voluntariness and responsibility based on moral action is clearly demonstrated in Kupperman's

elaboration of Hume's thesis that character is largely involuntary. According to Kupperman (1991, p. 58), "voluntary" is typically defined as "immediately controlled or controllable by an act of the will." A voluntary action is one which is within one's immediate control, and therefore, can be changed at will. In contrast, since character cannot be changed in the same way, Hume concludes that character is involuntary. A major problem with this view is that if the sense in which character is said to be involuntary parallels that of an action, it implies that, just as it is unreasonable to praise or blame a person for his/her involuntary actions, it makes no sense to praise or blame a person for his/her character. However, since character evaluation is neither unreasonable nor ineffective,⁵ the analogy between involuntary character and involuntary actions is inadequate. This inappropriateness suggests that it is improper to apply the conception of voluntariness of action directly to character. The foregoing clearly demonstrates that character cannot be under one's direct and immediate control as actions, since people cannot change their character immediately by an act of will. In fact, this main point is also made by Aristotle (1998, p. 63) who elaborates the different ways in which actions and character are voluntary:

But actions and states of character are not voluntary in the same way; for we are masters of our actions from the beginning right to the end, if we know the particular facts, but though we control the beginning of our states of character the gradual progress is not obvious, any more than it is in illness; because it was in our power, however, to act in this way or not in this way, therefore the states are voluntary.

Two points can be made, the first of which is, according to Aristotle, both

⁵ For example, if a person is blamed for his/her selfishness, this blame may well act as an incentive for him/her to avoid performing selfish actions, or even has the effect that he/she would prefer not to be a selfish person (Kupperman, 1991, p. 60).

actions and states of character are voluntary, but in different ways. Secondly, a close relationship between voluntary actions and character needs to be recognized. That is, “It is from the exercise of activities on particular objects that states of character are produced (Aristotle, 1998, p. 61).” Moral character must come about as a result of corresponding voluntary actions. Since actions are voluntary, the resulting character is also voluntary. In summary, one’s character is related to voluntary actions in such a way that, since its origin is in the agent, one is held responsible for its coming into being.

In terms of the connection between voluntary actions and character, it needs no specialized knowledge to know that a particular pattern of activity tends to result in a specific state of character.⁶ Since we are constantly advised, encouraged, or warned by family members and friends about where we are heading as a consequence of our actions, especially in our childhood, this knowledge is widely available to us (Jacob, 2001, pp. 22, 23). Moreover, with maturity, one is expected to be more capable of being aware of how one’s actions can make a difference to one’s character (Jacob, 2001, p. 22). Therefore, there is no good reason for people to excuse themselves from taking responsibility for their characters, which are formed from the result of their voluntary actions. Another crucial difference between responsibility for actions and responsibility for character is that the former adopts a snapshot view, which is not suitable for the latter. That is, in respect of one’s responsibility for character, there is the temporally extended opportunity for the moral agent to reflect on what one is doing and what difference it can make to one’s state of character (Jacob, 2001, p. 23).

Finally, the common misconception that voluntary actions presuppose the absence of any influencing factors needs to be corrected. In fact, the adverse circumstances do not prevent one from taking responsibility for character or actions. Quite the contrary,

⁶ Aristotle (1998, p. 61) makes a relevant remark “Now not to know that it is from the exercise of activities on particular objects that states of character are produced is the mark of a thoroughly senseless person. Again, it is irrational to suppose that a man who acts unjustly does not wish to be unjust or a man who acts self-indulgently to be self-indulgent.”

what is interesting and significant is what one makes of one's circumstances, and what one does about them (Jacob, 2001). By the same token, even though character is inevitably constructed in a web of conditions interwoven by luck of various kinds, there is still space retained for agency on the part of the agent. This whole idea is summarized well by Jacob (2001, p. 11):

We can acknowledge the role of influences, background, circumstances, and the like without abandoning the conception of people as voluntary agents. Although more and more is being discovered about the various causal influences on action and character, this does not provide adequate grounds to nullify significant ascription of voluntariness and responsibility.

The follow-up issue is how exactly the moral agent's voluntariness is manifested in dealing with his/her conditions, and in what sense he/she can be held to be responsible for character. It has to do with how we understand the notions of voluntariness and responsibility.

An Aristotelian developmental conception of voluntariness and responsibility for character

If voluntariness is a prerequisite for responsibility, it is necessary to show that an individual's voluntariness is involved in the construction of character in order to defend his/her responsibility for character. However, this idea is put at risk, since it is widely held that the agent's voluntariness is absent in the process of being habituated. In response, Jacob argues that, from an Aristotelian perspective, there are substantial respects in which one's voluntariness is exercised in habituation, and that additionally, one's responsibility for character should be correctly understood from a developmental viewpoint. More specifically, one's voluntariness is involved in the development of

character in different ways at different developmental stages and one's responsibility for character increases with maturity (Jacob, 2001, p. 17).

To begin with, according to the Aristotelian conception of voluntariness,⁷ human actions are voluntary insofar as they are not compelled, the agent does what he/she wants to do, he/she is aware of what he/she is doing, and he/she has some measure of control over his/her actions (Jacob, 2001, p. 10). In short, "the voluntary would seem to be that of which the moving principle is in the agent himself, he being aware of the particular circumstances of the action (Aristotle, 1998, p. 52)." Furthermore, in the light of the developmental conception of voluntariness, it is expected that an increasingly accumulated knowledge of the particulars, and an enlarged awareness of what is acceptable, can more inform the agent's actions with the passage of time (Jacob, 2001, pp. 11-12). That is, "the character of voluntariness needs to be more and more carefully specified as the agent is a more rationally capable agent with different types of awareness and knowledge expected at different levels of maturity (Jacob, 2001, p. 12)." It is for this reason that the actions of adults generally call for morally important different appraisals from those appropriate for children (Brickhouse, 1991, p. 142). In addition, one's responsibility is supposed to increase with time. One case for this is that our condemnation increases as the child becomes an adult, since blameworthiness is a specific sort of criticism which implies free choice (Andre, 1983, p. 205). Bearing this developmental conception of voluntariness in mind, it is time to expound the different ways in which voluntariness is said to be involved in habituation and the construction of character.

In the early pre-rational stage, children's moral behaviour is mainly directed by others, often by way of dictation, encouragement, discouragement, prompting, warnings, suggestions, inducement, expectation, norms, and so on. Children seldom

⁷ In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's discussion of the general issue of voluntariness and involuntariness, and particularly, his developmental conception of voluntariness suitable for explaining the formation of character are presented in chapters 1-2 of book III.

originate the thought of action on their parts; rather, they mainly do what they are told to do. Although children do not make deliberate choices of what to do, this does not close off all space for voluntariness, for at a minimum, the child contributes his/her will to comply or reject, and therefore, in this sense, he/she is still responsible for the course of conduct (Jacob, 2001, p. 15). Put it differently, “both children and the lower animals share in voluntary action, but not in choice, and acts done on the spur of the moment we describe as voluntary, but not as chosen (Aristotle, 1998, p. 53).” Moreover, habituation can also be seen as a kind of training for voluntariness, because ‘the transmission of values through habituation is occurring in an individual whose choices and acts make a difference to the extent to which the values are transmitted’ (Jacob, 2001, p. 15).⁸ Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that one’s voluntariness at this stage is very limited.

Later on, when children’s rational ability is activated,⁹ their voluntariness is mainly manifest in rational thinking and evaluative judgments. At this time, their voluntariness goes beyond the pure will to follow the dictate of others. Even though it is true that by the time one is mature enough to exercise one’s practical reason, one has acquired certain dispositions through habituation, having certain dispositions is not the same as having a firmly fixed, settled, and mature character (Jacob, 2001, p. 21). In the former case, there is still plasticity for character. A mature person may make a self-examination of his/her acquired dispositions, and then determines to sustain or change some habits with the help of practical reason (Jacob, 2001, p. 17). For instance, the agent can decide to undertake a willed change of character, and exercise conscious control of his/her character by, say, articulating his/her endorsed set of values (Kupperman, 1991). In this case, he/she has kept his/her ‘critical distance’ from his/

⁸ Some scholars take pains to illustrate the point that habituation is not simply the mindless learning of habits, or the mere repetition of behaviour, but rather, it is a critical practice. Through habituation, children are led to acquire “a subtle, discriminating, careful way of looking and thinking”. (Jacob, 2001, p. 16)

⁹ It is held that children’s rational reasoning on moral matters begins earlier than previously thought (Kristjánsson, 2006, p. 46).

her character by putting his/her acquired values and character traits under reflective assessment and even transformation (Russell, 2009). In this respect, as one matures and starts to deliberately forge one's life, one has ample time, opportunity, and capacity to reflect on and change one's dispositions (Hsieh, 2007, p. 48). Obviously, at this stage, "the transformation of habituated tendencies into firm characteristics that motivate specific actions through practical reasoning is a process in which progressively more self-controlled voluntariness is engaged (Jacob, 2001, pp. 22-23)."

The general idea of a developmental picture of voluntariness involved in habituation can be summarized as follows (Jacob, 2001, p. 15):

The establishment of stable, mature character involves the voluntariness and the practical reasoning of the agent, even though the "material" one works with are largely shaped by factors not in one's direct control. Even directed, guided activity typically involves voluntariness, and while the child is not making deliberative decisions about how to behave, neither is its behavior a mechanical result of habituation.

From a developmental perspective, even though nature and habituation may conspire to form a person of bad character, the agent should still be held responsible for his/her mature character, since he/she is supposed to be able to exercise his/her practical reasoning in accordance with his/her conception of good later in life. In this regard, "having a character of one's own depends not so much on how one came to have one's character, as on what one can do with the character one has (Russell, 2009, p. 379)." On the whole, in the light of the developmental conception (Jacob, 2001, p. 20):

There is not some specific point at which an individual becomes a fully responsible agent. Instead, the capacities for this sort of decision and planning are developed along with and through the development of one's capacities for voluntary activity.

Therefore, it can be concluded that habituation is not a process which excludes voluntariness or diminishes one's responsibility for character (Jacob, 2001, p. 19). Quite the contrary, one's voluntariness is more or less involved in the long process. As a result, "we should not regard habituation as limiting voluntariness but as a process crucial to the development of it (Jacob, 2001, p. 19)." In this regard, Carr (2003, p. 222) made a clear remark on the essentiality of voluntariness for the genesis of virtuous characters:

We are not born with virtuous characters, but acquire them in the course of various kinds of social and other training necessitating some voluntary effort and application. Indeed, according to the virtue-ethical mainstream, it is only to the extent we are responsible for the formation of our characters that we can claim any credit or esteem for our virtues: it is appropriate to praise or honour me as a generous, honest or just person only to the extent that I have chosen and worked hard to cultivate such qualities.

Finally, a common misunderstanding needs to be clarified. The idea that people are responsible for their characters does not imply that they must deliberately construct their characters as if they had blueprints for them in the first place. Quite the contrary, it is common that someone may drift into having a certain kind of character without any reflective control (Kupperman, 1991, p. 62). In this regard, care should be taken not to exaggerate the extent to which people exercise a particularly high degree of self-conscious control over their states of character (Jacob, 2001, p. 27).

Responsibility, voluntariness, condition of control, praise and blame

It is common for some people to be blamed for vices, and others praised for virtues. The ethical view which underlies this practice is that one is held responsible for what is praised or blamed for (Kupperman, 1991, p. 54), and the main cause of what is

evaluated comes from the agent, rather than someone else. Furthermore, “condemnation implies that you should not be like that, not that it is unfortunate that you are (Nagel, 1979, p. 33).” The fact that you have become a certain kind of person is not merely a matter of luck. Rather, it is believed that you have agency in constructing your character, and are therefore held responsible for it. Responsibility presupposes choice, and it is unfair to blame someone for what they cannot control (Sabini & Silver, 1987, p. 169). If one is responsible for some event, one is worthy of praise or blame for that event, which means that one is positively or negatively evaluated in light of that event (Zimmerman, 1987, p. 375). In this way, a series of concepts, including assessment of character, agency, judgment of responsibility, culpability, blame, praiseworthiness, voluntariness, and the like, are connected (Enoch & Marmor, 2007, p. 427).

The point of blaming an action is to diminish the likelihood of the recurrence of such an action. In general, blame exerts strong pressure in preventing people from performing wrong actions, whereas praise functions as a strong inducement to behave in an appropriate way (Kupperman, 1991, pp. 58, 59). Clearly, praise and blame can only function as inducement or pressure if the actions in question are under the agent’s control. The promise of praise and the threat of blame do not apply to actions beyond one’s control. For example, it is pointless to praise someone’s knee jerk, or blame someone for laughing when being tickled, and in view of this, it makes sense to only hold people responsible for their voluntary actions (Kupperman, 1991, p. 60).

A related point to make is that, just as moral and evaluative language has to be taught from one’s early years through moral education and upbringing (Hursthouse, 1997, p. 112), it is also educationally important to instruct general patterns of moral praise and blame, since these have substantial effects on the formation of character (Kupperman, 1991, p. 62). It is mainly in the process of learning to evaluate other people’s characters that children come to familiarise themselves with the language of moral praise and blame, and gradually grasp the criteria of character assessment. Having internalized these criteria, moral praise and blame subsequently act respectively as an incentive to perform morally good actions and a pressure to guard against morally

bad conduct.

Responsibility for character is jointly shared by the moral agent and his/her care givers

The example provided by Hursthouse of a racist upbringing helps to illustrate the previous account. If a child is brought up by parents who are extreme racists, this racist upbringing not only impacts his/her reactions to people of other races, but also manifests itself in his/her emotional responses to them, such as hatred, contempt, anger, fear, and the like. In general, his/her emotions are pervasively infected with racist beliefs, and he/she may consider his/her emotional responses to be innocent and justified, or beyond his/her control (Hursthouse, 1997, p. 112). Finally, it becomes extremely difficult for him/her to rid him/herself of racism, since it has taken root in his/her mind.

Suppose that someday, he/she somehow comes to realise that his/her emotional reactions are wicked and unjustified, and determines to make a change, can he/she undo the childhood training in racism, and re-train his/her emotional responses into “complete harmony” with reason (Hursthouse, 1997, p. 113), which is an important sign of Aristotelian virtue? It is argued that, although one can do one’s best to overcome these improper emotional responses, for instance, one can drag one’s emotions to the surface of consciousness, critically scrutinize them, and hammer them with rational beliefs, there is no guarantee that one will not continue to have them. Moreover, given the non-rational dimension of emotion, reason on its own may not be able to entirely unseat this bad childhood training (Hursthouse, 1997, p. 113). Since a virtuous person’s emotions are supposed to be in complete harmony with reason, by this standard, it may well be the case that this unlucky person cannot be fully virtuous, regardless of his/her efforts. More importantly, his/her bleak prospect of becoming a virtuous person is the outcome of bad luck. This is expressed well by Hursthouse (1997, p. 114):

Those of us who had racism inculcated in us early are unlucky; through no fault

of our own, and despite our greatest efforts, we may remain morally inferior to those who, in virtue of good training in childhood and rational principles, achieve complete harmony between their emotions and reason and thereby full virtue.

Two points can be made, the first of which is that it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, for an unlucky person of this sort to be fully virtuous. This example was originally intended by Hursthouse to address the issue of the training of emotions and the essentiality of appropriate emotions for virtues. It is stressed that, given the non-rational aspect of emotions, it is almost impossible to root out entrenched improper emotional responses at a later time. In this regard, this person's emotions are unlikely to be in complete harmony with reason, and he/she is thus doomed to be less than fully virtuous in this respect. It must be said in relation to this that the influence exerted by early childhood upbringing on the acquisition of virtues, especially the affective dimension of virtue, should not be underestimated. A brutal fact is that a bad upbringing may make a person unlikely to ever be fully virtuous.

Secondly, the notion of responsibility for character does not mean that an individual has to be held solely responsible for the construction of his/her character. Rather, it is inevitable that the responsibility should be jointly assumed by the agent and other people who care about his/her flourishing. As the example clearly shows, one's prospect of becoming a fully virtuous person to a substantial degree is subject to luck, that is, whether one is lucky enough to be raised in a way in which one's guardians pay full and serious attention to leading one to correctly perceive the morally salient features of a situation, and train one to feel the appropriate emotions toward right objects. It should be noted that, although whether he/she has had a good upbringing or not is a matter of sheer luck from the individual perspective, this is something within his/her guardians' deliberate choice and control. In other words, although whether we ourselves have a good upbringing is bluntly a matter of luck, it is up to us as parents to deliberately give our children a good upbringing (Hursthouse, 1997, p. 114).

Responsible caretakers are concerned about the quality of their own conduct and their practice of child-rearing (Spiecker, 1999, p. 216). For that matter, strictly speaking, the luck under consideration is not really beyond “anyone’s” control. In this regard, Nussbaum’s (2001, p. xxx) remark about the vulnerability of human flourishing to external conditions of luck is a case in point:

For if one thinks at all well about the vulnerable elements of human life, one sees that a lot of human vulnerability does not result from the very structure of human life, or from some mysterious necessity of nature. It results from ignorance, greed, malice, and various other forms of badness.

Although the very fact of having a body makes a person liable to injury, the fact that women are raped in wartime is the result of human wickedness, rather than natural necessity (Nussbaum, 2001, p. xxx). Likewise, the formation of moral character is vulnerable, to both internal and external factors of luck, some of which are manageable to some extent, although probably not by the agent him/herself. It is the responsibility of parents and other concerned people to bring their children up with a view to helping them to cultivate good character, since their ignorance, negligence, laziness, or even (less common) malice has substantial harmful effects on their children’s characters.

However, other people’s share of responsibility for character does not release an individual from responsibility. Rather, given the developmental nature of character over the long run, one is supposed to take the main responsibility for one’s character, even if one has received a bad upbringing. One cannot shirk responsibility simply by claiming that one is unlucky. For example, if the protagonist does not try to undo the effects of his/her harmful upbringing, but is content to claim that ‘it is not my fault’ and his/her emotions are out of his/her control, he/she is simply corrupt (Hursthouse, 1997, p. 114).

Conclusion

The challenge of moral luck to the notion of one's responsibility for character comes from the consideration to the effect that being infected with constitutive and situational luck, character may be regarded simply as an outcome of sheer luck. Therefore, it makes no sense to hold people responsible for their character. In response, I have argued that the very fact that character is subject to luck and conditioned by some raw materials, such as temperamental dispositions and other dispositions acquired through upbringing, does not preclude one's responsibility for his/her character. Moral luck on its own does not defeat the notion of responsibility for character, but it does draw our attention to the often ignored sober truth that some aspects of character are not directly or fully within one's control. For that matter, we have merely a restricted control over character. In my view, the practice of bringing the idea of moral luck into view helpfully acts as a corrective to the over-exaggerated notion of people's control over their states of character and their responsibility for character. Furthermore, only if we have come to become aware of the substantial effects these factors of moral luck exert on the formation of our character, can we choose to react to them deliberately and hence shoulder the responsibility for our character intelligently.

Since the construction of character depends heavily on moral upbringing the quality of which is a matter of situational luck, and one's temperament inevitably sets some limits on the formation of character, which constitutes a sort of constitutive luck, no-one can really author his/her character at will out of wholly self-created materials. In brief, the enterprise of the construction of moral character must be conditioned by some starting-points which are infected with luck, be it constitutive or situational, of necessity, and an individual should undertake the responsibility for his/her character with this knowledge.

Considering the nature of character, it is not appropriate to apply the conventional "snapshot" conception of voluntariness and responsibility to the issue of responsibility for character. Instead, an Aristotelian developmental conception of voluntariness and

responsibility is proposed, according to which one should be held responsible for character increasingly with the maturation of rationality.

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