Chapter 9
Operationalizing Creativity: Developing Ethical Leaders Who Thrive in Complex Environments

Harry H. Jones IV

> *"The sad truth of the matter is that most evil is done by people who never made up their minds to be or do either evil or good."*
>
> (Arendt, 1981)

9.1 Virtue as Skill: Thinking Differently About Developing Ethical Leaders

In an effort to add to the conversation around developing better leaders, this essay explores the relationship between ethics and creativity. Neither of these fields is new, though the history of research in creativity is much shorter than the long tradition of theorizing in ethics. Yet, these two fields are rarely considered together. It is not the aim to articulate in a broad and comprehensive way the relationship between creativity and ethics. Rather, they are considered in light of two very specific views within each tradition, and how, taken together, they might enhance leader development efforts. There are, of course, a variety of theoretical approaches both to ethics and to creativity. I will focus on a view of both virtue ethics and creativity in which *skill* plays a prominent role. Beyond that, I aim to draw upon empirical research that suggests we ought to be far more sensitive to the complex situations in which moral agents may find themselves. Figure 9.1 presents an overview of the main topics that are discussed. This is a key point because this volume is based on an underlying assumption that leader development is focused on growing moral agents.

It is not my intent here to argue in depth for a particular view of the nature of skill in leaders or followers. Rather, I will adopt the empiricist view of skill as contrasted with an intellectualist view. The standard for what counts as a skill, under the intellectualist view, is very high, requiring that the expert have both the ability to perform tasks and to explain them within the framework of a field-relevant theory

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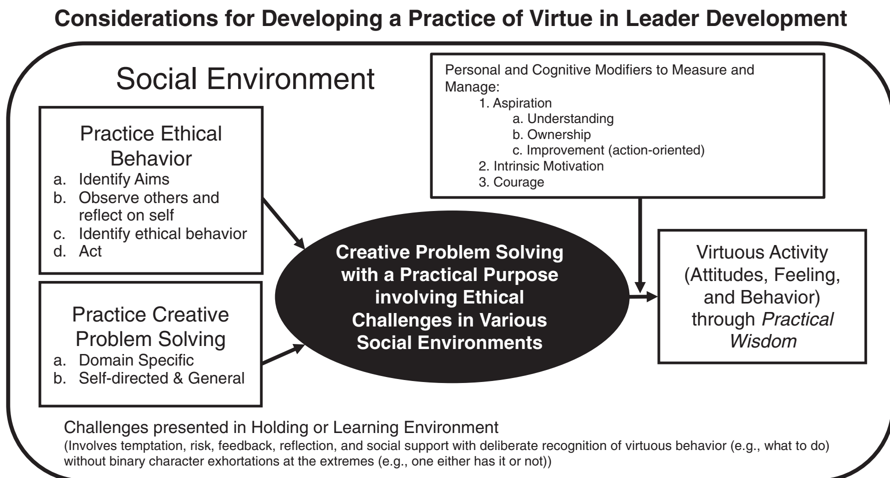

Fig. 9.1 Considerations addressed within the chapter for developing virtue and creativity as skills

(Stichter, 2007). Experts, therefore, must understand their subject in addition to being able to perform well (Stichter, 2007, p. 188). The empiricist view does not lower the bar insofar as the display of expert skill. However, under the empiricist view, there is no need for the expert to be able to explain in any deep, theoretical way why he or she does what he or she does. Mastery of skills, for the empiricist, comes largely through experience, rather than through adherence to universal principles (Stichter, 2007, p. 189). The emphasis on experience is not meant to discount the value of theory and the intellectual component of skill development. The expert will be able to say *something* about why he or she makes the decisions he or she makes. At some stages of development, he or she might be able to articulate why he or she is making the move he or she makes when exercising the skill. Consequently, this is precisely why the development of skills is an important topic for consideration in the realm of leader development. Here, too, we assume that leader development is about creating experts who can act as leaders. Whether leaders can explain why they act as they do in the realm of virtue and creativity is less important for this presentation and a topic for another time.

Requiring that an expert be able to explain his or her decisions in a theoretical way makes it difficult to account for performances in certain areas. A clear example is evident in medicine where an experienced surgeon, one who will surely be sensitive to a complex set of environmental factors during any given operation, might anticipate trouble based on any number of factors processed too quickly to articulate. It does not mean that the surgeon could not say *anything at all* about the decision, only that such an explanation need not be explicitly theoretical. The emphasis here is on the performance. One can be an expert by performing in an expert way

and be unable to explain in a theoretical way his or her expert decisions. But one cannot be an expert with respect to skills, even with the best theoretical explanations, without being able to perform in an expert way. In short, behaving in an expert manner is a necessary condition—while expert explanations are not—for possessing and demonstrating skill or expertise.

Taken together, because leaders are moral agents, we can embrace the empiricist view of skill as appropriate for virtue-as-skill. This has substantial implications for both the way one learns to be good and the way one teaches (and leads) others to do so. With that in mind, let us say what we mean by "virtue." Philosopher Robert Adams maintains that virtues are dispositions "[…] to act in certain ways or from certain motives, views, or commitments" (Adams, 2006, p. 161). Developing virtues, then, involves feelings and attitudes about doing the right thing as much as actually doing right.

The purpose here is to press a view of virtue that sees the notion of skill as key to understanding how virtues work and how they might be developed (Annas, 2011). Julia Annas is a leading voice in contemporary virtue ethics. She is careful to speak of the "skill analogy" when developing her account of virtue (Annas, 2011). I will speak of virtue as itself a skill. As a skill, virtue must be cultivated and practiced. Though imitation, practice, and routine are key to skill development, Annas is careful not to reduce skill development to mere routine. She notes that though one develops virtue through habituation, the result is not routine; rather, it is the kind of mastery one finds in expert musicians or athletes (Annas, 2011). Here one should see an immediate difference between, say, flossing one's teeth and performing Bach's Chaconne. The former is a habit in the ordinary sense; the latter is the product of "habituation." Habituation here for Annas means developing those habits associated with gaining mastery in the domain. Yet an expert performance is more than simply the exercise of relevant habits. An expert performance in the musical domain is an example of "intelligently engaged practical mastery" (Annas, 2011, p. 14).

Learning by doing is more than simple skill development. This is where a strict behavioral focus must merge with a cognitive approach within developing leaders. Simply, loyalty will not *make* one a virtuous person. One's aims and intent must also be good (Adams, 2006). One crucial requirement for developing virtue is aspiration (Annas, 2011). This implies that, similar to the way an Olympic sprinter aspires to be faster and deliberately works toward that aim, one must aspire to become more honest, more courageous, and the like, and to deliberately work toward that aim, intent, or purpose. Assuming this is correct, then aspiration is at least one feature that separates would-be virtuous agents from those who are not developing virtue in any meaningful way. Additionally, this means that aspiration is directly linked to a cognitive choice or autonomy on the part of the developing leader. Aspiration is the exercise of one's autonomy to pursue a certain aim. In the context of developing ethical and creative leaders, aspiration serves a critical function, and I will address it separately in one of the sections to follow. First, let us examine creativity as skill, where skill is the important theoretical link between virtue and creativity.

9.2 Creativity as Skill: A Key to the Development of Practical Wisdom

Creativity, as a concept, has a closer relationship to virtue than we ordinarily imagine. Creativity researcher Keith Sawyer considers creativity to be like moral agency in that it is a uniquely human trait (Sawyer, 2012). It is reasonable to think, as philosopher Christine Swanton claims, that creativity is a component of all the virtues (Swanton, 2003), and it is worth considering whether creativity is itself a virtue (Kieran, 2014). There are many interesting questions one might explore with respect to creativity, but my interest in creativity here is how it might serve in the development of moral leaders. First, it is important to define "creativity."

Philosopher of creativity Berys Gaut adds a helpful spin on the common definition that "creativity is the capacity to produce things that are original and valuable" in an attempt to further clarify what ought to count as "creative" (Gaut, 2003, p. 150). Gaut argues that this is insufficient, as it would permit instances of the creation of things that are both original and valuable by a process that is clearly not creative. He offers the following example: one might be covered with paint in a darkroom, flailing about for hours, thereby *accidentally* producing something valuable and original. Yet, surely this ought not count as creative. Conversely, if the method of production is purely "mechanical" it would be wrong to consider the act creative. This is to say that*how* the original and valuable product is made matters (Gaut, 2003, p. 150). To account for this, Gaut adds that in order to count as creative, valuable, and original products must be produced with *flair* (Gaut, 2010, p. 1041). Flair is not given a robust definition, but is clearly intended to be that thing that a person brings to the process such that the *how* of producing is neither by chance nor mechanized. It is reasonable to wonder what this has to do with virtue development. A number of such links are worth noting.

First, if Swanton (2005) is correct that creativity is a part of all virtues, then creativity has a central role to play in the development and exercise of virtue. Second, if Amabile (1996) is right to claim that creativity is sensitive to social environments, then thinking about creativity could helpfully illuminate aspects of our thinking about virtue. Third, if Gaut is right to suggest that creativity is inherently risky, then developing one's creativity would appear to have a moral component—namely that one would be simultaneously developing one kind of courage and a capacity for risk taking (Gaut, 2009). If Gaut (2009) is further correct that creativity is best thought of as a skill, then it fits nicely with the conception of virtue advocated here. Finally, enhancing one's capacity for creative problem solving seems that it would yield multiple benefits including finding creative solutions to difficult ethical problems *and* developing capacities for other goods such as empathy and the ability to look at problems from multiple perspectives. On balance, I suggest that developing creativity skills in a way that is overtly linked to development in virtue could better serve the aim of developing moral leaders who are exceptionally creative as well as provide leaders with tools for better ethical decision making. I will not pursue each of these connections. Instead I will focus on the ideas that (1) both creativity and virtue

are intelligent skills, where aspiration is an essential feature of developing such a skill, and (2) exercising these skills well requires practical wisdom. Snow characterizes practical wisdom as the ability to "discern the morally salient features of situations" and to respond appropriately (Snow, 2009, p. 83). This will feature prominently in the application of both virtue and creativity.

The claim that creativity is a skill does not imply that everyone could learn it equally well (Gaut, 2009, p. 96). As with any intelligent skill, there are a variety of factors, ranging from natural abilities to having the best teachers, that could influence how well one might learn it. It is, however, generally learnable*and* teachable. The same is true of virtue. To the extent that virtue and character share similar features as intelligent skills, they could be developed in similar ways. Amabile (1996) argues that intrinsic motivation is invaluable for creativity. Amabile's work demonstrates the importance of intrinsic motivation for creativity. Those who are (primarily though not necessarily exclusively) intrinsically motivated in the pursuit of a creative endeavor are more likely to produce creative results (Amabile, 1996). This is very much related to Annas' emphasis on aspiration, which I take to be tied up with one's coming to value the virtues for their intrinsic, rather than instrumental, worth. If Amabile is right, then aspiration (on account of recognizing the intrinsic worth of creativity) should be a prominent feature in the development of individual creativity. The extent to which it is true that persons do not aspire to be more creative or more virtuous, one should expect efforts at both creativity and character education to be largely ineffective. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how one might develop practical wisdom apart from aspiration. Practical wisdom is not the sort of thing that one acquires accidentally. Limiting oneself to the imitation of teachers will not produce practical wisdom and will block one from going beyond one's teachers. Creativity and virtue must work together in the devolpment of practical wisdom.

Swanton suggests that creativity is integral to practical wisdom. I want to argue that exercising creativity well requires practical wisdom the same way that exercising loyalty, for example, does. Swanton wonders whether creativity itself is an intrinsic good. It seems to me that it is not. Terrorists around the globe have exemplified tremendously lethal levels of creativity in recent years. How might we account for this? Though Swanton does not answer this specific example, her solution to the broader problem is to distinguish creativity from "virtuous creativity" (Swanton, 2003, p. 171). The clever person is creative. In the spirit of Swanton's language, one might say that the clever person possesses "vicious creativity." The difference between the two turns on the presence or absence of virtue. Creativity bounded by virtue yields *wise* creativity, which is creativity that is "also responsible, temperate, cooperative, and so forth" (Swanton, 2003, p. 171). Put this way, it seems that creativity shares this tension and potential for misapplication with other virtues such as loyalty, courage, and the like. Some of the greatest evil of the twentieth century was perpetrated by militaries with fiercely *loyal* soldiers. Similarly, it seems reasonable to attribute courage to at least some persons who would blow themselves up in service to their cause. We might argue that loyalty and courage aimed at evil ends are sufficiently lacking and ought not count as virtue. I think this

is right, but this may be merely to distinguish loyalty from virtuous loyalty the way Swanton distinguishes creativity from virtuous creativity. Either way, this should serve as a reminder that the action itself is not all that counts when accounting for virtues. Aims matter a great deal. Creativity in service to bad aims is creativity gone wrong. Loyalty in service to evil ends is loyalty gone wrong. Both bear a real similarity to their virtuous counterparts, but neither ought to count as virtuous on account of their respective aims.

In the context of our individual and organizational pursuits of virtue, we *must* emphasize that doing the right action is not all that matters. It probably is not even what matters most. We must aim for *virtuous* creativity, *virtuous* courage, and *virtuous* loyalty, and this depends upon practical wisdom. I do not mean to suggest we muddle our ordinary usage of virtue-terms by adding the qualifier *virtuous* when we mean the virtuous actions performed in service to good aims. Yet, we should be clear that not just any instance of loyalty or courage ought to count as virtuous. Of note, the ability to deliberate about practical matters is not equal to practical wisdom and is not necessarily a moral skill. As mentioned previously, one might possess what Aristotle calls "cleverness—the ability to reason well, though not virtuously" (Snow, 2009, p. 83). This is precisely why I argue that developing a capacity for creative problem solving *in the context of character development* is a worthy aim.

Exercising virtues in situations that are not familiar is a form of creative problem solving, though it probably more closely resembles an activity like improvisational jazz. Improvisational jazz involves a kind of creative problem solving, but when done by professional jazz musicians, it happens in a way that is transparent to the untrained observer. By definition, no two improvisational jazz performances are identical. But this should not be taken to imply that there are no rules or that there is no way to be *wrong*. Quite the opposite. A jazz ensemble who performs the same tune over and over is working off a standard melody, called "the head," which is often captured in a single piece of sheet music. It might take 35–40 s to play through the melody once, but performances of a single piece could last five times that long. Most of what gets played is *not* written down anywhere. There are hundreds of decisions being made throughout the performance. Leadership within the ensemble changes hand almost effortlessly and in an unscheduled way as one musician hands off the lead to another. The reason the members of the ensemble are able to do this is precisely because they have practiced for thousands of hours, mastering the skills appropriate for the field. Though it might not work with the same speed, and it might not appear as effortless, it seems to me that developing the ability to exercise the virtues in new situations is not terribly different from the way a great jazz musician develops the ability to play something new every performance for an entire career. Improvisational jazz seems to be in line with the skill-like nature of virtue for which I have been arguing.

Creative problem solving, done well and in service to morally feature rich problems, is simply the slow exercise of practical wisdom. Reacting virtuously in real time in various situations is analogous to the way jazz musicians just seem to know what to play when improvising during a performance. One way to conceive of expert creative

problem solving is as a slowed-down version of improvisation. Creative problem solving is practical wisdom in slow motion. Beyond that, this creativity is inherently risky when applied within the domain of creative problem-solving. For Gaut, the exercise of creativity demonstrates a certain kind of morally significant freedom insofar as the creative person is able to rise above her circumstances and look for a better way (Gaut, 2009). This fits nicely with Annas's concern that imitation may only lead to imitators in right action, rather than virtuous persons who develop practical wisdom such that they might criticize their teachers where appropriate.

Creativity for Gaut and virtue for Annas, when practiced well, give us the ability to reflect critically on our situations and to determine whether there is a better way. In doing this critical reflection, particularly in the context of an institution, one will almost certainly be required in due course to resist institutional norms in ways that are uncomfortable or unpopular and might even work counter to one's advancement in the organization. This is risky, and taking prudent risks of this sort requires courage. Gaut argues that creativity involves just this kind of risk on account of it necessarily involving a kind on non-routinized activity and, therefore, lacks the kind of reliability that routines provide. Because of this, Gaut claims that creative acts are "inherently risky" (Gaut, 2009, p. 102). To return to the jazz metaphor, this picks out the difference between the uncreative musician who simply plays the notes on the page, exactly as written, and the improvisational master who takes the notes on the page as the baseline and develops it into something much more.

I have looked at creativity alongside virtue and argued that (1) both creativity and virtue are intelligent skills and (2) exercising these skills well requires practical wisdom. The larger aim is to articulate the relevance of the points to growing leaders within organizations. Having noted that the social context is a very important consideration for both moral education and creativity, I will now look at some challenges to virtue ethics creativity with the social context in mind.

9.3 The Importance of Aspiration and Intrinsic Motivation for Both Virtue and Creativity

Aspiration is something that one cannot have thoughtlessly, involuntarily, or even casually. Aspiration is where the general recognition of a need to learn is translated into specific aims. Any serious athlete is likely to have specific aspirations appropriate to his or her sport (e.g., run the race 10 s faster, jump 2 in. higher, and the like). Identification of the goal is very important, but without aspiration, progress is unlikely. Similarly, if leaders consider courage to be a virtue worth developing, but they lack the aspiration to pursue it, substantial growth in courage is unlikely. This implies that even for an organization where there is a deliberate and programmatic effort to develop the character of its members, if individuals do not aspire to virtue, in a specific and intrinsically motivated way, then even the most thoughtful programmatic efforts (to the extent to which they operate independently of aspiration) will be largely ineffective.

While critical, as a cognitive process it is difficult to say what aspiration to virtue, in a meaningfully specific way, would look like for each individual. Consider these two aspirations: the first is for a college sprinter, and the second is for a college student who is a developing leader.

1. I aspire to run the 400 m in 45 s, 2 s faster than my personal best, by the end of the season.
2. I aspire to be 50% more virtuous by the end of the calendar year.

The former is exactly what one would expect from any serious athlete. Simply substitute the appropriate goal to the particular sport. In contrast, the latter sounds hopelessly vague. What, then, would aspiration to virtue generally, or even a particular virtue, look like? If it is really a critical component, we ought to be able to say something more specific than that we aspire to a particular virtue. Even if we consider a single virtue, like courage for example, how would we specify such an aspiration? Most citizens of First World nations do not have regular opportunities to exercise physical courage in their everyday lives. I suppose one might arrange such opportunities, such as skydiving for the first time for one who has a fear of heights. The topic of developing courage in growing leaders is addressed in detail elsewhere in this publication. However, even if we further limit courage to something like “moral courage,” we still face the same problem. Perhaps it is more likely that one would have the opportunity to exercise moral courage in the course of one’s daily life. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that these opportunities would look the same for any given set of people. It seems difficult, at best, to formulate aspirations to particular virtues in actionable ways. This does not undermine the value or the necessity of aspiration. It merely reminds us that becoming virtuous will be more difficult, despite similarities, than becoming physically stronger or faster. Even the best aspirations would not guarantee success.

This is not a cause for despair but rather a call to vigilance with respect to developing leaders. An underdefined aspiration will be better than no aspiration at all. Annas worries that without the aspirational component of virtue development, one might learn virtue to some degree merely through a mindless process of imitation. So, for example, children raised in an exceptionally moral household might develop various virtues through simple imitation of their parents. This is good and necessary when children are young, but an adult who never advances beyond imitation would not be an adult in possession of virtue. Rather, at best this person would simply be an adult with a childlike possession of the virtues. Without the aspiration to virtue, development does not continue beyond mimicry and therefore does not produce virtue. Adults with this sort of virtue might often “do the right thing,” but they will not develop as autonomous agents with the maturity and courage to criticize their teachers (Annas, 2011, p. 22). With respect to practical wisdom, they will either fail or get lucky when faced with new and difficult situations.

It should be clear, then, that aspiration is essential for education in virtue. Without it, one cannot grow beyond the level of imitator. Imitators are not unskilled, but they cannot be experts either. Any moral education program that fails to address *that* will have a limited effect at best. In Annas’s view, aspiration has three basic components:

understanding, ownership, and improvement (Annas, 2011). The learner must understand what is to be imitated in the teacher. The learner must also be able to perform the skill himself or herself. This is what I am calling ownership. Finally, the learner must not merely imitate the teacher up to the level of matching performance. Rather, the learner aims to improve to a level of skill that exceeds that of his or her teacher (Annas, 2011, pp. 17–18). The third component is where the action is, so to speak. The first two components are necessary but not sufficient for either virtue or creativity. It is the practical wisdom that allows one to see a *better* way (or, in complex situations, a *good* way at all) that distinguishes the artist from the technically skilled imitator. To say the master is an artist is not to oppose the emphasis on skill. Recall the focus on the empiricist view of skill which allows for expert performance without a requirement that the expert provide deep theoretical explanations of decisions. The artist makes a certain stroke because it is better than another. The poet chooses a particular word because it makes for a better poem. So to the leader with practical wisdom makes a judgment, not because it is precisely the judgment the teacher would have made, because it is best, on balance, at that moment given the totality of circumstances. The master-as-skilled-artist model assumes expert skill, but the exercise of those skills is performed in such a way as to transcend mere imitation of the teacher.

Annas presumes that learning virtue *necessarily* happens in a social context with all of its related trappings and influence. She worries, however, whether the nature of virtue education, with its heavy emphasis on imitation, will produce the kind of persons who are willing and able to criticize the very context (including the institutions, teachers, and leaders) in which they learned. This concern emphasizes that learning virtue is an inescapably social affair. It further serves as a warning to be on guard that our moral education does not produce *mere* conformists. To be sure, no one posseses perfect virtue or any of the virtues perfectly.

An important caveat to consider in this presentation is the frailty of virtue (Adams, 2006). Virtue is subject to degradation by a variety of factors. Yet, Adams claims that even "frail and fragmentary" virtues still count as virtues (Adams, 2006, p. 12). Here it is not necessary to say how frail or how fragmentary one's character may be and still count as virtue. More importantly, the emphasis is on the relevance of the idea of virtue-as-skill and the frail nature of character, especially in a social context. For the development of any given skill (including those that define a leader), there will be a range of performance from beginner to expert. Yet even when one obtains the level of expert, that achievement is no guarantee of future expert performances. If character really is far more fragile than we are apt to admit, this ought to push us in the following three ways. One, we ought to be more nuanced when accounting for misconduct, rather than assuming that a singular instance of bad behavior is the "proof" that a person lacks character. Two, it ought to make us far more vigilant in the continuous development and maintenance of our own character—understanding that any number of factors could conspire in such a way as to result in our own moral failing. Three, we ought to be very careful when elevating moral exemplars to a place that is impossible for any flawed human to attain.

Hagiographic accounts of past leaders in various contexts often overlook serious moral failings and imply an impossibly high standard for moral leadership. A more balanced assessment of past leaders, acknowledging the good and the bad, would go a long way toward tempering both our tendency to ascribe too much praise to some and too much condemnation to others. None of us has "arrived," morally speaking. Our character development is not a discrete event that takes place over a set period of time; rather, it is a persistent activity of the moral life. That is to say, we should be developing our moral muscles through training similary to the way an athlete trains for game day but with no expectation that there will be a *final* performance. In a very real sense, every day is game day. More pointedly, future leaders perhaps start as young followers (see Chap. 7) of a moral agent and are constantly practicing their virtue-as-skill. This also means that occasionally there will be failures, which one hopes fall within a socially acceptable range in that specific environment.

9.4 Challenges to Virtue and Creativity

Empirical research from social psychology during the past several decades has given rise to an ethical view called situationism (e.g., see Ross and Nesbitt, 1991; Doris, 2002). Among philosophers, the most prominent situationist voice for more than a decade has been John Doris (2002). The situationist critique is worth consideration even if only to remind those concerned with character that our behavior really is sensitive to situational factors. Taking seriously the role that situations play in ethical decision making fits nicely with the social psychological approach to creativity (Amabile, 1996) discussed previously, and it is here we find one of the key theoretical links between ethics and creativity. Before turning to creativity, I will briefly consider the challenge situationism poses to character-based ethics.

The conception of character that Doris opposes is one that considers good character to be "s*teady, dependable, steadfast, unwavering, unflinching*" in contrast to character that is "*weak, fickle, disloyal, faithless, irresolute"* (Doris, 2002, p. 1). The conventional way of speaking about character implies that "the person of good character will do well, even under substantial pressure to moral failure, while the person of bad character is someone on whom it would be foolish to rely" (Doris, 2002, p. 1). For any given moral decision, under the conventional view, character is the primary determinant. Drawing on research in experimental social psychology, Doris denies this. In fact, the reality, he claims, is quite the opposite. He thinks our behavior is quite sensitive to a variety of external factors (Doris, 2002). While drawing on the available empirical data allows us to craft a more accurate psychological picture of persons, it seems hasty to conclude that there is no such thing as character. Several contemporary scholars have defended virtue ethics against these sorts of claims (see Annas, Arpaly, Doris, Solomon, 2005).

One reason for advocates of virtue ethics *not* to be too alarmed by the empirical evidence is that it is almost solely focused on behavior. There is *no* serious view of virtue ethics that reduces to behavior. Behavior is, of course, a substantive concern.

But so are reasons, emotions, and motivations. Adams notes, "Claims about virtue […are…] about the ethical significance of *what lies behind our actions*" (2006, p. 9). Even if one is highly sympathetic to the empirical research, it hardly lays waste to a substantive virtue ethic. This point should not be overlooked. Again, no substantial view of character is concerned *merely* with right action. To the extent that an organization or institution aims merely to get its members to behave in certain ways, they are not doing character development but something else. Where character development efforts are focused *merely* on individual internal traits, such efforts will be limited by a failure to attend to the impact that external (i.e., situational) factors have on ethical behavior. Where one favors a strong view of character, taking into account findings from the empirical research will, I argue, provide one with a more psychologically realistic view overall. Rather than taking the empirical findings as telling against virtue ethics, I suggest that they actually provide support when considered in context.

So one need not abandon a virtue ethical approach in order to acknowledge that social context matters (Adams, 2006, p. 160). Even Annas, who strongly resists situationism, does not take the empirical research to be substantially at odds with virtue ethics. She clarifies, "[…] Virtue ethics has never, over two thousand years, told us to develop characters that will determine our behavior in ways that ignore or are insensitive to the situations in which we deliberate and decide" (Annas, 2005, p. 638). In one place, Doris urges that beyond obligations with regard to specific actions, we may have a "[…] 'cognitive duty' to attend, in our deliberations, to the determinative features of situations" (Doris, 2002, p. 148). He makes this comment in the context of telling a story of possible sexual infidelity between coworkers:

> Imagine that a colleague with whom you have had a long flirtation invites you for dinner, offering enticement of interesting food and elegant wine, with the excuse that you are temporarily orphaned while your spouse is out of town (Doris, 2002, p. 147).

For our purposes, assume that the invitee aspires to fidelity. Those not attentive to situational factors may think there is no reason for alarm. If one is convinced of the strength of one's character, this would provide a reason to think that one is prepared to do the right thing under any circumstances. If character is a guarantee of good behavior, the person of character can enter this situation with confidence. On the other hand, if one acknowledges that situations do, in fact, influence outcomes, then one would avoid this sort of liaison on account of not being able, confidently, to predict one's "behavior in a problematic situation" (Doris, 2002, p. 147). This lack of confidence is not due to a lack of character. Quite the opposite, it is a result of the exercise of practical reason which reminds you that despite a strong commitment to fidelity, it is reasonable to doubt one's "[…] ability to act in conformity with this value once the candles are lit and the wine begins to flow" (p. 147). This is straightforwardly wise and does not tell against virtue. Along these lines, Annas argues that it just is the person who foresees the danger and avoids it who is the example of virtue here. The virtuous person is "intelligent in practical matters, flexible and innovative when required" (Annas, 2005, p. 638). Regarding any cognitive duty we might have to attend to the features of the (determinative) situation, Annas

says, "[…] the virtue ethicist can cheer all the way; this is what the virtue ethics tradition has always emphasized" (2005, p. 638).

While both the empirical research and the situationist position are interesting, I do not take them to tell against the *existence* of character *simpliciter* or even, more precisely in the case of Doris, the existence of "global traits" of character. The situationist view does remind us that we ought to be sensitive to situational factors, but, as Annas points out, this is not a novel addition to virtue ethics. Nevertheless, advocates of virtue ethics would do well to give serious attention to the empirical literature. This exhortation fits nicely with the idea of virtue as skill. Serious athletes are extremely cognizant of their environments. They work very hard to arrange their environments in such a way as to facilitate the highest quality training and, subsequently, the best performances. Thinking about character training in this way could yield fruitful results. Before exploring those, it is important to turn attention to another skill that has promise for character development—namely, creativity.

I have argued for creativity as a skill and noted that Amabile's (1996) social psychological approach to creativity accounts for the influence of situational factors on one's creativity. But Amabile does not think that *only* situational factors influence creativity. Specifically, Amabile states that intrinsic motivation plays a substantial role. Her analysis of creativity shares similar features to virtue as discussed here. When it comes to good and bad behavior, the possession of virtues matters *as well as* a variety of situational (external) factors. But there is more to the story when it comes to external factors, creativity, and ethical decision making.

Some scholars have suggested recently that there is a "dark side" to creativity (Gino and Ariely, 2012). If a creative person might employ creativity to good ends to a greater degree than a non-creative person, then a creative person might equally employ creativity to bad ends to a greater degree than the non-creative person. Gino and Ariely (2012) specifically focus on dishonesty and creativity. In their own summary of the research, they suggest that creative people are more likely to be dishonest (Gino and Ariely, 2012). This is concerning. Organizations which focus on developing leaders usually mean to develop *ethical* leaders. More and more, organizations are placing a premium on creative leaders as well (often in the form of creative problem solving). It is often implicit that such organizations want leaders who are creative *and* ethical. If Gino and Ariely are right, developing leaders who are both creative and ethical will be more challenging than it might seem.

Relative to virtue and creativity as skills, effort is also an important consideration. Miller (2014) examines the empirical literature on cheating, and his research provides evidence of a potential moderating role of effort. His survey focuses on cheating in general rather than cheating in relation to creativity, but the literature suggests that cheating is widespread in a variety of contexts. He notes that even though incidents of cheating are less frequent than lying on account of the relative effort required to cheat, "[…] most human beings today are in fact disposed to regularly cheat when the relevant opportunities arise" (Miller, 2014, p. 61). Following Gino and Ariely's conclusion, one could expect that more creative leaders are more likely to behave unethically (at least with respect to dishonesty), and thus cheat more as discussed by Miller (2014). However, it is noteworthy that one reason cited

for the relative infrequency of cheating is that it requires "[…] more planning, effort, and time […]." In other words, Miller suggests that people cheat less, not because they are more virtuous with respect to cheating, but because cheating is relatively more difficult to carry out than lying. This suggests that the ease or difficulty of a behavior will influence whether or not people engage in such behavior. In an organization where dishonesty is relatively easy, one should expect to get more dishonesty. Where dishonesty is difficult (i.e., it takes more work), one should expect to see fewer instances. The situation often contributes significantly to the difficulty or ease with which one might exercise virtue or creativity. That said, Gino and Ariely's findings, while attentive to situational factors, seem to focus more on the fact that one is creative as an indicator of the likelihood that one will be dishonest in a given situation.

It seems somewhat intuitive that one who has a vivid imagination and is able to see problems from many different angles might also be adept at coming up with ingenious justifications for dishonesty. It also makes sense that when given the choice between "easy" and "hard" unethical behavior, one will likely go with that which is easier. Yet, it would be a false choice to suggest that organizations might have ethical leaders *or* creative leaders but cannot have both. On the contrary, empirical evidence for a negative correlation between creativity and dishonesty notwithstanding, I will argue that we might employ creativity in service to *better* ethical decision making. There is some empirical evidence for this as well (Bierly, Kolodinsky, & Charette, 2009).

Organizations from a variety of sectors recognize the need for leaders to be comfortable with ambiguity, take responsible but genuine risks, and creatively solve problems within substantial constraints. This requires, in conventional language, a person of *strong character*. Organizations which want creative and ethical leaders should not assume that honesty and creativity will go together easily. They should consider that creativity (and loyalty, for example) can be exercised in service to bad ends. Attention both to character development*and* situational factors will be more effective than over-reliance on either alone. More specifically, to the extent that it is possible to design environments (i.e., including one's workplace policies, organizational structure), efforts to do so in such a way as to make the desired behaviors easier and the undesirable behaviors more difficult have promise. In other words, organizations ought to try to make the right thing easier to do and the wrong thing more difficult. I will now give attention to what this might mean for leader development.

9.5 Developing Creative and Ethical Leaders

I have argued for an understanding of both virtue and creativity as skills. The presumption has been that organizations aim to develop leaders who are creative but who are first and foremost virtuous—one might call them creative leaders of character. To develop one's character is to cultivate the virtues. Under the

virtrue-as-skills view, one does this in a manner similar to the way one develops other intelligent skills, namely, through aspiration and practice guided by practical wisdom. That said, character is fragile (Adams, 2006). Insofar as character and creativity share the feature of being a skill subject to situational factors, it seems reasonable to think that creativity is fragile as well. Just as character is no *guarantee* that one will always do what is right, creativity is no guarantee that one will be maximally creative at all times. Each is subject to a variety of external factors. This has implications for how one might develop leaders to be both deeply ethical and creative.

The character development efforts with which I am familiar are almost solely focused on the individual and, more specifically, individual behavior. These efforts focus almost entirely on individual behavior and do not sufficiently address, for example, motivation or the role of emotion (i.e., feeling a certain way about an action) in ethical decision making. They do not sufficiently address how leaders during the growth process self-reflectively understand their own moral education. Leaders are, like ordinary adult persons, responsible for their moral education. If they do not take ownership of their own moral development, it is unlikely they will grow in character. Without the aspiration to virtue and the intrinsic motivation discussed earlier, progress is not likely. I take the Arendt quote in the opening of this essay to point to one important role of aspiration—namely, that in aspiring to become virtuous, people are "mak[ing] up their minds" to be good. Consider this in the context of moral education.

Assume, for the moment, that typical character education efforts are one directional and cerebral. That is to say, they aim to convey information, make arguments, and otherwise convince recipients to "do the right thing" for a variety of instrumental reasons, not the least of which is the aviodance of punishment. To the extent this is correct, we may safely assume that the recipients of such efforts did not opt in specifically for moral education. In other words, they are either young enough that their participation is non-voluntary or they have opted in to something else (e.g., a university, a military, or a commercial organization) that includes moral education. In either case, participants may find themselves the recipients of moral education aims which they tacitly accept, but to which they do not necessarily aspire. Where this is the case, efforts at character development will be less effective than they might otherwise. Recipients of such efforts are required to participate in classes, receive information, and avoid doing "the wrong thing." However, they are not required, in any meaningful sense, to pursue their own character development in the way they are required to pursue other ends (e.g., excellence in technical skills relevant to their specific role). Furthermore, in order to be successful on the moral front, participants typically need only to *refrain from certain behaviors*. No one is *required* to be virtuous. Rather, they are merely required to refrain from being vicious (i.e., refrain from lying, cheating, stealing, and so forth). Any number of reasons, other than one's intrinsic motivation to cultivate the virtues, might account for one's commitment to *not* lying, cheating, and stealing.

Additionally, character in various organizations, at least with respect to some virtues, is narrowly conceived of in domain-specific categories. For example, cour-

age in the military is typically conceived of in terms of physical, battlefield courage with very little emphasis on non-physical manifestations of courage (see a further discussion of courage in Chap. 5). Courage, at least in this context, is a domain-specific virtue. One might be courageous on the battlefield and cowardly in a professional setting where one is required to speak the uncomfortable truth to a superior. This should not be surprising when thinking about the way skills work. Consider a runner who is quite fast when running a foot race on flat pavement. Should that runner attempt to run a race of the same distance on a course filled with obstacles, hills, mud, and frigid water, he or she will not be as fast on account of the change in environment. We might think he or she has the trait "runs fast on flat ground" but not the trait "runs fast on uneven terrain with obstacles." But this is easily corrected by recognizing the difference in domains and working to develop the skill of being fast in off-road races. There is no reason such a runner could not develop the trait "runs fast off road." But we do not typically think about virtues in this way. We tend, rather, to attribute something singular and global when we say someone is courageous. This is overly simplistic and misleading, and, I think, can be helped by pressing the virtue-as-skill analogy.

Becoming virtuous is not merely about doing right action, and so character education ought to aim at developing the whole person. Picking up on the skill analogy, it is clear that becoming virtuous requires practice, often articulated in terms of habituation. By habituation here, I mean to refer to the intelligent and deliberate practice of an activity such that it becomes reflexive, the way an Olympic swimmer might execute a kick turn. This idea is not new and goes back at least to Aristotle. For Aristotle, practice is not merely an activity that helps us get better at doing right. Of practice, Burnyeat points out that it "has cognitive powers, in that it is the way we learn what is noble or just" (1980, p. 73). It is, if you will, a mode of learning, an activity that facilitates knowledge. And though individual behavior is what we can see and judge, it is not the only thing important in moral education. It is also not the *only* aim of habit formation. Philosopher Rachana Kamtekar explains that learning virtue involves, among other things, developing the appropriate emotional state associated with virtue (2004, p.481). That is, one must learn "to take the appropriate pleasure" in doing the virtuous thing (2004, p. 481). Of note here is the way Kamtekar ties practice to feeling. We see here more clearly the interconnectedness of habituation (practice), understanding (knowing *that*), activities (doing), and emotional states (feeling).

So while it is good to be concerned with right action, it is certainly not sufficient for moral development to be concerned *only* with right action or even to know what the right action would be in any given situation. One needs to feel the right way about the action *and* to see the intrinsic worth of the relevant virtue. If becoming virtuous requires more than merely to do the virtuous thing, then a system that only rewards the avoidance of wrong action will not be developing virtue in individuals so much as training individuals to avoid vice. Let us look more closely at the system or environment itself with respect to growth in virtue.

No organization is purely good or evil, and those who wish to do honest and substantive moral education would do well to try to see themselves as clearly as

possible in this regard. I suspect that pretending one's organization or institution (especially those with noble aims) is without sin breeds distrust as it belies an unrealistic grasp of the institutions' character. Clearly, we seek to correct some evils, but we cannot avoid the complicity that comes with simply being a committed member of the institution itself (Adams, 2006).

The situationist view of ethics articulated earlier is relevant here. It is worth seriously considering what role that situational factors might play in any given scenario. Consistent with the focus of this volume, I will focus on those who spend most of their professional life inside an organization. There are numerous items that might count as environmental factors, but what I have in mind here is the set of policies, administrative systems, cultural norms, and so forth ordinarily associated with an organization. These environmental factors are largely artificial (i.e., created), sometimes deliberate, and not typically crafted with a view to character development and moral decision making. Insofar as it is true that situations influence ethical decisions, it is both good news and bad news. Where one observes phenomena such as dishonesty in large bureaucracies, I argue that it is an institutional problem and cannot be solved by the efforts of individuals within the institution, except those at the very highest levels of leadership. It is common to think of doing the right thing as something which is difficult, at least insofar as doing the right thing "when it counts," so to speak. That may be true, but if institutions truly want their members to be persons of character, one way—in the spirit of training—is to make the right easier to do wherever possible.

I do not think this works against the aim of developing leaders who act according to virtue in extremis. It directly supports such an aim. The professional athlete does not train with poor equipment, inadequate facilities, a poor diet, and the like in order to learn to perform under nonideal conditions. Quite the contrary, athletes train with every aid at their disposal, habituating the right moves so that when all the support structure is gone, those moves will have become the moves that the agent knows *and feels* to be right. Thinking carefully about the environment in which one operates and designing it to support character development are critical to a thoroughgoing character development program. Yet, this is not meant to downplay at all the ownership the individual must take over his or her own character development.

We should be able to see better here the role of aspiration in developing virtue-as-skill. When considering serious athletes, no one questions whether or not the athlete aspires to be better than he or she is presently. Aspiration is a necessary component for achieving truly great athletic performance. It is at least highly unlikely that one could be, accidentally, a world-class performer. Yet, when discussing character development, the very idea of aspiration seems either to be presumed or judged irrelevant. If virtue is a kind of skill, as argued here, we should expect that it might be developed in a way similar to athletic or musical skill. A person who is brought up in a good environment with exemplary role models will be in a position similar to that of a person who has natural athletic or musical gifts. Each will have skills that resemble those of experts, but they will not themselves be experts apart from aspiration and effort.

With respect to character development efforts, a second point made clear in the athletic context is that athletes are not motivated by punishments and prohibition. Probably no one ever won a gold medal by focusing on a long list of "do not" items. Do not false start. Avoid running off course. Do not run slowly. Instead, athletes are surrounded by positive exhortations. Be fast. Be strong. Be focused. Be rested. Aim at winning. Aim to be the best, and the like. This seems to contrast with the way many organizations approach character development. Many organizations conceive of ethics within their organizations as clear lists of prohibitions—don't lie, cheat, or steal. Subsequently, the institutions develop a culture where members tend to focus on *not* lying, for example, rather than*being* truthful. If one can avoid lying, which is not identical to being truthful, one can successfully navigate the system, evade punishment, and move up within the organization.

For Gaut, creativity is a skill (2009). Through Amabile, the exercise of creativity is subject to environmental factors (1996). As such, creativity shares many features with the conception of virtue I have set forth. The athletic image is helpful for communicating the development of virtue, but the image has some very clear limits. One significant contrast between sports and virtue is that it is hard to measure progress with respect to virtue. A stopwatch can measure progress in the 100 meter sprint, and run times make it fairly easy to compare one runner to another. There is no such device for virtue. I do not deny that virtue can be meaningfully assessed, only that it is not obvious how one might reliably do so. Creativity is similar to virtue in this regard; it is difficult to measure and even more difficult to compare persons to one another. Though I am not prepared to argue that creativity is itself a virtue, I think developing creativity in the context of developing virtue could help us both grasp more clearly what we are supposed to be doing (e.g., aspiring to X, practicing, and so forth) *and* simultaneously give us better tools for addressing difficult ethical problems (i.e., enhancing our ability to exercise practical wisdom).

There are at least two ways creativity is helpfully related to virtue and leader development. The first has to do with the mutually reinforcing nature of virtue and creativity on account of their similarity as skills that require practical wisdom to exercise in expert ways. The second is that creative problem solving, a subset of creativity, could help us better address difficult ethical problems. I discussed the idea of creativity as skill above. From here, the focus will be on creative-problem solving and creativity skills as they pertain to moral education and leader development.

As preivously noted, Swanton claims that creativity is connected to all the virtues (2005, p. 161). This seems exactly right. Practical wisdom just is the mature ability to bring the appropriate virtues to bear in any given context. *That* is something one cannot simply copy by observation. It takes creativity to see how a virtue (or a cluster of virtues) might apply in unfamiliar and complex situations. This seems to align with the claim by Sawyer that "Creativity is part of what makes us human" (2012, p. 4). This suggests that creativity is a uniquely human skill, and virtue seems evermore so. If this is right, then perhaps virtue and creativity might go together in ways not previously considered. One might even argue that creativity itself is a virtue (Kieran, 2014). This seems plausible but would require separate treatment elsewhere.

Though there are many good reasons to develop creativity in persons, the assumption here is that most organizations are primarily interested in creativity in the context of problem solving. The creative problem solver embraces a mindset that, when given a challenge under substantial constraints, tends to believe that there is a way to meet the challenge. That might turn out to be false, but the creative problem solver sees problems as opportunities. As such, hard problems are just greater opportunities. The creative mind does not ask for either a blank slate (i.e., no constraints) or a blank check (i.e., unlimited resources). Rather, the creative mind welcomes certain kinds of constraints. By constraints here, I mean things such as budget, space, materials, and so forth. These sorts of constraints can push creativity. Other kinds of constraints such as negative pressure or impossible timelines would more likely work against creativity. Generally speaking, constraints drive creative solutions. The greater the constraints—up to a point—the greater the level of creativity one must exercise in service to the problem.

Furthermore, many organizations are calling for creative problem solving in all environments, whether those of extreme complexity or mundane, "everyday" problems. Problems which range from "establish security in Eastern Afghanistan" (in a military context) to "simplify the administrative process for employee leave" (in a business context) might be addressed by a similar process. With Weston, I will focus on creative problem solving "not because it is the only or even the most essential thing in ethics, but because *it has a special promise*" (2007, p. 7). For any given problem, creativity expands the set of possible solutions (Weston, 2007). Often this comes about through a process of reframing—considering alternative ways to frame the problem itself. This is especially helpful for problems which seem to only have undesirable solutions, problems where we feel stuck. Problem reframing is one of the more powerful concepts Weston offers as a way to unlock new possible solutions. Rather than solving the problem directly, consider that a good goal is simply to make progress (Weston, 2007, p. 35). The basic idea of reframing is taking the problem as presented, considering whether or not the problem as presented is really the problem, and considering the problem from within a different set of boundaries, a new frame. Weston illustrates the power of reframing with the real-life story of department store owner Emmanuel Evans. "The store had an attached, sit-down cafeteria. Segregation-era laws forbade the seating of black people in such an eating establishment" (2007, p. 36). Not willing to treat any of his customers with prejudice, Evans decided to take the indirect approach and change the situation for his white customers. To address his problem, he simply removed all the tables so there was no seating for anyone. The result? "No law was broken, but a powerful statement was made. His cafeteria became the first desegregated eating place in town" (p. 37).

Despite empirical evidence which suggests the contrary (Gino and Ariely, 2012), creativity and virtue can and should go together in a co-operative way. One problem-solving method that seems well suited here is human-centered design. Human-centered design, or design thinking (see Liedtka, 2013), is one approach to creative problem solving that has several relevant upshots for the purposes of developing leaders who are creative and virtuous. First, as a human-centered approach, empathy is a central feature. For design thinking, empathy is a front-end skill that is

necessary for the conduct of ethnographic research—an early step of the design process. Second, as a method of divergent problem solving, the power of design thinking is, to some extent, a function of the imaginative capacity of those exercising the process. Werhane (1999) writes that imagination, particularly *moral imagination*, "enables us to become aware of the moral demands of particular events and the conceptual schemes or mental models operating in specific contexts." Beyond that, it "accounts for our ability to reframe our experiences in different terms [… and…] helps in developing fresh interpretations of particular scenarios and creating new perspectives" (Werhane, 1999, p. 107). Design thinking is only one of many creative problem-solving methods, and there are dozens of individual techniques one might learn in an effort to enhance one's own creativity (see Sawyer, 2013). The design process forces one to get more attuned to the situational factors, as well as, and especially, the human factors, that must be considered when addressing ill-structured, human problems. This emphasis on attention to situational factors, and especially the way they influence moral decisions, would greatly enhance character development efforts. Furthermore, developing creativity skills in the context of character development would better achieve the aim of developing creative leaders who self-reflectively view their creativity as limited by ethical concerns. Though additional ethical constraints would undoubtedly make some problems more difficult to solve, mastery of a divergent problem-solving process, such as human-centered design, would give leaders tools with which to make progress on even the most challenging problems. In other words, teaching creativity through design thinking with an overt emphasis on virtue development could produce more virtuous leaders who are also exceptionally creative.

9.6 Conclusion

Organizations concerned with developing leaders of character who are also exceptionally creative will benefit from considering virtue and creativity as skills that can be trained. To do this well, inidivuals must aspire to grow both in virtue and creativity, be intrinsically motivated to do so, and develop a sensitivity to the wide variety of situational factors that influence ethical decision making. They must aim to cultivate practical wisdom as they seek to apply the virtues creatively in complex and ethically ambiguous contexts. Virtue will delimit the ethical boundaries of creative problem solving. Creativity will expand the possible ways the virtues may be exercised with respect to a particular situation. In the context of an organization's character-focused leader development program, teaching creativity both in parallel to and embedded within character development efforts would yield, on balance, leaders who both make better ethical decisions and are better equipped to make progress on even the most difficult ethical problems.

Disclaimer The views expressed here are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy position of the United States Military Academy, the Department of the Army, the Department of Defense, or the US Government.

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