Christian B. Miller. *Moral Character: An Empirical Theory*. Oxford University Press 2013. 368 pp. $60.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199674350); $34.95 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780198744207).

In the last fifty to sixty years psychology, especially social psychology, has shown us how wrong and at times delusional we can be when it comes to our behavior. Studies have consistently shown that character traits we think we have such as compassion or honesty can be undermined easily by any number of situational variables. Christian Miller's book is a thorough and systematic account of the effect of such studies on virtue ethics. After an introductory chapter the book is in three parts. In the first, Miller spells out the studies that have been done on helping behavior. Among other factors these include work on the effect of guilt, embarrassment, moods, empathy, and groups. Miller's research is extremely impressive. I have never seen a work in virtue ethics that so extensively makes use of these studies in psychology. The second part puts forth Miller's claim that it is more useful to think of humans as composed of Mixed Character Traits in contrast to the traditional view of virtues. Given the studies in psychology he argues that this is a more effective and realistic way of viewing human behavior. He begins with what he calls 'Mixed Helping Traits' and then generalizes this account to character traits in general. In the last part of the book he then applies his analysis to two other specific areas—aggression and lying. My response to the book is, as Miller might say, mixed.

The first major part of the book is a highly valuable resource for anyone interested in virtue ethics. One of the strongest points in this section is the distinction between altruistic and egoistic motivations. As the studies show, much of what we consider ethical behavior is actually done for egoistic reasons and Miller does a fine job of differentiating these motivations using the psychological studies. The chapters on guilt and embarrassment especially point this out. For example, much of our helping behavior is done to relieve guilt which Miller posits as fundamentally an egoistic motive. Likewise for positive moods. We act so as to maintain a positive mood or eliminate a negative one or we act so as to avoid embarrassment. What seems like altruistic behavior is actually egoistic. Miller argues that the one motivator that is actually altruistic is empathy and again he gives many examples of studies that show that empathy produces helping behavior independent of other egoistic desires. Miller does an excellent job of bringing together in one place a great deal of the most relevant material on character done in psychology in recent decades.

The next part is much more problematic. Miller argues that traditional virtues do not capture the reality of the facts unearthed by psychology. Miller argues that the traditional model of virtues does not apply to most people and that in fact most humans have, with regard to helping others, what he calls 'Mixed Helping Traits'. Our character is composed of a combination of beliefs and dispositions that sometimes activate helping others, sometimes not. Sometimes we are aware of these compounding factors, often not. Innumerable individual factors enter into the picture including personal histories and the relationship between the actual situation and the way the situation is perceived by the agent. These mixed traits are often consistent in the individual but may to the outside observer appear wildly inconsistent. The complexity of the mixed trait is simply not apparent to the observer unless that person knows the agent well, indeed, very well. Miller argues that Mixed Helping Traits make much more sense of the psychological data. After generalizing this account to ethics as a whole, Miller then in the last part of the book specifies some other mixed traits such as Mixed Aggression Traits and Mixed Truthfulness Traits and applies his analysis to studies like Milgram's shock experiment and to studies done on lying.

My problem with this section of the book is that I am not at all sure if anything is gained by postulating an entity called a 'Mixed Helping Trait' over and above the actual factors that inhibit or activate helping behavior. Virtues have both a descriptive and prescriptive role in ethics. If someone is compassionate, that describes a general tendency a person has, but the term is also highly normative. Miller says that a Mixed Helping Trait is neither a virtue nor a vice. It is simply descriptive. It would make no sense to say one should have more or less of the Mixed Helping Trait. But, if it is descriptive, what exactly does it describe? Apparently that people have character tendencies to help in some cases and not others, depending on a wide variety of factors brought to light by psychology. Why is it not more effective to say that helping behavior is simply impeded or enhanced by such and such factors? The ethicist can then go on, as Miller does in the previous section of the book, to delineate some of these factors while admitting that much more work needs to be done. To say that people have 'Mixed Character Traits' is to hypostatize the fact that multiple factors impede or enhance compassionate (or honest or courageous) behavior. Yes, we have mixed characters. Let's find out what those factors are that impede ethical behavior. That is the enormous value of the psychological experiments. What is gained by turning this complexity into an entity itself and then capitalizing it—Mixed Helping Traits, Mixed Aggression Traits, and Mixed Truthfulness Traits? The amazing fact that a properly situated mirror can affect our moral behavior or that a pleasant fragrance enhances helping are discoveries that are breakthroughs in understanding human ethical behavior. It is the facts that are important. Saying that we have a 'Mixed Helping Trait' adds nothing new and is an unnecessary abstraction when what we need to do is both analyze and make people aware of the facts of their behavior relative to helping others. Dogs bark at various times and places depending on the situation, how the dog perceives it, the animal's life history, its current physiological condition, etc. Not much is added, and little is gained by a dog trainer, by saying that dogs have a Mixed Barking Trait.

Since Miller admits that Mixed Character Traits are descriptive only and are neither virtues nor vices, they seem to be of little help when it comes to normative ethics. He claims the realism of his view adds depth to the analysis of behavior and that in turn has normative implications. Yes, except that claiming that one 'has' a mixed trait is simply to restate in a more abstract way the effect of situations, personal history, etc., on actions. It is the studies themselves that show the normative effect of factors like guilt or embarrassment on virtues like compassion, honesty and courage. The empirical information about human behavior is the relevant factor and this specific data has normative implications because it impacts traits we consider positive. Miller claims his analysis is conceptually superior to the traditional virtues in understanding human behavior. I would argue that it is more effective to keep the model of the traditional virtues as normative ideals and talk about the specific factors that inhibit or enhance them for an individual. It just is not clear why another intermediate conceptual entity is necessary or useful.

The last part of the book cites some fascinating work in aggression and lying. Most ethicists are familiar with Milgram but many of the other studies Miller cites are eye-opening even to those who are roughly familiar with the literature. But what is strange about this last part is that Miller in several places says things like 'as my theory implies' or 'predicts'. His Mixed Character Traits theory arises from the complexity shown by the studies in psychology. He then turns around and says that his theory 'predicts', not surprisingly, the mixed motivations in behavior discovered in studies in other areas. But how is this a 'prediction' or, if it is, how is it useful beyond what we already know? Compare the prediction that obedience to an authority figure can severely dampen helping behavior with the prediction that the Mixed Helping Trait will at times lead to impeding helping behavior. If

I wanted to make a prediction with substance, I would pinpoint the conditions I have experienced in the past (or that we have learned from psychology) and then the occurrence of those situations again might predict similar behavior and maybe I can do something to change it. Hypostatizing a wide variety of reactions to different situations as a distinct trait adds little descriptively and is no help predictively.

I recommend the book as a resource for the work in psychology as it is relevant to virtue ethics. It would be a useful teaching aid in that it would both give students valuable new information and be personally enlightening to them. It would also provide much grist for excellent discussion. Finally, it would give students a chance to argue whether adding 'Mixed Character Traits' as a descriptor of human behavior has heuristic value or not. I do not believe the latter adds much to virtue ethics itself. It does not replace the model of the traditional normative virtues as enhanced or impeded by the extensive and highly relevant information gained from psychology.

Daniel Putman, University of Wisconsin Colleges