

# Manipulation, character, and ego depletion: A response to Michael Cholbi

Aaron D. Brooks<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Michael Cholbi argues that moral character plays no role in ego-depleted, manipulated action (2014). He bases his claim on ego depletion studies in the psychological literature. Using an Aristotelian account of virtue and moral character, I will give two arguments as to why Cholbi's conclusion is too quick. While conceding the possibility of ego depletion and its potential influence in a manipulated environment, I first argue that character plays *precisely* the role that Aristotle believed it to play for at least two character types. Indeed, ego depletion studies may be good indicators of these types of character. Second, I argue that Cholbi has made a mistake in causal reasoning – because these ego depletion studies have not controlled for the influence of all-things-considered judgment in the participant's deliberation – judgments which are central to Aristotle's understanding of character – Cholbi is not justified in concluding that character plays no role in ego-depleted, manipulated action.

**Keywords:** manipulation, action theory, ego depletion, character, virtue ethics, Aristotle, Cholbi.

## Introduction

*We must not listen to those who advise us 'being men to think human thoughts, and being mortal to think mortal thoughts' but must put on immortality as much as possible and strain every nerve to live according to that best part of us, which, being small in bulk, yet much more in its power and honor surpasses all else (Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics).*

In his essay, "The Implications of Ego Depletion for the Ethics and Politics of Manipulation," Michael Cholbi argues that moral character plays no role in ego-depleted, manipulated action (2014). He bases his claim on ego depletion studies in the psychological literature. Using an Aristotelian account of virtue and moral character, I will give two arguments as to why Cholbi's conclusion is too quick. While conceding the possibility of ego depletion and its potential influence in a manipulated environment, I first argue that character plays *precisely* the role that Aristotle believed it to play for at least two character types. Indeed, ego depletion studies may be good indicators of these types of character. Second, I argue that Cholbi has made a mistake in causal reasoning – because these ego depletion studies have not controlled for the influence of all-things-considered judgment in the participant's deliberation – judgments which are central to

<sup>1</sup> Florida State University. 600  
W College Ave, Tallahassee, FL  
32306, USA.  
E-mail: aarondbrooks1@gmail.com

Aristotle's understanding of character – Cholbi is not justified in concluding that character plays no role in ego-depleted, manipulated action.

## Cholbi on ego depletion and manipulation

Ego depletion has received much attention in the philosophical and psychological literature since its introduction in the groundbreaking Baumeister *et al.* paper, "Ego Depletion: Is the Active Self a Limited Resource?" (1998). In that study, the authors offer the following definition of ego depletion, which will be assumed for the rest of this paper:

*[Ego depletion is] a temporary reduction in the self's capacity or willingness to engage in volitional action (including controlling the environment, controlling the self, making choices, and initiating action) caused by prior exercise of volition (Baumeister et al., 1998, p. 1253).*

In other words, they believe that when willing some act on behalf of oneself, one uses a limited resource that is capable of being depleted, thus making it more difficult to will the next action (p. 1252). This phenomenon of ego depletion applies to acts of volition issuing from the self's "executive function," or acts resulting from "the self acting autonomously on its own behalf" (p. 1252). Thus, they associate ego depletion with conscious, autonomous acts of the will.

Ego depletion has obvious implications, the clearest being that an agent who exercises her will at moment  $t_1$  will be more ego-depleted at  $t_1$  than she was at  $t_2$ , and thus will find it harder to will a particular action at  $t_2$  than she would have if she had not willed an action at  $t_1$ . By hypothesis, "find it harder" simply means that an ego-depleted agent will have less strength or energy to will a particular action at  $t_2$ .

Michael Cholbi believes another implication of ego depletion is that those who are "well-positioned to manipulate others [may do so] by creating choice environments temporally ordered so that ego depletion makes individual agents more likely to choose in ways the manipulator desires that they choose" (2014, p. 203). Let us call this the *Ego Depletion Manipulation Thesis* (EDMT). This thesis says that those who are familiar with ego depletion may use that knowledge to manipulate others. They can do so by offering other agents temporally ordered choices when those agents are ego-depleted and less likely to resist their wayward desires. Cholbi makes one further claim – a claim which will be the central focus of this paper. He argues that the EDMT implies that moral character plays no role in ego-depleted, manipulated action; or at least, less of a role than we previously thought. I will explore how this implication works in a moment.

Cholbi distinguishes between the standard view of manipulation and a subtler type, which he calls "ambient manipu-

lation." According to this type, "manipulation occurs when an individual operates within a constructed environment designed to encourage her to make certain choices, even without those doing the encouraging being present" (2014, p. 208). So ambient manipulation is a function of one's environment. It is this type of manipulation with which the EDMT is primarily concerned.

For Cholbi, the key to manipulation and its implications for character's (non)-role in ego-depleted deliberation seems to be that ego depletion results in a person acting against her otherwise-settled, all-things-considered judgments. For the purposes of this essay, I will understand these judgments to be what an agent would judge her best course of action to be if she were placed within a particular context, all relevant reasons for acting and against acting having been considered by the agent. Let us denote the agent's all-things-considered judgment as  $R_a$ . It is pivotal to Cholbi's account that  $R_a$  is not the reason for an ego-depleted agent's action, but rather the judgment she *would* make upon reflection, outside of the choice environment. Cholbi contends an ego-depleted individual is less likely to act in her own best interests; ego-depleting events make it harder for her executive function to will the next action, so it is more likely that she acts against  $R_a$ . This does not necessarily mean that she acts without recognizing reasons in the moment; instead, if she, being ego-depleted, is manipulated into doing action X based on reason  $R_1$ , the assumption is that she would not have done X when not ego-depleted, because her usual reason,  $R_a$ , for not doing X would have been sufficient to keep her from doing X. But given the agent's manipulated choice-structure due to ego depletion,  $R_1$  is all she needs to will X instead of  $R_a$ . In other words, if she would normally act on  $R_a$  when *not* ego-depleted, she may not see  $R_a$  as sufficient reason not to do X when she is ego-depleted. In fact, she may not recognize  $R_a$  at all, but instead respond to  $R_1$  in a way that she would normally prefer not to respond.

On this reading of Cholbi, there are two interconnected reasons for the agent's anomalous action. First, she is ego-depleted. Second – and a consequence of the first reason – the agent's choice-structure has been rearranged without her conscious assent. Thus, her usual judgments about what count as reasons, and especially her all-things-considered judgment about what the best action is, are irrelevant to her when ego-depleted – but not because she thinks them to be irrelevant in the moment. Rather, she does not think about them in the way she usually does. Thus, her executive function is not responsive to  $R_a$  in the way it normally would be on her behalf. Admittedly, the mechanics of Cholbi's account are still unclear, which is itself a criticism. But rather than getting bogged down here, we can understand Cholbi to be asserting ego depletion requires that an agent, when making an ego-depleted decision, will not understand  $R_a$  to be her usual all-things-considered judgment. Indeed, it will not be the agent's reason for action.

Finally, Cholbi says that the goal of ambient manipulation is to "encourage her to make certain choices" (2014, p. 208). Notice, however, that putting an ego-depleted agent into a manipulated environment wherein she must make a choice does not yet explain why she is more likely to choose

against  $R_a$  when making an ego-depleted decision. It would seem the ego depletion literature simply implies that she will have trouble willing anything at all, rather than only having trouble willing her all-things-considered judgments. That is, no matter what the choices may be or how they are made, a state of ego depletion in the agent only implies that she will be reluctant to engage in volitional action, period.

At this point in the argument, Cholbi gets help from Richard Holton's (2009) theory of "judgment shifts." Cholbi argues that ego depletion results in a shift of judgment which results in the affected individual not being able to recognize and act on  $R_a$ , but instead to act on desires formed at the time of the weakening of the executive function within the context of ego depletion. "Ego depletion thus makes a difference not to acting rationally as such but to whether we do what we most have reason to do" (2014, p. 212). So it would seem that Cholbi means to say that the agent does not act for reasons, but simply based on desires which do not require a forceful act of the will to pursue. Or, if one prefers to think of desires as reasons, one can understand Cholbi to be saying that these reasons are the only ones the agent seriously considers before acting.

Still, we may wonder what is special about these desire-reasons that would make her consider them more in an ego-depleted state. Cholbi is not exactly clear on this point, as he rejects Holton's understanding of judgment shifts being the result of strong and tempting desires to act against  $R_a$  while simultaneously recognizing  $R_a$  as one's all-things-considered judgment. Instead, Cholbi simply claims that ego depletion interferes with the executive function "so as to produce desires that, in turn, bar agents from recognizing and acting upon their all-things-considered judgments" (2014, p. 212). For Cholbi, then, the driving force behind judgment shifts seems to be a desire contrary to the agent's all-things-considered judgment – in the sense that it interferes with the agent's ability to recognize  $R_a$  as her all-things-considered judgment.

The import for manipulation is obvious: the manipulator can use ego depletion as a means of pitting a person's desires against that person's reasons. It is not necessary to manipulate a person's desires or beliefs directly, but rather the context of choice. Ego-depleted choices may still be based on reasons, but these choices are irrational insofar as they depend on the seemingly irrelevant-with-respect-to-reasons temporal arrangement of the choices presented to the individual at  $t_1$ ,  $t_2$ , etc. Though the time at which a choice is made should not, *ceteris paribus*, usually matter, things are different when ego-depleted. When ego-depleted, an agent will have more difficulty acting in accordance with  $R_a$  at  $t_2$  (post ego depletion) than at  $t_1$  (pre ego depletion). Further, it will not do to argue that at  $t_2$  we can simply attribute a new all-things-considered judgment to the agent. Because we are assuming ego depletion, we must concede that the ego-depleted agent finds it difficult to exercise his executive function, i.e. to act autonomously on his own behalf. Holton and Cholbi understand this to mean that the agent finds it difficult to act in a way that the agent judges best

for him, all-things-considered. Thus, if one were to say that the agent's all-things-considered judgment changes when ego-depleted, this claim would amount to saying that the agent *does* exercise his executive faculty in a way that he judges best for him, all-things-considered. But in fact, I have claimed that the EDMT assumes that he does not. To summarize: to use ego depletion for manipulation, the manipulator must alter the manipulated agent's environment so that she undergoes a judgment shift, thereby recognizing and responding to desire-reasons that are normally insufficient to make her act against her usual all-things-considered judgment.

All of this discussion serves as a necessary precursor to Cholbi's central claim, against which I argue for the remainder of this essay: he claims that the EDMT implies that the emphasis on character within the Aristotelian ethical tradition is misguided – that is, character plays far less of a role in self-controlled decisions than Aristotle assumed – for ego depletion and other situational/temporal factors influence an agent in non-rational ways that often result in an agent acting apart from his or her own established character. Let us call such action "out of character." I will discuss the relation between character and all-things-considered judgments in the next section.

I conclude this section with a brief example, to which I will make continued reference for the remainder of this paper. Cholbi considers a shopper in a supermarket. Normally, a person entering the store who has judged, all things considered ( $R_a$ ), that chocolate and cigarettes should be avoided will not seek those items out, even if that person has desires for those objects which are contrary to  $R_a$ . But his executive function will find it harder to resist such temptations when they are offered at checkout after an hour of ego-depleting choices, i.e. employing his executive functions to make informed decisions regarding nutritional data, recipe data, pricing data, and the like. In other words, because a lengthy period of practicing self-control and good decision-making leads to ego depletion, it is more likely that our unfortunate shopper can be manipulated to act against his own better judgment when his choices are arranged in such a way. By the time he arrives at checkout, he may not be able to recognize his all-things-considered judgment about candy/cigarettes. Instead, he may act for new desire-reasons: "I'm really hungry and tired – I need some sugar and some smokes to revive my energy." In the moment of temptation, it is easier for the executive function to act according to these reasons, rather than  $R_a$ . Notice, too, that this new judgment is not a new all-things-considered judgment, as Holton would claim. Rather, on Cholbi's account, if asked in a non-ego-depleted state, the shopper would not agree that these desire-reasons justify buying sugar and smokes. Rather, this new judgment derives from desires which bar him from recognizing and acting on  $R_a$ .

## Aristotelian rejoinders

Cholbi's view seems plausible. My dispute is not with his analysis of the possibility of the temporal influence of ego

depletion within a manipulated choice environment, but with the theoretical conclusions he draws about the limits of character in relation to ego depletion, and especially with his much-too-brief discussion of the role character plays in decision-making within the Aristotelian tradition. Cholbi merely mentions one type of character, the temperate (virtuous), deeming it “rare and ephemeral” (2014, p. 214). Aristotle, however, describes six moral states of character, at least three of which are relevant to the topic of manipulation. Discussing Aristotle’s view of the six moral states of character will take us too far afield. For the purposes of this essay, it will only be necessary to discuss the temperate (virtuous), the continent, and the incontinent of character.

Turning to Aristotle’s theory, the basic heuristic of character-types from Book III.10-12 and Book VII of his *Nicomachean Ethics* is as follows:

- *Virtuous*: Subject to rational principle; have moderate/good appetites
- *Continent*: Subject to rational principle; have excessive/bad appetites
- *Incontinent*: Knowledge of, but not subject to, the rational principle; excessive/bad appetites

When Aristotle talks of the “rational principle,” he means something like the rational part of the soul which rightly moves someone towards the best objects (Book I.13). In relation to practical reason, the rational principle requires the rational person, insofar as she acts rationally, to discern the universal and minor premises of a practical syllogism, and thus act in a manner that ‘fits’ the rational principle. The part of the soul comprised of appetites, on the other hand, may submit or rebel against the rational principle, depending on the soul’s established dispositions or habituation (Book I.13).

This interpretation of character in Aristotle is perhaps overly simplified and not without opposition, but given the bounds of this essay, this interpretation suffice to give one possible Aristotelian response to Cholbi. Notice, first, that Aristotle’s virtuous person is subject to the rational principle and has desires for what is good. In Aristotle’s prose, the temperate (virtuous) person desires “the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought; and this is what the rational principle directs” (Book III.12). So we might say that the temperate’s all-things-considered judgment accords with the temperate’s desires. Perhaps it would be a misstep to substitute “all-things-considered judgment” for “rational principle,” but it seems like a plausible gloss on Aristotle’s language. Because the rational principle serves to order a person’s reasons for acting, and because the rational principle also serves to move a person towards what is good, it does not seem like a stretch

to say that Aristotle’s “rational principle” serves the same role as Cholbi’s “all-things-considered judgments.” Indeed, we might simply want to say that for Aristotle the rational principle of an agent dictates that agent’s all-things-considered judgments. Let us assume this is so. With this understanding of character in hand, I will now move to analyze the relationship between character and ego-depleted action.

The virtuous person’s all-things-considered judgments accord with his desires. By definition, a virtuous person does not desire actions contrary to his all-things-considered judgments. Thus, the EDMT may be true, but simply not apply to the virtuous person. A virtuous person, no matter how ego-depleted, simply will not desire to buy cigarettes or candy after an hour of shopping because such desires would be contrary to his established all-things-considered judgment,<sup>2</sup> whether or not he recognizes his all-things-considered judgment as such when ego-depleted. For Aristotle, if such a contrary desire arose, the agent would, by definition, simply be intemperate if that desire was not in correct relation and proportion to the agent’s usual rational principle.

Cholbi seems aware of this objection; therefore, rather than debating the possibility of the virtuous person’s ability to be manipulated, he argues that such a person is rare and ephemeral. But this is an empirical claim about the frequency of a certain character-type, not a claim about whether or not character plays a role in ego-depleted choices. In fact, we have seen that on an Aristotelian scheme, in order for someone to be considered virtuous, character must play a role. In response to the charge of rarity, I argue that rarity is hardly a problem for Aristotle. Aristotle’s argument does not rely upon how common virtue really is; indeed, his overall rhetoric seems to imply that the virtuous person is rare, and perhaps only theoretical. In any case, more empirical evidence on both sides would be required to decide. Because some people in the ego depletion experiments did not act intemperately when manipulated and ego-depleted, it is possible that their actions were a direct result of their temperate character.<sup>3</sup>

For the moment, let us pass over the rather complicated case of the continent character and move on to the incontinent. This person has the appropriate all-things-considered judgment, but does not abide by it due to conflicting desires – the incontinent of character acts against his all-things-considered judgment. That is, the incontinent has the same rational principle as the virtuous, but this principle conflicts with his current appetites. Thus, the incontinent of character may be subject to manipulation in accordance with the EDMT. But Cholbi’s claim that the EDMT implies that character plays no role does not follow. It is easy to see why. While an agent is ego-depleted and experiencing a strong desire for cig-

<sup>2</sup> Of course, this point assumes, for the sake of argument, that smoking and eating candy are actions contrary to the rational principle of the virtuous.

<sup>3</sup> Cholbi also references situationist experiments, which some interpret as conclusive evidence that “human behavior is more heavily influenced by external or situational factors than by durable psychological traits or features” (2014, p. 213). Again, this may be true. But it is worth mentioning that in at least some of the experiments, although many acted against their all-things-considered judgments, a small percentage did not. Might those few have been temperate?

arettes or candy which conflicts with his usual all-things-considered judgments, it is likely that he will indulge. In fact, due to judgment shifts caused by the manipulated environment, he may not even consider *not* buying candy. But in this case, *it accords with his character*, since he is the type of person who acts against his all-things-considered judgment when faced with inordinate desires. Contrary to Cholbi's argument, then, the incontinent's character does indeed play a pivotal role in the actions he takes. In fact, given the ego depletion studies, it may simply be that a larger percentage of the population is incontinent than Cholbi would have thought.

We might conclude from this initial analysis of the virtuous and incontinent character types that ego depletion studies serve as a good test for characterizing a person. That is, we can simply turn Cholbi's claim on its head: the ego depletion studies show what types of desires a person has when ego-depleted, because the person in an ego-depleted environment acts according to these desire-reasons. If the person's actions accord with the person's usual all-things-considered judgment, he may very well be virtuous (assuming, as I did above, that all-things-considered judgments are dictated by a rational principle which directs a person to act as they 'ought'). If he does not act according to his usual all-things-considered judgment, he would seem to be incontinent (but I will need to qualify this statement after considering the continent of character).

Cholbi might object that I have not made a case for the role of character in ego-depleted action as much as I have shown that certain *actions* may be deemed virtuous or incontinent. In other words, Cholbi might still argue that character plays no role in an ego-depleted environment precisely because moral character requires a certain type of response to one's all-things-considered judgment; but by hypothesis, those who are ego-depleted have an executive function that is not properly responsive to their all-things-considered judgments. Indeed, they may not be in a state to judge at all. Thus, whether or not their actions when ego-depleted happen to correspond to what would be their all-things-considered judgment when not ego-depleted, ego-depleted action cannot be a function of their character. Character requires judgment; if no judgment is made, character is not involved. Rather, it is only a function of their desires and non-rational environmental factors. The import of this objection is that ego-depleted decisions cannot be determined by the agent's character while in an ego-depleted state because these decisions do not take into account the all-things-considered judgments which would normally issue from the agent's character. Indeed, whatever the ego-depleted action, it may properly be called "out of character" for the agent.

To this objection, an Aristotelian can reply that whether or not the agents in the study were conscious of their all-things-considered judgments in the moment, what really matters for character is whether their actions *accorded* with the rational principle. If their actions did not accord with the rational principle, they are incontinent. If their actions did

accord, they are temperate. In either case, because an agent's appetites play a role in the agent's character, the ego depletion studies can still help us decide the nature of an agent's character by showing us how the ego-depleted agent acts. For Aristotle especially, such action reveals character.

But what about the case of the continent? Recall that, for Aristotle, the continent person is one who is able to submit to the rational principle in the presence of contradictory desires. So then, a continent person does not act contrary to her rational principle and all-things-considered judgment, even though her desires may be opposed to those judgments. But assuming the continent person can only act based on desire-reasons when in an ego-depleted state, *i.e.* assuming the EDMT, we seem to be faced with the conclusion that those of continent character will act according to desires which may be contrary to their all-things-considered judgment. That is, the continent may perform actions "out of character," thus upholding Cholbi's claim that the EDMT implies that character plays no role in ego-depleted environments.

At a first pass, the Aristotelian might be tempted to argue that by definition the continent person, no matter how ego-depleted, simply will not buy cigarettes or candy, even though she experiences contrary desires (assuming that buying such things contradicts her all-things-considered judgments). Instead, she will act according to the rational principle and her all-things-considered judgment. But for what reason would she act in this way, given that she is at this moment ego-depleted and, as stipulated by the EDMT, does not recognize her all-things-considered judgment? If it is because she does not have wayward desires, then she, by definition, is not continent, but virtuous; if it is because she recognizes her all-things-considered judgment, then she does not fall under the purview of the EDMT. The only way out for the Aristotelian would seem to be to claim that the continent acts for some other reason, which by happy coincidence accords with her rational principle (which she does not recognize when ego-depleted) but which does not accord with her ego-depleted desires. But it is hard to see what such a reason could be, if not a strong desire-reason or all-things-considered judgment. If it is a fleeting thought or random neurological event, the Aristotelian would not want to attribute this to the agent's character. Thus, if we understand ego-depletion as stipulated by the EDMT, explaining the role of the continent agent's character in an ego-depleted environment is difficult for the Aristotelian.

A better way out for the Aristotelian is to deny the understanding of ego depletion assumed by the EDMT, *i.e.* to deny the controversial claim I made in the beginning that ego depletion requires an agent to be unaware of her all-things-considered-judgment. Indeed, my second argument against Cholbi is that to grant this controversial claim is to grant more than the data suggests. Cholbi has made a mistake in causal reasoning. Those who conducted the study did not ask the participants whether they had in mind their usual all-things-considered-judgement when deliberating. Indeed, as I mentioned at the very beginning, ego depletion

as understood by Baumeister *et al.* does not require that an agent fail to recognize his all-things-considered judgment as such when deliberating. Rather, it only requires that he find the next act of will more difficult than the last, where the evidence used to make this claim was that more people seemed to act against their all-things-considered judgment when ego-depleted than those who were not ego-depleted. But because some people did act in accordance with their all-things-considered judgment, it may very well be that those people who exercised self-control did so because they recognized their all-things-considered judgments as reasons. That is, some people may have acted as they did because they were continent or virtuous.

So in order to understand the EDMT and its implications in the way that Cholbi has, we would need a study that controls for all-things-considered judgments and their role in ego-depleted deliberation. Because the original study does not control for these judgments, my Cholbi-inspired inference that character plays no role for the continent agent in a manipulated, ego-depleted environment is unsupported by the study. In order for my Cholbian inference to be valid, the new study I am suggesting would have to overcome several problems: not only would the researchers need to know the agents' all-things-considered judgments, they would also need to establish that desires contrary to these judgments were driving the decisions of these agents while ego-depleted; moreover, they would need to know that the agents made no reference to their all-things-considered judgments when deliberating. Finally, they would need to contrast the agents in the manipulated, ego-depleted environment with agents in a non-ego-depleted environment (where the agents in the non-ego-depleted environment have most likely not undergone judgment shifts). Assuming such a study is even possible, the EDMT and Cholbi's inference would be confirmed if the continent and incontinent choose similarly in the ego-depleted environment, in contrast to how continent agents choose in the non-ego-depleted environment.

## Conclusion

The central argument of this paper is that Cholbi's inference from the EDMT is invalid. First, I argued that if we assume the EDMT is correct, it is only relevant for those who are continent of character. To put it another way, if the EDMT is correct, it can help us identify the virtuous. Because the EDMT assumes that desires play the decisive role in ego-depleted deliberation, and because the virtuous and incontinent act in accordance with their desires, we can assume they will do so in the ego-depleted environment. Those who act in accordance with their all-things-considered judgments in the ego-depleted environments are virtuous. Those who do not may be incontinent, in which case their character plays precisely the role we would expect. Or, they may be continent. But it is only in the case of the continent that we may infer that character does not play a role in the ego-depleted, manipulated environment. This

is due to the fact that the continent appear to be acting incontinently and, thus, out of character.

But second, I argued that such a conclusion is purely hypothetical; it cannot be confirmed by the original ego depletion study. To think that it does is to make a mistake in causal reasoning. Instead, we need a study that controls for all-things-considered judgments in manipulated, ego-depleted and non-ego-depleted environments. If those studies show that those who act according to their all-things-considered judgments in ego-depleted environments do so because they recognize those judgments as their best reasons for action, and if those people have already been identified as virtuous or continent of character, this fact will confirm not only that Cholbi's inference is invalid, but also that the EDMT is false.

The upshot of this second argument is that Aristotle, theorizing about the role of character in decision-making and action, may still provide us with a way to make sense of the empirical data, *i.e.* why people act the way they do. Indeed, my argument implies that Aristotle's conceptions of character may be used to falsify an empirical hypothesis, *i.e.* the EDMT. In fact, it points the way to a new study that controls for all-things-considered judgments and their role in manipulated, ego-depleted and non-ego-depleted environments. However, it is entirely possible that a new study will confirm the EDMT, thus making continence of character irrelevant to a person's decision-making when in a manipulated environment in an ego-depleted state. Whether or not Aristotle is correct in his division of character types is worth knowing precisely because it tells us whether or not developing our own character matters for how we make decisions when ego-depleted – a state which is common, and for which we typically think character matters (“When the going gets tough, the tough get going!”). But if the EDMT is confirmed by the second study that this paper calls for, then acting ‘continently’ when ego-depleted is a pipe dream.

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Submitted on December 01, 2016

Accepted on December 21, 2017