Philosophers have recently argued that traditional discussions of virtue and character presuppose an account of behaviour that experimental psychology has shown to be false. Behaviour does not issue from global traits such as prudence, temperance, courage or fairness, they claim, but from local traits such as sailing-in-rough-weather-with-friends-courage and office-party-temperance. The data employed provides evidence for this view only if we understand it in the light of a behaviourist construal of traits in terms of stimulus and response, rather than in the light of the more traditional construal in terms of inner events such as inclinations. More recent experiments have shown this traditional conception to have greater explanatory and predictive power than its behaviourist rival. So we should retain the traditional conception, and hence reject the proposed alteration to our understanding of behaviour. This discussion has further implications for future research in the field.
philosophical investigations of character and virtue.

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