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Moral and character education

At core, moral and character education aims to develop the moral person. How this end state develops has been hindered by interest from different theoretical positions, differences between practitioners and theoreticians, different assumptions about how far character is educable and associated measurement problems. Traditionally moral education is concerned with the interpretation and strategies one uses to understand moral phenomenon and defines the moral person as a predominantly thinking entity, whereas character education emphasises the development of habits and dispositions as a precondition for the moral person. Current interest is in finding commonalities across these traditions towards the achievement of human flourishing. These points of intersection have often been overlooked, but current work is demonstrating the importance of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches for practitioners, researchers and policy makers.

Key words: Moral education; character education; human flourishing; virtue; moral person

Historically, questions about the development of the moral person have been underpinned by two fundamentally different and often opposing perspectives – those that emphasise the direct cultivation of habits, dispositions and virtues and those that emphasize cognitive features, especially moral reasoning and judgement. In simple terms, this conflict reflects a basic historical difference between character and moral education, although the distinction between these two traditions is becoming much more difficult to maintain as a consequence of advances in these and other areas. Contemporary attempts to understand and explain the moral person and how character develops is obviously complex and involves a multitude of ideas and approaches from a range of academic disciplines, representing significant advances beyond this basic dichotomy. Indeed, this complexity has only increased in recent years as interest in moral phenomena has expanded to traditions and constructs not traditionally associated with moral and character education. In this article, we set out and discuss these often conflicting contributions and take the view that although there is a tendency for traditions to be viewed as confrontational there are important and valuable points of

intersection that collectively advance our understanding of what is the moral person and how this might best be realised while also addressing the many impediments for working out how to bring about the moral person. In the closing section of the paper we reflect on these exciting new advances in the fields of moral and character education and suggest that multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches are necessary for practitioners, researchers and policy makers alike.

The longstanding interest in what constitutes a moral person is reflected in the many and varied theoretical positions used to define its central features. In a recent review of the last 40 years of research in moral education, Lee and Taylor [1] found almost all of the dominant psychological traditions represented with increasing diversity in more recent times. Not surprisingly, proponents of historically oppositional approaches have proposed many different and conflicting definitions and methods leading to the confusion best captured by the 'Tower of Babel' analogy that Marvin Berkowitz [2, p247] often applies to the area. In this article, we identify five broad traditions for discussion and these encompass perspectives on the moral person that have at the centre of their enquiries: moral identity, emotions, positive character strengths, in addition to those traditions that emphasise virtue and cognition.

Tendency for traditions to be viewed as confrontational

Virtue-based character education

As the earliest kind of education for character, virtue based approaches are a good place to start. Sometimes these have been referred to as socialisation methods because children are said to acquire an understanding of the virtues and dispositional habits through a growing understanding of social norms and cultural traditions [3]. Education for character by direct and authoritative means was common place from the time of Plato and Aristotle until the early Enlightenment. This so called 'golden period' was legitimised by faith in the existence of an objective human essence and telos, a faith that came under serious challenge in the Enlightenment period by David Hume and

others with their assertions that morality amounted to nothing more than personal choice. Even so, this kind of character education was not significantly interrupted in practice until much later – an interruption that was a consequence of increased questioning about the possibility of moral truth as depicted in Alasdair MacIntyre’s ‘After Virtue’ [4], especially connected with a general demise in the dominance of moral philosophy and of religious authority.

In subsequent centuries, a range of alternative canonical paradigms were ushered in to replace this lost trust in moral truth and to support various forms of character education [5]. These have motivated an assortment of paradigms over the years such as, for example, assumptions in the 18th Century that children were originally sinful motivating approaches to character education that were basically in the shape of corrective discipline and strict religious development. This contrasts with the 21st Century where there has been a detectable shift - at least in the academic community - towards the view that the rightful purpose of education is to create the conditions for children to flourish. Emphasis on the pursuit of the flourishing student in education has gained significant traction in modern times as a consequence of a resurgence of virtue ethics in moral philosophy, a resurgence of Aristotelianism in educational philosophy and a shift in psychology towards positive rather than disease models of human functioning. World War II was also a key historical point for character education after which the belief that schools could develop character diminished because of fears that history might repeat itself if moral relativism were to take hold [6, chapter 2]. It was against this backdrop that Kohlberg’s theory [7] of moral development prevailed with its dominant rationalism and anti-relativist motivation - more of this later.

Virtue-based character education is underpinned by the broad view that moral character is ‘understood to encompass the evaluable, reason-responsive and educable sub-set of the human personality, and the virtues are seen as the main vehicles of that sub-set: more specifically, as settled states of character’ [5, p81]. This is generally associated with educational methods of role modelling, direct teaching and service learning etc. Character involves being a certain kind of person

and is not reducible to an act [8, p2]. Although character is irreducibly 'moral' [9, p2], character education nevertheless encompasses the development of some traits that are not of themselves moral such as perseverance and self-discipline for example [8, p28/9]. Virtue based character education is commonly inspired by virtue ethics and has been criticised, most noticeably in the form of challenges to its underpinning claims to moral truth and for being politically conservative, individualistic and religious [however, see: 10].

A tension is also perceptible between versions of character education that are theory-based and those that are more concerned with behaviour or bringing about appropriately motivated moral people [11]. Earliest versions of character education ought to be contrasted with the emergence in the United States in the 1990s of a rather more pragmatic effort to alter children's behaviour in response to widespread perception that society was undergoing a moral crisis [12]. Currently, virtue based character education is in ascendance in both theory and practice and this is evident in UK at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham where researchers, philosophers and educators are employed to advance a predominantly Aristotelian approach to character education, including the creation of specific school interventions. For character educators, virtue typically comprises a unique set of emotion, reason, attention and conduct and these learned qualities, are constitutive of human flourishing and have multifaceted expression in perception, feeling, thought and action [9]. The intention to deliberately cultivate these dispositional human qualities by a range of direct and indirect means - typically seen as the hallmark of character education - is sometimes a point of denigration since for critics this raises important questions about who decides on the content for socialisation and teaching.

Reason- based Moral Education

Concerns about the limitations of character education framed around the transmission of cultural norms came to a head following the Second World War. Critics noted the misuse of socialization practices to promote morally indefensible values and conceptions of the moral person [13].

Influenced by Piaget [14] and emphasized by Kohlberg, socialisation theories failed because communities were essentially pluralistic in nature, thus problematizing the direct cultivation of virtue in children because different traditions might define the virtues differently. In Kohlberg's view this problem of moral relativism was the result of a socialisation view of character untethered to universal principles. Only when the focus shifted to universal principles, he argued, could one determine the legitimacy of competing moral claims and help us untangle, for instance how responsibility, loyalty, courage, as evidenced in the service of National Socialist Germany was never defensible even if supported by the culture [Kohlberg referred to a 'bag of virtues' in this context, 13]. The power of these arguments in the late 1950s through the 1970s dominated moral education and suggested that increasingly sophisticated rational moral thinking was the best means for cultivating moral personhood. Additionally, the Kohlbergian view advocated the importance of democratic environments (see Just Community as a later development in Kohlberg's work, incorporating more of Durkheim's ideas) as the mechanism to develop advanced moral thinking. In these environments, children should be treated as equal agents rather than subordinate moral learners who were subject to directive adult socialisation. Kohlberg's cognitive developmental approach described individual moral improvement by passing through various stages of moral reasoning (there were six stages in his original theory). His conception of moral stages connected the work of the political philosopher Rawls [15] and Piaget [14]. More recently these stages have been superseded by neo-Kohlbergians in their revamped theories. For instance, expanding their emphasis beyond moral judgement - a focus increasingly considered too narrow [cf. 16] - some neo-Kohlbergians have adopted a Four-Component Model [17] that defines a person's moral functioning as comprising four components of moral sensitivity, motivation and action in addition to moral judgement. Affective processes are to some extent incorporated into this model and an interaction between each of the four components is assumed. Moral schemas are integral to this new theoretical direction where a shift from lower to more complex moral functioning can occur under the right circumstances, particularly in relation to tacit or non-conscious functioning. Three possible

levels of moral schema are depicted: personal interest, maintaining norms and a post-conventional schema [see 18 and other papers for a full description]. Changes incorporated into neo-Kohlbergian perspectives on moral functioning - abandoning the orthodox stage model, adopting the four component model, and relying on schema theory - weaken the original rationality versus virtue dichotomy outlined in the introduction to this article in ways unimaginable in the 1950s. The adoption of moral schema theory and its emphasis on tacit knowledge has also accomplished greater synergy with other traditions in social and personality psychology.

Although Jim Rest [17] accentuated moral behaviour and the moral processes necessary for this to occur, he did not incorporate virtues or stable traits into his model, perhaps as a consequence of adopting a socio-cognitive understanding of personality that is not static across situations and is (within reason) influenced by contexts [19]. Even so, the Intermediate Concept approach [20] represents a further convergence between Kohlbergian rationalism and character-based takes on the development of the moral person. As well as four component processes operating together and in interaction [21], there are three more levels at work in the moral judgement component. At the most general and abstract level are so called 'bedrock' schemas' (referring for example to moral judgements made largely on the basis of self-interest), in contrast to a third level of 'contextual norms' (e.g. professional codes or specific guidance) which prescribe action in specific circumstances. Intermediate concepts are located between these two levels and are considered specific to daily life and are related to virtue-based concepts [18] such as for example honesty and courage. This point of convergence between neo-Kohlbergian and neo-Aristotelian approaches was exploited in a research project about character among students, aged 14 and 15, in UK schools [22, 23] and this is discussed again later in the paper as an example of how traditions may be combined.

Moral Identity

A third tradition - moral identity [24] - builds on the general psychological literature of selfhood and identity to accentuate how far a person takes moral issues as salient to who they are – to their

identity [25]. Unlike virtue and rationalist traditions, this alternative point of entry for considering the moral person uniquely prioritises the will of the agent to consciously follow, identify, pursue and achieve a moral course in life. This focus requires perseverance, determination and integrity which is why theories of moral identity often prioritise self-regulatory mechanisms [26]. The study of moral identity has led to significant contributions in the field, especially in relation to moral motivation since it follows that a strong moral identity - a genuine personal commitment to a moral course in life - is likely to transfer into action [26, 27]. Moral motivation has proved particularly illusive from other perspectives, particularly when there is an overemphasis on moral judgment at the expense of action (Blasi [28] showed that advanced moral judgement cannot be assumed to sufficiently predict moral action). On the question of moral motivation, Lawrence Walker claims that 'many extant theories (of moral behaviour) do not have a ready answer because they ignore or disparage the role of the self in moral functioning' [29, p30]. However, others such as Aquino and Read promote a specific version of moral identity theory to argue that moral identity exists for a person as only one identity among other *social* identities and together these make up a person's self-schema. As these authors caution: 'although moral reasoning and cognitive moral development are important variables for explaining moral behavior, they are only part of the story' [26, p1425]. This particular viewpoint is rooted in a trait-based conceptualization of personality that builds both on the cognitive-developmental model [7, 14] and a sociocognitive model [30].

Relating to moral identity, promising advances are occurring for understanding moral motivation in a new area of research - the study of moral exemplars as extreme cases [27, 31-33] that is sometimes carried out under the auspices of moral personality theory [34, 35]. The general notion is that real examples of human moral excellence are investigated in a process of 'reverse engineering'. One early realisation for Colby and Damon [36, 37] is that morality isn't only about doing good for others but it is also necessarily the ability to identify and implement strategies to achieve the desired social outcomes; a degree of personal satisfaction also transpires from moral exemplars' community oriented actions. This has become known as the joint benefit of *agency* and *communion* - a

‘fundamental motivational duality’ [29, p32]. According to this view, there is a plethora of ways to be a good person and for moral exemplars, moral concerns and self-interest can be integrated within the person and that this reconciliation of *agency* and *communion* develops over time, thus signifying individual moral maturing or moral progress. Agency and communion are believed to come together from originally separate entities within the person (e.g. in a child or adolescent) and from the perspective of the reconciliation model [38], advanced forms of moral functioning will tend to encompass a conjoining of agency and communion. Although sometimes antagonistic to trait based approaches, the research on moral identity, including moral exemplars, is not entirely incompatible. In terms of educating children morally, Frimer and Walker [38] note that adolescence is a sensitive period for the reconciliation of agency and communion and it is surely profitable to consider educational interventions targeting the development and integration of these personality characteristics. However, it remains uncertain what can be done with this knowledge, not least because as Laspley and Stey [24] argue, new knowledge about moral identity emerged from the study of adults and their lives. Nevertheless, these authors draw on the work of Blasi [39] to convey hope that ways to cultivate will, self-control and moral integrity in children can be achieved based on this kind of research.

The Role of Emotions in Moral and Character Education

If the ‘big two’ traditions for moral and character education have been virtue and rationalist perspectives, then another related facet concerns the extent to which emotion features in various explanations of moral development and behaviour [40]. It’s not so much that emotion is completely missing from traditions discussed so far, rather we are interested here in the place that emotion occupies in various interpretations and explanations of the moral person. For example, in his book based on Aristotelian virtue ethics, ‘The Self and Its Emotions’, Kristjánsson [41] grants emotions an essential role in terms of their relationship with the self. Similarly, neo-Kohlbergians also acknowledge affect as a component part of moral functioning.

These attempts to incorporate emotions in traditional models of moral functioning may not go far enough. Recent attempts to address the role of emotions in moral and character education have advanced across a number of fronts. One line of interest coincided with the publication of Goleman's book on *Emotional intelligence* [42] and involved the amalgamation of a variety of research and practice efforts in this general area. This amalgamation formed a new approach called, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) [43] that sought educable outcomes, especially involving efforts to equip children with the skills they would need to cope with all aspects of their lives, not just in terms of their education. Quite radically, this included the development in children of appropriate attitudes and beliefs necessary for making careful decisions relating to their health, their personal relationships and other difficult issues common to growing up in modern society. SEL also aimed to help children negotiate and avoid a plethora of negative behaviours associated with troubled youth, including bullying and substance abuse for example. Helping children to develop a competent skills base for life is the main aim of SEL which seeks to make improvements in five specific areas: cognitive, affective, behavioural, relationship skills and responsible decision making [44]. An obvious criticism, however, has been the realisation that social and emotional skills - as developed by SEL - may just as easily be put to poor as good ends.

Although a serious criticism, it is one that is being addressed. In an inspiring chapter, Elias and colleagues [45] make a strong case for convergence between SEL and character and moral education approaches. In this auspicious move, they prioritise systemic socialisation in schools whereby social, emotional and other skills are viewed as being optimally developed within an ecology or system of socialisation. This approach takes us beyond the confines of specific educational programmes and interventions and foregrounds the school as an ecological environment in which the ways that children are treated across time matters (much in the same way Kohlberg and his colleagues viewed schools as optimally just communities). Children need to 'live' their social, emotional, character and moral education in an appropriate environment and within this context education can offer children a variety of specific experiences. Important questions still arise in terms of sources of moral

authority, but nevertheless this contribution from Elias et al represents an exciting synergy of theory and methods, especially it's conjoining of the practically savvy knowledge and experience of SEL with other moral components.

Of course, the rightful place of emotions in character and moral education cannot be mentioned without acknowledging Jonathan Haidt's radical attack on rationalism [46]. Emotions not reasons are for Haidt the main act. His Social Intuitionist Model grants intuitive primacy to emotions in a self-proclaimed 'new synthesis' of hard sentimentalism and social intuitionism. In doing this, Haidt also integrates the view that (slower) reasoning is secondary to (faster, automatic and affect-laden) intuition [47] – this is a provocative and intriguing claim that has attracted a lot of interest. Haidt maintains, too, that dominant social and cultural processes influence individual reasoning which is - to some extent at least - an activity done by communities, working across people rather simply within them, individually. From this perspective, strong moral emotions such as contempt, anger and disgust are instant and explained or justified rationally in hindsight.

Although one might argue that Haidt's position is a needed corrective to the overemphasis on cognition the application to educational practice is unclear. More helpful, are attempts to incorporate emotion within current models. For instance, Kristjánsson [48] argues that in Aristotelian virtue ethics there is a soft rationalist rather than hard sentimentalist solution for the treatment of emotions in understanding the moral person. The appropriate incorporation of emotion into our understanding of the moral person is imperative and good progress is being made in this respect, taking the field beyond crude polarised distinctions between emotion and rational thinking as if they are isolated human entities.

Positive Psychology and human flourishing

Also active in the pursuit of human flourishing for youth are positive psychologists [e.g. 49, 50].

After World War II, however, a focus on the factors promoting positive outcomes was not something

of direct interest to psychology as a discipline which was then preoccupied with a disease model where various human troubles and pathologies rather than human flourishing per se occupied their time. Marty Seligman is usually credited with motivating this shift towards a positive psychology that in the beginning based itself on authentic happiness theory but has more lately adopted well-being theory [49]. A central idea for positive psychology is that each person has a unique suite of skills and character strengths, the positive expression of which is constitutive of that individuals flourishing. The central concern, for positive psychology, therefore, is the identification and cultivation of a person's strongest personal qualities or character strengths. This 'build and grow' approach - not dissimilar from 1960's humanist approaches of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers - is often also connected with a vast literature on resilience. Strengths of 'grit', determination and perseverance are unfortunately frequently advocated in instrumental ways as personal routes to improved levels of educational and other kinds of achievement [51]. While the need for determination and perseverance as second order virtues (i.e., serve to promote more central components of character) is obvious, these are nevertheless the sort of personal qualities that can easily fail the same test as emotional intelligence [42] – in other words, these are strengths of character that can be put to both good and poor ends. Another problem for positive psychology and its quest to find and reinforce personal signature strengths is that many different personal strengths are needed in life and the negotiation of complicated moral situations often requires a sophisticated and sensitive overarching mechanism or adjudicator known to virtue ethicists as practical wisdom or phronesis [9]. Another, recent emergence in psychology is the positive youth development perspective. This was not linked to the rise of positive psychology and in taking a person centred (rather than variable centred) approach is concerned with relations between individuals and their contexts, especially adaptive development among youth [52, 53]. This work is especially noteworthy for its emphasis on the complex interplay between the development of youth and their contexts.

Impediments to working out how to achieve the goal of bringing about the moral person

The inherently interdisciplinary nature of moral and character education [8] is a strength and weakness, although as we will discuss it is not yet interdisciplinary enough. As we mentioned in the introduction, differences in traditions and associated definitional language have been an impediment to models and methods that capture the interdisciplinary / multidisciplinary nature of character and what constitutes effective moral education [54]. For many, working through the communalities and incompatibilities is unlikely to be profitable in the near term. For instance, Berkowitz, a leading theorist in the field, generally tries to sidestep the problem by 'get(ting) down to the business of fostering the development of character in youth'. [2, p248].

Although we arrive at a more optimistic view of the utility in engaging the field's diversity, it is important to highlight some additional impediments to the process of integration. For example, at contextual and political levels there are obstacles for working out the goal of bringing about the moral person. Sociologist, James Hunter [55, p15] argues that 'character is as much a function of the social order as it is a manifestation of the individual person' and he goes on to emphasise the social constitution of morality. Abend [56, p164], too, calls for the empirical study of morality to be done on an 'equal footing' by a much wider range of disciplines than are routinely involved at present. He mentions history, anthropology and sociology as disciplines that are likely to address cultural, institutional and historical factors. Of course once the focus shifts to context, then political dimensions come into sharp relief. One persisting charge against character education is that it supports the political status quo by emphasising individual levels of analysis rather than those of the group or community – features of obvious interest to the disciplines of sociology and political science. To be sure, rationality and virtue traditions have often been politically polarised between liberalism and conservatism respectively, and others argue that character education is plagued by a too narrow view of the political that does not instil in children the notion that they can change the political order by collective action when this is needed for the moral good to prevail [57, 58]. Sayer [59, p5], makes a similar argument: 'Ignoring racism, sexism, domination, exploitation, etc., and restricting ourselves to courage, gratitude, compassion, etc., renders philosophy voluntarist, gentile,

apolitical and ineffectual, though as we shall see, all the more politically useful for that'. Aristotelian scholars might point out that Aristotle's work can only be fully grasped when both his 'Politics' [60] and 'Nicomachean Ethics' [61] are read together with the former book contributing a necessary political dimension to the Nicomachean Ethics, but unfortunately the latter work has dominance in the moral and character education literature to the detriment of recognising the need for an appropriate political society and context within which human flourishing can occur.

Often there is an accompanying confusion between situations and contexts in the literature with the real effects of ongoing contextual factors being confused with isolated and sometimes extreme situations. For example, arguments abound about the extent to which social situations matter versus persisting traits of character [e.g. 62, 63, 64]. Experimental conditions generally inform situationist arguments by exposing participating individuals to manufactured circumstances and observing their reactions. When, in high numbers, participants respond poorly (for example, by picking up money from the floor), this is interpreted as confirming the dominance of a social situation over persisting character traits. The trouble is that these methods cannot provide clarity about the role of situations versus character. For one thing, the manufactured situations can be extreme, beyond ordinary experiences in the context of a person's character and life. Moreover, contextually relevant reasons for acting are just as important (e.g. for virtue ethics and neo-Kohlbergian traditions) as actual behaviour (the emphasis of the experiments), and this cannot be accounted for using these sorts of experimental methods. Finally, arguing for the possibility of trait based character that persists over time and context is not the same as claiming that good moral character of this kind commonly exists in populations since as theories about the development of moral character show, this is a hard won and potentially even quite a rare eventuality [cf 9].

In addition to impediments at the broad conceptual level, differences in theoretical perspectives for understanding and bringing about the moral person lead rather inevitably to alternative views on a number of key areas that are crucial for making progress towards this goal. There is not sufficient

space to cover all of these here, but among the most challenging contradictions and impediments to progress are those relating to matters of *development* and how progress may be assessed or proven – in other words matters of *measurement*.

The role of development

The demise of a clear stage based cognitive developmental approach [7] has left a degree of uncertainty about the question of change and continuities in moral and character across development , although there are many reasons to believe that the sorts of moral and character education needed differs by age. For instance, evidence from other related constructs within the social and personality developmental areas [65-67] as well as cognitive and motivational traditions, indicate the need to incorporate developmental factors in any comprehensive treatment of character and moral functioning. Indeed what may be needed is a more expanded developmental focus and in particular in younger populations where traditional moral developmental theories have not been emphasized. Recent work in domain theory [68] and during infancy [69] support a broader lens.

The fundamental role of measurements

In terms of moral and character development in the school context, what precisely should be assessed and why? Should we measure the impact of individual lessons or interventions in pre and post-test assessments; or should we be interested in self-reported improvements for various character strengths, especially grit, determination or perseverance towards levels of school attainment. Alternatively, do we instead want to know about objective expressions and changes in virtue among children, not only in behavioural or instrumental terms but in regard to their appropriate moral reactions, their feelings and perceptions or their hexis? Should we take the view that developing virtue in children is inherently valuable in its own right or is it necessarily connected

to certain educational outcomes? Is it really acceptable to make assessments about children's characters at all and should this be a private matter beyond the concern of educational establishments? When Kohlberg's theory of moral development was dominant, a focus on education and its role in moral development was clear, supported by reliable instruments for assessing progress. The theory also guided the design of school interventions and informed what should reasonably be included under the remit of moral education. The demise of the Kohlbergian theoretical paradigm has, in many respects, left a void, including various challenges associated with measurement or assessment. In simple terms, existing points of entry for understanding the moral person often rely on their own favoured methods of assessment with assessments sometimes being made without reference to clear theoretical or developmental underpinnings. Berkowitz and Bier [70] make a related argument concerning the implementation in schools of various interventions, when they state that even well-conceived and theoretically grounded interventions can be unrecognisable (from each other and from their original intentions) when they are put into practice as a consequence of a plethora of local factors in the daily reality of schools, rendering realistic comparisons difficult.

As mentioned, some traditions and researchers seem wedded to certain default methods. Positive psychologists, for instance, often favour self-report measures such as the Values-in-Action (VIA) Inventory of Strengths for Youth [50, 71]. These surveys use four or eight questions to assess each of the 24 character strengths (the entire range of VIA surveys is being reviewed [e.g. 72]). Others complain that self-report methods are insufficient [9, chapter 3], pointing to problems of self-realism whereby an individual might be thoroughly deluded about the kind of person they are. There are also possible problems of desirability bias, although large samples can to some extent mitigate these weaknesses. To virtue ethicists, the real focus ought to be changes of meaning within the person [9, p62] which makes for a very difficult measurement task. For example, the assessment of progress for a class on a particular intervention cannot account for each child's unique needs and responses

in the context of their lives, their progress to date and the natural virtue they may possess. In trying to overcome some of these problems and capitalise on the strengths and synergies within and between traditions, we argue that the best way forward is a multimethod approach [see 22 for an example of this] as probably the only possible way to understand and assess moral and character development, although of course this does not resolve the problem of a missing psychological developmental theory. As mentioned earlier, a study at the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues combined Neo-Kohlbergian and virtue ethics traditions in a multimethod study of character education in UK schools. The dominant method used was a survey incorporating moral dilemmas created by Thoma in the Intermediate Concept (IC) tradition [73]. Participants read about a realistic scenario and decide what the protagonist should do and why. This IC approach began in the professions (e.g. dentistry) and builds on the idea that a group of professionals can generally reach agreement about appropriate responses to typical real life situations (reflected in the dilemmas) as well as in respect of reasons or justifications for acting. This expertise has been translated more generally to adolescents by Thoma et al in the ICM Adolescent [18], to provide a measure of the application of virtue-like concepts to real life situations from adolescent life. In the spirit of triangulation, the same study also included student self-report measures (VIA Youth survey), teacher interviews and reports by teachers on the pupils as a group.

Finding points of intersection and new advances

Now that five broad traditions and various impediments for understanding the moral person have been discussed, we need to define what triumph for character and moral education might look like and work out how far towards that goal has been travelled and what more needs to be done? Inevitably, any definition of success in character and moral education should reflect 'real world' progress in bringing about the development of the moral person. Ideally, we believe that eventually in this vision of success the following might be included: an accepted underpinning theory (ies) of moral development; a level of consensus about what is morally educable; at least some agreement

about the educable content for moral and character education and its pedagogy (allowing for cultural differences); the availability of a range of trusted research instruments for assessing progress among groups, schools and for various educational interventions; a shared language and due recognition and account of contextual influences or cultural and institutional presuppositions [56]. In the same spirit, Kristjánsson reflecting on the real practical progress for moral/character education [9] concluded that four conditions need to be satisfied in order for any particular moral or character educational paradigm to take hold. In brief, these are: (1) A resonance with the concerns and anxieties of the general public; (2) A reasonably broad political consensus from both 'left' and 'right'; (3) A philosophical theory that underpins the proposed approach - especially one that provides a 'stable methodological, ontological, epistemological and moral basis.' [9, p147]; (4) and, finally a prevailing psychological theory is needed that underpins the approach, connecting psychology to educational theory in a way that is possible. Success on all four counts was achieved during the period of Kohlbergian rationalism, but now in the 21st Century, Kristjánsson assessed his own preferred Aristotelian character education approach against these criteria to consider its chances of gaining 'taxonomic bite' [74] in current policy and educational terms. He concluded that the absence of a prevailing psychological theory is its downfall and so only three out of four of these conditions were met.

In the light of this discussion, we shall focus in this next section on encouraging points of intersection towards this goal. In taking this approach to a wide and varied field of study, children's fundamental need for high levels of basic care and attachment stands out as an obvious point of intersection even if it is not always explicitly acknowledged. Clearly, infants and children require rudiments of care and attachment in order for moral development to successfully occur. As developed in attachment theory [75, 76] this fundamental relationship helps to bind to the self to many of the characteristics and predispositions that serve character development throughout the lifespan. Empirical evidence suggests secure attachment characterized by parental availability and positive emotional responses help the infant to develop self-regulation - a characteristic that positive psychologists later define as

grit in children; a positive view of human availability—an orientation that may influence a later sensitivity to psychological communion and an interest in justice and fairness as well as a positive emotional reaction to human exchange. In short, a full model of the moral person must incorporate these fundamental building blocks of character and how they influence and become understood by the developing child. We know that the quality and consistency of close relationships influence the extent and ways in which the infant feels (in)secure. Sayer finds it incredulous that attachment theory is omitted from most accounts of character and moral education. After all, as he goes on to say, ‘our sense of self also depends on our pre-linguistic and subsequent experience of being held, loved, played with, celebrated, rather than ignored, disliked, hurt, shamed, etc.’ [59, p11]. Sound attachments as babies, infants and adolescents generate hopeful possibilities for the cultivation of the moral person. After all, a child who learns to be wary, suspicious and anxious as a consequence of poor basic care and an absence of secure and loving relationships will have a hard time learning empathy, justice and care for others [77]. These important lessons of attachment theory should motivate a vital point of intersection for any attempt to develop children morally.

Narvaez and Lapsley [78] have also worked on a holistic and comprehensive passage for cultivating the moral person. In the Integrative Ethical Education model (IEE) they bring together many of the strands already discussed in this article. As a programme of ethical character development, IEE is intended for all age groups mostly in educational settings but also in the home. Reassuringly, IEE also stresses as fundamental, (1) the importance of caring adult relationships with the child and goes on to emphasise four more key factors which are: (2) a climate to support excellent achievement and ethical character; (3) efforts by adults to foster ethical skills across activities; (4) the encouragement of self-authorship / regulation and (5) that the adults work to build a community. The authors connect this model with an exciting new development in the field, namely neuroscience to assert three firm conclusions about moral development and moral action as it is embedded in contexts. Based on the knowledge that experience shapes brain biases, they claim that

moral functioning is multivariate; that moral identity may be the most influential predictor of moral behaviour (and motivation); and that moral experts are different to novices.

Conclusion and Implications for research and practice

The complexity of this necessarily multidisciplinary field cannot be overstated. There is significant risk of applying an approach that is too narrow both to theoretical, empirical and research work as well as to practical interventions. For example, we would highlight the narrow focus of positive psychology on the rather instrumental amoral emphasis on building a narrow range of character strengths in a vacuum. By contrast we suggest that the merging of traditions as was done in the development of the ICM represents a more profitable approach for exploring character and moral education. Additionally, there are trends in the broader field that have the potential to expand the empirical support for a broad-based model of character and moral functioning. First, recent work in infancy, evolutionary psychology suggests normative predispositions in our interactions with others. How these building blocks of character intersect with the attachment relationship should provide insight into how character emerges as the self becomes organized in the social world. Second, the limitations of his work notwithstanding, Haidt has correctly noted that emotions are an underappreciated contribution in our moral understandings. Character education has focused on the cognitive and rational because of the historical focus on these constructs and because cognition is more amenable to educational interventions. However, if emotions are influential there must be a place for it in our modelling of character and moral action. Perhaps as measurements move away from traditional formats to incorporate advances in virtual real-time assessments the power of the intuitive and reactive will become more evident. Third, there is a need to facilitate the interdisciplinarity we see as central to addressing the missing criteria Kristjánsson lays out in his evaluation of the current state of character education. Too often, researchers in the various traditions linked to character and moral education have little to do with one another. Each group has different professional homes, attends to different journals and rarely work together. As we

move into the current climate where interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work is being encouraged by funding agencies, these links may be easier to form. However, until journal and other outlets welcome interdisciplinary work structural barriers to the development of integrative models will remain.

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