THE CHARACTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP: VIRTUE EDUCATION
FOR RAISING MORALLY RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUALS

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Surely, moral education is not merely intended to result in theoretical knowledge, but instead attempts to change people's behavior. However, when examining and evaluating current trends in moral education, it appears that hitherto moral education has fallen short of its goal to make people better. In this paper, I try to determine what has caused this perceived failure of moral education and conclude that approaches that focus on teaching moral reasoning skills rather than on teaching actual moral content, i.e., values and virtues, are generally ineffective for moral improvement. However, a more traditional form of moral education, namely character education, appears to be a viable alternative to the moral reasoning methods.

Since character education can be regarded as the practical application of virtue ethics, I first describe and evaluate virtue ethics and defend it against potential criticisms. I then examine what methods are effective for teaching virtues, and how such methods can potentially be incorporated into the curriculum. Since virtues cannot be taught through theoretical instruction, the acquisition of good habits constitutes the necessary foundation for the establishment of good moral character. Some methods that have been suggested for laying the foundation for virtue are the use of stories, role play, as well as the inclusion of physical and outdoor activities, etc. Furthermore, habituation constitutes the basis for the acquisition of good habits, and as such it requires the application of rewards and punishment by a caring tutor, who at the same time can serve as a role model for virtuous behavior.
Finally, I extrapolate if and how character education can be employed to make people more environmentally conscious citizens. I conclude that environmental virtue or character education is the most effective method of environmental education, since it affects how an individual understands, views, and subsequently interacts with the natural environment.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1  INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................... 1

CHAPTER 2  A THEORY OF VIRTUE ETHICS .............................................................. 6
   An Overview ......................................................................................................... 6
   Traditional Virtue Ethics ..................................................................................... 6
   The Virtues and Moral Perception: Thoughts on Moral Motivation ...................... 9
   Virtue Ethics, Character, and Moral Rules ....................................................... 14
   Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology: Do Character Traits Exist? ...................... 21
   Criticisms of Traditional Virtue Ethics ............................................................. 28

CHAPTER 3  ENVIRONMENTAL VIRTUE ETHICS ..................................................... 45
   All about EVE: Why It is Superior to Other Theories of Environmental Ethics ... 45
   Different Types of EVE and the Determination of Environmental Virtues ........... 48
   Common Criticisms of EVE ............................................................................... 64
   Conclusion ......................................................................................................... 69

CHAPTER 4  THEORIES OF MORAL EDUCATION .................................................... 70
   The Psychological Regime or How NOT to Teach Ethics ................................... 71
   An Alternative to the Psychological Regime: Character Education..................... 85
   How To Teach Character: Cultivating Sentimental Dispositions ......................... 99

CHAPTER 5  TEACHING VIRTUES ........................................................................... 107
   Character Education, Virtues, and Moral Perception ........................................ 107
   Habituation and the Cultivation of Virtue ....................................................... 109
   Cultivating Moral Sensitivity ........................................................................... 114
   What’s the Moral of the Story? The Power of Narratives .................................. 124
   Aesthetics in Virtue Education ......................................................................... 130
   The Power of Music ...................................................................................... 131
   The Role of Schools in Character Education ................................................... 133
   The Role of Parents in the Moral Upbringing of Children .............................. 138
   Conclusion .................................................................................................... 141
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

To have people who are well informed but not constrained by conscience is, conceivably, the most dangerous outcome of education possible. Indeed, it could be argued that ignorance is better than unguided intelligence, for the most dangerous people are those who have knowledge without moral framework. It is not the lack of technological information that threatens our society; it is the lack of wisdom, and we run the risk today of having our discoveries outdistance our moral compass.

Ernest Boyer

To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.

Theodore Roosevelt

The discipline of environmental ethics is a relatively new one; yet it is already fraught with internal disagreements and criticisms. The field of environmental virtue ethics is newer still, since initial theories of environmental ethics seem to have focused on rule-based approaches. These rule-based theories of environmental ethics have led to seemingly insurmountable difficulties in establishing moral standing for nonhuman entities such as animals, plants, and even entire ecosystems. While it is certainly not impossible to establish such an ethical status for nonhuman nature, the basis for moral considerability in environmental ethics has been hotly contested. These disagreements with regard to who or what warrants moral consideration can mainly be traced to the fact that nonhuman entities usually cannot fulfill traditional requirements for moral considerability, which rely heavily on notions of rationality, reciprocity, or being able to enter into a social contract. Therefore, it has been difficult to base environmental ethics
on concepts of duty to or rights of natural entities. Theories of virtue ethics, on the other hand, do not rely on establishing moral standing for nonhuman nature, as their focus is rather on the character of the moral agent and his or her cultivation of certain dispositions or traits that are conducive to human flourishing. Naturally, while this approach seems to avoid the problems inherent in rule-based theories, it has to contend with its own internal difficulties. For instance, Holmes Rolston, III has charged environmental virtue ethics as being somewhat selfish, disregarding the intrinsic value of nature in favor of looking at what nature has to offer the moral agent in terms of his or her own character development. In other words, Rolston contends that theories of environmental virtue ethics only value nature as far as it aids the moral agent in the cultivation of virtue, but that the value nature has in and of itself is ignored.

Furthermore, virtue ethics in general has been accused of being too vague, as it does not offer any procedural principles that would aid the moral agent in making specific ethical decisions. Rule-based ethical theories, on the other hand, are precisely favored for their presumed ability to help the moral agent determine precisely what to do. However, in reality moral situations are rarely so clear-cut as to allow the straightforward application of ethical principles, and thus it could be argued that the common preference of rule-based theories is based on a chimera. In his article “The Role of Rules in Ethical Decision-Making,” Eugene Hargrove demonstrates how rules frequently produce conflicts that are not readily resolved, and I make explicit some of

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Hargrove’s views in the section on rules and their place in virtue ethics.\(^3\) Jean-Paul Sartre makes a similar claim in his paper “Existentialism is a Humanism,” where he essentially states that principles cannot provide guidance in morally conflicting situations.\(^4\) Sartre gives the example of a young man who is torn between joining the war effort to avenge his fallen brother or staying at home with his mother who is utterly (psychologically) dependent on him. When the student asks Sartre for advice, Sartre says that he cannot aid the student in his decision-making. Ultimately, the young man must make a decision, but ethical principles are not helpful to do so. For example, applying Kant’s Practical imperative of not using people as mere means cannot guide the young man’s decision-making, because no matter which course of action the man chooses, he is always in danger of treating some person(s) as mere means: either his mother, if he decides to leave to go to war, or his comrades, if he decides to stay home with his mother. So the choice he makes is not made on the grounds of principles. Sartre even claims that by choosing an advisor for help in making a decision, a person is essentially making the decision already, because by selecting one advisor instead of another, a person already knows what the advice will be (at least to some degree). In other words, all ethical theories, including virtue ethics, run into the problem of practical application, since they are, after all, theoretical frameworks.

In this paper, I argue that a virtue ethics approach is preferable to rule-based theories of environmental ethics. I assess and respond to the criticisms leveled against virtue ethics in general, paying special attention to the most recent challenge against it

\(^3\) Eugene Hargrove, “The Role of Rules in Ethical Decision Making,” Inquiry 28, no. 3: 3-42.

raised by social psychology, namely, the claim that the very existence of robust character traits is questionable and any talk about such characteristics ought to be abandoned.⁵ Clearly, if this challenge cannot be addressed, any discussion of virtue ethics as a theoretical framework for environmental ethics and subsequently environmental education is pointless.

Next, I examine and evaluate different approaches to moral education by roughly tracing the history of moral education in the United States of America. I claim that hitherto moral education has largely failed in its goal to make people better or at least make them act better. I try to determine what has caused this wide-ranging failure of moral education and conclude that approaches that focus on the teaching process, i.e., moral reasoning, rather than on content, i.e., values and virtues, are generally ineffective for moral instruction. I then point out specific characteristics of character education, which is the moral education approach that grows out of virtue ethics. I examine whether and how virtues can be taught, what methods are effective for teaching virtues and values, and how such methods can be incorporated into the curriculum.

Finally, I extrapolate if and how character education can be employed to make people more environmentally conscious citizens. I conclude that environmental virtue or character education is not only a feasible approach, but is rather the most effective method of environmental education, since it affects how an individual understands, views, and subsequently interacts with the natural environment. In other words, the

character of a person can be shaped in a way that will render the individual more sensitive to environmental concerns.
CHAPTER 2
A THEORY OF VIRTUE ETHICS

An Overview

In order to evaluate the current state of environmental virtue ethics, I first want to discuss and elucidate some aspects of virtue ethics in general, especially potential criticisms leveled against it. If virtue ethics is not a viable ethical theory in its traditional, human-centered form, then the case for developing an environmental virtue ethic becomes unfeasible. Thus, I proceed as follows: First, I give a brief overview of virtue ethics and distinguish it from its two main rival theories, deontology and utilitarianism, in order to point out its advantages over other ethical theories. Next, I address the most common criticisms brought up against virtue ethics in its traditional human-centered form. Lastly, I illustrate the concept of environmental virtue ethics and discuss and evaluate criticisms that have been raised against it.

Traditional Virtue Ethics

Historically, virtue theory constitutes a seminal ethical theory in moral philosophy, and it is frequently contrasted with its two main rival theories, utilitarianism and deontology. In contrast to the two other principal ethical theories, virtue theory generally does not evaluate the moral rightness or wrongness of an action but instead focuses on assessing the character of the moral agent performing the action. Whereas in utilitarianism an action is generally assessed and evaluated in terms of its outcome, deontology evaluates an action in terms of whether it was performed in accordance with as well as for the sake of duty. While at first glance these two approaches appear to
have little in common (utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism as it focuses on the outcome of an action, while deontology concentrates on the motive for the action), they both are mainly concerned with the evaluation of individual actions (i.e., an action’s moral rightness or wrongness), not with the assessment of the agent performing the action.

In addition, utilitarianism and deontology are fundamentally rule-based ethical theories, since both provide broad ethical principles that ought to be followed if an action is to count as morally praiseworthy. For instance, the principle of utility, which is the basis of traditional utilitarianism, affirms that one should always act to promote “the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.” In contrast, the main principle of Immanuel Kant’s deontology, the categorical imperative, states: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law.”⁶ Accordingly, actions are then assessed in terms of their adherence to, or their failure to adhere to, these moral standards. On the contrary, virtue ethics does not provide any such clear-cut moral principles, and instead of merely evaluating individual actions, virtue ethics assesses the character from which the action originates.

In other words, then, virtue ethics is not so much concerned with the moral quality of activities or actions; instead, it aims at achieving the greatest moral excellence within an individual. Thus, the major distinguishing feature of virtue ethics is its emphasis on character development and the cultivation of virtues. Since these ethical theories focus on the dispositions of the moral agent, a moral act is usually regarded as an expression of a person’s character. Consequently, systems of virtue ethics normally

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do not spell out rules of conduct according to which one has to act in order to behave morally; instead, written accounts of virtue ethics generally discuss the nature of virtues and methods for their cultivation. To provide general guidelines for moral behavior, theories of virtue ethics attempt to determine how a virtuous person would act in specific situations in accordance with his or her character. Thus, virtue ethics can be described as an emulative theory in contrast to rule-based theories, which essentially depend on obedience and conformity to set principles.

In summary, virtue ethics differs from both utilitarianism and deontology in two important ways: (1) Virtue ethics evaluates moral character rather than moral action; and (2) Virtue ethics does not provide specific ethical principles to follow. Naturally, it is specifically against these two points of difference that many of the criticisms against virtue ethics are leveled; for instance, the very existence of what we call a moral character, which presumably consists of several robust character traits called virtues, has recently been called into question by moral psychology, and I discuss this particular criticism in the following section. Another problem with focusing on the character of moral agent rather than on the moral act lies in the fact that even morally good (virtuous) persons can occasionally fail to behave virtuously. Of course, if they fail to do so often enough, they will eventually not be considered “good” persons anymore. But how would virtue ethics evaluate such aberrant behavior if it does not specifically evaluate actions? Even more problematic, how is one to determine who is, in fact, a virtuous person and who is not? The only evidence we can use for such an evaluation

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7 Certainly, there are many more differences between these ethical theories, but for the sake of this discussion, I focus on two crucial differences that are most pertinent in this context.
are the overt actions of the agent, which in turn implies that we are in effect evaluating moral actions (rather than moral agents) after all.

Furthermore, virtue theory has been criticized as being too vague and possibly inapplicable to real life situations due to its failure to provide ethical rules to follow, a charge that I address by discussing the motivation problem which plagues all ethical theories and which might be circumvented by looking at the concept of moral perception.

The Virtues and Moral Perception: Thoughts on Moral Motivation

One problem that is frequently discussed in moral philosophy concerns the issue of moral motivation. In effect, the main question is what precisely motivates a person to act in a moral manner. In “Educating Moral Emotions or Moral Selves: A False Dichotomy?” Kristjan Kristjansson discusses the motivation problem in light of research done by Augusto Blasi. In 1980, Blasi published a paper containing a meta-analysis of studies that examined the relationship between moral reasoning and moral behavior.8 In that analysis, Blasi discovered that moral judgments do not play a large part in the motivation of moral action. From these findings, Kristjansson concludes: “Thus, a ‘moral gap’ had been identified between cognition and action that theorists—including Blasi himself—have been trying to bridge ever since.”9

To be sure, the issue of moral motivation is not just of concern to virtue ethics but instead applies to all ethical theories in the same way. Elsewhere, I have suggested that

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the concept of moral perception can serve as an explanation or solution to the motivation problem.\textsuperscript{10} In essence, regarding the problem of moral motivation, i.e., the issue of what ultimately motivates a person to take action, moral perception seems a likely candidate for providing the agent with the original impetus for action. Whether one adheres to the belief that actions are motivated by rationality and deliberation (à la Immanuel Kant) or instead asserts that actions always derive from some sort of feeling or emotion (à la David Hume), the basic question of moral motivation remains unanswered: it is still not clear how the moral agent is motivated to deliberate or how the motivating feelings first arise in the agent. In either case, something has to happen prior to deliberation or to feeling, something that actually enables the moral agent to recognize a situation as demanding a moral response in the first place. As Lawrence Blum puts it:

\begin{quote}
The point is that perception \textit{occurs prior to deliberation}, and prior to taking the situation to be one in which one needs to deliberate. It is precisely because the situation is seen in a certain way that the agent takes it as one in which he feels moved to deliberate.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

Clearly, any ethical theory that focuses on the process of rational deliberation or on the presence or absence of moral sentiments already presupposes the recognition of the situation as being of a moral nature. Furthermore, the correct reading of a situation by a moral agent can have moral import and can therefore be judged morally. Blum notes:

\begin{quote}
An agent may reason well in moral situations, uphold the strictest standards of impartiality for testing her maxims and moral principles, and be adept at deliberation. Yet unless she perceives moral situations as moral situations, and unless she perceives their moral character accurately, her moral principles and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} See Monica Lindemann, \textit{Environmental Virtue Education: Ancient Wisdom Applied} (Saarbruecken, Germany: VDM Verlag, 2008).

skill at deliberation will be for naught and may even lead her astray. In fact one of the most important moral differences between people is between those who miss and those who see various moral features of situations confronting them.\(^{12}\)

In other words, a certain sensitivity and ability to discern the morally salient features of situations is required for moral action to be possible in the first place. This sensitivity or ability to discern moral situations as such constitutes what I shall henceforth call moral perception.

I agree with Blum that moral agents differ significantly in their ability to pick up on certain aspects of a situation, and I additionally offer the thesis that the capacity to become sensitive of the salient features of a moral situation can be improved and refined through certain educational practices and specifically through the cultivation of moral virtues.\(^{13}\) In fact, I want to argue that one aspect that makes virtue ethics superior to other ethical theories is its influence on moral perception. Astute moral perception appears to be a component of the characteristics and dispositions of a person, as it constitutes an integral part of how a person interacts with the world. Sherman states that “character is expressed in what one sees as much as what one does.”\(^{14}\) In other words, moral virtues seem to be not only action-guiding but also perception-guiding traits of character; they give our perceptions acuity.

These observations are not novel, since Aristotle already states that virtue lies in the mean relative to the individual and that the correct judgment of virtue “depends on

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\(^{13}\) See my discussion on moral perception in *Environmental Virtue Education: Ancient Wisdom Applied* (Saarbruecken, Germany: VDM Verlag, 2008).

perception."\(^{15}\) In other words, the more virtuous a person becomes, the more accurately he or she will be able to distinguish the mean (which constitutes virtue) from both excess and deficiency. In contrast, a less virtuous individual might wrongly assess excess or deficiency as the mean. For instance, to cowardly persons, the rash person might seem courageous; thus, they are not able to make a correct judgment regarding virtue and the mean. Aristotle makes the connection between virtue and correct judgment even more explicit when he states:

> For the excellent person judges each sort of thing correctly, and in each case what is true appears to him. For each state of character has its own distinctive view of what is fine and pleasant. Presumably, then, the excellent person is far superior because he sees what is true in each case, being himself a sort of standard and measure.\(^{16}\)

Accordingly, I argue that moral perception, which necessarily occurs prior to any moral judgment, is closely linked to ethical theories of virtue, as the virtues appear to shape an agent’s understanding and discernment of his or her moral environment. In other words, a person who has cultivated the virtues of love and benevolence perceives the world in a distinctly different way than a person who is lacking these qualities. As Sherman states:

> Preliminary to deciding how to act, one must acknowledge that the situation requires action. The decision must arise from a reading of the circumstances. This reading, or reaction, is informed by ethical considerations expressive of the agent’s virtue. Perception thus is informed by the virtues. The agent will be responsible for how the situation appears as well as for omissions and distortions. Accordingly, much of the work of virtue will rest in knowing how to construe the case, how to describe and classify what is before one. An agent who fails to notice unequivocal features of a situation which for a given community standardly require considerations of liberality, apparently lacks that


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 1113a30-35 (emphasis added).
Thus, Sherman emphasizes that an accurate appraisal of a moral situation is expressive of a person's moral perceptivity, which in turn is “informed by the virtues.” Furthermore, Sherman rightly asserts that a person lacking the moral sensitivity to discern certain features of a situation can be judged and subsequently held accountable for this deficiency, as moral agents are responsible for how a situation appears to them. If this seems to be an unduly strict position, it is instructive to note that Aristotle himself supports the same view. He explicitly writes:

Someone might say that everyone aims at the apparent good, but does not control its appearance; but the end appears to each person in a way that corresponds to his character. For if each person is somehow responsible for his own state of character, he will also be himself somehow responsible for its appearance.\(^{18}\)

In other words, moral agents have much control over the character they are ultimately going to possess and how they are going to perceive and interact with the world.

Sherman argues:

Perception informed by ethical considerations is the product of experience and habituation. Through such an education, the individual comes to recognize and care about the objects of ethical consideration.\(^{19}\)

It will become clear in the discussion of environmental virtue education that many of the educational exercises that are effective in the cultivation of environmental virtues will include the training and honing of the moral agent’s perceptive skills, because accurate and responsive discernment of situations is a definitive prerequisite for moral action. In

\(^{17}\) Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, p. 29 (emphasis added).


\(^{19}\) Sherman, *The Fabric of Character*, p. 31.
the next section, I elucidate whether and how rules can provide a useful function in the
development of a good moral character by improving an agent’s moral perception.

Virtue Ethics, Character, and Moral Rules

Because of the strong belief in the importance of rules and principles for any
adequate theory of ethics, new questions and concerns about virtue ethics have arisen
in recent times. One of the fundamental issues of contemporary virtue theory is whether
virtue ethics can be completely independent of moral rules. The absence of rules is
indeed obvious in the works of one of the most famous examples of ancient virtue
ethics, Aristotle. According to an account of Raymond Devettere, principles did not
actually play a significant role in Greek ethical thought:

The Greeks would consider the modern language of moral principles (or moral
laws, rules, and rights) a distraction from seeing how virtuous people actually
manage to live good lives. Prudence, not principle, is fundamental. Practicing
prudence is what the virtuous person does, and should do, because prudence is
the only way that he can realize the goal and vision of living a good life in an
ever-changing world. Principles (or moral laws, rules and rights) are important
but prudence does not follow principles; principles follow prudence.20

As Devettere states, the curious absence of rules in most theories of virtue ethics can
be explained by the inflexibility and static nature inherent to rules qua laws. Since
ethical decisions are always context-dependent, prudence or practical wisdom serves
as the primary guiding principle in virtue ethics. In this sense, theories of virtue ethics
might be somewhat vague, but at the same time they provide the flexibility demanded
by the dynamic nature of the ethical life.

Since most rule-based systems of ethics maintain their (frequently) strict and straightforward approach to ethical questions, the role of rules in environmental ethics has come under scrutiny. In fact, theories of virtue ethics are frequently criticized for their failure to provide rules and principles according to which the moral agent should act. They are charged with being unspecific, and therefore difficult to apply to real-world situations. In his article “The Role of Rules in Ethical Decision Making,” Eugene Hargrove sheds some light on the importance of rules in morality by successfully drawing an analogy between the game of chess and ethical decision making.\footnote{Eugene Hargrove, “The Role of Rules in Ethical Decision Making,” \textit{Inquiry} 28, no. 3 (1985): 3-42.} He argues that the analogy is illuminating because of the existence of two different types of rules in chess, only one of which has an equivalent in ethical decision making. Hargrove refers to the first set of rules as \textit{constitutive rules}, which make up the game of chess itself. In other words, in changing or disregarding those rules, one is no longer playing chess, as these rules are integral to the configuration of the game. Hargrove argues that these rules are comparable to the laws of nature, as the laws of nature make up what nature is and thus cannot be ignored.

Ethical rules, Hargrove argues, are more akin to the second set of rules in chess, which he calls \textit{nonconstitutive rules}. In chess, nonconstitutive rules are contextual and flexible guidelines that inexperienced players study in order to quickly become better players. According to Hargrove, these rules “serve as guides to action and not as categorical imperatives.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 10.} As such, players are in no way required to follow nonconstitutive rules, but in most cases the application of those rules will yield advantages in the game. However, Hargrove also explains that in other contexts,
disregarding the nonconstitutive rule might be beneficial to the player. Hence, such rules are strictly context-dependent, which supports the analogy between nonconstitutive rules and rules in ethical decision making.

Interestingly, regarding the application of nonconstitutive rules, it remains doubtful that the player applies the rules consciously. Indeed, Hargrove argues that the players intentionally apply those rules only in situations where they can “detect no favorable or unfavorable consequences resulting from any possible move available—they apply a rule that they learned as a beginner for want of anything better to do.”23 However, even though nonconstitutive rules in chess are not applied straightforwardly or consciously by the player, knowledge of those rules does decidedly improve the player’s ability to play chess. How can this be? Since the evidence does support the claim of improved playing ability, the rules necessarily have to influence the player’s decision making, even if not on a conscious level.

In order to determine the role of nonconstitutive rules, it becomes necessary to better understand the process of decision making in chess. In examining chess players during their games and observing their decision-making, Adriaan de Groote determined three separate phases the players went through: (1) an orientation and exploration phase in which the player orients himself or herself by looking at a few move possibilities and then tries some of them; (2) an investigation phase in which there is a “deeper, more serious search for possibilities, strengthening, etc., that are quantitatively and qualitatively sharply defined”; and (3) a proof phase in which the player “checks and

23 Ibid., p. 14.
recapitulates,” striving for proof which is “subjectively convincing.” As this approach illustrates, in order to come to a decision, the player first has to grasp the board situation correctly. In order to do so, he or she tries out or tests several possible moves, which further clarifies the problem at hand by providing additional details about the board situation. Only then is the player able to make a decision that is subjectively convincing, which means that the player believes he or she chose the best move under the circumstances. Much like in ethical decision making, making a perfect judgment is difficult due to the copious factors that have to be taken into consideration when making a decision.

During the decision-making process, the chess players explore numerous board scenarios in their minds, frequently reinvestigating their preferred moves to better understand the board situation. Instead of simply reiterating the exact same scene, though, the imagined scenario seems to change every time the particular move is played out in the player’s mind. Obviously, although the process may seem repetitious and inane, trying out the same moves in their minds over and over must serve a definite purpose for the players. Indeed, Hargrove writes:

Each attempt to solve the chess problem also simultaneously further clarifies and redefines the chess problem itself, as a result, throughout the investigation the problem being solved goes through a series of changes, and the player is essentially trying to solve the problem before he even knows what the problem is. In other words, every time the player reinvestigates a previously discarded move, he or she is adopting a new perspective of the problem. For instance, whereas the first time around he or she investigates the problem in terms of potential danger from the knight,

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24 Ibid., p.15.
25 Ibid., p.17.
the second time he or she might pay attention to the bishop, and so on. By looking at the problem from a variety of angles, and by taking as many particulars into account as possible, to the player’s mind the board situation is continuously evolving; this process is a matter of attaining the most accurate and precise perception of the problem at hand. Clearly, it is not viable to calculate all possibilities or take into account each and every factor, but nonetheless, much like the moral agent, the player tries to gain as much insight as possible to reach the best decision possible for any given board situation. Assuming this description of the decision making process is accurate, the implications for the role of rules in ethical decision making are profound. As Hargrove puts it:

In summary, the player cannot apply a rule until he knows what the problem is and he cannot do so then, because by that time he has already solved the problem: to bring forth a rule at this point is more like labeling a situation than applying a rule to it…. Although justification is certainly rule-governed, it is not at all clear that decision making is.26

In most cases, then, rules are consciously employed to justify decisions that have already been made, but do not factor into the decision-making process itself on a conscious level. Why, then, do inexperienced players improve significantly after having studied nonconstitutive rules in chess? Clearly, the learning of the rules must have had some measurable effect on the player’s decision making process.

In that context, it is interesting to consider Hargrove’s claim that for less experienced players, the nonconstitutive rules sometimes constitute limitations rather than offer assistance; due to their lack of experience in the game, these players lack perceptual skills, and thus cannot see the situation on the board as

26 Ibid., p. 18.
clearly and precisely as more experienced players do. In an experiment conducted by Adriaan de Groote, less experienced players missed an advantageous move because it broke a nonconstitutive rule that they had studied previously. In this case, Hargrove argues that all of them were limited by the rule because they were lacking crucial experience. In contrast, the more experienced players were able to look past the nonconstitutive rule and consequently make the profitable move. Such players subconsciously recognized that the particular board situation represented an exemption to the rule, and so in these cases the correct perception of the problem took precedence over the nonconstitutive rule. In contrast, inexperienced players sometimes subconsciously treat nonconstitutive rules like constitutive ones, because they do not yet possess the refined perception of the situation that would allow them to see possible exceptions to the nonconstitutive rule. Thus, Hargrove explains:

> In this case, the players were not trying to apply rules, but rather were *simply trying to perceive the board situation correctly*. The rule entered the decision process as an element or factor in the player’s ability to perceive specific states of affairs, and in this sense was functioning more like a constitutive rule than a nonconstitutive one, since the constitutive rules were also apparently structuring the perceptual process, eliminating illegal moves without any accompanying awareness.\(^\text{27}\)

In other words, although the rules are usually not applied consciously to the decision-making process, they nevertheless factor into the player’s perception of the board situation. Thus, it seems apparent that the nonconstitutive rules in chess shape the player’s perception of the board situation by both guiding and limiting them in their game. Since nonconstitutive rules are merely intended as tools for less experienced players and thus serve as *rules of thumb*, first-hand experience of the game further

\(^\text{27}\) Ibid., p. 18.
refines the player’s perception of the board situation; practice is therefore crucial to
significant improvement of skills.

Hargrove concludes his examination of the role of rules in chess by stating that, despite
the fact that rules are not consciously applied to the decision, the study of
nonconstitutive rules by chess neophytes is indeed warranted, “since that study
translates into elements of the player’s perception which contributes significantly to his
[or her] ability to find correct moves in actual games.”

The insights from the chess example are illuminating in regard to the role of rules
in shaping ethical perception. Apparently, the nonconstitutive rules in chess are
generally not applied consciously to any given board situation; rather, studying the rules
and then practicing the game itself results in a different and arguably improved
perception of particular situations. Likewise, a set of nonconstitutive rules in
environmental ethics in combination with an education in basic ecological principles
might be helpful in shaping and refining an individual’s perception of environmental
conditions. Hargrove states:

The proper approach, I believe, is to introduce a group of nonconstitutive moral
rules paralleling and complementing Aristotle’s treatment of dispositions, which
then can be studied in the same manner as nonconstitutive rules are studied in
chess.

In essence, then, studying nonconstitutive rules in ethics might aid inexperienced moral
agents in improving their moral perception, thus giving them a more accurate
understanding of the problem at hand.

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28 Ibid., p. 19.
29 Ibid., p. 28.
Next I address one of the most recent, and arguably most influential, challenges raised against theories of virtue ethics, that is, the issue of whether robust traits of character actually exist. This challenge has to be taken seriously, given that without the existence of character traits, virtue ethics would be utterly impossible.

Virtue Ethics and Social Psychology: Do Character Traits Exist?

One recent challenge to the viability of virtue ethics has come from an unlikely front, namely, from social psychology. Especially in light of trying to provide an account of environmental virtue education, which is a type of character education, it is crucial to determine if stable character traits, such as virtues and vices, exist, or, if it is not possible to determine whether they actually exist, if it is at least meaningful or useful to act as if they do (i.e., use the virtues and vices as heuristic devices). Therefore, it is imperative to evaluate the claim of social psychology that the existence of robust character traits or dispositions, commonly referred to as virtues, has not been supported by empirical evidence and should thus be abandoned. More precisely, if virtue ethics provides an accurate descriptive account of human psychology (as well as a normative account of ethics), then one would assume that there in fact exist robust or reliable character traits, which in turn would help predict as well as explain the behavior of persons over time. Additionally, if there are differences between people regarding these character traits, those differences should show up in social experiments that test behavioral responses to specific situations. For example, a person that is considered to

30 In this context, it is worth noting that I use the term *character trait* to refer to a quality or an attribute of a person that is not inborn, but rather acquired.
be compassionate should act compassionately in a given situation, whereas a person that lacks compassion should exhibit this deficiency in the same context.

As it turns out, experiments in social psychology have not shown a significant difference in the behavior of people based on their presumed character traits; instead, the empirical evidence suggests that the behavior of persons seems to be much more dependent on situational factors than on the existence of robust moral qualities. In fact, the observed evidence that exists has led some psychologists to conclude that the attribution of character traits that are firm and global is misguided. For instance, Gilbert Harman states: “There is no reason at all to believe in character traits as ordinarily conceived.” As for the implications of such a conclusion for virtue ethics, Harman says: “If there are no character traits, there is nothing one can do to acquire character traits that are more like those possessed by a virtuous agent.” In fact, Harman goes so far as to say that talking about character and character traits is essentially harmful, since he explicitly states:

I myself think it is better to abandon all thought and talk of character and virtue. I believe that ordinary thinking in terms of character traits has disastrous effects on people's understanding of each other, on their understandings of what social programs are reasonable to support, and of their understandings of international affairs. I think we need to get people to stop doing this. We need to convince people to look at situational factors and to stop trying to explain things in terms of character traits. We need to abandon all talk of virtue and character, not find a way to save it by reinterpreting it.

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32 Ibid., p. 224.
33 Ibid.
He arrives at this fairly radical conclusion by examining different psychological experiments that have been designed to assess how much situational context influences moral behavior. In his words:

Empirical studies designed to test whether people behave differently in ways that might reflect their having different character traits have failed to find relevant differences. Since it is possible to explain our ordinary belief in character traits as deriving from certain illusions, we must conclude that there is no empirical basis for the existence of character traits. It seems that ordinary attributions of character traits to people are often deeply misguided and it may even be the case that there is no such thing as character, no ordinary character traits of the sort people think there are, none of the usual moral virtues and vices.34

Now, if Harman is correct in his conclusion that there is no such thing as character or dispositions such as virtues or vices, the project of developing an environmental virtue ethic, let alone the attempt to formulate an environmental virtue education, is doomed from the start, for what are we trying to cultivate in people if virtues do not actually exist? What does the term character education even refer to if there is no such thing as character? Does Harman’s conclusion lead to some kind of ethical and moral relativism that is inescapable?

In answer to Harman’s conclusions, several arguments have been brought up. First of all, the basic fact that human beings are generally rather successful in predicting the behavior of people they are familiar with strongly suggests the existence of character traits that remain fairly consistent over time. If such robust qualities did not exist, it would be utterly impossible for moral agents to make predictions regarding other people’s behavior, which in turn would render moral life extremely difficult to impossible.

Furthermore, Nafsika Athanassoulis argues that the experiments quoted by Harman as evidence against the existence of character traits are not really devised to “test” for such robust traits. In principle, designing experiments to determine the existence or the absence of character traits is a complex endeavor, since experiments can only be evaluated based on the overt behavioral output of the test subject. Virtues, however, are not simply dispositions to act, but also dispositions to feel. Aristotle writes: “Virtue, then, is about feelings and actions.” Furthermore, correct action involves right thinking and right deliberation, none of which are expressed in overt behavior. The external behavioral output of the moral agent might or might not be indicative of virtue. Athanassoulis provides a telling example for this problem:

To make this clear I will appeal to Aristotle’s distinction between virtue, continence, incontinence and vice. With respect to their outward behavior, the virtuous person is identical to the continent person, in that they both perform the correct act. They differ in their internal desires; the virtuous person acts effortlessly, desire re-affirming the results of reason, whereas the continent person’s external act is the result of an internal struggle between reason and contrary desire. Similarly, the vicious person and the incontinent person act in the same way, however the incontinent person differs in that he has lost the battle between desire and reason. Thus, empirical evidence about outward behavior alone is not sufficient in order to draw inferences about the precise state of character of the agent; we may confuse the continent agent with the virtuous one or the incontinent with the vicious.

In other words, the actions overtly performed by the moral agent can only tell a very limited part of the story. What is entirely missing from these observations are the motivations, feelings, thoughts, and attitudes that accompany the behavioral output. Athanassoulis concludes:

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It is not that there are no character traits, rather that we are too quick to attribute specific character traits to people from insufficient evidence.\textit{What is wrong is our assumptions in attributing specific character traits to individuals as we only have access to external manifestations and not internal explanations of character traits.}\textsuperscript{37}

In effect, a person might exhibit seemingly virtuous behavior; however, if the internal motivations and feelings are morally deficient, we would be mistaken in judging the agent to be virtuous. Naturally, this problem renders the task of making the distinction between the truly virtuous person and a seemingly virtuous one extremely complex. Additionally, only the fully virtuous person can be expected to consistently exhibit virtuous behavior across different situations; however, since it is widely acknowledged that only relatively few people can serve as exemplars of virtue, it is to be fully expected that many people will fall short of the ideal, which seems to be what the empirical evidence is at most able to show. Athanassoulis asserts: “Although full virtue is a stable and fixed disposition that will manifest itself despite difficulties and temptations, there is no reason to suppose that it is a \textit{widespread} disposition.”\textsuperscript{38} Aristotle himself states that approximating virtue is enough; the mean is the ideal and moral improvement simply means that the moral agent is getting closer to the mean.

Social psychologists that follow Harman’s train of thought refer to their theory as situationism, which stands in marked contrast to virtue ethics or so-called dispositionalism. Many proponents of situationism would claim that it is far more important to pay attention to the particular situational context of a moral agent in order to ensure morally praiseworthy behavior than to focus on the specific character traits (if they exist at all) of the moral agent. John Doris explains:

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 220 (emphasis added).

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 219.
The way to get things right more often, I suggest, is by attending to the determinative features of situations. We should try, so far as we are able, to avoid "near occasions for sin," morally dangerous circumstances. At the same time, we should seek near occasions for happier behaviors situations conducive to ethically desirable conduct. This means that the determinants of moral success or failure may emerge earlier in an activity than we might think.39

Even if Doris is correct in his assessment that ethical behavior is largely situational or context-dependent, and that moral agents should pay close attention to and even monitor the situations in which they find themselves, I contend that this assessment does not preclude the possibility of the existence of relatively stable dispositions in the moral agent. In fact, I agree wholeheartedly that the moral agent should probably not seek out situations that might lead to immoral or morally problematic behavior (although some people might believe that morally difficult situations would actually strengthen a person’s character by “training” the person’s willpower); however, recognizing a situation as being morally problematic before engaging in it seems to already indicate a certain degree of moral sensitivity that might actually suggest the existence of (some) moral virtue in the person’s character. In other words, Doris’ claim about situationism as a normative theory is not as strong as it seems at first glance, since it appears that the moral agent’s recognition of the salient features of a situation already requires the moral perception that is enhanced by the moral virtues. He explicitly states:

> Then condemnation for ethical failure might very often be directed, not at a particular failure of the will in action, but at a certain culpable naïveté, or insufficiently careful attention to situations.40

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40 Ibid., p. 517.
Essentially, what Doris refers to as “insufficiently careful attention to situations” is suggestive of an agent’s deficiency in moral sensitivity, which in turn could be indicative of a lack of moral virtue. He furthermore acknowledges that it lies within the realm of the responsibility of the moral agent to “attend to the determinative features of situations”:

The implication of this is that our duties may be surprisingly complex, involving not simply obligations to particular actions, but a sort of “cognitive responsibility” to attend, in our deliberations, to the determinative features of situations. If it is true that this cognitive responsibility may frequently be exercised in “cooler” decision contexts, this approach might affect a considerable reliability in ethical behavior.41

Ultimately, Doris’ situationist position appears quite compatible with certain aspects of virtue ethics, even if it attempts to deny the most important feature of the theory, namely, the existence of solid character traits.

It is my view that none of the findings in the stated experiments categorically demonstrate the absence of robust character traits. Aristotle himself would be the first to admit that the situational context or the environment that a moral agent inhabits has a strong bearing on the successful cultivation and even the outward expression of virtue. This, of course, is especially true of the moral agent who is still deficient in the virtues. I believe that Aristotle’s emphasis on choosing the right kind of friends and engaging in the right activities readily plays into the claims of situationism, since by doing so one minimizes one’s exposure to morally problematic contexts. It has always been a strong suit of virtue ethics that it is decidedly contextual in nature and as such does not provide categorical rules to follow.

In summary, I do not perceive an inherent conflict between the more modest claims of situationism and a perhaps more modest version of virtue ethics. While it

41 Ibid., p. 517.
might be true that for the completely and perfectly virtuous person the influence of the situation on behavior is negligible, very few people actually achieve such a state of moral perfection. For the rest of us, we need to pay close attention to situational pressures and challenges to our behavior. Furthermore, it appears that a certain degree of sensitivity is required from the moral agent in order to be able to correctly assess the situations that confront us before we actually engage in them. Cultivating such sensitivity and awareness is itself a component of virtue ethics, since it has been argued that the fostering of virtues goes hand in hand with a refinement in moral perception. In other words, the process of cultivating virtues influences the way that the moral agent perceives the world, usually leading to an increased sensitivity regarding the salient feature of moral situations. Having addressed the most serious challenge to virtue ethics, I now turn to other criticisms brought up against the theory and evaluate their merit.

Criticisms of Traditional Virtue Ethics

In order to address some of the most common criticisms leveled against theories of virtue ethics, I mainly draw on Robert Louden’s article “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics,” as he does an excellent job in pointing out some weaknesses that seem to be inherent in traditional accounts of virtue ethics. Procedurally, I examine each point of criticism brought up by Louden and then assess their merit. Ultimately, I hope to successfully show that either (1) each of the criticisms or perceived weaknesses of

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virtue ethics can be individually remedied, or (2) that the weakness in question is not unique to theories of virtue ethics but in fact affects all ethical theories in the same way.

First, Louden gives a brief account of how theories of virtue ethics differ from other ethical theories. In his assessment, virtue ethics diverge from deontological and utilitarian approaches in several important ways. One fundamental difference between virtue ethics and most other ethical theories is that virtue ethics is agent-based rather than act-based; in other words, it does not evaluate individual actions but rather focuses on the evaluation of character. Clearly, this is not a novel observation, as this fact has been pointed out by numerous scholars throughout the years. However, according to Louden, this essential difference leads to other crucial discrepancies between act-centered and agent-centered ethical theories.

First, Louden claims that the two rival approaches to ethical reasoning (i.e., agent-based versus act-based) will probably employ practical reasoning in differing ways. While act-based theories mainly utilize practical reasoning for the development of action-guiding moral principles or rules, agent-based theories chiefly regard practical reasoning as a discerning faculty that is most useful in interpreting moral situations correctly, since such theories are not focused on providing action-guiding principles.

Second, Louden believes that the views about moral motivation differ between act- and agent-based moral theories. For instance, in deontological ethics, duty itself is seen as the prime motivator for moral action, while in utilitarian theories the motivation lies in the desire to bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people (or of sentient beings). In contrast, the prime motivator for moral behavior in virtue theory is a commitment to the virtues themselves. In other words, virtue theory is
not concerned with fulfilling one’s duty or bringing about the greatest happiness for the
most people, but rather focuses on acting rightly for the sake of being virtuous.
However, Louden may not be entirely correct in this characterization of virtue ethics and
the motivation for virtuous behavior, since even Aristotle acknowledges that the moral
agent ultimately acts virtuously for the sake of being a happy and fully actualized human
being. So it could be argued that the motivation for virtuous behavior is really the
agent’s own happiness, or *eudaimonia*. Furthermore, as I argued in the previous section
on moral perception, I want to reiterate that the motivation problem in moral philosophy
can most easily be answered with an appeal to the concept of moral perception. As
stated previously, prior to making a moral judgment, the situation has to be recognized
as one requiring moral action, and to do so, the moral agent has to possess a certain
moral sensitivity and acuity. In effect, all ethical theories have to address the problem of
moral motivation, since moral reasoning or judgment can only occur *after* the situation
has been discerned as a moral one. I would argue that virtue ethics actually stands a
better chance of explaining moral motivation than its rival theories, seeing that a
connection can be made between the cultivation of moral virtues and a refinement in
moral perception. Moral perception, in turn, can serve as an explanation for moral
motivation, as it can account for the ability to recognize the salient features of a moral
situation. I now turn to the specific criticism Louden levels against theories of virtue
ethics and assess their merit.

Casuistry and Applied Ethics

Due to its general failure to provide specific principles or rules to follow, virtue
ethics has often been accused of being unable to provide any type of practical guidance when a moral agent is faced with a real-life moral situation. In other words, virtue ethics regularly fails to answer the question “What should I *do*?” as it is presumably too focused on addressing the question of “What sort of person should I *be*?” Louden takes this criticism of virtue ethics very seriously, and he explicitly states:

   But what can a virtues-and-vices approach say about specific moral dilemmas? As virtue theorists from Aristotle onward have rightly emphasized, virtues are not simply dispositions to behave in specified ways, for which rules and principles can always be cited. In addition, they involve skills of perception and articulation, situation-specific "know-how," all of which are developed only through recognizing and acting on what is relevant in concrete moral contexts as they arise. These skills of moral perception and practical reason are not completely routinizable, and so cannot be transferred from agent to agent as any sort of decision procedure "package deal." Due to the very nature of the moral virtues, there is thus a very limited amount of advice on moral quandaries that one can reasonably expect from the virtue-oriented approach.43

While Louden may be correct in asserting that virtue ethics is not focused on what is frequently referred to as “dilemma ethics,” i.e., the type of ethical education that describes morality as consisting of endless moral dilemmas that a moral agent is faced with day in and day out, the failure to provide practical guidance in applied ethics is not unique to virtue theory. In fact, even having precise principles to follow frequently does not make the task of deciding what to do much easier. For instance, if the moral dilemma consisted of deciding whether to terminate a late-term pregnancy that could result in the death of the mother, the principle “Thou shalt not kill” is not exactly helpful. Likewise, trying to apply Kant’s Categorical imperative to the situation is not very illuminating because it is not clear whether either maxim (something along the lines of “it is permissible to abort a fetus when the mother’s life is at stake” versus “it is permissible

to carry out a pregnancy that might result in the death of the mother) can be universalized by all rational beings. If the fetus is at a stage of development where it is viable (maybe in the seventh month of pregnancy or so), who is to decide which life is more important: the life of the mother or the life of the unborn child? One cannot save both, so who is it to be? Surely, one could appeal to the utilitarian principle of deciding which of these two humans would contribute more to the good of society, but can such cold-hearted calculation really substitute for the fact that an actual human life is at stake? Clearly, virtue ethics cannot provide a foolproof principle to follow in an ethical quandary like this one, but the question is whether other theories fare any better in such situations. Louden also states:

> Virtue theory is not a problem-oriented or quandary approach to ethics: it speaks of rules and principles of action only in a derivative manner. And its derivative oughts are frequently too vague and unhelpful for persons who have not yet acquired the requisite moral insight and sensitivity. Consequently, we cannot expect it to be of great use in applied ethics and casuistry.44

It is instructive to note that Louden explicitly mentions derivative rules and actions that can be found within theories of virtue ethics, although he regards them as being too blurred to provide actual guidance to behavior. However, I would argue that it is exactly these rules and principles, which I have elsewhere referred to as nonconstitutive rules, that can teach a moral agent how to act in specific situations while he or she has “not yet acquired the requisite moral insight and sensitivity.”45 In summary, while I think that Louden has a valid point in criticizing virtue ethics for its failure to provide specific guidance in applied contexts, I am not convinced that other ethical theories perform much better in terms of providing such guidance. Furthermore, I want to emphasize that

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44 Ibid., p. 230 (emphasis added).
45 See my previous discussion on Hargrove’s “The Role of Rules.”
I strongly believe that it is possible for virtue ethics to develop nonconstitutive rules of action that are more akin to rules-of-thumb than to categorical principles.

Tragic Humans

Under the heading “tragic humans,” Louden points out that it is entirely possible for a virtuous person to make a wrong choice on occasion, which, however, under the virtue ethics approach cannot readily be judged or criticized in isolation from the person’s overall character. In other words, Louden argues that since virtue ethics evaluates character instead of isolated actions, an occasional lapse in judgment by an otherwise good person will simply be ignored under such theories. If a person’s action is not based on vice, but rather on misinformation, and is still performed with the best of intentions and without negligence, the character of the moral agent is generally not put into question (unless, of course, such “slips” or lapses become commonplace, which in turn would render the character of the person suspicious). According to Aristotle, cases such as these give rise to the concept of tragedy, since we deal with a person of good character "whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgment".46 Louden emphasizes that even the most virtuous person can fall prey to such errors in judgment due to the fact that all humans are imperfect and have incomplete knowledge of the world. The specific problem that theories of virtue ethics face in such cases consists of their inability to evaluate occasional aberrant behavior apart from the person’s general character. Louden states:

My point is that virtue ethics is in danger of blinding itself to the wrongful conduct in Oedipal acts, simply because it views the Oedipuses of the world as honorable

persons and because its focus is on long-term character manifestations rather than discrete acts.47

While I am sympathetic to Louden’s criticism, I do not consider virtue ethics to be particularly deficient in this regard as compared to other ethical theories. Granted, theories of deontology and utilitarianism could judge such actions in isolation from the agent’s character and evaluate them according to their compliance or noncompliance with given ethical principles; however, these theories might not even be able to recognize the behavior of the person as being “aberrant” or “uncharacteristic” for that person in the first place. For instance, if the action was performed for the sake of duty and with a pure motive (a so-called “good will”), Kantian deontology would actually judge the action to be morally praiseworthy, even if it was based on misinformation or an error in judgment. In fact, if the action was performed in accordance with and for the sake of duty (and along the lines of the Categorical imperative) and with a good will, there would not be an error in judgment in the Kantian view. In contrast, utilitarianism does not really account for the underlying motive of an act, but focuses instead on the outcome of the action, so that in the case of Oedipus, killing his father and marrying his mother would be morally condemnable even if he did have good intentions and a pure motive. In other words, the judgment of the act in isolation from the person’s character does not seem inherently better or preferable than the approach taken by virtue ethics. Furthermore, it is a strong assumption to claim that virtue ethics might be “blinding itself” to wrongful action; after all, the character of a person is usually evaluated by looking at that person’s conduct over time, so that wrongful actions would necessarily be taken into account when assessing a person’s character.

In summary, I do not find Louden’s criticism regarding this point very convincing, seeing that other ethical theories deal with their own specific problems of evaluating wrongful conduct. In fact, I believe that virtue ethics has some advantages over other theories, given that it is able to recognize wrongful action as being atypical or aberrant to a person’s general moral character. Evidently, this does not mean that the moral agent cannot or should not be held responsible for his or her error in judgment; on the contrary, once such atypical action is noted, it is essential to determine the primary cause of that action, be it misinformation or misjudgment. Then, the moral agent has a chance of learning from his or her mistake in judgment or from the lack of information in order to perform better next time.

Intolerable Actions

Another criticism Louden levels against virtue ethics and its perceived inability to evaluate actions in isolation from a person’s character lies in its failure to provide specific rules for the prohibition of ostensibly intolerable actions. According to Louden, there are some actions that are so harmful and detrimental to the moral fabric of society that they demand explicit prohibitions. He states:

In every traditional moral community one encounters prohibitions or "barriers to action" which mark off clear boundaries in such areas as the taking of innocent life, sexual relations, and the administration of justice according to local laws and customs. Such rules are needed to teach citizens what kinds of actions are to be regarded not simply as bad (a table of vices can handle this) but as intolerable. Theorists must resort to specific lists of offenses to emphasize the fact that there are some acts which are absolutely prohibited. We cannot articulate this sense of absolute prohibition by referring merely to characteristic patterns of behavior.\(^\text{48}\)

In considering this problem, I think that Louden takes an unnecessarily strict view of virtue ethics and its societal context. While most theories of virtue ethics in fact do not provide specific rules or principles to follow, it is quite clear that society in general (even if it is to be a society of mostly virtuous persons) is in need of rules or guidelines. Nowhere has it been suggested (at least not to my knowledge) that virtue theory is intended to serve as a complete substitute for written rules or laws. Actually, in ethical theory a distinction is frequently made between axiological and deontic moral judgments.\(^{49}\) According to David Heyd, the axiological face of morality focuses on moral agents or state of affairs, and is primarily concerned with values, virtues, and ideals. As such, it is rather open-ended in the sense that it has no natural limit, since a given state of affairs or a specific moral agent can, at least in principle, always be perfected or improved upon. In contrast, the deontic face of morality emphasizes moral action and prescribes moral requirements, the fulfillment of which are taken as the minimal conditions for morality. Heyd claims that most ethical theories contain both axiological and deontic aspects, and I do not believe that virtue ethics should be regarded as an exception to this claim. In other words, it appears perfectly consistent for a theory of virtue ethics to also provide a set of rules that can augment its effectiveness. In fact, I have argued for the inclusion of nonconstitutive rules in character education in a previous section entitled “Virtue Ethics, Character, and Rules.”

Furthermore, as John Stuart Mill already recognized in his theory on utilitarianism, there are both internal and external sanctions to human behavior, i.e.,

internal and external motivations to act in a morally praiseworthy manner.\textsuperscript{50} External sanctions are usually regarded as the desire for praise and the fear of punishment or censure by one’s fellows, while internal sanctions mostly consist of what is frequently referred to as a person’s conscience. Mill claims that internal sanctions, if properly cultivated, actually make a stronger claim on a person’s behavior; yet, he acknowledges that until they are so established, society needs to utilize the power of external sanctions. Ultimately, I am in complete agreement with Louden’s claim that some actions are so intolerable that they demand outright prohibition; however, unlike Louden, I do not see this claim as incompatible with virtue ethics. Just because many theories of virtue ethics do not offer explicit rules, this fact does not necessarily imply that these theories are expressly committed \textit{against} having any solid principles in place. For instance, I do not believe that a proponent of virtue ethics would argue against having a rule prohibiting the unnecessary and unprovoked killing of innocent people. Nevertheless, the basic idea behind virtue ethics is that if a person is sufficiently virtuous, they would not need to refer back to such rules in order to refrain from killing innocent people; ultimately, the rule would become superfluous \textit{for them} even if it is not superfluous for society at large. In fact, some evidence suggests that ethical rules are frequently not employed consciously, but are rather used as justification after a decision has already been made.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} See John Stuart Mill, \textit{Utilitarianism}, chapter 3 “Of the Ultimate Sanction of the Principle of Utility.”

\textsuperscript{51} See my previous discussion on Hargrove’s “The Role of Rules.”
Character Change

Louden states that another reason for demanding that an ethical theory be able to evaluate actions in isolation from a person’s character is the fact that a person’s character can change over time. Aristotle basically agrees with Louden on this point when he states that we become virtuous by practicing the virtues; it seems natural to infer from this point that if we fail to practice the virtues, we lose them over time. Louden states:

[W]e can lose a certain sensitivity. People do become morally insensitive, relatively speaking, missing opportunities they once would have noticed, although perhaps when confronted with a failure they might recognize that they had failed, showing at least that they hadn't literally "forgotten the difference between right and wrong." If the moral virtues are acquired habits rather than innate gifts, it is always possible that one can lose relative proficiency in these habits.\(^{52}\)

He then goes on to argue that if character is plastic rather than static, “a more reliable yardstick is sometimes needed." However, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle actually says:

The happy person has the stability we are looking for and keeps the character he has throughout his life. For always, or more than anything else, he will do and study the actions in accord with virtue, and will bear fortunes most finely.\(^{53}\)

While I do agree that moral virtues need to be practiced continuously if a person is to be considered virtuous, I fail to see how this issue poses an inherent challenge to virtue ethics. Human character is not the only thing that is malleable and prone to change; the moral universe itself is not static and unchanging. Moreover, I believe that the fact that character is changeable is actually an advantage of virtue ethics because it means that the moral agent has considerable control over or at least influence on who he or she will

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become. Without a doubt, cultivating a good character is a lifelong endeavor, but being an active participant in a moral universe requires such lifelong involvement at any rate. I think that Louden is correct in saying that moral agents can, over time, lose their moral sensitivity, but the flip-side of this point is that morally deficient persons can also improve their moral sensitivity over time. In other words, as moral agents we can never quite rest on our laurels; since virtue always requires practice, we have to remain active and involved. As such, Louden’s criticism of virtue ethics in this particular context can be turned on its head and thereby be transformed into a benefit: since character is changeable over time, we are not destined to be one way or another; instead, we can choose to become the person we want to be and thus exert considerable control over our own personality.

Moral Backsliding

The criticism raised by Louden under the heading of moral backsliding is almost identical to the problem of tragic humans: basically, Louden states that if virtue theory focuses on the evaluation of character over time instead of evaluating individual moral actions in isolation, it is prone to overlook the occasional vicious or wrongful act if it is committed by an otherwise respectable person. He further argues that such backsliding can eventually give rise to self-deception in the moral agent, because the agent can rationalize and justify her increasingly vicious behavior over time. However, just as in the case of the tragic humans, I do not see that Louden’s criticism has much force, given that virtue ethics derivatively evaluates moral actions in order to be able to evaluate a person’s character. If moral backsliding occurs, it too will have to be taken
into account in determining the moral character of a person. If the moral agent regularly fails to tell the truth, for instance, he or she will not be judged to be an honest person overall.

At the same time, self-deception seems to be one of the most common moral shortcomings of all; therefore, I do not think that the phenomenon of self-deception is unique to virtue ethics. People regularly lie to themselves regarding their true motives for acting, and virtue ethics is one of the few ethical theories that actually emphasizes the importance of becoming aware of such self-serving behavior. In this regard, it appears that virtue ethics really holds an advantage over other ethical theories, as it explicitly cautions the moral agent in regards to his or her own preconceptions and to the dangers of not perceiving and judging a situation correctly due to said biases.

The Problem of Determining Who Is Virtuous

Louden does point out a legitimate problem occurring in theories of virtue ethics. Since such ethical systems do not offer specific moral principles, having appropriate role models or exemplars of virtues that one then attempts to emulate is of utmost importance. However, Louden stresses that a problem may arise in trying to figure out who could serve as such a role model. Louden explains that in determining a person’s character, most theories of virtue ethics use the “externalist” approach, i.e., the character of a person is inferred by observing the actions of that person over time. However, Louden insists that there is no necessary connection between a person’s overt behavior and his or her character, or that character is generally not reducible to the sum of a person’s actions. Thus, the externalist approach is bound to result in
mistakes when trying to determine who is truly virtuous, or in a failure to really produce a distinction between virtuous and vicious persons. This is especially true if one takes Aristotle’s view that a truly virtuous person not only acts virtuously, but does so for the sake of being virtuous, and that such actions spring from a firm trait of character. Seeing that it is not possible to “look inside” a moral agent to discern his or her true motivation for action, for an outside observer the only element accessible for the evaluation of a person’s character is his or her overt behavior. His or her internal motivations remain entirely hidden to the outside world. Yet again, I wish to point out that this phenomenon is not restricted to theories of virtue ethics; specifically, deontology, which focuses on the motives of a person, runs into the same problem. Kant is keenly aware of this limitation, for he writes that "the real morality of actions, their merit or guilt, even that of our own conduct, remains entirely hidden from us." 54 However, even if determining who is virtuous or vicious is not an exact science and is undoubtedly complex, identifying a certain degree of consistency between a person’s words and actions, and a certain reliability in his or her behavior over time, should at least indicate some level of what is sometimes called moral integrity. Louden claims that there is no necessary connection between a person’s behavior and his or her character, but what is character if not a certain consistency and reliability in a person’s behavior over time? While I personally would recommend not putting such role models on a pedestal by judging them to be beyond reproach (given that they are merely human and therefore fallible), I do believe that persons of moral integrity can play an important role in emulative moral theories. It is not a mere coincidence or whim that some people ask themselves “what would Jesus

do?” when faced with morally complex situations; rather, they apparently regard Jesus as a morally exemplary person whose behavior is worthy of being emulated. Much in the same way, one might ask oneself what a virtuous person might do in a given situation in order to successfully navigate one’s way through a complex moral environment.

Style over Substance

According to Louden, virtue ethics is guilty of emphasizing “being” over “doing,” which leads him to the charge that such ethical theories tend to focus more on style than on substance. In other words, he asserts that virtue ethics is not sufficiently result-oriented and instead focuses exclusively on whether the moral agent acts in a “style” that is proper to a virtuous person. In this context, Louden lumps together theories of virtue ethics and duty-based ethics, since he alleges that both variants of ethical theory emphasize the internal over the external, i.e., that they focus too much on the right motive of the moral agent and in the process neglect to take into account the actual results of an action. However, some scholars disagree with Louden’s criticism of virtue ethics or at least consider it to be too strong a claim. For instance, Kristjansson asserts that “we can rest assured that the emotional make-up of persons will generally translate into action, because emotional dispositions are essentially action-guiding.”

Even if Louden is correct in pointing out the tendency of both virtue- and duty-based ethics to evaluate motive rather than outcome, it is difficult to see why this emphasis on motive is inherently inferior to the consequentialist focus on the results of

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actions. After all, would we consider an action morally praiseworthy merely because it happens to have a positive result, even if the moral agent had a completely different, morally dubious, motive when performing the action?

Furthermore, consequentialism and its focus on results runs into its own set of problems, because results are difficult to predict and sometimes people with morally bad intentions might end up causing positive consequences. It appears that in judging moral actions as well as moral agents, taking both motive and outcome of moral activity into account might circumvent many of the problems that arise if one focuses merely on one or the other aspect. In fact, the legal system already uses such an approach in evaluating legally problematic actions: it is not sufficient for an action to have a negative outcome since the mindset or underlying motive of a person is also taken into consideration in legal judgments. For instance, a legal judgment of murder usually requires premeditation by the person committing the crime, which essentially means that he or she fully intended and planned to kill. In contrast, if the killing was not planned or premeditated, the sentence is usually significantly less severe.

In summary, Louden’s criticisms of virtue ethics are well thought out, and I have to confess that I am particularly sympathetic to the conclusion he reaches at the end of his article when he writes:

The moral field is not unitary…. No single reductive method can offer a realistic means of prioritizing these different values…. The theoretician's quest for conceptual economy and elegance has been won at too great a price, for the resulting reductionist definitions of the moral concepts are not true to the facts of moral experience. It is important now to see the ethics of virtue and the ethics of rules as adding up, rather than as cancelling each other out.56

In other words, he comes to the same conclusion that I would like to put forth, namely, that the best approach is probably one that fuses the advantages of virtue ethics and rule-based theories. I wholeheartedly agree that there are no simple solutions to the problems of everyday morality, and I feel that the quest for a monistic conceptual answer to the demands of living in a complex moral universe is probably misguided. Nevertheless, I believe that virtue ethics, with the aid of very general, nonconstitutive rules of conduct, is sufficiently broad and flexible to deal with a pluralistic world. Without a doubt, virtue ethics has inherent limitations, as aptly pointed out by Louden; however, these limitations can largely be overcome if one is willing to amend the theory to admit some aspects of rule-based theories. In fact, I am willing to argue that any limitations of an ethic of virtue are greatly outweighed by the advantages of the theory, not the least of which is its effect on the moral perception of the moral agent, which fundamentally transforms the way a moral agent perceives and understands the world. This transformation of perception, in turn, leads to an essential alteration in the interaction with others.
In environmental ethics, the virtue theory approach has received increased attention in recent years, as utilitarian and deontological approaches to environmental ethics have run into numerous problems. As I have argued previously in *Environmental Virtue Education: Ancient Wisdom Applied*, many difficulties arise from the language of rights, duties, and moral claims that is common to both utilitarianism and deontology when applied to the human-nature relationship. Fortunately, environmental virtue ethics might be able to circumvent many of those difficulties, since it does not rely on the extension of moral consideration to the nonhuman components of the environment.

Generally speaking, there are inherent problems in applying deontological and utilitarian accounts to environmental issues. For instance, many rule-based ethical theories rely on the concept of reciprocity. In such theories rationality is frequently regarded as the prime criterion for moral considerability, since rationality is thought to be a necessary condition for the ability to reciprocate. Naturally, this condition raises the question of how to extend moral status to nonhuman entities that are not considered "rational" in the traditional sense. The issue of who or what deserves moral consideration is arguably one of the major points of contention between different theories of environmental ethics, and if environmental virtue ethics is able to steer clear of this problem, it has already resolved one of the key concerns in environmental ethics.

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Second, it seems that trying to use more or less strict ethical principles to deal with moral and environmental issues is both daunting and impractical, given that both the realm of morality as well as nature itself are rather malleable and thus might require a more flexible approach. Especially considering the intricacies of ecology, which include but are not limited to the complex interactions between the biotic and abiotic components of ecosystems, it becomes clear that any adequate theory of environmental ethics has to be able to respond quickly and ingeniously to the challenges that might arise in dealing with environmental issues. Sandler writes:

Given the richness and complexity of our relationship with the natural environment and the diversity, dynamism, and interconnectedness of our environmental problems, it is somewhat surprising to find that many prominent approaches to environmental ethics are monistic…. It seems unlikely that an adequate environmental ethic could be monistic…Evidence of this is that there are so many monistic approaches.58

In other words, the mere fact that there are countless monistic accounts of environmental ethics, all of which are trying to adequately deal with the complexities of the moral and environmental universe, bears witness to the issue that a monistic approach to environmental ethics might neither be realistic nor desirable. Frankly, I am not sure that any theory exclusively relying on categorical rules or principles of action is up to the task.

Third, utilitarian and deontological theories of environmental ethics place enormous emphasis on evaluating singular moral acts, whereas assessing the moral agent and his or her character is more or less ignored, which in effect disconnects the moral agent from his or her actions and furthermore views moral acts as isolated

instances that do not form a comprehensive picture of the person performing said actions.

Therefore, it appears that environmental virtue ethics can provide a solution for some of the most glaring problems inherent in rule-based ethical theories, since

(a) It is not concerned with establishing moral standing for nonhuman nature
(b) It is inherently flexible and context-dependent
(c) It focuses on the evaluation of character instead of judging isolated moral acts

To explain these points in more detail, a brief explanation of the basic nature of environmental virtue ethics is in order. Roughly, environmental virtue ethics, often referred to simply as EVE, is a type of environmental ethics that focuses on the character development of the moral agent instead of the rightness or wrongness of specific moral actions. Frequently, environmental virtue ethics launches from the naturalistic premise that human beings are first and foremost biological entities that are intricately connected to other biological entities as well as to the natural environment they inhabit.\(^5^9\) As already mentioned, one of the principal advantages of environmental virtue ethics over other theories of environmental ethics lies in the fact that it does not need to specify exactly which components of nonhuman nature deserve moral consideration, thereby avoiding one of the major points of disagreement between other theories of environmental ethics. In other words, environmental virtue ethics neatly dodges the problem of establishing the moral standing of nonhuman nature by focusing instead on cultivating certain character traits within the moral agent.

Ironically, it is precisely this frequently criticized aspect of virtue ethics, namely, its focus on character instead on principles of action, which actually constitutes its major advantage.

advantage in the field of environmental ethics. Sandler eloquently states: “One implication of this for moral theory is that no principle of right action is a replacement for moral wisdom, sensitivity, and experience.”

Different Types of EVE and the Determination of Environmental Virtues

How to Determine Environmental Virtues

Naturally, one of the most important challenges any adequate environmental virtue ethic has to face is the issue of identifying and specifying environmental virtues. According to Sandler, there are several strategies an environmental virtue ethicist could adopt to accomplish this task.

First, Sandler argues that one could determine environmental virtues by simply extending the traditional range of interpersonal virtues to include nonhuman nature. In other words, this strategy uses traditional virtue ethics as a starting point, and extends the range of the applicability of virtues to relationships that involve nonhuman nature. For instance, extensionists might argue that if compassion is the appropriate response to another person’s suffering, then, by extension, compassion would be the appropriate response to the suffering of nonhuman animals as well.

Another tactic for specifying environmental virtue would be to emphasize the benefit a particular disposition has for the moral agent. While at first glance this approach sounds decidedly self-interested, Sandler maintains that it appeals to the enlightened self-interest of the moral agent, which leads him to claim that “it allows for

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environmental ethics to be self-interested without being egoistic.”61 In other words, Sandler believes that the more open and sensitive the moral agent becomes in his or her relationship with the natural environment, the more benefits he or she will derive from nature; these benefits, in turn, might serve as an incentive to cultivate the virtues of openness and sensitivity, as they tend to significantly increase agent benefit. So only a person of a certain character (ideally a virtuous character) can ultimately reap the benefits that nature is able to provide. Sandler states:

The natural environment provides plentiful opportunities for meaningful relationships with its denizens, but those relationships are only possible for those who are open to having them.62

Importantly, agent benefits are not just limited to the satisfaction of the physical needs of the person, but can additionally extend to the enjoyment a person derives from the beauty of nature and can even include the spiritual benefit that many religions ascribe to nature.

Third, environmental virtue ethics can specify environmental virtues by emphasizing only dispositions that result in human excellence. This strategy limits the designation of environmental virtues to character traits that aid human flourishing. In other words, environmental virtues would be regarded as character traits that render their possessor a good or excellent person. In this context, being a good person as well as the concept of human flourishing are understood holistically and naturalistically, i.e., a good person would not only be exemplary in regard to other human beings but also toward nonhuman components of the natural environment. As such, an environmentally virtuous (good) person would not wantonly destroy natural environments or waste

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62 Ibid., p. 4.
natural resources because such behavior would be indicative of a certain insensitivity and callousness. In summary, this approach views the cultivation of environmental virtues as a necessary component of human flourishing.

Lastly, in order to designate environmental virtues, environmental virtue ethics can take the approach of studying the dispositions of persons that are regarded as exemplars of environmental excellence, such as Aldo Leopold, Rachel Carson, and John Muir. By looking at these exemplars of ecological virtue, one can extrapolate character traits or dispositions that are common to many or all of them, such as frugality and humility. Subsequently, one has reason to conclude that these dispositions can be considered environmental virtues. This approach makes even more sense in light of Aristotle’s emphasis on the importance of having appropriate virtuous role models for the uninitiated moral agent; these role models not only exemplify the virtues but can also offer practical guidance in moral situations.

In summary, I have described and explained four approaches to designate environmental virtues: (1) virtues adopted from traditional virtue ethics (extensionism); (2) virtues as traits that benefit their possessor in some way; (3) virtues as traits that render their possessor an excellent person, and (4) virtues as desirable traits extrapolated from environmental roles models.

Some Environmental Virtues

In talking about the development of a theory of environmental virtue ethics, one of the major questions concerns which character traits would be considered virtues. The
following is a list of “eco-virtues” that were already suggested by Leopold in his *Land Ethic*:

(1) Love
(2) Respect
(3) Admiration
(4) A high regard for the land’s intrinsic value

It is noteworthy that Leopold’s eco-virtues are not only character traits or dispositions, but also constitute *feelings or sentiments* one should have toward the land and the biotic community. Indeed, virtues are closely related to feelings or sentiments; Aristotle already states that one should have the appropriate emotions at the appropriate times toward the appropriate objects to the appropriate degree. Granted, this is a rather vague prescription, but it allows for such feelings as righteous indignation when perceiving an injustice or fear when encountering a real danger.

Another, rather extensive, rendition of eco-virtues is suggested by James Connelly:

(1) Faith
(2) Hope
(3) Charity
(4) Courage
(5) Wisdom
(6) Justice
(7) Moderation
(8) Frugality
(9) Care
(10) Patience
(11) Righteous indignation
(12) Accountability
(13) Asceticism
(14) Commitment
(15) Compassion
(16) Concern
(17) Cooperation

Some of these traits are so closely related to appear redundant; for instance, frugality, moderation, and asceticism are all concerned with a person’s level of consumption. Similarly, compassion, concern, and care deal with one’s concern for the well-being or welfare of another. Virtues such as commitment and cooperation further emphasize the community aspect of the eco-virtues.

As per my own research, additional candidates for virtues that an environmentally responsible person should cultivate are:

(1) Moral integrity
(2) Compassion
(3) Respect
(4) Humility
(5) Benevolence
(6) Prudence or practical wisdom
(7) Courage
(8) Justice

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These lists make it salient that there is some significant overlap between more general civic virtues and environmental virtues, i.e., that some virtues appear essential for both being a virtuous civic and environmental moral agent; among such virtues are hope, courage, respect, humility, moderation/temperance, respect, justice, friendship/love, and compassion. Arguably, the eco-virtues go beyond the civic virtues in many respects, which can be ascribed to the fact that an environmentally responsible person has to widen his or her concept of community to include not only nonhuman members but the entire ecological community. In other words, an environmentally virtuous person would ideally also be a good citizen because he or she would recognize and acknowledge membership in both the civic and biological community. I argue that the civic virtue of friendship is closely related to the eco-virtue of compassion, and that decency, which is listed under the civic virtues, also greatly enhances the list of eco-virtues.

In order to further delineate ecological virtues, Connelly also provides a list of environmental vices:

1. Hubris or pride
2. Gluttony
3. Envy
4. Sloth
5. Greed
6. Anger
7. Exploitation

See Monica A. Lindemann, Environmental Virtue Education: Ancient Wisdom Applied (Saarbruecken, Germany: VDM Verlag, 2008).
Cruelty
Willful ignorance
Cynicism
Despair

Even though these vices are characterized as being environmental vices, I argue that most of them could be considered civic vices as well. For instance, hubris, gluttony, sloth, cruelty, anger, greed, exploitation, and envy are undesirable in virtuous citizens generally, and environmentally virtuous citizens particularly. Noticeably, Connelly lists willful ignorance as a vice, a claim that I agree with. In today’s news and media-driven world, there are just no excuses for being ignorant of current social and environmental issues. Simply closing one’s eyes and refusing to see the problems for what they are is not an option anymore. Also, the vices of cynicism and despair are exceptionally significant, since they both might lead to inaction or maybe even destructive action (only in the most extreme cases).

In an interesting contrast to the above-mentioned eco-virtues, Paul Taylor presents his theory of “Respect for Nature.” While respect is listed as an ecological virtue by Leopold and others, Taylor has quite a different view on what an attitude of respect for nature entails. As mentioned earlier, Leopold views respect as a feeling of affection for the biotic community. In contrast, Taylor points out repeatedly that respect for nature is significantly different from love for nature. He states: “Being a moral attitude, respect is not a matter of simple personal affection or caring in the way the love

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of nature is.” Taylor seems to want to argue that respect for nature involves a moral commitment to nature that personal affection or love for nature does not necessitate. Respect for nature is less of a private relationship with nature than a matter of impersonal moral commitment.

As this brief discussion of environmental virtues indicates, a virtuous character is desirable for responsible citizenship since it provides for an internal motivation for conscientious action. The virtues govern from within by evoking the appropriate emotions and judgments while laws and regulations can only govern externally. Therefore, cultivating a virtuous character in citizens can successfully augment sound policy and other regulatory frameworks.

The Value of EVE for Environmental Protection and Care

Having discussed common strategies for determining environmental virtues as well as specifying actual environmental virtues, it now is necessary to clarify what an environmental virtue ethic has to offer in terms of environmental protection. One approach to environmental virtue ethics, probably the most uncontroversial or unproblematic one, is simply the view that a healthy environment is a necessary condition for achieving eudaimonia or human flourishing. In other words, if human flourishing is the goal of an environmental virtue ethic, as it is for most theories of virtue ethics, then a relatively healthy natural environment is a prerequisite for achieving that goal, since a person cannot live a flourishing life in an ecologically imperiled world. For instance, in Ecosystem Sustainability as a Criterion of Genuine Virtue, Louke van

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Wensveen breaks down the necessity of ecosystem sustainability for human flourishing in the following way:

1. Ecosystem sustainability is a necessary condition for the cultivation of a virtue.
2. A genuine virtue includes the goal of ensuring necessary conditions for its cultivation.
3. A genuine virtue includes the goal of ensuring ecosystem sustainability.67

Of course, the success of her argument depends entirely on whether one accepts the premises she puts forth, specifically the idea that “ecosystem sustainability is a necessary condition of a virtue.” If this premise, however, is treated as an axiom, an unassailable principle, given that ecosystem sustainability serves as a criterion of genuine virtue (as the title of her article indicates), then the rest of the argument appears sound. Similar to Sandler’s sentiment regarding the advantages of the context-bound nature of environmental virtue ethics, van Wensveen subsequently asserts that “situation-sensitive interpretation is needed here, for no general rule can cover all the relevant relations.”68 Arguably, this type of environmental virtue ethic might be the most unproblematic due to the fact that it does not require much modification from more traditional accounts of virtue ethics. In other words, more traditionally oriented persons might more readily accept such a theory, even though it appears inadequate to most environmentalists. It is fairly obvious that this version of an environmental virtue ethic is still explicitly human-centered, since it only takes the ecological health of the environment into account insofar as it affects human flourishing. In this case, Holmes

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68 Ibid., p. 236.
Rolston, III would be justified in his criticism of environmental virtue ethic neglecting or even ignoring the intrinsic value of the nonhuman natural world by solely focusing on what the natural environment can “do,” instrumentally, for the virtuous person and his or her moral development. Of course, to satisfy people who want to explicitly express the value of nature *per se*, accounts of environmental virtue ethics would have to be couched in a language that is more unequivocally concerned with nonhuman nature.

A more convincing approach to environmental virtue ethics involves an attempt to demonstrate that cultivating environmental virtues is not just necessary for the survival of the human species or for human flourishing, but that it in fact promotes human flourishing. In this way, environmental virtues such as simplicity and frugality are not merely regarded as instruments that are necessary to ensure human survival or to make human flourishing possible, but instead they are deemed essential to human flourishing. I believe that this approach might be the most fruitful, seeing that other approaches have not been compellingly shown to be effective. Even though people have become increasingly aware of the fact that the environmental crisis has reached dangerous proportions, there have not been any significant changes in large-scale patterns of consumption. Scare tactics can actually backfire by making people apathetic or paralyzed with fear. They might think “it’s too late anyway, so what’s the use of me changing my behavior now?” If, on the other hand, environmental virtue ethics can be linked to human flourishing, and if the claim can be substantiated that virtues such as simplicity and frugality are not just good for the natural environment but good for the

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human character *per se*, then I believe the theory stands a very good chance of producing some sort of behavioral change.

Fortunately, several scholars have expounded the notion that the virtues of environmental care and concern are integral components of human excellence. For instance, in *Character and Environment*, Sandler states:

> Good environmental character is not only valuable insofar as it leads to proper actions. *It is also beneficial to those who possess* it. Dispositions to appreciate, respect, wonder, and love nature enable people to find reward, satisfaction, and comfort from their relationship with nature….For those who are receptive to it, nature can be a steady source of joy, peace, renewal, and knowledge.\(^7^0\)

In other words, Sandler wholeheartedly embraces the idea that environmental virtues are not simply desirable in virtue of the behavioral changes they can effect, but also for the increased receptivity and enjoyment of the natural environment by the moral agent.

Another example is presented by John O’Neill in *Ecology, Policy, and Politics: Human Well-Being and the Natural World*, where he provides a general account of how human flourishing is intricately connected with the preservation of nature. He writes:

> The value of knowledge lies in the contemplation of that which is wonderful and beautiful. *Such contemplation extends our own well-being since it realizes our characteristic human capacities*. There is a relationship between our capacity to appreciate the value of the natural world and human well-being.\(^7^1\)

More precisely, he claims that knowledge of and interaction with the natural world engages capacities and satisfies desires that are conducive to human thriving. He adds:

> For a large number, though not all, of individual living things and biological collectives, we should recognize and promote their flourishing as an end itself. *Such care for the natural world is constitutive of a flourishing human life. The best human life is one that includes an awareness of and practical concern with the good and entities in the nonhuman world*. On this view, the last man’s act of

\(^{7^0}\) Sandler, *Character and Environment*, p. 2 (emphasis added).

vandalism reveals the man to be leading an existence below that which is best for a human being, for it exhibits a failure to recognize the goods of nonhumans.\footnote{Ibid., p. 24 (emphasis added).}

In referring to the last human’s act of vandalism, O’Neill provides an explanation for why it would be morally wrong for the hypothetical last human to needlessly destroy nonhuman life: according to him, this wanton act of destruction constitutes a failure to recognize the good of nonhuman nature, and as such is indicative of a moral defect. On the other hand, a virtuous moral agent would demonstrate concern for nonhuman nature and thus refrain from its destruction; in fact, such concern would render human life more excellent or complete. If O’Neill is correct in assuming that a truly flourishing human life necessarily includes some concern and care for nonhuman nature, then environmental virtue ethics can stand on its own as a viable ethical theory. However, it is essential to examine how and why the failure to care about nonhuman nature is in fact indicative of a moral defect.

This claim goes back to the issue of standing in a proper relationship with one’s surroundings. A virtuous person knows how to rightly interact with the world, because he or she is able to perceive situations accurately and knows her place in the greater order of things. Thomas Hill, Jr. writes: “What seems to be missing, then, in those who understand nature but remain unmoved is a proper humility.”\footnote{Thomas E. Hill, Jr., “Ideals of Human Excellence and Preserving Natural Environments.” \textit{Environmental Ethics} 5, no. 3 (1983): 219.} He continues:

The major obstacle to humility before persons is self-importance, a tendency to measure the significance of everything by its relation to oneself and those with whom one identifies…learning humility requires learning to feel that something matters besides what will affect oneself and one’s circle of associates.\footnote{Ibid., p. 220.}
The character trait that Hill refers to as “self-importance” can also be referred to as egocentrism, pride, hubris, or any of the vices that are characterized by taking oneself and one’s own needs too seriously and judging them to be significantly more important than the needs of others. Hill further clarifies:

To cherish something is not simply to be happy with it at the moment, but to care for it for its own sake...one simply wants the thing to survive and (when appropriate) to thrive, and not simply for its utility....Thus, if someone really took joy in the natural environment, but was prepared to blow it up as soon as sentient life ended, he would lack this common human tendency to cherish what enriches our lives.75

Interestingly, Hill emphasizes the point that a truly virtuous human agent would not only care about sentient nature, but would also take into consideration and value things that cannot explicitly “suffer,” i.e., the non-sentient components of the natural environment. Furthermore, it is clear that the virtue of humility is closely related to the issue of being sensitive to the needs of others and of having refined moral perception, which is the precondition of all moral action. A failure to notice or take into account the needs of nonhuman nature shows a lack of sensitivity and empathy, and is therefore indicative of not relating properly to one’s surroundings. Since we are generally responsible for how things appear to us, this failure can be morally judged and deemed deficient.

Also supporting the claim that the virtues of environmental care and concern promote human excellence, Philip Cafaro argues in his article, “The Naturalist’s Virtues,” that studying natural history and being actively engaged with nature can improve the quality of human life, and, in effect, make us better people. He explicitly states:

75 Ibid., p. 224.
This paper argues that spending time in nature and studying natural history will make us more virtuous; that is, better and happier people. I claim that the active exploration of wild nature improves lives by building character, enriching experience, increasing knowledge, developing intellectual faculties and fostering beneficial, lasting relationships with wild things and wild places. I also claim that lives lacking such activities and connections to nature are importantly deficient.76

However, it is important to note that Cafaro does not limit his discussion of the virtues that can be fostered through the study of natural history to the moral virtues, but instead relies on a very broadly construed conception of virtue. He defines virtues in the following way:

I define the virtues as those traits that help promote individual and collective well-being or flourishing. A virtue is any quality which importantly contributes to human flourishing: any quality the possession of which makes a person a better person (all else being equal).77

This broad understanding of virtue as any characteristic that renders a person more excellent is completely in line with the traditional meaning of virtue or arête as “excellence.” Thus, Cafaro argues that emulating some of the behaviors of the naturalists can aid in cultivating intellectual, moral, physical, and aesthetic virtues. It is striking that even though he qualifies virtues as being different in kind, a closer look demonstrates that most of them could just as easily be categorized as moral virtues, if the definition of moral virtue is itself broadly construed. For instance, the virtues he enumerates under the heading of “intellectual virtues,” namely, patience, perseverance, thoroughness, and attentiveness, could clearly at the same time be considered moral virtues. In fact, Cafaro himself points out more than once that many of these virtues are linked and that the categories overlap. Therefore, I find his distinction between the

77 Ibid., p. 87.
different kinds of virtues to be largely superfluous, even if it might be (minimally) informative. All the same, the vital point of Cafaro’s article is that by adopting some of the habits of the naturalists, we can become not only better, but also happier people.

Additionally, Cafaro appears to draw a connection between the habit of studying nature closely and a refinement in perceptive abilities, for he states:

The heightened awareness they make possible is enjoyable in itself and opens up new worlds of knowledge. They make the world more interesting and allow us to enjoy it without demanding that it crudely entertain us... nature study also heightens our perceptive abilities: we see, hear and smell more, and more keenly, because of it.78

Interestingly, Cafaro argues that enhanced perceptiveness accompanies the cultivation of the intellectual virtues, which reinforces the previously stated theory that the promotion of moral virtues improves moral perception. As I have argued in Environmental Virtue Education: Ancient Wisdom Applied, the cultivation of moral virtues is a perception-guiding endeavor, and the improvement in moral perception and sensitivity subsequently plays a significant role in the behavior of the moral agent.79 Cafaro puts it this way: “Make a habit of close looking, and you will see more,”80 which is the perfect synopsis of how good habits can result in the improvement of one’s perceptive abilities.

Cafaro states that “of all the intellectual virtues, perhaps the greatest is a sense of wonder toward the world.”81 This sense of wonder is frequently seen as the very starting point of philosophy, for in Plato’s Theaetetus Socrates states that “philosophy

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78 Ibid., pp. 88-89.
79 See Monica A. Lindemann, Environmental Virtue Education: Ancient Wisdom Applied (Saarbruecken, Germany: VDM Verlag, 2008).
81 Ibid., p. 90.
begins in wonder."\(^{82}\) Alfred North Whitehead adds: “Philosophy begins in wonder. And, at the end, when philosophic thought has done its best, the wonder remains.”\(^{83}\) In other words, the ideal situation would be for human beings to never lose the sense of wonder toward the world, since then they would remain entirely open to all of the possibilities the world has to offer.

In his article, Cafaro actually has a subsection entitled “The Really Good Life,” in which he provides insight as to what constitutes a fully actualized, happy, and rich human life. He writes:

The great naturalists suggest an appealing alternative to lives devoted to economic consumption: the exploration, understanding and appreciation of nature. From Thoreau onward, they have echoed the ancient philosophical belief that the pursuit of knowledge is a nobler goal than the pursuit of wealth or physical pleasure. They have also argued, and demonstrated in their own lives, that a rich experience is key to living a good life, and that attentiveness and wonder are more important than money in enriching our lives.\(^{84}\)

In other words, many people are misguided when they seek happiness and fulfillment in consumption and the acquisition of material goods. In fact, when looking at traditional virtue ethics, it is striking to note that most of the ancient authors believed that the quality of human life would be improved by diminishing economic activity and reducing consumption. Frequently, the insistent pursuit of wealth was seen as an impediment to the achievement of eudaimonia, or human flourishing; instead, these writers recommended living a simple life devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and virtue. To this end, one was to avoid luxurious food and dress, and try to make do with the simple pleasures in life (Epicurus was a prime advocate of such a philosophy). Even Aristotle

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\(^{82}\) Plato, Theaetetus, 155c.


\(^{84}\) Cafaro, “The Naturalist’s Virtues,” p. 96.
argued that a life devoted to wealth was an impoverished life, although he acknowledged that having some money was necessary for achieving eudaimonia.

Cafaro adds:

With Carson, I can think of no better alternative to our current destructive ways than a physical and intellectual engagement with the natural world. Instead of consumers, let us be appreciators. Instead of possessors, let us be content to explore and enjoy nature, and pass it on to the next generation unimpaired. Properly understood, this is no sacrifice. It feels better and is better—even from a "selfish" point of view.85

Here Cafaro seems to argue that once a person properly understands his or her place in the world and appreciates the value of things outside of him- or herself, reducing consumption and becoming engaged with nature is not actually a sacrifice but rather a gain. Essentially, he thus supports the argument that becoming environmentally conscious and virtuous promotes human flourishing.

Common Criticisms of EVE

Despite its possible advantages, environmental virtue ethics has been faced with criticism. However, many of the criticisms brought up against EVE are not unique to environmental virtue ethics, but rather address virtue ethics as a whole. The most common criticisms brought up against environmental virtue ethics are that

1. The theory is egocentric/selfish.
2. It is difficult to determine what sort of character traits constitute environmental virtues.
3. It is equally difficult to determine which individuals count as environmental role models.

85 Ibid., p. 96 (emphasis added).
Clearly, the last two points have been put forth by Louden in his essay “On Some Vices of Virtue Ethics” (more specifically in the sections on “Casuistry and Applied Ethics” and on the “Problem of Determining Who Is Virtuous”) and I already addressed them in a previous section of this essay. I address the remaining criticisms in turn.

First off, environmental virtue ethics has been accused of being anthropocentric and egocentric, and has therefore been deemed unfit to serve as an appropriate theory of environmental ethics. Most notably, Holmes Rolston III raises this criticism in his essay “Environmental Virtue Ethics: Half the Truth but Dangerous as a Whole.” More specifically, Rolston argues that environmental virtue ethics does not account for the intrinsic value of nature whatsoever since it regards nature only as valuable insofar as it promotes the moral development of human beings. He clearly states: “The other cannot be seen simply as a source of personal transformation.” Rolston’s point is well taken insofar as he seems to be correct in asserting that EVE does not explicitly promote non-anthropocentrism. However, it is not entirely clear that while the value ascribed to nature in EVE is anthropogenic, i.e., it originates in the human valuer, it necessarily has to be anthropocentric. In effect, the human valuer might be the attributer of value but he might not be the bearer of value. By the same token, even if Rolston is correct in

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86 Regarding the lack of practical application of EVE, it is illuminating to realize that in the anthology *Environmental Virtue Ethics* by Sandler and Cafaro, only two of the essays expressly address applied environmental virtue ethics, while the remainder of the work focuses on the theoretical underpinnings and potential problems of the theory. Therefore, it appears that the practical side of EVE has been sorely neglected up to this point.


88 Rolston, “Environmental Virtue Ethics,” pp.61-78.

89 Ibid., p. 69.
asserting that an environmental ethic should \textit{ideally} be non-anthropocentric, it does not necessarily have to be so. Instead, I argue that weak anthropocentrism might be a more realistic position in environmental ethics, especially since weak anthropocentrism does allow for assigning intrinsic value to nature.\textsuperscript{90} I concur with Hargrove in his assertion that he does not think “it is possible for humans to avoid being anthropocentric, given that whatever we humans value will be from a human (anthropocentric) point of view”\textsuperscript{91} However, it is important to point out that this (weak) anthropocentric position is not to be confused with the view that all value ascribed to nature is therefore instrumental. On the contrary, according to Hargrove, it is entirely possible to assign weak anthropocentric intrinsic value to nature, as in the aesthetic appreciation of natural environments. In this case, the value is anthropocentric, i.e., it is assigned from a human-centered point of view, but it is also intrinsic, i.e., it does not serve any other purpose and nature is valued in and of itself. Thus, I assert that Rolston’s conclusion that EVE is anthropocentric and that it is therefore inadequate as an environmental ethic is flawed, since it appears entirely possible for EVE to be (weakly) anthropocentric and still serve as an adequate environmental ethic.

With regard to Roston’s claim that EVE is inadequate as an environmental ethic due to its being egocentric, this is not a novel criticism by any means. In fact, egocentrism constitutes one of the most common charges brought up against virtue ethics, since theories of virtue ethics are typically focused on the flourishing or happiness of the moral agent. However, since the flourishing of the moral agent is


\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., p. 186.
necessarily tied to the well-being of other people as well as to the relative health of the natural environment, it is not clear how much weight this criticism carries. In other words, even if virtue ethics is ostensibly egocentric, it does not mean that it is automatically egoistic.

In addition to Rolston’s criticisms of EVE, environmental virtue ethics is also frequently criticized for not presenting a decision-making procedure or tool when faced with actual environmental dilemmas or problems. Since it does not provide any specific rules to follow, the moral agent is left to ponder what a virtuous person would do when faced with a similar situation, a task which is sometimes less than helpful. However, as previously stated, the insistence of a monistic solution to the pluralistic demands of a moral universe is probably misguided and possibly even dangerous. Luckily, environmental virtue ethics can draw on the wisdom of other theories to help with the decision-making process. For instance, according to Marilyn Holly in “Environmental Virtue Ethics: A Review of Some Current Work,” consequentialism can serve as a useful and important adjunct to virtue theory in environmental ethics, specifically when virtues are seemingly in conflict with each other.92 To support her claim, Holly draws on Sandler’s article, “A Virtue Ethics Perspective on Genetically Modified Crops” as well as Lisa Newton’s Ethics and Sustainability: Sustainable Development and the Moral Life.93 In Newton’s case, Leopold’s land ethic serves as an extension of consequentialism that should be added to her account of virtue ethics. The land ethic evaluates any action in terms of its effect on the “integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community,” thus

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focusing on the consequences of specific actions on the health or well-being of the ecosystem. After examining these cases, Holly concludes that consequentialism can be useful as a decision-making tool, for “it adds a criterion of right action to virtue theory’s discussion of good and bad character.”

To be sure, environmental virtue ethics is not simply intended as yet another theory of environmental ethics; its explicit aim is to inform and reform practice and guide people to excellence. In his article “All About EVE: A Report on Environmental Virtue Ethics Today,” Hull states that “EVE is ultimately justified by its contribution to guiding human practice, to improving the well-being of ordinary people, and preserving the environment.” He further argues:

We should expect from an EVE a theory of virtue that includes a strong account of human flourishing, an explanation of green excellence and its relation to other desirable states of character that reflects this account of flourishing, plus guidance for making resource-use decisions, and specific advice regarding behavioral choices.

Essentially, then, Hull agrees that any successful environmental virtue ethic has to include both accounts of human flourishing and excellence as well as provide tools that aide moral agents in making ethical decisions. Thus, he appears to promote a pluralistic solution which draws from both axiological and deontic accounts of ethics. In other words, it appears perfectly consistent for a theory of virtue ethics to also provide a set of rules that can augment its effectiveness.

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94 Ibid., p. 408.
96 Ibid., p. 102.
Conclusion

In summary, environmental virtue ethics can not only circumvent many of the most glaring problems encountered by other theories of environmental ethics, but it can also preserve the most useful and practical aspects of those theories by combining them into a framework of action-guiding principles and perception-guiding character traits that simultaneously promote human and natural flourishing. For an environmental virtue ethics to succeed, it is essential to move away from ways of thinking that regard human flourishing as being in conflict with environmental health and well-being. Both of these are in reality compatible with each other if people realize that simplicity and frugality are not externally imposed sanctions on their behavior, but that they are instead character traits that improve human life tremendously. As long as human beings buy into the idea that happiness and a full human life are dependent on consumption and the possession of material things, human well-being and natural well-being are indeed incompatible. However, experience has shown that material success beyond the satisfaction of the basic needs for food, shelter, and protection does not increase overall happiness; therefore, it appears that our usual approaches to happiness through the achievement of material security and prosperity need to be revised.
CHAPTER 4
THEORIES OF MORAL EDUCATION

In modern times there are opposing views about the practice of education. There is no general agreement about what the young should learn either in relation to virtue or in relation to the best in life: nor is it clear whether their education ought to be directed more towards the intellect than towards the character of the soul. The problem has been complicated by what we see happening before our eyes, and it is not certain whether training should be directed at things useful in life, or at those conducive to virtue, or at nonessentials. All these answers have been given. And there is no agreement as to what, in fact, does tend toward virtue. Men do not all prize most highly the same virtue, so naturally they differ also about the proper training for it.97

This quote could easily have been written by a present-day observer, but it is in fact Aristotle who is describing the complex issues facing moral education during his lifetime. Even at that time, in a society that was arguably much more homogenous than most society are today, there was no consensus on what children should be taught regarding their moral development and behavior. Luckily, Aristotle himself presents a comprehensive theory of character education, most of which is still valid today.

As a general rule, most people would agree that moral education is intended to improve people’s behavior. However, some troubling trends suggest that moral education is currently not accomplishing its general goal of making people, especially young people, behave better or be better. Indications that suggest the failure of moral education are the following tendencies observed in young people:

1. Rising youth violence
2. Increasing dishonesty (lying, cheating, and stealing)
3. Greater disrespect for parents, teachers, and other legitimate authority figures

Increasing peer cruelty
A rise in bigotry and hate crime
The deterioration of language
A decline in the work ethic
Increasing self-centeredness, accompanied by declining personal and civic responsibilities.
A surge of self-destructive behaviors such as premature sexual activity, substance abuse, and suicide
Growing ethical illiteracy, including ignorance of moral knowledge as basic as the Golden Rule and the tendency to engage in behaviors injurious to self or others without thinking it wrong.\(^{98}\)
Clearly, something is wrong with the current state of moral education if people become worse over time instead of better. In order to determine the main reasons for the failure of moral education, I want to examine how morality, moral rules and moral values are currently being taught in schools and compare these educational approaches with older, possibly more successful models.

The Psychological Regime or How NOT to Teach Ethics

One explanation for the general failure of moral education, leading to a kind of moral illiteracy among young people, is the way the moral life of children is currently understood, which in turn frames the way moral education is taught in schools.

Generally speaking, morality in children is primarily seen through a psychological framework, while contributions from philosophy or theology remain sparse. The reason for psychology’s predominance in the moral sphere is most readily explained by the general distrust of seemingly “subjective” approaches in favor of more “objective” or “scientific” ones. Since theology and philosophy are regarded as subjective in nature,

people tend to put more trust in the “scientific” approach of psychology. And psychology focuses almost exclusively on the concept of moral development. As James Hunter puts it, the belief in psychology can be summed up as follows: “If we know what moral development is, then we will know what moral education ought to be.” 99 Apparently, the basic assumptions are fairly simple: first of all, while for a long time children were regarded as small versions of adults, now they are presumed to mature along very specific stages of moral development. This development is not reversible, and the higher stages depend on the lower stages. However, this moral maturation does not take place automatically, but rather requires some kind of trigger, usually in the form of interactions with other human beings. 100

Generally speaking, the field of psychology regards morality to be the result of the interaction between the intellectual and the affective faculties. In fact, frequently no distinction is made between intellectual and moral development. Especially the feelings surrounding one’s concept of the self are considered important, and the idea of fostering the “self-esteem” of children has received nearly universal acclaim. 101 More recently, the concept of self-esteem has given way to the idea of “emotional intelligence,” which is now regarded as indispensable to healthy psychological (and thus moral) development. Although the approaches of the psychological regime appear diverse at first glance, upon reflection, the differences between the approaches vanishes. If the term regime seems too extreme to employ in this context, the definition Hunter provides for it seems very fitting. He states:

100 Ibid., pp. 82-83.
101 Ibid., p. 85.
By regime I mean the complex network of institutions, ideas, ideals, and interests whose collective purpose is to propagate a general strategy of moral understanding and learning.\(^{102}\)

Calling the current approaches to the creation of moral frameworks a *regime* is not to suggest that a sinister plot is at work to perpetuate certain views; however, it does mean that institutions are in place that inadvertently support and endorse the regime’s viewpoints. According to Hunter, the shared assumption of the psychological regime puts the autonomous self at the center of its moral framework. So what is in fact being taught in schools, the institutions that are primarily responsible for the moral teaching of the young?

Generally speaking, there are two main approaches to moral education, which can roughly be traced back to the philosophical and educational theories of Plato and Aristotle. The approach based on Aristotle’s ethical and educational theory could be called *character education*, and it originates from the assumption that through practice, certain desirable traits of character (in the context of this work these desirable traits of character are referred to as “virtues”) can be cultivated in people, which in turn affect the way a person perceives the world and subsequently interacts with it. As mentioned previously, this approach has to contend with a trend in social psychology that denies the very existence of such robust traits. However, when comparing the effectiveness of character education with other types of moral instruction, it is clear that while far from being perfect, the character education approach appears to be more successful in bringing about improvements in moral behavior than its alternatives.

\(^{102}\) Ibid., p. 86.
The other approach to moral education is based on Plato’s (or Socrates’) idea that if an individual truly knew the good, he or she would automatically be good. This approach is also known by the names decision-making, moral reasoning, the dilemma method, or values clarification.\(^{103}\) While these teaching methods technically differ from one another, they share certain underlying assumptions which allow us to classify them as more or less the same approach. Most importantly, all of these methods share the assumption that the most important aspect of moral education is to present the student with a method or process for arriving at moral values or decisions without actually providing any content to the moral discourse. Aside from being steeped in Platonism, the decision-making model of moral education can further be traced back to two different traditions. While the values clarification method stresses the importance of feelings, personal growth, and a nonjudgmental attitude, the moral reasoning or cognitive developmental moral education method focuses on critical thinking skills and cognitive development. On a basic level, these approaches both derive from certain psychological traditions, and can thus be grouped together as what Hunter refers to as the “psychological regime.” I will describe the most common manifestations of the psychological regime next, and point out why they are generally not successful as frameworks for moral education.

The Psychological Regime’s Brainchild: Values Clarification

The values clarification method was developed in 1966 with the publication of Values and Teaching by Louis Raths, Merrill Harmin, and Sidney Simon. While the

\(^{103}\) William Kilpatrick, Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong—And What We Can Do About It (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 16.
values clarification method has been largely abandoned since the late 1980s, it nevertheless deserves a closer look due to its impact on the way moral education is currently taught. The book advises that the teacher should never directly tell students what to believe or what values to hold, i.e., he or she should never issue a declaration of what is right and what is wrong. Instead, students are encouraged to ponder questions pertaining to their likes and dislikes, how they feel about certain situations, etc., which in turn is supposed to help them discover their own values. The main reason for adopting this laissez-faire approach to education is to avoid “indoctrinating” children with the values held by the teacher or by society at large. In Readings in Values clarification, Sidney Simon and Howard Kirschenbaum have the following to say about traditional methods of moral education:

We call this approach “moralizing” although it has also been known as inculcation, imposition, indoctrination, and in its most extreme form “brainwashing.”104

Clearly, the terms imposition, indoctrination, and brainwashing have exceptionally negative connotations, and any attempt to avoid these questionable practices seems commendable at first glance.

Generally, the values clarification method involves a very optimistic view of human nature, largely adopted from the theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. According to Rousseau, human beings are naturally good, and a proper moral education simply provides the foundation to let the child’s inherently good nature develop freely. He writes: “Let us lay down as an incontestable principle that the first impulses of nature

are always right. There is no original perversity in the human heart.” Seeing that Rousseau also supports the view that society and its morality constitutes a corrupting influence on the moral character of the individual, it becomes clear why the values clarification method insists on avoiding the “indoctrination” of children with a corrupt society’s values.

Naturally, this sort of moral “education” more or less reduces values and right and wrong to personal preferences of the individual. Sidney Simon’s book *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students* explicitly states on its back cover that values clarification is intended to help students become “aware of their own feelings, their own ideas, their own beliefs, their own value systems.” Generally, values clarification relies on seven steps that are intended to help students spell out their values: steps one and two require prizing one’s beliefs, steps three, four and five focus on choosing one’s beliefs freely, and, finally, steps six and seven entail acting on one’s beliefs.

Unsurprisingly, certain problems arise with this laissez-faire approach to moral education. For one, the strong emphasis on feelings in the values clarification method leads to something akin to emotivism, virtually equating values with feelings. According to the values clarification handbook, a value is “what you like or love to do”; hence, if a student insists that he or she likes to lie and manipulate people to get his or her own way, there is not much recourse a teacher has to “correct” this particular view. Through

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making students participate in activities that ask for a solution of some moral dilemma, such as deciding which six out of ten people should be admitted to a fallout shelter during World War II., the students are presumably taught “a process of valuing that is value-free.”\textsuperscript{108} In other words, no matter what answer a student gives to the dilemma under discussion, as long as he or she has followed the seven steps of the values clarification method, his or her answer is considered acceptable. Unfortunately, even Hitler could have used this seven step approach to justify his values; for instance, it is clear that he “cherished and prized” his values, and he obviously “publicly affirmed” them as well. It seems, then, that the values clarification process can be used for all kinds of purposes. Additionally, even though values clarification claims to be value neutral, it rather makes students believe that all values are relative, which can be confusing and at worst be dangerous. Research into this type of moral education has largely shown values clarification to be ineffectual.

Another Heir to the Psychological Regime: Kohlberg’s Moral Reasoning Model

The moral reasoning approach, which also falls under the umbrella of the moral decision-making model, was introduced by Lawrence Kohlberg, who wanted to replace the focus on feelings so prevalent in the values clarification project with a focus on moral thinking. In other words, Kohlberg’s approach focuses on teaching children the proper process of moral reasoning which would still leave them to make their own decisions; however, at least these decisions would be based on reason rather than emotion. More precisely, Kohlberg believes that human beings move through specific

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., p. 12.
stages of moral development as they mature. Since he regards individuals as being fundamentally rational beings, the basic difference between immature and mature moral reasoning consists of the reasons given for one’s moral judgments. His theory postulates that all human beings pass through six developmental stages that are further grouped into three main levels.\(^{109}\)

In order to determine which of the stages of moral development an individual inhabits at any given time, research subjects are given a hypothetical dilemma and asked both what the person in the dilemma should do, and, more importantly, the reasons why the person should do so. For example, the famous *Heinz dilemma* postulates a person named Heinz who is faced with the decision of whether or not he should steal medicine for his dying wife. Regarding this scenario, most people agree that it would be morally permissible for Heinz to steal the medicine to help his wife, but the reasons given for why stealing would not be immoral in this context differ vastly between individuals.

According to Kohlberg, the purpose of moral education is to aid in a person’s development and ultimately to create autonomous moral agents. He states that the “teaching of virtue is the asking of questions and pointing of the way, not the giving of answers. Moral education is the leading of men upward, not the putting into the mind of knowledge that was not there before.”\(^{110}\)


Thus, even though Kohlberg’s approach clearly focuses on the rationality of the moral agent and attempts to promote the moral development of a person, it shares certain characteristics with the values clarification approach, in that both assert that the individual is the source of his or her own value system and that anything goes as long as one can find sufficient reasons for choosing one’s values. Both approaches also hold in common the view that the moral life is characterized by an endless array of moral dilemmas that make moral demands on a person which are not easily solved.

To examine whether Kohlberg’s moral reasoning approach is viable in its practical application, one does not have to look far. Although Kohlberg took moral education very seriously, his attempts at implementing his educational theories generally did not end very successfully. For instance, he founded an experimental cluster school in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1974. This “just community” school only kept its doors open for students a mere five years. In the words of Professor Sommers who bore direct witness to the school’s practices:

These student-citizens were forever stealing from one another and using drugs during school hours. These transgressions provoked a long series of democratically conducted “town meetings” that to an outsider look very much lie EST encounter groups. The students were frequently taken on retreats … where many of them broke the rules against sex and drugs. This provoked more democratic confrontations where, Kohlberg was proud to report, it was usually decided that for the sake of the group the students would police one another on subsequent retreats and turn in the names of the transgressors.111

Notably, none of these proposed “remedies” actually worked, and the school had to continually contend with problems of drugs, sex, and racial discrimination even though the school consisted of only thirty (!) students, who were supervised and educated by

111 Kilpatrick, Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong, p. 91.
six especially trained teachers and had access to dozens of consultants, including Kohlberg himself. A few years later, Kohlberg wrote in *The Humanist*:

Some years of active involvement with the practice of moral education at Cluster School has led me to realize that my notion ... was mistaken.... The educators must be a socializer teaching value content and behavior, and not only a Socratic or Rogerian process-facilitator of development.... *I no longer hold these negative views of indoctrinative moral education and I believe that the concepts guiding moral education must be partly “indoctrinative.”* This is true, by necessity, in a world in which children engage in stealing, cheating, and aggression.112

Kohlberg’s change of view regarding “indoctrinative” educational practices is quite remarkable, and it is also entirely understandable. He was working under the mistaken view that if left alone, students would come up with proper values to follow.

Even though Kohlberg claimed that he was following in Socrates’ path regarding his approach to moral education, he seemingly forgot one central aspect of the Socratic method of teaching: *it was never intended for children or adolescents*. In fact, Plato, whose dialogues provide the clearest examples of the Socratic dialectic, strongly emphasized that this method of inquiry was only appropriate for mature persons over the age of thirty. Plato said that it was one essential precaution to not to let the students get a taste of arguments while they were still young since they might develop a taste for arguments instead of a taste for truth. In the *Republic*, Plato cautions that young minds, just like young dogs, would “pull and tear at arguments” which might keep them amused but would not lead to the cultivation of a virtuous character.113 Instead, Plato argues that it is more crucial to instill in young people a *love of virtue* before letting them engage in arguments about virtue. Furthermore, one must concede another problem in using the Socratic method as a tool for teaching morality and virtue to young persons: most

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112 Ibid., p. 92.
113 See Plato, *The Republic*, 538a-539d
people do not possess Socrates’ maturity, intelligence, and skill; therefore, they cannot truly be expected to benefit from this approach.

Importantly, it appears that very few problems in morality are due to faulty or deficient reasoning about dilemmas; it seems much more common that a person knows what he or she ought to do but simply lacks the character to do what is right. In other words, the problem does not usually consist of figuring out what to do but instead to actually do it. Therefore, teaching people how to reason well about moral dilemmas does not solve the problem of *akrasia* or weakness of will, which is responsible for most moral failings. I would argue that in order to address the problem of a lack of character or strength of will, it is more constructive to teach people good habits instead of good reasoning skills. Of course, this approach does not mean that the dilemma approach to teaching morality should never be used, as it can be useful if used carefully. It is obvious that the realm of morality is fraught with moral situations that do not provide clear-cut answers, and learning how to navigate through such moral dilemmas by using hypothetical scenarios could be fruitful. The problem arises when the approach is used before some core values are established, which usually results in confusing the child or making him or her believe that all values are, in fact, relative. Rationality and reasoning skills are tools that can be used for good and ill, and it is important to settle some basic moral facts before teaching children how to reason about more complex moral situations. In other words, when contending with the question of whether to teach process or content in moral education, I believe that learning (some) content has to occur prior to learning process.
The Problem of Using Value Terminology in Schools

Unfortunately, the teaching of value terminology in contemporary education is not looked upon very favorably. As mentioned earlier, most institutions of learning prefer the values clarification approach, which more or less renders children unable to speak in any meaningful way about the values they hold. The general reluctance to include the teaching of value terminology in school curricula can be traced back to the apprehension of indoctrinating or even brainwashing children in some way. Frequently, the inclusion of value talk is rejected in favor of seemingly value-free vocabulary, which is deemed more “objective” and thus less offensive or threatening. However, this preemptive caution might be detrimental in ways few would imagine.

In a note from the editor in the Journal *Environmental Ethics* (Fall 2010), Eugene Hargrove likens this “indirect” approach of teaching values to the way that George Orwell described the teaching of Newspeak in his book *1984*. The idea behind Newspeak was that if people did not know specific terms, such as moral expressions, they would subsequently be unable to think in those terms. In other words, Newspeak was an attempt to leave people unable to think morally. It consists of extremely simplified language (for example good, plus good, and double plus good versus ungood, plus ungood and double ungood). The fact that value education is neglected in today’s school leaves our students’ vocabulary impoverished in much the same way as Newspeak influenced people in Orwell’s novel.

In order to find out whether teaching children value terms would help them think more accurately in moral terms, Kelli Moses, a student of environmental philosophy and biology working under the direction of Hargrove, added some value language into the
environmental education summer camp program at the Elm Fork Education Center. Some of the children at the camp ranged in age from eight to ten years old whereas others were between eleven and thirteen years old. In her presentation to the older group of children, Moses focused on economic value, intrinsic value, and aesthetic value. Interestingly, the children exhibited very little difficulty in talking about the introduced values, and the lesson was readily accepted as just another part of their instruction. Subsequently, Moses moved on to the younger group, emphasizing intrinsic value (the value something has for its own sake), instrumental value (the value something has for its use), and aesthetic value (the value in terms of a thing’s appearance). Once the values were presented to the children, they were asked to pick a flagship species for the state of Texas, draw a picture of that species, and put down the reason for their choice. The next day the children were asked to discuss their reasons for picking the flagship species, and put them on the board. They also had to decide which value was most at play in their choice, i.e., did they select the species mostly for its intrinsic, instrumental, or aesthetic value? Interestingly, the children easily recognized which was which, and were aware without further coaching that the values they used to make their choice were almost in every case intrinsic values. In fact, only two of the children presented instrumental value arguments, namely, that seeing-eye dogs are valued instrumentally because they help blind people across the street and that barn owls have instrumental value because they consume mice and rats. They also saw that species can have both intrinsic value and instrumental value simultaneously.

Tellingly, none of the children even mentioned economic value in their discussion. Furthermore, in the two weeks of instruction none of the children brought up
rights language, which might have been expected in light of the fact that the concept of rights is so prevalent in the domain of environmental ethics and policy. The children seemed to realize on their own that there is a fundamental difference between protecting a species and protecting the individual members of a species, as they argued, for instance, that even though wind farms kill individual birds, they are still valued instrumentally for the renewable energy they provide. In fact, the children realized that the instrumental value of the wind farms as an alternative energy source outweighed the fact that they were detrimental to a small number of birds.

In light of the fact that when introduced at a later stage, college students have a hard time using intrinsic value terminology, it seems surprising that younger children exhibit so little difficulty in employing such terms. However, it seems probable that the proper terminology was kept from the older students when they were children, and they were instead exposed to heavy doses of instrumental (especially economic) value language. This exposure might have unconsciously made them immune against intrinsic value terminology. Much like with Newspeak in 1984, if people do not know a word needed to express a thought, they are severely limited in the way they think and will have to improvise by talking about how they feel or by using rights terminology inappropriately. This experiment suggests that introducing value terminology to adults might be too late to do much good. Hargrove concludes:

Environmental laws in the U.S.—for example, the Endangered Species Act—often include purpose statements that list values that are supposed to be promoted. Normally, economic value is not included and the promotion of the listed values is supposed to inhibit economic exploitation untempered by conservation. Teaching children how to think about these values without the need for translation into economic and instrumental terms could be a step forward in teaching environmental citizenship—and introducing the term *intrinsic*
value could fit in with such instruction, helping them articulate ideas that they might feel but not otherwise be able to express.\textsuperscript{114}

In other words, if we expect people to be both morally and environmentally literate, we have to make available the language that is necessary for such literacy, and we have to do so fairly early in their lives to ensure that they have the appropriate terms to express their values accurately.

An Alternative to the Psychological Regime: Character Education

Due to the general failure of the psychological regime as a framework for moral education, some educators have called for a renaissance of the classical emphasis on character education. In order to evaluate the feasibility and applicability of character education, it becomes necessary to specify what we mean by character, to determine its connection to the virtues, as well as to point out possible means for the cultivation of character and/or moral virtues. Before these issues can be tackled, however, a brief look at the history of character education is necessary, since its feasibility can only be evaluated in light of its historical success. One of the main issues concerning the history of character education is why it was dispensed of. More precisely, the question is whether it was supplanted by the decision-making model of values clarification and cognitive behavioral moral education due to a failure of its practical application. So, how well did character education work and why was it ultimately abandoned? In general terms, character education was dispensed with due to two major intellectual movements, namely, the Enlightenment and Romanticism. According to the enlightenment, human beings should be governed by reason and rational choice, which

\textsuperscript{114} Eugene Hargrove, “Teaching Intrinsic Value to Children,” \textit{Environmental Ethics} 32, no. 3 (2010), 228.
essentially gave each individual the autonomy to discover the truth. Immanuel Kant is a prime example for Enlightenment thinking, and he was a major influence on Lawrence Kohlberg’s moral reasoning approach to education.¹¹⁵

Kohlberg’s theory of moral development suffers from several problems. For instance, does it imply that morality depends on the intelligence of the moral agent? Kohlberg seems to suggest that it does. Furthermore, does the fact that boys are better than girls at abstract reasoning (a claim that has been supported by numerous studies) also mean that boys are better at moral reasoning as well? Carol Gilligan openly criticized Kohlberg’s theory on account of the fact that boys consistently scored higher on Kohlberg’s scale of moral development since boys seemingly approached a moral dilemma like a human math problem while girls looked at it in terms of relationships and issues of care and concern. This difference, of course, raises a third question concerning Kohlberg’s approach to moral education, namely, the question of how conceptual and abstract moral reasoning can be until it looses complete sight of the human component of morality.

The demands for abstraction and impersonal detachment of the Enlightenment was eventually met with resistance, which in turn resulted in a movement called Romanticism. In contrast to the Enlightenment, Romanticism emphasized the importance of the nonrational, the mysterious, and the emotions. Both Enlightenment Rationalism and Romanticism celebrated the individuality of a person, who did not need to look anywhere else for values and morality than him- or herself: either his or her reason and rationality would discover values and universal moral principles, or his or

¹¹⁵ For a summary discussion on the history of character education, see Kilpatrick, *Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong*, pp. 96-111.
her emotions would tell him or her what to value and what to despise. In either case, reliance on authority figures or external sanctions was deemed unnecessary, which was a complete break from past traditions that still saw the wisdom of the past or excellent individuals as worth emulating.

In general terms, the moral reasoning approach to moral education arose from the rationalism of the Enlightenment whereas the values clarification emphasis on discovering what one likes or dislikes has been inherited from Romanticism. Unfortunately, neither the values clarification nor the moral reasoning approach to moral education has much use for good examples, since both emphasize the intellectual and emotional independence of the individual in all matters moral. In that respect, they strongly resemble the traditions that they originated in.

One simple and straightforward definition of character is provided by Kupperman in “Virtues, Character, and Moral Dispositions.” Kupperman defines character as

[a] person’s normal pattern of thought and action, especially with respect to concerns and commitments in matters affecting the happiness of others or of that person, and most especially in relation to moral choices.\footnote{Joel J. Kupperman, “Virtues, Character, and Moral Dispositions,” in \textit{Virtue Ethics and Moral Education}, David Carr and Jan Steutel, eds. (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 202.}

Kupperman asserts that virtues play an important role in the evaluation of character, even though he rejects the Aristotelian concept of the unity of virtues. In other words, Kupperman believes that it is actually possible for a person to be good in one respect while simultaneously failing to be good in other respects. Whether this is in fact possible, or whether Aristotle is instead correct in arguing for the unity of virtues, can neither easily nor convincingly be settled here. However, in light of the serious challenges brought up against virtue ethics by social psychology, I believe it is prudent
to adopt the position that is most easily defended against potential criticisms; therefore, I side with Kupperman and argue that a person can exhibit some of the virtues, while having deficiencies in other aspects of their character. Kupperman says, "[p]lainly a good character will include a number of virtues, such as honesty, fortitude, considerateness and willingness to go to some trouble to help those in need."\textsuperscript{117} So even if a good character does not require possessing all of the (moral) virtues, it certainly requires having many or even most of them. However, since character is not simply comprised by the sum total of virtues of a person, it is generally much easier to focus on single virtues (or vices) instead of trying to evaluate character as a whole.

According to Aristotle’s account of education in the \textit{Politics}, any proper instruction of the citizens of the best regime has to be undertaken in three separate stages. The first phase lasts from birth to the age of seven; the second stage encompasses the years between eight and fourteen, and the last stage occurs from ages fifteen to twenty-one. Aristotle suggests that children before the age of eight should not be exposed to education in the proper sense at all; on the contrary, he expresses the undesirability of exposing children under five years of age to any type of “learning” in favor of restricting their activity to mere “play.”\textsuperscript{118} By the age of six and seven children are mature enough to become observers of the activities that they will be required to learn at a later stage in life. Interestingly, Aristotle emphasizes that education is a public matter and should thus be governed and provided by the best

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 202.

regime. Aristotle explicitly states: “Correct habituation distinguishes a good political system from a bad one.”

Thus, according to Aristotle, moral education should be the responsibility of the government. However, he also acknowledges that while it should be the responsibility of the state, most governments fall short in this respect. He writes:

Now a father’s instructions lack this power to prevail and compel; and so in general do the instructions of an individual man, unless he is king or something like that. Law, however, has that power that compels; and law is reason that proceeds from a sort of prudence and understanding…. And yet, it is only in Sparta, or in a few other cities as well, that the legislator seems to have attended to upbringing and practices. In most other cities, they are neglected and an individual lives as he wishes, ‘laying down the rules for his children and wife,’ like a Cyclops. It is best, then, if the community attends to upbringing, and attends correctly. But if the community neglects it, it seems fitting for each individual to promote the virtue of his children and his friends.

So, Aristotle concludes that if the government fails to attend to the moral upbringing of children, then it is the family’s responsibility. This view is especially interesting considering the general reluctance of contemporary educators to include any kind of value discourse in today’s curricula. Thankfully, virtues can be taught through good examples and role models, even if value terminology is shirked. While this is not an ideal scenario for moral education, it still paints a relatively positive picture for the possibility of raising virtuous human beings even without proper terminology.

As one educator puts it:

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120 Arguably, the translation of the term *polis* as either *government* or *political system* does not do the concept justice, and the term *regime* (minus its negative connotations) might more closely approximate the meaning of *polis* in this context.

121 Ibid., 1180a18-33 (emphasis added).
How can I teach civility?... How can I teach compassion? I can be compassionate. I can put myself in another’s position.... How can I teach courage? I can be courageous.  

This approach implies that public superintendents of children will be responsible for the supervision of the play and observation by the children. Seeing that in most cases education today is in the hands of the government (either locally or even federally), the application of Aristotle’s suggestions to today’s society are readily observed. At the same time, the responsibility of thoroughly and properly training our current teachers and educators is obviously indispensable, for they are habituating the future citizens of the country. Therefore, any education in environmental virtue ethics will have to occur on two separate levels. First and most importantly, the educators have to be trained to be able to set positive examples for the young and to “trigger” the acquisition of virtue.

Furthermore, Aristotle stresses the importance of monitoring the children’s exposure to stories and tales as well as their interactions with slaves, which were thought to exert a corrupting influence on the offspring. As this example shows, certain aspects of Aristotle’s theory of education cannot readily be applied to contemporary times. Clearly, any censorship of children’s stories and tales will prove to be difficult in the era of free speech, media frenzy, and internet access. Nevertheless, such problems do nothing to diminish Aristotle’s claim that young children are easily influenced, confused, corrupted, and possibly harmed by their exposure to any type of unsuited materials and should therefore be safeguarded against such abuses. Many cases in recent history confirm Aristotle’s distrust of the corruptibility of the incomplete or unrefined character as it occurs in young children. At any rate, narratives and instructive

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stories might very well represent the most successful and applicable method of relating the concept of virtue to young children. As Alasdair MacIntyre already states “In all those cultures, Greek, medieval and Renaissance … the chief means of moral education is the telling of stories.”\textsuperscript{123} I return to this aspect of narrative for character education in a later section.

As previously mentioned, Aristotle suggests separate phases of education, in which the earlier phases are always seen as being “for the sake of” or “with a view to” the later or higher forms. In order to understand this claim, it becomes necessary to bear in mind Aristotle’s view of the human soul, which according to him contains two parts, the rational and the irrational. The rational part is, strictly speaking, the superior element of the soul, as it represents the part that makes us truly and fully human. Ideally, the irrational part of the soul should always be guided and controlled by the rational part. The irrational part of the soul is comprised of two parts, namely, the passionate or spirited part and the appetites. The part that responds to the guidance of reason without being rational itself is the passionate part, which at the same time is regarded as the seat of the character virtues.

It should be noted that this view closely corresponds to the definition of emotion as containing the components of cognition, affectivity, and desire. The passionate or spirited part in Aristotle’s system is represented by the affective component of emotive ethical theory. As has previously been argued, individuals can indeed be held responsible for the way they emotionally react to situations through a shaping of moral perception. This shaping mainly influences the affective component of emotions (the

\textsuperscript{123} Alasdair MacIntyre, \textit{After Virtue}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), p.121.
tone of the emotion), which noticeably corresponds to Aristotle’s understanding of virtue education as habituation. As already mentioned in the previous section on education, moral virtues are acquired by practicing them; thus, habituation for the sake of establishing moral virtue is mainly directed at the passionate component of the soul. However, according to Lord:

Moral virtue cannot be understood to be the end of the best life. Moral virtue must be understood as the foundation of a higher form of virtue, and the education in moral virtue as the preparation for a higher kind of education. The higher education in question will be, as it seems, an education in mind and through reason. 124

As this quote indicates, Aristotle develops a hierarchical view of education, where the lower levels have to be established as a basis or foundation for the development of the higher levels. At the same time, Aristotle’s ethics hold that not all persons are equally capable of developing the skills required for the higher levels of education, given that individuals have differing potentials, and some may lack the intelligence or capabilities for theoretical reasoning.

However, this investigation also shows that despite the fact that not all persons are capable of achieving the highest levels of education, the comparatively basic education required for the cultivation of moral virtues is certainly realizable for almost all individuals. Since habituation is mainly targeted at the spirited or passionate part of the irrational soul, this type of education appears suitable for people of nearly all intellectual capacities. Therefore, the remainder of this section focuses on this form of education, which according to Aristotle takes place between the ages of eight and fourteen, and is aimed at the shaping of the individual’s moral character.

Generally, Aristotle distinguishes between three basic forms of education. The first one is the training of the body, the second concerns the training of the desires (the irrational part of the soul), and the third aims at the education of the mind (the rational part of the soul). The first two sections consist of education through habituation, whereas the third is an education by speech or reason. The first section, namely, the education taking place from age seven to puberty, is mainly an education of the body, intended to prepare the mind for the next phase of development. Accordingly, the period from puberty to twenty-one years of age consists in the training of the irrational part of the soul. For the purposes of this discussion, these two periods of education are sufficient, as they are the ones concerned with habituation and character development.

In my opinion, in his discussion of education Aristotle emphasizes many important issues that have recently been neglected in the discussions of character development. Aristotle points out the necessity of a hierarchical system of education, where the lower parts serve as a foundation for the higher parts. Accordingly, physical education is the first step in the sequence of education, which might come as a surprise in the context of character development. However, seeing that physical education fosters discipline and responsibility for one’s own body, I have to agree with Aristotle’s emphasis on this point. The Romans used to say: “Sit mens sana in corpore sano” (“Let there be a healthy mind in a healthy body”). Fortunately, the connection between physical activity and the cultivation of a virtuous character seems to be recognized more and more, as the publication of books such as *Teaching Responsibility through Physical Activity* shows. In the development of an environmentally virtuous character, physical

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education should involve outdoor activities as much as possible for the development of a strong psychological and spiritual bond with the natural environment.

The most important stage of education for the purposes of this discussion consists of the period between puberty and twenty-one years of age, for this stage targets the spirited part of the soul by training and refining the passions of the individual. This stage once again demonstrates the importance of emotions in Aristotle’s ethical system. And once more it is worth pointing out that by emotion I am not referring to blind passions and desires, but rather the carefully trained and refined emotional response to ethical situations. This response could also be called an agent’s moral perception. Furthermore, the second stage of education is concerned with subjects that are liberal and noble instead of merely useful and necessary. This distinction is crucial to Aristotle, for the first period of education prepares the individual for life in general (by preparing him or her for a profession and by preparing for more advanced kinds of learning) whereas the second phase consists of the training of the moral character, hence, an education on how to become a better human being.

Aristotle mentions different subjects that he considers helpful and appropriate for the second stage of education. Notable among those subjects are drawing and music. Lord argues, “For Aristotle and for the classics generally, literature and the arts constitute the core of an education designed to form the tastes, character, and judgment of good citizens and free men.” According to Aristotle, drawing encourages the appreciation of beauty in objects by teaching individuals how to properly perceive and contemplate beauty. Therefore, drawing is seen as a noble discipline, pursued for its

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126 Lord, Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle, p. 19.
own sake as well as for the sake of higher forms of education. As the example of
drawing as a part of character education shows, the correct way of seeing and 
perceiving is essential to the entire project. In the Politics, the discussion of music as a 
form of education receives a much more detailed analysis by Aristotle. In fact, he tries to
determine what the function and power of music is. Ultimately, he argues that music is 
not merely enjoyed for the sake of pleasure, but that the fundamental power of music 
lies in its ability to educate people. As Lord formulates it: "Aristotle's answer to the 
question of the 'power' of music is that what is most fundamental in music is its capacity 
to affect the character and the soul."\textsuperscript{127} Therefore, the pleasure that music brings to 
people is more or less seen as an accidental side effect, which makes it all the more 
suitable for education, as people will also enjoy music for its own sake.

At this point it becomes necessary to discuss what precisely Aristotle means by 
the term \textit{mousike}. It is oftentimes assumed that he is referring to "music proper," 
meaning melody and rhythm. However, certain passages in the Politics suggest that he 
also includes poetry in his definition of \textit{mousike}, seeing that he refers to \textit{mousike} as a 
pleasure "both by itself and with song."\textsuperscript{128} The next question to be addressed concerns 
the wide appeal of music to people of all ages, classes, and genders. It is this very 
feature of music that makes it such an appropriate educational tool. According to Lord, 
in the Poetics Aristotle claims "that poets first came to exist because imitation and the 
delight in imitation are natural to human beings."\textsuperscript{129} Therefore, especially in the pre-

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., p. 83.


\textsuperscript{129} Lord, Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle, p. 91.
moral phase of childhood, these insights into the powers of imitation might lend themselves to the development of efficient educational tools.

Curiously, it has often been assumed that Aristotle and Plato are extremely mistrusting and suspicious of any kind of imitation, seeing that Plato expels all styles of imitation from his ideal society in the *Republic*, except for very specific hymns to the Gods and famous men. The main argument of Plato (or rather of the character of Socrates in the *Republic*) against allowing imitation in the ideal state refers to the fact that imitation in the form of poetry and art is twice removed from reality (i.e., from the Platonic Forms) and thus does not promote veracity. Furthermore, Plato argues that poetry and art seduce the audience to feel emotions that are irrational and inappropriate. However, Plato’s view might simply serve to show that he is indeed aware of the immense power of poetry and art on all people, which Aristotle then puts to use in his discussion of character education. In the *Politics*, Aristotle explicitly states:

> And since it so happens that music belongs to the class of things pleasant, and since virtue has to do with enjoying oneself in the right way, with liking and hating the right things, clearly there is no more important lesson to be learned or habit to be formed than that of right judgment and of delighting in good characters and noble actions. Now in rhythms and in tunes there is the closest resemblance to the real natures of anger and gentleness also of courage and self-control, and of the opposites of these, indeed of all the other kinds of character; and the fact that hearing such sounds does indeed cause changes in our souls is an indication of this. To have the habit of feeling delight (or distress) in things that are like reality is near to having the same disposition towards reality itself."{130}

In other words, Aristotle argues that *mousike* serves as a helpful device for teaching people how to “enjoy oneself in the right way,” which is proper to virtue. Arguably, the very ability of *mousike* to excite passions and emotions in people makes it an effective tool for character education in Aristotle’s view. Nevertheless, due to its pervasive

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influence on people, the exposure to *mousike* would have to be severely safeguarded and censored, which is not an easy task in any society, let alone in our contemporary culture. However, the powerful sentiments nearly all people have in regards to types of imitation as well as the ability of imitation to prepare people for real-life situations can prove very accommodating in other contexts as well. Since the shaping of moral perception is essential to any successful application of a system of environmental virtue ethics, ‘imitation’ in the form of pictures, drawings, documentaries, and other media will provide an effective tool for the instruction of persons that lack experience with the natural environment. Therefore, not only music (which might not necessarily show a strong connection to environmental sentiments), art, and poetry are reproductions that are helpful, but imitations that effectively emulate the natural environment could further prove useful. Clearly, there are powerful ways of using media to not only educate the audience, but also make them develop certain emotions appropriate to the occasion. This is not to say that different types of media should be “abused” to appeal to the very basic emotions of people (such as making them fear for their life by telling them about the dire situation of the Earth’s ecosystems, “we are all doomed,” etc.), but it does suggest that the correct ecological information about the issue at stake combined with powerful imagery might be able to elicit an emotional bond between the audience and the subject matter. Al Gore’s documentary *An Inconvenient Truth*\(^{131}\) serves as an example of such an attempt to emotionally draw in the audience, although the accuracy of the information presented in that documentary might be subject to doubts.

The most important aspect of Aristotle’s discussion could be seen in his insistence on developing right of appropriate emotions and passions for the habituation of virtue. Naturally, his methods have to be modified in order to be applicable to contemporary problems. The importance of shaping oral perception by developing the correct emotions toward environmental situations can be accounted for—at least in part—by the use of imitation.

As can be seen in Aristotle’s account on education, the appreciation and perception of beauty as well as the imposition of orderly and systemic ways of thinking are fundamental for the development of virtues. Therefore, creative subjects such as drawing and music (for increasing aesthetic appreciation) as well as mathematics and geometry (for introducing discipline and order in the mind) are essential to a well-rounded curriculum, seeing that they prepare the character for the acquisition of virtue.

So, if character itself is not teachable, are virtues, which to some extent comprise character, teachable? Aristotle seems to suggest that they are, even if not in the same straightforward manner that mathematics and geography are teachable. Aristotle is very explicit in saying that what is appropriate for early stages of education is not the same as what is appropriate in later stages. The foundation of moral instruction requires good habits; in fact, philosophical instruction in later years is for naught if a person has not previously been prepared for it by instilling good habits. Aristotle explicitly states:

The soul of the student must first have been cultivated by means of habits … like earth which is to nourish the seed…. The character then must somehow be there already with a kinship to excellence.132

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So the teaching of virtues comes in the form of the teaching of good habits to young children. In a famous passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states:

Virtues, by contrast, we acquire, just as we acquire crafts, by having first activated them. For we learn a craft by producing the same product that we must produce when we have learned it; we become builders for instance by building, and we become harpists by playing the harp. Similarly, then, we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions...to sum it up in a single account: a state [of character] results from the repetition of similar activities. That is why we must perform the right activities, since differences in these imply corresponding differences in the states. It is not unimportant, then, to acquire one sort of habit or another, right from our youth. On the contrary, it is very important, indeed all-important.\footnote{Ibid., 1103a32-1103b25.}

In effect, Aristotle maintains that although virtue cannot be taught through theoretical instruction, and although children still lack the mental faculties for the cultivation of genuine virtue (i.e., they are not yet able to choose or decide on virtue for the right reasons), the best preparation for the cultivation of moral virtue consists of the acquisition of good habits, starting in early childhood. I examine the concept of habituation in a later section.

How To Teach Character: Cultivating Sentimental Dispositions

In following the Aristotelian tradition, many scholars argue that moral education includes the cultivation of proper emotions and affect. According to Jan Steutel and Ben Spiecker, the cultivation of affective dispositions is considered essential in three regards: as necessary, i.e., the aims of moral education cannot be achieved without the cultivation of affective dispositions; as significant, i.e., a considerable amount of a child's moral education should be devoted to her sentimental education; and, lastly, as basic,
i.e., the cultivation of affective dispositions is a prerequisite to the cultivation of other mental capabilities.

The cultivation of affective dispositions, in turn, is related to two other aspects of the Aristotelian educational approach. One, the virtuous person is regarded as the goal of moral education, and two, virtues are not just dispositions for choice and action, but also dispositions for feeling. As Steutel and Spiecker put it:

To put it more precisely, a virtuous person is someone who will have and exhibit particular feelings on the right occasions, for the right reasons, towards the right people, with the right strength and in the right manner. Virtuousness implies having proper feelings—that is, having feelings as one should.¹³⁴

It will be obvious that these two claims offer strong reasons for giving sentimental education a central role in the practice of moral education. For if the proper aim of moral education is the virtuous person, and if having proper feelings is partially constitutive of being virtuous, promoting proper sentimental dispositions will be an important task for moral educators.¹³⁵

Naturally, these claims presuppose that the affective dispositions, or feelings, are in fact susceptible to education. Such education must clearly be different from traditional forms of theoretical classroom instruction. It is unlikely that simply learning about virtues and appropriate dispositions will automatically result in such dispositions; rather, character education is ultimately based on the cultivation of proper habits. As Aristotle notes, ethics is not a study of what it means to be good; instead it is a practical endeavor aimed at making people good. However, many scholars, most notably among them Immanuel Kant, believe that emotions are unruly, fickle, and unreliable, and that the moral agent has no influence over his or her emotions. Therefore, those scholars argue, emotions should play no role in ethics. Most virtue ethicists, on the other hand, disagree

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 532.
with this view of emotions. Not only can emotions be refined by the moral agent, they also are of moral import. As Arne Vetlesen states:

Through instruction and habituation, that is, we have to learn how to master our feelings and inclinations in order to avoid being mastered by them. Feelings, admitted in emotivism to have the first and final word in all human interaction, are to be shaped and then thereafter acted on. It is only through such an ongoing process of education and habituation that we acquire the virtues; far from arising in us by nature the virtues are developed in us by our consciously activating and practicing them. 136

As Vetlesen indicates, emotions are not necessarily irrational and disorderly; someone who argues otherwise may have confused emotions with plain desires or inclinations, which indeed can be irrational and hard to control. Emotions, however, cannot simply be equated with desires, for emotions incorporate several distinct elements. After all, human beings are not forced to follow each and every whimsical desire that they harbor; on the contrary, many ethical theories are founded upon the supposition that desires need to be controlled in order to make human beings ethical at all. However, this assumption might turn out to be too radical, since it is just as difficult to diametrically oppose or subdue any given desire. If emotions indeed consist of several integral elements, then the shaping and developing of appropriate, moral emotions is possible and feasible. At the same time, if the shaping of emotions is indeed possible, moral agents are—at least in a limited sense—responsible for their emotions. This latter claim goes beyond the scope of this essay; nevertheless, it is a logical conclusion of the idea that emotions can be influenced and shaped.

According to a theory defended by Justin Oakley in his *Morality and the Emotions*, emotions are morally relevant. He claims that despite the fact that we cannot

influence and change our emotions at will, we can still be held responsible for them. Oakley argues that emotions consist of three distinct components—cognition, desire, and affectivity—that are dynamically linked with each other. In his account, Oakley succeeds in showing that due to the three separate components of the emotions we can indeed influence what and how we feel about particular a situation. At this time, it is vital to recognize the distinction between controlling one’s emotions, and influencing or shaping them. Given that Oakley maintains that emotions cannot be had at will, exerting absolute control over them is equally impossible. Nevertheless, the moral agent has a degree of influence on the way he or she feels about particular contexts. Special attention in the process of emotional shaping is given to the elements of cognition and affectivity, seeing that cognition mainly involves the realm of rationality and reason, whereas affectivity most closely corresponds to what the ancient philosopher Plato would have called the “spirited” component of the soul.\footnote{See Plato’s \textit{Republic}, Book IV (435c-441c) for a fuller discussion of the tripartition of the soul.} According to Oakley, emotions do not skew or taint our perception of the world. On the contrary, he argues that emotions are necessary for understanding certain aspects of the world, which would otherwise remain concealed. Thus, for a complete perception and appreciation of all features of morality, emotions are not only permissible, but integral. Specifically, the aspect of emotional affectivity determines how we perceive the world, and so Oakley asserts that emotional affectivity serves a “perception-giving function.”\footnote{Justin Oakley, \textit{Morality and the Emotions} (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 11.} He claims that the underlying emotional affectivity not only sensitizes a moral agent to certain salient features of his or her surroundings, but additionally guides the agent’s attention, actions, and desires. In other words, emotional

\footnote{ Justin Oakley, \textit{Morality and the Emotions} (New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 11.}
affectivity provides the “rose-tinted” glasses through which the lover perceives his beloved, or in other cases, the black cloak which taints a depressed person’s view of the world. Accordingly, Oakley argues that “the psychic dimension of emotional affectivity is the mental tone which affects us when we have an emotion, and which characteristically permeates our perceptions.” It is telling to notice that Oakley explicitly holds an aretaic position regarding the role of the emotions in ethical judgments, since he draws the intimate connection between the cultivation of virtues and having the (appropriate) emotions. Therefore, the way virtues refine our moral perception is closely associated with the development of the appropriate emotions for any given situation. Those emotions, on the other hand, play an integral part in the motivation for subsequent virtuous action.

Regarding the cognitive component of emotion, Oakley asserts that, “the cognitive component of emotion should be read as encompassing a variety of ways of apprehending the world, ranging over beliefs, construals, thoughts, and imaginings.” In other words, Oakley consciously provides a broad definition for the cognitive component of emotions, since he maintains that it is not limited to consciously held beliefs or thoughts. To illustrate this point, he provides the example of an agent’s irrational fear of dogs. Despite the agent’s firm belief that his neighbor’s dog is truly harmless, he nonetheless experiences the sentiment of fear upon seeing it, since deep down he or she still harbors the thought that the dog might somehow cause harm to him. In this context, this person has a certain way of understanding the world around

139 Ibid., p. 11.
140 The adjective aretaic is derived from arête (Greek for excellence or virtue).
141 Ibid., p. 15.
him, and he thus feels fear upon encountering his neighbor’s dog despite his rational belief of the dog not being dangerous.\textsuperscript{142} Therefore, the cognitive component of emotions can remain subconscious, and is thus difficult to control, but possible to influence.

The element of desire in emotion can consist of either conscious or unconscious desires, and generally speaking the desires might or might not be expressed by the agent’s actions. Arguably, then, the component of desire in emotion is the hardest to influence and shape, since desires can arise rather unexpectedly and subconsciously. Nevertheless, desires do play a significant role in the realm of emotions and thus have to be taken into consideration for any adequate account of morality and the emotions.

Interestingly, Oakley provides an astute account of the influence of emotions on a person’s insight and perception, which lends additional support to my previous argument of the intimate connection between moral perception and the emotions. Oakley argues that emotions have moral significance due to their impact on the way a moral agent perceives the world around him or her. According to this account, not only do particular emotions, such as care and interest, provide a person with a more profound understanding of certain features of the world, but additionally “having certain emotions may sometimes be necessary for understanding some features of the world, such that an appreciation of these features would be beyond an unemotional person.”\textsuperscript{143} In other words, it seems that an unemotional person is lacking perceptual, and thus moral, sensitivity to the world around him or her, which emphasizes the importance of emotions for a complete and flourishing human life. Among the emotions essential for

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\item \textsuperscript{142} Ibid., p. 14.
\item \textsuperscript{143} Ibid., p. 50.
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the virtuous character of a moral agent are love, compassion, interest, and care, as these particular emotions extend one’s concern to include the good of others. Oakley argues particularly that the emotion of love has the power to intensify our understanding of the world, as it allows us to “adopt the view point of our beloved– i.e., to, as it were, see things through their eyes, and experience with them.”144 In other words, by opening oneself to the perspectives of others, the world of the moral person is enriched internally and externally, allowing the recognition of certain aspects of the world that were previously veiled.

Concerning the moral significance of emotions in terms of their wrongness and rightness in particular situations, Oakley refers to the concept of phronesis, or “practical wisdom.” As suggested elsewhere, practical wisdom (phronesis) constitutes the foundational virtue, since it is concerned with pursuing what is good and thus directs all other virtuous activities.145 Accordingly, Oakley suggests that phronesis serves as a guide for the evaluation of emotions because “an emotional response is right if we take it to be directed at a particular object, which phronesis would direct it towards here, while an emotional response is wrong if we take it to be directed at a particular object which phronesis would direct it away from in this context.”146 Therefore, practical wisdom determines the appropriateness of emotions in ethical situations. As discussions show below, the significance of the Aristotelian notion of phronesis, which I will hereafter only refer to as practical wisdom, for ethical decision making is invaluable.

Briefly summarized, practical wisdom “integrates perceptual, deliberative, affective, and

144 Ibid., p. 52.
145 See my discussion in Environmental Virtue Education: Ancient Wisdom Applied.
146 Ibid., p. 81.
practical faculties so that they operate well together…. It guides our particular emotional response towards morally good objects.”¹⁴⁷ In other words, practical wisdom allows for the appropriate response to particular situations by perceptually acknowledging and understanding the individual context while at the same time never losing sight of the ultimate end of virtuous activity, which constitutes human flourishing.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 82.
One major question facing character education regards its current status. In other words, is character education currently being taught in our educational system? In 1999 the Character Education Partnership (CEP) and the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character (CAEC) at Boston University released the results of their joint study entitled “Teachers as Educators of Character: Are the Nation’s Schools of Education Coming Up Short?” The report was based on an extensive national survey of two hundred deans of schools of education in an attempt to discover their views on character education as well as to determine what their institutions were doing to prepare future teachers for this aspect of their work.\(^{148}\) The following is a brief summary of the findings of the study:

Finding One: More than 90% of the survey’s participants agreed that core values can and should be taught in schools.

Finding Two: Only 24.4% of respondents said that character education is highly emphasized within their program’s course offerings. Only 13.1% said they are satisfied with their character education efforts.

Finding Three: There is little consensus about what character education is and how it should be taught.

Finding Four: Where preparation in character education occurs, “community” is a dominant framework and a powerful metaphor in character education efforts.

Finding Five: Today’s schools of education are more inclined to cite the learning process, rather than curricular content, as the primary vehicle for character education.

\(^{148}\) Karen E. Bohlin, Susan Dougherty, and Deborah Farmer, *Practices of Teacher Educators Committed to Character: Examples from Teacher Education Programs Emphasizing Character Development* (Boston: Character Education Partnership, 2002).
Finding Six: Colleges and universities that mention character education in their mission statements (63.2% of the sample) are more likely to teach it.

Finding Seven: Schools of education with religious ties are more strongly committed to character education than their secular counterparts.

Finding Eight: Educators generally (64.8%), but cautiously, favor making character education a requirement for state certification.\footnote{Summary of Findings from “Teachers as Educators of Character: Are the Nation’s Schools of Education Coming Up Short?” (Nielsen-Jones, Ryan, Bohlin; Washington DC: CEP, 1999).}

Although these findings explicitly refer to values instead of virtues, the actual focus of the study is on virtues, since it is primarily concerned with the issue of character, which in turn is intimately connected to the cultivation of virtue.

As these findings show, although a large majority of educators interviewed claimed that values and virtues can and should be taught (see finding one), most were not satisfied with the level of so-called character education at their respective programs. Furthermore, the study drives home the point that there is still not a clear consensus in terms of what character education is and how it ought to be done (finding three). Even more tellingly, the participants stated that the schools of education regard process rather than curricular content as the driving force of character education, which is quite consistent with the “psychological regime’s” emphasis on teaching of process rather than content.

As stated previously, the general reluctance of educators to teach values in school can at least partly be traced to the fear of accusations of indoctrination. This fear is partly due to the fact that the cultivation of virtue is associated with the idea of habituation. Next, I discuss the concept of habituation and its connection to the cultivation of virtue.
Habituation and the Cultivation of Virtue

What exactly is habituation, as understood by Aristotle? The following are some of the basic characteristics of habituation as discussed by Steutel and Spiecker in their article *Cultivating Sentimental Disposition through Aristotelian Habituation*:

First, habituation is a type of experiential learning, or *learning by doing*. In essence, one cultivates the appropriate affective dispositions by engaging in the corresponding virtuous activities. In other words, a child will not acquire virtues by merely verbal instruction, but in addition has to engage repeatedly in virtuous behavior.

Second, habituation takes time and effort. It is not enough to practice virtuous behavior intermittently or occasionally. The effort has to be frequent and consistent in order to cultivate virtues. Aristotle points out that not only the moral virtues are acquired through repeated practice, but so are moral vices. Thus, a virtuous person will engage in virtuous behavior frequently and consistently.

To sum up, then, it can be stated that habituation, in the Aristotelian sense of the term, consists in (i) practicing the virtues or, more precisely, performing those actions that correspond with virtuous sentimental dispositions, (ii) performing such actions frequently and consistently, and (iii) doing so under the guidance or authority of a virtuous tutor.\(^\text{150}\)

Although the terms *habit* and *habituation* sometimes seem to be used imprecisely, the difference between them deserves some attention. Steutel and Spiecker explain the connection between habituation and habit in the following way:

\[^{150}\text{Steutel and Spiecker, “Cultivating Sentimental Disposition through Aristotelian Habituation,” p. 536.}\]

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\[^{150}\text{Steutel and Spiecker, “Cultivating Sentimental Disposition through Aristotelian Habituation,” p. 536.}\]
By consistently doing the proper things at the proper moment, the odds are that the child will acquire a settled disposition to do those things at the right time.\textsuperscript{151}

In other words, habits are acquired through habituation. And in order for habituation to take place, tutors are essential:

[T]he virtuous dispositions towards pleasure and pain are cultivated by the application of pleasure and pain. Accordingly, the task of the tutor does not merely consist in giving the child instructions. If the tutor wants to bring up the child properly, the tutor must reward or praise the child when he is acting as virtue requires and punish or blame the child when he is acting contrary to virtue. In modern jargon we might say that habituation is a form of conditioning in which virtuous affective dispositions are inculcated by connecting the child’s behavior with different reinforcing and punishing stimuli.\textsuperscript{152}

Given the fact that the tutor is a person with virtuous cares and concerns, we can sketch a more sophisticated picture of the role of pleasure and pain in habituating the child. As a reaction to the child’s behavior, the tutor will not merely give the child a reward when he is acting rightly, or confront him with unpleasant things when he is acting wrongly, but also show in word or deed all kinds of feelings and emotions. If the child is acting as virtue requires, the tutor will respond with positive feelings and emotions, showing joy, delight, elation, relief or pride, and if the child is acting contrary to virtue, the tutor will exhibit negative feelings and emotions, such as distress, sorrow, anger, sadness or disappointment. These positive and negative sentimental responses to the child’s behavior, which are all manifestations of virtuous concerns, will also function as reinforcing or punishing stimuli. In particular if there is a mutual loving relationship between the child and his tutor, which will normally be the case if the tutor is his parent, the child will experience the tutor’s positive affective responses as pleasurable and the negative affective responses as painful.\textsuperscript{153}

As Aristotle already mentions in the \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, the application of pleasure and pain are some of the primary tools of habituation.\textsuperscript{154} In psychology, this method of teaching through punishment and reward is referred to as \textit{operant conditioning}, and it

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{151} Ibid., p. 540.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Ibid., p. 544.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Ibid., p. 544.
\item \textsuperscript{154} Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 1104b16-18; 1172a21-22.
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has been shown to be very effective. Of course, the tutor also serves as a role model, not just as the administrator of praise or blame. The child will attempt to emulate the behavior exemplified by his or her tutor, and will feel ashamed if he or she falls short of the perceived ideals and conversely experience pride if he or she achieves them.

Arguably, one of the most common accusations leveled against any kind of directive education, such as character education, is that they serve to indoctrinate students. However, Christina Hoff Sommers writes:

One of the main arguments against teaching of values at school consists of the belief that all values are subjective and relative, and that there is no consensus on which values to teach. Without such a consensus, teaching of values becomes arbitrary and should therefore be abandoned altogether.  

However, many educators and philosophers attest that this belief is mistaken. Although cautious relativism is still well represented in ethical theory, most people would probably agree on the core values a school should teach. In other words, there seem to be overarching values that transcend the relativistic underpinnings of moral education. For instance, very few people would argue that possessing the character traits of honesty and courage is to the disadvantage of a person, even if those character traits should probably not be expressed in some situations. Likewise, few people would support the claim that lying and stealing are good behaviors that individuals ought to strive for, even if such actions are called for on occasion. Thus, morality is not quite as individualistic and relativistic as it is often made out to be. In his book *The Death of Character*, Hunter refers to those commonly held values as *consensus values* and states that the pursuit of such overarching values has become commonplace in many school districts.  

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example, Nashville, Tennessee, established a curriculum promoting such “universal
virtues,” such as respect for self, doing what is right, giving service, respecting others,
accepting responsibility, caring, forgiveness, etc.¹⁵⁷ Mainly, the focus on teaching
“dilemma ethics” in the classroom reinforces the widely shared belief that morality
consists of a never-ending catalog of moral dilemmas that do not have a definitive
answer. For instance, many courses on ethics include debates on the permissibility of
abortion or of the death penalty, and each issue is then discussed from all possible
perspectives. The lesson students usually draw from such debates is that morality is
relative and that there is no right or wrong answer in moral matters. However, even if
debates on abortion and the death penalty do not have a right or wrong answer, it does
not follow that right and wrong are therefore completely relativistic. In addition, morality
does not merely consist of endless moral dilemmas and conflicts; it sometimes can be
as simple as helping someone in need even if nothing else is at stake. I believe that
“dilemma ethics” can be helpful in helping students learn how to reason well; however, it
can also be harmful if it leads students to complete moral relativism.

It is perversely misleading to say that helping children to develop habits of truth
telling and fair play threatens their ability to make reasoned choices. Quite the
contrary: Good moral habits enhance one’s capacity for rational judgments.¹⁵⁸

In other words, we are quite mistaken if we believe that good habits stifle our ability to
make good choices; on the contrary, good habits increase our ability for good choices.
According to Kilpatrick, it is similar to someone “choosing” to run the Boston marathon:
running the marathon is not a genuine choice for someone who is completely out of
shape, since he or she would not actually be able to run the marathon. It is only a

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.
¹⁵⁸ Sommers, “Teaching the Virtues,” p. 11.
genuine choice for someone who also has a concurrent ability to *actually* run the marathon. Along the same lines, someone who is enslaved to his or her desires is not able to freely choose her actions; only if he or she is in control and command of his or her desires can he or she truly be said to make a choice regarding what to do. This would also explain the strange phenomenon that our society, which claims to value and promote freedom of choice above all else, consists of people who are least able to exercise their choice due their addictions and compulsions. People are not only addicted to substances like alcohol and drugs but also to food and compulsive behaviors like gambling or playing video games. Kilpatrick claims that none of this would have surprised Aristotle who knew that any culture that failed to instill good habits in its young people would eventually fall prey to its incessant desires.

The obvious question is how a society should instill good habits in its citizens. The Greeks believed that the best way to teach good habits is to identify a person that is already practicing good habits and then have people emulate that behavior. Seneca wrote: “Plato, Aristotle, and the whole throng of sages ... derived more benefit from the character than from the words of Socrates. The way is long if one follows precepts, but short and accommodating if one imitates examples.”\(^{159}\) Aristotle makes a very similar claim in saying that the excellent man is the standard for what is good, and by implication he serves as the role model for the activities of others that have not yet perfected virtuous behavior.\(^{160}\)


\(^{160}\) In the *Nicomachen Ethics*, Aristotle writes: “The good person insofar that he is good is the measure of each thing, then what appear pleasures to him will also really be pleasures, and what is pleasant will be what he enjoys” (117617-20).
Cultivating Moral Sensitivity

The education of character is unlike most other forms of education due to the fact that this type of education is not supposed to teach moral agents theoretical knowledge of what it means to be good, but instead make moral agents good. Therefore, only a fragment of character education can be accommodated in traditional classroom settings. In “A Comprehensive Approach to Character Education,” Thomas Lickona provides a rough overview of the aspects of character education that can be fostered through the traditional school system. He enumerates four fundamental ideas that provide the framework for such a type of character education:

1. “Good” can be defined in terms of moral values that have objective worth - values that affirm our human dignity and promote the good of the individual and society

2. Two universal values form the core of a public, teachable morality: respect and responsibility

3. Respect means showing regard for the worth of someone or something…. respect is the restraining side of morality; it keeps us from hurting what we ought to value

   Responsibility is the active side of our morality. It includes taking care of self and others, fulfilling our obligations, working to improve the human condition, and taking responsibility for our actions.

4. If schools wish to make respect and responsibility operative values in the lives of students, they must educate for character.  

The two core values Lickona mentions, namely, respect and responsibility, are not merely values, but they are considered virtues as well. As such, for their cultivation, they necessitate practice and habituation, which Lickona acknowledges. In fact, he provides some classroom strategies that should aid the teacher in cultivating the virtues of

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respect and responsibility in the students. The following are some of his suggested strategies:

(1) The teacher should be a caregiver, a moral model, and moral mentor

(2) The teacher should aim to create a moral community within the classroom setting

(3) The teacher should establish moral discipline in the students by setting up and enforcing certain rules that reinforce respect and responsibility

(4) The teacher should create a democratic classroom environment, in which the students are allowed to participate in decision-making

(5) The teacher should teach values throughout the curriculum, i.e., the values should not simply be taught in an ethics or civics class but in all disciplines.

(6) The teacher should encourage cooperative learning

(7) The teacher should develop strategies for students to perform their work well and responsibly

(8) The teacher should encourage the students to engage in moral reflection

(9) The teacher should teach the students conflict resolution

Admittedly, the guidelines provided by Lickona are rather vague; also, it is not entirely clear that these guidelines are singularly appropriate for character education, as they seem just as fitting for other types of moral education. For instance, encouraging students to engage in moral reflection might also be appropriate for the values clarification approach to moral education, and Lickona does not specify how much influence the teacher as moral guide should exercise in the oral reflection component. Furthermore, creating a democratic classroom environment which allows students to participate in decision making may sound good at first glance, but it might fail in the long

run. After all, depending on the age of the students, they may or may not have sufficiently developed moral sense and the requisite deliberative powers to make good decisions. If they are still fairly young, it might actually be better to make some of the decisions for them until they have reached sufficient maturity to participate in the democratic process. One prime example for the failure of establishing democracy in a school environment can be found in Lawrence Kohlberg’s Cluster school, which failed miserably. Initially, it was established that the school would be governed by direct democracy. Students and teachers were to have the same basic rights, and no one was to govern over anybody else.\textsuperscript{163} Ultimately, the school ran into severe problems regarding the enforcement of rules. As this example shows, democracy is not always the ideal, especially when dealing with children or adolescents.\textsuperscript{164}

To investigate further if and how virtues \textit{per se} can be cultivated, a look at the ancient tradition of virtue ethics can again be illuminating. As mentioned earlier, Aristotle points out that the moral virtues cannot be taught in an entirely theoretical framework; instead, he insists that the virtues are a result of habit or habituation, i.e., of practice. As already mentioned, the development of virtues in a person’s character goes hand in hand with a change in attitudes, feelings, and perceptions. For instance, a compassionate person will perceive the world in an entirely different light than a person who lacks compassion. As a result, a compassionate person will also interact with the


\textsuperscript{164} Plato’s distrust of democracy is well known, and is arguably well-founded. If every person counts as one, no more and no less, the input of well informed citizens only gets as much hearing as the opinions of less informed people. Whether or not this is the best form of government remains debatable.
world in a different manner than a person without compassion. Regarding the cultivation of virtues, Gilbert Mailaender states:

Any advanced instruction in ethics depends therefore on a prior inculcation of basic moral attitudes. Acquiring moral principles is not just learning to reason in certain ways, nor is it simply attaining clarity about what we think. It is coming to feel certain ways and being characterized by certain habits of behavior. Especially for young children, these basic moral virtues are not developed by reasoning; on the contrary, they provide the foundation for all future moral reasoning.\textsuperscript{165}

Again, the connection is made between the cultivation of virtue and the subsequent refinement of moral feelings and attitudes. Furthermore, Mailaender agrees with Aristotle’s contention that children do not yet have the rational faculties to consciously choose a life of virtue; nonetheless, character education should start at a young age, as the foundations for virtue and practical wisdom have to be established early in life.

Since the acquisition of virtues is closely connected with the refinement of moral perception, any education in character development should start with an inquiry into moral perception. Although children’s moral perception differs significantly from the moral perception of a practiced, and hopefully virtuous, moral agent, a discussion of how a given situation is experienced and perceived will doubtlessly improve perceptual sensitivity and moral awareness. As Nancy Sherman writes:

Education is thus a matter of bringing the child to more critical discriminations. The Aristotelian presupposition is that the ability to discriminate is already there and in evidence, as is an interest and delight in improvement. \textit{What is required is a shifting of beliefs and perspectives through the guidance of an outside instructor.} Such guidance cannot merely be a matter of bringing the child to see this way now, but of providing some sort of continuous and consistent instruction which will allow for the formation of patterns and trends in what the child notices and sees. This emphasis on the internal process must be central to education in a way that it remains at best peripheral to rhetoric. Though the educator

\textsuperscript{165} Gilbert Mailaender, \textit{The Theory and Practice of Virtue} (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), pp. 81-82 (emphasis added).
persuades and exhorts, the goal is not to *manipulate* beliefs and emotions—to influence and outcome here and now—but to prepare the learner for eventually arriving at competent judgments and reactions on his own. Any method which secures rational obedience must at the same time encourage the child’s own development.\(^{166}\)

Sherman makes clear that the role of the educator is to merely guide the child to a keener discrimination of the salient features of a given situation; as such, the teacher or instructor can both serve as a role model for virtuous behavior as well as an aide for the refinement of moral perception. Hence, the early education in virtue theory involves a sharpening and sensitizing of the person’s ability to perceive situations correctly. The parents or teachers thus serve as guides to differentiate components of specific situations efficiently and correctly.

According to Isaacs, certain abilities have to be developed in children to make the acquisition of virtues possible in the first place. In other words, these abilities serve as prerequisites for the cultivation of virtuous dispositions. He enumerates the following abilities:

- Ability to distinguish between facts and opinions
- Ability to distinguish between what is important and what is secondary
- Ability to seek out information
- Ability to select sources of information
- Ability to recognize their own prejudices
- Ability to analyze critically the information they receive and to check out anything that looks doubtful
- Ability to relate cause and effect

Ability to recognize what sort of information is necessary in each case\textsuperscript{167} Looking at the abilities mentioned by Isaacs, it is conspicuous that all of them deal with the correct perception and discernment of a situation. It appears that the abilities necessary for the acquisition of the virtue of practical wisdom correspond to the skills necessary for the refinement of moral perception. For small children, the development of these abilities should start with making very basic observations. In other words, children should be actively encouraged to practice and improve their observational skills in order to refine their perceptions of situations. In order to do so, a child could be asked to describe a situation to somebody else and answer questions about said situation. In the beginning of this particular training, all descriptions of observations should remain confined to “factual” information, since the main goal is to develop a keen sense of discernment. Only in later settings should a description of moral situations be included.

More particularly, in the development of an \textit{environmentally} virtuous character, such physical education should involve outdoor activities as much as possible for the development of a strong psychological and spiritual bond with the natural environment.

An environmental educator sums up early environmental education as follows: Here’s my take on how ethics work. The thing that builds an ethical human being, an ethical child, are not reasons, but feelings. The energetic base of morality is compassion which requires being in touch with things, feeling empathy. That’s not just environmental ethics, it’s any ethics. And you cannot feel empathetic towards something until you’re intimate with it somehow. Intimacy is the key word here. And these students that are going out in the woods year after year are establishing a certain intimacy with that habitat by developing a personal connection to a place. Every year they become more aware about what’s going on; they really know the relationships not just intellectually, but they can sense them. That’s where environmental ethics comes from.\textsuperscript{168}


Accordingly, for the successful implementation of an ecological education, significant components of instruction are geared toward the development of a personal relationship with nature and the members of the biological community. Smith and Dilafruz enumerate the following principles as important parts of environmental education:

- Development of personal affinity with the earth through practical experiences out-of-doors and through the practice of care
- Grounding learning in a sense of place through the study of knowledge possessed by local elders and the investigation of surrounding natural and human communities
- Induction of students into an experience of community that counters the press towards individualism that is dominant in contemporary social and economic experiences
- Acquisition of practical skills needed to regenerate human and natural environments

Clearly, these principles focus mostly on the cultivation of the virtues of love, respect, and a feeling of kinship or community with the biological community, just as it was envisioned by Aldo Leopold. Leopold himself states:

Perhaps the most serious obstacle impeding the evolution of a land ethic is the fact that our educational and economic system is headed away from, rather than toward, an intense consciousness of land. Your true modern is separated from the land by many middlemen, and by innumerable physical gadgets. He has no vital relation to it; to him it is the space between cities on which crops grow.

Therefore, the development and cultivation of sentiments of environmental citizenship will have to include direct experience of the natural world, which can be accommodated through field trips and other activities that take the students outside the classroom. Unfortunately, this aspect of education has been sorely neglected, mainly due to the

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numerous bureaucratic hurdles that educators have to overcome in order to be permitted to take the students into the field.

A primary effect of habituation is that we gradually learn to perceive things correctly through more nuanced patterns of seeing; we become more and more responsible for how things ‘appear’ to us as experience gives us an eye.171 This again shows that the cultivation of the virtues goes hand in hand with a refinement and improvement of moral perception. In other words, the virtuous agents will perceive the world very differently and arguably more “correctly’ than a person that is less virtuous. Furthermore, the moral agent is largely responsible for seeing the world through the correct moral lens.

The character virtues … are psychological states produced over time. They cannot be taught; they are acquired only by actual practice. If the practice originates from a person’s natural dispositions, the resulting psychological state is natural character virtue. If the practice is dictated by prudence and free choice the resulting psychological state is authentic character virtue. We develop authentic character virtue by freely making prudential personal decisions over and over again.172

I argue that instead of being blind habits, virtues are action-guiding properties. In fact, I would argue that one of the crucial aspects of virtue theory is that it is strongly associated with and dependent on action. It is important to emphasize that despite the tendency to evaluate a person’s character instead of individual moral actions, virtue ethics is concerned with activity, because the actions constitute the fundamental moral training the moral agent receives. In this respect, virtue ethics is a theory of activity, of being actively involved with one’s immediate surroundings. This account runs contrary


to the view that virtues once cultivated are just inert qualities within a moral agent. As Devettere adequately formulates:

First, when we say that the character virtues are ‘states’, this does not imply that the character virtues are passive states. Just as it would be impossible, Aristotle reminds us, to consider a horse excellent if it had the capability of doing well but never left the barn to run well or to carry its rider well or to perform well in battle, so it would be impossible to consider a person excellent (virtuous) if that person had developed the states of being temperate, courageous, just, and loving, but never behaved in such a way. Although the character virtues are psychological states, they are states concerned with feelings and actions. Virtue is a decision-making state, and Aristotle says explicitly that character virtue is a decision-making state (NE 1139a-34). *The states forming character virtue are not passive; rather they are expressed in what we feel and what we do.*

Aristotle explicitly says: “Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are *made perfect by habit.*”

In his own research, Kristjansson finds that there are some aspects of character education that may appear questionable or even potentially dangerous

(a) The fear of *indoctrination*: that the manipulation inherent in the habituation process prevents the unfettered employment of autonomy;

(b) The possibility of *foreclosed options* - that in suppressing alternative conceptions of the good, moral habituation restricts future life options; and

(c) The threat of *force*: that habituation necessarily involves force and is, thus, morally and politically suspect.

As far as a curriculum for environmental character education is concerned, a closer look at theories of moral character education becomes necessary. As discussed earlier, the teaching of virtues is unlike other forms of theoretical instruction in that it is strongly dependent on experience, practice, and habituation. Furthermore, any moral

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173 Ibid., p. 72 (emphasis added)
education has to be adjusted to the needs and capacities of the respective moral agent. It has to be taken into account that young children do not have the same ability to reason or abstract from situations as older, more experienced persons. The pre-rational moral shaping of children will play an important role in the development of an environmental virtue ethic.

One of the major issues in education, and specifically in moral education is to find some kind of balance in teaching content versus teaching process. Right now, the emphasis is clearly on process-based learning, and the unfortunate result of such teaching is that students know very few facts. For example, in 1989 a survey showed that one quarter of high school seniors could not tell apart the thoughts of Karl Marx and the United States Constitution. From personal experience, I have found that some people actually do not know where Germany is (I was asked whether Germany was a part of Europe). This lack of factual knowledge can prove detrimental to society at large, although most educators would claim that it is more important to know how to find facts (such as doing an internet search, or even going to the library) than to memorize them. However, factual knowledge helps students make sense of the world around them, and it creates a shared reality between individuals that hold the same beliefs about the world. Furthermore, the possession of factual knowledge has been thought to enhance cognitive processes.

The Character Education Partnership proposes the following eleven principles of effective character education:

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1. [Promote] core ethical values and supportive performance values as the foundation of good character.
2. [Define] "character" comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior
3. [Use] a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to character development.
4. [Create] a caring school community
5. [Provide] students with opportunities for moral action
6. [Include] a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed.
7. [Strive] to foster students' self motivation
8. [Engage] the school staff as a learning and moral community that shares responsibility for character education and attempts to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students
9. [Foster] shared moral leadership and long range support of the character education initiative
10. [Engage] families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.
11. [Evaluate] the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.  

As these eleven principles emphasize, character education is not simply the responsibility of educators and schools, but has to take a holistic approach that involves families and communities as well.

What's the Moral of the Story? The Power of Narratives

While traditionally moral education used to use narratives and stories to transmit knowledge of values and virtues, the current educational trends do not (usually) include stories. It appears as though educators are afraid of using narratives in their educational practices, perhaps because the use of stories seems obsolete and outdated.

\[178\] The Character Education Partnership (http://www.character.org)
Presumably, it is thought that we do not need morality wrapped up in the “pretty packaging” of a story, but that we can instead reason our way to morality. So it is as if we want the “moral of the story” without the actual story. To be sure, moral dilemmas frequently presented in moral education do resemble stories to a degree, but they are stories that are lacking real content since we do not really care about the people in the dilemmas. They frequently appear very two-dimensional, and morality is more or less presented as some kind of human math problem that needs to be solved. Again, we fall into the danger of losing sight of the human aspect of morality if we look at issues as problems to be solved without paying attention to relationships between people.

A prime example of such a mathematical approach to a moral question is utilitarianism, which reduces the realm of morality to a cost-benefit calculation of pain and pleasure. Jeremy Bentham’s hedonistic calculus unabashedly celebrates the reduction of moral questions to “units” of pleasure and pain that can be added up or deducted.

Stories are especially effective in transmitting values and virtues if one recognizes the intimate connection between morality and vision. As stated previously, one of the main advantages of virtue ethics lies in the fact that it is tied to moral perception in ways that other ethical theories are not. More precisely, the cultivation of virtues is thought to go hand in hand with a refinement in moral perception, which fundamentally changes the way a moral agent sees the world. So it is one’s actual vision as well as one’s worldview that is affected by the cultivation of virtue. If one realizes that stories are one of the major ways that ways of seeing the world are transmitted, their value for character education becomes clear. As Kilpatrick writes:
If we can agree that morality is intimately bound up with vision, then we can see why stories are so important for our moral development, and why neglecting them is a serious mistake. This is because stories are one of the chief ways by which visions are conveyed (a vision, in turn, may be defined as a story about the way things are or the way the world works). Just as vision and morality are intimately connected, so are story and morality. The question is not whether the moral principle needs to be sweetened with the sugar of the story but whether moral principles make any sense outside the human context of stories.¹⁷⁹

According to Kilpatrick, many educators and psychologists have recognized the power of stories in affecting moral behavior. Kilpatrick himself has tested the theory that stories affect behavior in a different way than moral reasoning or any kind of moral abstraction does. He noticed that students in his classes react differently when they are represented with a values clarification dilemma than if the same dilemma is presented as a dramatic story. He uses something similar to Garret Hardin’s metaphor of lifeboat ethics as a moral exercise for using the values clarification method. More specifically, the students are asked to imagine an overcrowded lifeboat that is in danger of sinking if its load is not lightened. Then the students receive a brief description of the lifeboat’s passengers and are subsequently asked to decide who should be thrown overboard. As is typical with the values clarification method, there are no categorically right or wrong answers to this exercise, as its sole goal is to generate a lively discussion. Clearly, the state of affairs on the hypothetical lifeboat is quite similar to the situation the crew and passengers of the Titanic faced when their ship sank. Interestingly, when the event is presented as a story instead of a dilemma, the students react very differently. While they may struggle with the lifeboat dilemma and the question of who should be sacrificed, their struggle is mainly intellectual and definitely hypothetical. However, when they watch the movie A Night to Remember, which portrays the sinking of the Titanic

¹⁷⁹ Kilpatrick, Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong, p. 135.
and the subsequent struggle of individuals to stay alive, many of them cry. Instead of
debating the lives of merely imaginary people as presented in the lifeboat dilemma, the
individuals in the movie appear as three-dimensional characters whose struggles the
students can easily relate to and feel for. Kilpatrick writes:

The film doesn’t leave the viewer much room for ethical maneuvering. It is quite
clear who has acted well and who has not. And anyone who has seen it will
come away hoping if ever put to a similar test, he or she will be brave and not
cowardly, will think of others rather than of self. Not only does the film move us, it
moves us in certain directions. It is definitive, not open-ended. We are not being
asked to ponder a complex ethical dilemma; rather, we are being taught what is
proper. There are codes of conduct: women and children first; duty to others
before self. If there is a dilemma in the film, it does not concern the code itself.
The only dilemma is the perennial one that engages each soul: conscience
versus cowardice, faith versus despair.

While I do not agree with Kilpatrick optimistic assertion that anyone who has seen the
movie will ask themselves the hard questions, I am fairly confident that most people will.
And it is striking to realize that narratives involving the emotions of the moral agent are
not only evaluated differently than hypothetical ethical dilemmas, but also serve as
moral lessons by clearly illustrating proper versus improper behavior.

In the environmental context, a prime example of how narratives and stories
move people more than mere abstractions in the environmental movement is the
influence of the book Silent Spring on public opinion and concern. When Rachel Carson
presented the issue of pesticides and their impact on nature in a narrative and
descriptive account that people could relate to their own lives, it really hit home, much
more than any abstract presentation of the same information would have been able to.

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180 Ibid., p.139.
181 Ibid., p. 139.
Kilpatrick argues: “The more abstract our ethic, the less power it has to move us.”\(^{182}\) If this is true, and I would claim that it is, the issue becomes of how to make our moral education as practical as possible.

That the telling of stories constitutes an essential part of human life can be seen in the fact that people usually view and understand their own lives as a narrative. Most people want to be heroes, and we admire others who behave in heroic ways. The desire to be a hero is another way of asserting that we want our lives to unfold like a story. Since any good story has a plot, we would like to have our lives follow a plot as well. For instance, Viktor Frankl famously states that biggest need in our lives is to find meaning; if we are able to find meaning, then even suffering ceases to be suffering.\(^{183}\) In turn, Frankl argues that the most effective therapy is not one of tension reduction (à la Freud) or self-actualization (à la Maslow), but instead one that helps clients see their lives as meaningful stories.

Famous psychologist Bruno Bettelheim says something very similar when he prescribes the reading of fairy tales and hero stories to convey meaning to children. He prescribes such stories because they teach that “a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence—but that if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious.”\(^{184}\) Interestingly, what works for children is also efficient for adults. Bettelheim writes:

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\(^{182}\) Ibid., p. 142.


To find deeper meaning one must be able to transcend the narrow confines of a self-centered existence and believe that one will make a significant contribution to life—if not now, then at some future time.\textsuperscript{185}

Stories help us believe that life is meaningful after all. In that function, stories can literally save lives.

The conviction that our life is a meaningful story can literally keep us alive. The stories we read or hear or see on film can reinforce and sustain that conviction. They help us to see that our lives are worth living.\textsuperscript{186}

Although at first glance this claim may seem far-fetched or exceedingly strong, when looking at people who have attempted suicide, the common observation is that their lives have lost meaning, that existence seems pointless and empty. Kilpatrick writes: “We are willing to endure suffering if the suffering has meaning, but meaning is exactly what is absent in the case of a potential suicide.”\textsuperscript{187}

Stories can also help to keep us on the path of virtue. They can give us not only a reason for living but also a reason for living well…. The point is this: The best motivation for acting well—and hence the surest foundation of morality—is the belief that we have a role to play in life…. Morality is not merely a matter of rule keeping but of role-playing.\textsuperscript{188}

The notion of role playing does not sound good to our modern sensibilities, since we are taught that playing a role is bad and that we should be “authentic,” which essentially means that we should always strive to be who we are. However, looking at it from another, more traditional perspective, the ancient Greeks often regarded life as a dramatic story, and playing a role did not necessarily mean being inauthentic or taking on the role of somebody else. Instead, it signified rising above oneself, overcoming

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., pp. 3-4.
\textsuperscript{186} Kilpatrick, \textit{Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong}, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{187} Ibid., p. 194.
\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., pp. 196-197.
one’s own limitations. Kilpatrick writes: “Virtue, understood in its original sense, requires a certain passion for life. And stories can supply some of that passion.”

Interestingly, the power of stories to shape a life and give it meaning has increasingly been recognized in therapy. For instance, one particular group, Alcoholics Anonymous, explicitly employs the telling of one’s story as a means for recovery from alcoholism.

Aesthetics in Virtue Education

In the Birth of Tragedy, Friedrich Nietzsche famously proclaimed that “It is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified.” Nietzsche thus implied that people are swayed not by rational argument but instead by aesthetic appeals. Naturally, this idea could also be used in more ominous, negative ways. The Nazis, for example, employed aesthetic arguments to further their cause, and it is a well known fact that Hitler himself was a would-be artist. The film Triumph of the Will by Leni Riefenstahl in many ways constituted the culmination of the Nazi propaganda machine and it clearly used aesthetic means to influence its viewers. While the Nazis use of art and film constitutes a negative example of the power of aesthetic arguments. It nevertheless goes to show that people vividly respond to artistic claims. Additionally, this aesthetic claim goes hand in hand with the argument that morality is closely tied to vision, and that stories play an instrumental part in the teaching of values and virtues. Clearly, vision is an aesthetic phenomenon, and stories not only affect our

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189 Ibid., p. 198.
moral but also our artistic and aesthetic sensibilities. Aristotle himself thought that imitation is a great tool for moral instruction, and that appreciation of beauty, which is an aesthetic phenomenon, was integral to becoming a virtuous moral agent. In the Politics, Aristotle repeatedly and emphatically discusses the use of music in the education of virtuous citizens, which I examine in the next section.

The Power of Music

Akin to the use of stories, using music as an educational tool appeals to people’s aesthetic sensibilities, and again aesthetic arguments prove to be more convincing than rational ones. It is quite clear that human beings learn very easily when something is set in rhyme or song. This is one of the aspects that make commercials so successful; in fact, it works so well that frequently we can remember the jingle of an advertisement better than the advertisement itself. Of course, this phenomenon can be employed in much more constructive ways, as the use and effectiveness of nursery rhymes readily shows.

The question becomes whether it is possible to effectively conduct moral education through rhyme or song. The fact that Greek society learned much of its values through works such as the Iliad or the Odyssey, which were frequently sung to audiences, seems to suggest that morality really lends itself to being taught musically. Plato already recognized the power of music in influencing people’s feelings and behaviors, for in the Republic he famously suggests censoring many types of music (and other forms of art). Interestingly, Plato was actually not talking about the lyrics of music, but the music itself. He claimed that an individual raised with harmonious music
would be more likely to have a harmonious soul as well since like is attracted to like.

Whether he is correct in that assertion or not is not really pertinent to the discussion of whether music has the power to educate, since it clearly does. But what kind of music would aid in creating a good moral environment? Kilpatrick offers these broad suggestions:

1. **Music that can be shared**: in contrast to rock music, which has had a largely divisive effect, we should focus on music that lends itself to being shared, such as children’s songs, folk songs, ballads, carols etc.

2. **Music that channels emotions**: naturally, the most obvious appeal music has is of an emotional nature. The aim of education should not be the denial or removal of emotions but rather the channeling of them into appropriate directions. Music can help in this endeavor.

3. **Music that shapes the soul**: Kilpatrick explains: “Morality is not merely about learning the rules of right and wrong; it is about a total alignment of our selves. Because music moves our whole being, it plays a major role in setting that alignment.”

4. **Music that has stood the test of time**: Generally, music that is able to influence people in a positive way possesses the characteristic of timelessness and thus speaks to generation after generation.

5. **Music that tells a story**: “Songs that tell a story have a natural attraction for us because they suggest that the beauty and harmony of music is potentially present in our lives. Put another way, the events of life seem more ordered and less chaotic when they can be given musical expression.” In other words, music can aid in making life appear less frightening and overwhelming.

As Kilpatrick eloquently puts it:

> In summary, music has powers that go far beyond entertainment. It can play a positive role in moral development by creating sensual attractions to goodness, or it can play a destructive role by setting children on a temperamental path that leads away from virtue.

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191 Kilpatrick, *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong*, p. 185.
192 Ibid., p. 187.
193 Ibid., p. 188.
As such, music can play a vital role in the moral education of children; it is therefore advisable for parents (and possibly society?) to encourage the enjoyment of music that appears conducive to proper moral conduct and maybe even contains moral lessons.

The Role of Schools in Character Education

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that it should be the role of the government to raise morally good people. However, he also acknowledges that most (if not all) governments fall short of this ideal. Unfortunately, not just the governments fail in bringing up morally virtuous human beings; parents are frequently negligent in the moral upbringing of their own children. So the question of who is responsible for the moral education of children is still as pertinent today as it was in Aristotle’s time. What role should schools play in character education? Sommers writes:

1. Schools should have behavior codes that emphasize civility, kindness, self-discipline, and honesty.
2. Teachers should not be accused of brainwashing children when they insist on basic decency, honesty, and fairness.
3. Children should be told stories that reinforce goodness. In high school and college, students should be reading, studying, and discussing the moral classics.

I am suggesting that teachers must help children become acquainted with their moral heritage in literature, in religion, and in philosophy. I am suggesting that virtue can be taught, and that effective moral education appeals to the emotion as well as to the mind. The best moral teaching inspires students by making them keenly aware that their own character is at stake.  

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194 As mentioned previously, the translation of the term *polis* as government might not adequately capture the meaning of the concept for Aristotle.

In essence, Sommers argues that our fear of brainwashing or indoctrinating students has led to a moral vacuum in schools. Instead of teaching students right and wrong we have left them morally confused. At the same time, parents neglect to teach their children moral values, either because the parents themselves lack the terminology and knowledge to transmit values to their children or because they believe that it should be the job of the educational institutions to teach values. The result is moral illiteracy and moral relativism. The concepts of character and virtue have nearly disappeared completely from schools. Kilpatrick suggests that we should look at some aspects of military institutions to learn lessons for our schools. He claims that the army is largely successful due to its shared ethos. This ethos is created in reinforced in the following ways:

First, by conveying a vision of high purpose: not only the defense of one’s own or other nations against unjust aggression, but also the provision of humanitarian relief and reconstruction in the wake of war or natural disaster.

Second, by creating a sense of pride and specialness….

Third, by providing the kind of rigorous training—physical, mental, and technical—that results in real achievement and thus in real self-esteem

Fourth, by being a hierarchical, authoritarian, and undemocratic institution which believes in its mission and is unapologetic about its training programs.  

Personally, I find Kilpatrick’s admiration for the military’s shared ethos and the way it is maintained a little frightening and believe that it almost justifies people’s accusations that character education requires brainwashing and indoctrination. For instance, the creation of pride and a sense of specialness is precisely what made National Socialism in Germany so successful. Also, the unapologetic and undemocratic nature of the military, which rouses much admiration from Kilpatrick, can also be compared to

National Socialism in Germany. In other words, the methods used by the military to ensure obedience and a shared ethos can easily be misappropriated and abused for ominous purposes. If we were to support such educational practices, it begs the question of how we know that the values that we are promoting are the “right” ones.

On the other hand, I am sympathetic to some of the main points Kilpatrick makes. I think he is correct in saying that schools should not be run democratically, since young students are not sufficiently mature to stand on the same level of authority as headmasters and teachers. Likewise, parents stand in an authoritarian relationship to their children, as they presumably know better what is good for their child. For instance, if we let children autonomously decide what they want to eat, they would only eat chips and ice cream because that is what they “like.” However, as Aristotle points out, we can teach children to like and dislike the appropriate things by using pleasure and pain, reward and punishment. Aristotle explicitly writes: “That is why we need to have had the appropriate upbringing … to make us find enjoyment and pain in the right things; for this is correct education.” Naturally, we can only do so if we ourselves like and dislike the appropriate things. Kilpatrick states:

Isn’t it better that people behave themselves without compulsion? Yes, eventually, but sometimes compulsion is what is needed to get a good habit started. We don’t wait for a child to decide for himself that tooth brushing is a good habit. The same applies to weightier moral matters.

Even Aristotle would agree with Kilpatrick that in order to instill good habits in young people, we have to force them to behave in certain ways, even if it is against their inclinations. We, in fact, frequently do not know what is good for us, and must be forced

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198 Ibid., p. 231.
to do what is good even if it is difficult and perhaps even unpleasant. If we cultivate good habits in people, they will eventually take pleasure in the appropriate activities.

Kilpatrick further argues that the old adage that we cannot legislate morality is overly simplistic, as it is true that while we cannot force people to think or feel morally, we can at least give strong external incentives for them to act in specific ways. Forcing them to act in certain ways can actually result in a change of heart eventually. As Kilpatrick puts it, “Obeying the law over a long period of time induces certain habits which alter attitudes.”199 He writes:

The primary way to bring ethics and character back into schools is to create a positive moral environment in schools. The ethos of a school, not its course offerings, is the decisive factor in forming character. The first thing we must change is the moral climate of the schools themselves. What we seem to have forgotten in all our concern with individual development is that schools are social institutions. Their first function is to socialize.200

Besides changing the moral environment of schools, there are also more direct ways of teaching character. There is a small but increasing number of schools that explicitly set out to teach students character. One such example is the North Clackamas School District in Oregon. Teachers in that school district have devised a four-year cycle in which each year focuses on one set of character traits to be promoted. The first year emphasizes patriotism, integrity and honesty, and courtesy, the second year focuses on respect for authority, respect for others, for property, and for environment, and self-esteem; year three teaches compassion, self-discipline, and responsibility, work ethic, and appreciation for education; and lastly, the fourth year deals with patience, courage, and cooperation. After four years, the cycle is repeated and students are expected to

199 Ibid., p. 232.
200 Kilpatrick, Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong, p. 226.
appreciate these traits more deeply. The teaching includes definitions, the study of virtuous persons, concrete ways of applying these virtues to situations, and activities like poster, essay, or photo contests. Here are some examples for the definitions for patience:

- Patience is a calm endurance of a trying or difficult situation
- Patience is waiting one’s turn
- Patience is appreciating people’s differences
- Patience is enduring the skill levels of younger children when playing a game

Once these definitions are learned by the students, they are discussed especially in terms of their practical application. So, while the character trait itself is never questioned, the realm of its applicability can be explored. For instance, in the segment focusing on respect for authority, students study cases in which resistance to authority is legitimate, as in the case of Rosa Parks or Martin Luther King Jr. In other words, students are not blindly indoctrinated but are encouraged to think critically about the application of each virtue. While it might be difficult to come up with lists of virtues that should be promoted, most scholars agree that every list should contain at least the four cardinal virtues of the Greeks, namely, prudence, justice, courage, and temperance.

Kilpatrick writes: “They are called cardinal because they are the axis (cardo) on which the moral life runs.” It might come as a surprise that having discussions about the application of virtues is deemed an essential part of character education in light of the negative assessment such forms of instruction (i.e., discussions about values) has been given within the framework of values clarification. So what is the difference between the

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201 Ibid., pp. 238-239.
202 Ibid., p. 239.
kind of discussion involved in character education and the discussions as promoted by values clarification? Kilpatrick states:

In one case, students carry out their discussions in a framework of moral wisdom. In the other, there is no framework, and morality becomes a matter of "what I say" versus "what you say." A knowledge of the virtues provides a standard by which opinions and feelings can be measured.203

The Role of Parents in the Moral Upbringing of Children

In recent years, surveys have shown that Americans do not especially like children. For instance, in response to an Ann Landers column in the mid-seventies that posed the question of whether parents would have children if they could do it all over again, seventy percent of over 10,000 respondents answered that they would not. Granted, this response to a column does not precisely have the accuracy of a scientific survey, but it nonetheless provides an indication of the general attitudes toward children.204 One of the major reasons for this dislike can be found in the fact that children and adolescents are becoming increasingly disrespectful and disobedient. Even in my own, relatively short experience with college students, I have observed a trend of decreasing respect for authority as well as for rules. The fact that children are increasingly difficult to be around partly accounts for the phenomenon that parents spend less and less time with their own children; they are just no fun to be around. Some scholars have even suggested that mothers not only want to work outside their own home due to the economic necessity, but also to simply get away from their children. While this sounds awful, it is also understandable. Of course, child-rearing

203 Ibid., p. 243.
204 Ibid., p. 246.
experts never cease to remind us that the most important ingredient of raising children is love; however, what they do not mention is that it is much easier to love children that are lovable.

In essence, then, our aim should be to raise lovable, or perhaps admirable, children. How do we do that? One of the most fruitful ways to do that, says Kilpatrick, is to help children cultivate their character. He claims that doing so has benefits not only for the parents, but for the children themselves, because they are happier. Even Aristotle acknowledges that we should cultivate the virtues, not out of a sense of duty, but to become happy. If most parents would like to raise virtuous children, then the question becomes why they are not doing it. According to Kilpatrick, this failure rests on several false beliefs shared by most Americans:

1. The myth of the “good bad boy”: the belief that bad boys are essentially lovable is perpetuated through movies, books, etc. and renders terms such as obedience as having negative connotations.

2. The myth of natural goodness: this myth goes back to Jean Jacques Rousseau’s idea of the “Noble Savage;” it rests on the belief that virtue will develop naturally if we just let children grow up in their own way (although Rousseau also holds that society as such exerts a corrupting influence).

3. The myth of expert knowledge: parents increasingly defer to the knowledge of experts on childrearing who in turn frequently subscribe to the myth of natural goodness.

4. The myth that moral problems are really psychological problems: behavior problems are frequently seen as the expression of underlying psychological problems.

5. The myth that parents don’t have the right to instill their values in children: again, the standard belief is that children should be free to develop their own values, and that transmitting of values by their parents constitutes brainwashing or indoctrination.205

The best thing a parent can do for her children is to discipline them in a reasonable way. Not setting boundaries or limits for a child can be harmful in the long

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205 Kilpatrick, Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong, p. 248-249.
run. Contrary to popular belief, children do not know implicitly what is best for them, and therefore it is the job of the parent to look out for the child’s “interests.” Kilpatrick claims, “Setting limits and enforcing habits of good behavior is not easy in the short run, but it is the best policy in the long run.”

Paradoxically, discipline in earlier years frequently results in more freedom down the road. For instance, children that were raised with discipline (the Latin root for discipline actually means teaching) were less likely to fall prey to the tyranny of their peer group. Also, increased discipline leads to a better parent–child relationship.

Another good habit for children to learn is helping with household chores. A fifty-year long Harvard study that followed 465 boys into middle age showed that boys who were given jobs or household chores grew up to be happier adults, with higher-paying jobs, higher job satisfaction, more successful marriages and better relationships, and were even physically better off than boys who had not had similar responsibilities as children. Psychiatrist George E. Valliant offers the following explanation: “Boys who worked in the home or community gained competence and came to feel they were worthwhile members of society. And because they felt good about themselves, others felt good about them.”

Another good habit to reinstitute is the habit of family reading. As many studies have pointed out, the practice of watching television has been detrimental to the feelings of unity and identity of families. Family reading, once a common occurrence in homes, not only encourages family members to spend time together, it also leads to

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206 Ibid., p. 258.
lively discussions. However, the most important benefit of reading to children is the impact it has on character, especially if good books are chosen.

Reading and listening to the right sort of stories creates a primitive emotional attachment to behavior that is good and worthy; it implants a love and desire for virtue in the child’s heart and imagination; it helps to prevent moral blindness.\textsuperscript{208}

Finally, Kilpatrick adds:

[Family reading] puts you and your children in touch with one of the great civilizing traditions of the human race. All the great cultures of the past preferred to express their most serious thought through stories. The wonder of it is that we can share in many of those same stories today. They have survived because the truths they tell are timeless.”\textsuperscript{209}

While many people will be appalled by the conservative tone of the educational practices suggested by Kilpatrick, he is more than willing to offend the sensibilities of more liberal-minded educators. The crux of the matter is this: clearly, something is amiss in current educational practices, seeing that children are becoming worse, morally speaking. Something is obviously not working. What are we doing that we were not doing a few decades ago? We are teaching morality in a democratic and liberal way and it is obviously not very successful. Therefore, we might have to revisit previous educational practices that seemed to work better.

\section*{Conclusion}

In conclusion, I have argued that character education is superior to both values clarification and the cognitive behavioral approach to moral education. Usually, the failure to behave morally does not occur on the level of trying to decide what to do but rather in a failure to do what one knows to be right. Therefore, the remedy to the

\textsuperscript{208} Kilpatrick, \textit{Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong}, p. 267.

\textsuperscript{209} Ibid., p. 267.
general failure of moral education does not seem to lie in teaching students how to reason better about moral dilemmas but rather to inculcate habits that promote good character. Although character education is frequently said to be indoctrinative, this fact does not necessarily detract from the potential advantages of such an education. After all, morality and moral values are really not as relativistic as they are often portrayed to be. In fact, most people would agree on certain overarching moral values, and character education can focus on those traits (such as honesty, responsibility, respect, etc.).

In order for character education to be feasible, certain presuppositions have to be upheld. For instance, it is necessary to hold that virtues are educable, even if not in the same way that mathematics can be taught.

Character education can take many forms, but ultimately Aristotle’s suggestions seem to hold true. For instance, many scholars agree that the telling of stories can serve as a useful tool for the transmission of values and virtues. Naturally, the most important way to cultivate moral virtues is to behave in a virtuous manner frequently and consistently, just as Aristotle suggested 2,400 years ago. He also emphasized the importance of having good role models whose behavior can be emulated, and this type of emulative learning might still prove to be of great value today.
While it is clear that moral education necessarily has to include multiple factors, including the family, the community, as well as the school system, I here want to focus on the public aspect of character education: the effects of community and public schooling on character development, and subsequently, on responsible citizenship.

John Dewey writes:

The devotion of democracy for education is a familiar fact. The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated. Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education. But there is a deeper explanation: A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity.210

Interestingly, Dewey here mentions two important aspects of civic education: (1) the cultivation of an internal “authority” or motivation which governs citizens by what might be called a conscience; and (2) the recognition of being a member of a community which brings with it certain responsibilities toward all other members of that community.

I discuss both of these crucial features of education for responsible citizenship in turn at a later point

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With regard to responsible environmental citizenship, the last part of Dewey’s quote takes on a novel meaning. In retrospect, globalization first made it possible to utterly divorce modern men (and women) themselves, or rather, to completely blind themselves, from “perceiving the full import of their activity.” In other words, industrialized nations have not always been the ones that had to bear the brunt of the impact of their own production and consumption.\textsuperscript{211} Likewise, within industrialized nations, the wealthy few have not had to deal with the garbage and pollution of their consumer choices, since waste disposal industries and other locally undesirable land uses have traditionally been located in poorer neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{212} However, more recently, globalization has also made it possible to finally recognize and feel some of the consequences of the unsustainable behavior of (usually industrialized) nations: mass media informs us of the impact of global warming; we can expect water and food shortages to become more pronounced as the world population increases; it has finally come to our attention that we all share the same planet and the same resources with each other (or at least it has come to the attention of some people). So to rephrase and revisit the question that was raised earlier: how can we get people to make responsible choices, responsible not only with regard to themselves but with regard to the well-being of the entire social and ecological community around them? Dewey already states that “a democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.” Therefore, it is essential to examine the

\textsuperscript{211} With exceptions: for instance, during the Industrial Revolution in Great Britain, air pollution was horrendous.

\textsuperscript{212} Clearly, these are issues of environmental justice, or rather, environmental injustice that I do not want to address in detail here.
concept of a community, not only a community of human beings living together, but also of human beings living within a larger community of ecological relationships.

The Importance of Community in Cultivating Ecological Citizenship

Clearly, developing a sense of community is necessary for responsible and virtuous citizenship, because a person would not take into consideration the needs and interests of other individuals unless there is some sense of unity and kinship, friendship, or other positive relation with the members of the community. Aldo Leopold already states that "[e]thics are possibly a kind of community instinct-in-the-making."

Interestingly, in the process of developing his idea of a land ethic, Leopold already introduces a number of virtues that he deems essential for the character of an environmentally responsible person (citizen?). He explicitly writes:

We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in.....It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, of course, I mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense.213

The virtues explicitly mentioned by Aldo Leopold are love, respect, admiration, and a high regard for its value in the philosophical sense, which most have interpreted to mean the land's intrinsic value. I return to Leopold's discussion of environmental virtues at a later time; for now, I want to focus on the importance of the concept of community for true citizenship, both civic and environmental. Leopold explains the importance of the community concept in the cultivation of a land ethic in the following way:

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise: that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to cooperate. The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.²¹⁴ In essence, in order to make responsible choices as an environmental citizen, we first have to recognize and accept the fact that we are all members of the biotic community as a whole, i.e., members of the biosphere. However, responsible citizenship also calls for the recognition of being a member of a regional, local community, since most decisions and actions will have to be taken on a small-scale level. The realization and acknowledgment of humanity’s true place in the grand scheme of things can be accomplished in part by a rudimentary education in the science of ecology, which points out the interconnectedness of all life forms. Unfortunately, it can be said that the feeling of being a member of any community has largely been lost in modern society. There is not one single factor to blame, but the contemporary lifestyle of frequently moving from place to place, of not setting down roots in any one place, of not knowing one’s neighbors or one’s native fauna and flora, are all symptoms of our loss of a sense of community. This is evidently a societal problem which is also tied to the strong emphasis on individualism and consumerism prevalent in today’s world. As Eberly eloquently writes:

The search for human progress in the form of technical and material advances has created a society wedded to the pursuit of happiness through power, interest group privilege, litigation, and crass consumerism. The result has been the triumph of the private over the public, the individual over the community, the secular over the sacred, and commerce over character.²¹⁵

In order for responsible civic and environmental citizenship to work, the community concept has to be revived and fostered, especially since the community plays an integral part for the cultivation of character. After all, “it takes a village to raise a child.”

How Virtues Can Augment Policy

While it is clear that solid policies, laws, and regulations, as well as the enforcement of these, are indispensable to ensure the well-being of society as a whole, these external means of control can be augmented by the cultivation of virtues in the citizens. The policies provide an external motivation to behave responsibly, either by punishing disobedience or by rewarding obedience to the laws, the virtues would in turn provide an internal motivation to make wise and responsible decisions. In other words, it is ultimately important what people do when “no one is watching,” i.e., when the threat of punishment is not present. As Connelly puts it:

> Virtuous eco-citizens will internalize the purpose and value of good environmental practices and their obedience will thus transcend mere compliance, going beyond it toward autonomous virtuous activity.

Along the same lines, in his book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, James Hunter explicitly states that “[i]f moral society is their objective, the goal of the orthodox should be the cultivation of virtue, rather than simply maintenance of the law.”

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The cultivation of virtues has traditionally been associated with the fostering of good character, i.e., in order to build good character, virtuous habits need to be adopted, and vice versa. Good character consists of “knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good.”219 In other words, the building of character requires “use of the head, the heart, and the hands.”220 As such, character has multiple dimensions which include a cognitive, an affective, as well as a behavioral component. While traditional classroom education mostly addresses the cognitive aspect of character building, education for environmental citizenship requires a more holistic approach that includes the establishing of good habits and practice. These good habits can in turn become virtues through reflection and repetition.

Importantly, the cultivation of virtues is not only closely associated with the development of good character, but also with a refinement of moral perception. Briefly, moral perception refers to the ability to perceive and judge moral situations correctly, subsequently resulting in action. In other words, moral perception precedes moral action; one first has to realize that a situation has features which require moral action by the moral agent. If a person does not have appropriately fine-tuned moral perception, he or she cannot be said to be virtuous because being virtuous presupposes that one is able to observe and judge particular situations correctly.

An important question now becomes: what are some civic and environmental virtues? Virtues in the traditional sense of the term are excellences of character; they are characteristics that promote the flourishing or happiness (eudaimonia) of a person. As such, virtues seem to be rather selfish or at least self-oriented, aiming at the self-
actualization or fulfillment of the virtuous agent. However, virtues are both individual and social; while they are always self-oriented, they are also regularly other-oriented, especially the civic and environmental virtues. Aristotle, one of the most famous proponents of virtue ethics, divides virtues into two groups: intellectual and moral virtues. For the sake of this discussion, I focus on the moral virtues, and more specifically, on the other-oriented civic and environmental moral virtues. Connelly explicitly states that “although virtues are private responsibilities, their possession is a public good, and their development and reinforcement is a public as well as private duty.”

In her book *Civic Virtues and Public Schooling: Educating Citizens for a Democratic Society*, Patricia White discusses the following civic virtues:

1. Hope and confidence
2. Courage
3. Self-respect and self-esteem
4. Friendship
5. Trust
6. Honesty
7. Decency (i.e., good manners)
8. Loyalty
9. Gratitude
10. Patience

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Clearly, these virtues promote social cohesion and functioning by promoting respectful and responsible relationships between the members of the social community. Furthermore, these civic virtues appear to be interconnected; for instance, one cannot have friendship without trust and honesty. Interestingly, White mentions courage and hope as civic virtues, which at first glance might not appear self-evident. However, in the course of her discussion, she makes clear that without hope, no positive action will be taken; instead, apathy and despair will ensue. The civic virtue of courage is also interesting in that it promotes affirmative action in case an injustice is perceived.

In order to see the connection between civic virtues and virtues an environmentally responsible citizen should have, the following is a list of “eco-virtues” that were already suggested by Aldo Leopold in an earlier discussion:

1. Love
2. Respect
3. Admiration
4. A high regard for the land’s intrinsic value

As argued earlier, Leopold suggests that these character traits and sentiments develop once individuals enlarge their concept of community to include natural communities, such as ecosystems. In essence, then, both ecological and civic virtues have to do with the way a person conducts him- or herself in respect to other members of the community. The issue at stake is simply who or what is regarded as a member of one’s community.

This brief discussion of civic and environmental virtues indicates, a virtuous character is desirable for responsible citizenship since it provides for an internal
motivation for conscientious action. The virtues govern from within by evoking the appropriate emotions and judgments while laws and regulations can only govern externally. Therefore, cultivating a virtuous character in citizens can successfully augment sound policy and other regulatory frameworks.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

One of the main advantages of virtue ethics compared to rule-based theories of environmental ethics can be seen in its focus on character development, which in turn causes a refinement of the moral perception of a person. In effect, environmental virtue ethics does not have to explicitly establish moral considerability for the nonhuman world, as the moral agent will perceive his or her relationship with the natural world differently. Environmental virtue ethics can be justified by asserting that any authentic virtue must fulfill the criterion of ecosystem sustainability, since a sustainable, healthy environment is both a prerequisite of and a goal for the cultivation of virtue.

Ultimately, the great potential of environmental virtue ethics lies in its attempt to sensitize moral agents to their proper place in the world. Ideally, through a refinement of moral perception, which accompanies the cultivation of environmental virtues, the moral agent recognizes the importance of all components of nonhuman nature for human flourishing. Although the proposed environmental virtue ethic is not intended to be explicitly biocentric, a more holistic perspective of humanity’s place in nature should automatically arise. In this respect, the environmental virtue ethic would ideally encompass some aspects of biocentrism (i.e., life has non-instrumental value) and weak anthropocentrism (i.e., human beings still experience and value the nonhuman world from a human perspective). The main goal of an ecological virtue ethic lies in the cultivation of a moral character that displays sensitivity to the natural world. The change of moral perception that is intimately associated with the cultivation of virtue can accommodate for that necessity.
The inclusion of certain types of rules, heretofore referred to as nonconstitutive rules, can prove helpful in improving the moral perception of inexperienced moral agents. It is important to note, however, that these nonconstitutive rules are not categorical in nature, but rather resemble rules of thumb. The connection between rules of conduct and virtues is not a novel insight. For instance, in his *Respect for Nature*, Paul Taylor already points out the connection between virtues and rules, although his own approach is heavily based on Kant’s ethical theory and thus differs significantly from the environmental virtue ethics suggested by me. Taylor refers to virtues as “character traits needed for compliance with a single rule of duty or with some rules but not others.”\(^2\) Clearly, then, for Taylor the virtues are subservient to established moral rules rather than the other way around. In other words, even though virtues are desirable traits, they are desirable because they aid in the compliance to given ethical principles. In contrast, nonconstitutive rules are intended to help moral agents become virtuous, and as such are not categorically binding.

In regard to the cultivation of virtue, the issue of character education is paramount. Since virtues cannot be taught through theoretical instruction, the acquisition of good habits constitutes the necessary foundation for the establishment of good moral character. In the *Politics*, Aristotle suggests several methods of instruction, including physical training and musical education. Other methods that have been suggested are the use of stories, role play, outdoor activities, etc. Habituation constitutes the basis for the acquisition of good habits, and as such it requires the

application of rewards and punishment by a caring tutor, who at the same time can serve as a role model for virtuous behavior.

Clearly, character education is not an easy task, especially if there is no consensus on who is responsible for the moral education of children. It seems that society as a whole should have a vested interest in bringing up morally good people, so that the responsibility does not fall on the shoulders of one single group. Schools, parents, teachers, and other citizens can and should all play a major role in the formation of character of the next generation. Importantly, Aristotle himself draws a strong connection between moral education and citizenship by essentially claiming that the proper moral education of individuals serves the greater good by producing better citizens, which in turn creates a better society. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he explicitly writes:

> For even if the good is the same for a city as for an individual, still the good of a city is apparently a greater and more complete good to acquire and preserve. For while it is satisfactory to acquire and preserve the good for even an individual, it is finer and more divine to acquire and preserve it for a people and for cities. And so, since our line of inquiry seeks these goods, for an individual and for a community, it is a sort of political science.\(^{224}\)

Thus, Aristotle asserts that while the moral education of an individual is crucial in itself, it derives some of its significance from its beneficial effects on the city or society.

In conclusion, then, the good of an individual and the good of the community he or she inhabits cannot be separated. Both Plato and Aristotle seem to agree on the reciprocal relationship of societies and individuals, meaning that good societies create good individuals through the application of appropriate laws and moral practices, and

\(^{224}\) Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b8-13 (emphasis added).
morally virtuous persons participate in creating good societies through citizenship.\textsuperscript{225} As a result, character education seems to be both a private and public matter, in which (ideally) all members of a community share an interest.

\textsuperscript{225} See Plato’s \textit{Republic}, specifically his discussion of the systematic relationship between the healthy soul of the individual and the healthy society.
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