Handbook of Moral and Character Education
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Philosophical Moorings

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Part I
Defining the Field
Historical, Philosophical, and Theoretical Foundations
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As with the rest of human life, morality and moral education have an outside and an inside. Seen from the outside, morality provides a way of getting along with others, and from the inside it is a way of getting along with oneself. In other words, moral education is at once a necessary condition for social control and an indispensable means of self-realization. Most of us, including philosophers and psychologists as well as parents and educators, assume that these two functions of morality sustain each other: what is good for society is good for our kids, and vice versa. Although Nietzsche and a few other so-called rugged individualists have rejected this assumption I will not spend time defending it in this chapter. Instead I will focus on the second of these two perspectives, the “inside view.” My motives for doing this are twofold. First of all, I want to unpack the general understanding, shared by contemporary educators of all persuasions, that morality is a form of self-realization. Also, I want to situate this understanding within the philosophical tradition of what, using the term in its broadest possible sense, I will simply call “human development.”

Specialists in the fields of education and psychology may object that not all conceptions of moral education are developmental, and that is certainly true if we understand development in the biological sense of an organic unfolding of innate powers, taking place within a reasonably stable environment that sustains but does not itself shape the developmental process. It is also true if we understand development in a nonbiological but equally narrow sense as an ordered progress through cognitive stages, each of which has its own logical structure. But our everyday concept of human development is not so narrow: there what is distinctive is not its inevitability or logical structure, but its normativity. Plainly put, most of us think of development as a movement from a less desirable state to a better one, even though in the case of human development the “betterness” at issue—namely, human flourishing—is subject to philosophical debate.

In what follows I will trace the way philosophers have formulated the fundamental developmental idea of human flourishing, since I believe that the history of their
struggles to understand what it means to be human have shaped the ways in which contemporary moral educators understand their own enterprise. I am tempted to say that here as elsewhere in the history of ideas, ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. However, to say this would oversimplify the way theories emerge within an intellectual tradition. It would be more realistic, I believe, to think of traditions, including our philosophical tradition, as providing necessary albeit usually unnoticed moorings for a specific theory or practice such as character education or moral judgment development. Thanks to these moorings a theory or practice is secured, stabilized, and thereby rendered intellectually plausible and practically useful. This point applies across the board, but as we will see in the following pages it is especially true for the theory, research, and practice of moral and character education.

When I spoke just now of “our philosophical tradition” I had in mind the usual pantheon of Western philosophers, beginning of course with the Greeks. One could begin even further back, since ancient non-Western thought is rich with insights into the moral dimension of selfhood—or better, the liberation from the demands of the self. However, the non-Western part of our story is well covered in the next chapter, so let’s begin with what might be called the early Greek cognitive-developmental conception of human development.

**SOCRATES AND PLATO**

For Socrates (469–399 BCE) and Plato (428–347 BCE), human development consisted in increasingly adequate knowledge of the ideal forms and, at the highest level, knowledge of the form of the Good. This form or idea (the usual two translations of the Greek *eidos*) is supremely intelligible, and other forms “participate” in its goodness because they too are thoroughly intelligible albeit more limited in their referential range. Since even sensible things and images participate in the intelligibility of their respective forms (the tire on my car can be understood as representing, imperfectly, the idea of a perfect circle), they too have a derivative sort of goodness. Furthermore, something of the same sort also holds for the cognitions directed toward these forms and things: perceptual knowledge is good but intellectual knowledge is better. The movement from less to more adequate modes of thinking is represented in Plato’s famous Allegory of the Cave (more on this in a moment).

Although the Good was the highest in a hierarchy of ideal forms, it could be known indirectly in the course of knowing lower forms that reflect its goodness—indeed, one can get a glimmer of the highest form from the most banal perceptual experience. This idea is not as arcane or counterintuitive as it might first seem. We use lofty ceremonial language to commend saints and heroes for their goodness, but we also smack our lips after eating a hot dog and say, quite unceremoniously, “Mmm, that was good!” Banalities such as the hot dog commendation have been the subject of language-analytic theorizing by metaethical philosophers since G. E. Moore, but they also illustrate something very important in Plato’s theory of the forms. In our lived experience the theoretical distinction between knowing and willing disappears. In ordinary, nonproblematic circumstances—say on a perfect day at the stadium when the home team is winning and lunch was a very long time ago—to see or smell a hot dog cooking on the grill is by that very fact to want it. In other words, the hot dog is perceived as desirable or, as Plato would say, it is apprehended “under the form of the Good.”
This account also applies to more lofty forms of cognition. Christian philosophers and theologians influenced by Plato have hypothesized that the beatific vision enjoyed by the saints in heaven is at once a face-to-face knowledge of God and a perfect loving union with him. And theorists of human development have said the same thing about knowledge of the Good qua moral, namely that it is the ideal form of Justice: to know it is to choose it. Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg are examples of this sort of moral cognitivism. The philosopher William Frankena is another. In his classical article on metaethical internalism, he argued that the very locution “X is the good [or right] thing to do” entails a motivational claim on the part of the speaker that he or she is at least somewhat inclined to do X (Frankena, 1958; see also Wren, 1991).

But neither contemporary cognitivists nor ancient Platonists ever thought that it is easy to attain a direct, internally motivating vision of the Good itself. Piaget and Kohlberg postulated a series of logically structured stages through which one must pass on the way to the complete fusion of moral knowledge and moral virtue. Plato, on the other hand, simply told a story, his famous Allegory of the Cave. In it he describes a group of prisoners who have been chained together since birth and can only see shadows on the wall in front of them, cast by a fire behind them against crude two-dimensional replicas of things in the outside world, which of course the prisoners have never seen nor even imagined to exist. One of the prisoners is dragged outside the cave where, after becoming accustomed to the bright light of the real world, he attains true knowledge or what we might call the higher stages of Platonic cognitive development. He sees for the first time and with increasing acuity the really real things (here read: eternal truths and values) that were so poorly imaged in the cave. Eventually he also sees the Sun itself, which like the Good, is the source of all things. The story does not have a happy ending, though. He later returns to the cave, where he is reviled by the prisoners for his inability to predict the goings and comings of the shadows on the wall. As often happens with those who try to enlighten others, he is eventually killed.

The beauty of virtue. Plato’s most famous account of virtue is his discussion of justice in the Republic, where he compares the tripartite structure of the soul (mind, spirit, and appetite) to the three classes of an ideal society (rulers, guardians, and workers). Each of these three classes has a distinctive function—ruling, protecting, and producing or consuming goods—which when done well exhibits the virtues of wisdom, courage, and temperance respectively. A just society is one in which all three classes work well and harmoniously together. Similarly, an individual who is wise, courageous, and temperate is said to be just in a global sense that corresponds to what we mean today by calling someone a very righteous or moral person.

So far so good. But here as in Plato’s other dialogical writings, it is important to recognize what precipitated his famous parallel of personal and societal justice. Much earlier in the dialogue Socrates had been shocked by the cynical claim, represented by the sophist Thrasydamus, that justice is nothing more than an instrument of self-interest. In opposition, Socrates argued that justice (and by extension, virtue in general) is not a means but rather a good in itself, a “thing of beauty” (to kalon). But what does this mean? Is Plato grounding his moral theory in purely aesthetic value? Not at all.

Although he expounded his comparison of a just person and a just society without going into detail about any of the constitutive virtues, it is clear from this and other parts of the Republic that he believed each virtue has its own status as an ideal Form or eternal truth, and hence can be known directly in roughly the same way as are the other Forms.
or eternal truths, such as the one embodied in the tire of my car. In the latter case the
eternal truth is the mathematical formula for a circle \( c = \pi d \); in the former (the moral
judgment) it is a moral principle. Supposedly those who are truly wise understand the
hurly burly of daily life in these terms, which in the moral context means that our judg-
ments about what to do are based “on principle” in a double sense: the principle provides
a motivational component as described above and also a justificatory rationale. Under-
stood in this way, Plato’s teaching on the virtues fits with the rule-oriented moral theory
of Immanuel Kant and his contemporary heirs—who include not only philosophers like
John Rawls but also cognitive developments such as Piaget and Kohlberg—as well as with
the disposition-oriented theory of Aristotle and his heirs—who include not only philo-
sophers like Alasdair MacIntyre but also most of the character educationists featured
elsewhere in this volume.

ARISTOTLE

After Socrates’ death in 399 BCE, Plato taught in the academy until he died, during which
time Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was a student and then, after Plato’s death, the founder
of a rival school, the Lyceum. The institutional rivalry between these two schools is of
little historical interest, but the intellectual rivalry between Aristotle and those of Plato’s
disciples who remained true to their teacher’s intellectual idealism is important. The
contrast is supposedly illustrated in Raphael’s famous painting *The School of Athens*, in
which Plato and Aristotle are pictured together, the one pointing heavenward toward
the realm of the ideal Forms and the other gesturing downward to the earth which, for
Aristotelians, was the truly real world.

Plato’s notion of human development was fundamentally backward-looking—the
prisoner in the cave was really trying to go back to a pristine state that he had lost, but
for Aristotle human development was as forward-looking as any other sort of organic
development. It was a goal-seeking sort of process, not a form-recalling one. It was,
in a word, teleological. Just as the internal dynamism or *telos* of an acorn is to grow
into an oak tree, so the *telos* of human beings is to develop into fully functioning,
happy, flourishing rational animals. And that is what organisms do when nothing goes
wrong. Of course things can go wrong and often do, for people as well as acorns. Even
so, the acorns have an easier time of it, since they cannot err. Unless certain external
conditions are absent (the acorn falls onto a sidewalk rather than fertile soil) growth is
guaranteed, for the simple reason that acorns are not conscious of the end-state they
are moving toward.

With this we come to what may be the two most important yet least understood parts
of Aristotle’s theory of human development and, accordingly, his conception of charac-
ter and character education. The first part is his conception of the human *telos* as living
in conformity with reason. Such a life may appear from the outside to be hopelessly con-
ventional, but if the “reason” to which a person conforms is his or her *own* reason and
not just an external social norm then it is clearly wrong to equate good character with
mindless conformity. Even so, Aristotle is often read in the latter way, owing to the second
part of his theory of human development, namely his account of character acquisition
as “habituation.” These two themes, “conformity with reason” and “habituation,” need to
be disentangled if we are to understand the relation between classical Aristotelian virtue
theory and contemporary theories of moral education.
There is an important ambiguity in Aristotle’s use of the term “reason” in the context of moral character and virtue. Sometimes he seems to mean the individual’s own historically situated cognitive faculty and at other times he echoes Plato’s notion of Reason as a transcendent reality that by its very nature always seizes upon the truth. The latter impression is strengthened by W. D. Ross’s famous translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1984), where the original Greek *orthos logos* is rendered as “right rule” (1138b25). However, more recent scholarship regards this choice as far too Kantian, so that now the preferred translations are “right reason” and “practical wisdom.” Indeed, the more colloquial (and more literal) phrase “straight thinking” may be even closer to what Aristotle has in mind, but this is not the place to quibble over terminology. What is important is that for Aristotle moral reasoning was an interpretation of here-and-now situations, not the imposition of antecedently known eternal principles onto the empirical phenomena of the present moment.

Over the last 20 or 30 years this point has been made repeatedly by Aristotle scholars, but it is only slowly percolating into the respective literatures of moral development and character education. In his early work Kohlberg (1970) dismissed virtue theory as an essentially noncognitive bundle of habits that were not only conceptually and psychologically disconnected from each other (character being considered as “a bag of virtues”) but also too situation-specific to be the subject of any realistic education program. He eventually qualified this view (see Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989) but the line had been drawn, and character educationists such as W. Bennett (1991) who resisted the Kohlbergian characterization of virtue as knowledge of the good also implicitly resisted the idea at the heart of Aristotle’s own view, namely that virtue is cognitive through and through. It is, as he put it in the *Ethics*, “a character state concerned with choice, lying in the mean relative to us, being determined by reason and the way the person of practical wisdom would determine it” (1107a1).

This idea of practical wisdom or *phronesis*—sometimes rather misleadingly translated as “prudence”—is the core of what we might call Aristotle’s interactive model of cognitive developmental and social learning moral psychology. Moral goodness and wisdom are necessary conditions for each other, in that a person cannot be fully good without practical wisdom nor practically wise without also being virtuous. So put—and this was the way Aristotle himself put it (1144b31–2)—this famous dictum may sound like a chicken-and-egg sort of circular argument. But if we temporarily suspend the chronological question of which precedes which, and instead analyze separately what Nancy Sherman (1989) has called the four areas of practical wisdom, we can see what Aristotle had in mind. We can also see the general outlines of what he would have said about the current disconnection between the cognitive developmental and character formation models of moral education.

The four areas of practical wisdom that Sherman identifies (while adding that there may be more) are perception, deliberation (choice-making), collaborative thinking, and habituation. Each of these areas has its own logical geography and developmental course, and of course all four overlap in important ways. Each has been the subject of arcane debates among philosophers, classicists, and philologists, but their basic features are reassuringly familiar to anyone who has raised children or engaged in any sort of moral education. The first area, perception, is essentially interpretative, since it is the ability to pick out the salient features of a situation. The person with good moral perception can “read the scene” in much the same way as a person with good social skills knows what to
say at a funeral, an art critic sees when things come together in a painting or concert, a
military commander realizes when the battle is turning, or a coach quickly sizes up the
other team’s strengths and weaknesses.

This description of perception begins with the concrete situation and is therefore
quite different from the top-down account of moral reasoning that is also identified
with Aristotle, namely the practical syllogism. In the latter account moral cognition is
modeled on deductive inference, where a major and minor premise logically entail a con-
clusion. Analogously, the so-called practical syllogism (Aristotle himself never used this
term) combines a general value statement such as “My goal is X” with a factual statement
about the here-and-now situation such as “Doing Y on this occasion will lead to X,” from
which the conclusion follows, “Therefore I should do Y.” True, the practical syllogism
model incorporates perception—after all, the situation-specific minor premise would
be impossible without it—but only as an accessory to the transsituational and person-
ally neutral value or moral principle that constitutes the major premise. For this reason
it would be a mistake to reduce Aristotle’s notion of perception to the task of applying
abstract principles to specific situations. Moral cognition and its developmental story
run in the opposite direction: our general knowledge of what counts as courageous, just,
etc. is the resultant of many specific interpretations of real world situations. Perception is
part of the moral response, not its prelude. As Sherman aptly puts it, “Pursuing the ends
of virtue does not begin with making choices, but with recognizing the circumstances
relevant to specific ends” (p. 4).

One might object that some people are just born with greater social sensitivity than
others, and that it would be unfair to regard them as more moral than someone who,
perhaps because of a harsh upbringing or a cognitive processing deficit, often fails to pick
up important social cues. However, Aristotle sees the distribution of moral sensibility as
an educational problem, not a fairness issue. He would applaud the “sensitivity training”
that is now part of our corporate culture as well of the school and the family. He would,
I think, see such efforts as constituting an essential component of moral education.

But of course seeing and doing are not identical. They are different moments of vir-
tuous action, and this difference takes us to Aristotle’s second area of practical wisdom,
which is the deliberation that precedes choice-making. Like sensitivity, deliberative
thinking is a skill that can be learned, in moral as well as nonmoral contexts. Here again
we can think of the corporate sector, where management trainees are expected to parti-
cipate in workshops and other sorts of programs in which they learn how to improve
their ability to determine which actions are most appropriate means toward selected
ends. This ability includes such subskills as being able to prioritize multiple goals and
to integrate them in ways that minimizes conflict. The analogy with moral deliberation
should be obvious, regardless of whether training in this area is done formally or inform-
ally. Instruction, modeling, trial and error, vicarious experience through historical or
literary narratives, debates about hypothetical cases—moral educators have used such
practices for centuries.

Aristotle’s third area of practical wisdom is collaborative thinking, which is both the
source and the fruit of hands-on collaboration. Collaboration can be on any scale and
at any level of sophistication: within the family, among friends, civic activity, and even
across national boundaries. In every case the cognitive requirement is the ability to take
the perspective of another, and the affective requirement is the tendency to care about
whatever is revealed when one takes such a perspective. Its most primitive version is
collaboration for mutual benefit, but Aristotle believed that it is in our nature as “political animals”—zoon politikon—to care about common goods such as the quality of our family life itself, the preservation of our friendships, the prestige of our city, and so on. This expansion of our horizons includes an increased sensitivity to social complexity: children develop better understandings of why their parents worry about the things they do, lovers learn new things about their own motivations, citizens discover in public debate issues they never dreamed of, and so on. Social bonds are not blind attachments but rather richly cognitive relationships, shaped not only by day-to-day interactions with family members, friends, and associates but also by what is now called civic education. The pedagogies for civic education are controversial—what is the correct ratio of discipline to creativity, how to combine respect for authority with critical thinking, etc.—but there is little doubt that Aristotle thought collaborative thinking, like perception and deliberation, is something that can be learned, and that this learning process was an integral component of moral education.

As we turn to the fourth area of practical wisdom, habituation, it might seem that here Aristotle’s emphasis will be on noncognitive processes. Many commentators as well as moral educators who invoke Aristotle have interpreted him in that way, but within the scholarly community the tide shifted a few decades ago (see Burnyeat, 1980; Rorty, 1980; Nussbaum, 1986; Sherman, 1989; Sorabji, 1973–1974). Those who continue to favor the noncognitive interpretation take quite literally Aristotle’s distinction between the intellectual and moral virtues, according to which the latter consist in habits that regulate the “irrational” parts of the soul—i.e., the passions. These habits, Aristotle tells us, are acquired in childhood by means of external shaping factors such as discipline, good example, and above all by the repetition of good acts. In this way, we are told, the child develops moral virtue as a “second nature,” a phrase that character education theorists sometimes confuse with simple conformity.

The problem with that interpretation of Aristotle is that, as Sherman explains, “it leaves unexplained how the child with merely ‘habituated’ virtue can ever develop the capacities requisite for practical reason and inseparable for full virtue” (p. 158). As we have seen, Aristotle insisted that full virtue is possible only with practical wisdom (1144b30–33), which includes the heavily cognitive areas or dimensions of perception of salience, choice-making abilities, and collaborative thinking. It is far more plausible, as an interpretation of Aristotle but also as a description of our own children’s early development, to suppose that habituation includes not only rewards and punishments but also reasoned explanations as to why certain actions are rewarded or punished, certain persons are held up as models, and so on. For a child to lack adult-level practical wisdom does not imply that he or she has no cognitive capacities for reading situations, making choices, or taking the perspective of others. Furthermore, a closer look at what Aristotle said about the so-called nonrational parts of the soul—i.e., the passions or emotions—shows that even the crudest responses of fear or anger or desire have cognitive dimensions and hence can be directed by one’s own intelligence as well as by external pressures.

To sum up so far, it seems that each of Aristotle’s first three areas of practical wisdom has its own educational agenda or pedagogy. Perception is developed through sensitivity training, which includes teaching children how to pick out the morally salient features of a situation. Deliberative thinking is developed through what might be called managerial pedagogy, which shapes the ability to set goals and figure out how to meet them. And collaborative thinking is developed through perspective-taking training and, on a larger
scale, civic education. But what about his fourth area, habituation? Does it have its own pedagogy too?

Yes and no. Aristotle went to great length to explain how moral teachers—typically parents—should use discipline, modeling, and consistent repetition to enable the learner to acquire the right habits. This is the pedagogy of habit formation, but it should not be understood as radically distinct from the other three areas of practical wisdom. Virtue is itself a habit and so are all its component skills. For instance, children develop the habit of reading common household social situations (perception) by observing their mother’s sensitive response to a sibling’s unspoken needs, they develop an established habit of carefully weighing the pros and cons of any course of action (deliberation) by doing so on repeated occasions, and they expand their interpersonal horizons to civic readiness (collaborative thinking) by emulating leaders whom they see praised and honored for their service to the community. For Aristotle moral education was organic, not modular: each component pedagogy made its own contribution to the goal of living a life in conformity to reason, but as it did so it provided the necessary conditions and platforms for the other pedagogies. This integration of functions was only to be expected in a fundamentally teleological philosophical system such as Aristotle’s.

Aristotelian teleology has as its contemporary counterpart recent psychological and educational theories in which reality, especially moral reality, is understood in developmental terms. It should therefore come as no surprise to learn that cognitive developmentalists such as Piaget and Kohlberg sometimes compare Aristotle’s account of habituation to their own accounts of the early stages of moral competence (see Power et al., 1989, p. 134). Such comparisons are plausible, but we should not identify Aristotle too closely with any contemporary psychological theory. His recognition of the importance of external pressures such as discipline, good example, trial and error, and above all the repetition of good acts is also compatible with the more cognitive approaches of social learning theory, such as Martin Hoffman’s (2000) “induction,” which emphasizes the role of reason-giving in parent–child relationships, or Walter Mischel’s (1968, p. 150) “observational learning,” which is mediated by perceptual–cognitive processes. It is safest to say that Aristotle’s theory of habituation and, for that reason plus others, his entire ethical theory is underdetermined as far as contemporary moral psychology is concerned. Even though much of what he says in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and elsewhere is clearly incompatible with hard-core behaviorist or associationist approaches to moral socialization, and even though his account of moral education has important developmental features, it leaves open important questions such as whether the acquisition of moral habits is best understood in stage-structural terms, according to which the cognitive capabilities discussed above (perception, etc.) either advance in tandem or are clustered in distinct and increasingly complex ways during the child’s developmental career. Perhaps the best way to characterize Aristotle’s thought in this important area is to say that it seems to be more a refinement of common sense than deep psychological theory. That moral virtue is indeed part of the human *telos* is old news.

**BRITISH EMPIRICISM**

We now skip over the transformations of Aristotelian teleology wrought by the Roman Stoics who turned philosophy into a “therapy of desire” (Nussbaum, 1994) and later by the medieval scholastics who baptized the very idea of goal-seeking and treated it as
part of the larger story of divine providence and salvation history. We even rush past the opening century of modernity, when in the 1630s René Descartes rejected the teleological model itself, dismissing it as the keystone of the existing ramshackle edifice of unwarranted assumptions, beliefs, superstitions, and appeals to tradition. These were all important phases in the history of philosophy and the formation of our contemporary views of human nature, but they are not of special relevance to contemporary theories and practices of moral education or character formation. However, the so-called “empiricist” phase that came next was not only relevant but amounted to a radical break with what was then the established view of human development.

John Locke. And so we come to rest in the following century, and take up the so-called Father of British Empiricism, John Locke (1632–1704). Uninspired by the worn-out scholasticism current when he was a student at Oxford, Locke cheerfully embraced Descartes’ repudiation of tradition as the font of wisdom. However, he rejected its accompanying theory of innate ideas and other cognitive structures. In this respect Locke and the empiricists who followed him had the same ambivalence toward Descartes that Aristotle had toward Plato’s notion of self-standing ideal forms.

What psychologists now call human development was a relatively unanalyzed notion in British empiricism. Locke never directly challenged the general Aristotelian model of human flourishing, which he inherited from scholastic philosophy and the conventional Christianity of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Here as elsewhere, he took a common sense approach to human nature, as did the philosophers who followed him. However, he replaced Aristotle’s dynamic notion of human development as the unfolding of an inner teleology with his own relatively static notion of experience as receptivity to external perceptions or “inputs.” For instance, Locke believed our moral understanding is shaped by a combination of natural prosocial “sentiments” and experiences (observations) of prosocial behavior in others.

Locke’s famous image of the mind was a “blank slate” (tabula rasa). It lies at the heart of the conception that he and other empiricists such as David Hume and Adam Smith had regarding what counted for them as human development. The blank slate metaphor has two parts: (1) there are no innate ideas (certain ideas such as the moral principle of the Golden rule and principles of identity and contradiction are self-evident, but that does not make them innate), and (2) experience is the only stylus that can write on the slate. There were, said Locke, two sources of experience: sensation (which was the primary source, derived from sensible objects external to the mind), and reflection (the secondary source, entirely internal to the mind). Among the latter are moral ideas, but Locke left it to his successors to spell out exactly how these ideas emerge.

David Hume. The most important of these successors, especially in matters of moral psychology, is undoubtedly David Hume (1711–1776). Like Locke he located moral ideas and their corresponding passions under the category of “ideas of reflection” since they were not immediate perceptions of an external reality. He shared Locke’s belief that their mutual predecessor Thomas Hobbes had gone too far in his account of psychological egoism, according to which all action, even moral action, is motivated solely by self-interest. Their more moderate position was that motives of benevolence as well as self-interest are operative in human affairs. However, in his Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals (1751) Hume went on to argue that the way we actually make moral judgments is to approve or disapprove certain actions rather than to describe any unique moral quality they might have. Since as far as he could tell most of the actions we approve of
happen to increase public utility, he concluded that we have a natural tendency (motivation) to consider and promote the well-being of others. The “calm passion” of benevolence combines with “pleasurable impressions” such as knowing one is esteemed by others, and thereby creates what learning theorists would later call schedules of internal reinforcement.

In sum, Hume believed that morality is based on affectivity, not rationality, that our nature includes not only the power to reason but also two types of passion, namely self-regarding and other-regarding sentiments, and that successful social systems cultivate both sorts of affectivity. Moral development consists in the cultivation and balance of the sentiments, but he did not think there is any special cognitive framework within which this development must take place.

There are several reasons for this absence, but the main one is Hume’s associationist theory of knowledge in general. Wielding Ockham’s razor, he did away with the assumption that ideas necessarily have a one-for-one correspondence to the components of external reality. Whatever coherence the world (or the self) seems to have is, he claimed, a matter of the simple application to our mental life of three natural laws of association, namely the laws of resemblance, contiguity, and causality (which is basically contiguity in time rather than space). Note that what is associated in these laws are not things or events in the world but introspectible entities, namely ideas, taken in the broad sense as including the internal contents of all experience.

The educational implications of this skeptical disconnect between the way our ideas are configured and the way the external world is configured are profound, and they are especially profound in the case of moral education. What is learned are regular relations between certain kinds of experiences and certain kinds of perception, typically the sentiment-laden perception that one is the object of other persons’ approval or the experience of benevolent feelings. How these relationships are learned varies. Sometime the learning in question is the simple repetition of a pair of ideas or mental events such as the smell of cigarette smoke and the pain of a sublethal electric shock, and sometimes it is a very complicated set of resemblances and correlations such as what the social learning theorist Albert Bandura has called “observational learning,” which is to say watching human models. As he explains,

> By observing others, one forms rules of behavior, and on future occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action.... Throughout the years, modeling has always been acknowledged to be one of the most powerful means of transmitting values, attitudes, and patterns of thought and behavior.

(1986, p. 47)

Absent from this quotation is any hint of why or how the simple experience or set of experiences of seeing a model perform a certain action leads one to form a rule for that action. Like Hume, Bandura applied Ockham’s razor to lop off any epistemological account of the correlation between observation and rule-formation. Although he prefers to be called a “social cognitive theorist” Bandura’s approach to observational learning is at bottom as epistemologically barren as Pavlov’s classical conditioning paradigm or B. F. Skinner’s radical behaviorism (see Wren, 1991, ch. 3). The same could be said of any program of moral education that was governed by Hume’s three laws of association as closely as Bandura was in the passage just quoted.
KANT

It was perhaps inevitable that Hume’s skepticism about our moral and scientific knowledge of the external world would generate a counter-skepticism about the validity of the entire empiricist program. However, when the reaction came it was not a return to the straightforward realism of classical philosophy but rather an entirely new conception of philosophical inquiry, known from its very beginnings as “transcendental critique.” Its founder was Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), who began his philosophical career in much the same way that Locke did a century earlier, working within the scholastic dogmatism that had somehow lingered on during the modern era. This came to an end for Kant when, in what must have been the philosophical equivalent of a midlife crisis, he read Hume’s work and, as he later put it, awoke from his dogmatic slumbers.

The rationalists inspired by Descartes and the empiricists inspired by Locke shared the same goal of explaining how our concepts can match the nature of objects, but Kant changed the program. Taking what is now called a constructionist approach, he argued that philosophers must show how the structure of our concepts shapes our experience of the world. He broke this huge task into two parts. The first was to establish the conditions under which (Newtonian) scientific knowledge—and by extension any experience whatsoever—is possible, which he did in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781/1998). Then, using similar categories and methods of argument, he went on to establish the conditions of the possibility of any moral experience, first in his famous *Foundations for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785/1959) and then in the more formidable *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788/1956).

Unlike the empiricists, Kant had a clear and radically new conception of human development: personal autonomy. Paradoxically, the way one becomes autonomous is by obeying the law, especially the moral law. But one must obey the law for the right reasons, which is to say from motives of duty rather than the “inclinations” of self-interest. (Note that Kant saw nothing intrinsically wrong with acting from inclination, as long as one does not do so instead of acting from duty. He was, in fact, something of a bon vivant according to many reports.) Kant unfolded his idea of moral autonomy as follows. Since a truly good person is one who has internalized and follows the moral law, the core conception of moral agency is not the teleological notion of human flourishing or virtue but rather the deontological notion (from the Greek word for duty, deon) of following a self-imposed rule. Simply put, when I act from inclinations—which range from crude sensual desire to the composite desire for happiness—I am letting my actions be ruled by something other than my own will. I am properly described as acting under the rule of something “other,” which Kant called heteronomy of the will. But when I act in accord with a law that I generate and impose on myself as a rational member of the human community, I am self-ruled, which is of course the literal meaning of the word autonomy. Like all legislation, the moral law is formulated as a set of prescriptions, commands, or imperatives, which Kant divides into sorts: hypothetical and categorical.

“Hypothetical”: As the term suggests, hypothetical imperatives, like hypothetical statements, have an “if-then” structure, linking an antecedent condition and a consequent action or action-mandate. The action that is the object of the command is considered good simply because it is a means to achieve an ulterior end or proposition (the antecedent): “If you want y, do x;” or negatively, “Avoid x if you want y.” Seemingly moral injunctions such as “Keep your promises if you want people to trust you,” and “Don’t
steal if you want to avoid problems with the police,” are hypothetical in form and for that reason not really part of the moral law.

“Categorical”: In contrast, a truly moral action has neither antecedent nor consequent components. Its rightness is simply unconditioned, that is, independent of considerations of external goals or circumstance. There are no “ifs, ands, or buts”: the action is commanded simply because it is considered to be of value in itself. Thus the general form of a moral imperative is “Do \( x \)” or “Don’t do \( y \)” —as in “Keep your promises” and “Don’t steal.”

Of course it is possible to issue obviously nonmoral commands that are categorically trivial in the sense that no antecedent is uttered, as when a parent says, “Wash your hands before coming to the table.” What makes a truly moral imperative different from “Keep your promises” is, then, something over and above the simple absence of an antecedent term. This “special something” is, Kant believed, a formal quality of the \textit{maxim} underlying the action in question, a point that Kohlberg (1981, p. 135 \textit{et passim}) later seized upon in order to differentiate his judgment-oriented approach from the content-oriented approach typical of character education.

To examine this quality we first need to understand Kant’s notion of a maxim or, to use a phrase common in contemporary analytic philosophy, the relevant act-description. Kant’s own example is a person who normally tells the truth but is prepared to lie if doing so is to his or her advantage. Such a person has adopted the maxim “I will lie whenever doing so is to my advantage,” and is acting on that maxim whenever he or she engages in lying behavior. Of course many maxims have nothing to do with morality, since they are purely pragmatic policies such as straightening one’s desk at the end of each workday or not picking up hitchhikers.

Now we can identify the “special something” that makes a maxim a moral maxim. For Kant it was the maxim’s \textit{universalizability}. (Note that \textit{universalizability} is a fundamentally different concept than \textit{universality}, which refers to the fact that some thing or concept not only should be found everywhere but actually is. However, the two concepts sometimes flow into each other: human rights are said to be universal not in the sense that they are actually conceptualized and respected in all cultures but rather in the sense that reason requires that they \textit{should} be. And this is a moral “should.”) However, in the course of developing this idea, Kant produced several formulations of the Categorical Imperative, all of which turn on the idea of universalizability. Commentators usually distinguish the following five versions:

1. “Act only according to a maximum that at the same time you could will that it should become a universal law.” In other words, a moral maxim is one that any rationally consistent human being would want to adopt and see others adopt. The above-mentioned maxim of lying when doing so is to one’s advantage fails this test, since if there were a rule that everyone could or even should lie under such circumstances no one would believe anyone—which of course is utterly incoherent. Making such a maximum standard practice would destroy the very point of lying.
2. “Act as if the maxim directing your action should be converted, by your will, into a universal law of nature.” The first version showed that immoral maxims are logically incoherent. The phrase “as if” in this second formulation shows that they are also untenable on \textit{empirical} grounds. Quite simply, no one would ever want to live in a world that was by its very nature populated only by people living according to immoral maxims.
3. “Act in a way that treats all humanity, yourself and all others, always as an end, and never simply as a means.” The point here is that to be moral a maxim must be oriented toward the preservation, protection, and safeguarding of all human beings, simply because they are beings which are intrinsically valuable, that is to say ends in themselves. Of course much cooperative activity involves “using” others in the weak sense of getting help from them, but moral cooperation always includes the recognition that those who help us are also persons like ourselves and not mere tools to be used to further our own ends.

4. “Act in a way that your will can regard itself at the same time as making universal law through its maxim.” This version is much like the first one, but it adds the important link between morality and personal autonomy: when we act morally we are actually making the moral law that we follow.

5. “Act as if by means of your maxims, you were always acting as a universal legislator, in a possible kingdom of ends.” Finally, the maxim must be acceptable as a norm or law in a possible kingdom of ends. This formulation brings together the ideas of legislative rationality, universalizability, and autonomy. What Kant had in mind can be illustrated by imagining an ideal parliament of partisan but nonetheless civil senators or deputies who have, over and above their personal feelings, deep-seated respect for each other as legislators, typically accompanied by courtly rhetoric such as “I would respectfully remind my esteemed colleague from the great state of ___ that…”

Like most philosophers who discuss the way we think about moral issues, Kant took as his normal case a fully functional adult living in a basically decent environment. But cognitive developmental psychologists who focus on children’s moral reasoning processes have also worked in the long shadow of Kant ever since Jean Piaget wrote his *Moral Judgment of the Child* (1932/1965). This work is now a classic scholarly resource for moral educational theory. The same can be said of much of the work by Lawrence Kohlberg, whose first publication in 1958 was a doctoral study based on Piaget and whose last publications appeared posthumously as late as 1990 (Kohlberg, Boyd, & Levine, 1990). In both cases they charted the development of the child’s ability to make moral judgments about the rightness or wrongness of specific (though hypothetical) actions, and in both cases claimed to discover an ordered set of stages that began with what Kant called heteronomous principles of action and ended with autonomous principles.

The logical structures of Piaget’s and Kohlberg’s stages are, of course, well known, but what is not always clear is the dynamic by which the child moves through the sequence. Here we find no help from Kant, who apparently assumed that a clear-thinking person of any age would have an intrinsic motivation to think and act autonomously, even though moral struggle always remained a logical as well as empirical possibility. Surprisingly, one of the best accounts of our tendency to reason autonomously can be found in Aristotle’s treatment of collaborative thinking. As we saw above, he posited an innate prosociality (the human person as *zoon politikon*) that was realized in the quest for shared goods at various levels of inclusiveness. Aristotle’s conceptions of human flourishing and moral standards were typically ethnocentric, but there does seem to be an important affinity between his idea that people are political animals and Kant’s idea of moral agents as “universal legislators in a possible kingdom of ends.” If so, then the developmental dynamic in question may be connected in important ways with the Kantian constructionist epistemology that
Piaget and Kohlberg deployed. As they explain in various contexts, children (and adults, at least in Kohlberg’s scheme) move from one stage to the next because of interactions that take place between them and other persons: conflicting social demands, questions proposed by others who think differently, responsibilities for distributing resources, and so on. Toward the end of his career Kohlberg decided that classroom discussions of moral dilemmas were far less effective as occasions of moral growth than were real-life experiences of decision-making. With this realization came the “just community” approach to moral education, which in spite of its Kantian conception of moral reasoning seems to incorporate much of Aristotle’s own understanding of practical wisdom.

However, the deep gap between Aristotle and Kant remains. As we saw above, Aristotle believed that practical wisdom, which for him was the supreme moral virtue, is something quite different from principled reasoning. Whereas Kant thought that we first formulate and adjudicate moral maxims and then apply them to concrete situations, Aristotle thought that we first pick out the goods that are at stake in a given situation, then work out the best way to balance these goods in a coherent and publicly responsible way, and then—but only if one is inclined to be a moral philosopher as well as a moral agent—distill all these considerations into a set of moral principles such as those found in his discussion of distributive justice in Chapter 3 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

**THE AFTERMATH**

The history of moral philosophy did not end with Kant, but the parts that have most influenced moral educators did, with of course a few exceptions. One of the most important exceptions is Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), whose conception of the world, including the human world, as the representation of a cosmic force or “Will” influenced Freud and those educators who understand morality primarily in Freudian categories. However, Freud himself insisted that Schopenhauer’s influence was incidental to his own discovery of the unconscious and related primary processes, and it seems safe to say that whatever Schopenhauer’s influence on Freud really was, it has had no direct impact on moral educators in the English-speaking world. Something of the same sort holds for the moral theories of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831) and Nietzsche (1840–1900), whose influence on nineteenth and twentieth century ethical philosophy is not matched by any direct impact their works had on moral education.

Another important exception is John Dewey, who anticipated the cognitive developmental view that human beings advance in their understandings of moral issues in a progressive way. His application of this general psychological principle to the classroom—the controversial “progressive education” pedagogy—foreshadowed the just community approach mentioned a few lines earlier. As Power et al. (1989) once explained, “our basic expectation, derived from the theories of Dewey and Piaget, was that participation in the governance of a small school community would stimulate growth of moral reasoning more than would participation in the more traditionally governed high schools” (p. 266).

Philosophers continue to add their voices to the dialogue of moral and character education, but for the most part they do so by retrieving—or better, refurbishing—the parts of the philosophical tradition that we have surveyed in this chapter. Among more recent moral philosophers the figure of the late John Rawls (1921–2002) towers over all, but without denying his importance it is clear that much of the power of his
social contract theory of justice and its consequent importance for moral educators is an extension of the Kantian approach, as he himself readily acknowledged. Similar retrievals have been made by virtue theorists such as Alasdair MacIntyre (1929–) who advocate a return to the teleological conception of character found in Aristotle, and utilitarian philosophers such as Richard Brandt (1910–1997), whose contributions to the moral education debate were drawn from the deep well of Humean empiricism.

The Global Order. As the twentieth century drew to a close, the difference between virtue-based and principle-based accounts of morality became a philosophical theme in its own right, articulated in what is often identified as the liberal-communitarian debate. Virtue-based accounts portrayed moral agents as motivated by commitments and loyalty to those with whom they share traditions, nationalities, and other sorts of communal bonds. Here the historical roots are in Aristotle’s notion of virtue, especially as it operates in friendship relationships. In contrast, principle-based accounts saw moral agents as motivated not by communal ties (except incidentally) but rather by a sense of duty that is grounded in universal and impartial principles of justice prefigured by Kant’s Categorical Imperative. Over the last few decades the debate between virtue-oriented and duty-oriented moral philosophers has focused on a variety of issues that have their own educational implications (Wren, 2005). However, since the beginning of the present millennium many of the virtue vs. duty issues have been absorbed into still more complex discussions of globalization and its moral implications. In what follows I will quickly frame those discussions and then indicate their relevance to moral education.

It is sometimes remarked that today’s moral and political discussions of globalization recapitulate the opposition between cosmopolitanism and nationalism that has been with us since the days of Hellenistic and Roman Stoics. As an abstract generalization in the history of ideas this claim is true enough, but it fails to take seriously the fact that questions about our responsibilities to distant others have a new urgency, thanks largely to technologies and international structures that have emerged in the wake of colonialism and the cold war. Our general obligation to those in far-off lands is no longer a second-tier responsibility, to be addressed only after our more important local obligations have been sorted out and fulfilled.

The complex philosophical structure of our moral responsibility to distant others is part of a still larger evaluative question that already lies at the center of civic education and is beginning to show up in the theory and practice of many moral educators: What are the normative implications of the increasingly powerful forces of globalization? Any serious answer to that question must recognize that moral educators and philosophers (as well as public policy specialists and hands-on decision-makers who deal with ethically complex issues of international relations) need a distinctive “ethics in a world of strangers” (Appiah, 2006). And any answer to that question will also have to go beyond the now-familiar philosophical distinction between communitarian and liberal ethical theories. Whatever use that distinction might still have in philosophical accounts of personal decision-making, it seems to be of little help in designing and morally assessing collective strategies and policies concerning large-scale transnational issues such as forced industrial development, governmental corruption, or conflicts between tribal practices and democratic institutions.

In short, we need to develop new philosophical and educational approaches that deal with justice and other moral issues on a global scale. The standard communitarian approach presupposes existing ties to friends, relatives, and fellow nationals. For that
reason it would be illogical to expect it to provide an ethic for a world of strangers, even when the concept of community is expanded to include the regional loyalties of, say, citizens in Latin America or the European Union. Admittedly, not everyone would agree with this assessment. (The pioneer of globalization studies, Roland Robertson [1938–], would certainly disagree.) However, the tendency toward boundary maintenance is now a well-documented characteristic of ethnic and cultural groups (see Barth, 1969), and so it seems empirically as well as logically wrong to view communitarianism as a self-standing globalization ethic.

A somewhat different lack of logic undermines the liberal understanding of global ethics. Philosophers who take that approach to moral questions (e.g., Kant, Mill, Rawls) tend to treat our relation to distant others as a motivationally barren, purely logical connection. For instance the only connection that Kant’s Categorical Imperative or the Golden Rule formally acknowledges between “others” and oneself is a common rationality and vulnerability to fear, pain, and death. Whatever validity or motivating force this quintessentially liberal notion might have in personal or small group relationships, it seems clear that in today’s globalized world the relationships and corresponding moral obligations we have regarding distant others are much more complex, and that this complexity should be recognized by moral educators. For instance, it is plausible that in the course of our everyday use of the natural resources which multinational corporations have exploited from developing nations through dishonest “rent transfers” (typically a euphemism for certain bribes at the highest levels of government) we become accomplices to the crimes committed by corrupt governments against their own people. Under this interpretation (elaborated by Thomas Pogge, 2002), we have a moral obligation to make restitution, directly or indirectly, to the citizens of that country for the stolen goods we have purchased from its leaders or corporate accomplices, just as we would have an obligation to restore a stolen car to its rightful owner even though we had purchased it unwittingly.

There are many other moral issues generated by globalization that moral educators could and should address. One of the most frequently discussed of those issues is the distribution of resources from wealthy to poor nations. Another is the seemingly paternalistic export of participatory democracy and human rights mandates to non-Western peoples who have other political traditions. National sovereignty is challenged by morally charged efforts to control emissions on a global scale, and policies regarding immigration, free speech, and access to education are now seen as human rights issues. Social, political, and economic problems that used to be local or national issues are now subject to international assessment, as are their remedies and, by implication, the ethical standards for those remedies, especially standards couched in the language of human rights. In a word, civic virtue has taken on a whole new meaning, one that calls for new approaches to the civic dimension of moral education.

More specifically, over the last decade or two it has become increasingly clear that civic virtue should be understood and taught as a special case of moral virtue (see McLaughlin, 1992, and my expansion of his ideas in Wren, 2013). With this new understanding has come a new emphasis on collective action, since there is little that a single individual can do to address justice or benevolence issues in far-off lands, in international contexts, or on any sort of large scale. For this and other reasons voluntary collective action now seems to be an important aspect of moral education in global contexts. That the global not-for-profit sector is one of the most effective and accessible fields for such action is shown by
the remarkable increase in the number of international NGOs since 1990 as well as by
the explosion of literature devoted to this new version of what the medieval philosopher
Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) called “commutative justice,” namely the responses that
individuals and groups should make to the legitimate claims which other individuals and
groups—no matter how distant—have on them (Summa Theologica [1265–1273/1945],
II, II Q61a1; see also Edwards and Gaventa, 2001).

CONCLUSION
So where does this leave us? Good answers to that question are to be found throughout
this book. To return to the “mooring” metaphor that introduced the present chapter, we
should keep in mind that the various assertions, denials, interpretations, and methodol-
gies offered throughout this volume are not free-floating intellectual constructions but
rather are moored to long-standing but still-evolving philosophical traditions. However,
they are moored in different ways and tied to different mooring posts, by which I mean
that their underlying assumptions are drawn from significantly different philosophical
conceptions of what it means to be—and to develop into—a fully human person. Under-
standing how their respective philosophical infrastructures differ will not resolve the
complex theoretical and practical differences among moral educators, but it will enable
them to take each other’s perspective more thoroughly and, let us hope for the sake of
our children and ourselves, more productively.

NOTES
1. For an example of the “outside view,” consider Robert Dreeben’s (1968) structural functionalist conception
of the school as

   an agency of socialization whose task is to effect psychological changes that enable persons to make
   transitions among other institutions; that is, to develop capacities necessary for appropriate conduct
   in social settings that make different kinds of demands on [students] and pose different kinds of
   opportunities. (p. 3)

2. This point has been discussed at length by Ger Snik and other contributors to a volume entitled Philosophy
of Development: Reconstructing the Foundations of Human Development and Education (van Haaf ten,
Korthals, & Wren, 1997). As Snik explains, “The question is not whether we should use the notion of devel-
opment but only what specific conception of development is most appropriate in educational contexts”

3. Here as elsewhere it is hard to separate their respective views of the Forms since most of what we know of
Socrates comes from his role in Plato’s dialogues, especially the Phaedo and the Republic. Following the usual
practice in Plato scholarship, I have used the Stephanus method of pagination when referring to specific
passages in Plato’s works (see Plato, 1997).

4. In the introduction to the first volume of his collected writings Kohlberg (1981, p. xxix) presents an eight-point
summary of the elements of Plato’s conception of justice that he incorporated in his own work. His third point
is especially relevant here: “Virtue is knowledge of the good. He who knows the good chooses the good.”

5. Ross’s translation of the Nicomachean Ethics is contained in Aristotle, 1984. A much better overall trans-
lation of the Nicomachean Ethics is the one by C. Rowe, contained in Aristotle, 2002. Note, by the way, that in
my discussion of Aristotle I have followed the usual practice of using line numbers (the Bekker numbers)
rather than page numbers since there are so many different translations of Aristotle’s work.

6. Some philosophers prefer to say the conclusion is not “I should” or any other sort of statement but rather
the decision itself to do Y—or even the act of doing Y.

7. Hoffman defines this oddly named parenting technique as “the type of discipline … in which parents high-
light the other’s perspective, point up the other’s distress, and make it clear that the child’s action caused it”
REFERENCES

