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MORAL DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION: ARISTOTLE AND KANT

Exploring the Need for Normative Foundations in Moral Education

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ABSTRACT

Many claims in the field of moral education are made against a background of moral psychology, pedagogy, and other related disciplines. However, it is thereby attempted to derive grounds for moral education by combining descriptive claims with claims that no more than vaguely remind of normative theory. Within this thesis I will explore the possibility of deriving grounds for moral education from the normative theories of Aristotle and Kant, in respectively virtue ethics and deontology. I will consider their implications for moral education, in order to conclude that normative foundations for moral education can indeed be found and should be used.

KEY WORDS

Moral education, moral development, ethics, deontology, virtue ethics, Immanuel Kant, Aristotle

Content

1. Introduction

In recent years an increasing number of pedagogic experts and moral psychologists has argued in favor of implementing ethics in education and upbringing. Their methods of raising children to become good adults no longer necessarily involve traditional moral rules as can be found in the Bible, but often show a more modern take on moral education. Various complementing features of different disciplines are combined to form a new theory; in this case a theory of moral education that seems to overrule all previous discipline-specific theories. I would like to label this activity as *'theory-shopping'.* Even though these new theories can contain indirect references to one or several normative theories; their claims are more often than not of a descriptive nature. For example, a common goal in curricula of moral development is to 'build character', as educational psychologist David Light Shields describes: "Education should develop intellectual character, moral character, civic character, and performance character, along with the collective character of the school. Together, the four forms of personal character define what it means to be a competent, ethical, engaged, and effective adult member of society."[1] However, even though the trained eye would recognize certain normative indications, such claims rarely involve actual normative theory or show evidence of a direct link thereto, for they are based upon pedagogic theory or other theories of a descriptive (or: empirically investigated) kind. This raises the issue of whether a descriptive claim in the field of moral education should ideally find its origin in an actual moral theory, in order to be of any substantial and justified ethical value. Is it even possible to find such a normative foundation for theories of moral education?

Within this thesis I explore two normative theories that might possibly be able to provide such foundations. By clearly separating the descriptive from the normative claims concerning the subject I hope to find a strong theoretical support for moral education. In exploring these normative theories I strive to 'return to the basics' and so I have chosen two very distinct normative theories: Aristotle's Virtue Ethics and Kant's Deontology. To enlarge the chance of finding succinct and unambiguous results, I chosen to limit my discussion of virtue ethics to just one work, the Nicomachean Ethcis, and several of its later interpretations. For similar reasons I will limit the discussion of Kant's ethics to the Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals and again several of later interpretations. As this is the earliest, most discussed work of Kant's ethical oeuvre I am positive it will provide me with the best possible chance of finding an explicit foundation for moral education. I do not aim to offer exhaustive and conclusive accounts of these two ethical theories, but merely strive to find the information necessary for the subject at hand. After each discussion of normative theory I will move on to the implications this theory could have for moral education. I hereby hope to offer a thorough exploration of fundamental normative principles and their possible practical implications; hence move from the normative to the descriptive. In the third part of this thesis I shall turn my attention to these practical implications and relate them to the current discipline of moral education, to find out whether and how moral education makes use of normative theory. For I think not only the normative foundations are of importance, but also their practical implications: the normative *goals* of moral education.

[1] David Light Shields, "Character as the Aim of Education," in *Phi Delta Kappan* 92 (2011): 49.

The desired goal of moral education would logically be to help the child develop into a respectable (or good) moral agent. However, who this ideal moral agent actually *is*, what his characteristics are, will differ for every theory. In order to make any claim as to what the specific normative goals should be in moral education and how they are to be achieved; it first needs to become clear what the normative ideal consists of. I will therefore first discuss the features of the ideal moral agent in accordance with the above-named theories on a purely normative and fundamental level. After I have done so I will move on to their implications for moral education, whereby I hope to offer an exhaustive exploration of normative origins and their possible practical implications; hence move from the normative to the descriptive. It will thus become clear that both realms do indeed contain references to one another, however, hardly ever explicitly named. I will now however first continue to offer a short commentary on the development of moral education, which can serve as a frame of reference for this thesis.

2. Moral Education in Practice

Relatively recent developments in the western world such as cultural modernization, globalization and growing multiculturalism confront people with many formerly unknown religions and lifestyles. As such lifestyles can be founded on fundamentally different and deep-rooted beliefs; they can potentially clash and cause conflict or social pressures. The need for commonly recognized moral qualities and values is therefore an increasingly pressing matter. One possible way of meeting this need could be to focus on the moral development of individuals and to stimulate or adjust such development where possible, in order to create a more refined moral sensitivity in each individual.

Colin Wringe addresses this sensitivity as follows: "The sensitive moral agent will also have regard for the religious commitments and susceptibilities of others."[2] Therefore – while taking the risk of over-simplification of the issue into account – it would seem a viable project to create an improved sense of mutual respect and citizenship by offering guidance during the crucial moral development of individuals. Wringe argues: "The ability to think morally as well as simply act innocently is particularly important as young people mature into adult citizens for […] active citizens are not only required to act well in respect of their private conduct but, are, in a democracy, constantly called upon to judge the actions of others vastly beyond the private sphere, in situations that may be not only complex but novel.[3] An improved sense of morality would therefore not only diminish an individual's firm beliefs, but would also result in moral awareness when it comes to reasoning and actions; thus improving moral agency in general.

This is where moral education comes in. In recent years many educational institutions have found the need to offer modern alternatives for the more traditional religious educational programs. Some of these modern alternatives are purely directed on 'active citizenship', in which the main focus is on rights and responsibilities. However, the most interesting as well as the biggest development takes place in the field of moral education – which results in ethics classes becoming an essential part of the curriculum. The aim of such education is to raise moral awareness and improve moral development by means of training and coaching as well as the more traditional approach of

[2] Colin Wringe, *Moral Education, Beyond the Teaching of Right and Wrong* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 106.
[3] Wringe, *Moral Education, Beyond the Teaching of Right and Wrong*, 110.

instruction; yet without advocating one absolute moral goal. Wringe elaborates: "This, of course, involves no highly abstract or generalised conception of morality as an ideal of perfection, but an appreciation of the full range of considerations that may come into play in the appraisal of a particular action or proposal."[4] Again, flexible, individual moral reasoning and agency are paramount.

Given the current lack of unambiguous protocol for ethics education, the discipline is often offered as a mix of moral philosophical theories, combined with elements of moral psychology, pedagogy, and other disciplines.[5] Within the extent of this thesis I will examine whether a combination of normative theories can serve as philosophically viable grounds for moral education, if at all. In order to do so I will first discuss the normative theories and claims of both Aristotle and Kant, starting with the former.

3. Aristotle's Virtue Ethics

3.1 Happiness: The Good

Instead of revolve around specific character traits of virtuous agents, as general virtue ethics does, Aristotle's moral theory defines the ideal moral agent in terms of leading a good life that will allow him to flourish. According to Stan van Hooft: "For Aristotle the issue was 'How should we live well?' rather than 'What is the morally right thing to do?'"[6] Doing well or living well depends on the function you fulfill. For instance, a carpenter has a distinct function and wants to do his job well if he is to reach the Good; this Good being the highest end we pursue for its own sake. In turn, for a human being to live well and reach the Good, he or she must also live up to his or her function. This human function is "activity of the soul in accord with reason or requiring reason"[7] and as such is distinctly human. In order to complete any function it is to be completed in accordance with virtue.

Consequently, the one and highest human Good is happiness, for it is the one thing we all want for its own sake; the end of all activity that does not need further justification. An agent's actions are furthermore teleological, which in this case means they are always directed towards happiness. And happiness, which can also be understood as human flourishing, is in turn the activity of a good soul. These subtle yet crucial distinctions form a very succinct outline of Aristotle's virtue ethics, in which happiness equals rational activity of the soul, in accordance with virtue. In other words, to be good one has to do well; a statement that logically results in the fact that human beings are not born virtuous, though we all possess the ability to become virtuous. Aristotle hereby emphasizes the importance of the development of an individual into a moral agent, by cultivating qualities of character, habits and dispositions that will allow him to do so. Very important in this development is the distinction of the two parts of the soul: the irrational and the rational. As I will discuss in depth in the rest of this chapter, these parts correspond to moral and intellectual virtues, respectively.

[4] Wringe, *Moral Education, Beyond the Teaching of Right and Wrong,* 109.
[5] An example of such a combination can be found in the curriculum of Primary Ethics; an Australian organization that offers ethics- instead of scripture classes in primary school. More information on: http://www.primaryethics.com.au/
[6] Stan van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics* (Chesham: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2006), 50.
[7] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (London: William Heinemann LTD, 1975), 671.

3.2 Moral Virtues: Character Traits

As discussed above, the activity of the soul plays an important role in happiness, and as such in moral development. In moral development, there is an important distinction to be made in the realm of the soul. For according to Aristotle: "[…] the soul consists of two parts, one irrational and the other capable of reason."[8] I will discuss the irrational part of the soul first, and the next paragraph will concern the rational part of the soul. The irrational part of the soul concerns itself with virtuous character, and it is where feelings are located. These feelings are controlled by the rational part of the soul, which is to find a suitable mean. A moral agent is thus able to find the mean that suits him, right in between pleasure and pain, right in between "deficiency or excess"[9]. This mean may differ for different people and different situations, but becomes a habit over time. The ideal moral agent is able to live a virtuous life, in which the training of such habits is crucial. On virtues Aristotle writes: "[…] nature gives us the capacity to receive them, and this capacity is brought to maturity by habit."[10] By way of practice the agent is eventually able to turn his virtuous actions into dispositions to act a certain way.[11] What these dispositions are supposed to be is demonstrated to us by others, or by tradition.

All of this requires a great deal of individuality from the agent: he must know and recognize which action is the best and subsequently perform it out of virtuous motivation. There is no general rule of behavior or a standard method to find the mean. If he can acquire a morally virtuous disposition through habit and development, and live by it, he will truly possess a virtuous character. Because this is still rather ambiguous and vague – for instance: what constitutes deficiency or excessiveness in a particular case? – Aristotle introduces the virtues of thinking, which I will discuss in the next paragraph.

3.3 Virtues of Intellect: Strength of Mind

In addition to the moral virtues acquired by habituation, Aristotle introduces the intellectual virtues related to the rational part of the soul. This rational part is concerned with issues of two natures: those of an invariable nature that can only bring about contemplation, and (practical) issues of a variable nature that require calculation or deliberation.[12] The ideal agent is in possession of practical wisdom, which, in case of issues of a variable nature, will allow him to adjust desire and action to fit each other. Van Hooft explains: "It is not that reason is separate from desire and controls it, but rather that desire must be reasonable for the action that it motivates to be good."[13] Practical reason will help the agent to better himself in an ethical sense; it is a sort of moral prudence. This means that the ideal moral agent knows what is good for human beings, and makes sure to act accordingly. Aristotle writes: "It therefore follows that Prudence is a truth-attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to the things that are good for human beings."[14] Neither virtue, nor happiness can therefore exist without prudence.

[8] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 63.
[9] Van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics,* 59.
[10] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 71.
[11] Van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics,* 57.
[12] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 329.
[13] Van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics,* 66.
[14] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 339.

The way to acquire or develop such skills is by being taught and by studying; merely habituating them is not an option. Practical wisdom, or prudence, will guide the moral agent in determining a course of action, a process in which he trusts his rational deliberation. In doing so the agent responds to the particular situation rather than applying a general rule or method. However, this intellectual part of the soul makes sure the decisions are not recklessly based on just one action or reason either – it helps the agent grasp the underlying moral principles.

Without prudence an agent will know what ends to pursue but will not have a clue how to realize this end. To have a disposition alone will not suffice; an agent will also need practical wisdom in order to fulfill his distinctly human function. An adult individual will thus need both moral virtues as well as intellectual virtues in order to be a moral agent. The correlation between moral- and intellectual virtues can be illustrated by the following quote: "As a youth your virtue consisted in being well trained. As an adult, virtue builds on this and becomes based upon your prudent judgment."[15]I will discuss this development of agency in the next paragraph.

3.4 From Ethics to Politics

Aristotle's path to happiness can be summed up thusly: "But as happiness consists in activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be activity in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be the virtue of the best part of us."[16] The best part of us, and accordingly the best activity, is our reason, and contemplation. However, individual contemplation can never truly satisfy a man, for he lives in a social situation and must interact to facilitate his basic needs. Aristotle thus makes the transition from ethics to politics. In politics an individual can practice his virtue, however, only the like-minded will be susceptible to the good political ideas. As it proves extremely difficult to change man's mind by argument when set in its ways, something must change at an earlier stage.

As described earlier in this chapter, an agent must know he is performing a virtuous act, for he must be motivated by its virtuosity. The agent's actions must be consistent with his virtuous habits, or character. A child, who has not developed its character yet, simply mimics other people's behavior but does not know why. Aristotle writes: "Children imagine that the things they themselves value are the best; […]"[17] So, they need to be educated! This process is about teaching as well as practicing: "[…] it is not enough for people to receive the right nurture and discipline in youth; they must also practice the lessons they have learnt, and confirm them by habit, when they grow up."[18] The next issue surfaces: if not all men are susceptible to political ideas, then this would mean that not all men should be children's moral educators. This illustrates the importance of setting the right example and proper assistance in developing a virtuous character and virtuous habits, in other words: moral guidance. To facilitate the creation of proper moral examples, Aristotle argues that there should also be measures for adults: "Accordingly we shall need laws to regulate the discipline of adults as well, and in fact the whole life of the people generally; for the many are more amenable to compulsion and punishment than to reason and moral ideals."[19] So Aristotle calls for a political

[15] Van Hooft, *Understanding Virtue Ethics,* 71.
[16] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 613.
[17] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 609.
[18] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 633.
[19] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 633.

reformation of the entire society in order to facilitate moral development, for children as well as adults. Now that I have discussed the normative aspects of Aristotle's theory, I will move on to what implications these might have for the field of moral education. How can this normative theory influence the descriptive realm of moral education?

3.5 Aristotle's Virtue Ethics and Moral Education

Aristotle is of opinion that the moral agent should act out of virtuous motivation, and act directed towards happiness or flourishing. Therefore: "In addition to performing outwardly approved actions, young people must be brought to see the point and value of such conduct and act as they do out of a conviction that it is a right and admirable thing to do."[20] Children will need to be taught not just to do right because it is imposed upon them, but they will need to aspire it for themselves, as they turn their virtuous behavior into habits. Another very important aspect of moral education is the cultivating of a child's affective life, and thus emotion. Steutel and Spiecker argue: "[…] moral virtues are not only dispositions for choice and action but also dispositions towards feelings. It is with respect to how one feels and not merely to how one chooses and acts that one may be said to be virtuous."[21] Emotion is thus an important moral motivator and essential in the decision-making process. This results in the need for sentimental education, to teach the child to use its reason to control the irrational part of the soul where emotion is located, in order to find the mean. This again emphasizes the need for practice, and guidance by morally wise tutors. This leads to another important aspect of Aristotle's ethics; that of individuality. A child must be taught to individually examine any particular situation and the relevant moral issues. Nancy Sherman writes: "[…] a moral judge has an obligation to know the facts of the case, to see and understand what is morally relevant and to make decisions that are responsive to the exigencies of the case."[22] This increases the pressure on an individual, and again the need for guidance.

In this process, it is of utmost importance that the child develops its practical wisdom. Sherman explains this as follows: "[…] Good moral choices are responsive to the circumstances in which an individual finds him- or herself. An agent has a moral obligation to know the facts of the case. This does not preclude the use of general rules, but they are, at best, only rough guides, summaries of past actions, a part of our web of background knowledge useful in understanding a case."[23] This quote emphasizes that it is crucial for a child to be taught about tradition, about society's values. Because making moral decisions is such an individual process, the child needs to know about every aspect involved: from general moral background to particular interests. Moral life thus appears to be a *practical* sphere of endless human enquiry and conduct, in which training and habituation have an important part to play.[24] Furthermore, natural disposition or blind faith in tradition is not what constitutes virtue; true virtue is a deliberate choice.[25] Thus, true virtue is a delicate equilibrium of assessing, practicing, and habituating. This all starts with the appropriate value perceptions that

[20] Colin Wringe*, Moral Education, Beyond the Teaching of Right and Wrong*, 63.
[21] Jan Steutel and Ben Spiecker, "Cultivating Sentimental Dispositions Through Aristotelian Habituation," in *Moral Education and Development* ed. Doret J. de Ruyter and Siebren Miedema (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011), 97.
[22] Nancy Sherman, "Character Development and Aristotelian Virtue," in *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* ed. David Carr and Jan Steutel (London: Routledge, 2005), 38.
[23] Sherman, "Character Development and Aristotelian Virtue," 38.
[24] Jan Steutel and David Carr, "The Virtue Approach to Moral Education," in *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* ed. David Carr and Jan Steutel (London: Routledge, 2005), 259.
[25] Walter Nicgorski and Frederick E. Ellrod, "Moral Character," in *Philosophical Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development: Act and Agent*, ed. George F. McLean and Frederick E. Ellrod (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 147.

must be communicated (or taught) by the wise representatives of the adult society, as part of the process of socialization.[26] This is where Aristotle's call for the reformation of politics comes in: in order to create the right role models that can, without indoctrination, guide children to become better people, the adults must first be released from their closed-minded ways. Now, having explored the practical implications of Aristotle's theory, I move on to the basics of Kant's normative theory: deontology.

4. Kant's Deontology

4.1 Strength of mind: Reason

Reason is the most prominent faculty in Kantian deontology. In being a distinctly (and universal) human faculty, it forms the necessary basis of the existence of ethics, for it is the only possible origin of an agent's good will. Barbara Herman describes Kant's argumentation as follows: "[…] if morality binds with practical necessity, it cannot work through the passive desires and interests that agents happen to have. Moral agents therefore cannot be described by an empiricist account of motivation. They must possess the capacity to be moved by principle (or by a conception of the good)."[27] This sensitivity for a fundamental principle is found in reason, whereas an agent's instinct concerns itself with the more particular and individual decisions that benefit preservation, welfare, or happiness.[28] Reason's function can therefore logically not resemble that of instinct; the faculty of instinct would be much more appropriate for the task of reaching the above-named ends. Reason's function must transcend such earthly ends; in fact, reason must serve purposes that completely transcend individual happiness or survival altogether. It thus becomes clear that reason's function is to bring about a will that is good *in itself*, which entails that it cannot serve any other particular purpose. According to Kant, this is called the *good will*, and: "Considered in itself it is to be esteemed beyond comparison as far higher than anything it could ever bring about merely in order to favour some inclination or, if you like, the sum total of inclinations."[29]

The good will is therefore unaffected by possible outcomes of actions, personal preferences, or any other individual purpose; what matters is its intrinsic goodness. In turn this good will forms the condition for the fulfilment of any other end, or the existence of virtue or duty. In the following two paragraphs it will become clear why an agent's development of reason is so very important, even though it does not necessarily improve his enjoyment of life (think: 'ignorance is bliss'). As I will discuss later, the dynamics between rational deliberation and resulting action will provide more insight as to what the ideal moral agent would do when confronted with a morally ambiguous situation.

[26] Wringe, *Moral Education, Beyond the Teaching of Right and Wrong,* 66.
[27] Barbara Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), VIII.
[28] Immanuel Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," trans. H.J. Paton in *The Moral Law,* H.J. Paton (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1972), 61.
[29] Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 60.

4.2 Maxims & Categorical Imperative: Duty

Considering the importance of the development of reason as discussed in the paragraph above as well as the originating of a good will; the step towards determining the right course of action now follows logically. Kant writes: "The practically *good* is that which determines the will by concepts of reason, and therefore not by subjective causes, but objectively – that is, on grounds valid for every rational being as such."[30] This entails that the perfectly good will would be able to subject itself to a moral law, for this law is simply the best guide in deciding how to act. At this point, two kinds of *imperatives* start to play an important role. The hypothetical imperative concerns determining a course of action as a path to some kind of purpose, whereas the categorical imperative concerns actions that are good in themselves; matters of principle that do not involve outcomes. The categorical imperative is of a moral nature and should ideally form the motivation for the moral agent's actions.

Next, Kant elaborates this notion of the categorical imperative as follows: "Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[31] Maxims accordingly are subjective principles of action based on the valid and common rational grounds mentioned above. Then, if such maxims are indeed suitable to become a universal law, we enter the realm of duties. With the risk of sounding over-generalizing, I argue it is fair to say that actions are *good* if they are undertaken for the sake of duty. This leaves personal inclinations or feelings out; actions should only be undertaken with duty as an end in itself in mind, applying the method of the categorical imperative. The universal law in turn demands respect from the agent, as his good will demands his autonomous support. The agent respects the fact that this law is an imperative of reason that simply transcends all other interests. Additionally the agent also respects human kind, himself being the same kind of rational being as everyone else is, as not merely being means to an end but always being ends in themselves.[32] This recurring universality has its repercussion on the moral agent and what is expected of him, as I will explain in the next paragraph.

4.3 Universality: Consistency

Now that it has become clear that specific or individual interests or even consequences should have no say in the moral law, and that this calls for a general principle applicable in all situations, it is time to examine how such a principle can be established. The having of a good will also entails autonomy, as clarified by Herman: "A will's integrity is the empirical form of its autonomy (rational agency)."[33] This entails that the good will is not open to manipulation or any other influence; it must base its decisions upon *a priori* reasoning. That way, any rational agent by means of such reasoning must logically come to the same conclusion. This autonomy of the will, in other words, means that the will can be a law to itself without the need for external example.

[30] Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 77.
[31] Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 84.
[32] Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 90.
[33] Herman, *The Practice of Moral Judgment,* 155.

Moreover, the moral agent, being both autonomous and an end in itself: "[…] must be able to regard himself as also the maker of universal law in respect of any law whatever to which he may be subjected; for it is precisely the fitness of his maxims to make universal law that marks him out as an end in himself."[34] The moral agent thus obeys the law and chooses to do so for he is not only following this law but is its legislator himself.[35] The moral agent thus knows how to formulate and reformulate maxims if he comes across exceptional situations. These situations however do not form the basis of his methods: he does not learn by studying examples, but by applying the same universal method or law in any given situation. As such he is very independent (yet universal), morally responsible and devoid of any interest or emotion in making moral decisions. The moral agent therefore is very strict and above all very consistent when it comes to deciding his course of action.

4.4 Moral Development

The question remains however how an individual can become a moral agent, how this development actually works. When it comes to the moral status of children Kant remains rather quiet, especially in the Groundwork. It seems apparent however that he will not assign a full moral status to a child due to its undeveloped reason, though he does acknowledge that they are in the process of rational development and so must be treated with this potential in mind.[36] As mentioned before, Kant argues in favor of sophisticated cognitive capacities and practical reasoning. These capacities can be developed with the help of philosophy.[37] This is unfortunately all on moral development that can be deducted from the Groundwork or any other of Kant's works on ethics. In other, later works, he did formulate many opinions on the subject, though Kant's ethics and Kant's work on education are clearly two separate domains.

In *On Education* for example, Kant describes a detailed method of moral education with the ultimate ideal of developing good moral character, and thus creating good men. His approach is rather visionary: […] children ought to be educated, not for the present, but for a possibly improved condition of man in the future […].[38] The way this is to be done is rather harsh and rigid, and not unlike the training of pets. Kant describes this as follows: "It is, however, not enough that children should be merely broken in; for it is of greater importance that they shall learn to think. By learning to think, man comes to act according to fixed principles and not at random."[39] The 'breaking in' of children is done through physical education, which is aimed at facilitating discipline. The further development of reason and duty, as well as a reserved attitude towards distractive emotions and feelings, is acquired through other forms of practical education, in which the understanding and accepting the correct principle is key. Correction must be aimed at future improvement and understanding, not at expressing emotion. This in turn means that not everyone is suited for educating: an educator must possess a highly developed reason and insight himself in order to convey these abilities to others.

[34] Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 99.
[35] Wringe, *Moral Education, Beyond the Teaching of Right and Wrong,* 57
[36] Andrews Reath, "Contemporary Kantian Ethics," in *Routledge Companion to Ethics,* ed. John Skorupski (London: Routledge, 2010), 415.
[37] Kant, "Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals," 69-70.
[38] Immanuel Kant, *On Education,* trans. Annette Churton (Mineola: Dover Publications, 2003), 14.
[39] Kant, *On Education,* 20.

It is not important to create the right inclinations or habits in children, because what matters above all is a well-developed reason that can recognize and apply the correct principles in any given situation. Moral development thus revolves around duty; the establishing of a law inside a child's mind, which then serves as its conscience. I will now move on to discuss what implications Kant's normative theory and his opinions on moral development would have for the field of moral education.

4.5 Kant's Deontology and Moral Education

As I discussed in the paragraph above, Kant's deontology concerns itself with principle and method rather than with character traits or inclinations. According to Kant, individuals require the capacity to form moral judgments, a skill or discipline in which they should be trained through practice and education. A moral agent must always act out of duty. To establish this, children must be taught according to normative theory that will "[…] take no account of human needs, shortcomings, desires or inclinations but apply, in principle to all rational beings whatsoever and wherever."[40] This theory is therefore ultimately founded on the will, which according to Kant is unconditionally good and does not need further justification. This will is not concerned with outcomes of actions or other interests, it purely wants to act according to maxims that are capable of becoming universal laws. Thus, a child's reasoning needs to be developed, for herein lies the ultimate foundation of ethics altogether. This is a process that takes a strict and universally applicable method for choosing actions, in which emotions, partiality or other personal distractions play no role. Therefore, moral self-perfection is developed by children through studying the results of their moral maxims in different scenarios and cases; this is a way of thinking that needs to be trained and adopted. As children do not yet possess a fully developed reason, they are not to be treated as equals by their peers. They merely possess a certain potential and should therefore be treated distantly, and most of all not emotional. Anger is therefore never a good way to discipline, but rather the loss of respect for a child, this lack of personal interest or emotion will then allow the child to develop its rational capacities and moral discipline.

This way of thinking is not merely an individual process; it extends beyond the personal sphere. For the moral law of one individual will by means of its a priori foundations resemble that of another: "The rationally chosen ends of one rational being […] set limits to the freedom of all other rational beings and his or her legitimate ends are similarly limited by theirs."[41] The fate of moral agents of both creating and following their own moral rules is shared, and thus will create a sense of mutual respect. Therefore, children will not only become legislators of moral law, but will also recognize that others are as well, and treat them accordingly. This treatment of others should furthermore show that others are ends in themselves too, and must not be used as means. To sum this all up, children must be taught to recognize the importance "[…] of our conduct and our judgments of the conduct of others being consistent and reasonable, of considering the point of view, concerns and [moral] feelings of others and of striving for harmony with others who are prepared to do the same."[42] It is only by consequently following such a universally binding approach that mankind in general might one day exist of better moral agents.

[40] Wringe, *Moral Education, Beyond the Teaching of Right and Wrong*, 56.
[41] Wringe, *Moral Education, Beyond the Teaching of Right and Wrong,* 57.
[42] Wringe, *Moral Education, Beyond the Teaching of Right and Wrong,* 61.

On this idealistic note I conclude the exploration of both normative theories and their practical implications. I will now move on to explore the field of moral education, and what role these two normative theories play herein.

5. Moral Education

Thus far I have explored the role of the ideal moral agent in Aristotle's virtue ethics, as well as in Kant's deontology. I have subsequently shown how each of these normative theories could be translated into practical goals for moral education, hence moving from the normative to the descriptive. In this chapter I will continue to focus on the subject of moral education, starting with naming some of the important differences in the normative theories' implications for moral education, which might have implications for this field. I will then explore some descriptive goals found in methods of moral education and see how these in turn relate to Aristotle's and Kant's normative theories. Lastly, I will discuss the implications of my findings.

5.1 Noteworthy Differences

After having discussed the implications of both theories for moral education, I would now like to highlight a few important elements that cause these two theories to contrast. In a moral education based upon Kant's deontology, there is no role for tradition; the foundation for morality should be purely rational. The same cannot be said for a moral education based upon Aristotle's virtue ethics, in which children are taught to listen to both tradition, and reason. For virtue ethical education, in other words: "[…] the point […] is that moral decision-making requires both a top-down specification of general ends and a bottom-up narrative of circumstances."[43] The general ends being society's tradition and direction; the circumstances being the particular situation in which a child can find itself. Kant's ethics offers a very strong method to respond to any moral situation by assessing it bottom-up. However strong on method it might be, Kant's ethics does not focus much on the specific content of situations. Virtue ethics on the other hand is very strong on content, but less strong on method.[44] This results in a big responsibility for the child, who has to figure out a method that best suits him personally, instead of applying one universal approach.

Irving describes the goal of Kantian moral education as follows: "Moral education fashioned around Kantian deontology is one that emphasizes the primacy of reason, judgment, and decision making. The goal of ME [Moral Education] is to cultivate powers of reasoning so that one better apprehends what the moral law requires; so that one better knows what one is obliged to do given the exigencies of the case."[45] Aristotle's moral education concerns developing the virtuous traits that will contribute to living a good life, and living it well. Aristotle emphasizes what habits and disposition should be cultivated in order for a child to flourish as a moral agent. Kant's moral education on the other hand is mainly directed at the development of reason, so the child can determine the right course of action.[46] Both theories thus offer a very different approach to moral development, in which very different goals are desired.

[43] Sherman, "Character Development and Aristotelian Virtue," 39.
[44] Lapsley and Yeager, "Moral-Character Education," 151.
[45] Lapsley and Yeager, "Moral-Character Education," 151.
[46] Lapsley and Yeager, "Moral-Character Education," 151.

5.2 Theories of Moral Education

In his introductory text to the book 'Nice Is Not Enough', Larry Nucci offers an outline of moral education's goal: "Moral education, then, is […] about contributing to the development of caring and fair people with respect for the general conventions of society. We want to educate children who are sensitive to the needs of others and who know how to balance self-interest with justice and compassion. We want to educate children capable of regulating their emotions and handling disputes peaceably. We want them to be able to make wise choices and to avoid self-destructive behavior."[47] In this excerpt, several normative-theoretical aspects referrals can be found. For instance, the elements of 'conventions of society', 'compassion' and 'regulating their emotions' could be called typical elements of Aristotle's theory. On the other hand, 'justice', 'make wise choices' and 'avoid self-destructive behavior' remind more of Kant's theory. In his book 'Raising Good Children' Thomas Lickona practices a similar approach. He names features that constitute a good child, which for instance are that: "You want them to respect the rights of others. You want them to respect legitimate authority, rules, and laws." and "You want them to be able to stand on their own two feet […]. You want them to be capable of generosity and love."[48] The first quote reminds more of Kant and his quest for a universally binding moral law, whereas the second quote reminds more of Aristotle and his wish to create morally independent agents that know how to handle emotion in their decisions. Even though all of the elements thus far mentioned can overlap and possibly refer to many other normative theories as well, it seems obvious is that they are not unambiguously founded on one specific normative theory alone.

Subsequently, a quote taken from the educational method-section of one of the books mentioned above can be read against a background of Aristotle's virtue ethical theory: "A child who maintains an orientation of goodwill feels emotionally secure and expects the world to operate according to basic moral standards of fairness. Children who maintain this orientation are more likely to engage in prosocial behavior."[49] A child's feelings need to be regulated by its reason, which is an emotionally secure state of being. To reach this state a child needs moral guidance by a morally wise tutor who teaches him the 'ways of the world', giving him the opportunity to practice and habituate moral standards in a safe and supportive environment. Children thus become morally wise themselves and can contribute to a better world, for instance by involvement in politics. I now take another excerpt from one of the methods in a book mentioned above, which can be read against a normative background of Kantian theory: "Stage 4 [of Lickona's envisioned gradual moral development] helps you be good to people you don't know and may never see. It keeps in mind two questions: *How will my actions affect other people in the system?* And *What if everybody did it?*"[50] Kant demands respect for the self and for other agents, as well as the accompanying behavior of treating them as ends in themselves. Furthermore, the deliberation of whether or not a subjective maxim can be willed as a universal law demands thinking of the bigger picture and society as a whole.

I hereby hope to show that either of these two books, which in my opinion are representative of the currently available methods on moral education, contain references to both Aristotle's and Kant's normative theory, and probably to many others. Furthermore, these references are not explicated in

[47] Larry Nucci, *Nice is Not Enough: Facilitating Moral Development* (New Jersey: Pearson Education Ltd, 2009), 3.
[48] Thomas Lickona, *Raising Good Children* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985), 3.
[49] Nucci, *Nice is Not Enough: Facilitating Moral Development,* 86.
[50] Lickona, *Raising Good Children,* 202.

the methods. As I have thus far established in this thesis, and specifically in paragraph 5.1, the two discussed normative theories offer very contrasting views on what would be beneficial to becoming a good moral agent, or what would conduce to being or living 'good'. How does this information affect theories of moral development? I argue that conflicting moral theories as grounds for moral education can lead to contradictory results. A very concrete example is that of emotion; the two theories ask completely opposite behavior from the child when it comes to emotion. The child should either refrain from emotional influence in deciding a course of action, or let emotion be a major factor in the decision-making. It is impossible to do both at once. Therefore, it can be useful to fully understand the implications of all normative grounds involved, before proposing a theory of moral education that combines them.

5.3 Moral Education

In this thesis I have attempted to find a normative foundation for moral education in two normative theories: Aristotle's virtue ethics and Kant's deontology. I explored the features of the ideal moral agent for each theory, in order to find out whether these ideals could be reached by improving moral development. As I found out, both theories indeed offer a legitimate foundation for moral education. The foundations in Aristotle's work are a little more obvious, for he included them in his works on ethics; Kant's works on ethics on the other hand do not include any direct reference to moral education or development (though it can be logically deduced) but have been discussed in later works. I have explored the implications of both theories for moral education. As it turns out, both philosophers offer rather complete systems of moral development and even an attempt at a method of practical implementation. However, their results and approaches differ. For a school to implement a strictly Aristotelian approach to virtue ethical education would mean that students have to learn to assess every moral situation individually and take every aspect and consideration into account in order to come to any 'good' conclusion. A Kantian deontic moral education would on the other hand imply that students would learn to detach themselves from their personal feelings and inclinations in order to strictly apply a method of universality in deciding a course of action.

Both theories offer very useful goals and approaches to moral education, but when applied individually and to their full extent they can lead to impractical or illogical situations. It is therefore not surprising that most theories on moral education are written by applying a certain amount of 'theory-shopping' by which useful elements of several disciplines are combined, to meet an envisioned purpose. However, in this process, one should in my opinion never lose sight of the normative theories that lie at the foundation. Compiling a new theory by picking many complementing elements of different theories in order to affirm the already established conclusion, without including the fundamental research, is not justifiable. Furthermore, when discussing 'moral' development, 'moral' realms, or any other related concept, it should be acknowledged what its normative origins are. No moral educator should ever teach their subject based solely on unsupported moral claims intertwined with moral psychology, pedagogy, or other descriptive claims, if they take ethics seriously. A mixture of descriptive and normative claims without reference to their origins should not be accepted, for this ruins any moral justification or worth the claims could otherwise have had. As I have demonstrated in this thesis, it is certainly possible to find normative claims on which to build a descriptive theory of moral education.

The question that remains is whether or not this is a problem of such significance that moral education should improve its methods. And if so, how should this be done? I argue that this problem is indeed of such importance that ignoring the normative foundations weakens the actual theory of moral education. Even though such normative theories are often re-interpreted and criticized by many since their original formulation, ignoring them is to avoid taking the risk of being refuted. A theory of moral education should certainly combine elements from different theories and disciplines; I think this is the only way to create a strong and comprehensive theory. One discipline cannot claim to have all the expertise on a subject that covers so many fields. However, it would be useful to include philosophy, or ethical theory, as an explicit contributor to the field and hence to recognize its fundamental value.

6. Conclusion

This thesis started off as a research project with the ultimate goal of finding out whether any of the existing descriptive theories concerning moral education contain any substantial link to normative theories. Many books on moral education, such as 'Raising Good Children' by Thomas Lickona[51] or 'Nice is Not Enough: Facilitating Moral Development' by Larry Nucci[52], do not contain any reference to either Aristotle, Kant, or any other moral philosopher. And yet these books contain numerous claims concerning 'moral reasoning', 'moral values', and the 'moral domain'. These books appear to combine claims of different disciplines, be it moral psychology, pedagogy, or even combine different normative theories, without explicating or justifying their origins. This led me to wonder: is it possible to explicitly found a theory of moral education on normative theory, and would this improve its moral value? I thus set off to explore the possibility of normative foundations for claims made in the field of moral education. Thereby, as I announced in the introduction, I hoped to find an unambiguous normative basis for moral education, in other words: "[…] notwithstanding modern psychological attempts to derive moral educational conclusions from quasi-empirical research alone."[53]

I began my thesis with a short clarification of moral education as we find it today. I found that moral education is increasingly popular and that most would agree on its good cause, even though it lacks an unambiguous approach. I then moved on to discussing my two chosen normative theories: Aristotle's virtue ethics and Kant's deontology. At the end of each discussion I explored the implications the theory could have for moral education. I found that each normative theory did indeed offer a solid normative basis for moral education. In the final part of this thesis I discussed some important differences between the implications of both theories, differences that caused me to believe that an unsupported combination between the two theories in moral education can lead to conflicting results. I then tried to show, by taking examples from Lickona's and Nucci's books, that such confusing combinations are indeed often made, without including supportive research.

[51] Thomas Lickona, *Raising Good Children* (New York: Bantam Books, 1985)
[52] Larry Nucci, *Nice is Not Enough: Facilitating Moral Development* (New Jersey: Pearson Education Ltd., 2009)
[53] Jan Steutel and David Carr, "Virtue Ethics and the Virtue Approach to Moral Education," in *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* ed. David Carr and Jan Steutel (London: Routledge, 2005), 3.

I am of opinion that a combination of theories and disciplines is very viable; interdisciplinary research is more and more popular and effective today. However, when it comes to moral education, it would decrease value to ignore philosophical expertise in formulating a new theory. In such an interdisciplinary field it must be acknowledged that every discipline offers their own expertise, and that a justified combination of such expertise strengthens a theory. Developers of moral educational theory should therefore make use of the existing normative frameworks; they are out there and can do nothing but improve the moral significance and seriousness of a theory.

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