



Introduction to the Special Issue on Moral Psychology and Moral Education

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Moral psychology, a discipline at the intersection of empirical psychology and ethical theory, investigates the moral mind and the insights empirical psychological studies can offer for normative theorizing. Among the issues discussed in moral psychology are the reliability of moral intuitions, the nature of moral reasoning, the role of emotions in moral judgment and motivation, the structure of moral agency, and the dynamics of virtuous and altruistic behaviour (see Doris 2010). Ethicists working in moral psychology are often driven by the assumption that ethical theorizing that brackets the empirical aspects of moral cognition is at best incomplete and out of touch with reality and at worst fundamentally flawed. While philosophical common lore has it that ‘fact’ and ‘value’ belong in two not-to-be-conflated spheres, ethicists working in moral psychology tend to hold that rigidly adhering to this strict division will inhibit rather than advance our understanding of ethical matters. Moral psychology is not a new discipline. Many of the great moral thinkers – most notably Aristotle, Hume, and Kant – were effectively moral psychologists *avant la lettre*. In recent years, however, moral psychology has been experiencing a renaissance, emerging as one of the most vibrant areas of philosophical research (see e.g. Bublitz/Paulo 2020; Doris 2010; Sauer 2017). Findings from empirical and philosophical moral psychology have had a profound impact on numerous adjacent philosophical disciplines, most notably metaethics and normative ethics. This special issue is inspired by the idea that the field of moral education, too, can benefit from sustained engagement with moral psychology.

Moral education, sometimes regarded as somewhat peripheral to the ‘core business’ of moral theory, actually plays a central role in moral life. Our understanding of ethics and the ethical life is incomplete without an account of how the capacity for ethical judgment and action is acquired or imparted. Considering the crucial role of moral education and leverag-

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ing the rich body of research in moral psychology, the guiding question of this special issue is what the discipline of moral education can learn from moral psychology. The contributions to the special issue, which were all previously presented at an online workshop held in early 2022, explore the numerous links and connections between moral education and moral psychology. They discuss various ways in which findings from the latter can shape or challenge our conceptions of the nature of successful moral education.

One helpful way of organizing one's thinking about moral education, and to navigate this special issue, is to consider the potential goals of moral education. Three principal accounts of the goal of education, moral or otherwise, can be distinguished (Watson 2016). According to goods-based accounts, education is primarily about the transmission and acquisition of epistemic goods, such as knowledge or understanding (e.g. Goldman 1999). Skill-based accounts hold that education ought to aim at fostering certain cognitive skills, especially critical thinking (e.g. Siegel 1988, 2017). Finally, character-based accounts identify the cultivation of certain virtues and character traits as the principal aim of education (e.g. Arthur et al. 2017; Kristjánsson 2015). Applying this distinction specifically to moral education, we can distinguish three potential goals of moral education. Its goal may be (1) to transmit moral knowledge or understanding, (2) to teach moral skills or competencies, or (3) the cultivation of moral virtues or a moral character.

The distinction also helps us to get a grip on the central question of the special issue regarding the significance of moral psychology for moral education. Against the backdrop of the three possible goals of moral education, we can ask (a) to what extent findings from moral psychology support or challenge certain accounts of what the goal of moral education ought to be, and (b) how such findings might inform us about the best ways to achieve these goals. Many contributions to this issue explore the guiding question by engaging with one of these sub questions.

Dominik Balg offers an unabashed defense of the idea, often deemed naive, that moral education should aim at the transmission of moral knowledge. He defends this idea specifically against the 'objection from disagreement', that is, against the concern that systematic disagreement about moral issues renders attempts at transmitting moral knowledge futile. Against this, Balg points out that there is substantial moral agreement among experts, not just on some first-order moral questions, but also on meta-ethical questions and on how to respond to uncertainty about first-order questions. Moreover, disagreement is not a problem *specifically* for the transmission account. Those holding that moral education should instead aim at cultivating moral skills or moral virtues must also contend with the fact that the virtuous or skilled moral students will develop moral beliefs that are subject to justification-defeating disagreement.

Paul Rehren and Hanno Sauer assess the role of moral education, understood as the social transmission of moral information, in bringing about moral progress. Contradicting the natural and prevalent view in the literature, they offer a somewhat deflationary perspective on whether moral education can cause moral progress. Because the moral views of educators often mirror those held by the broader population, moral education is more likely to reinforce existing moral outlooks than to induce genuine moral progress. They conclude on a cautiously optimistic note, suggesting there is some merit to preserving the moral status quo, as it can function as a launching pad for potential moral progress.

In her contribution, Kirsten Meyer emphasizes the significance of reasoning skills for moral education. Contrary to some findings in moral psychology that question the efficacy

of reasoning skills for moral education, Meyer argues for their essential role. First, she uses the case of moral emotions to outline the importance of reasoning skills. Emotions can at times corrupt moral judgments as they are subject to biases, and the targeted training of reasoning skills can help to critically reflect on their role. This will provide students with a greater degree of autonomy because they can protect themselves from the potentially harmful influences of emotions and thus develop the ability to make their own moral judgment. In the second part of her article, Meyer delves into the significance of reasoning skills for improving societal and political discourse. Argumentative skills allow for more productive discourse on moral issues. This elevates the students' understanding from a factual level to a meta-level, where they can potentially resolve moral conflicts. Meyer substantiates her claims with references to empirical studies. In the final section, Meyer discusses how teaching argumentation skills can also improve social discourse overall. To this end, she draws on environmental and climate education as a case study for moral education.

Katharina Bauer and Julia Hermann's contribution could also be assigned to the skill-oriented camp. They advocate for the acquisition of moral resilience, specifically *technomoral* resilience, as a goal of moral education. This capacity, conceptualized as 'restabilisation after destabilisation,' enables individuals to cope with moral change accompanying technological disruptions. According to Bauer and Hermann, teaching technomoral resilience should involve fostering three core skills: (1) moral imagination, (2) critical reflection, and (3) the ability to maintain one's moral agency. The significance of technomoral resilience is discussed and demonstrated through an example of the use of robots in elderly care.

In his paper, Christian Miller argues for the continued relevance of character education, despite the challenges posed by situationists. He first delineates the concept of character education and highlights its primary goal: the cultivation of moral virtues. The situationist challenge, based on experiments conducted in the 1970s onwards, shows that moral behavior is influenced by situational factors, challenging the traditional view that it is primarily determined by fixed virtues or character traits. Miller argues that the situationists' findings neither negate the existence of moral virtues nor contradict the notion of global character traits. He elaborates on this in two parts: First, he points out that virtues can exist in varying degrees, and second, he emphasizes that (moral) behavior often results from a bundle of psychological dispositions that can be viewed as overarching behavioral tendencies. Miller notes that many people exhibit a mixture of character traits, which explains the inconsistency in displaying perfect virtues and accounts for the findings of the situationists. In conclusion, Miller argues that moral education should aim to refine these mixed character traits, with an emphasis on reinforcing the morally positive aspects and mitigating the morally negative ones, making several suggestions on how to improve character effectively.

Alex Madva, Daniel Kelly and Michael Brownstein address the question of whether moral education should be rooted at the structural or individual psychological level to foster moral progress. Using the example of anti-racist moral education, they focus on and critique Ibram Kendi's structural realist approach. Building on their critique of Kendi, they introduce their own approach to anti-racist moral education. Madva, Kelly and Brownstein advocate for a hybrid model that emphasizes individual psychological aspects yet is situated within a structural realist context. They contend that certain virtues, which they term "structure-facing virtues", play an essential role in moral (anti-racist) education. These virtues assist individuals in recognizing structural injustices, taking actions against such inequities, and cultivating a critical stance towards prevailing structures. Their perspective offers fresh

insights into the role of moral education in effecting social change and advancing moral progress.

Finally, Hyemin Han discusses how novel neuroscientific findings and techniques — large-scale neuroimaging analyses, experimental studies, and neurocomputational approaches — can support and advance the neo-Aristotelian virtue-theoretical account of moral education. His discussion focuses specifically on how evidence from neuroscience can improve our understanding of the habituation of virtues and the cultivation of phronesis. It does so by providing insights into the neuronal patterns of moral functioning and the mechanisms of moral learning and development. Han's investigation is anchored in a discussion of how new advances in neuroscience can address long-standing methodological issues surrounding neuroscientific research, relating e.g. to the difficulty of matching a specific functionality to a specific brain region, or that of inferring causation from correlation.

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