

THE PHILOSOPHY OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. This article presents a view of moral development based on the interdisciplinary study of moral psychology and virtue ethics. It suggests that a successful account of moral development has to go beyond what the developmental psychology and virtue ethics advocate and find ways of incorporating ideas, such as ‘moral failure’ and ‘unpredictability of life’. It proposes to recognize the concept of moral development as an essential concept for ethics, moral philosophy and philosophy of education, and as a useful tool for anyone who wants to engage constructively in dialogues of religions, cultures and personal interaction.

Introduction

What is ‘moral development’? Is it something that we learn? Or, does it happen to us naturally? If it is learnable, how do we learn it and how do we teach it? Is there a space for ‘moral development’ in education? If education, as several dictionaries seem to suggest, is the process of teaching, training or learning of specific skills, in a *prescribed* or customary course of study in a school or college, then can we prescribe a course on moral development at school or college? Or, is moral development something we should foster without making direct references to it? But, how do we foster it if we perhaps don’t know what exactly constitutes moral development? The reality is that although the phrase ‘moral development’ isn’t unfamiliar, it does not appear directly in our educational curricula. What is the *prima facie* problem here? Are we nervous about teaching any specific moral doctrine and giving, as the content of our teaching, specific sets of answers to moral questions? Such a concern would seem legitimate, especially in our multi-cultural and multi-religious world. Why is the idea of

moral development, prominent within the areas of moral psychology (as I will attempt to show later in this article) and philosophy, especially philosophy of education, not their most important concept? Besides, the whole field of philosophy of education is one of the weakest subfields of both philosophy and education. Philosophy of education seems to be both unpopular and disconnected from philosophy (by being insufficiently rigorous for the tastes of many „real” philosophers) and from the broader study and practice of education (by being too philosophical, too theoretical). In spite of this weakness, I would like to suggest that, although philosophy doesn’t operate as freely and as frequently with the idea of moral development as moral psychology, philosophy does offer a wealth of insights related to moral development. One may say that Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* is almost solely about moral development, understood as the development of a good human ‘state’, *hexis*, in other words, ‘character’ with virtues as its traits. It is beyond the scope of this article to trace the roots and meanings of moral developmental thinking through the history of philosophy. Instead, I propose to focus on aspects of philosophy, more precisely, a school of moral philosophy imbedded in Aristotelian thought, namely virtue ethics. In my view, virtue ethics offers us many important insights regarding moral development and it seems to be the most suitable conversation partner for moral psychology (whose developmental theories have already established a rather solid ground for moral developmental thinking). I shall argue that virtue ethics and moral psychology complement each other. I will attempt to show (in the form of five steps) that utilizing and extending the insights of these two discourses helps us to offer an account of moral development that is both illuminating and promising. My view, based on the studies available to us, is that a successful approach to moral development has to be interdisciplinary. Moreover, in order to be plausible, it has to go beyond what developmental psychology and virtue ethics suggest and find ways of incorporating ideas, such as those of ‘moral failure’ and the ‘unpredictability of life’. This article will begin with a brief exploration of the phrase ‘moral development’.

I. The meaning of the phrase ‘moral development’

‘Moral development’ is often interchanged with terms like ‘moral growth’, ‘moral maturation’, ‘moral progress’ and ‘moral formation’. ‘Growth’, ‘maturation’, ‘progress’, ‘development’ and ‘formation’ are words from

the same ‘family’. They all imply change and some sort of open-endedness, within this change. ‘Formation’ can have a negative meaning, since it can be programmed in such a way that it prevents growth or progress.

The main problem with the term ‘moral development’ arises from the lack of a precise definition: of ‘moral’ and of ‘development’. I suggest that ‘moral’ can be articulated (not defined) as about becoming a better, more rightly ordered and more authentic human being. ‘Development’ consists of the Latin ‘*dis*’, which means ‘apart’ and the French ‘*voloper*,’ which means to ‘unwrap’. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1989 p. 563) gives, as its third meaning (the closest one to the theme of moral development) „to unfold more fully, bring out all that is potentially contained in”. Thus, I propose to define the term ‘development’ as ‘unfolding the potential’ and the term ‘*moral* development’ as signifying the unfolding of the potential of the moral self.

II. The exploration of the concept of ‘moral development’

First step: developmental psychology

There are three main schools or styles, within developmental psychology, that deal with ego development, cognitive development, social development, affective development, and affective/interpersonal development. They are: the Freudian school with a focus on how a person’s identity as a whole is formed; and the Piagetian and Flavellian schools, both with a focus on cognition. In my studies of psychological developmental theories I chose one or two representatives of each school: Erik Erikson as a representative of the Freudian school, Laurence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan as representatives of the Piagetian school and Jane Loevinger as a representative of the Flavellian school. Space does not permit me to even sketch each theory. Hence, the only alternative is to briefly summarize the findings of my study.

Developmental psychology contributes towards a better understanding of the self. It points to the nature of the human person as relational; human relationality is essential to successful moral development. It insists on a movement from self-absorption to self-transcendence. It emphasizes the role of cognition in moral growth. It points to the relationship between childhood development and later (adult) growth. It stresses the developmental dimension of a person. It helps us to understand the meaning of *epikeia* in moral growth – a capacity to make reasonable and responsible exceptions to rules. By using the term ‘post-conventional’ we are reminded

that there is more to moral growth than simply following the rules that prevail in a society.

Psychological theories help us understand that moral development is about the skilful living of our relational lives. They articulate what precisely is involved in such skilful living, so that our cognitive, affective and interpersonal human capacities can grow. The growth of human capacities is presented in the form of progressive-hierarchical steps: each theory defines development in terms of structure, organization, and process, and expresses it in the form of stages. However, the approach to these stages differs from theory to theory, and most notably, between the theories of Erikson and Loevinger on the one hand, and those of Kohlberg and Gilligan on the other. These (structural) differences are not especially significant for us, and present no great difficulty. Harder to handle is the issue of the different contents ascribed to each stage by the different theorists, especially the higher stages. The lower stages are easier to describe and their boundaries are more clear-cut, and the movement from one stage to another is relatively straightforward. By contrast, adult life is usually much more complicated and difficult to describe than life during childhood and adolescence. The content of lower stages is similar in each theory but there is no overlap in the content of the higher stages. Each theory aims to describe the path to moral maturity.

Moral development, in the context of the four psychological theories, is a process of expanding self-awareness and of the more conscious exploration of the self – the self as relational – so that the self successfully meets the demands of the relational life.

Second step: virtue ethics

Another discipline that contributes to the understanding of moral development is virtue ethics. Although virtue ethics, unlike developmental psychology, does not operate with the developmental terminology, it too stresses the importance of skilful living, but skilful living is realized through the practice of virtue(s). ‘Virtue’ refers to a human disposition that involves the judgment of the intellect, leads to right action and directs towards the attainment of the moral good. Virtue ethics focuses on the individual virtues (such as prudence, justice, temperance, courage) that are essential for the moral growth characterizing a well-developed human being. It stresses that the acquisition of these virtues takes place through participation in practices. This insight of virtue ethics complements the deficiency of psychological accounts, a deficiency shown by the fact that the latter pay little

attention to practical aspects of the moral life – they presume rather a straightforward link between mind and action. Participation in virtuous practices is not simply mechanical motion – it is purposeful and chosen doing. Virtue ethics tells us that, if we want to live in a morally right way, we need not only to develop our reasoning skills, shape our identity and realize relational nature. We, also and most of all, need to act intelligibly and promote the moral good. Virtue ethics views a person as a moral agent – people are more than what happens to them. A moral agent is one who not only possesses the capacity to act, but one who has a capacity to choose which actions to perform, because he or she has moral understanding. Virtue ethics engages the self much more than the psychological theories. Human beings are not simply formed by the interaction of psychological and environmental forces. The overall idea of moral agency helps us to understand that, despite the limits of the world in which one lives, one is still able to shape responsibly the image of the person one ought to become.

Third step: combining the insights of moral psychology and virtue ethics.

So far, we have been dealing with the insights of two disciplines separately. Now I will attempt to offer a combined account of these insights. Both disciplines communicate that moral development, as the unfolding of the potential of the moral self, is expressed in moral behaviour.

Moral behaviour

The psychological theories claim that if we are able to understand what the demands of our relational life are, and if we are able to resolve successfully any tensions that occur, then we will be able to live rightly. Virtue ethics conceives the developed self as a self that behaves in a virtuous way. Such behaviour is produced by virtues, that is, by dispositions of our mind that direct us to the moral good. It is expressed in intelligible actions and is characterised by consistency and continuity. This does not mean that ‘virtuous behaviour’ is not concerned with the fulfilling of relational demands. The two approaches, developmental psychology and virtue-centred ethics, are not concerned with two different realities but with the same reality expressed in two different ways. Virtuous behaviour is displayed by people whose characters are rightly ordered; characters cannot be rightly ordered without fulfilling the demands of relationships. Although character is a person’s individual identity, it is shaped by interactions with other people. By pointing to virtues, virtue ethics suggests that right behaviour is not

just about resolving tensions (as in Erikson's theory), or finding solutions to dilemmas so that parties representing both sides of the tensions and dilemmas are satisfied with the outcomes (as in Kohlberg's and Gilligan's theories). Virtue ethics goes a step further, by suggesting that right behaviour must not simply be about settling down and being content with the smooth running of our relational lives. Right behaviour involves constantly examining (through the virtue of prudence) whether one's living promotes the moral good and finding ways of improving one's behaviour so that one can move closer to the *telos*, and truly live the kind of life that is best for a human being to live. The point that needs to be realized here is the distinction between *smooth running* and *what is truly best*. Virtue ethics is clearly concerned with the latter. Psychological accounts tend to be concerned with the former. However, they help us to recognize that, in realizing what is truly best, we need to be fully aware of our relational nature and display certain personal characteristics.

For approaches grounded in developmental psychology, it seems that to have these characteristics means to have a certain kind of attitude, a certain level of reasoning or emotional integrity. For virtue ethics, to have these characteristics means to have virtues and to express them in behaviour. This is where the two disciplines complement each other.

What both disciplines have in common is a certain dynamism that suggests the need for the improvement of our behaviour, and for growth towards moral maturity. Therefore, in what follows we shall synthesize the accounts of moral maturity (that is, the different ideas of the culmination of moral growth) that each discipline provides.

Right living is more than just a sum total of singular actions, understood narrowly in terms of external performances. It is, most of all, a continuous (habitual) and perfect (skilful) combination of right attitudes, emotions and the internalization of values and principles.

Culmination of moral development

Does moral development have a culmination? If so, what is its culminating point or goal. If not, how best can we describe its endless (though not aimless) journey. My preference here is to adopt the first approach and seek to identify and describe the culmination of moral development.

While developmental psychological theories communicate their account of maturity by means of the content of the highest stages of the relevant psychological theories, virtue ethics articulates such an account by attempting to answer the following question: 'how do I achieve my ideal moral

self?’ This question is formulated on the basis of a three-question structure (‘who am I?’, ‘who I ought to become?’ and ‘how do I get there?’). Psychological theories see moral maturity in terms of *relational maturity*, while virtue-centered ethics sees it in terms of *individual attributes* – that is, virtues. In spite of the fact that each discipline sees the culmination of moral development in a different way, I think it is plausible to combine these two ways in order to have a richer account of the culmination of moral development.

According to our four psychological theories, if a person moves successfully through the stages of growth, he or she will not only effectively resolve dilemmas (both real and hypothetical), and sort out conflicts and tensions that are caused by living with others, but will also reach a state of overall relational maturity. Such a state would be a sum total of what each psychologist proposes as the culmination point of his or her theory. Erikson calls this point integrity. Kohlberg sees it in terms of autonomy based on the internalisation of the principle of justice. Gilligan understands it in terms of care and responsibility. Loevinger (like Erikson) views this state as integrity, by which she means something like a mixture of identity, autonomy and responsibility. Thus, according to the psychological theories, a person who has reached the final stages, and hence developed integrity, autonomy and care, would be able to live a successful relational life.

Unlike psychological theories, virtue ethics does not have a culmination point as such. Instead, it suggests that virtues, as personal attributes, can make a person morally mature. Such a person would have a set of related virtues like prudence, justice, temperance, courage, that would enable him or her to act in a way that promotes the moral good and achieve internal goods (like friendship, solidarity, honesty, fairness, etc). These goods can only be reached, as Alasdair MacIntyre suggests in his *After Virtue*, through the practice of virtues.

If we combine the relational maturity of the psychological theories with virtue ethics, we can say that a morally mature person, through the virtue of prudence, which involves skilful reasoning, would understand how society functions. He or she would know and understand its laws and regulations and their strengths and limitations; he or she would act in way that is best for others (those distant ones – in the light of justice, as well as those with whom one is bonded in a special way – in the light of fidelity); he or she would be able to exercise courage and self-restraint, and would take into account their own individual needs (through the virtue of self-care).

Moreover, virtue-centered ethics, with its use of the concept of the *telos* – a moral goal that can be viewed as the culminating point of virtue-

centered ethics, but not as the definite goal presented in the psychological theories – can deepen developmental psychological theories. Virtue ethics contributes a sense of the variety of ways in which this can be realized, and asserts that the good of the *telos* is internal.

Having established the link between the relational maturity emphasized in the psychological theories, and the individual attributes and idea of the *telos* stressed in virtue ethics, I suggest we now consider the structure of the process of moral development.

The process of development

To a large extent, the psychological theories see the process of moral development in terms of *adjustment*, though by no means exclusively, whilst virtue ethics stresses the importance of creativity, especially ‘the working out of the *telos*’. Thus, the two disciplines make a complementary contribution. Both disciplines see the process of moral development in terms of progress, even though their understandings of the idea of progress are not the same.

Basic to the psychological theories is a sense of *an ordered sequence of unavoidable stages*. These stages are in general quite exact, measurable and dependable. ‘Exact’ means that the content of each stage is different and easily distinguishable; ‘measurable’ expresses the possibility of assessing to which stage an individual belongs; ‘progressively attained’ means that the higher stages depend on the successful completion of the lower stages. These accounts of moral development, structurally logical and systematized, are useful as a starting point. They offer a general framework for analyzing an individual’s moral growth. However, they do not leave much space for individual differences. This may suggest to an individual that, if he or she does not progress (with a certain ‘speed’) on the moral ladder that is designed by the psychological theories, he or she may be morally underdeveloped. In most situations this would be the right ‘moral diagnosis’ but this may not apply to all cases. Psychological theorists may well be right in claiming that most human beings share the same developmental pattern. However, there are also variations to this process and psychological theories do not accommodate these variations. Here virtue ethics offers complementary insights, by offering us a different structure for moral growth. It views it as a passage from ‘who we are’ to ‘who we ought to become’; a transfer from good to better or from worse to less bad.

The dynamic of the developmental process, in virtue-centred ethics, implies that, although progress is a kind of movement that leads towards

becoming a more rightly ordered person, this movement may be intermittent, subject both to regression and meandering.

With regard to the content of the process of moral development, the two disciplines help us to see that this process is about improving our moral self: psychological theories express this a growth in our understanding of our relationality; virtue ethics expresses it in terms of the perfecting of the self. In the former it is expressed as a greater ability to co-ordinate different relational tasks, so that the demands of different kinds of relationships are met and fulfilled. In the latter it is expressed in the choice and performance of actions that, in line with one's virtues, promote the moral good.

While the psychological theories indicate that in the process of moral development we *adjust* our selves to the external realities of our relational life, virtue-centred ethics points to two inter-related aspects of this process: *participation* in virtuous practices, and the subsequent *acceptance of a general principle*, ('principle' in this context means a guide for one's future behaviour). It is derived from recognition of the value of practice, on the basis of one's prudent judgment, because of the value of these practices for the whole of the moral life. How can these three facets (adjustment, participation and acceptance) of the reality of moral growth be translated into the language of moral development?

First of all, 'adjustment' suggests that, to a large extent, we are not the creators of our external realities. We find ourselves in the midst of realities, in which we need to discover how best to interact with others, who share these realities with us. But even if we do influence our relational realities by our own choices, as when we choose friends or marriage partners, there are still things, in these realities, to which we need to adjust. Thus, adjustment is a process of adapting ourselves to the different relational experiences of our lives, taking responsibility for those with whom we share our lives (in an intimate, global and unique way) and managing and meeting the demands of these relationships. In order to progress in the moral life we constantly need to adapt to the relational spheres of our lives. Adjustment requires from us both partiality and impartiality, so that we can reach and maintain our integrity. Adjustment, as the psychological theories hold, is a developmental, and not a static reality: the more we adjust, the fuller will be the relational life that we are able to live. Adjustment is never fully accomplished, as there are always new situations in life, to which we will have to adjust. Nevertheless, having successfully adjusted to the realities of the past, we will be better equipped to adjust to the realities of the future.

The stress, in virtue ethics, on *participation* in practices, means that growth in the moral life is not possible without taking part in different kinds of activities that make human life flourish. Though this ethics stresses the importance of *individual* involvement in activities that engage other people, it does not deal in detail with the relational dimensions of this participation. The relationality that virtue-centered ethics adumbrates can be filled out in much more detail if we introduce the insights of our psychological authors. Although the psychological theories do not consider the idea of participation in practices, they remind us that participation in practices should not simply refer to the sphere of civil activities (to which MacIntyre primarily refers), but should include participation in the narrower sphere of our personal relationships. For example, we cannot be good husbands or wives if we devote our whole time to caring for values in our workplace. Conversely, we will not be of much use to wider society if the only thing we really care about in life is our own family. Moreover, the psychological theories stress the need to find the right balance among conflicting realities. We constantly need to work out which activities we should get involved in, so that the poise in our lives is sustained. Here the virtue of prudence has an important role to play. Our participation in practices does not serve merely the smooth running of our relational life, but also helps us to realize that we need to improve constantly and continuously so that we can lead the kind of life that is best for a human being to live. Through our participation in virtuous practices we can consciously discover the values of these practices, accept them as our general principles and, on the basis of these activities, plan our further moral activities.

Accepting values as our general principles means adopting these principles as our own. We are aware of what we are doing and we recognize that this activity is right. We are not doing something because someone has forced us to do it, rather we recognize the importance of our activity. Accepting values as our own also denotes occasional rejection of types of activities, which we consider not worthy of being engaged in. At this point we can see that moral development is a conscious process: it involves the full engagement of our cognitive capacities. This development involves a continuous expanding of self-awareness and a more and more conscious exploration of the self. However, it also involves our affective domain: relational interactions touch our emotional sphere.

On the basis of the above synthesis we can say that the process of moral development is not a once-and-for-all act, but a series of movements that take place within us and are expressed externally. Both psychology and

virtue ethics imply that moral growth proceeds from an ego-centred orientation to an other-centred orientation, but without the exclusion of the self. It proceeds from the unconscious to the conscious, from a lack of self-understanding to a better self-understanding. It proceeds from dependence on external sources of reinforcement and lack of insight about oneself, towards the progressive interiorization of one's experience and responsibility for oneself and the other.

The process of moral development is a relational journey, which leads towards the improvement of the moral self. 'Moral development' is the means by which we integrate our life activities (such as different kinds of practices) into purposeful behaviour. It is a continuing, dynamic and always-new process that really and truly has to be open-ended: there are always new situations to which one has to adjust, new practices to promote and new principles to adopt. Although there are relational patterns that are common to us all, this journey is always creative. Only such a process can be called *developmental*.

Although moral development is about progress, it is not always straightforward. It can be broken, irregular and regressive. However, growth can take place even when there is disruption and brokenness – growth in those situations, in particular growth through moral failure, can be profound. I will return to this point in Step Four.

The understanding of the 'self'

I suggest we understand the self (the I) as the innermost dimension – the core – of a person. The two disciplines discussed conceive the self in terms of consciousness; moral growth, as we noted earlier, is, largely but not exclusively, a conscious reality. But although both disciplines view the self as conscious, the psychological theories view the self as the self-in-relation, while virtue ethics understands the self as a moral agent.

Psychological accounts stress that one's true selfhood allows mutuality and connectedness with others. They hold that to know oneself is to know one's desires, needs and reasons, and that this knowledge entails the ability to assume the roles of others: to see oneself as others do; to construct a sense of self that is modeled on others' expectations and on roles that one has to fulfill; to organize one's experiences mentally – experiences that always involve interactions with others. The self and the other are always connected. Each of our four psychological theories sees development in terms of the movement from self-absorption to self-transcendence. Self-transcendence

dence is understood in terms of other-regarding concern – concern for those who are close, as well as for distant others.

Virtue ethics is also concerned with self-transcendence, but in a different sense. It is concerned with the movement from the self as at it is in the *present* to the self as it may be in the *future*. Although the present is the outcome of one's past, virtue ethics does not pay great attention, as do the psychological theories, to the past part of one's moral history. The self, in this context, denotes the capacity to act intelligibly, that is, to choose which actions to perform on the basis of one's moral understanding. A person is able to shape his or her future by becoming the kind of person he or she wants to become, because he or she has worked out his or her ideal moral self (who he or she *ought* to become). Virtue ethics concentrates primarily on the future of the moral agent. (Note that this ethics is often labeled 'teleological').

The idea of moral development, as the two approaches emphasize, implies that the self is developmental. The ideal moral self needs to be worked out on the basis of our relational nature. In order to develop morally one needs to accept 'who one is' in the light of one's moral history. The self is conditioned by the past, but it is not determined by it. This means that our past immoral behaviour does not determine our future behaviour. Conversely, our past rightly ordered behaviour does not guarantee moral success in the future.

Both disciplines, although with different emphases, stress the importance of having self-understanding. To have self-understanding is to have a realistic view of one's own self. To have a realistic self-understanding means to understand one's moral history on the basis of experience. Experiences, as the psychological theories emphasize (especially those of Kohlberg and Gilligan), involve other people. Self-understanding and experience are necessarily connected: we cannot reach moral maturity without integrating the former with the latter. Different experiences shed different light on the way we understand ourselves (a point stressed by Gilligan).

Step Four: Extending insights of developmental psychology and virtue ethics by the inclusion of concepts of 'growth through moral failure' and 'growth through unpredictable reality'.

Growth-through-moral failure

Although both disciplines indirectly refer to moral failure, neither really deals with it. Moral failure, however, is a part of life, and this cannot be

neglected in our educational systems. To neglect the concept of moral failure would be a failure in itself. Moral failure should not be simply acknowledged, but must be understood and viewed as a growth-furthering experience. *Knowing* where we went wrong disposes us to understand better how to avoid making similar mistakes in the future. A person who fails morally can have a better practical understanding of the area of life in which moral failure has occurred. Understanding the reality of moral failure can help us to develop compassion and a kind of sensitivity to the plight of those with whom we share our relational lives. It is not just moral success, but also moral failure, that can enable us to see more deeply what our relational demands are, and what living rightly is about. On the basis of this understanding we can plan our behaviour, and constantly examine it in the context of the moral good. Behaving rightly, as the outcome of moral failure, enables us to be more committed to issues as well as to people.

Thus, although moral failure is an obstacle to a regular pattern of growth, it can still be incorporated within the structure of moral development. Even if we operate with the vocabulary of psychological stages it may still be plausible to bring moral failure into developmental patterns of growth. It may be impossible to predict precisely where (at which stage) and what (the kind and depth of) moral failure will occur and how exactly we can grow out of it. Moral failure can be an awakening experience. It can enable one to see things that, without moral failure, would never have occurred (such as the power of forgiveness).

Growth-through-unpredictable reality

Another point, not discussed by the psychological theories, is the relationships in which we find ourselves totally unpredictably. They too, as much or as little as the other types, affect our moral life and moral growth. The question that arises here is how the unpredictable, which by nature is unpredictable, can be conducive to moral behaviour? Obviously, a clear-cut answer to that question, given that the growth is of its nature unpredictable, is impossible. However growth that results from an encounter with the unpredictable can be truly profound and the demands of relationships can be met in a more powerful way than when the unpredictable does not happen. The unpredictable situation, such as the illness of someone close, can be an opportunity to develop virtues that otherwise may have not been developed. Moreover, it can give new meaning to our existing virtues. Unexpected realities involve other people: either directly (as when one falls in love with another person) or by means of an event that involves a human

being (like a car accident that involves *someone's* injury or death). There is always a relational reality. Therefore, bringing this reality to our consciousness can lead us to a fuller realization of our connectedness with others; we can begin to act in a way that expresses our deep concern for others and for ourselves. It is the particular qualities of persons whom we encounter in our lives that shape the process of moral growth. It is not simply their existence but their talents, problems, their whole life histories, which can help us to unfold our potentials. An unexpected reality can awaken us to finding the fuller meaning of the moral life. Contingent relationships change the moral landscape of our imagination and broaden the view of our own moral selves. They are a means to self-discovery; discovery of who we are now and who we are capable of becoming. The unpredictable other can improve our understanding of the self as a moral agent, influence the practice of virtue and give new meaning to activities that promote the moral good. It can restructure our cognitive capacities and emotional engagements. Unexpected realities make changes in us. This theme can help us to take into account a variety of experiences that influence our moral outlook and moral behaviour, and that empower us to a new self-understanding. Through contingent relationships we can unfold our potential – a potential that would not have been realized if we had not encountered the unpredictable other.

Conclusion

The idea of moral development is not intended to give the impression that moral growth is an easy enterprise. This idea implies that we are subject to change, and that this change is inaugurated in the self – here lies its dynamic character. John Henry Newman (1973, p. 100) said: 'To live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often'. Thus, moral development is a process that is *never completed*, because there is always something that needs to be unfolded more fully. A person can always become more just, more temperate, more brave, more compassionate, more faithful and so forth.

Moral development is *cumulative*. On the model of moral development sketched here, human capacities (cognitive, affective, interpersonal) play a central role. Also, this model of moral development takes into account who we are and who we ought to become in the context of our past.

The process of moral development starts with 'who we are' and leads to 'who we ought to become'. However, a person's character is his or her moral history. That is why the past is also important. We can reflect on it

and learn from it. We can see how well we are moving towards the moral good. Thus, the past – ‘already’, in terms of ‘who we have been’ is linked to the now, ‘who we are’ at present, and gives us a background for the future – ‘not yet’, or ‘who we ought to become’ (our own *telos*). The *telos* is not a static point – something that can be reached, as in a race. There are many unexpected realities that make the *telos* open to redefinition, reformulation and unfolding, even though the basic idea of the moral good remains the same.

The concept of moral development belongs to a language that has significance independently of the contents of the values of specific cultures, and it can, therefore, serve as a useful concept in a variety of contemporary multi-religious, multi-disciplinary and multi-cultural debates. It is an essentially tolerant concept. This means that every culture, at every moment of its history, would have an idea of moral growth and moral maturity and will be able to list some basic virtues that constitute right behaviour. And even though the virtues, values and moral outlooks do differ in terms of their contents, the lists themselves do not really change. For example, if we take patience, we could say that patience has a different meaning in New York and San Salvador. However, both New Yorkers and San Salvadorians would know whether their fellow citizens are patient or not. And it is here that both individual beings and different cultures and religions can find a common ground upon which to provide space for ‘moral development’.

In the beginning of this article I posed two questions: whether moral development is learnable/teachable, and whether education as system of training can have a space for it. If education is more than a form of ‘child-farming for the sake of the state’ as proposed by Plato (even if we agree that the desired outcome of education is – to put it in Greek philosophical terms – a just society), but is, rather, a form of ‘unfolding of the human potential’ for the benefit of both the state and the individual, then ‘moral development’ – a process that enables the unfolding of human potential – seems to be not only a concept compatible with education (including philosophy of education), but a key concept for any discourse that involves business, professional, or, in fact, any human interaction. This concept, in spite of its generic character, allows us to focus on a person as a whole. In contemporary moral philosophy there is a tendency to focus on one or two aspects of moral growth. Some writers concentrate exclusively on, for example, the rightness of moral action, others on detachment from actions. Bringing the concept of moral development to our contemporary debates allows us to integrate different concerns into one, namely, the concern for

moral maturity, and this concern, now more urgently than ever, should have our attention.

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