A Critical Examination of the Appropriateness of Characterising Character Education in Terms of the Inculcation of Virtues

Yi-Lin Chen[*]

Abstract

A troublesome question that first confronts a researcher into character education is the concept itself. In other words, it is incumbent of one to specify the particular version under consideration. The purpose of this study was to draw on two ready-made frameworks for classification, of which the most popular and influential version, i.e. character education in a non-expansive sense, which is generally characterised in terms of the inculcation of virtues, is chosen as the target of discussion. In contrast to the elusive large concept of character, terms related to virtue are more concrete and easier to operationalise, and it seems to make sense to shift the focus from character to virtues, and characterise character education in terms of the inculcation of virtues. However, the case is made that for character education to precede more productively, some misgivings and shortcomings of this

[*] Yi-Lin Chen, Assistant Professor, Center for Teacher Education, National Taiwan University
E-mail: chenyilin@ntu.edu.tw

(over) simplified characterisation needs to be taken into full account and properly remedied. The most important issue is that character education runs the risk of giving the false impression that it is nothing more than a duplication of the "bag of virtues" approach. Secondly, the cultivation of the various virtues is emphasised at the cost of paying due consideration to the inevitable outcome, namely, the individualisation of (moral) character and its sister thesis of the varieties of moral personality. Finally, considering the multiple senses of character and the primacy of the ethical sense of character, it is argued that non-expansive character education is defensible with the caveat that it is "moral character" rather than "character as a whole" that is at issue.

以「德目教學」界定「品格教育」
之適當性探討

陳伊琳[*]

摘　要

　　品格教育研究者首先面臨的棘手問題便是「品格教育」概念本身，明確界定所探討的品格教育派別於是成為他／她責無旁貸的責任。筆者利用兩個現成的分類架構，挑選出最盛行、最富影響力的版本，即以「品格教育的根本義」做為批判性檢視的對象，一般是從「德目教學」的角度予以界定。相較於「品格」這個微妙、難以捉摸的佶大概念，「德目語詞」顯得較為具體、容易操作，因此論述焦點由品格轉向德目似乎是可以理解的，這同時說明了以「德目教學」界定品格教育的表面信度。然而，本文旨在論證為了品格教育更有成效地進展，這種（過度）簡單的界定所產生的一些疑慮與缺失，需要被納入充分考量與適度補救。首先，它容易給人「品格教育不過是『德目錦囊法』的翻版」的錯誤印象。其次，這種品格教育觀在強調培養各種殊德的同時，未能適當關照德目教學必然生成的後果──（道德）品格的個殊化與道德人格的多樣性。最後，有鑑於品格的多義性及其倫理意涵的首要性，筆者認為「品格教育的根本義」是可以證成的，惟須特別強調的是，精確而言，當代品格教育關

*　陳伊琳，國立臺灣大學師資培育中心助理教授
　　電子郵件：chenyilin@ntu.edu.tw

心的是「道德品格」，而非「品格整體」。

關鍵詞： 品格教育、德目教學、德目錦囊法、品格個殊化、道德品格

Introduction

Contemporary character education[1] has been popular in current educational policies and practices in many countries (Kristjánsson, 2002; McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999). However, despite its vitality, many scholars (Kohn, 1997; Kristjánsson, 2002; Leming, 1997; Lickona, 1998; Lockwood, 1997; McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999) have cried out for the necessity to place it under critical scrutiny, and it has even been suggested that the task should be undertaken by a philosopher of education (Nash, 1997). This paper can be seen as an attempt made to contribute to this large project. Specifically, it aims to subject an influential conception of character education to a critical examination.

Since a review of the relevant literature indicates that the concept of "character education" is a major source of confusion in itself, it is suggested that it should first be clarified, and the general understanding that character education is a distinct approach to moral education[2] (Noddings, 1997) is not sufficiently informative. Considering the great variety of existing versions of character education, this paper aims to put a specific prevalent and robust notion of character education to the test.

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[1] It needs to be noted that a prefix which is often added to the current character education is "contemporary" or "new". This is because it is widely accepted that character education is not only the latest fad, but also the oldest mission in American education (Ryan, 1996). For that matter, the present revival of interest in character education represents a resurgence of awareness of the issues and concerns which have been a constant in education (Purpel, 1997), and this is best understood from a historical perspective.

[2] From a historical perspective, it is appropriate to regard character education as a distinct approach to moral education, along with two other dominant approaches at that time, i.e. values clarification and Kohlberg's cognitive developmental theory of moral reasoning.

The case will be made that it can afford a plausible (and provisional) account from which character education proceeds, but character education thus characterised is not without problems. Some defects of this simple characterisation are brought to light which need to be properly remedied, if character education is to proceed in a more sophisticated way.

To this end, I will firstly, delineate the whole contour of character education developed so far by means of two frameworks of classification, and secondly, pinpoint a particular version of character education as the target of my discussion. This is character education in the non-expansive sense (non-expansive character education, NECE, for short), and it is widely accepted to be the most popular and widespread faction and generally understood to be an educational enterprise aimed at the inculcation of virtues.❸ After being subject to critical scrutiny, certain

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❸ The terms, "virtue" and its opposite "vice," are old-fashioned, but the concerns are still relevant. Nowadays, they are largely captured by terms of character traits, such as honesty, justice, courage, temperance, and their opposites. Virtues and vices are generally defined as being relatively stable dispositions to act in certain ways. For example, an honest person is believed to act honestly across a variety of situations. For this reason, they are often confused with purely behavioural dispositions. A major problem with this is that certain essential elements of virtues are thereby omitted, which distorts the real nature of virtues. These missing dimensions of virtues are not specifiable in behavioural terms. For Aristotle, the agent's proper psychological states are indispensable to the possession of virtues, because "we generally think that we should not only try to do the right thing, but also aspire to do it in the right spirit (Dent, 1984: 7)." "The right spirit" signals an essential set of complex psychological states which a virtuous person must embrace, and this is so central that it serves as an important criterion to differentiate virtues (and character traits) from mere behavioural dispositions. For example, without the simultaneous presence of appropriate psychological states, a boy who has a behavioural disposition to treat his sister kindly cannot be said to possess kindness as a trait of character (and virtue). As a result, in order to ascertain whether or not someone has a particular virtue, our moral interest does

shortcomings of the common practice of characterising character education in terms of the inculcation of virtues are highlighted. Among others, a familiar doubt often cast on this conception is whether character education is simply a duplication of the "bag of virtues" approach, derogatorily dubbed by Kohlberg, who criticises the problematic practice that the virtues are taught in an entirely separate and fragmented way, as if they were randomly scattered in a bag and completely disconnected to one another. Secondly, a serious drawback of this characterisation is that the task of cultivating a full set of virtues is often emphasised at the cost of giving due attention to the critical issue of the individualisation of (moral) character and the variety of moral personality. That is, it turns a blind eye to the obvious fact that virtuous people in the world are in actuality of different sorts. What is more, considering the close connection between virtue and character, a question about the terminology in use is raised: if the inculcation of virtues is the primary concern, why choose the term of "character education" instead of "virtue education?" After exploring the three senses of character, the case will be made that NECE is mainly being talked about in the ethical sense of character, and that the practice of narrowing "character" down to "moral character" is defensible. Hence, it must be borne in mind that it is moral character rather than character as a whole that is at issue.

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not stop at observing what he/she does, but extends to the motive, desire and intent displayed in, or revealed by, what is done (Dent, 1984). To ensure that one's psychological state is on the right track is essential to attributing a virtue. In a nutshell, it is widely accepted that virtues are "dispositions to act, think and feel in certain ways (Annas, 2003: 21)."

Framework of classification: "non-expansive" and "expansive" conceptions of character education

As already mentioned, a thorny question which confronts a researcher of character education in the first place is the concept itself, given that there are an incredibly large number of factions of character education in existence. This fact explains why it is claimed that "'character education' is clearly no single thing, and is capable of being interpreted in a number of different ways (McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999: 133)." As a result, it is incumbent on the researcher to specify the particular version under consideration.

Fortunately, there are two ready-made classificatory schemas respectively proposed for use by McLaughlin and Halstead (1999) and Kristjánsson (2002). Both of these classify the various factions into two categories, namely, NECE and expansive (expansive character education, ECE, for short), but it needs to be noted that the criteria according to which the classifications are made are different. More specifically, although Kristjánsson takes his cue from McLaughlin and Halstead, he develops a different set of criteria according to which his specification of non-expansive and expansive forms of character education is substantially different from that of McLaughlin and Halstead.

Let me begin with McLaughlin and Halstead's framework in which the three criteria of classification are, individually, the nature of the rationale for character education, the nature of the qualities of character proposed for development, and the emphasis placed on the exercise of appropriate reasoning on the part of the student. In the case of NECE, the rationale is limited, the qualities of character are narrowly

conceived, and the emphasis placed on the role of reasoning is restricted (McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999). More specifically, firstly, character education is usually regarded as being a remedy for individual and social ills. Secondly, the qualities of character suggested for development are basic core values, which are alleged to be universally accepted. Finally, the cultivation of these qualities of character precedes an open discussion of controversial moral issues (McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999).❹

In contrast, the rationale given by ECE is more elaborate. For instance, in some cases, the nature of a liberal democratic society is taken to be a context for its argument for character education (McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999). As to the qualities of character, they go beyond certain basic values to include a complex set of substantial and particular virtues. In some cases, these are intended to be applied to particular schooling contexts, such as religious schools, while in others, these qualities of character are not directly connected to moral life as a whole, but to a particular domain of life. For example, civic virtues are specific to the political and public dimension of one's life and education for citizenship. Finally, the nature and scope of moral reasoning is especially underscored.

Even if McLaughlin and Halstead's schema provides a useful preliminary contrast between NECE and ECE on the one hand, and highlights the shared concern

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❹ Other characteristics of NECE include: (1) great emphasis being placed on the manifestation of proper behaviour, which is seen as evidence of the success of the inculcation of virtues; (2) character education should be undertaken systematically and explicitly, and it is necessary to directly instruct moral rights and wrongs; (3) emphasis should be placed on the influence of moral examples set by the teacher and the school ethos (McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999).

of character education, i.e. the development of certain qualities of character on the other hand, I agree with Kristjánsson on the point that this schema doesn't do justice to NECE, since it unduly favours the common criticism of NECE. Among other things, not all NECE ignores the important role of reasoning, or regards character education as merely being a remedy for social deterioration and moral crisis (Kristjánsson, 2002). As a result, he puts forth an allegedly superior framework of classification, the distinctiveness of which can generally be illustrated in three aspects (Kristjánsson, 2002): the first is that NECE is not characterised as neglecting moral reasoning or offering a naïve rationale for character education. Secondly, it points out that moral reasoning is not equally stressed by all conceptions of ECE. For example, religious-based character education may not place the same emphasis on moral reasoning. Thirdly, an advantage of Kristjánsson's framework is that it can not only classify various factions of character education, but also distinguish character education from non-character education orientated approaches to values education, such as values clarification and Kohlberg's developmental theory of moral reasoning. This schema is graphically presented in table 1.

According to Kristjánsson, moral cosmopolitanism and methodological substantivism are two sufficient conditions and defining characteristics of NECE. Firstly, in terms of the content of character education, moral cosmopolitanism indicates that "there exist transcultural moral values that transcend the boundaries of time and geography," and the precise core of character education is the cultivation of these universal virtues (Kristjánsson, 2002: 138). In contrast, moral perspectivism contends that the virtues espoused by NECE are "too narrow, too underdetermined, or even, simply—qua transcultural values—non-existent," and therefore, they should

Table 1　Trends in values education from 1965 to the present

| | VALUES TO BE TAUGHT | |
	Perspectivist	*Transcultural*
EMPHASIS IN TEACHING *SUBSTANCE*	Religious-based character education Liberationist pedagogy/ critical postmodernism Civic education (ECE)	Non-expansive character education (NECE)
FORM	Values clarification	Philosophy for children Moral reasoning/ developmental approach

Source：Kristjánsson (2002: 143).

be complemented or replaced by "a set of perspective-sensitive virtues, reflecting more specific moral concerns of a society, culture or religion (Kristjánsson, 2002: 138)." The job of ECE is to cultivate an expansive set of perspectivist virtues. Secondly, in terms of the emphasis within teaching, while methodological substantivism places more emphasis on the content than the method by which these moral values and virtues are taught, for methodological formalism, moral education aims to develop ways of thinking about moral issues (Kristjánsson, 2002). Based on this premise, both NECE and ECE are methodologically substantial, and concerned with the inculcation of virtues and values, while the moral content of the former is transcultural, and that of the latter is perspectivist.

In the light of the framework for classification, the target of discussion in the paper is NECE, which is generally characterised in terms of the inculcation of virtues. This choice is made basically on the grounds that it is widely agreed that the contemporary character education movement is concerned with the notion in a non-expansive sense (Kristjánsson, 2002; McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999). This is made

explicit by Kristjánsson (2002: 137):

> The view trotted out under the banner of 'character education' in the United States and elsewhere is more often than not synonymous with a specific conception of character education, espoused by thinkers such as Lickona, Kilpatrick, Wynne and Bennett, a conception that I shall, following McLaughlin and Halstead's (1999) lead, term "non-expansive."

Some misgivings of characterising character education as the inculcation of virtues

In general, my response to this common practice of defining character education in terms of the inculcation of virtues is two-folded. For one thing, insofar as the close connection between virtue and character is concerned, characterising character education in terms of the inculcation of virtues seems fairly sensible. However, for another thing, this simple characterisation is not without problems. Before setting out to spell out the specific misgivings of it, I want to make explicit the conceptual affinity between virtue and character which grounds the apparent plausibility of this simple characterisation in question.

In the first place, let me cite some statements below as proof to show the conceptual affinity in question:

(1) Dent (1984: 4) puts it:

although the term "virtue" may sound awkwardly in ordinary talk, people still do discuss a person's honesty, generosity, kindness, selfishness, greed, malice etc.; and in so talking they are talking of his virtues and vices even though these specific words are not used.

(2) Goldie (2004: 40) says that:

whilst we don't these days use the words "virtue" and "vice" ("vice" these days has an entirely different sense—"vice-rings" and so on), we are still talking about virtues and vices when we talk about character traits as being good or bad—about Bryron's being kind and about David owen's (supposedly) being a shit. So whilst the language that moral philosophers use may be somewhat out of date, the topic is not. There are still kind and generous people, and cruel and heatless ones.

(3) Carr (1991: 44-45) indicates that:

For us the term "virtue" refers primarily to particular states or qualities of human character such as honesty or generosity or perhaps less surely to the idea of a rule or principle which people invest with some sort of moral value.

(4) Haydon (2006: 36) has it that:

We have in English an old word that we can use as roughly equivalent to "a (morally) good way a person can be in their thinking and action." The word is "virtue." Though it has rather fallen out of use in everyday language it is a useful word for picking out the kinds of personal quality that we find morally desirable or admirable. So we can say that tolerance, unselfishness or integrity are virtues.

These notions demonstrate that the specific word, "virtue" is old-fashioned and hence is seldom used in present-day ordinary language. The same objects previously described in terms of virtue are now signified in terms of character trait. A virtue is basically a trait, state, or disposition of character which is relatively enduring, and an

excellence acquired and developed over time (McLaughline & Halstead, 1999). Or, bluntly, as Hursthouse (2006: 141) puts it, "virtues have to be character traits." It seems plausible to say that it is exactly this strong link between the two words, virtue and character, that makes sense of the apparent plausibility of the characterisation at issue.

In the next place, Cunningham (2005: 168) offers a reason further explaining people's preference for virtue to character as follows:

Character is difficult or impossible to operationalize—to verbalize, to theorize, and to rationalize—and so it has been difficult to study. Educational researchers have concentrated on less encompassing terms: specific traits, such as honesty, self-deceit, self-esteem, specific behaviors, such as drug use or cheating, specific academic skills, artistic creativity, or physical stamina and prowess.

That is, in contrast to the tricky large concept of character, terms of virtue are more concrete and easier to pin down the objects in question. In this regard, Hartshorne and May's celebrated "Character Education Inquiry"[5] is a case in point.

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❺ It was a five-year project (1924-1929) launched at the Teachers College, Columbia University, at the request of, and financed by, the Institute of Social and Religious Research, and co-directed by Hartshorne and May. It was undertaken in a wide atmosphere of stressing the use of scientific laboratory methods to investigate the objective effects of moral and religious education. The research report was published under the general title, 'Studies in the Nature of Character', which comprises three volumes: volume Ⅰ: Studies in Deceit (1928), volume Ⅱ: Studies in service and self-control (1929), and volume Ⅲ (1930): Studies in the organization of character (1930) (Hartshorne & May, 1930). This study is generally acknowledged to be the most ambitious and extensive empirical study on the subject of character. Besides, it is seen as a landmark in the history of character education, since it is widely accepted that it delivered a death blow to character education

They admitted that although the objective of this study was to measure the solid reality of character, given its elusive nature, it had to be approached in a somewhat piecemeal fashion (Hartshorne & May, 1930).❻ For this reason, the conduct tests were implemented in the form of an observation of the research subjects' actual performance, which involved developing tests of four types of behaviour, namely, deception, service, inhibition and persistence (emphasis mine) (Hartshorne & May, 1930). It needs to be noted that these four sorts of behaviour are also understood as being traits of character and terms of virtue. For example, deception (and its opposite, honesty) is classified as one type of behaviour in the first place while, when it comes to the analysis of the research findings, it is treated as a trait of character. Here, a change in focus from character to virtue (and even further to its associated patterns of behaviour) is fairly obvious.

In spite of the advantage of shifting the focus of attention from character to virtue, as indicated previously, this simple characterisation of character education in terms of the inculcation of virtues is nevertheless seriously deficient, since it runs the risk of neglecting to consider some crucial issues of character education which need to be further addressed.

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at one time.

❻ To be specific, in the study, character was understood in four aspects, namely, intellectual factors, dynamic factors (such as desires, attitudes, and motives), performance factors (social behaviour), and self control (which refers to the relationship among the former three factors, and their relationship with social-self integration) (Hartshorne & May, 1930), and therefore, moral knowledge tests, attitude tests, and conduct tests were designed and carried out respectively.

Duplication of the "bag of virtues" approach?

A question often raised about NECE is how to differentiate it from the "bag of virtues" approach, which is severely criticised by Kohlberg.[7] McLaughlin and Halstead (1999: 145) express this concern and suggest a way out of the misgiving:

> Often the virtues are presented as if they were distinct items on a list which can be tackled systematically and separately by educators. This has been described as the "If it's Tuesday, this must be Honesty's approach (Kohn, 1997: 154)." Further, the impression is sometimes given that the virtues are merely separable and isolatable pieces of behavior. In the absence of an overall and adequately sophisticated characterisation of the nature and structure of the virtues, and a specification of the ingredients of the sort of practical reasoning with which they must be inseparably connected, proponents of "character education" are in danger of being left with a mere "bag of virtues" for transmission. This makes it difficult to address, let alone resolve, questions of meaning, priority and coherence with respect to

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[7] It is well-known that Kohlberg's objections to character education are mainly expressed in his criticism of the "bag of virtues" approach. However, in a later paper co-authored with his colleagues, Kohlberg concedes that his earlier work errs in confusing Aristotle's approach to moral education with the contemporary fashionable "bag of virtues" approach. As a result, his criticism of the latter cannot necessarily be applied to the former, since it does not do justice to Aristotle's conception of virtue, and his envisaged processes of character education (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). This is manifest in Kohlberg's remark that "despite its being named 'virtue,' the 'bag of virtues' had virtually nothing in common with the classical tradition of the discourse of virtue," since "what he speaks of would be the imposition of arbitrarily chosen exterior acts upon students in the name of virtue (Power et al., 1989: 146)."

the virtues. For example, it is difficult to attend to important considerations relating to the overall structure of a person's qualities of character and virtue. (emphasis mine)

This doubt is derived from the familiar flawed practice, namely that character education is often conducted in the form of transmitting a list of virtues, each of which is specified by a set of definite rules of conduct, as if a virtue could be fully defined by a narrowly specified behavioural pattern, independently of the context. This misconception of character education falls prey to Kohlberg's critique of the "bag of virtues" approach according to which moral virtues are understood in terms of the teaching of specific rules of behaviour which constitute the substantial contents of moral education (Hamm, 1977). Moreover, this problematic practice treats the virtues as if they were completely detachable and disconnected to each other altogether. No wonder, the virtues are often inculcated one by one in an entirely isolated way, e.g. one virtue per week. On this view, the formation of virtuous character is seen to be the mere aggregation of lots of freestanding virtues. This defective picture is well depicted by Kent (1999: 111) as follows:

> Virtuous character threatens to dissolve into a hodgepodge of admirable traits, leaving moral development to look like nothing more than a matter of acquiring more such traits, no matter which combination or in which order.

With regard to the genesis and prevalence of the defective practice, some explanations are needed. For a start, the practice of specifying a given virtue by a typical set of moral rules appropriate to it has to do with the common endorsement of a defectively narrow understanding of virtue. More specifically, these behavioural

rules are merely generalisations about what typically counts as specifications of particular virtues, for example, "generally, standing one's ground in the face of the enemy is brave," and "generally, giving goods to those more in need is an act of generosity (Sherman, 1999: 39)." A serious drawback of this is that it fails to address the intelligent adaptability and situation-sensitiveness internal to moral virtues. These features are a decisive discriminative criterion of a virtuous person from a moral novice. A virtuous person's moral understanding is manifested in his/her delicate decisions, which display sensitivity to the particulars of the situations, whereas a moral beginner mainly acts merely out of habit, and is therefore unable to respond to situations flexibly (Annas, 2003). In this regard, Annas (2003: 26) compares a virtuous and practically wise person to a master plumber, and highlights the contrast between a novice's routinised habits and an expert's situation-sensitivities:

> What makes them experts, rather than learners, is that they understand what they do. They do not mechanically follow the rule-book, but approach each new challenge in a way informed by long practice, but sensitive to the particular demands of the situation, and ready to respond in creative ways to unfamiliar challenges. We want our practical experts to have learned from experience and practice, but we do not expect them to have developed a routinized habit that produces predictable outcomes whatever the nature of the individual challenges.

Moreover, since these rules of thumb are simply extracted from some "characteristic or paradigmatic contexts for the expression of virtue, and characteristic ways of acting (Sherman, 1999: 39)," they are undoubtedly limited in

their ability to account for the related virtues. As a result, a pernicious consequence is that, if they are mistakably identified with the virtues, some substances of virtues are thereby neglected, or dismissed out of consideration altogether. For example, courage is traditionally seen to be a military virtue, since it is often characterised as a virtue specifically dealing with physically dangerous situations. Given this over-simplistic and misleading conception, it is not uncommon to find that someone is physically courageous, but not brave in the presence of social threats and pressures, say, ridicule and disapproval. In summary, it is not possible to specify any particular virtue exhaustively with a comprehensive list of relevant rules of conduct, nor is it appropriate to reduce a given virtue to a limited number of moral rules.

Whilst acknowledging that this misgiving has some truth in it, especially with reference to actual character education practised in schools, I submit that properly construed character education can escape this criticism, and that the crux lies in explicating the interrelationship of the virtues. More explicitly, I agree with McLaughlin and Halstead on the point that in order to dispel this misgiving, the main job consists in clarifying the very nature of virtue, and the relationship among the virtues in particular, which is typically rendered in the long-standing doctrine of the unity of the virtues (UV, for short).[8] By and large, UV is intended to express the

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[8] UV is open to many interpretations. Hursthouse (1999) indicates that Timothy Chappell once claimed that there were thirty versions of the doctrine of the unity of the virtues. Among them, a classic version holds that one can have a virtue in a developed form if, and only if, one has all of the virtues, and this view is claimed to be representative of Aristotle's notion of the doctrine (Badhwar, 1996; MacIntyre, 1985). More specifically, it contends that one cannot possess one virtue without possessing the rest, and one can possess a virtue if, and only if, one has all of them. In other words, the possession of any virtue entails the possession of all the others, and the absence of any virtue entails the

thought that the virtues are unified in some sense, at least insofar as the appropriate exercise of any given virtue demands specific knowledge of all the other virtues. This is most clearly manifested in complex moral cases where more than one moral consideration is relevant. In order to appropriately exercise a particular virtue, the moral agent must weigh its importance in relation to all of the other concerns simultaneously present in the same moral situation. It is in this sense that the virtues cannot be seen as being entirely disconnected from each other. For that matter, the individual virtues are not to be acquired in a wholly separate, disconnected way. Quite the contrary, the unavoidable chances of the compresence of moral concerns of (some of) the various virtues in a complex moral situation highlight the point that the virtues are unified and connected to each other in a certain sense. In a nutshell, the gist of UV is that the more virtuous one is, the more integrated one's acquired virtues are with each other. That is, the educational goal of becoming virtuous cannot be exhausted solely by the idea of accumulating the virtues as more as possible, since the unity and integration of the virtues is also an indispensable aspect of the educational business of the inculcation of virtues. On this score, UV is suitably taken as a further step of the notion of the inculcation of the various particular virtues.

Neglect of the individualisation of character

Another problem with this simple characterisation is that the natural

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absence of all of them. For that matter, UV is meant to express "the mutual implication of the virtues (Halper, 1999)." In this paper, I adopt Wolf's (2007) weak and more plausible version of UV, which is said to regard the common observation that someone has some virtues without the coincidence of others as a platitude. For a full and detailed argument for this weak version of UV, please consult Wolf (2007).

consequence of the inculcation of virtues, viz. the particularity and individuality of character, is overlooked, and this is well illustrated by Kupperman (1991: 9-10):

> Character has much to do, we might say, with the particularity of a person's life, with making it the possibly distinctive life of this person. This suggests a more continuous and less impersonal role for character than that of, say, the virtue of being honest. What matters in the virtue of honesty will be pretty much shared by all honest people, and its importance will be largely limited to those special moments when we are offered a chance to be dishonest. What matters in your character may well be important, continuously, as shaping your life and the way you experience it, and it also will set you apart from at least some other people of good character.

Thus characterised, character education presents itself as if moral agents, by being educated, would ultimately turn into virtuous people of the same kind, i.e. perfectly virtuous people. Thus, the individuality of (moral) character as a necessary result of this educational business is unduly brushed off in the existing simple-minded discourse about fully inculcating all the virtues indiscriminately in people. Character education thus portrayed is very likely to convey a misleading, or rather mistaken message to the effect that the ideal moral character is singular, and one and the same for all, and that, through education, all people are expected and presumed to be able to develop and possess all virtues equally and fully at long last. To debunk the unreality of this view, I shall argue that, it is imperative for character education to fully take into account a more personal dimension of character development and certain decisive factors which are unavoidably involved in the educational process,

and consequently, conducive to the individualisation of (moral) character. These include the influence of temperament, the assuming of different social roles and occupations, and the pursuit of different good lives, to name some. After taking full account of this issue, I submit, we are ready to accept Flanagan's notion of the varieties of moral personality, and this raises a further question about how to set an appropriate and defensible goal of character education for real people.

On balance, addressing this more personal aspect of character development helps to highlight both the individual's active role and the limits of one's agency in constructing character. In terms of the former, this theme may act as a healthy antidote to the predominant instrumental argument for character education[9] by shedding light on the significance of character building for personal flourishing. As to the latter, highlighting the inevitable influence that temperament may exert on the inculcation of virtues acts as an important counter-weight to an exaggerated claim on

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[9] I have argued elsewhere that the relevant literature on character education is permeated by a means-end argument, according to which, contemporary character education is proposed to be a remedy against perceived social ills and moral decline (Arthur, 2005; Lockwood, 1997; McLaughlin & Halstead, 1999; Molnar, 1997; Rusnak, 1998). Put differently, a healthy dose of character education is seen to be a panacea to prevent the young from causing disturbing problems (Rusnak, 1998). This instrumental argument is at risk of misconceiving character education as being nothing more than an effective means of reducing social problems. More seriously, it stresses the social benefits which are likely to be generated by character education at the cost of articulating its intrinsic value, i.e. the significance of character development for the individual. If it is fair to say that character education is worthwhile, not only in its own right, but also for the many desirable results it may produce (Pritchard, 1988), evidently enough, the existing discourse is one-dimensional and not sufficiently profound, since the intrinsic value of character education is inappropriately downplayed, or even entirely ignored. For that matter, a sound argument which maintains an appropriate balance between instrumental value versus intrinsic value, and social benefits versus personal flourishing, is badly needed.

behalf of deliberate self-making with regard to character (Jacob, 2001). This is the case because it is shown that our inherited temperaments unavoidably set limits to our disposition toward certain virtues, and away from others. For example, in the cases of fortune's favourites, their temperamental dispositions endow them with a salutary breeding ground for certain virtues, the cultivation of which thereby appears less difficult, or relatively easy.[10] Also, since people are simply passive recipients of the blessing or misfortune of their temperament, we cannot be held responsible for having, or lacking, certain temperamental dispositions, nor can we be accountable for the way in which temperament figures in the inculcation of virtues, and thus contributes to the individualisation of character. Briefly, this educational business in question is not wholly within one's control.

Further, the thesis of the individualisation of character encourages people to consider the development of character as a whole, and to think about the proper place of each virtue, and the relative importance and priority of the various virtues in one's life. On that score, it helps to remedy a defect made clear by Davidson (2005: 226):

> I would suggest that character education has broken character down into its composite elements, but has failed to present an adequate vision of character in its wholeness—especially for pre-adolescents and adolescents who require a deeper rationale of what it is and why it's important.

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[10] Aristotle touched on this idea briefly in his concept of "natural virtue." It is well known that natural virtue is not Aristotle's major concern, since natural dispositions are simply an inclination to act in certain ways, and without the guidance of reason, they are liable to lead people astray and are, therefore, harmful. Briefly, natural virtue without reason is like a strong body which may stumble badly without sight (Aristotle, 1998).

In summary, I begin with NECE, which is generally understood to be the inculcation of virtues. It is argued that, firstly, to distance it from the "bag of virtues" approach, it is imperative to elaborate on the nature of virtue, and illustrate the relationship among the virtues. Secondly, in order to forestall the misconception that virtuous people must be of the same sort, the missing piece of the individualisation of character as a necessary corollary of the inculcation of virtues must be brought into the present puzzle of character education.

Character education or virtue education?

It is odd to find that in contrast to the conspicuous place of virtue, character is mentioned far less in current character education discourse. Yet, is not "character" education? It may be said that terms of virtue are more workable and manageable than the huge concept of character, which according to Cunningham is difficult to operationalise. Another possible reason has to do with the theoretical concern of virtue ethics, which is widely recognised as being the main philosophical foundation of contemporary character education, specifically NECE. That is, virtue ethicists consider that virtue, rather than character, is most central to their theory. For them, "the concept of virtue is in some way theoretically dominant (Watson, 2003: 232)," and character is generally understood to be a collection of dispositions, virtues and vices (Athanassoulis, 2005).

In the face of the imbalanced focus on virtue, people may wonder why it should not just be called "virtue education."[11] After all, it seems more appropriate to

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[11] Sherman does use the term (Sherman, 1999).

describe what is really going on as being virtue education rather than character education. A simple response is, as mentioned above, that the word "virtue" is outdated, while "character" is still in wide use. Apart from this, I will argue that taking a close look at the tight connection and subtle differences between virtue and character helps to judge whether character education, thus characterised, is defensible. For this purpose, McKinnon's account of the three senses of character will be heavily drawn on.

Three senses of character

Naturalistic sense of character

As its name implies, the naturalistic sense of character has to do with human nature. Its main idea is roughly that: human beings are born with various dispositions, whether physical or psychological, but without a character, and that it is part of human nature to construct a character afterwards (McKinnon, 1999). With maturity, every normal human being is destined to go through it. In short, the naturalist sense stresses that the task of becoming a person with character is innate to human nature.

More specifically, in the very early years, small children begin to see themselves as discrete entities, physically separate from others, and in possession of subjective perspectives and experiences of the world. At that time, what they have is a proto-self.[12] At this level, the self has no distinctive characteristics which can give its possessor determinate directions. Later on, they begin to observe and assess other

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[12] This is "a minimal person," in Flanagan's (1991) terms. A minimal person is an individual (in a physical sense) who possesses a subjective point of view (Flanagan, 1991).

people's characters, and consider the kind of character they judge as being admirable and better to emulate, before deciding the kind of person they want to be in a self-reflexive way. Moreover, people are not satisfied with merely choosing their character in some way, and instead, they go further to reflect on their choices and assess them. This is because "humans are the kinds of beings who cannot thrive or lead fulfilling lives unless they have evaluated their commitments and goals, and are relatively pleased with them (McKinnon, 1999: 60)." This assessment provides them with an important source of self-worth, because when they endeavour to narrow the gap between the present character and the admired one, they achieve a sense of self-worth according to the proximity of the fit.

This raises a further question about the criteria by which character is properly evaluated. Since people have some shared consensus on the evaluative valence of character, it is implausible to say that the criteria are entirely subjective, and this is clearly demonstrated by people's reproach of a criminal's cruelty, and their praise of the bravery shown by a person who rescues a child from a burning building. In this respect, McKinnon (1999) contends that there are objective evaluative standards rooted in human nature, by which we evaluate people's characters, and determine what it is to be a good person leading a good life. Here, the ethical sense of character is thus brought to the forefront.

Ethical sense of character

The use of character in its ethical sense is most familiar to us, since it is a commonplace that "the modern concept of character emphasizes aspects of what a person is that are closely related to good (or bad) ethical choice (Kupperman, 1999: 202)." When we talk about someone's virtues or vices, we refer to some traits of

character in the ethical sense, and in this respect, it can be said that character education in the current form is mainly being talked about in the ethical sense of character.

Notwithstanding its centrality, it should be noted that character cannot be exhausted by moral traits. Then, what else is implied by character? On this point, Kupperman's two pairs of concept, i.e. strong and weak character on the one hand, and good and bad character on the other, help to illustrate the point that character cannot be reduced to a simple collection of virtues and vices. The two twin concepts make up four states of character, namely, a good and strong character, a good and weak character, a bad and strong character, and a bad and weak character.[18] That is, the criteria by which the two contrasting pairs are made are not only different, but also independent. An obvious example to illustrate their independence is that we would be relieved to find that a bad person does not persist in doing evil things.

This familiar set of contrasting good and bad characters is classified in the light of the goodness of character. If someone is judged to possess a good character, it suggests the presence of virtues and the absence of vices (Kupperman, 1991). Moral paragons are paradigmatic of people with good character. In contrast, having a bad character suggests the presence of vices and the lack of virtues. When describing a character in positive terms, we refer to certain virtues possessed. If evaluating it in a negative way, it is certain vices that come to mind (Steutel, 1997). Clearly enough,

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[18] For Aristotle (1998: 34), a virtuous person's character is "firm and unchangeable" in the sense that he/she is not easily swayed by the situation, and is resistant to temptations and pressures. Similarly, a vicious person's character is also firm and unchangeable, though in a negative sense. For that matter, strength of character is a necessary condition for both good and bad character.

the presence or absence of moral traits counts a great deal in our assessment of character. It can be said that character is mainly evaluated along ethical dimensions, i.e. whether the possessor of the character leads a good human life, and has traits which are taken to be necessary for such a life (McKinnon, 1999). In summary, character is mainly judged in the ethical sense, and hence moral traits, i.e. virtues and vices, count most heavily in the evaluation.

The central place of moral traits in the assessment of character is sometimes so exaggerated that virtues and vices are treated as being interchangeable or co-extensive with character traits. This is instantiated by Steutel's (1997: 387) remark "not only do all virtues and vices appear to be traits of character, it seems also possible to regard all traits of character as virtues or vices." However, this idea is proven to be untenable when the second set of the twin concept is taken into consideration.

The second pair of the concept, strong and weak character, is classified according to strength of character. Having a strong character means that its possessor is loyal to ongoing concerns, committed to long-term projects, even when confronted by difficulties or under pressure (Kupperman, 1991). In contrast, someone with a weak character is not resistant to great temptation, pressure, difficulties, or others' insistent expectation, but surrenders easily (Kupperman, 1991). Unlike the first pair which entirely centres on moral traits, many non-ethical dispositions and abilities are involved in the second pair. Among others, the ability to persevere and endure challenges, a tendency to rebound from failure, and a disposition to maintain one's position even under pressure, are all consistent with a strong character, and count a lot in our account of someone's character, although none of them is specifically

ethical (Kupperman, 1991, 1999). Moreover, some traits of character, such as considerateness, self-reliance and the like, are in a grey area, because it is not always clear whether or not they count as moral traits, since it depends on how narrowly or broadly morality is understood (Kupperman, 1991). Yet, it cannot be denied that all of these qualities play a role in our description and evaluation of character, and for that reason, they are also important contents of character. This is well summarised by Kupperman (1991: 8), who says:

> What we praise and admire in someone's character often will include a broader range of excellences than those that would commonly be placed within the domain of morality; conversely, what we condemn and scorn can include unattractive qualities that would have no direct connection with what we would consider morally wrong behavior.

The breadth of character is thus underscored. Nevertheless, as repeatedly stressed, when someone's character is concerned, honesty, courage, and other moral qualities will first come into the evaluator's mind. Therefore, some scholars endeavour to give consideration to both the breadth of character and the strong moral overtone of character. Kupperman (1999: 202) provides a good example when he says:

> Clearly then character cannot be regarded as straightforwardly and simply an ethical concept. Never the less, when we are describing someone's character, those features that are crucial to being morally reliable will be very prominent.
>
> Nonmoral virtues, if we are willing to speak of such, count in the assessment of character, but moral virtues count most heavily.

(Kupperman, 1991: 9)

To sum up, most of the time character is used in its ethical sense, and includes moral traits of character, generally known as virtues and vices. For that matter, character education under consideration is mainly being talked about in the ethical sense of character.

However, when considering the wholeness of character, there may be doubt that character education in its modern guise is comprehensive enough and justifiable. In this respect, Kupperman argues that a moralistic person tends to see character as entirely lying within the domain of morality, and regards the education of character as being co-extensive with moral education. This equates the possession of a good character to having moral virtues to a high degree, and yet the moralistic conception of character raises the question, "to the extent that moral virtues count in our assessment of someone's character, can talk of character be replaced by talk of virtues (Kupperman, 1991: 9)?" I will come back to this question after expounding the third sense of character.

Metaphysical sense of character

Although it may be said that two people have the same virtue, say, honesty, it cannot be said that they have the same character. This is because character plays a less impersonal role than virtue, and what matters in virtue is shared by everyone who possesses it, while what matters in one's good character sets one apart from other people of good character (Kupperman, 1991). This subtle, but crucial, difference can explain why we are inclined to identify people by their characters, rather than the sum of their virtues and vices (McKinnon, 1999). This distinguishing feature highlights the metaphysical sense of character, which emphasises that it is

character which makes one who one is, and provides a criterion of identity to distinguish one person from another. Character is unique to the possessor, and no-one else can have another person's character (McKinnon, 1999). This invokes ideas of moral identity and continuity, that is that one's character persists through physical changes, and endures throughout one's whole lifetime (McKinnon, 1999). In contrast, virtue lacks such features as uniqueness, individuality, and the identity characteristic of character.

To conclude, the three senses of character can be summarised as follows: naturalistic sense stresses that it is part of human nature to construct a character for oneself, which gives a meaning and direction for one's life, and constitutes an essential component of a flourishing human life. Ethical sense explains the close connection between character and moral traits, and highlights the central place of moral traits in the assessment of character. Finally, metaphysical sense indicates that character is an important criterion of identity.

Is 'character' education in the current form defensible?

First of all, it must be admitted that, in contemporary character education, the ethical sense of character is emphasised at the cost of the other two senses, and as traits of character, virtues and vices are stressed at the expense of other non-moral traits of character. In this respect, character education in the current form is fairly restricted. In Kupperman's view, it seems that it is utterly representative of a moralistic conception of character education. In contrast, the sort of 'education of character' advocated by Kupperman concerns "shaping the development of what (at the start) are not in the fullest sense persons into ones of certain sorts." Put briefly, it

is about 'personmaking' (Kupperman, 1991), and no doubt, this is a far larger project than the one under consideration. It is plausible to say that, if Kupperman's version of character education was to be carried out, it would be very different from what we have now. It is sure that, by Kupperman's standard, NECE is not comprehensive enough, but I shall argue that it is defensible as far as the primacy of the ethical sense of character is concerned. After all, character education is proposed to be a distinct approach to moral education, and therefore, a selective focus on the moral dimension and ethical sense of character meets the case. Nevertheless, considering the breadth and wholeness of character, it may be better to make it explicit that what is concerned is moral character, rather than character, simpliciter.

Here I defend character education in its current form on the strength of the inherent moral overtone of character, the primacy of the ethical sense of character, and the specific context in which it is advocated as a distinct approach to moral education, and dismiss Kupperman's proposal of comprehensive character education. However, it cannot be denied that both Kupperman's and McKinnon's accounts help shed light on the limitations of the simple characterisation of character education as the inculcation of virtues.

Conclusion

A researcher into character education is destined to face a knotty conceptual question: the definition of character education. After drawing on two ready-to-wear frameworks for classification to map the whole terrain of character education in a sketchy way, I select the most common and influential version, namely, NECE to be the target of a critical examination by reflecting on the appropriateness of defining

character education in terms of the inculcation of virtues. Certain misgivings and shortcomings of this characterisation are brought to light. First and foremost, it runs the risk of giving the impression that character education is nothing more than a duplication of what Kohlberg derogatorily dubbed, the "bag of virtues" approach. Secondly, predominantly great emphasis is placed on cultivating the various virtues at the cost of bringing its natural corollary, viz. the individualisation of character and its sister thesis of the varieties of moral personality, which denotes that virtuous people need not be alike, and in fact, they are of different types, to the forefront. The case is made that for character education to proceed more productively, these defects need to be properly remedied, and some ways out of these predicaments are suggested.

In the face of the far more frequent occurrence of 'virtue', in contrast to "character," in the relevant literature, a question about the terminology used is raised. As a response, some reasons are given to explain why people have a preference for "character" to "virtue," and abandon "virtue education" in favour of "character education." Further, in order to make clear the subtle differences between virtue and character, an elaboration of the three senses of character is under way. It is argued that contemporary character education, thus characterised, is concerned with character mainly in its ethical sense, and therefore, it should be noted that, precisely speaking, what is concerned is "moral character" rather than character as a whole. Considering the multiple senses of character, NECE is undeniably fairly limited in scope. However, on the other hand, in view of the specific context in which character education is proposed, and the primacy of the ethical sense of character, character education in the current form is defensible.

Some practical implications can be drawn for character education. First of all,

all educators partaking in NECE should realise that suchlike character education is restricted in scope in the sense that it is concerned about the formation of moral character rather than the construction of character as a whole. Surely, it is another important issue as to how to integrate moral character with character as a whole. Secondly, given that the unity and integration of the virtues is an integral part of moral character, it requires much attention and concern to correct the undesirable tradition of teaching the virtues one by one and in an entirely isolated manner. Among other things, the educated should be guided to notice the fact that the moral requirements of some virtues may come about simultaneously in certain circumstances, and they must learn to weigh their respective importance against each other, and sort out an appropriate course of conduct as a response. Last but not least, the individualisation of moral character as a natural byproduct impels us to pay attention to this more personal aspect of character education, along with the apparently impersonal task of the inculcation of virtues. This crucial issue of the individualisation of moral character re-directs our attention to the formation of moral character as a whole.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1: A summary of the whole argument of the paper

The contemporary character education movement is heterogeneous and is of a great variety of versions.

⇩

The two frameworks for classification developed by McLaughlin and Halstead (1999) and Kristjánsson (2002) are employed to delineate the whole contour of CE and to pinpoint a particular version of CE as the target of discussion. This is character education in the non-expansive sense (NECE, for short) which is generally characterised as an educational enterprise aimed at the inculcation of virtues. NECE represents the most prevalent and influential conception of CE.

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Is this simple characterisation of CE as the inculcation of virtues defensible? The plausibility and the defects of this simple characterisation are demonstrated.

⇩

The apparent plausibility of this simple characterisation can be explained in two respects.

1. There is a strong conceptual link between the old-fashioned word, "virtue" and "character" which is by far more widely used in the present-day ordinary speech.

2. People prefer terms of virtue to the elusive big concept of character, since the former are more concrete and easier to pin down the objects in question. (Take Hartshorne and May's celebrated "Character Education Inquiry" for example.)

Some defects of this simple characterisation need to be properly remedied.

1. A common misgiving is whether CE is simply a duplication of the 'bag of virtues' approach. In order to dispel this misgiving, the main job consists in clarifying the very nature of virtue, and the relationship among the virtues in particular, which is typically rendered in the long-standing doctrine of the unity of the virtues (UV, for short). The gist of UV is that the more virtuous one is, the more integrated one's acquired virtues are with each other. For that matter, the integration of the virtues is an essential aspect of the inculcation of virtues. A practical implication is that the individual virtues should be cultivated by reference to one another.

2. The individualisation of moral character and the varieties of moral personality, as a natural consequence of the inculcation of virtues, is mistakenly dismissed out of consideration in the existing simple-minded discourse about fully inculcating all the virtues indiscriminately in people. Addressing this more personal aspect of character development helps to highlight both the individual's active role and the limits of one's agency in constructing character. Besides, people are encouraged to think about the construction of (moral) character as a whole.

⇩

In view of the by far conspicuous place of virtue in the current CE discourse, it may be raised as to why people still choose the term of "character education" instead of "virtue education." A simple response is that the word "virtue" is outdated, while "character" is still in wide use.

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This brief reply seems not satisfying. A more in-depth explanation which can account for the subtle differences between the two concepts, character and virtue is needed. For this purpose, McKinnon's account of the three senses of character is heavily drawn on to illustrate the rich meanings of character (in contrast to the univocal concept of virtue) and more importantly, to show clearly that NECE is mainly being talked about in the ethical sense of character, and hence concerned with moral character rather than character as a whole. → The narrow focus on the ethical sense of character raises a question to the effect that considering the breadth and wholeness of character which cannot be exhausted simply by moral traits, is 'character' education in its modern guise which is characterised in terms of the cultivation of virtues comprehensive enough and defensible? → The case is made that NECE is defensible insofar as the primacy of the ethical sense of character is concerned. Besides, given that character education is proposed to be a distinct approach to moral education, this selective focus on the moral dimension and ethical sense of character meets the case.