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Virtue Monism. Some Advantages for Character Education

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Abstract
Character education is an increasingly discussed topic drawing upon virtue ethics as a moral theory. Scholars have predominantly understood educating character as a process that entails the formation of certain distinct character traits or functions through practice and habituation. However, these approaches present some problems. This paper explores the educational implications of various accounts focusing on the relationship between *phronesis* and other virtues. In particular, our focus will be on those that Miller (2023) has classified as Standard Model and Eliminativist Model of practical wisdom. Starting from these accounts, we will outline three specific problems that the latter models appear to generate at a theoretical level in character education. Finally, we will address the task of demonstrating why the monist account of moral virtue recently proposed by the Aretai group—which conceives being virtuous in possessing *phronesis* understood as ethical expertise—might offer a refined response to these challenges. In addition, we will illustrate three educational pathways that can emerge from the same model.

Keywords Virtue Ethics · Practical Wisdom · *Phronesis* · Character Education · Virtue Monism

1 Introduction

The idea that character can be cultivated is as ancient at least as Aristotle.[1] The basic assumptions of his virtue theory are still at the core of the contemporary retrieval of character education. One of Aristotle's (1999) main tenets is that character is open—to a certain extent—to education and self-education. Indeed, virtue is not something that one possesses birth but is defined as a habitual state (*habitus*), i.e. a stable element of our character that must be developed and educated (NE, 1103 a14-25).

Aristotle, as it is well known, states that acquiring a virtue is a process of learning by doing. Several scholars, including Annas and Stichter (Annas 2011; Stichter 2018), have embraced his thesis, examining the parallels between the acquisition of virtues and the mastery of specific skills. Within this framework, they propose that practical knowledge in ethical actions, such as acting justly or courageously, shares meaningful similarities with expertise in activities like driving or playing a musical instrument. According to the Aristotelian picture, each distinct virtue is a complex and stable disposition to excel in the relevant domain: to be courageous amounts in excellent conduct in front of dangers, to be generous amounts in excellent conduct about giving goods to others, to be compassionate amounts in excellent conduct facing other's suffering. At the same time, Aristotle holds that in order to be fully virtuous, each token of conduct must encompass *phronesis*, the intellectual virtue that harmonises and unifies the distinct ethical virtues that constitute character (NE 1144 a 6–9; 1139a 12–13). So, Aristotle conceives the education of character as the acquisition of individual distinct virtuous traits—courage, generosity, compassion, and so on—through exercise, practice, and habituation *plus* the activity of *phronesis*. Therefore, character education seems to be composed of two main parts. (i) During childhood and adolescence—when reason is not fully developed—character is shaped through repetition and emulation of appropriate ways of acting and feeling. Then, (ii) gradually, as reason becomes entirely present, the exercise of *phronesis* makes rational and properly virtuous each distinct disposition previously formed. As we will

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show, this picture—in some form or another—lies beneath the most influential contemporary attempts to think about character education.

In this paper, we argue that this way to conceptualise the process of character education raises various educational problems and that a reconceptualization of virtue in a monist sense may offer some important advantages for thinking about character education. In the first section, we draw on Miller's classification (2023) of the main philosophical contemporary models of practical wisdom in order to infer their educational implications.[2] Then, we point out three educational problems related to the different conceptions of practical wisdom. These issues, we will argue, arise from the conceptual tension between multiple distinct character traits on the one hand and the need for unification and integration of character on the other. In section three we will present a recent attempt to dissolve this tension through a monistic conception of virtue. Finally, in section four, we will show how the monistic conception considered suggests interesting answers to the educational problems discussed and may provide a new basis for rethinking character education.

1.1 Models of Practical Wisdom and Related Educational Implications

Recently, starting from the Aristotelian proposal, space has been made for reconstructions and reconceptualization of different possible ways of educating character, thanks to the contribution of virtue ethics and moral psychology. The key point for classifying the different character education (hereafter CE) approaches is the conception of practical wisdom on which they are based. As Kristjánsson claims, indeed, "*phronesis* is nothing less than the central idea of what is now called 'character education': namely the *raison d'être* of such education" (Kristjánsson 2021: 1303). Thus, *phronesis* emerges as a central concept, and, as Carr (2023) asserts, the interpretation of its role becomes pivotal, influencing crucial aspects of education.

According to Miller, three main models of practical wisdom can be found in contemporary philosophical literature:

(i) The Standard Model: "Practical wisdom is a character trait which is distinct psychologically from the moral virtues, but which is necessary for them to count as virtues" (Miller 2023: 195);

(ii) The Monistic Model[3]: "Practical wisdom is not distinct psychologically from the moral virtues; rather "when one is virtuous, what one really possesses is the single virtue of practical wisdom" (Miller 2023: 198);

(iii) The Eliminativist Model: Practical wisdom as a character trait does not exist. In order to explain each of several functions attributed to practical wisdom "we can appeal to a distinct trait that corresponds to that function" (Miller 2023: 200).

Starting from these different models of practical wisdom we can infer the basic constituents of character and the basic educational assumptions about their cultivation:

(i) The Standard Model: moral character is constituted of a set of virtues *plus* a higher-order trait. Thus, in this model, CE appears to comprise two stages: agents would initially develop a set of virtues and then, at the appropriate time, CE would promote the development of a higher-order faculty (i.e. practical wisdom) that provides cohesion and integration to the character as a whole;

(ii) The Monistic Model: moral character is entirely constituted by the possession of practical wisdom. Therefore, we can deduce that CE would consist of the exercise and refinement of practical wisdom;

(iii) The Eliminativist Model: moral character is composed of a set of traits. Therefore, what we can glean from this model—in particular from Lapsley's proposal (2021), since Miller does not formulate educational hypotheses—is that CE would be based on the cultivation and refinement of a set of a number of relevant traits.

A quick look at these models suggests that the Standard Model and the Eliminativist Model might share an educational implication: *character must be educated, first of all, through the exercise and refinement of a given set of distinct traits*. From here on, the two models take different paths. The Standard Model envisages the intervention of a higher-order virtue (*phronesis*) that provides cohesion and integration to the character. Its cultivation differs in timing and manner from the basic traits. The Eliminativist Model, on the contrary, argues that character is not orchestrated by any higher faculty. Thus, CE should be limited to the exercise of a given set of distinct skills. Let us now describe in more details some educational approaches based on the two models of practical wisdom just mentioned. We will get back to the monist account later.

[2] In what follows, we will not discuss all models of practical wisdom, but rather focus on what we consider as the main philosophical ones. Recently, the debate around practical wisdom has become more and more fertile thanks to the work of the various branches of psychology that have given rise to new questions, for example about the empirical reliability of the philosophical account of *phronesis* (i.e. Fowers 2005; Lapsley and Narvaez 2004; Snow 2015; Snow et al. 2021).

[3] In the classification proposed by Miller (2023), Virtue Monism is labeled 'Socratic Model'. Virtue Monism can be considered Socratic insofar is monistic, but not insofar is intellectualistic (as the reference to Socrates may suggests).

1. CE Approaches Based on The Standard Model The most widespread line of research in CE proposes itself as a reconsideration of Aristotelian thought and endorses the Standard Model of practical wisdom (e.g. Carr 1991; Curren 2000; Peterson 2011; Harðarson 2019; Kristjánsson 2015; Szutta 2021). The Standard Model holds that flourishing is primarily a matter of habituating distinct character traits, i.e., fostering behaviour associated with such virtuous traits (Kristjánsson and Fowers 2022). Thus, virtues are conceived as dispositions that can be independently cultivated through habituation in the course of early character development. Those traits are then orchestrated by practical wisdom, a meta-virtue that develops at a later stage of moral development.

Currently, one of the most influential neo-aristotelian model of CE is proposed by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues at the University of Birmingham. The Jubilee Centre Model (e.g. Arthur and Kristjánsson 2022) holds that an agent becomes virtuous by acquiring certain clusters of virtuous traits (moral virtues, civil virtues, intellectual virtues, and performance virtues) which constitute what they define as the "building blocks of character" (Arthur and Kristjánsson 2022: 9). Acquiring those virtues would also, at a later stage, bring to the development of practical wisdom which is conceived of as a metacognitive capacity—or as Aristotle calls it a "meta-intellectual virtue" (Kristjánsson 2021: 1303). Practical wisdom is capable of "helping us figure out what to do when we get 'stuck' […] particularly (or perhaps exclusively) in the moral domain" (Ibid.). According to this approach, practical wisdom is characterised by four functions: constitutive function, integrative function, blueprint function, and emotion regulative function (Darnell et al. 2019, 2022). These functions, according to the authors, would help agents evaluate the weight of relevant values, courses of action, and emotions. It would thus help them to reason, choose, and behave well in every particular context, giving unity, integration, and cohesion to the multiplicity of virtues.

2. CE Approaches Based on The Eliminativist Model This perspective, as Miller puts it, "maintains that there is no character trait of practical wisdom [or some other higher-order capacity] above and beyond whatever sets of general capacities" (Miller 2023: 201). According to this approach, a multiplicity of distinct character traits lies on the same plane, and CE consists of the cultivation of a selection of these traits.

The most important educational model among the eliminativist ones, the integrative ethical education (IEE), is an attempt to integrate development theory and psychological science (Endicott et al. 2003; Narvaez and Lapsley 2005). According to this view, character is regarded as a set of teachable and ethically relevant skills. The Four Component Model advanced by Narvaez and Rest (1995), for example, identifies these skills in four psychologically distinct processes: ethical sensitivity, ethical judgement, ethical motivation, and ethical action. The aim of this approach is thus to guide agents in achieving increasingly higher levels of competence in each of the four psychological processes, cultivating and developing the subject's skills (Narvaez and Rest 1995). Starting from this framework, Lapsley advances some scepticism regarding practical wisdom and elaborates what he terms the "redundancy theory". The aim of the redundancy theory is to translate the neo-aristotelian model of practical wisdom advanced by Darnell and colleagues (2019) into psychological categories that make sense within developmental and personality science studies (Lapsley 2021). In this sense, Lapsley replaces *phronesis* with the four components—or psychological constructs—that we mentioned above.

Another approach that seems to share some of the Eliminativist Model's educational implications is the one advanced by the large majority of positive psychologists[4]. Positive psychology, as it is known, draws attention to positive character traits which would be crucial to achieving positive mental health (i.e. Noble and McGrath 2008; Seligman 2011). For example, Lerner's Positive Youth Development model aims to develop what he calls the 5Cs (competence, confidence, connection, character, compassion) which should contribute to the development of self, community, and society (Lerner et al. 2003). What interests us here, however, is that this approach does not assign any special role to *phronesis*—or some other higher order trait—over individual character traits. By this alleged absence of practical wisdom, critical reflection in positive education also seems to be lacking. That is why, as we said, positive psychology seems to be another form of Eliminativism[5].

According to the above mentioned approaches CE is thus understood as the cultivation of individual virtues, traits, or skills aimed at the flourishing of the person. The point on which these different educational approaches differ is how these individual virtues and functions are orchestrated and organised, especially in the case of conflicts between values, of moral dilemmas, and of substantial changes of context.

At this point in the discussion, it appears to us that the relationship between ethical virtues and practical wisdom

[4] Note that in the context of positive psychology a methodological and theoretical discussion is emerging from the conceptual tension between multiple distinct character traits on the one hand and the "good character" as a whole on the other (See Feraco et al. 2023).

[5] Within positive psychology, there are also some attempts to stitch together philosophical and psychological views. For example, The Whole Trait Theory (WTT) of personality psychology (Flesson and Jayawickreme 2015) is integrated in the light of understanding neo-Aristotelian conceptions of virtue (Jayawickreme and Fleeson 2017).

remains something obscure, giving rise to several issues in CE. We will address these issues in the following section.

1.2 Three Educational Problems

Our intention here is not to make claims in virtue theory, nor do we intend to establish what is the correct interpretation of the Aristotelian text in this regard. What we are interested in doing here is to show some problematic implications of the models of practical wisdom discussed above at an educational level. In general terms, the most critical issue seems to concern what kind of educational pathway can ensure that the acquisition of a number of distinct dispositions results in the formation of a unified and integrated character that is flexible across contexts and open to change in the face of difficulties and radical novelty.

Let us now look in more detail at some of the educational problems that, in our opinion, the approaches we discussed above imply:

(i) **The emergence of *phronesis***: the first problem which is already highlighted in the literature (i.e. Burbules 2019; Kristjánsson 2021, 2022; Lapsley 2021) and on which there is still a lack of clarity regards when does *phronesis* emerge. According to this literature, practical wisdom operates to map out the salient characteristics of each situation to enable deliberation and to choose the appropriate virtuous actions; it would appear at some unclear point between adolescence and early adulthood, after the agent has developed all the other virtues to a certain degree (Kristjánsson and Fowers 2022; Kristjánsson 2022). Concerning this specific point, for example, the Jubilee Center holds that children first "catch" the particular virtues through virtuous exemplars or ad hoc teaching curricula. Then, in adolescence and early adulthood, when the development of critical thinking and reflection gradually begins, they are "sought" by the agent who would be able to recognise the value of moral goods and virtuous actions (Arthur and Kristjánsson 2022). Thus, there seem to be two moments in the CE process: (i) first, the individual virtues are learned and (ii) second, practical wisdom is integrated as a previously unknown ability that helps to bridge the gap between knowing and acting morally in a reflexive way.
This idea seems to bring at least two problematic issues: first of all, no empirical evidence demonstrates that we first acquire a set of distinct traits and then we acquire practical wisdom. Also, there is no psycho-educational evidence that these two moments are clearly distinct. Beyond the empirical side, these models are also problematic as none of them explain when or by which virtue practical wisdom appears. In this sense, *phronesis* appears almost like a *deus ex machina* which intervenes in the flow of the events to resolve the situation. Indeed, what still remains unclear is whether *phronesis* emerges only after the development of all the other virtues or whether it can also emerge in the character-formation process. At this point, therefore, it is worth considering whether a plausible moral development could involve the cultivation of virtuosity from an early stage[6].

(ii) **Proliferation of virtues or traits**: the second issue pertains to the prioritization of developing and cultivating individual character traits. All the previously presented models (Standard and Eliminativist) emphasise individual virtues, which exist and operate as ontologically distinct global character traits. As we have already noted, for example, the Jubilee Centre identifies some specific clusters of virtues to be acquired. On the other hand, authors in the field of positive psychology such as Peterson and Seligman (2004) identify 24 character strengths to be cultivated and developed. The consequence of these perspectives is a conceptualisation of character as fragmented into various virtues or traits. It follows that there is a risk of producing lists of virtues that paradoxically could become endless. Eliminativism also operates similarly, proposing a list of traits and characteristics that a formed character should possess (e.g. Miller 2021). Consequently, also in this case the possible infinite list of traits is at stake. Since this problem has already been highlighted and discussed by others (De Caro et al. 2021), we will not delve into this issue further.

(iii) **Openness to moral change in a broad and complex domain**: the third problem regards the challenge of dealing with an open and complex field such as ethics without possessing a unified expertise. The ethical domain concerns specific, often unique situations. Consequently, the difficulty in perceiving value conflicts, in deliberating on how to resolve them, or in realising certain value goals in such morally complex circumstances can only be addressed through the development of good character, i.e. a sufficiently flourished character. However, following the approaches discussed above, until practical wisdom is acquired, the agent would only possess specific capacities related to individual traits (e.g. being honest when the context requires honesty), but not the general capacity to reason and act well in all kinds of situations, even the most complex or novel ones. Thus,

[6] It is evident that this first problem only concerns the Standard Model as the Eliminativist model does not contemplate the presence of *phronesis.*

> from our point of view, the educational approaches provided by these models may result in an ethical competence consisting of a fragmentary set of ethical skills and ethical virtues cultivated in precise situations, each of which focuses on a small part of the moral domain. This may pose problems: how could such educational approaches account for new, dramatic, and surprising situations?

To illustrate this point, let us consider two fictional situations. A med student like Mark, who is extremely honest but has not yet had the opportunity to sufficiently develop the virtue of tact, and (who) has to communicate to a patient that they have an incurable disease with a high death rate. He may think that it is right for the patient to know everything about their condition and that it is good to always be honest. However, Mark should be the best interest of that patient (and not what should be right in general). Thus, he would need to first understand if and what that patient wants to know. Then, Mark must deliver the right amount of information—which could also be none if the patient tells him that they are not ready to learn the truth—although the general rule is to be honest. Similarly, a girl like Lisa may be extremely brave in general but may not know how to behave in a new school where she meets for the first time a bully who steals her best friend's sandwich every day and mock him for his stature. Because of the fear of being bullied herself, she may run away or even follow the bully in teasing her friend, instead of doing the right thing and reporting to the teacher what is happening.

It should be clear from these examples that the problem is not only one of exhibiting compartmentalised reasoning (or acting). In order to act well in the complex domain of morality and to understand how to behave in novel situations, in difficult circumstances, or when a conflict arises between reasons or several virtues, it is not enough to possess a set of virtuous traits. The agent needs to reason well, to manage their emotions, and to be *flexible*. In a nutshell, it is necessary to have a unified expertise, and this can only be ensured when practical wisdom is developed. However, to do so, it is necessary to have a sufficiently broad view of moral change. But the accounts we discussed above such as the Standard Model hold that an agent can only become a moral expert from a certain (unclear) moment in their life. On the other hand, we believe that the complexity and diversity of the moral domain, particularly in today's world, demonstrate the need for occurrence of significant moral changes throughout our lives. The Standard Model may not be sufficiently capable, or perhaps less so to justify moral changes since the various virtues are established early in human development. Thereafter, the presence of *phronesis* seems to play mainly a reflexive and organising function for those particular virtues. On the contrary, the absence of *phronesis* in the Eliminativist Model creates the problem of coherence, unity, and internal direction of moral change. These issues may arise because practical wisdom, rooted in a deep understanding of context and a discerning grasp of the complexities inherent in moral dilemmas, offers a nuanced and unified moral character as opposed to a fragmented one. Finally, *phronesis*, fostering reflexivity, plays a role in steering the course of moral development.

1.3 The "Aretai Model"

In the face of the problems listed above, the Aretai research group has recently advanced an interesting new hypothesis in the field of virtue ethics that may provide useful answers. Before getting into this topic and explaining why we think so, let us introduce the "Aretai Model" (De Caro et al. forthcoming). The Aretai Model defends a monistic view of moral virtue according to which being virtuous entirely amounts to the possession of *phronesis*. This model falls within the category of accounts that conceptualise practical wisdom as a multifaceted trait (e.g., Darnell et al. 2022) or as a form of expertise (Swartwood 2013; Tsai 2022). However, with respect to those models, De Caro and colleagues have come up with a new proposal. They suggest that other accounts are not clear enough about (a) the relationship between the acquisition and performance of *phronesis* and the ethical virtues, and (b) the relevance of the cross-situational competence which characterises practical wisdom as such (De Caro et al. forthcoming). Their model thus aims to combine insights from other accounts reconceptualising the idea of virtuous characters, holding that virtue consists in the possession of practical wisdom (understood as ethical expertise De Caro et al. 2018). Thus, the Aretai Model does not rely on single ethical virtues—which would be nothing more than emanations or manifestations of *phronesis*.

What is to be monistic about virtue according to the Aretai group? The authors describe practical wisdom as a high-order competence that can account for the manifestation of virtuous behaviours. This means, as we mentioned before, that to be virtuous is to be wise, and to be wise is to demonstrate that one possesses practical wisdom in different contexts. The latter idea implies that courage, patience, hope, tact, honesty, and all the other traits we may add to this list, are not independent traits, but manifestations of practical wisdom (see also De Caro and Vaccarezza 2020). According to the Aretai Model, "virtues" are in fact *phronesis*' *ratio cognoscendi* as only by observing those cross-situational manifestations of virtuous behaviour it is possible to infer the existence of practical wisdom (De Caro et al. forthcoming). On the other hand, practical wisdom represents the specific virtues' *ratio essendi*. In this sense, practical wisdom

is no longer conceived as a meta-virtue that emerges at a certain point of moral development and orchestrates other virtues that can be cultivated independently. It is the only virtue, representing a form of excellence in making the right decisions and actions in morally relevant circumstances.

In particular, according to De Caro and colleagues, practical wisdom is a multifaceted form of expertise that is characterised by a set of skills: *moral perception*, *moral deliberation*, *emotion regulation*, and *moral motivation*. They represent the "integral elements" (De Caro et al. forthcoming) of *phronesis and* enable the agent to understand which is the best decision to take 'all-things-considered'. Also, these skills help them to act appropriately, and choose the most appropriate behaviour in different practical contexts, even in the novel and unfamiliar ones (De Caro et al. 2021). To provide some details on practical wisdom's skills, *moral perception*, which is similar to what other accounts refer to as "moral sensitivity" (e.g. Darnell et al. 2022), is the capacity to "detect" the morally relevant factors of a situation and understand whether they may conflict with one another. *Moral deliberation* is the ability to reflect on how to achieve a certain goal, critically evaluating and reflexively comparing the ends "in light of a broader conception of the good life" (De Caro et al. forthcoming). *Emotion regulation* is the capacity to manage one's affective experiences. Finally, contexts, and domains of life, and the ability to act according to them.

Now that we have provided a description of the Aretai Model, we can explore the reasons why it appears to be effective in addressing the issues outlined earlier (see Sect. 2) and examine the potential educational implications for CE.

1.4 The Aretai Model: A Compelling Framework for CE

Generally speaking, the concern at hand is what kind of educational pathway can ensure that the acquisition of a number of distinct dispositions results in the formation of a unified, integrated character that is flexible across contexts and open to change in the face of complex situations and (more or less) radical novelty.

As we have seen in the first section the Standard Model and the Eliminativist Model share an educational implication: *character must be educated, first of all, through the exercise and refinement of a given set of distinct traits*. This claim, we argue, is an assumption from which some important educational problems arise (see Sect. 2). The correspondent core educational assumption based on virtue monism would sound: *character must be educated, first of all, through the exercise and refinement of a globalist moral commitment*. In short, the distinction is between a modular conception and a holistic conception of moral education. It should be noted that this educational stance is compatible with forms of virtue monism other than the specific approach advocated here (see Sect. 3).

Conceiving practical wisdom as something unitary and integrated does not mean regarding it as something static and always the same. The very same object—think for example of a human voice—can vary in intensity, adapt to different contexts, and manifest itself in multifaceted ways. In order to account for the variability of manifestations of *phronesis* the Aretai Model, as illustrated above, identifies four aspects that are reciprocally entangled in each excellent moral conduct. Furthermore, every piece of conduct is deeply tied to the particular kind of situation—from which the different names of wisdom (i.e. the virtues) derive. Within this framework, clearly, moral education is from the very beginning an education in the multiple faces of this kind of moral/ethical expertise: practical wisdom.

Let us now see how the Aretai Model seems to solve the difficulties exposed in the second section.

(i) The first difficulty afflicts only the Standard Model and concerns the obscurity on the ways and times in which *phronesis* would begin to make its appearance along the educational path, until it becomes its keystone. In the framework of virtue monism this problem seems not to arise, since practical wisdom is thought as a single expertise *ab origine*: this means that the functions associated with *phronesis* are cultivated from the beginning of the educational path. It could be argued that this is too demanding for infancy and pre-adolescence, and that reflective skills are not a proper educational goal at these developmental stages—an idea underlying the Standard Model. Robust evidence, however, suggests that reflective skills during childhood are well present, diverse, and complex (see Gelman and DeJesus 2019).

(ii) The second point concerns the much-discussed problem of identifying a complete list of ethical virtues. It must be admitted that virtue monism does not escape the challenging metaethical and normative questions that are involved in this debate. At an educational level, however, the advantage is clear. As we have seen, according to the Aretai Model, virtues are the names with which we call practical wisdom when it is realised in a specific area. On the one hand, the object of moral education is only one, and therefore there is no need to determine any list. On the other hand, the list of the kind of ethically relevant situations (and, correspondingly, the list of virtues) can remain open and provisional.

(iii) Finally, the third problem concerns the difficulty in dealing with a domain as open and complex as ethics. If character is educated, first of all through the exercise

of a given set of distinct traits, situations that present a high degree of difficulty or novelty compared to training contexts will be problematic. On the contrary, a character educational program aimed at the development of *phronesis*, from childhood through adolescence understood as virtuousness, has the potential to adopt a more optimistic perspective regarding agents' moral progress and to shape a more flexible character to enhance the various character inclinations that have already been developed (De Caro et al. forthcoming). According to the Aretai Model, CE should be geared towards the cultivation and training of a nuanced, flexible, and at the same time unified ethical competence that enables agents to deal with such a broad domain as ethics (De Caro et al. 2021). If this is correct and practicable, the hypothesis is a CE approach aimed at developing practical wisdom as ethical expertise that presents the ability to transfer specific ethical skills to different morally relevant situations (cf. Barnett and Ceci 2002).

Based on the theoretical proposals of the Aretai Model, we can identify three educational aims and hypothesise the related educational strategies, which do not fall into the problems discussed above. Such strategies are only sketched here and should be further developed theoretically and subjected to empirical investigation.

The first character-educational aim is toward a *globalist moral commitment*, that is toward a highly unified and integrated ethical expertise. The corresponding educational practice, in our view, should be guided by a systematic reminder of the mutual integration of the four main aspects of practical wisdom. Let us for example consider the case of a child who witnesses abuse at school. They realise a situation of offence and injustice (moral perception), would like to intervene to help transforming the situation (moral motivation), but the fear of exposing themself and of being treated badly in turn inhibits them (emotion regulation) from acting. They then decide to talk about it with a trusted teacher to discuss what is most appropriate to do (moral deliberation). In this case we should focus on their capacity to regulate the latter moral skills, underlining its importance precisely in connection with the other aspects of the overall moral commitment shown by the child with respect to that particular situation.

The second educational aim is to foster a *cross-situational virtuous conduct*. In order to achieve this goal, the educational interventions should include a systematic invitation to hypothetical comparison (reflective and imaginative) with different contexts. Here "context" has a broad meaning: the range of possible comparisons is extremely vast, and the most effective ones will depend on the situation and on the agent. What if you were in their place? What if material/social/cultural/religious conditions were different? What if you had different constituent characteristics? If something like this had happened to you in the past, what effect would it have? What if you did not have these securities/resources guarantees? Or what if you had them? Solicitations of this kind, naturally, would take on a more determined content based on age and particular situation. In the educational relationship with a pre-adolescent who is very enterprising and courageous in physical activities, for example, we could suggest reflecting or experimenting with contexts such as acting on a stage or speaking at a school assembly.

Finally, the third educational aim we can draw from the Aretai Model is *openness to lifelong moral growth*. Educational practices oriented towards this goal should be guided by a systematic reminder of the possibility of dealing with something new, unknown, or unexpected, which would require an adjustment to our conduct in a similar situation. It involves drawing attention to an unavoidable margin of provisionality regarding the ethically appropriate conduct with respect to a certain situation. This margin may be extremely thin or significantly large. The point is to form a character willing to carefully preserve a certain openness to change and revision. For example, imagine repeatedly encouraging a daughter to apologise and make peace after arguments and outbursts of anger with her sister. It would be important to suggest that there could be similar situations in which, however, the perceived offence is so strong that apologising or trying to resolve the conflict would only promote external, forced and, at worst, hypocritical attitudes.

2 Conclusion

This paper examined the possibility of conceptualizing a holistic conception for moral and character education, rather than a modular framework. Within this holistic conception, we aim to delineate an educational pathway ensuring the formation and development of a unified, integrated character that is flexible across contexts and open to change in the face of complex situations. The argument underscores the persistent theoretical challenges arising from the obscure relationship between distinct ethical virtues and *phronesis* within different approaches to character education.

Leveraging Miller's taxonomy of philosophical models of practical wisdom (Standard Model, Monistic Model and Eliminativist Model), we infer some educational implications. In light of this classification, Standard Model and Eliminativist Model share an educational implication that, as we argue, rises some educational issues (Sect. 2). In contrast, the Monistic Model—recently introduced by the Aretai group—seems to posit a distinct perspective: *character must be educated, first of all, through the exercise*

and refinement of a globalist moral commitment. Indeed, a monistic approach to CE primarily responds to the arising issues and then offers three potential educational direction: (I) global moral commitment due to the reciprocal integration of the different aspects of practical wisdom as ethical expertise; (II) development of cross-situational virtuous behaviour through constant reflexive and imaginative comparison with different contexts; (III) openness to lifelong growth and moral development, in an educational sense, due to the possibility of facing something new and unexpected that requires constant adjustment of our behaviour.

Although these three educational directions need to be expanded and systematised in the light of future studies, virtue monism seems to be capable of solving various educational problems that afflict CE from a theoretical point of view, and of offering a very promising conceptual basis for developing an innovative character-based educational model.

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