D I Walker, University of Alabama

Preprint version – later accepted in the Journal of Moral Education after review

Sociological contributions for researching morality and cultivating states of moral character

A few academic disciplines regularly conduct research on morality, where morality is investigated in characteristic ways for those disciplines. The behavioral sciences for example are concerned with cognitive processes and the brain, often in response to moral stimuli (Abend, 2012; Bykov, 2018; Mogilski, 2016). This engages psychologists, neuroscientists and evolutionary biologists in studies of universally shared (and sometimes culturally distinct) moral functioning, often thought to have developed as a consequence of communal living and processes of natural selection. Similarly, in moral psychology and philosophy over the years, there have been major contributions to the field of morality research, including Lawrence Kohlberg's classic work on stages of moral development (Kohlberg, 1958, 1984) and neo-Kohlbergian developments (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999; Rest, Narvaez, Thoma, & Bebeau, 2000). Other major contributions to the field of morality research include Jonathan Haidt's moral foundations theory (Haidt & Joseph, 2004), work on moral identity (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Blasi, 1984; Lapsley & Stey, 2014), social domain theory (Turiel, 2002) and core ethical theories such as virtue ethics, utilitarianism and deontology.

A tendency for research on morality, however, is to focus on the individual, sometimes at the expense of context or ecological validity (Abend, 2012), using overly individual notions of the person (Smith, 2010). To some extent this is an understandable consequence of disciplinary focus, and a scientific need to break phenomenon down into manageable parts, although of course contextual or societal factors are not completely absent from morality scholarship. Two classic examples of attention to context are Kohlberg's Just Community Schools (Kohlberg, 1985) and Aristotle's reference to the Polis and community (Aristotle, 1941). Nevertheless, it is all too easy for full contextual implications to slip from

academic notice or receive inadequate treatment. In order to address this blind spot, more inter and multi-disciplinary research on morality is needed and this might even develop into post disciplinary endeavors (Sayer, 1999). In broad terms therefore, the current article advocates conjoining disciplinary strengths for understanding morality. This is because isolating academic disciplines can often have the effect of narrowing thought and altering important real-life relationships (MacIntyre, 1983, p. 264). More specifically, and as a contribution in this direction, the current article suggests bringing together philosophical and Aristotelian notions of hexeis with the sociological concept of habitus in order to further understanding of morality and character in context (less so, situations), and to apply this to its development and education across the life course. Although habitus is a Latin translation of hexeis, in sociological hands it has acquired quite different meaning. Expanded definitions for hexeis and habitus are provided further below, but in simple terms hexeis refers to states of moral character whereas habitus describes a structure of dispositions within the person that is shaped by social, gender and class-based characteristics and the like. Admittedly, attempts at interdisciplinary scholarship such as those being suggested are not entirely without risk. As Macintyre identifies, there is inherent peril of oversimplification from the perspectives of scholars belonging to those disciplines (MacIntyre, 1983, p. 264) - hopefully these risks will be minimal and worthwhile.

Fortuitously, some progress engaging different academic disciplines in morality research is occurring, and so disciplines are already drawing upon one another to some extent. Jonathan Haidt's inclusion of sociology in formulating his theories is one such example (Haidt, 2012), together with sociological adoption of critical realist philosophy (Gorski, 2013; Mooney, 2014; Sayer, 2000; Smith, 2010), and work connecting classical sociological texts to virtue ethics and ideas of societal balance (Gorski, 2012). It is also the case that morality scholarship is increasingly found in atypical disciplines for this area of study. Staying with sociology as one such discipline, examples include the emergence of a 'new sociology of morality' (Hitlin & Vaisey, 2013), work on 'moral sociology' (Vandenberghe, 2018), and sociological

analysis of character in modern society (Hunter, 2000; Sayer, 2019). Although directly engaging value or morality was not always welcome in sociology and the social sciences, it is becoming more prominent. Realistically, engaging values in research cannot be avoided when 'people's relationship to the world is one of concern' (Sayer, 2011, p. 1).

If morality scholars were to be located on a continuum for level of analysis ranging from individual to social, we might find neuroscientists (Greene, 2014) at one extreme and structural sociologists (e.g. Emile Durkheim) at the other. No wonder engagement between various disciplines is difficult if such variance exists in the field. Sociology emphasizes social and contextual factors as they are embedded in real lives and across time (Abend, 2012). Research on morality ought to take account of the varied social circumstances, differences and inequalities that are not of an individual's making (MacIntyre, 1983, p. 213), but are nevertheless implicated in morality and its development. Drawing on Williams (1985), Abend contends that morality research is overly concerned with 'thin' morality, (using artificial replication of situations, and experimental or survey settings to investigate moral judgement) at the expense of engaging morality in all of its real life complexity, more in line with a so called 'thick' morality (Abend, 2012). According to this view, while this sort of research on thin morality is valuable and necessary, thick concepts are different for they are thoroughly entwined in social context since they both describe and evaluate. Similarly, Sayer argues for a lay ethics that focuses on morals as entirely caught up in everyday life, merging the normative and factual. Understanding morality in this thick sense requires engagement with the 'institutional and cultural pre-conditions' of a particular context in order to understand human morality, since these form the conditions of intelligibility (2011, p. 142). Sayer further adds that any understanding of practical reasoning about what a person should do (i.e. the kind assessed in moral dilemmas testing etc.) should ideally take account of the particulars of a context and tacit-levels of know how if we are to avoid risks of scholastic fallacy whereby academics project their own ways of thinking on to their subjects. Although it may seem like it, this insistence on covering

contextual nuance and detail does not deny universal features of human morality, nor does it deny human agency. Instead, Abends intention is to advocate pluralist coverage of both universality and difference according to research question. Engaging 'thick' local practices, institutions and concepts is suggested to mitigate the identified blindness in morality research.

The relative absence of a sociological perspective for research on morality is curious. After all, sociology's founding father - Emile Durkheim - identified the need for balancing social integration in societies to avoid excesses or deficiencies that could lead to different kinds of suicide. For example, anomic societies do not provide enough opportunity for human belonging or for moral guidance (Durkheim, 1897/1951, 1925/1961). It was also more common for scholars during this time to have a broader perspective. Adam Smith (c.f. Barbalet, 2012) for example, was a dominant enlightenment theorist on morality who worked across psychology, sociology, politics and philosophy in the sort of way being suggested in this article. Like Durkheim, Marx also connected entire systems of society to human wellbeing, claiming that capitalist forces concealed the true worth of working-class labor, depriving them of necessary conditions for self-realization (Marx, 1926). This is a moral matter concerned with relations between social structure and the individual. Each academic discipline has 'different and opposed interests' (Burawoy, 2005, p. 24) and Marx and Durkheim's *social – individual* analysis is quintessentially sociological. These kinds of social analysis can however be unwelcome. For one thing, a social perspective may unearth societal power relations otherwise concealed (Lukes, 1974,2005), and may be difficult to reconcile with common individualized conceptions of the person. Unfortunately, Durkheim, and many traditional sociologists, are often accused of reductively transferring the structures of society to individuals and their lives, denying possibility for human agency. This reductionism is at odds with how individuals generally see themselves and such overly deterministic conceptions represent a barrier for sociology's engagement beyond its own followers (Sayer, 2011; Smith, 2010).

Nevertheless, important sociological texts, tracing the effects on people of structural societal changes, have been enlightening for understanding human lives and morality. For example, Fromm's class-based analysis suggested basic character structures were formed within the person through family and upbringing experiences that were themselves shaped by economic location and associated social relations (Fromm, 1947). Similarly, Reisman's 'Lonely Crowd' (1950), sketched a changing American character in response to a society that shifted from emphasizing productivity to emphasizing consumption – changes that were later defined as comprising the postindustrial era. This sort of analysis focusing on differences between traditional and modern societies was common among classic sociology (Bykov, 2018) and shaped much of its concern with questions of morality. Max Weber conceived modern society as pluralistic and divided, as well as dominated by bureaucratic rationalism where rationality was linked to ends in strategic and instrumental ways (Sayer, 2011, p. 90). This represented a fundamental break with traditional societies where morality or character was understood as located in fixed social roles, had inherent worth and was associated with belief in the possibility of a human telos (MacIntyre, 1983, p. 122). In pre-modern forms of basic society, morality and social structure were combined and morality as a separate knowledge from social bonds did not exist, since social roles and related virtues were centrally valued in those communities, such as courage in Homeric society for example. In terms of researching morality, post – enlightenment pessimism about continuous progress and moral truth, together with Weber's analysis represented a blow to social scientific treatment of human morality. Weber's insistence (Weber, 1949a, 1949b), in line with Hume (1978), on separating facts and values ushered in emotivist and subjective conceptions of values and of the person as unsuitable for social scientific attention. This alienated social research and especially sociology from realistic engagement with ordinary people, since for ordinary people values are always present (Sayer, 2011). Moreover, Smith (2010, p. 141) points out that sociology has been generally averse to acknowledging human needs and drives for fear of essentialism and motivated by a preference

for emphasizing group differences more than similarities, especially if they are class, gender or ethnicity based. The fact value distinction could not be sustained in sociology however because sociologists make value judgements in their work regardless of their awareness of doing so (Smith, 2014).

Notwithstanding the various challenges for sociological engagement with morality, hope is on the horizon for increased sociological involvement in morality research. This is especially so for lines of enquiry concerned with how human beings can live well, and attend moral character and virtue as necessary, but not sufficient for human flourishing. A small group of scholars are combining sociological perspectives and this sort of Aristotelian scholarship in promising ways (Mooney, 2014; Gorski, 2012; Sayer, 2011). Similarly, Alasdair MacIntyre, though not a sociologist, also works sociologically and his canonical text 'After Virtue' contextualizes Aristotelian virtue ethics in modern societies (MacIntyre, 1983), although MacIntyre's grounding of virtue in practices rather than universal features of human nature is at odds with the direction being suggested in this article¹. Originally, when Aristotle wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics* (Aristotle, 1941, 1999), he had the social firmly in focus. In these works, Aristotle assumed the existence of ongoing human relations in the presence of a good (albeit fixed, simple and flawed (slavery & patriarchy)) community or polis. Further supporting the idea that moral agents cannot go it alone is Aristotle's insistence on the centrality of good friendships as components of a good moral life. For instance, it is through the objective reflections of good character friendship that these special interactions may be conducive to moral development (Aristotle, 1999; Sherman, 1989). Overall, Aristotelian virtue ethics has had recent appeal to several scholars who combine it with sociological perspectives, and this combined disciplinary focus has further promise. After all, as Smith (2010) suggests: if sociologists can engage the concept of virtue, it will lead them to ask important questions such as what is the social good?

¹ However, MacIntyre (2009) seems to adopt a more naturalist position in his book 'Rational Dependent Animals'.

With this kind of sociological input, better incorporating contextual factors into morality research promises improved understanding of human morality in real and entire lives. As Iris Murdoch (2001) reports, moral life happens continuously and does not occur only in the form of specific and bounded moral choices. Progress incorporating context into morality research, however, requires adequate treatment of both structure and agency, something with which sociologists have grappled for years. While healthy disagreements about this continue, Bourdieu's concept of the habitus - bringing together structure and agency within the person - is a promising approach for morality research and character education that is compatible with virtue ethics philosophy. Although some (e.g. Margaret Archer) think that Bourdieu conflates structure and agency, others such as Sayer do not, and this distinction is important because moral action presupposes agency as irreducible to structure. Ignatow also supports the possibility for moral agency and commends habitus, as a 'valuable theoretical tool for the sociology of morality' and argues its 'wholism' (2009, p. 99) works well for morality research by bringing together the subjective and objective. While habitus is old hat to sociologists, especially in education research (e.g. Dumais, 2002; Thomas, 2002), it is in fact older than this, since as already noted habitus is a translation of Aristotelian *hexeis*. But, in their respective disciplinary homes habitus and *hexeis* have quite different meanings, and each are discussed in turn in subsequent sections.

Habitus and individual change

The sociological concept of habitus builds on Fromm's idea that a character structure emanates from social relations (Meisenhelder, 2006), and so habitus for Bourdieu is a structuring structure that is shaped by social and class-based characteristics. Habitus is patterned by context, but is not determining (Lemert, 1995; Meisenhelder, 2006). It is an internalized and persisting disposition relating especially to early upbringing which differs by social location and class. The habitus shapes a person's perceptions and interpretations, expectations and desires. The habitus operates deep within the person and is thoroughly caught up in the context of a life. It is an ongoing force of engagement with the world and

can persist even when social contexts from which it emerged are absented or change. Habitus can be an asset and / or hindrance. People from shared class, status group or social location will therefore share certain characteristics and tastes. This being so, the habitus - based in the structures of society - is taken into the person and forms a kind of 'socialized subjectivity' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 126).

Adopting this concept, Ignatow claims that the 'habitus develops as a response to realities of the social environment in which he or she was raised, and these realities leave their imprint across the interwoven cognitive and bodily dimensions of the habitus' (Ignatow, 2009, pp. 109, 110). Adoption of Bourdieu's theory often involves tracing constraining effects of a working-class habitus (or other disadvantaged groups) that denies individuals 'cultural capital' available to other classes, thus hindering them unfairly. For many, this is a weakness for placing excessive emphasis on a one-way force of social reproduction (Alexander, 2006). In this view, habitus reproduces society in class-based ways at the internalized level of the person, precluding adequate space for original or resistant human agency.

While Bourdieu's habitus surely prioritizes effects of social relations on individual dispositions, personal and social change is possible too (Yang, 2014). To be sure, reflecting on one's habitus toward change is difficult, for habitus operates mostly behind the scenes, making up what we take for granted and assume to be so. One useful but extreme illustration of processes of habitus and personal change among adults is available in the example of military service. The current author conducted semi-structured interviews with British soldier's ending lengthy Army careers. Discussions concerned the soldiers' experiences of leaving the Army. It was clear from the soldier's narratives that institutional Army culture had become partially inscribed in their characters and identity (Walker, 2011 & 2012). This included various treasured attributes, such as intolerance for inactivity, expectation for taking control, and even a sense of superiority over civilians. However, in the liminal space (Van-Gennep, 1960) of leaving the Army, the soldiers' Army-based-habitus were being partially revealed to them as troublesome, while familiar social relations were beginning to fall away during preparations for leaving

the Army such as job applications, moving house and the like (Walker, 2011 & 2012). The soldiers also varied in their capacity for reflection about the person they had become within an Army context. For sociologist Margaret Archer, people can partially reflect on habitus in four ways. Of these four ways or types of 'internal conversation' (Archer, 2003), *meta-reflexives* are particularly interesting for morality research. Individuals capable of being meta-reflexive interrogate their contextual circumstances and own dispositions to formulate ongoing judgements against their value-based hopes and aspirations. For Archer (2007, p. 155), these can become community-oriented life projects. Meta reflexives, from Scramblers (2013, p. 149) analysis, are 'self-critical and tend to be preoccupied with the moral worth of their projects and their worthiness to undertake them'. This dual sociological recognition of capacity for *moral* change (meta reflexivity) and contextual legacy (habitus) is promising for morality research and character development. Moreover, approaches combining habitus and Archer's reflexivity acknowledge several important factors for character development and education, even though Archer herself is not a fan of habitus. First, in such an approach the formation of a 'structure' of character through social relations (either as a child or later (e.g. professional soldier) is thought to be possible. Second, structures of character can persist in the person even when supportive contexts are removed. And, third, changing deep dispositions is believed possible, but requires difficult self-knowledge, effort and insight – something that may not be possible for all individuals. In the case of the soldiers mentioned earlier, reflexive recognition of aspects of Army habitus were occasioned by the social rupture of transitioning out of the Army and needing to find civilian employment – circumstances that at times rendered a military habitus a liability, causing significant personal discomfort. Probably, few of the soldiers would seek out such personal change independently, although disruptions to habitus are common in other forms or stages of modern life such as illness or retirement etc.. For other types of reflexivity, Archer places more emphasis on social compliance or personal distress and so meta reflexivity may not be available to everyone. As for Archer's other kinds of reflexivity, Scrambler (2013,

p. 149) helpfully summarizes these as follows: 'communicative reflexives are oriented to 'consensus'; autonomous reflexives are oriented to 'outcome'; meta-reflexives are oriented to 'values'; and fractured reflexives are non-or disoriented'.

Notwithstanding Archer's optimism for reflexivity, habitus can be further elaborated with recourse to autobiography showing processes of both continuity and change since the force of sameness inherent in habitus ought to be appropriately retained. For example, JD Vance's book, *Hillbilly Elegy* (2016), without mentioning the concept once, is arguably all about habitus. My aim here is not to champion Vance's triumph over a dire upbringing, though that is important, but to highlight aspects of his life involving individual and contextual influence. The book describes the demise of industry and economy. And, it describes drug abuse, military service, access to an elite university, poverty, neglect, love from grandparents and more. Vance belonged to a chaotic dysfunctional hillbilly family that moved from Appalachia so his father could work in the Ohio steel industry. The family brought to a new and materially richer Ohio life, an Appalachian Hillbilly habitus. They espoused values of loyalty and love of country, were violent, verbal and abusive to each other. Their past was embedded within them, despite a new context and affluence. Vance's father - papaw - was a drunk. His mother - mamaw - was violent, unstable, hysterical, addicted and non-available. His grandparent's failings softened with age, and mostly they were loving but chaotic. Eventually, Vance joined the Marines. He then went to Yale Law School and became a lawyer, buoyed by a military attitude, individual talent and a desire to succeed. Vance preaches messages of tough love, personal responsibility and in one instance recounts having no patience for an old acquaintance, who left his job because he disliked waking up early. Having 'made it' in a new life and career, Vance nevertheless recounts how his past (habitus) regularly emerges unhelpfully in his perceptions, interpretations and reactions. His habitus was partially at odds with his new social relations and caused him recurring discomfort and uncertainty. A developed discipline and

reflexivity were only partially helpful against the legacies of his past. The structuring structure of a formed habitus cannot be entirely erased by will and reflexivity; continuing to function well in his new environment involved effort. Blended in Vance's story and habitus are social circumstance and individual energy. Macro factors such as the demise of industrial jobs in USA and lost family incomes shaped Vance's habitus, but these are factors often omitted from interpretations of potentialities for human flourishing of which moral development plays a key part. Vance's book describes interplay between individual and society, life and character, but moral dimensions are only implied and unfortunately are absent, too, from Bourdieu's original concept of the habitus (Ignatow, 2009; Lamont, 1992; Sayer, 2005). Sayer and Ignatow advocate modifying Bourdieu's habitus to redress this imbalance. Indeed Ignatow's (2009) version of a modified habitus seems especially promising for its combining of cognitions and the body. This modification of habitus suggested by Ignatow's, by combining cognitions and the body as part of habitus, works well with Archer's reflexivity and mirrors Aristotelian treatment of emotion and thinking as integral to virtuous (character) development.

Hexeis

Hexeis for Aristotle describes states of character that - though never complete - develop out of practical experience and engagement with the world (Kristjánsson, 2015). This is unsurprisingly like habitus but concerns moral development. Individuals are born with potential for cultivating hexeis which comprises a mix of virtues, but this does not occur naturally. While hexeis is often described as a disposition, it is more precise to define dispositions as parts of hexeis that may be less persisting than hexeis itself. For Aristotle, hexeis refers to a blend of stable, almost permanent states of virtue or character. Much like habitus, this might be considered a durable disposition.. Hexeis develops through social experience including nurturing in the home, school and elsewhere during a so-called period of habituation where social experiences reinforce and develop modes of sensing, perceiving feeling and acting so that hexeis is formed. Hexeis can comprise both good and poor desires, virtues and vices, and relates to social

circumstance and situations where ethical responses are required (Malikail, 2003). Hexeis is formed by habit but is not habitual. For example, habit implies regularly repeated patterns of action rather than a particular set of inclinations and ways of responding to the world. It is an active condition of the person that can't easily change. Socrates described it as a kind of holding, and this might involve holding oneself prepared. It is 'a condition from which one can't be moved all the way over into a different condition' (Lockwood, 2013). Early hexeis as clusters of habituated or 'natural virtue', though stable and persisting are nevertheless unrefined, falling short of full virtue. Nancy Sherman distinguishes between mere habituated virtue and full virtue (Sherman, 1989). Habituated virtue or early hexeis cannot be relied upon for responding well to all circumstances but does generate characteristic patterns of response for the person. For example, someone whose hexeis has proclivity toward excessive honesty may run into difficulties from being characteristically honest in unbalanced ways (doctrine of the mean), perhaps being honest in ways that cause unnecessary hurt. With the benefit of intellectual or phronetic deliberation, through ever increasing practical experience of situations requiring honesty, this can be refined. The distinction between rudimentary and phronetic hexeis suggests at least two key developmental and educational periods for cultivating states of character: formation of habituated hexeis and refinement of this toward phronetic hexeis across a life. This is a responsibility of the person and may be more or less facilitated by different kinds of social relations. MacIntyre (2016) suggests individuals have responsibility for cultivating their desires. This statement seems likely to divide academic disciplines for its focus on the individual at the expense of the contextual, but in conjunction with habitus does at least offer developmental emphasis for moral and character education. Importantly, achieving moral excellence may involve developing virtue in ways counter to habitus if the aim is to lead flourishing lives. This is difficult territory. Care is needed not to blame individuals for dire social circumstances and inequalities associated with race and gender for example, all of which might present poor conditions for human flourishing. But so is care needed to deny supremacy to social

forces. It follows that attempts to understand and educate for character need to attend individual responsibility, thick contextual factors and a realistic grasp of what individual change entails in specific contexts. Different social relations and ways of life offer varied messages and resources for shaping hexeis and habitus, including which virtues are to be developed and clustered, and what form this might take. Although virtues may be universal (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), their application and the form they can take have both similarities and differences (Thoma et al., 2019). One strength of Aristotelian based virtue ethics is the recognition that different lives and human potentialities encourage different blends and manifestations of virtue as states of character (Kristjánsson, 2015). In this spirit, there are multiple ways to achieve human excellence.

Once formed, hexeis operates in a causal way - as a source of actions and ends. Despite being a state or feature of the person (Aristotle says soul), it is oriented toward action and actions that are motivated from hexeis should be morally good (Rodrigo, 2011). As a moral state of character, hexeis therefore incorporates acts or situations into its definition since from this perspective a moral act cannot occur unless it is carried out by a person of good character. The way the person feels, senses and reasons are just as important as the action itself. All of this needs to align for the act to be moral according to virtue ethics philosophy. Hexeis therefore pulls together the person and context by connecting moral acts to a person and circumstance. It does this in two other important ways. First, a person with a state of good moral character (hexeis) will seek out good actual ends since a properly formed phronetic hexeis includes related actions (they are chosen) but, second, if a person, let's say with natural hexeis, is brought to good acts and ends that they have not chosen, then this experience can become developmental for the person so drawn in by taking part they are exposed to what acting morally entails. And so, states of character as hexeis may be developed toward phronetic hexeis in this way.

Hexeis therefore involves the development of both moral and intellectual virtues. The intellectual virtue of practical wisdom or phronesis comprises ever more expert and complex wisdom in choosing

objectively good ends. Phronesis operates as an overarching virtue enabling developed responses and careful deliberation to particular circumstances based on prior and ongoing refinement. It follows that a person with practical wisdom must have hexeis or character as the basis on which to further refine, but that a person with hexeis does not necessarily have practical wisdom if this is a more habituated or natural state. A state of character or hexeis therefore can include flaws or vices, but a developing phronetic hexeis less so.

Hexeis, habitus and character development

Engaging the influence on habitus of 'thick' local practices and institutions is needed for understanding conditions for developing states of character. Unfortunately, despite some noted exceptions habitus has lost its moral dimensions in most sociological use of the term, unlike hexeis which is centered on the moral. In habituated form, hexeis can comprise clusters of both good and poor desires (Malikail, 2003). It necessarily relates to social circumstances where ethical responses are required. Hexeis is therefore also contextualized and requires a developing capacity to attend both to universal and particular ethical requirements. As persisting states, both habitus and hexeis are difficult to change once formed. Critical reflection on one's formed habitus/hexeis is needed for change to occur, and development may need to be contrary to one's immediate context or life. Necessary too is a capacity for self-awareness without delusion about one's moral standing. None of this is straight forward, since people may adopt a strategy of 'faking it to make it' to overcome inhibitions of their habitus without much critical reflection. Constant attentiveness to one's habitus may also produce crippling self-consciousness, but one thing is for sure, working directly against a person's context is needed if it lacks resources for human flourishing. Seeking out such knowledge appears integral for moral / character education and development in modern society and this will have clear limits. A sociological lens for understanding implications and possibilities for moral and character education is an asset for once hexeis and habitus are formed, but more crucially during early formation in a period of so-called Aristotelian habituation. Research on

morality therefore needs to better understand how contextual factors are supporting or hindering human flourishing, and how various inequalities might be addressed collectively and politically.

Education concerned with developing individual character needs ultimately to be aimed at a developing phronesis which cannot occur without an already formed hexeis, although there are differing views about how far phronesis co-evolves with hexeis. Cultivation, through individual and social efforts of the cognitive intellectual capacity of phronesis is needed toward critical thinking capable of seeing through various distractions from human flourishing, including the misrecognition of some social phenomena. Some sociologists (Mooney, 2014; Smith, 2010) adopting critical realist and virtue ethics perspectives recognize that individuals and communities may value practices, habits and relations that are not objectively good for them. Of course, in ideological terms, this is similar to classic Marxism whereby working classes are denied consciousness by capitalist domination. Bourdieu's concept of misrecognition touches on this too in that individuals or groups can come to interpret phenomena in line with common discourse, concealing alternative and more accurate interpretations. Sociologists claim that misrecognition often operates to the detriment of individuals. For example, a pervading tendency to downplay our inherent human vulnerability is common despite the need to acknowledge human vulnerability in order to accurately understand possibilities for flourishing (Fowers, 2017). In this example, misrecognition of human vulnerability hinders human flourishing and can also sometimes conceal vested interests. The distinction between what is actually good for human flourishing and what is socially approved or common in practice is prime territory for the discipline of sociology working in collaboration with other disciplines in the field of morality research and this involves acknowledging vulnerability as a fact about us. This interdisciplinary collaboration has much to offer the theory and practice of moral education too, especially for developing individual capacity to tell the difference. The critical realist separation between ontology and epistemology as taken up in sociology is especially useful for this as it relates to habitus and hexeis. Critical realist philosophy distinguishes between reality

and knowing and posits that there are certain facts about social relations that individuals and groups are more or less aware of. This extends to morality. Andrew Sayer who, in challenging a fact/value distinction in social science, adopts a critical realist approach to morality, and promotes a qualified ethical naturalism. It is a rare for sociological perspectives to be used alongside a theory of ethics such as ethical naturalism because the latter prioritizes the nature of a human being rather than society for determining definitions of good and bad. It extends beyond subjective evaluations as well as cultural and social ones. According to ethical naturalism, we can know what is objectively good for people in terms of what is needed for them to flourish as human beings. However, Sayer is cautious not to go too far in this direction and argues for a *qualified* ethical naturalism. Sayer's qualified ethical naturalism acknowledges human capacities are 'always culturally-mediated and elaborated' (Sayer, 2003, p. 7). Sayer is not so much prioritizing the nature of a human being, but rather he is putting it on equal footing with social factors. In particular, he emphasizes a potential fallibility for local concepts of morality that are formed within specific cultures and supported by discourses that can misrepresent moral goods. Ultimately, by working in an interdisciplinary way Sayer's contribution in this regard is to argue against the risks of 'individualising and depoliticizing' morality (Sayer, 2003, p. 12). This kind of interdisciplinary or even postdisciplinary perspective, open to notions of universal human morality, is needed to correct the blinkered outlooks of single disciplines such as philosophy or sociology is a much-needed corrective for inter or even post-disciplinary research on morality.

Concluding Remarks

Embracing sociological contributions for researching morality and cultivating states of moral and character education has been suggested in this article. This has been informed by a small group of scholars working in the spirit of virtue ethics philosophy alongside a sociological perspectives, and in the case of Sayer advocating a qualified ethical naturalism. Improved treatment of social and contextual factors in morality research and moral education is the suggested application for these important

interdisciplinary advances. Regarding common dialogue between philosophy and social science, there is an ongoing need to negotiate the difference between the former's primarily normative agenda and the latter's primarily descriptive/explanatory/positive agenda, in order to avoid disciplines communicating past each other. Habitus and hexeis have been highlighted in this article for promotion as important assets for morality research and for moral education. Perhaps eventually, habitus and hexeis will belong to a new sociology of virtue concerned with how these states may be cultivated together under various social conditions offering more or less resources for human flourishing. One important promise of the sort of interdisciplinary scholarship discussed in this article is that appropriate attention be afforded to morality in terms of universality, individuality and context. Sociological insistence for acknowledging thick morality (Abend, 2012) needs to be better observed in morality research. As for character education, two clear differences are identified: early formation of habitus and hexeis² and ongoing cultivation, reflexivity and phronetic improvement. Attending contextual and social factors at a deep level (habitus) requires direct engagement with social or cultural norms that may be detrimental or beneficial for human flourishing. As a discipline, sociology has much to offer here. Individuals need to develop a capacity for interpreting social phenomena or events based on their genuine contribution toward living well (e.g. Bourdieu's misrecognition). If virtue is acquired through social relations, then the circumstances of those relations differentiated by social circumstances such as class, gender, ethnicity are important for the shape that might take. But, these traditional areas of sociological emphasis are too narrow, however important they might be. Likewise, individual responsibility for ones hexeis and habitus has limits and obviously differs between children still developing dispositions and adults embedded in strong cultures. If hexeis is a cluster of virtues

² Although, Margaret Archer apart, many sociologists ignore the fact that with varying degrees of success even in early life we have to learn to make choices, and to reason about things. And even later in life, major lasting changes, such as divorce or redundancy can lead to changes in practices and dispositions.

(Kristjánsson, 2015) that differs according to individual potentiality and the life being led, then we need to anticipate interminable ways to develop good states of character and human flourishing. The sociological contribution par excellence is an insistence that, through habitus, even the most individual aspects of a person can be saturated with social influence in both good and poor ways – moral and character education will do well to cultivate individual capacity for the difficult reflexivity and insight needed to see through some unhelpful social practices.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to Professor Andrew Sayer at Lancaster University for comments on an earlier draft.

References:

- Abend, G. (2012). What the Science of Morality Doesn't Say About Morality. *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 43(2), 157-200. doi:10.1177/0048393112440597
- Alexander, J. (2006). *The Civil Sphere*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Aquino, K. R., & Reed, A. (2002). The self-importance of moral identity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 83(6), 1423-1440.
- Archer, M. (2007). *Making Our Way through the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Archer, M. S. (2003). *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Aristotle. (1941). *Politics*. Paper presented at the The Basic Works of Aristotle, New York.
- Aristotle. (1999). *Nicomachean Ethics*. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Barbalet, J. (2012). Adam Smith's The Theory of Moral Sentiments: A Foundational Text of Emotions Sociology. In K. Senge, & R. Schützeichel (Eds.), *Hauptwerke der Emotionssoziologie* (pp. 333-339). Berlin: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Blasi, A. (1984). Moral identity: its role in moral functioning. In W. M. Kurtines & J. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Morality, moral behavior and moral development* (pp. 128-139). New York: John Wiley & sons.
- Bourdieu, P., & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Burawoy, M. (2005). For public Sociology. *American Sociological Review*, 70.

- Bykov, A. (2018). Rediscovering the Moral: The 'Old' and 'New' Sociology of Morality in the Context of the Behavioural Sciences. *Sociology*, 53(1), 192-207. doi:10.1177/0038038518783967
- Dumais. (2002). Cultural Capital, Gender, and School Success: The Role of Habitus *American Sociological Association*, 75(1).
- Durkheim, E. (1897/1951). *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. London: Routledge.
- Durkheim, E. (1925/1961). *Moral Education*. New York and London: The Free press.
- Fowers, B. (2017). *Frailty, Suffering, and Vice: Flourishing in the Face of Human Limitations*. Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association
- Fromm, E. (1947). *Man for himself*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Gorski, P. (2012). Recovered goods: Durkheimian sociology as virtue ethics. In P. Gorski, D. Kim, J. Torpey, & J. V. Antwerpen (Eds.), *The post-secular in question* (pp. 77-104). New York: NYU Press.
- Gorski, P. (2013). What is Critical Realism? And Why Should you Care? *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews* (Vol. 42).
- Greene, J. D. (2014). The cognitive neuroscience of moral judgment and decision making *The cognitive neurosciences*, 5th ed. (pp. 1013-1023). Cambridge, MA, US: MIT Press.
- Haidt, J. (2012). *The Righteous Mind: Why Good people are divided by Politics and Religion*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Haidt, J., & Joseph, C. (2004). Intuitive ethics: How innately prepared intuitions generate culturally variable virtues. *Daedalus*, 133(4), 55-56.
- Hitlin, S., & Vaisey, S. (2013). The New Sociology of Morality. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 39(1), 51-68. doi:10.1146/annurev-soc-071312-145628
- Hume, D. (1978). A Teatise of Human Nature. In L. A. Selby-Bigge & P. H. Nidditch (Eds.). Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press.
- Hunter, J. D. (2000). *The Death of Character - Moral Education in an Age Without Good or Evil*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ignatow, G. (2009). Why the Sociology of Morality Needs Bourdieu's Habitus. *Sociological Inquiry*, 79(1), 98-114.
- Kohlberg, L. (1958). *The Development of Modes of Thinking and Choices in Years 10 to 16.*, University of Chicago.

- Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The Psychology of Moral Development: The Nature and Validity of Moral Stages (Essays on Moral Development, Volume 2)*: Harper & Row.
- Kohlberg, L. (1985). The just community approach to moral education in theory and practice. In M. W. Berkowitz & F. Oser (Eds.), *Moral Education: Theory and application* (pp. 27-88). New Jersey: Hillsdale.
- Kristjánsson, K. (2015). *Aristotelian character education*. New York: Bantam.
- Lamont, M. (1992). *Money, Morals, & Manners: The Culture of the French and American Upper-Middle Class*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lapsley, D., & Stey, P. (2014). Moral self-identity and the aim of Education. In L. Nucci, D. Narvaez, & T. Krettenaur (Eds.), *Handbook of Moral and Character Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Lemert, C. (1995). *Sociology After the Crisis*. Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Lockwood, T. C. (2013). Habituation, Habit and Character in Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. In T. Sparrow & A. Hutchinson (Eds.), *A History of Habit: From Aristotle to Bourdieu*. New York USA, Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books.
- Lukes, S. (1974,2005). *Power A Radical View*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MacIntyre, A. (2016). *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- MacIntyre (2009). *Dependent Rational Animals*. London: Bloomsbury.
- MacIntyre, A. M. (1983). *After virtue*. Notre Dame Notre Dame Press.
- Malikail, J. (2003). Moral Character: Hexis, Habitus And 'Habit' *Minerva - An Internet Journal of Philosophy*, 7, 1-22.
- Marx, K. (1926). *The essentials of Marx; The communist manifesto, by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels; Wage-labor and capital; Value, price and profit, and other selections, by Karl Marx*: New York : Vanguard press, 1926.
- Meisenhelder, T. (2006). From character to habitus in sociology. *The Social Science Journal*, 43(1), 55-66. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soscij.2005.12.005>
- Mogilski, J. K. (2016). Science and Morality. In T. K. Shackelford & V. A. Weekes-Shackelford (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Evolutionary Psychological Science*.
- Mooney, M. A. (2014). Virtues and Human Personhood in the Social Sciences. In V. Jeffries (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Altruism, Morality, and Social Solidarity - Formulating a Field of Study* (pp. 21-41). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Murdoch, I. (2001). *The Sovereignty of Good*. london: Routledge.

- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rest, J., Narvaez, D., Bebeau, M., & Thoma, S. (1999). A Neo-Kohlbergian Approach: The DIT and Schema Theory. *Educational Psychology Review*, 11(4).
- Rest, J., Narvaez, D., Thoma, S. J., & Bebeau, M. J. (2000). A Neo-Kohlbergian Approach to Morality Research. *Journal of Moral Education*, 29, 381-396.
- Riesman, D. (1950). *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Rodrigo, P. (2011). The Dynamic of Hexis in Aristotle's Philosophy, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 42:1, 6-17, DOI: 10.1080/00071773.2011.11006728
- Sayer, A. (1999). *Long Live Postdisciplinary Studies! Sociology and the curse of disciplinaryparochialism/imperialism* Paper presented at the British Sociological Association Conference, Glasgow.
- Sayer, A. (2000). *Realism and Social Science*. London: SAGE.
- Sayer, A. (2003). *Restoring the moral dimension in social scientific accounts: a qualified ethical naturalist approach*. Paper presented at the International Association for Critical Realism, Amsterdam.
- Sayer, A. (2005). *The Moral Significance of Class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sayer, A. (2011). *Why Things Matter to people - Social Science, Values and Ethical Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sayer, A. (2019). Critiquing – and Rescuing – ‘Character’. *Sociology*, 1-22.
- Scrambler, G. (2013). Resistance in Unjust Times: ARcher, Structures Agency and the Sociology of Health Inequalities. *Sociology*, 47(1), 142-156.
- Sherman, N. (1989). *The fabric of character*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Smith, C. (2010). *What is a person*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Smith, C. (2014). *The Sacred Project of American Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thoma, S. J., Walker, D. I., Chen, Y.-H., Frichand, A., Moulin-Stožek, D., & Kristjánsson, K. (2019). Adolescents' application of the virtues across five cultural contexts. *Developmental Psychology*, 55(10), 2181-2192. doi:10.1037/dev0000770
- Thomas, L. (2002). Student retention in higher education: the role of institutional habitus. *Journal Education Policy*, 17(4), 423-442.
- Turiel, E. (2002). *The culture of morality: Social development, context, and conflict*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Van-Gennep, A. (1960). *The Rites of Passage*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Vance, J. D. (2016). *Hillbilly Elegy : A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*. New York: Harper Collins
- Vandenberghe, F. (2018). Sociology as Practical Philosophy and Moral Science. *Theory Culture & Society*, 35(3), 77-97.
- Walker, D. (2011). *Narrating Identity: Career Soldiers Anticipating Exit from the British Army*. (PhD), Durham University, Durham.
- Walker, D. I. (2012). Anticipating Army Exit: Identity Constructions of Final Year UK Career Soldiers. *Armed Forces and Society*, DOI: 10. 1177/0095327X12437689.
- Weber, M. (1949a). *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (E. A. Shils & H. A. Finch, Trans.). Glencoe: Free Press.
- Weber, M. (1949b). Objectivity in social science and social policy. In M. Weber (Ed.), *The methodology of the Social Sciences*. Glencoe: Free Press.
- Williams, B. A. O. (1985). *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Yang, Y. (2014). Bourdieu, Practice and Change: Beyond the criticism of determinism. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 46(14), 1522-1540. doi:10.1080/00131857.2013.839375