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Abstract

Recent critics have suggested that character education (either in and of itself or certain instantiations of it) is overly individualised and, as a result, fails to engage adequately with the political. In this paper, I offer an account of character education which takes issue with such criticisms, and seeks to make clear connections between the moral and the political necessary for character formation and expression. Drawing on an Aristotelian understanding of the political, I argue that individuals are intimately connected with their social associations, which in contemporary plural, westernised democracies include the sort of engagement with the political advocated by critics of character education. Through a focus on civic virtue and deliberative engagement, it is argued that an Aristotelian inspired account of character addresses the precise concerns, including recognising and challenging social injustices and deliberative engagement with difference, which critics suggest are lacking from character education.

Keywords

Biographical note

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Abstract

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Introduction

In an article in this Journal in 2006, Wolfgang Althof and Marvin Berkowitz (2006: 495) advanced the argument that 'citizenship education necessarily entails character and moral formation, but [that] this integration is hindered by negative stereotyping between the two fields'. More than a decade since, and despite some notable attempts to make clear the connections between them (see, for example, Carr, 2006), the relationship between character

education and citizenship education[1] in a number of nations – including the United States, England, and Canada – remains highly contested[2]. The analysis offered is intended as a direct response to the views that character education involves the 'disappearance of the political' (Suissa, 2015) or exhibits a 'cancerous' relationship with citizenship education (Boyd, 2010). In responding to recent work critical of the turn to character education in the United States, England, and Canada, the aim here is twofold: First, to examine and contest the view that character education takes the individual as its primary focus and that, as a result, character education either underplays or ignores altogether wider connections with political communities. Second, to offer some thoughts about how the political might be understood and enacted within character education which draw on Aristotelien roots but that also remain relevant for today[3].

The view that character education fails to take the political seriously is a concern for those, like myself, who wish to prioritise character as central to meaningful education and schooling. As such, it is beholden on advocates of character education to explicitly address the charges made and to assert not only *that* character education can and should include the political, but also *why* and *how* it should do so. Clearly, clarifying the political seems crucial for a more widespread acceptance of character education. The endeavour attempted here is also of practical relevance given that it is frequently the case that in practice curricula for citizenship education include some form of character education, whether to a greater or lesser extent (see, for example, Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003; QCA, 1998, 2007). In addition, a further interesting feature of recent criticisms of character education is that several of those whom offer criticism appear fairly open to the idea that character education can be

[1] For the purposes of this paper, and in common with most of the literature in the field of civic and citizenship education I use the term citizenship education here to refer widely to various educational processes which prepare young people for their role as citizens. This may include, but extends well beyond, the teaching of Citizenship education as a formal, curriculum subject within schools.

[2] It is important to recognise here, that while not uncontested, the relationship between character education and citizenship education is more clearly connected in some, non-western democracies (here, Singapore, in which Character and Citizenship Education is a school subject, provides a illustrative example; Lee, 2012; Shumer, Lam and Laabs, 2012; Sim and Lee, 2012). While not wishing to ignore the importance of other contexts, the analysis offered here focuses deliberately on character education and citizenship education in westernised democracies.

[3] Though it is not necessarily my primary aim, the arguments I seek to offer are also relevant to wider debates in the field of civic and citizenship education pertaining to the nature of citizenship. There is not scope to go into detail about this here, but my own view is that drawing deeper connections between character education and citizenship education – both in theory and practice – can provide a more useful and hopeful alternative than the typologies of citizenship that somewhat dominate current literature (see, for example, Westheimer and Kahne, 2004; for a critique of these see Cohen, 2019).

reconciled with some form of citizenship education (see, for example, Hoge, 2002; Boyd, 2011; Suissa, 2015).

Seeking to add to the recent body of literature committed to an Aristotelian-inspired approach to character education, the argument made in this paper is that, broadly speaking, the conceptual resources needed for delineating the political nature of character and character education lie largely within Aristotelian/neo-Aristotelian scholarship and that, as such, engagement with Aristotle's political work offers a useful way of thinking about the political within character education, in particular that character formation and expression cannot be isolated from wider social contexts, and therefore only make sense when understood in relational terms. Following this introduction, this paper comprises three sections. In the first, recent criticisms of character education are examined. In the second section some thoughts are offered regarding the relationship between the individual and the political from a neo-Aristotelian perspective. Here it is argued that, when transposed to contemporary democratic communities, there are important reasons for viewing political communities as a space for the expression and cultivation of virtues. On this basis, the third section offers some considerations for education and focuses in particular on deliberation as an illustrative case.

In making these arguments three related presuppositions are involved. The first, well supported in existing scholarship on Aristotle's political thought but about which there is not sufficient scope to justify here, is that Aristotle's *Politics* builds on and compliments the views of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Indeed, the two texts are best considered as part of an extended treatise. The second is that Aristotle can be read as conceiving that participation in the political life of the community requires virtues, and, in turn, can support the formation of virtues (Cooper, 2010). The third is that when Aristotle refers to man as a political animal (*zoon politikon*), he is not referring to the political in a narrow sense of governance of the political entity (though this is included), but to wider social life[4] (Mulgan, 1990; see also Miller, 1995). I shall offer greater analysis of these latter two presuppositions in the sections which follow.

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[4] For a contrasting, narrower reading see, for example, Keyt (1987), and for a wider discussion see Duvall and Dotson, (1998).

Two further points of clarification should also be stated from the outset. It is not my intention to tackle directly the anachronistic aspects of Aristotle's political thought. Others have provided persuasive accounts of the progressive and inclusive potential of applying Aristotelian ideas to contemporary democracies (see, for example, Nussbaum, 1990; Curren, 2000; Kristjánsson, 2013). Nor is it my intention here to provide a detailed, close reading of Aristotle's *Politics* or to offer an original interpretation of Aristotle. Rather, it is to draw on certain elements of his thought, and subsequent interpretations of it, which might be usefully put to work in making clearer the political within character education[5]. As such, my goal is to offer some considerations about the political and character that I hope will be attractive to advocates and critics of character education alike (or will at least lead to further discussions *between* advocates and critics).

Criticisms of character education

Before advancing the importance of the political for any meaningful account of character and character education it is worth paying some attention to the precise nature of recent criticisms of character education with respect to the political (or lack thereof). It should be noted that when advancing these criticisms those doing so focus on a range of targets, whether character education *per se*, a particular instantiation of character education in official policy or particular programmes of character education. Unfortunately, and not always helpfully, critics of character education at times move interchangeably between targets, thereby obfuscating differences *within* character education while also replicating certain 'myths' about character education that can be readily dispelled (Kristjánsson, 2013). That said, it is undeniable that character education has received its fair share of criticism for its (real or supposed) lack of recognition of the political. Across these recent critiques two connected concerns are notable. The first is that character education focuses wholly or excessively on the formation and expression of particular capacities, traits and dispositions by individuals *qua* individuals. The second is that, by extension, character education suffers from a lack of

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[5] In choosing to draw on Aristotelian themes, I am aware that there are other traditions of political thought that also pay attention to themes of moral and political character and how sociability and sympathetic understanding might be cultivated. These themes are found in the work of Adam Smith and David Hume, and were central to the ethical citizenship of British Idealism. See Brooks (2014) for a detailed examination of the latter.

focus on wider political ties and communities, including recognising and challenging the presence of ongoing structural inequalities and injustices.

The view that character education is narrowly concerned with the personal, private capacities, dispositions and moral conduct of individuals is readily expressed by its critics. Kisby (2017: 3; emphasis added), for example, has suggested that 'the focus of character education is on personal ethics rather than public ethics, and with addressing important moral or political issues at the level of the *individual* rather than at any other level'. Similarly, Walsh (2018; emphasis added) has suggested that 'proponents of character education appear to concede that social context matters, but they conclude that it is more pragmatic to *change individuals* than it is to change society'. Winton (2008: 305; emphasis in original) echoes these comments, suggesting that character education's 'focus on *individuals* leaves political, economic, and cultural institutions unchallenged… and perpetuates the status quo'.

The idea that character education focuses on the character of individuals is often associated with the fairly consistent reading by critics that character education serves socially conservative and economically liberal agendas (see, for example, Winton, 2008; Bull and Allen, 2018; Taylor, 2018). In his critique of character education programmes, Boyd (2010: 384) suggests bluntly that 'most (perhaps all?)' literature on character education 'is highly conservative in about every way possible. Not to put too fine a point on it, I consider most of it to be conceptually, empirically, morally, politically, and educationally corrupt'. Clearly, the case of those advocates of character education who wish to promote the progressive and emancipatory political potential of virtues is not always helped by discourses – such as those surrounding recent UK government policy on character education in English schools – that use rhetoric which connects the possession (or lack thereof) of certain character traits with increased (or lack thereof) social mobility. For critics of character education, the posited correlation between certain traits (such as resilience and grit) with increased social mobility is understandably concerning, running the risk as it does of implying (explicitly or implicitly) that social immobility is a direct result of a lack of these traits in the most disadvantaged. It could be suggested instead that the problem here is one of emphasis. It is one (clearly problematic) thing to state that social immobility results from a lack of character or that those who are disadvantaged and marginalised lack positive character traits, but another (much less

problematic) thing to suggest that one's character traits are likely to have an impact on how one experiences and reacts to those challenges – including structural, political challenges – which do and will impact on the life chances of oneself and of others. While the former line of argument focuses unduly and unfairly on the individual, the latter necessarily appreciates that those who are disadvantaged by political and social inequities are likely to need – and are likely to some extent to possess already – character traits which enable them to work with others to challenge current conditions.

Aligned with the concern that character education is overly and myopically preoccupied with the individual, a number of critics have made the associated claim that character education is, deliberately or otherwise, apolitical and seeks to foster social conformity and obedience rather than engaging critically with political structures, social justice, and with difference. Walsh (2018), for instance, claims that through focusing on character as a basis for human and societal flourishing, character education 'underplays the role of social, political and economic contexts and the structural forces of inequality', while Kisby (2017: 30) argues that proponents of character education 'fail to distinguish between the good person and the good citizen'. Similarly, in her analysis, Judith Suissa (2015: 105) has argued that the rise of character education in England has been accompanied by the 'disappearance of the political'. According to Suissa, current character education programmes 'displace the idea of political and, through their language and approaches, avoid any genuine engagement with the very concept of the political in all but its most superficial sense' (105). Suissa (2015: 107; emphasis added) continues that 'without a more radical conception of just what 'the political' means, and without engaging children in debates about how political aims, ideas and values are intertwined with, yet importantly *distinct from*, moral values, there is no hope of engaging children in the pursuit of a more socially just and less oppressive society'. So too, Boyd (2010: 384; emphasis added) opines that 'it is extremely problematic to conflate character education and citizenship education in a manner that fails to see them as *inherently different* in important ways' (see also, Boyd, 2011).

The view that character education and citizenship education are ultimately distinct endeavours is not only found amongst critics of the former. Althof and Berkowitz (2006: 509), for example, have argued that citizenship education 'must entail more than moral

education'. For this reason, they suggest that it is best to 'understand the relationship… as a set of Venn diagrams (partially overlapping domains)' (Althof and Berkowitz, 2006: 512; see also Davies, Gorard and McGuinn (2005) and Hoge (1992) for somewhat similar views). Others have presented different ways of approaching the distinction between character and citizenship education. Winton (2008) is less optimistic about reconciling character with political education, positioning critical democratic education as an *alternative* to character education. In contrast, though recognising that democracy involves morality and so not ruling out the potential of reconciling the political within character education, Suissa (2015: 110; emphasis added) suggests that we should not 'overlook the importance of the *distinction* between political questions and *purely* moral questions'. Common across each of these positions seems to be the view that, whether or not they are reconcilable, citizenship education and character education are ultimately distinct subjects. My concern is that while overlaps and distinctions may *on the surface* offer something of value, they can become oversimplified precisely because they concentrate on the similarities and differences of concepts and curricular content rather than interrogating deeper interconnections between the moral and the political. In addition, these views seem to rest on an inconsistent and unclear shifting between narrower definitions of the political often associated with liberal democracies, and now fairly well contested in literature on citizenship education, that separates out the strictly political (i.e. governance) and wider understandings of the political which include other social and civic associations[6]. In the next section, I suggest that prioritising and clarifying this wider understanding of the political is valuable to character education and so the focus now turns to an examination of character, the political and civic virtue on a broadly neo-Aristotelian account.

Character, the political and civic virtue

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[6] In making this claim, it should be noted that it is not always clear which specific definition of the political critics are seeking to work with. Often, politics is defined rather generally as challenging social injustices, engaging with the democratic process and seeking change. In calling for a more radical conception of the political, Suissa (2015: 110) suggests a need 'to bring back a focus on the political, and an attempt to get children to see political thinking, argument and action as a particular form of human engagement concerned with particular kinds of questions'. She continues 'What is essential is that *the political* – understood as that whole realm of human enquiry and experience that touches on the question of 'how people like us are to live together' – is brought back into the classroom as a live issue' (emphasis added).

In contrast to the overly sharp distinction between the individual and political communities that critics identify within character education, Aristotle posits a mutually beneficial and supportive (or indeed corrosive in deficient constitutions) relationship between the individual citizen and the social community. As noted in the introduction, when Aristotle refers to man as a political animal (*zoon politikon*), he is not referring to the political in a narrow sense of governance of the political entity (though this is included), but to wider social life and associations. The *polis*[7] as Aristotle understood it refers to 'the community itself, a complex system of human relationships', and 'does not consist merely in *political* relationships, although Aristotle values these highly' (Miller, 1974: 63; emphasis added; see also Miller, 1995; Mulgan, 1990). Mulgan (1990: 197) contends that Aristotle 'clearly had a notion of taking part in civic duties or sharing in the exercise of community power, which is very close to our notion of political participation and may be translated as such'[8]. Aristotle also states that while the independent *polis* 'came about as a means of securing life itself, it continues in being to secure the *good* life' (1992; 1252b27-30; emphasis in original). The association of the *polis* on Aristotle's account is one of freely engaged citizens, who understand that living in community offers the possibility a life not attainable for the asocial, isolated individual (Mulgan, 1990). As Cooper (2010: 228) suggests in his influential analysis of Aristotle's in his ideal polis:

> we can see that on Aristotle's fully developed theory of the virtues of
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> character and practical intellect, each and every exercise of them, if they
>
> are to be properly exercised at all, requires an orientation not just to one's
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> own happiness (in exercising the virtues) but to the happiness (the virtuous
>
> living) of the others with whom one shares life in one's political community.

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[7] Note here that Aristotle uses the term *polis* in different ways in the *Politics*. In Book I, *polis* refers to the whole community, whereas in Book III the term is used to refer to the political entity of the state (Miller, 1974).

[8] Mulgan also reminds us that Aristotle offered a different notion of the relationship between common matters and individual matters than that between the public and personal usually invoked in liberal democracies. According to Mulgan, the liberal principle of non-interference in the personal realm is not found in Aristotle's work.

In this sense, Aristotle offers a vision of a community consisting of a group of people working in common to achieve mutual benefit (Aristotle, 1992: 1252a1-7; Kraut, 2002; Cooper, 2010), based on an appropriate level of equality and civic friendship (Curren, 2010; Peterson, 2018). Duncan (1995:147-8) summarises this relationship in the following way:

> The object of virtuous civic participation for Aristotle … is not
>
> to reinvigorate or enshrine the state … but to help individuals
>
> fulfil themselves on a multidimensional (and therefore truly human)
>
> rather than unidimensional scale. In other words, it is in the interest
>
> of the self, given its social context and "public" dimension, to
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> participate politically in a virtuous manner.

When we move to actual communities, the relationship envisaged between the citizen and the community is not one in which the former is subordinate to the latter (it is not totalitarian), but is one in which citizens participate through active, deliberative engagement and in doing so express their character. Indeed, the possession of intellectual and moral virtues affects the level and quality of participation within the community (Duvall and Dotson, 1998), and this seems vital for protecting the stability of the community as a whole. In other words, and by extension, in a properly instituted form of neo-Aristotelian character education the mutuality between the character of citizens and the character of the community is fundamental, a point which is sometimes lost in the recent critiques of character education examined in the previous section (though, and as I return to later this is not to suggest that current policies directed at character education, such as those in England, do not also make this error).

Of course, the city-state Aristotle had in mind was different in nature to modern, heterogeneous democracies – not least in terms of equality, pluralism and suffrage. As such, working with the contemporary relevance of Aristotle's is to suggest that his thought contains

valuable, insights of relevance today, not that it can be transposed simplistically. This noted, Aristotle (1992; 1279a16) asserts that the health of the political community requires that those who enjoy particular advantages work to address those inequalities which limit freedom. He argues, for example, that 'Whenever the one, the few or the many rule with a view to the common good, these constitutions must be correct; but if they look to the private advantage, be it of the one or the few or the mass, they are deviations. For either we must say that those who do not participate are not citizens, or they must share in the benefit' (1992; 1279a22). In addition, Aristotle rails against poverty within a democracy, asserting that 'the duty of the true democrat is to see that the population is not destitute; for destitution is a cause of a corrupt democracy' (1992; 1320a17).

The relationship at play here is dependent on a general commitment to justice and cooperation, broadly understood, as just distribution and civic friendship support the stability of the political community (Schwarzenbach, 1996; 2015; Scorza, 2004; Leontsini, 2013; Schwartzberg, 2016). In the *Nichomachean Ethics* Aristotle suggests in relation to civic friendship that 'when men are friends they have no need for justice, while when they are just they need friendship as well, and the truest form of justice is thought to be a friendly quality' (NE 1155a26-29). Civic friendship and fellow-feeling within a political community are not fixed entities, but require cultivation and deliberation to enable competing interests to be shared and understood. Such deliberation, therefore, requires citizens to enter into dialogue with others about 'the expedient and the inexpedient, and therefore also the just and unjust' (Bickford, 1996: 400).

Indeed, rather than stifling engagement with difference and conflict as some critics of character education suggest, a properly framed neo-Aristotelian approach attaches great importance to deliberating with others. Terchek and Moore (2000: 905) remind us of this commitment in their commentary and interpretation of Aristotle's politics, suggesting that 'we find an Aristotle who tells us not that we must harmonize our thinking to some shared conception of the good… Rather Aristotle is concerned with the constitution of the polis and the formation of crucial institutions and practices that support deliberative citizens and the public sphere'. Crucial to these institutions and practices is the creation of conditions through which conflicts within the state can be navigated and, where possible, resolved. Indeed, in the

Nicomachean Ethics Aristotle suggests that we only deliberate over matters of disagreement or which may be otherwise[9]. This reflection seems rather obvious, but is particularly relevant given the criticisms examined earlier that character education often or necessarily remains focused on perpetuating the status quo and is not interested in changing society. Instead of forcing compliance and subordination to a singular common good, this reading of Aristotle – particularly when transposed to contemporary democratic societies – understands the good as being realised at least in part through our attachments to each other (see also Yack, 1993).

To suggest in a general sense that a relationship exists between the character of citizens and the character of the state also raises the crucial question of how, precisely, the moral and the political connect within the particularities of a contemporary *democratic* state[10]. Here, two responses seem fruitful. The first response is to centre in on the importance of civic virtues, such as civility, tolerance and neighbourliness. Understood in general terms, civic virtue can be understood as referring to the 'disposition to further public over private good in action and deliberation' (Burtt, 1990: 24). Through civic virtues, citizens are able to act in accordance with their political nature, participating actively within their communities. On this reading, civic virtues involve the expression of moral and intellectual capacities that are important for both individual citizen and the flourishing and wellbeing of the democratic state. As Cooper (2010: 230; emphasis in original) argues in his reading of Aristotle, 'virtuous actions and activities, however much undertaken always by individuals, are an *essentially* communal undertaking'. On Cooper's position, individual citizens act as partial co-agents and co-beneficiaries in the virtue of all citizens within the community (for a discussion, see Lott, 2017), acting as civic friends in support of virtuous living for all. In other words, in a well-functioning political community all citizens share the benefit directly.

Of course, here the critic may reply simply that while a focus on civic virtues may be valuable in theory, difficulties arise in practice if the precise meaning of these civic virtues are essentially restrictive and serve to privilege the interests of some (i.e. those with access to

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[9] 'no one deliberates about things that are invariable, or about things that it is impossible for him to do' (Aristotle, 2009; 1140a31-b12).

[10] I recognise here that there is dispute about the extent to which Aristotle was democratic, even if we leave aside his views regarding women and slaves. For the purposes of this paper, I take there to be sufficient democratic possibilities expressed in the *Politics* (see Kraut, 2002; Johnson, 2015) for this to offer instructive possibilities for an Aristotelian inspired approach to character education.

power) over others (i.e. those without access to power). Indeed, some critics have suggested that character education is guilty of mistakenly universalising and essentialising virtues – including civic virtues – thereby excluding or denying cultural differences (see Boyd, 2011 and Suissa, 2015 who both make this assertion). Here the response has to take a fairly simple, though initially vague, direction; namely, that civic virtues in contemporary plural democracies are likely to be those one can readily associate with 'active, critically-minded citizens who possess[ed] sufficient economic independence and equality of condition to exercise political judgement and engage in public affairs' (Sandel, 1998: 324-5). In other words, the precise sense of each civic virtue will follow a general form but will necessarily be shaped and informed by the particularities of the democratic state in question, moulded that is by historical and contextual factors. In addition, and as Carr (2006: 448) explains, when Aristotelian inspired virtue theorists 'insist that virtuous agents are those who act at the right time, in relation to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive and in the right way, they are claiming only that justice or friendship (for example) may be variably expressed in different contexts – not that justice takes on an entirely new meaning in different contexts'. Thus, key questions for exploration in and through character education include what it means to be a good citizen in a particular constitution and, therefore, what democratic citizenship and civic virtue mean today.

The second response returns us to a concern with existing attempts to reconcile character and citizenship education identified in the previous section, namely that they rely on the identification of overlaps between character and citizenship. The relationship between the moral and the political, I wish to suggest, is more nuanced than this, and involves continual exploration on the part of the individual of how moral virtues (such as kindness, gratitude and compassion) connect to the wider communities in which citizens – including young citizens – exist and interact. For example, the political state or constitution in which individual citizens live and engage manifestly impacts on the character of those individual citizens – whether for good or ill – and *vice versa*. As Curren (2010: 552) reminds us, the constitution is not 'simply a blueprint for a form of government, but a functioning political system whose actual patterns are heavily determined by the characteristics of the people involved'. It is certainly true that Aristotle draws an important distinction between the good person and the good citizen[11].

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[11] While some commentators dispute this (Keyt, 1987), that Aristotle wished to draw a distinction between the good citizen and the good man is a widely supported view (Mulgan, 1991; Duvall and Dotson, 1998).

Nevertheless, for those sensitive to an Aristotelian inspired form of character education it remains that although 'a polis that is less than ideal is not adequate for full virtue among all… it is still better than no polis' (Johnson, 2015: 61). As such, and crucially, at least part of the reason why we teach children to be kind and honest (for example) is because they live in a democratic society in which the dispositions to be kind and honest are valued (if not always attained) and in which there is general consensus that without certain levels of kindness and honesty the democratic project will either be worse off or will collapse altogether. In other words, the wider political factors which influence our commitments to, and understandings of, given moral capacities are always at play, whether consciously or otherwise. A necessary but not always present condition of character education is precisely that it enables children to examine and discuss virtues such as kindness and honesty, including how they relate to democratic life more generally (including any tensions that arise).

Character education, deliberation and engagement with difference

In this final section I wish to focus in particular on the importance for character education of the capacities necessary for deliberation. I do so because deliberation provides a worthwhile and illustrative case and because a focus on the virtues of deliberation challenges the not uncommon, but mistaken, view that 'citizenship education… requires many skills not typically of central interest to character education, e.g. resistance to political persuasion, critical analysis of political messages' (Althof and Berkowitz, 2006: 513), and highlights how these skills are (or at least should be) of central concern to character education. Put simply, once we recognise the situated nature of character within particular democratic communities we can conceive the capacity to resist political persuasion and to critically analyse political messages as central elements *within* character education given that these elements represent salient features of a given situation requiring moral sensitivity, perception and discernment.

Recourse to the political elements of Aristotle's work reminds us that 'there is no more important lesson to be learned or habit to be formed than that of right judgement' (1992; 1340a15). Within the context of contemporary democracies, one domain for learning and expressing such right judgements are the institutions and processes of deliberative

engagement themselves. These institutions and processes, which include those deliberative practices operated within and through education and schooling but also move beyond these to incorporate informal forms of participation outside and beyond of formal education (for example, within civil society), provide opportunities for pupils as citizens to develop and express their own character – including their civic virtues. That such processes offer formative educational opportunities through promoting good judgement in political realms is not uncommonly professed in the policy and academic literature on citizenship education (Gutmann, 1987; QCA, 1998; Carnegie Corporation and CIRCLE, 2003; Peterson, 2009; Sorial and Peterson, 2019) and there are examples of practical programmes combining character and citizenship education for this purpose (see, for example, Alberta Education, 2005[12]).

Furthermore, and again as is widely advocated in research in political theory and on citizenship education, deliberation requires looking beyond the individual self in order to hear and be attentive to the interests of others as well as appreciating that one's interests are intimately connected to those of the wider social and political community. This requires citizens who appreciate the shared enterprise of their associations, as well as the fact that associations between citizens that operate independently of the state – including those within civil society – can play a crucial role in addressing social issues. Of course, the demands involved will necessarily be affected by context. The small, largely homogeneous community Aristotle had in mind would provide less challenge in this regard than contemporary social or liberal democracies[13]. However, this point noted, for deliberative systems to survive and prosper today does seem to require citizens of a certain character; that is, citizens who are trustworthy, compassionate, civil, open-minded, curious, critical and who are committed to deliberation with others about what might be possible.

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[12] *The Heart of the Matter: Character and Citizenship in Alberta Schools* (Alberta Education, 2004: 7) offers an interesting approach to combining character education and citizenship education, and in doing so explicitly tackles the connections between the two stating that: 'As citizenship education grapples with ways to teach that respect an individual's multiple identities and affiliations, and character education recognizes the importance of an individual's interactions in and affiliations to communities and society, the lines between citizenship and character are increasingly blurred'.

[13] Even here the cooperation needed may be somewhat easier in certain contemporary democracies (perhaps the social democracies of Nordic countries) than it is in others (such as the United States). For an insightful exploration of the challenges involved, see Allen (2004).

Educationally, such deliberation by its very nature includes a consideration of what kind of democracy pupils live in, what kind of democracy pupils wish to live in, and how any gap between the two might be reduced. In fact, there seems to be something crucial in suggesting that before pupils can deliberate about what kind of democracy they wish to live in and how any gaps between this and the current situation can be addressed, they need to have examined and understood the present situation sufficiently well to inform their reflections. As Bernard Crick (2000: 32) suggested, discussing 'how should things be reformed?' before a 'realistic knowledge of how things are actually done' is problematic; it is to put the cart before the horse. Recognising the importance of political deliberation with fellow citizens (including about the present, past and future), then, provides a robust response to the view of critics that character education ignores the political and individualises social problems. Indeed, there may well be some fertile common ground here given that it is not immediately clear how the thoughts outlined above differ substantively from Suissa's (2015: 114) provocation that:

> to overcome urgent social problems of injustice, inequality and oppression…
> surely an essential part of such an approach is convincing people that such
> change is both possible and necessary, and creating a climate of public
> political discourse where ideas about what and how to change, and why, are
> openly debated and argued for.

Of course, recognising the connections between character and the political also requires us to understand citizenship education in wide terms, and as extending well beyond formal learning about political constitutions and institutions (again, a view supported widely by advocates of citizenship education). Indeed, there are multiple aspects of schooling and education, not all of them overtly political, which support attitudes and behaviours conducive to engaging with others in respectful and cooperative ways. As such, the content and resources for an education in virtuous citizenship comprises diverse and multifarious elements. Important resources include the culture of the school, relationships of respect between teachers and pupils, as well as engagement with literature and the arts for the extent to which they provide insights into different viewpoints and possibilities, and enable and

expand the moral imagination. As Carr (2006) has persuasively argued, reconciling the moral with the political in education is likely to 'foster the robust commitment to ideals that are clearly important for genuine citizenship' and 'may also be conducive to cultivation of the kind of moral imagination that enables us to empathise and sympathise with others'. It is precisely the ability to be compassionate and sympathetic to others that underpins meaningful deliberation, including the ability to share our own interests and to hear those of others (Nussbaum 1987; D'Olimpio and Peterson, 2018)). In addition, without using their moral imagination it seems improbable that pupils, as citizens, will be able to understand and reconstruct the feelings, thoughts and goals of others within their political communities, and far less act upon these understandings and reconstructions to address injustices suffered by others. Without a moral basis for their deliberation with others for whom they have some sense of mutual concern and with whom they are involved in a common enterprise, pupils may fall into engaging without hearing or argumentation without real understanding. It seems unlikely, that is, that the awakening and expression of the moral imagination will occur unless the political and the moral are appreciated as intertwined and as mutually reinforcing.

Before concluding, it would seem logical to suggest that the political nature of character education will be strengthened through its explicit and intentional recognition within curricula and teaching. If we turn our attention to the specific context of policy in England there is reason for concern that the political basis of character is being underplayed. While the inclusion of citizenship education in the curriculum for secondary schools in 2002 was premised on the important connection between the moral and the political (QCA, 1998) successive iterations of the curriculum have ignored the moral. Additionally, recent government interest in character education in England has included little about the political (a point consistently made by critics of character education), and such interest and resulting policy has run separately from policy on citizenship education. Clearly, if the English case is anything to go by, more work is needed at a policy level to connect individual character to wider political communities. That this is so also raises pressing questions for the practice of character education in English schools. Within a policy context that prioritises resilience, grit and the like and that treats character and citizenship education as separate endeavours, serious questions remain about how and whether schools and teachers are allowing for the open critical discussions about virtues and society argued for here.

Conclusion

The analysis provided here has been an attempt to respond to criticisms aimed at character education that consider it as necessarily or largely focused on individuals and individual character traits, thereby ignoring the political. The response offered has been that, on a broadly neo-Aristotelian view, the expression – and indeed the formation – of virtues are situated in a political context, one which involves a range of associations, including those typically invoked by a more narrow conception of the political associated with liberal democracy. Recognising the political nature of humans requires a movement away from individualistic accounts of character, virtues and character education in such a way that starts from the view that associations are needed for the good life. On this reading, character education necessarily includes preparing pupils for, and engaging them in, their associations – including those connected with citizenship. Such engagements require virtues, such as honesty, compassion, open-mindedness etc., as well as supporting their further development. When pupils are engaged in their communities, including in deliberation with others, such engagement is not separate from questions of who they are and who they wish to become. Developing the character of the individual and engaging with the political community, including recognising and challenging structural injustices, are not necessarily separate endeavours. Rather, the political community is a sphere within which character can be cultivated and expressed. The fact that this connection remains underrepresented in policy and within academic research remains in need of redress.

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