The Good Sense of Aristotelian Character Education

Making Character Education More Explicit:

The Case for a Taught Course

Dan Wright

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Context

Recent Party Political Conference speeches have put Character Education firmly back on the political and educational agenda for contemporary UK schooling. In September 2014, both the Secretary and Shadow Secretary of State for Education highlighted the 'moral calling' [1] of teaching and the need to support innovative ideas to help schools and young people to develop 'character, resilience and grit'[2]. The current Secretary of State for Education took this further, adopting the Jubilee Centre's interpretation of Character Education as definitive for the purposes of current policy:

'Character is a set of personal traits that produce specific moral emotions, inform motivation and guide conduct. Character education is an umbrella term for all explicit and implicit educational activities that help young people develop positive personal strengths called virtues.'[3]

Moreover, during her recent Priestley Lecture at the University of Birmingham, on 27th November 2014, the newly appointed Secretary of State for Education, Nicky Morgan, argued that

We want to ensure that young people leave school with the perseverance to strive to win, to persevere against the odds, to overcome the challenges that life throws at them and bounce back with vigour and confidence, something that the expeditions of Sir Raymond Priestley demonstrate in abundance.

We want pupils to revel in the achievement of victory, but honour the principles of fair play, to win with grace and to learn the lessons of defeat with acceptance and humility. And we want pupils to become honest citizens who contribute to their communities, neighborhoods and countries.[4]

This, in addition to the £5 million pledge to support the development of character in maintained schools, denotes a warm and agreeable policy environment for those teachers committed to a virtue-based curriculum.

Such debates have been amply reflected in both the trade press [5] and mediated through national mouthpieces such as *The Daily Telegraph*[6]*, The Guardian*[7]*,* BBC Radio 4's *The Moral Maze* [8] and The Policy Exchange's public debating quorum[9].   Policy, it seems, is finally catching up with grassroots practice, validating, and further mandating what many teachers, educators and fine schools [10] already know and do so well. Indeed, for many teachers this conversation itself

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[1] http://press.labour.org.uk/post/98055389239/speech-by-tristram-hunt-mp-to-labour-party-conference
[2] http://press.conservatives.com/post/98807929855/nicky-morgan-speech-to-conservative-party-conference
[3] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/media/news/article/4176/Secretary-of-State-Announces-Character-Building-Fund-and-Adopts-Centre-Definition-of-Character
[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/secretary-of-state-for-education-our-plan-for-education
[5] https://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6420245
[6] http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/10353031/Why-character-is-the-key-to-a-perfect-education.html
[7] See in particular recent debates surrounding the quality of independent/maintained character provision and:
http://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/may/18/lessons-in-virtues-and-values
[8] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/media/news/article/4185/Dr-Sandra-Cooke-Speaks-on-BBC-Radio-4-s-Moral-Maze-
[9] See: The Policy Exchange *Teaching Character Education is a Waste of Time*, November 2014, at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DFQX5pr_7jQ
[10] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/515/character-education/schools-of-character

marks a welcome departure from an exclusive and dangerously narrow policy and teacher training focus on the acquisition of knowledge and skills, or tokenistic, vague, and conceptually incoherent platitudes about 'values'. At last, it seems, teachers are being invited to articulate and explore their vocation and identity and the extent to which it is primarily about enabling boys and girls to acquire virtue, to flourish. To what extent, for example, does teaching have an inbuilt moral purpose to it? If so, what does it look like and how should it function?

Yet whilst for many teachers and indeed parents[11], this call to arms strengthens what they already do so well, broader professional and public comment continues to baulk at the prospect of an explicit approach to character education. Many, who may be persuaded of the importance, necessity and unavoidability of Character Education in principle, may only go to the extent in practice of understanding this as being communicated exclusively through 'ethos and values', school procedures, teacher role-modelling and extra-curricula provision. Moreover, where concession is made to explicit character education it only extends to recognising those more psychological and less moral attributes such as 'resilience' and 'grit' – especially when such seemingly uncontentious attributes can be manifested and measured in the hard currency of high examination results, competitive university entrance and conventionally high performing careers. Such psychological strengths as 'resilience, grit and determination' are no doubt important, but slipped from their metaphysical moorings they can easily be put to nefarious ends, (such as building The Third Reich, as the oft belaboured, but important point, rightly contends).

This paper argues for an explicitly taught course, claiming it has a vital part to play in a school's broader provision for building character. It is important to stress at the outset, that it is envisaged that a discrete taught course provides an important 'addition to' a school's provision for Character Education, rather than being offered 'instead of' the other more indirect, implicit means. These other means include: rigorous professional development and pedagogical thinking on what is involved in Character Education, a leadership team that is committed to building character, a sense of shared mission to develop character, role-modelling, service learning, and a culture of high expectation and 'nurturant relationships'[12].

I argue, in particular, that an approach to explicit, direct Character Education built on the foundations of Aristotle-inspired virtue ethics cuts the clearest swathe through the dense thicket of issues and concerns that circulate around taught course. As Berkowitz has it in his 2011 position, direct teaching from a taught course has the best potential to be 'a useful 'saliency strategy': it makes the concepts prominent in the minds of students and the life of the school'[13].

Not only does this paper engage with the 'why' of a taught course, it also suggests ways in which this can be done practically, engaging with the 'how' of Character Education. The initial fruits of this thinking are best seen in the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues' Programme of Study[14], where a range of approaches is set out to advance the debate on what a taught course should look like and how it should function.

This paper assumes broad support for the notion of character education, whether through an explicit taught course, or through more implicit, character building activities. As a result, I do not engage with those who are against Character Education, per se; for that, may I point in the direction of arguments fielded by Arthur[15], Damon[16] and Davison-Hunter[17], in particular, as in initial step.

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[11] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Populus%20Parents%20Study%20-%20short.pdf
[12] See in particular Berkowitz, M. http://www.character.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Understanding-Effective-Character-Education.pdf
[13] ibid
[14] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/433/character-education/programme-of-study
[15] Arthur, J. *Education With Character: The Moral Economy of Schooling* RoutledgeFalmer (2003); Davison-Hunter
[16] Damon, W. *Failing Liberty 101: How We Are Leaving Americans Unprepared for Citizenship In a Free Society* Hoover (2011)
[17] Davison-Hunter, J. *Death of Character: Moral Education in An Age Without Good or Evil* Basic Books (2001)

The Point of a Taught Course

In this paper, I offer a specific interpretation of Character Education, based on the Jubilee Centre's Framework which, in turn, understands Character Education as the educational incarnation of Aristotelian or quasi-Aristotelian virtue ethics. [18] So, what would be the point of a neo-Aristotelian inspired taught course in Character Education, built on those foundations? What is it *for*?

The point and purpose of a neo-Aristotelian inspired taught course would be to expose boys and girls to the fullest exploration of the practical and theoretical issues associated with their own personal development, or growth in virtue, with *their* individual flourishing, with *their* living well. Through furnishing their minds and reflecting on, challenging and supporting their habits, a taught course offers space for the clearest sight on how boys and girls can actualise *their* innate potential to flourish as human beings.

Set out below is an illustrative, rather than exhaustive list of the sorts of '*personal traits that produce specific moral emotions, that inform motivation and guide conduct*'[19] - the sorts of habits of character to which any Aristotelian agenda worthy of its salt should seek to aspire to cultivate. A taught course is the most focused means to providing stimulating and structured support in helping boys and girls to think through how to become:

- practically wise, educable, far-sighted, open-minded and resolute, rather than pertinacious, or impulsive;
- courageous, rather than cowardly or over-confident;
- fair-minded and just, rather than easily exploited, or avaricious and selfish;
- self-controlled, rather than insensible, or self- indulgent;
- studious and intellectually curious and serious, rather than cynical and indolent, or intellectually superficial;
- patient, peaceful and well-focused, rather than bored (and boring), or impatient and easily distracted;
- courteous and pleasant, rather than rude and egotistical, or obsequious and malleable;
- witty, rather than cold and sarcastic, or buffoonish and silly;
- even-tempered, rather than a 'push-over', or prickly, and over-sensitive;
- truthful and straightforward, rather than cringingly self-deprecating, or boastful;
- grateful, rather than ungrateful, or unctuous and sycophantic;
- compassionate and kind, rather than callous and cruel, or condescending or insincere;
- generous, rather than mean-spirited, or wasteful;
- humble, rather than arrogant, or servile and obsequious;
- tolerant and forgiving, rather than narrow minded, vengeful, self-righteous and bigoted, or overly indulgent and complicit in the face of wickedness and vice;
- high-minded and conscionable, with well-grounded self-esteem, rather than stunted by low self-esteem, negativity and hyper-criticism, or with an over-inflated and ill-founded sense of self;
- a stronger friend and to emulate worthwhile qualities in others;

Keeping the focus on developing these sorts of intellectually and morally based virtues, or traits of character, is the best way to counter the most pressing objections against Character Education in general and a taught course in particular.

Prime amongst these objections is the notion that a taught course would give the fullest rein to a certain caricature, or grotesque of what 'character education' is supposed to be. On such a reading, Character Education is about the top-down imposition of a set of (vicious) values, or mechanical verbal and behavioural responses, uniformly and heavy-

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[18] Notably, this understanding may depart substantially from the way Character Education is specified in some introductory texts about moral education, with reference to a specific post-1990s U.S. tradition.
[19] http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/media/news/article/4176/Secretary-of-State-Announces-Character-Building-Fund-and-Adopts-Centre-Definition-of-Character

handedly imposed on students – a kind of immoral 'moral education' that is characteristic of modern totalitarian regimes and cults. A procession of rather quaint bogeymen, soft targets, Aunt Sallies, Straw Men and Trojan horses all trundle in, drawn from the ranks of erstwhile totalitarian regimes and chauvinistic, persecuting societies and provoke needless hysteria in the more sensitive and liberal imaginations.

An Aristotelian-inspired agenda is not primarily concerned with subjective 'values', which will differ according to the eye of the beholder. Capitalists will value 'capitalist values'; socialists will value 'socialist values'; progressives will value 'progressive values' and conservatives will value 'conservative values'; and the 'religious' may well value 'religious values', with the non-religious valuing 'non-religious values'. This tells us nothing about whether such 'values' are virtuous or vicious. It is merely a statement of preferences. On the contrary, an Aristotelian taught course aspires to make better use of that educational time and space than to comply supinely with the 'values' of the prevailing establishment, be whatever it may. It aims to cut deeper to the objective, non-instrumental qualities that constitute a life well-lived. And, despite important and engaging problems of definition, few could seriously disagree that a good life is made up of at least some of the qualities or traits listed above – regardless of societal context. In fact, when confronted with such a top-down inculcation of a narrow set of 'values' outlined at the beginning of this paragraph, or to parrot mantras inspired by disturbingly dubious 'character gurus', one would hope that the student versed in Aristotelian ethics would be deeply resistant to such pressurising and indeed have the good sense and courage to speak out against such soft ideological indoctrination. On this reading, education is safeguarded from the various forces that can corrupt or exploit it as an instrument of control and indoctrination, and placed firmly back in the hands of the boys and girls who are to benefit from it. Thinking through what it means to be a society that is fair-minded, generous, self-controlled, forgiving, built on friendship, etc, rather than a society that is unjust, selfish, hedonistic, indulgent, self-righteous and cruel may well be the best way to frame any debate about 'values'.

At the other extreme, objections to a taught course have focused on the concerns that it would be too removed from the individual experience of the boys and girls in the group, too abstract, dry and rigid to be of any meaningful use. To reduce formal moral education to a series of rule-based dilemmas, or utilitarian calculations, or still worse, meaningless casuistry would be of no service to anyone. There is indeed much in this critique. But this objection, like the former, can, I think, be answered by the kind of approach or hallmarks that qualify as an Aristotelian approach to moral education.

The Hallmarks of a neo-Aristotelian Inspired Approach to Explicit Character Teaching

The first hallmark is that any taught course has to be about the cultivation of good sense[20], or practical wisdom in students. The virtue of 'good sense' forms part of every other virtue. It moulds, *in-forms* and transforms our basic desires, emotions, instincts and impulses into morally good decisions. These decisions strengthen our virtues and tackle our vices. 'Good sense' is like a lighthouse, which illuminates what we have to do to realise or practise the virtues. It is an intellectual virtue that forms part of moral action, steering us towards the more virtuous decisions, and away from the less virtuous ones. It takes a lifetime of practice, experience and reflection to calibrate this compass correctly. Developing and acting with 'good sense' deepens freedom enabling agents to be thoughtful and vigilant, enabling us to understand what we are doing, why we are doing it and what we hope to achieve for ourselves and others through doing it.

'Good sense' pulls together all the necessary virtues to cope with what the situation demands. Living with 'good sense' sets out the ways and means of realising the good in the down to earth, concrete realities of any given situation. When it is well practiced, it enables suppleness in the face of the complexities of the ethical life. It is the essence of a life well-lived. This frees us from the egregious claim that character can be built by an instruction manual that seeks to provide

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[20] See in particular: http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/other-centre-papers/Framework.pdf

cases for every eventuality. The cultivation of this, through a clear, systematic and rigorous set of theoretical, reflective and experiential techniques is the ideal way in which this can be done[21].

The second hallmark of the Centre's approach to Character Education, as set out in the Framework, is to combine both the theoretical and the practical, situating issues in the context of students' individual lives and tailoring them to the individual needs of the students, the school and the community. A taught course has the best hope of extending these aims. Moreover, a taught course has the potential to enable healthy dialogue with various wisdom traditions – not least that stimulated by 'The Philosopher' himself. This is refreshing and realistic: it would be absurd and potentially damaging to suggest that relative beginners in the moral life can decide, understand, or even recognize what's involved in the tricky business of making good moral decisions without some assistance[22]. Through a taught course, we are given concepts, tools and practices that will enable us to grow deeper into the freedoms of the moral life and that only comes with theory, practice, discussion, experience, reflection and exposure. How, for instance, are students to understand what a moral issue is, what an emotion is, the kinds of 'positive and negative construals' that define and differentiate specific emotions[23] without direct instruction and structured enquiry? How, moreover, are students to understand which virtues educate which corresponding emotions, where the golden mean may lay for them personally and how to identify whether they are doing 'the right thing, for the right reasons, in the right way, and experiencing the right relish in so doing? How, also, could boys and girls be expected to balance out the competing moral demands of an issue without some formal education and dialogue with the very best that has been thought and said? A taught course, then, has the best hope for pulling these threads together, for strengthening and informing what goes on elsewhere in the school in terms of character education. This assumes that these 'threads' are provided in the rest of the curriculum, whether in the subject-based curriculum or in extra-curricula activities. Any taught course is not intended simply as a 'wedge' [24]between other parts of the curriculum, with no relation to what should be going on elsewhere in the school in terms of character education. Its purpose is to provide a discrete space to enable students *'to integrate in a systematic fashion ideas and insights gained in other parts of the curriculum about the essential features of human flourishing and how they fit together in a well-rounded life'.*[25]

PSHE De-valued?

Other objections to a taught course in Character Education concern the practicalities of implementation, rather than objections in principle. Chief amongst these is the question of where it sits in an already densely packed curriculum. The shortest answer and the best practice tend to locate it in either one of two places: in form tutor time on a 'little and often' basis, decoupled from PSHE, or in the PSHE timetable slot, giving over a unit of time to it per week. The decoupled 'form time' slot has much to recommend it. Primarily, it strengthens the role of the personal tutor to that of 'character mentor', or 'wise guide'; it also provides a stimulus to the kinds of discussion personal tutors should be having with their tutees, as they get to know them in the round. Basing three out of five available sessions per week around the development of character for say, twenty minutes a-piece, helps to keep the course and concepts focused and alive.

Alternatively, Character Education would sit in the PSHE slot. The obvious danger to this is that Character Education becomes yet another 'mini-module' box to tick, alongside many of the other well-intentioned initiatives that are poured, top-down into that slot. The best way to prevent this is to recast PSHE in terms of issues and the virtues needed to handle the issues, rather than the values that are the instrument of the political or moral fashion of the day. With its emphasis on the top down inculcation of 'British values', amongst other issues (not least the 2010 Equalities Act), reinforced with a compulsory SRE statutory framework, in the wrong hands PSHE can look remarkably like the top-

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[21] See in particular: Schwartz, B. and Sharpe, K. *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing* Riverhead Books (2011)
[22] See the sparkling chapter entitled *Teaching Morals* in McCabe OP, H. *God Still Matters* Continuum (2005)
[23] See Roberts, R.C. *Emotions: An Essay in Aid of Moral Psychology* Cambridge University Press (2003)
[24] Berkowitz, *ibid.*
[25] I am grateful to Kristjánsson, K. for access to a draft text for this insight.

down, heavy-handed imposition of politically correct values that is rightly dismissed as an all too impoverished caricature of moral education – the 'immoral moral education' argument engaged with above.

On this reading, PSHE is simply the instrument for the political fashions of the day to impose its values on boys and girls – and to pressurise overtly and covertly into compliance. To prevent this, the task is to recast PSHE in terms of virtue and character development. A neo-Aristotelian approach forces us to reflect on the sorts of virtues we wish to develop, the kind of person we hope to become; the values to which we hold will no doubt be expressive of that, but the emphasis is more on developing children who show good sense, courage, self-control, fairness, compassion, etc, rather than holding to putative 'right-on' views. Virtues must precede and prevail over the discussion of 'values'.

There are, of course, advantages to locating Character Education in the PSHE slot. Primarily, it enables course leaders to let the issues that drive a PSHE course become the material for reflection on how to handle those issues in ways that lead to personal growth and flourishing. The issues often concern salient moral problems; these salient moral problems trigger emotions; these emotions are material for practising the virtues; practising the virtues, and falling short in them, when confronted by the issues is all part of the reflective process required to grow. Unlike other approaches to moral or 'values' education, the accent of Aristotelian inspired Character Education is overwhelmingly on developing sound moral judgements (good sense), action, personal reflection and growth into ethical maturity.


A Taught Course: Structure and Pedagogy[26]

Firstly, a word of caution: any taught course in character can only hope to offer the faintest adumbrations and the sketchiest of outlines as to what is required, or commended in the life of virtue, or the building of character. As Aristotle would have it, building character is a most inexact and messy 'science'. The emphasis has to be on the students making the issues raised in it their own, colouring, detailing and reshaping them with the unique stories of their own lives. To do this, the best curriculum model to adopt in designing a taught course may be the Spiral Curriculum model, set out by Bruner[27]. As the diagram below suggests, the spiral curriculum model moves students through phases of personal experience and practice, information gathering and documentation, reflection, analysis and internalisation and informed action, and round again, as if moving up a spiral. This enables students to look at previous learning and experience in a new light, and look at new learning from the perspective of previous experience. Growth in knowledge, judgement and practice is the purpose of such an approach. It is an experiential curriculum model, with its accents on personal engagement, ideas, reflection, refinement, and internalisation, or habituation.

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[26] This section elucidates issues set out in the Jubilee Centre's Programme of Study for a Taught Course in Character Education, 11-16: http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/433/character-education/programme-of-study
[27] Bruner, J. *The Process of Education* Harvard University Press (1960)
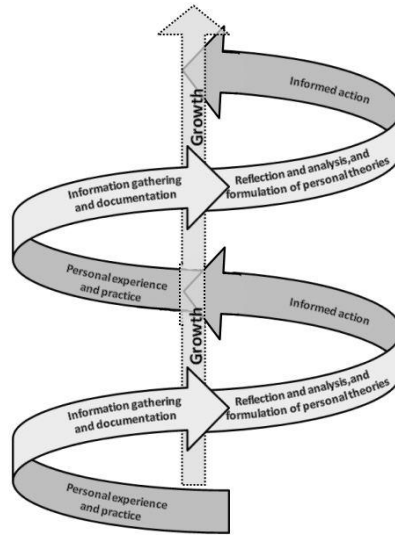
This can be contrasted with an alternative curriculum model, one that is driven by fixed outcomes. These fixed outcomes are the product of behavioural competencies, measurement, and 'tick boxes'[28]. This latter approach would not sit well with any meaningful attempt at Aristotelian inspired Character Education.

The spiral curriculum model reconceptualises the role of the teacher and makes important demands of them. On this reading, the teacher is to become a wise and sensitive guide, responsive to the needs and strengths and weaknesses of their individual students. It allows for a more personalised approach to development. This can be contrasted with an alternative conceptualisation, which sees the teacher as simply a technical deliverer and assessor of a curriculum, with no real personal engagement with the needs and interests of the students, still less their personal growth[29]. Again, this latter approach would not sit well with Aristotelian inspired Character Education.

Any taught course needs to include a combination of pedagogical approaches that reflect the differing elements of Aristotle's approach to moral education. Some approaches need to be shaped around a deductive and conceptual approach, with students coming to understand what the structure of a virtue is, then thinking through how these principles apply to the facts of their lives, and how they can use those realities to practise the virtue or virtues. Other approaches need to adopt a more inductive approach, beginning with specific issues, working out towards the realities of the students' lives, and then onto the underlying principles. Both are necessary and both can be harmonized. Amongst the challenges teachers have faced in Character Education to date is in the development of a mutually intelligible discourse – many students simply do not have the language of Character Education, let alone the concepts. A taught course is the best means to redressing this problem.

In September 2014, the Jubilee Centre launched its first attempt at thinking through what a discrete taught course in Character Education, known as the 'Programme of Study', might look like. This is available online, the Jubilee Centre's website (above). The Programme of Study contains three broad approaches to Character Education.

Approach 1: This focuses on building Virtue Knowledge, Virtue Reasoning and Virtue Practice[30] for some classically recognised virtues. This forms the more conceptual part of a taught course, and is found in elucidation of specific virtues, e.g. the virtue of courage, or virtue of self-control, etc. It sets out the framework, or 'bare bones' anatomy of

[28] For a penetrating critique of these alternative approaches see Pring, R. *The Life and Death of Secondary Education For All* Routledge (2012)
[29] For a fuller account of these rival styles see Carr, D. *Making Sense of Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy and Theory of Education and Teaching,* Routledge (2002)
[30] See the Jubilee Centre's *Knightly Virtues Project* for further pedagogical issues, research and resources related to this approach: http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/417/projects/development-projects/knightly-virtues

specific virtues. Whilst this part is more conceptual, and deductive, there are plenty of opportunities here for application.

Each specific virtue is broken down into three sections; each section explores how to exercise the virtue in question.

- **Section 1:** Virtue Knowledge
- **Section 2:** Virtue Reasoning[31]
- **Section 3:** Virtue Practice

Virtue Knowledge is about acquiring and understanding the sometimes technical language and concepts associated with virtue. Here, students learn the following issues for each virtue:

- What those who have this virtue can do particularly well
- What the benefits of acting out this specific virtue are
- Which situations may be appropriate for the acting out of this virtue
- Which emotions, or desires and feelings may be alerting one to the need to practise this particular virtue
- How to think through and construct dilemmas and scenarios which illuminate how the virtue might best be exercised

But knowing *about* virtue is not sufficient *for being* virtuous – in other words, it may not necessarily change behaviour for the better. Students may, for instance, know what courage is in general, and how it is required when one experiences the emotions of fear or overconfidence, but this need not necessarily *make* them courageous in the situations that call for it. A taught course needs to move students from knowing what a virtue is, to how and when it should be practised. For this, an education in virtue reasoning is required. And for this, the material in the Virtue Reasoning phase of the taught course becomes relevant.

Virtue Reasoning is about making reasoned judgements about when and how to act well. This includes the ability to explain differences in moral situations, such as moral dilemmas. This emphasis on acquiring judgement is reflective, and allows for each individual to make their own decisions about how best to give expression to the virtues in situations that are pertinent to them. Virtue reasoning, for example, is about taking our understanding of courage and thinking through how best to give expression to that when we find ourselves in situations that call for it.

Here, students learn the following issues for each virtue:

- What their basic dispositions and inclinations are in the light of this virtue – if there are patterns to their emotions and desires when in this situation? How well, and when have they practised this virtue in the past?
- What are the circumstances, options and choices for practising this specific virtue? When can they practise this virtue in the near future?
- Where the *Golden Mean* lays for them and which actions will give the best expression to this in self-identified scenarios; which actions will look like falling short in the virtue; which actions will like over-shooting the virtue?

What is **Virtue Practice** about? Both of the above components, virtue knowledge and virtue reasoning are linked to the promotion of virtue practice. Students may, for instance, acquire some cognitive understanding of what would be the desirable virtue to display in certain circumstances, but be unable to translate this knowledge and reasoning into virtuous action on a stable basis. Virtuous practice, therefore enables expression of virtue in desirable, recognisable and observable attitudes, behaviours and action. Self-examination, makes up an important component of 'virtue practice'. So, virtue practice, for example, demands that students be courageous in situations that they identify as calling for that virtue; it also demands that students are able to examine how courageous they really are when in the situation that called

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[31] Virtue Knowledge and Virtue Reasoning are collectively known as 'Virtue Literacy' in the *Knightly Virtues Report*.

for it, and how they might continue to build on their strengths and challenge areas of failure in relation to the virtue; they will also understand how their emotions alert them to how well they are practising the virtue; for instance, those who are growing to maturity in the virtue of self-control would take the right amount of pleasure and the right amount of pain in consuming or not consuming the right things to the right amount on the right occasions.

<u>Approach 2</u>: The second approach in the JCCV's Programme of Study for the taught course is to furnish the students with the tools to build virtues neither mentioned, nor developed in the Programme of Study. This offers scope to apply Approach 1above to the very unique and specific circumstances of students' individual lives, or contexts. Students, for instance, are invited to build their own understanding of virtues like gratitude and compassion and how best to exercise them in their lives. This makes for some interesting applications.

They are encouraged to identify the virtues that they need to cultivate in order to flourish once they enter the world of work. Those aspiring to Journalism, for instance, may wish to cultivate the virtue of truthfulness; those aspiring to medicine, the virtues of compassion and care; those aspiring to teaching, patience and humility, and so on. This enables students to practise the conceptual and practical tools required to continue the project of growing in virtue beyond the time they leave formal education.

Using the various templates should also enable individual subject teachers to explore growth in specific virtues through their subjects. It allows for a more individualised approach to the cultivation of virtue, situated within genuine issues with which students must grapple. How, for instance, could PE become a context for exploring and practicing the virtue of courage; or, how could a study in English of *The Grapes of Wrath* by Steinbeck help us to explore and practise the virtue of compassion; or, how might the pursuit and enjoyment of Music help to grow in virtue in the round, as Aristotle most definitely thinks it has the potential to do.
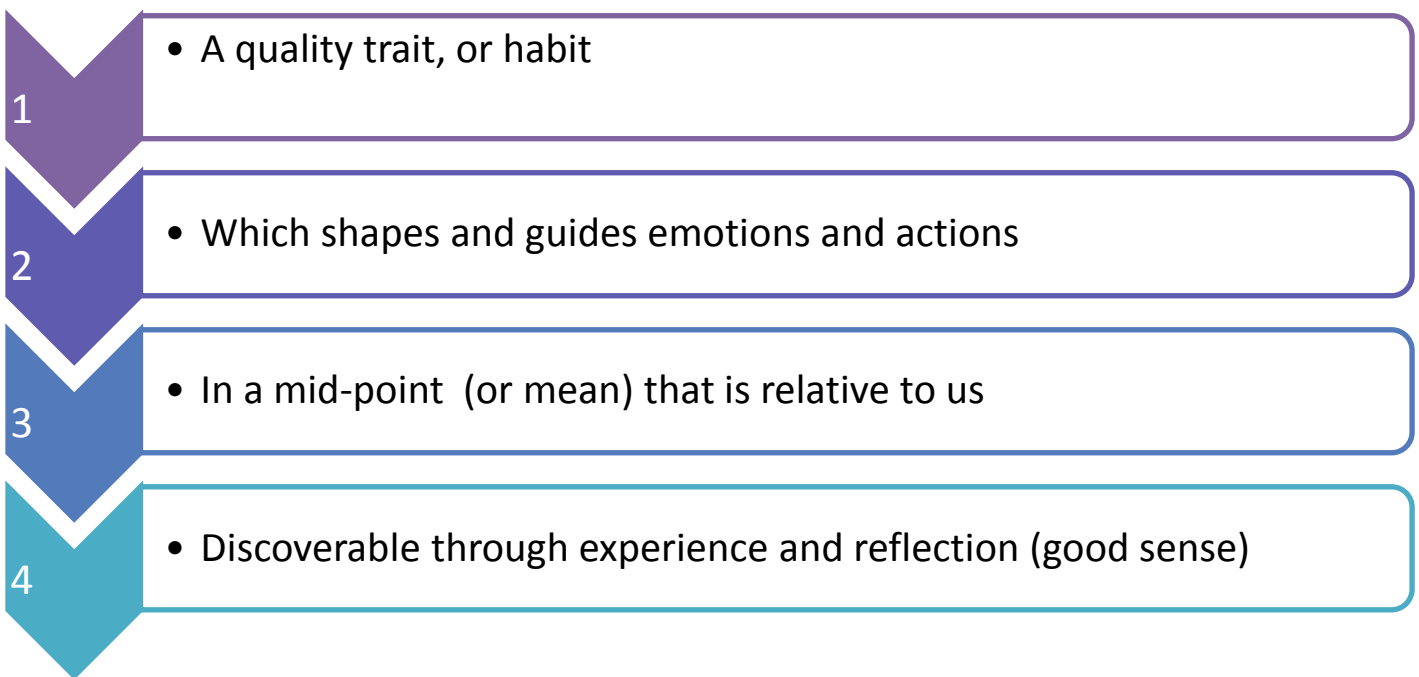
Approach 2 would also be particularly useful to schools who wish to prioritise the development of specific virtues as a 'whole school' focus. Schools may, for instance, feel they wish to develop greater self-control, resilience and stillness in their students, especially in the face of substance abuse or stress issues; or, they may wish to tackle virtues connected to justice and self-control, raising the social awareness of their students. Good schools know the needs of their students well. Faith schools, in particular, may wish to see how the revelation around which their community is shaped, integrates, builds upon, extends and deepens (or indeed unravels), the concepts set out in this particular exercise in emotion, reason, action and self-knowledge. How, for instance, might a Catholic school make sense of the golden mean for generosity, when the story of the Prodigal Son speaks of the wasteful and lavish love of the father; or how can one stop forgiveness becoming overly-indulgent, when Jesus commands his followers to forgive 'seventy times seven'?

<u>Approach 3</u>: The third pedagogical approach to a taught course is to focus on issues which drive and spark a call to act virtuously. This forms the more applied, inductive part of the course. This is primarily about how we bring our knowledge, reasoning and practice about virtues to specific issues that call for their exercise. Many of these specific issues arise out of what we may recognise as the PSHE curriculum. Issues such as *Why do good people do bad things? How to develop resilience, and how to handle stress* are all dealt with here. We each react differently to situations, or moral issues; each moral situation will call for the exercise of a virtue, or a cluster of virtues; the cluster of virtues that we are called to exercise will vary from person to person – as will the way in which we are called to practise them. The moral virtues that we practise, or fail to practise will have performance and civic implications. Thinking through how to practise and develop virtues in performance and civic domains forms an important part of Approach 3, moving out from the moral agent to the wider society.

Discerning the elements of an Aristotelian approach

Any neo-Aristotelian taught course needs to contain certain discernible elements central to Aristotle's ethical theory.

At the centre of this approach is the cultivation of virtue. On Aristotle's reading, a virtue is:

1	• A quality trait, or habit
2	• Which shapes and guides emotions and actions
3	• In a mid-point (or mean) that is relative to us
4	• Discoverable through experience and reflection (good sense)

This is perhaps easier to understand if we look at how we come to acquire and practise 'virtues' – which we, and our students no doubt already do to varying degrees. Put at its crudest, the way to build our character consciously and systematically goes something like this.

- Firstly, we have to recognise that we are in a moral situation. A moral situation is a situation that calls for us to do something we ought to do. To do 'that thing that we ought to do', requires the practice of a virtue.

- Secondly, this situation triggers emotions, desires, or feelings in us. Sometimes these can be very strong – sometimes they can be very weak. We have to be able to specify and identify the emotion or desire that the situation has triggered in us.

- Thirdly, we need to identify the virtue(s) that can educate our specific emotion(s) towards realising the good in the situation we are in. We 'realise the good' through words, actions and deeds – by doing the right thing, at the right time, in the right way, and for the right reasons – and, hopefully, but not always, with the right consequences. Stages one to three are covered by the **Virtue Knowledge.**

- Fourthly, we need to think through our options and to weigh up the morally relevant features of a situation. We need to think about how we can practise, or give expression to the virtue(s) that corresponds to the emotion(s), or desire(s) that are stimulating us, or failing to stimulate us. This is where the **Virtue Reasoning** comes in. These practices need to tread a careful path between 'overdoing it', and 'underdoing it', trying to give the very best expression to acting in a way that is in line with *the golden mean*, or ideal, most reasonable, morally good, set of actions, given the circumstances.   These practices will educate and shape our emotions – not eradicate them.

- Fifthly – we need to act, to learn by doing, by getting involved in service learning, or social action, or some other small scale moral project. Then, we need to reflect on how well we handled the situation, looking at where we might be strong, and where we still might need to grow, or to practise the virtue. We need to look at our emotions, desires, our pleasures and pains, and of course, the quality of our actions – more often than not, our fumbling and clumsy attempts at becoming better people.   This is where the **Virtue Practice** comes in.

Even if Aristotle may need some updating, dragging him into our contemporary ethical concerns and issues should make for some interesting and fruitful chemistry.

Evaluating and Assessing a Taught Course

Perhaps the thorniest practical issue concerning a taught course in Character Education is the issue of measurement[32].

So, how do we evaluate and assess Character Education?

Aristotle's approach to Character Education itself treads a virtuous mean between the extremes of not engaging in moral education at all (vice of deficiency), or of overdoing it, or doing it in ways that are immoral or stifling (vice of excess). He calls us back to a reasonable, balanced position, marked with modest expectations:

. . . We will be satisfied to indicate the truth roughly and in outline; since our subject and our premises are things that hold good usually [but not universally], we shall be satisfied to draw conclusions of the same sort . . . For the educated person seeks exactness in each area to the extent that the nature of the subject allows.

Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle

Whilst there is much still to do on this, Kristjánsson's contention that a 'mixed method instrument combining self-reports, other reports and more objective measures, (specifically dilemma tests) may be our best at the moment'[33]. Triangulating the various dimensions of a student's experience and, the experience teachers and parents may have of that student, may provide the best hope. This puts the emphasis on the teacher adopting the role of 'wise guide', with the tutor unlocking not just hidden potentialities of intellect, but also of character.

Aristotle suggests some basic tools, or frameworks that enable us to reflect on how far we are growing in the life of virtue. These tools are necessarily inexact, but useful. This is because growing in virtue is both an objective and a subjective experience. It is objective, because some desires and actions are clearly off-limits for the life of virtue, and will erode character, rather than build it. We can reason reliably to some positions, e.g. that taking more than our fair share of cake is unfair, if there are people at the table who would benefit from some, yet have none. Moreover, we can *perceive* virtue and vice in others, and that virtue and vice is real. It is subjective, because only the subject can say with any confidence what is *really* happening in their emotions. Only they are able to say whether it pained them to do the right thing, or whether they actually enjoyed engaging in virtuous activity. Only they *really* know if they were pained at offering their little brother some cake, to even things out, or if it pleased them to do so; or, if it pleased them to deny their little brother cake, as an act of spite, denying him what is rightfully his, in justice! Similarly, any self-reporting will be bedevilled by the so called 'self-biases' that lead subjects to view themselves in the most positive, yet unrealistic light.

Given the real but intangible nature of a virtue, then, it is important not to 'hard pedal' the issue of measurement at this stage; neither should we let problems surrounding assessment and evaluation torpedo attempts at character education.

[32] See in particular: http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/MeasuringVirtue.pdf; and, for more detailed exploration of the issues and debates surrounding them: http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/485/papers/conference-papers/can-virtue-be-measured-papers

[33] Kristjánsson, K. *Some Recent Work on Measuring Virtue for Character Education: A Critical Overview* located at:
http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/MeasuringVirtue.pdf

Building character takes practice; and, practice presupposes that we make mistakes, but are constantly prepared to learn from them. This is a healthy and realistic attitude to becoming a better person. Growing in virtue not only takes maturity, but a commitment to grow in it is the first sign of ethical maturity. We all have to be prepared to get it wrong, be frank about our mistakes (with ourselves) and think through how we can better educate our emotions and think through our actions when similar situations arise. Being frank with ourselves does not require us to publicise our emotions to others, or to disclose information that could damage us, or those associated with us beyond reasonable limits. It is simply a call for us to reflect more deeply on the issues and to learn from them.

Evaluation and Assessment Guidelines in the Programme of Study

Below, are set out the basic stages in the Programme of Study that Aristotle uses to reflect on how we are building, or strengthening our characters, rather than engaging in actions that erode and undermine them[34]. According to Aristotle, those in the initial stages (the Person A and Person B categories) are unable or unwilling to be persuaded that building one's character is a worthwhile pursuit. Those who bear the characteristics of a Person A, for instance, are simply not yet ethically mature, or free enough from psychological, biological or environmental factors to contemplate acting well, as far as some virtues may be concerned. Those defined as 'Person B' are unpersuaded by the call to virtue, and would prefer to shape their lives around ends that could ultimately erode character, rather than build it. For both, patience and compassion are no doubt required; time, ethical and spiritual maturity, psychological balance, healing, events and a range of positive influences (not least compassionate people) may be instructive in helping these individuals move beyond these stages to commit to a more worthwhile, ethical life, when they are ready for it.

Once we move beyond the Person A and Person B categories, we have the various stages of moral development and their associated characteristics. Here is an overview of those stages:

Here, then, are the hallmarks, or characteristics of the Person A and Person B individuals, and the subsequent Stages, 1-5, that provide a framework for reflecting on our own moral development. These are set out in much more detail:

'Person A' - 'Not ready for this yet': I am not yet free enough to commit to growth in the life of virtue.

- I may have had traumatic experiences or major personal difficulties surrounding this virtue. These historic experiences and circumstances prevent, or constrain me from acting differently. I may, for instance, have an addiction which controls me, rather than I, it.

- I may have been socialized into a culture or environment that has generated bad habits – I may, for instance, have been taught that stealing from others is a good thing, or that one should always give in to stronger forces; or, that being rude and offensive to others is commendable.

- I may simply be unwell. It may, for instance, be no good talking to me about self-control when it comes to drink, as I am an alcoholic. I need sympathy and therapy, not the life of virtue!

'Person B' - 'Not buying into this yet: I am unconvinced that the life of virtue is really what it's all about, or that building one's character can commend itself in any way. I would much rather shape my life around the pursuit of fame, pleasure, money and power at all costs. The Aristotelian ethical project simply does not speak to me, at any level.

- I can frankly admit that my actions are motivated purely by the pursuit of wealth, status, pleasure, power or self-aggrandisement. I see nothing at all wrong with this admission. Anything that threatens to stand in my way on the way to these goals needs to be eliminated. I want much more money than I need; I want it to impress my

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[34] This section of the Programme of Study has drawn on the clear and systematic analysis of Curzer, H. *Aristotle and the Virtues* OUP (2012), Chapters 16 and 17; and Sanderse, W. *Character Education: A Neo-Aristotelian Approach to the Philosophy, Psychology and Education of Virtue* Eburon (2012), pp.102-121

magnificence upon others; I want it to have influence and power; and I want to be feted and famed wherever I go. I am happy to give up any pretence of 'building character'. I don't just want self-preservation; I want emphatic self-assertion: I'm basically out entirely for myself, in the most selfish ways possible, and not afraid to admit it.

- I simply cannot see the point in living an ethically sound life.

Aristotle doesn't think much can be done with such attitudes as those found in Person A and Person B types. Extrinsic positive and negative reinforcement strategies, for instance, may be what he would prescribe. Failing that, the events that go on to shape the lives lived in such ways may become educative and pedagogic, forcing a rethink. Perhaps it may be best to delay the conversation about virtue until a later stage in the lives of such individuals, when there is more material to reflect on.

For the sake of argument, let us all assume that students can begin their self-reflection from the following stage, which we'll call Stage 1. It is fair, I think, to assume, that we are all more or less committed to growth in the life of virtue, and to building our character, rather than letting them decay, erode or crumble!

Here, then, are the stages of moral development that form the basis of self-examination and one to one discussion in a taught course:

Stage 1: I am open to the idea of acquiring this virtue; I am committed in principle to this idea; but, I am unconvinced about some aspects of it, as yet.

- I may, for instance, be unsure as to how the particular virtue in question builds character, or leads to a flourishing life.

- I am a little clumsy in applying the principles of the virtuous life and character building to specific cases.

- But, I am interested in virtuous action for its own sake, and would really like to lead this kind of life.

- I let my emotions get the better of me on many occasions – I even let them cloud my judgement in situations.

Aristotle would suggest that to move on from this stage, you are to be encouraged. Acquire knowledge, and internalize that knowledge, of which acts are virtuous and which are not. Also, don't be afraid to experience a sense of personal disappointment at failing to have acted correctly – this can often be a strong motivator to virtuous action.

Stage 2: I am committed to building this virtue; but my emotions carry me away. Despite knowing what the right thing to do is, my various emotions push me into acting in ways I know to be eroding of character.

- I know what the right thing to do is, and wish to do it simply because it is the right thing to do. I'm not looking for any applause, neither do I have self-interested motives.

- But, I let me desires and emotions carry me away; sometimes these emotions erode the principles I know to be good and worthwhile.

- When I succumb to my more powerful emotions, I sometimes experience a sense of remorse and regret.

To move to the next stage, Aristotle might suggest that you structure out your bad habits with some good habits. If, for instance, you want to develop the virtue of self-control, turn off the television and go for a run instead; or, if you want to improve your study concentration, turn off all distractions and commit to study for a period of time, without shifting from the desk. Habituating yourself to act in this way will strengthen the particular virtues you are trying to work on. Also, think through how you might feel if you do bad acts, or things you'd rather not admit to yourself. Let the prospect of personal disappointment prevent you from acting like this. Never be afraid to listen to your regrets – remember, the wise person listens to them and learns from them; the fool suppresses them, or ignores them. From these regrets, identify new resolutions to live by. Acquire the habit of acting rightly, to triumph over bad acts.

Stage 3: I can practise this virtue, but through gritted teeth. It pains me to do the right thing!

- I know how to give expression to the virtues in given situations.

- I can perform virtuous actions habitually, more or less.

- I know what needs to be done BUT: I don't always do it.

- My emotions occasionally carry me away, and do not run in line with what I know to be right.

- And, I am not really that clear about how and why certain sorts of acts might express various virtues; or, even, why I should be virtuous at all in this situation.

According to Aristotle, to move on from this stage students need to: keep looking for opportunities to perform virtuous, character building acts, such that they become habitual. Ensure that, wherever possible, you expose yourself to the very best in art, music, literature, politics and sport – this might inspire one to get a better grip on the emotions, especially when they conflict with what you know to be the right actions?

Stage 4: I am committed to becoming a better person in respect of this virtue; I've got a pretty good grip of myself, and am consistently able to bring my emotions into line with my reasoning; but I'm not really sure why.

- I can do the right thing simply for the sake of doing the right thing.

- I know which acts are virtuous, and build character, and which acts erode, or destroy it.

- I know how to enact these virtuous acts in many of the differing circumstances of my life.

- I have acquired habits of virtuous action in certain domains.

- I have acquired habits of virtuous emotion, and feel rightly – it gives me pleasure and joy to do the right thing, and it pains me not to do the right thing, when confronted by situations that call for a moral response.

- BUT: I don't really understand why virtuous acts are virtuous.

According to Aristotle: these need to build their character, you need to think through acts that evidence particular character traits; and, whether the character trait is a virtue. You need also to understand how this fits with a happy, flourishing life. If you keep acting well, you will think well; and, if you think well, you will act well.

Stage 5: I feel the right way, about the right things, at the right time, in the right way, and act it out rightly. And, I know why.

- This Stage includes all of those set out in Stage 4, but the chief difference is that those in Stage 5 are able to *explain why* some actions are more virtuous than others[35]. This provides a basis for commending certain courses of action and inaction to others. It is perhaps best if we assume that this may become more refined with maturity, even if we see signs of this stage in our students.

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[35] This argument is taken from Curzer H. *Aristotle's Virtues* OUP (2012) Chapter 16

In the Programme of Study, at the end of each Chapter, or virtue, there is a self-reflection framework that corresponds to Stages 1 to 4 above, tailored to the virtue under discussion. Teachers, parents and students are to use this framework as a guide to ensuring that students get the most out of their self-reflection.

Growth into self-knowledge and ethically responsible adulthood is necessarily a rough and ready business: Aristotle has given a suggestive framework with which students and teachers can begin to make some sense of the mess; encountering and using this framework is best done through the means of a taught course.

As Kristjánsson puts it succinctly in *Some Recent Work on Measuring Virtue for Character Education: A Critical Overview*:

In an ideal research world of unlimited time and resources, I can imagine the possibility of drawing up, step by step, a complex picture of students' broad moral hexeis/schemas by homing in separately on each of the components of Aristotelian virtue, for example gauging perception of moral salience by letting them analyse a novel or a film and identify the moral issues that it elicits, gauging moral emotion and desire through an implicit-measure test, gauging moral self-concept through a self-report questionnaire, gauging moral understanding/reasoning through a deep interview, gauging moral motivation through dilemma testing, gauging moral behaviour and general character-related school ethos through a longitudinal observational study, and then corroborating the findings of the study through detailed peer reports (parents, friends, teachers) over an extended period of time. As current research resources in the actual world will scarcely allow for such an extensive measurement project, we need to make do with less ambitious – 'quicker and dirtier' – instruments, like the one currently being used in the Jubilee Centre (Walker, 2014), instruments that still allow for triangulation and actualise some of the potential of a mixed-method approach[36].

Might the best time and resource for such a sophisticated, nuanced and finely valenced set of approaches to measurements of impact be found in a taught course?

The old Aristotle: the new St Benedict?

In his seminal *After Virtue* [37] Alasdair MacIntyre ominously concluded by noting that our contemporary times amounted to a 'New Dark Ages', with the barbarians not so much at the frontiers, but having held sway over us, almost imperceptibly, for some time already. In the face of this unwelcome and insidious technocratic domination, he called for the re-establishment of communities that were capable of sustaining intellectual, moral and civil life; he went on to remark that we were awaiting a new, but 'doubtless very different' St Benedict to lead the work of founding and strengthening integrated communities that could support growth in virtue. Some might argue that the 'old' St Benedict, with his profoundly wise, humane and balanced Rule, left in the raw, would still be good enough to lay down a fine and noble challenge to today's deracinated teenage consumers[38]. This, however, could well be a counter-cultural proposal too far for many of today's youngsters. But, might that 'new, but doubtless very different' [39] St Benedict have been lying more or less dormant amongst us all this time, in the shape of the 'old Aristotle', albeit reinterpreted in the light of today's advances in knowledge, and revivified to engage with the concerns of today's contemporary youngsters – and educationalists?

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[36] Kristjánsson, K. Some Recent Work on Measuring Virtue for Character Education: A Critical Overview located at: http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/MeasuringVirtue.pdf

[37] MacIntyre, A. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* Notre Dame (2007)

[38] For modern, accessible and eminently practical commentaries on The Rule of St Benedict see Casey, M. OSB *Seventy Four Tools For Good Living: Reflections on Chapter 4 of St Benedict's Rule* Liturgical Press (2014); and, *Strangers to the City: Reflections on The Beliefs and Values of the Rule of Saint Benedict* Paraclete Press (2005); for an autobiographical account of life under The Rule and outside of The Rule see in particular Hendra, T. *Father Joe* Random House (2004)

[39] MacIntyre, A. (2007)

Such a suggestion may well have a great deal to offer educationalists concerned about the explicit teaching of character education today. Not only does Aristotle speak out of a stable and venerable intellectual tradition amongst the 'very best that has been thought and said', he also furnishes curriculum thinkers with the inspiration, concepts and tools to go about the practicalities of a taught course in Character Education.   And that taught course must sit within much wider systematic provision for the development of character. It is time for today's educationalists and curriculum thinkers to think through the practical implications of those long overdue, but daily increasing, footnotes to Aristotle.