R.S. PETERS' COMPREHENSIVE THEORY OF MORAL EDUCATION

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Abstract. This article presents R.S. Peters' theory of moral education embedded in his broad conception of morality. The author examines Peters' views against the background of Kohlberg's stage theory of moral development; hence, the positions of both thinkers are interwoven throughout the discussion. It addresses some central issues relevant to moral education such as, for example: cognitive and affective aspects of morality, and the acquisition of virtues. In the article the author argues that Peters' account of moral development and moral education provides supplementation for the somewhat narrow theory developed by Kohlberg, thus establishing a broader framework relevant to moral education.

1. Introduction

R.S. Peters is best known for his work on the analysis and the justification of education. But he also had a deep interest in a third, fundamental question that any serious philosophy of education should try to address: How do we adequately conceive of moral development and moral education?

Peters elaborates his approach to moral education in a critical dialectic with Laurence Kohlberg's cognitive theory of moral development. He accepts Kohlberg's view that the ultimate goal of moral education is the acquisition of a rational, principled morality, be it in a suitably supplemented form. In this paper, I show how Peters supplements Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental psychology in order to construct a comprehensive theory of moral education that covers the form as well as the content of morality. Because '… a determinate notion of "morality" is an essential precondition for any serious approach to moral education' (Peters, 1974a, p. 541), I start with an outline of Peters' moral view.

2. The form and content of morality

To do justice to the phenomenological complexity of moral life Peters operates with a very broad conception of morality. Phenomenologically astute, Peters (1970, pp. 69-70; 1973, pp. 16-17) distinguishes between five aspects of our moral life. In describing them he uses different vocabularies in different contexts. Sometimes he uses the vocabulary of principles, rules and duties, at other times that of character-traits or virtues (and vices) and motives. Given that character-traits and motives are internalized or personalized principles and rules, there is no harm in using these vocabularies interchangeably.

There are, first, the principles and rules which govern the conduct between members of a democratic society. Two types of virtues are important in this interpersonal realm. On the one hand, we have the highly specific virtues, such as honesty, punctuality, tidiness and politeness, on the other we have the more 'artificial' virtues, such as justice, fairness, the impartial consideration of interests and respect for people. To this sphere of morality also belong basic rules, 'e.g. concerning contracts, [non-injury,] property and the care of the young, which any rational man can see to be necessary to any continuing of social life, man being what he is and the conditions of life on earth being what they are' (Peters, 1970, p. 65; also 1973, p. 13; 1974a, p. 546; 1978, p. 124).

There are, secondly, motives which personalize purposes, or even goals of life, that are based on appraisals of a situation. This facet of our moral life includes, among others, the virtues of benevolence, compassion and gratitude, the vices of ambition, envy and greed. These 'natural' virtues contain within themselves reasons for action, whereas the 'artificial' and highly specific virtues just mentioned lack built-in reasons for action. The exercise of such action-related virtues typically arouse feelings and emotions. Motives and emotions are more at home in the sphere of personal relationships than in the public sphere of civic virtues.

There are, thirdly, qualities of the will 'that are both content-free and which do not, like motives, introduce teleological considerations. … They are of a higher order and relate to the ways in which rules are followed or purposes pursued' (Peters, 1971, p. 247). To this element of our moral life pertain virtues such as determination, persistence, courage, consistency, integrity and autonomy. It is essential to these so-called virtues of 'self-control' that counter inclinations must be present when such virtues are exercised. One needs only to exercise self-control in a situation when one threatens to be overcome by inclinations that go against one's will.

Peters casts his moral net very wide. Not only principles and rules, motives and volitional qualities are morally relevant, but also, fourthly, worthwhile activities are included in the moral sphere. These 'good' or 'desirable' activities are deemed to be so valuable that children ought to be initiated into them. To this range of activities belong, among others, science, history, poetry and engineering, and possibly also a variety of games and pastimes. These activities, on the basis of which individuals can make something of themselves if they freely engage in them, supply not only for their occupations and professional lives but also for their vocations and ideals of life.

Finally, there are particular role-responsibilities – a person's station and its duties. These are specific obligations that go together with occupying a social role in society. Role-responsibilities involve what is socially required of a person as, for example, a husband, father, citizen, and member of an occupation or profession.

How does Peters combine this ethical pluralism with his emphasis on a classical principled morality? Such a principled morality gradually emerged in Western civilisation. It took a long time, until the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, before a rational, universalistic type of morality became distinct from religion, law and customary codes of conduct. The hallmark of such a morality is its appeal to fundamental principles, which are presupposed in all practical reasoning in a democratic society, to adjudicate on particular codes and their conflicts.

To bring these two elements of his moral theory – pluralism and principlism – together Peters makes the important distinction between the form and the content of moral consciousness. He describes the structure of consciousness by making use of Michael Oakeshott's 'experience and its modes' terminology (Oakeshott, 1933). 'Experience' functions as a wide and generic term. It also includes knowledge and understanding, and it is further qualified in different specific 'modes' of experience such as the historical, scientific, practical or moral. So, moral consciousness is in this terminology called 'the moral mode of experience'.

The emergence of a principled morality in Western civilisation amounts then to the emergence of a rational form of the moral mode of experience. A principled morality is a universalistic type of morality constituted by fundamental principles that are presupposed in the exercise of practical reason. These higher-order principles of a procedural kind – impartiality, the consideration of interests, freedom, respect for persons – supply a rational form for the moral mode of experience.

They provide a form of thought that structures the more culture-bound and concrete content of the moral mode of experience. Henceforward, I abbreviate the phrase 'the moral mode of experience' just by the term 'morality'.

Against the backdrop of this form-content distinction, Peters is able to distinguish between the more procedural and the more substantive elements of morality: principles, basic rules and the qualities of will belong to the form of morality, whereas highly specific rules, worthwhile activities and the role-responsibilities belong to morality's content. Certain 'universalistic' motives, such as benevolence, also might be taken to concern the form of morality. So, Peters' ethical pluralism can be rationally reconstructed by distinguishing between the form and the content of morality. Yet, although both moral form and content are integral parts of his moral theory, he is first and foremost interested in its form, or what he calls 'rational morality' (Peters, 1973, p. 15).

3. Comprehensive moral education

With Peters' pluralistic conception of morality and his emphasis on a rational morality in place, we can turn to his approach to moral development and moral education. Given that a moral theory is an essential preliminary for such an approach, Peters' ethical pluralism precludes any simple-minded or one-dimensional view of moral education.

According to Peters (ibid., pp. 23; 46), the gradual emergence of a rational morality in Western history is paralleled by the gradual emergence of an autonomous stage in the moral development of children. The 'ontogenetic' emergence of such a stage parallels the 'phylogenetic' emergence of a principled morality in the West. Whatever one thinks about this sweeping hypothesis, the cognitive-developmental psychology of Jean Piaget (1932) and Laurence Kohlberg (1981) is undeniably the point of reference from which Peters builds up his own view of moral education.[1] He articulates his approach in a critical dialectic with this so-called 'constructivist' theory.

In line with his ethical pluralism Peters does not interpret social-learning theory (or behaviourism) and constructionism as competing theories between which an exclusive choice has to be made. Although Peters takes the constructivist

[1] For a general philosophical treatment of the Piaget-Kohlberg theory, see Flanagan, 1991, chap. 5.

view as his point of reference, he repeatedly emphasizes that the Piaget-Kohlberg theory needs supplementation with other theories of moral education, among which even Skinnerian behaviourism. Moreover, the cognitive-developmental psychology is, according to Peters, too one-dimensional in its narrow focus on the cognitive aspect of moral education. It needs, therefore, to be supplemented by an account of the affective aspect of moral development.

So, the overall picture that comes to light is that Peters offers us, not another competing theory, but an original comprehensive theory of moral education that tries to do justice to the several facets of our moral life. I commence the exploration of this comprehensive picture with a brief outline of Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental psychology.

4. Kohlberg's stage theory

What is, according to Kohlberg, moral development? He takes over from Piaget, who adopts a Kantian framework, the constructivist conception of intellectual and moral development. Constructivists claim that parallel to the biological development of the body there exists a psychological development of the mind through time. The mind is conceived as a system of mental structures (or schemata) that changes from infancy through childhood and adolescence to adulthood. The mind receives and operates on experiential input; it transforms the experiential input into behavioural output by making use of (hidden) mental structures. These structures are neither copied from the outside nor programmed by the inside, but constructed in the dialectical relation between the child and its environment. Mental structures change through time in an orderly pattern, which is conceptualized in terms of stage succession and progression. The mind develops intellectually as well as morally through such temporally and hierarchically ordered stages.

From his experimental research, Kohlberg identified a sequence of six stages of moral development proceeding through three levels:

A. Preconventional or Egocentric;

B. Conventional or Heteronomous; and

C. Postconventional (Principled) or Autonomous.

He claims this sequence to be invariant and universal, that is to say, all (biologically normal) children go through all the stages successively without

stage-skipping and all the stages are found in all cultures. This claim is not implausible because Kohlberg explicitly makes the distinction between the form and the content of moral development, and the cultural invariant claim only pertains to the form (or structure) of moral development. Although there can be considerable differences between cultures as to the content of moral rules, the development of their form is culturally invariant. Obviously, Kohlberg's form-content distinction as to moral development mirrors that of Peters as to moral life. It is precisely because Kohlberg's stage theory is so greatly significant for the development of a rational or principled morality in childhood that this theory functions as the point of reference in Peters' approach to moral education. Kohlberg is not interested in the teaching and learning of variable moral codes or specific moral rules, which he derides as 'a bag of virtues' approach. They are context-dependent and instable character-traits, whereas fundamental principles, especially the principle of justice, which constitute a rational morality, are stable and cross-culturally uniform.

Kohlberg's stage theory as a theory about the development of a rational morality in childhood is, therefore, a theory about the development of children's way of grasping principles. Corresponding to the changes children's form of thought concerning rules undergo, their moral judgement at each stage has a specific character. Children, Kohlberg claims,

> start by seeing rules as dependent upon power and external compulsion; they then see them as instrumental to rewards and to the satisfaction of their needs [in the egocentric stage]; then as ways of obtaining social approval and esteem; then as upholding some ideal order [in the heteronomous stage]; and finally as articulations of social principles necessary to living together with others – especially justice [in the autonomous stage]. (Peters, 1971, pp. 238-39)

The way in which rules can be conceived is analogous to the style in which beliefs can be held. One can, for example, 'egocentrically' believe in the existence of God because it fulfils one's need for comfort. But one can also 'heterogeneously' hold this belief on the authority of a priest, whom one trusts. Alternatively, one can 'autonomously' believe in God's existence on the basis of rational proofs for the existence of God. In the case of empirical beliefs one can justifiably hold them on sufficiently supporting evidence. This rational style of believing is comparable to the critically reflective way in which one conceives rules and principles in the autonomous stage.

5. Peters' supplementation of Kohlberg

According to Kohlberg, the culturally invariant sequence in levels of conceiving moral rules – from egocentric through heteronomous to autonomous – is constitutive of moral development (Peters, 1973, p. 24). The process of moral development involves, however, according to Peters, more than Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental psychology covers. An adequate theory of moral development and moral education needs to cover not only the form but also the content of morality. Moreover, Kohlberg's restriction of the form of morality to the cognitive aspect is too limited. Against the background of his ethical pluralism, Peters supplements Kohlberg's stage theory with three fundamental elements, which are, in addition, constitutive of moral development and/or moral education.

First, against Kohlberg's dismissive attitude towards instilling 'a bag of virtues', Peters argues for the central importance of the content of morality in moral teaching. As a corollary, he defends the view that not only reason but also habit is crucial in moral education. Secondly, the development of moral competence essentially comprises an affective aspect in addition to a cognitive aspect. Besides reason we also need compassion in educated people, and even reason cannot function on its own without rational passions. Thirdly, and this is an important preliminary point, Kohlberg's very narrow conception of teaching (conceived primarily as direct instruction) should be supplanted by a more broad one to make plausible the claim that moral development essentially involves some process of teaching. I elaborate upon these supplementations in the reverse order.

6. Can virtue be taught?

Kohlberg's answer to this Socratic classical question is, surprisingly at first sight for a constructivist, negative. If moral development is constituted by the development of a rational form of morality through stages, then the transitions between the stages cannot be an effect of teaching. Concrete content can be learned by instruction and other explicit teaching methods, as well as by example-imitation or identification. Yet, changes in the way in which rules are conceived do not depend upon teaching, but upon the interaction between the child and its social environment, aided by what Kohlberg calls 'cognitive stimulation'. Moral stage progression is neither the product of socialization nor of maturation, but the effect of the child's experience of moral conflicts and active thought about

moral dilemmas (e.g. the famous 'Heinz dilemma') motivated by the desire to take the most 'reversible' or universal perspective. Although the child itself has the experiences and has to actively think for itself, the social environment can stimulate such experience and active thought. Parents, teachers and other educators can confront the child with problematic moral situations and provide feed-back that confirms or disconfirms its current moral problem-solving. So, virtue can be cognitively stimulated, but not taught. In this sense, Kohlberg's stage theory is only a theory about moral development and not about moral education at all.

However, in opposing cognitive stimulation so starkly to teaching, Kohlberg runs the risk of diminishing the contributory cause of the educational environment in moral development to almost zero. As Peters (1974a, p. 548) critically observes: 'But in contrasting the interaction with the environment, which stimulates the development of a rational form of morality [cognitive stimulation], with "teaching", which he thinks is singularly ineffective in this sphere, he makes it look too much as if the child, as it were, does it himself.' Cognitive stimulation only seems to trigger the stage transitions but does add neither content nor form to the child's internally developing moral competence. If external influences do not, or only minimally contribute to moral development, then the rational form of morality is not co-constructed in the child-environment interaction but self-constructed by the child alone. Kohlberg's stage theory is, as a consequence, in danger of collapsing into a kind of maturation theory, either biological nativism or a somewhat mysterious Rousseauian (or Deweyean) type of self-discovery theory.

Since constructivism subscribes to the contributory causal impact of the social environment, it has to defend the claim that moral development involves partially but essentially some process of teaching. That is the reason why Peters corrects Kohlberg's sharp contrast between cognitive stimulation and teaching by making a crucial distinction between teaching in the restricted and teaching in the unrestricted sense (Peters, 1971, pp. 243-45; 1973, pp. 37-38). In making his contrast, Kohlberg unduly restricts the concept of teaching to the specific notion of teaching as direct instruction. So restricted, the concept of teaching has indeed no application in the case of learning to grasp (moral) principles and to conceive of (moral) rules in an adequate way. Explicit instruction is appropriate in cases of information transfer and training skills but not in the case of learning principles, rules and the adequate attitudes towards them.[2] Learning a principle

[2] Here I skip over the ambiguity between learning principles and learning the adequate attitudes towards them. Peters writes: 'If one takes … the forms of conception that are features

does not come down to learning an explicit content. Although the teacher has to exhibit a number of concrete items to the learner, the unifying principle under which these items are organized is itself not a further item for direct instruction. In bringing a child to an adequate grasp of a principle, all the teacher can do is present instances and draw attention to their common features until hopefully, 'the penny drops' – until, that is, the learner catches on to the principle that is being instantiated. Therefore, on Kohlberg's restricted notion of specific teaching, (moral) principles cannot be taught.

However, the unrestricted or 'normal' concept of teaching is also applicable in the case of learning principles and rules. In accordance with this concept, central cases of teaching activities have to fulfil three necessary conditions:

(i) they must be conducted with the intention of bringing about learning,
(ii) they must indicate or exhibit what is to be learnt,
(iii) they must do this in a way which is intelligible to, and within the capacities of, the learners. (Peters and Hirst, 1970, p. 81)

Even if Socrates was not explicitly telling Meno's slave that the resultant square is twice the size of the original square, he taught him this ratio all the same by appropriate exemplifications and questions. Teaching methods depend upon the nature of what has to be learnt. Direct instruction is suitable in the case of the acquisition of information and skills, whereas indirect indication is suitable in the case of learning principles, as it is in the case of, for example, learning the grammatical rules of a language. In the latter case, a principle or rule is indicated by way of presenting several of its concrete instances. Even if one did not accept such an indirect case as a central case of teaching, it still would be a case of teaching in the derivative sense, because '[i]t is … possible that there are cases of "teaching" that disregard any one or even two of these [necessary] conditions, and yet are understood derivatively as cases of "teaching"' (Peters and Hirst, 1970, p. 81). So, given the unrestricted concept of teaching, Kohlberg's method of cognitive stimulation is a bona fide teaching method, and in accord

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of the different developmental stages, it is not obvious what can be done about these – for example, coming to see a rule as connected with approval rather than with rewards.' (Peters, 1971, p. 244). This is actually not about two types of principles, but about the difference between a principle itself and a cognitive attitude towards a principle. See also Peters, 1978, p. 117.

with this concept there is no problem for a constructivist to claim that teaching essentially contributes to moral development.[3]

7. The passions

Kohlberg's stage theory is exclusively a theory about the development of children's form of thought concerning the principles of a rational morality, especially the principle of justice. However, besides the development of this cognitive aspect there is, according to Peters, the equally important development of the affective aspect, about which Kohlberg's cognitivism is silent. The formal principle of justice – no distinctions or exceptions should be made without relevant differences or grounds – will readily lead to the more material principle of the impartial consideration of people's interests, but not in and of itself to caring about the interests of others. Concern for others in Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental psychology only functions as a rational principle, but is not based on feeling concern for them.

Yet, although young children are not capable of adequately grasping such a principle, empirically speaking they seem capable of such a sentiment, perhaps deriving from innate sympathy, very early on (Peters, 1973, p. 42). As a matter of fact, empathically caring about others appears to come much earlier in child development than grasping other-directed principles. Parallel to the development of children's form of thought concerning the principles of a rational morality apparently runs the development of their form of feeling concerning such principles, from a particularistic through to a more universalistic sentiment to what David Hume (1777) called, 'the sentiment for humanity'. In line with his proposal to include certain universalistic motives, such as benevolence, in the form of morality as well, Peters argues for the supplementation of Kohlberg's stage theory with an ontogenetic account of affective concern for others. As a way of conceptualizing this affective supplement in a way consistent with Kohlberg's cognitivism, he suggests a combination of Martin Hoffman's development theory of altruism with Peevers' and Secord's theory of personal understanding (Peters, 1978, pp. 119-21).

[3] There are, of course, other contributory factors. Both internal conditions, psychological as well as biological, and external social conditions have a marked influence on moral development. See Peters, 1973, pp. 38-41.

According to Peters, moral education comprises the education both of reason and compassion, rational principles as well as the moral sentiments:

> … moral education is centrally concerned with the development of certain types of motives, especially what I have called the rational passions. When looked at in a justificatory context, some of these, e.g. benevolence, respect for persons and the sense of justice, function as fundamental principles. But if such principles are to be operative in a person's conduct, they must become *his* principles. That means that they must come to function as motives, as considerations of a far-ranging sort that actually move him to act. (Peters, 1970, p. 75)

Without a sense of justice, the principle of justice stays inert. Without benevolence, the principle of the impartial consideration of interest remains external. To get children 'inside' the form of morality, we need the moral motivation of, what Peters calls, 'the rational passions'. By themselves principles and rules – 'artificial' and highly specific virtues – are inert or external in that they lack built-in reasons for action, whereas motives – 'natural' virtues – have reasons for action built into them and, accordingly, they lead a person all the way to action. In their connection to motives, moral principles are not affectively neutral and, thus connected, provide the moral motivation for authentic action.

8. Morality's content and habituation

Kohlberg's stage theory is first and foremost a psychological theory about the form of morality, not about its content and, correspondingly, a theory about moral development, not about moral learning and teaching. Kohlberg does not occupy himself with the teaching and learning of 'a bag of virtues', but with the ontogenetic development of a principled morality. Peters admits that 'the level of conception [of principles and rules]', especially the conventional or postconventional level, 'determines both the type of content that can be assimilated and the aids which are available for this assimilation' (Peters, 1973, p. 35). However, as against Kohlberg, Peters argues for the strong claim that the learning by habituation of morality's content – a code-encased morality – is logically and practically necessary for the development of morality's form.[4] Although habituation is, thus, necessary, it is not sufficient for moral development.

[4] Peters also argues separately for the weak claim that the interactionistic development of the form of morality is compatible with the behaviouristic learning of the content of morality by means of habit-formation. For an evaluation of this claim, see Cuypers, 2009.

Before I start expounding this claim, it is important to see why Peters defends it. This can be understood against the backdrop of Peters' general view on the concept of education. On his account, education is an initiation into different modes of experience and knowledge, among which worthwhile activities and modes of conduct (Peters, 1963, p. 102-10). This amounts to an initiation into a shared inheritance and public traditions (Peters, 1974b, p. 423-24). Of vital importance in the educational transmission are the impersonal content and procedures which are enshrined in this traditional heritage. In the light of Peters' ethical pluralism, initiation into concrete worthwhile activities and specific codes of conduct is part and parcel of moral education: 'In this more specific sense of education, …, all education is, therefore, moral education, …' (Peters, 1970, p. 73). Initiating children into morality's content is, therefore, essential for their moral education. They cannot simply develop the form of morality and work out its content for themselves. Educating children into the form of morality without its content is empty.

The way in which children conceive of moral rules determines without a doubt what they can assimilate of the moral life and how they can assimilate it. There are crucial differences between the (Kohlbergian) conventional and postconventional levels as to the place of learning morality's content and the role of teaching methods at each level. I already commented on Kohlberg's claims that virtue cannot be taught, though it can be cognitively stimulated and that learning a principle is not the same as learning an explicit content. These claims are primarily made in the light of the postconventional or autonomous level of moral development. At the conventional or heteronomous level, children's conception of moral rules is, however, conformity-based and authority-based. Such a conventional form of thought correlates not only with the initiation into a code-encased morality but also with the fact that its specific content is learned by imitation and identification as well as by a behaviouristic process of operant conditioning, primarily by positive and negative reinforcement. At this level of 'good boy' or 'nice girl' morality, concrete moral content and specific moral codes are instilled in children by means of habit-formation or habituation.[5]

[5] Since Peters holds that the instilment of morality's content in the conventional stages is essential for the moral life and, as a matter of historical and social fact, moral development beyond these stages is rather an exceptional phenomenon, his supplementation of Kohlberg's

As against Kohlberg's neglect of the importance of inculcating highly specific virtues and role-responsibilities in children, Peters makes the strong claim that the learning of morality's content – a code-encased morality – is logically and practically necessary for the development of morality's form. Given that children at the conventional level cannot adequately grasp moral rules, the learning of a moral code cannot proceed by means of instruction and explanation. Since young children cannot see the rationale of moral principles, they are impervious to concept-clarification and reason-giving. If, at the conventional level, cognitive moral learning is impossible, then only behavioural moral learning or moral habit-formation seems to be possible as a path to post-conventional moral understanding. At the conventional level, educators have to resort to habit-training by means of behaviouristic reinforcement. Peters loosely connects the Aristotelian idea of moral education by habituation with the Skinnerian idea of moral training by operant conditioning. Although Peters is not a Skinnerian, and even criticizes behaviourism, he recognizes the value of the behaviouristic insight that there is no other way to meaningfully implant moral rules in young children except as backed up by reward or punishment, praise or blame (Peters, 1978, p. 125). Consequently, the educational environment in the moral development of children functions, according to Peters, not only as a contributory cause, in line with Kohlberg's constructivism, but also as a constitutive cause, in accord with social-learning theory.

Why is learning a code of conduct by habituation so important? (Peters, 1973, pp. 58-60; 1974a pp. 560-61; 1978, pp. 123-24). Learning morality's content is logically necessary for the development of morality's form for two reasons. First, without such learning a direct development from the egocentric attitude towards moral rules at the preconventional level to the autonomous attitude towards them at the postconventional level would be impossible. The postconventional, rationally reflective attitude towards rules presupposes the normative conception of a rule as based on conformity and authority. Children acquire this necessary basis to reflect on the validity of rules by picking up and internalizing specific rules of a code-encased morality. How could a child come to follow a rule autonomously, if it had not learnt – in, what Piaget calls, the 'transcendental' stage of moral realism – what it is to follow a rule as a rule? The child needs to conceive

stage theory faces the charges of 'second-handedness' and indoctrination. For an account of Peters' response to this criticism, see again Cuypers, 2009.

of a rule as something authoritative and not just as something one egocentrically complies with in order to avoid punishment or to get rewards.

Secondly, the exertion of morality's form by applying moral principles would be inconceivable without morality's content. Abstract principles could not function without concrete content. What moral principles such as justice and the consideration of interests mean is only intelligible in relation to highly specific virtues (like that of honesty), role-responsibilities (like those of being a parent) and other specific normative notions (like that of need). In other words, Kohlberg's thinking about principles is top-down, whereas Peters' is bottom-up. This bottom-up approach to principles allows for the immanent presence of them in social practices and roles. Moral principles only come explicitly into play when the justification or criticism of some determinate moral content at the lower-level is in order; they are only appealed to in cases of moral conflict and uncertainty at the ground floor of the moral life.

Moreover, learning morality's content is practically (or instrumentally) necessary for the development of morality's form for two reasons. First, peaceful social life would degenerate to the state of nature where 'the life of man, [is] solitary, poore, nasty, brutisch, and short' (Hobbes, 1651, part I, chap. 13), if children as well as adults were not to observe a basic code of conduct. Given that only a very small minority of the population reaches the autonomous level of principled morality, it is vital that the vast majority follows the basic moral rules such as contract-keeping and property-preserving.

Secondly, the moral life would be psychologically exhausting if on all occasions we had to rationally reflect upon the validity of moral principles and rules before making decisions and acting accordingly. In order to avoid moral paralysis, it is essential that we can rely on the direct operation of a fair stock of moral habits, among which highly specific virtues, internalized basic rules and role-responsibilities.

If the learning of morality's content is necessary for the development of morality's form, then the adoption of the learning method of habituation, assisted by Aristotelian-Skinnerian teaching devices, seems inevitable: 'Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes its birth and its growth to teaching …, while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, …' (Aristotle, 2009, 1103a, 14-17). Aristotle contrasts here teaching by explicit instruction as the method for the intellectual virtues, such as

scientific knowledge and theoretical wisdom, with teaching by habit-formation as the one for the moral virtues.[6] What exactly is habituation? Aristotle gives the canonical formulation of this concept:

> … , it is from the same causes and by the same means that every virtue is both produced and destroyed, and similarly every art; for it is from playing the lyre that both good and bad lyre-players are produced. And the corresponding statement is true of builders and of all the rest; men will be good or bad builders as a result of building well or badly. … This, then, is the case with the virtues also; by doing the acts that we do in our transactions with other men we become just or unjust, and by doing the acts that we do in the presence of danger, and by being habituated to feel fear or confidence, we become brave or cowardly. The same is true of appetites and feelings of anger; some men become temperate and good-tempered, others self-indulgent and irascible, by behaving in one way or the other in the appropriate circumstances. Thus, in one word, states of character arise out of like activities. (Aristotle, 2009, 1103b, 7-26)

Repetitious activity, in the sense of going through the same motions many times, produces settled dispositions or habits, good and bad. One acquires virtues (or vices) by repeatedly doing virtuous (or vicious) acts in appropriate circumstances.

In line with this account of habituation, Peters (1971, pp. 250; 255) delivers the following conceptual analysis: In the moral education of children habituation is a learning process in which they familiarize themselves with and repeat certain action patterns so that specific dispositions to act get instilled. This process might, but need not involve, drill. During habit-training the action patterns are stabilized by means of behaviouristic reinforcement in terms of reward or punishment, praise or blame. Once inculcated, habits meet two conditions in particular: they are characterized by a settled dispositional structure which implies (a) repetition in the future and (b) a certain automatism in routine situations. Since one does not have to rationally reflect and deliberately take decisions about habitual action, one can habitually act more or less automatically. Yet on a particular occasion, mostly when routine breaks down, one may review one's habits and, for example, resolve against them.

According to Peters, learning morality's content by habituation is necessary, but not sufficient for the development of the moral life for three reasons (ibid., 1971, pp. 251-53). First, and this is an immediate consequence of Peters' ethical

[6] Compare this with the unrestricted concept of teaching, introduced in section 6.

pluralism, the different aspects of our moral life relate differently to habit-formation. The method of habituation works well in the cases of learning highly specific virtues, internalizing basic rules and adopting role-responsibilities. However, in the cases of learning principles, strengthening motivations and exercising will-qualities the effect of this method is very limited, or at most only indirect. As I already explained, learning a moral principle is not the same as learning explicit moral content. To grasp a moral principle, for instance that of the impartial consideration of interests, a child needs to grasp the presupposed concepts, such as that of 'interest', and the development of these cognitive prerequisites seems inconceivable on the basis of some process of behavioural conditioning alone. Moreover, the open-endedness involved in the application of principles is orthogonal with the condition of repetition in the future for habitual action. As to the other moral aspects, the process of habit-formation cannot directly reach both strengthening motivations, which depend on the arousal of emotions, and exercising will-qualities, which presuppose the presence of counterinclinations. The active participation of the mind in motivation and will-power goes against the condition of automatism in habituation.

Secondly, in non-routine situations habits can no longer serve as guides for conducting a moral life. In addition, when the reinforcing sanctions are withdrawn, there is no guarantee that habits will remain operative in controlling behaviour. As soon as one cannot rely anymore on the automatism of habitual dispositions, other considerations have to come in to guide the decisions and actions taken in the moral life.

Thirdly, and connectedly, moral habits have an essential incompleteness about them in that they exclusively operate on extrinsic reasons. Highly specific virtues, basic rules and role-responsibilities lack built-in reasons for action. Given that intrinsic reasons are absent, they strongly depend on contextual factors, such as the presence of reinforcing sanctions, for their continuation.

Exactly these two latter points constitute the kernel of Kohlberg's criticism that 'a bag of virtues' is situation-specific, short-term and reversible. This critique does, however, no damage to Peters' strong claim that the learning of a code-encased morality by habituation is (indeed) not sufficient but only necessary for the development of the moral life.[7]

[7] An extended version of this paper appeared as chapter 6 in Cuypers and Martin, 2013.

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