"LITTLE ARISTOTLE" - ETHICAL VIRTUES WORKSHOP

LAURA GHINEA[1]

ABSTRACT. "Little Aristotle" - Ethical Virtues Workshop. Inspired by *"Nicomachean Ethics"*, the project aims to seed virtuous consistent attitudes in children, as part of their moral enculturation process, understood as a coherent set of knowledge, criteria, and capacities of moral judgment. Character's dispositions like courage, generosity, friendship, correctness or gentleness were aimed to be cultivated by activating non-formal educational methods, anchored in real life and adapted to children's stage of development. The activities and conclusions of this workshop are presented in this article, which the main purpose is to find a place for Aristotelian ethics in nowadays moral education for children, to highlight the need for an appropriate moral pedagogy, that takes into account children's capacities of understanding and to inspire ethicists and moral trainers in their work.

Keywords: moral education, virtues, applied ethics, moral experience

RÉSUMÉ . "Le petit Aristote" : atelier sur les vertus éthiques. Inspiré par L'Éthique à Nicomaque, le projet "Le petit Aristote" - Atelier sur les vertus éthiques a pour objectif de susciter chez les enfants des attitudes conformes aux vertus, dans le cadre du processus de leur enculturation morale, comprise comme un ensemble cohérent de connaissances, de critères et de capacités de jugement moral. En activant des méthodes éducatives non formelles, ancrées dans la vie réelle et adaptées au stade de développement de l'enfant, on veut cultiver des dispositions de caractère telles que le courage, la générosité, l'amitié, la justice ou la gentillesse. Les activités et les conclusions de l'atelier sont présentées dans cet article. Le but principal est de trouver pour l'ethique d'Aristote une place dans l'éducation morale des enfants, de mettre en évidence la nécessité d'une pédagogie morale appropriée à la capacité de compréhension des enfants et d'inspirer des éthiciens et des formateurs morales dans leur travail.

Mots clés : éducation morale, vertus, philosophie pratique, expérience morale

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[1] Ph.D. student, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Bucharest, Romania, laura.ghinea@drd.unibuc.ro

Introduction

Morality guides people's lives and ensures communities' cohesion since the dawn of humanity[2]. However, when it comes to moral education, the approaches are divided, the responsibility continues to be passed between institutions, and the desirable methodical consensus tends to be suspended between pedagogical theories. Leaving the child's moral formation to the family, although the "first seven years at home" are rather meant to build the child-parent emotional relationship; underestimating moral dimension in school, although the assimilation of the rules that give the key to social adaptation is closely linked to major acquisitions gained during school years; the long-term synonymy "moral education - religious education", although the individual life and moral experience cannot be equated with the mystical ground of moral religious behavior – all this led society to the limit of an ethical failure. The poor consideration of moral education is also reflected in the increased rates of juvenile delinquency[3]. The juvenile deviance mirrors the failure of institutional factors within moral pedagogy, as convergent proofs from multiple fields reveal that learning plays a crucial role in shaping moral behavior (Cushman et al., 2017), as learning processes reach their maximum during the pre-adult age throughout school years, which period is highly organized by institutions: "Whether we like it or not schooling is a moral enterprise" (Kohlberg, 1977).

Of strategic importance, children's moral education, by which I will further understand "moral formation" (character building) and not "moral information" (teaching theoretical ethics as a simplified version of academic ethics), is a complex process that includes a wide range of objectives, various pedagogical approaches, and philosophical orientations and whose success depends on a perpetual adaptation to the new and dynamic social contexts. Beyond objectives such as founding a moral culture, establishing a fundamental set of values or validating a spectrum of moral judgment criteria, there is an ultimate goal which organizes and orients any individual,

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[2] The problem of morality is attested as a prehistoric concern, essentially because no society can function without its members being morally trained. There is archaeological evidence attesting to a certain form of ethics of care in prehistoric societies. Neanderthals, for example, cared for people with disabilities who, despite extreme living conditions, managed to live with severe physical disabilities.

[3] In Romania, according to the 2018 Activity Report of the Prosecutor's Office attached to the High Court of Cassation and Justice in Bucharest, almost 40,000 minors have been sued between 2009 and 2018, of which about 30,000 were convicted. There is an undeniable connection between this negative phenomenon and the lack of education in general and moral education in particular. Five juveniles are sent to court daily for committing robbery and two juveniles for burglary. Every day, a minor who commits a simple or serious bodily injury arrives before the court. Every three days a minor is brought before the judge for committing a sexual act against another minor or for committing rape. Also, one minor is brought before the judge every three days because he killed another person, in most cases intentionally. The report is available at http://www.mpublic.ro/sites/default/files/PDF/raport_activitate_2018.pdf [accessed 01.09.2019]

from early childhood, towards a fulfilled life, towards happiness – the Good. Its legitimacy has a long time been strengthened by great moral philosophers, such as Aristotle, Kant or Mill. Despite their theoretical magnitude, although there are some limits regarding their deductive explanation, which, however, I will not argue here, classical ethical theories may seem anachronistic nowadays, as the ideals they project appear to the contemporary generations a mirage rather than a Northern Star to guide the moral compass in a world with more and more subjectivist horizons.

In this context are reiterated two fundamental questions which equally concern moral philosophy and pedagogy, and are highly relevant for this discussion: "What kind of people do we want our children to become?" and "How do we educate them to become those people?".

To answer these questions I designed a workshop during which I aimed to bring to light the Aristotelian theory of virtues, by activating formal, informal and non-formal educational tools adapted to children's stages of cognitive and psychological development. The intuition of an appropriate moral education, that takes into account one's capacity of doing good is also rooted in Aristotle's moral psychology compendium (Nicomachean Ethics), and further developed by many other thinkers, engaged with moral philosophy – I. Kant (On Pedagogy, 1803), A. Smith (The Theory of Moral Sentiments, 1790) or B. Russell (On Education, 1926).

Before setting up the workshop, in a preliminary phase, I portrayed the subjects I was going to work with (children aged 7-14 years old) from the most relevant perspectives – biological, psychological and cognitive viewpoints; the overlap of these hypostasis resulted in an anthropogram, grounded on biological research and cognitive and psycho-moral theories (J. Piaget, L. Vygotsky, L. Kohlberg, E. Erikson), that I tried to harmonize into a comprehensive picture. Secondly, I "translated" the *Nicomachean Ethics* into a vocabulary adjusted to children's understanding and finally, from a wide range of pedagogical tools and methods, I made a selection to operate with during the workshop. I've circumscribed all these aspects to what I call "the moral enhancement stage-appropriateness principle". This principle connects all the capacities one has at a certain age to the right moral pedagogy, as a *how-to* "bridge" between *is* (multidimensional profiling) and *ought* (fulfilling moral expectations).

This article shows how ethical Aristotelianism could play a role in nowadays children's moral education and highlights the need for an appropriate moral pedagogy, that takes into account children's range of capacities. The demarche could be seen as a roadmap that drives us from moral philosophy (theoretical input) to moral behavior (practical output). I rely on the philosophical ground of Aristotle's ethical system, which revolves around the idea of happiness (*eudaimonia*) as the supreme good (*ariston*) and set an imperative to act in accordance with virtues; I make use

of a set of pedagogical non-formal methods to make ethical Aristotelianism applicable in real life and society, in a morally relevant way, as a character-building tool that shapes an ethical behavior.

Theoretical framework

The current research is bounded by Aristotle's theory of virtues, which sets the philosophical ground, the theories of cognitive and psycho-moral development, which correlate psychic abilities with the stages of cognitive development, and contemporary educational theories, which extend the traditional pedagogical boundaries to nowadays circumstances.

First of all, I may need to briefly justify the preference for Aristotle's moral philosophy, which I favor as being a more appropriate theoretical base for children's moral education, compared to other philosophical positions phrased in consequentialist or deontologist theories. The reason is that, at this age, children are in an accelerated learning phase, eager to experiment new things, they are not yet completely aware of the consequences of their actions, nor do they thoroughly mentally absorb the notions of "responsibility" and "duty". Hence I consider the Aristotle ethical paradigm more suitable for children than the consequentialist or deontologist theories.

Besides, it is also Aristotle who inaugurates the systematic approach of moral philosophy and moral teaching. His theoretical contribution to the development of ethics and the strong echo of Aristotelian thought in Western practical philosophy are a good reason for bringing to light the ethics of virtues. Focused on character building, Aristotle's moral philosophy is, in fact, a moral technology – "only by doing certain things one becomes a certain kind of person" (NE, III, 1105b), a practice of a range of ethical virtues - stable habitual dispositions, acquired through exercise, that help us to correctly sense the golden mean, acknowledging the circumstances. Therefore, Aristotle does not conceptualize human nature with embodied moral dispositions. On the contrary, he stresses the need for early childhood moral training, so moral dispositions have enough time to become habits – "it makes no small difference, then, whether we form habits of one kind or of another from our very youth ; it make a very great difference or rather all the difference". (NE, II, 1103b).

This practice is possible only within the broader context of human nature. Aristotle's theory of human nature is centered on the notion of "soul", understood as a power updated in vital activities such as nutrition, development, degeneration, sensation, and thought. Of all beings, humans are the only ones who manifest all these capacities and the only ones capable of perfection.

What we are particularly interested in remembering from the Aristotelian moral psychology compendium is that, although it postulates two parts of the soul - "one endowed with reason and one irrational" - Aristotle does so only out of the logical need to distinguish them by definition, for, otherwise, "the capacities of the soul cannot exist separately, the soul functioning integrated" (Mureșan, 2007).

Moreover, Aristotle conditions the existence of moral virtues (born of the harmony of the irrational part of the desire with the deliberative rational part of the soul) of a favorable biological background, consisting of the presence of natural virtues (pertaining to the appetitive irrational part of the soul - *orektikon*, which can be subjected or not to reason), that is, of innate endowments, which facilitate the approach of moral socio-pedagogy. Thus, here is a first intuition of the need to correlate the learning and the practice of the virtues with the biological and psychological capacities of the human being.

In addition come the theories of psychological constructivism, those about the stages of cognitive and moral development in children of J. Piaget, L. Vygotsky, E. Erikson, and L. Kohlberg.

The psychology of development adds to our theoretical palette Jean Piaget's perspective, who placed great importance on the education of children. Cognitive development targets two categories of processes that determine changes in development - biological programming and interaction with the environment. The controversy regarding the long-drawn line dividing nature and nurture being overcome today by the quasi-consensus that there is an interdependence between the two[4], that nothing works alone, as "genes need an environment to work in and environment will only help in the presence of particular genetic tools' (Hoper, 2008) is yet another proof in support of the need for a multidisciplinary, non-compartmentalized correlation of the individual's capacities for the stage adequacy.

Intrigued by the fact that children's mistakes were different at different ages, but in the same context, Piaget theorizes cognitive development as a form of progressive reorganization of processes resulting from both biological maturation and interaction with the environment. For Piaget, intelligence has a "dual nature" (*Psihologia inteligenței*, 1998, p.7) - biological and logical - hence the descriptions he makes using biological terms (assimilation, accommodation, adaptation) and logic (logical-mathematical structures, group structures). Particular manifestations of intelligence correspond to specific stages of development: the sensory-motor, pre-operational stage, the stage of concrete operations and that of formal operations. The development occurs in an orderly and simultaneous way, on several levels - in

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[4]   The multifactorial gene-environment interaction model

Piaget's research, the biological one and the cognitive one. What we are interested in remembering at this point is, again, the importance of this recurring variable - the age of the individual, who imposed, among other things, the adaptation of the curriculum for children in school education and which guided modern parenting practices. Piaget's vision is reflected today in the performances of the "open education" classes.

A complementary approach (and not opposite, as it might seem) belongs to Lev Vygotsky, who criticizes certain limitations of Piagetian constructivism and advances the theory that social interaction plays a major role in individual development. Although development is based on the natural baggage of the individual, social and historical forces are the primary cause of cognitive development, actively guiding it. I point out that Vygotsky's principles are also related to the biological phases of the individual, which imprints human ontogeny (Van der Veer, 1986).

Lawrence Kohlberg extends Piaget's scientific findings regarding cognitive development and aspects of children's moral judgment. Their conjunction with the results of Kohlberg's research in the field of moral psychology, which followed, among other things, children's reactions to moral dilemmas and how they justify their actions, has materialized in the theory of stages of moral development. This theory affirms the existence of six stages of moral adequacy, grouped on three levels (pre-conventional, conventional and post-conventional), designed to explain the evolution of moral reasoning. Moral development, therefore, occurs through constructive stages, begins in childhood and continues throughout life (Kohlberg, 2008). Although certain shortcomings (androcentrism, cultural subjectivity) have been pointed out, its theoretical significance remains of great importance.

The present study

"Little Aristotle" workshop took place on June 2019, in Bucharest, as part of UniCo's summer intensive training program[5]. Forty children, divided by age into two groups (7-10 years old and 11-14 years old), boys and girls equally represented, have participated in two interactive courses, which lasted for two hours each. Children came from both public and private schools, from urban-based families with average incomes, middle to higher education.

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[5] UniCo is a founding member of the European Children's Universities Network, which promotes an alternative type of education for children between 7 and 14 years old. In Romania, UniCo develops educational programs in partnership with several universities, among which the University of Bucharest

The workshop was designed as a Socratic seminar[6], and had the following structure: presentation of participants (moderator and children introducing themselves), presentation of general themes (slideshow), theoretical discussion on the proposed topics (partial control turned over the children), illustration of the topics through a living experience, collecting individual feedback and comparison of opinions before and after workshop. The overall discussion took the form of a cooperative dialogue, based on asking and answering questions, to stimulate children's critical thinking, to challenge their own beliefs, and also to bring out their definitions for a better understanding.

While the general objective was to consolidate children's moral culture, strengthening notions such "good", "generosity", "freedom", "friendship", "courage" etc., and to outline a moral way of life, more specific objectives were also considered – rationally framing the moral judgment, confronting moral prejudgements children may have, inquiring the intuition that moral enhancement depends on cognitive and psychological development stages. To reach these objectives, the discussion was structured around a set of open-ended questions, inspired by Nicomachean Ethics (Fig. 1): „When doing anything, what's your purpose?"; „Is this purpose rather good or bad?"; „What did you notice when you repeat an activity?"; „Does becoming better at doing something make you happy?" etc.
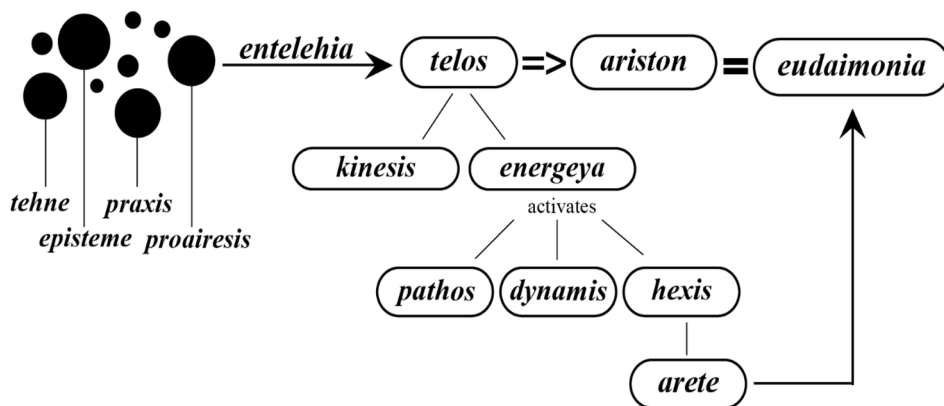

Fig. 1. NE, Books I-II

I will further resume the discussion.

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[6] The method searches for commonly held truths that are scrutinized to figure their consistency. It also helps to shape beliefs by comparison with others.

In the first part, children were asked if they knew who Aristotle was. Approximately 20% of them (aged 9 years old and older) knew he was a philosopher, and defined the philosopher as a person who knows a lot of things, who asks a lot of questions about anything, who's very curious – *why this, why that, exactly like kids do*[7]. A girl pointed out that even if you're very smart you can mistake sometimes (sharp observation endorsed by the moderator with Aristotle's spontaneous generation theory – how he used to believe at that time that a female mouse becomes pregnant by licking salt). Led to virtues topic, to explain the workshop's subheadline, almost all children defined „virtue" as a quality and were able to name at least one body, mind and character virtue (children's top of mind – fast running, being smart and, respectively kindness). When asked „Are people born with these qualities?" and „How do you believe these virtues can be achieved?" all children unanimously answered that people don't have these qualities at birth, reiterating Aristotle assertion: „none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature;…. rather we are adapted by nature to receive them" (NE, II, 1103b), but can become a faster runner, a smarter or a kinder person if they act: "only by doing certain things one becomes a certain kind of person" (NE, III, 1105b), toward a goal. They also noticed, by recalling personal experiences, that most of their goals were toward a good thing – „Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim" (NE, I, 1094a). To the question „But what could possibly happen if everybody would do bad things?", the answers came from three perspectives: evolutionary – *If we do wrong to each other, we'll end by killing each other and we will finally disappear from the planet*, socio-economical – *If you do good, the world develops* or *If everybody would do bad things, it would be chaos and conflict*, and moral – *If you do a good thing, you feel happy, but if you do a bad thing, it lies heavy on your conscience and makes you sad, unhappy*. „Verbally there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and doing well with being happy" (NE, I, 1095b). Once equating „good" with „happiness", children were driven to the next level of Aristotle's theory – how to do good and how do you know the thing you do is a good thing. First of all, they notices that it's harder to do good things and easier to do bad things – *When you do a bad thing is like you take something, and it's easy to take, but when you try to do something good, you must give something from yourself, you make an effort, and that's harder* or *To do good, you have to think and to control yourself, and that's not always easy*. Most of the children admitted that they don't know

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[7] All children's answers are written in italics

spontaneously, by themselves, what's good and bad – *that's a thing you learn* from parents or experience: *Parents told me so, I'm getting punished if I do something wrong* or *When the other person is happy, you know you did a good thing* – but once you learned, it's a matter of exercising to become a better person. „For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them" (NE, II, 1103b): *First, it was very hard for me to give away even just one toy, but now, I can donate even two bags of toys, and I do it regularly. And I feel happy when I do it because I make someone else happy; I do it for mercy because I saw some videos on YouTube which impressed me*. Further on, children were asked to choose the top three „qualities" that matter the most for them. „Friendship" came first - *Friendship is very important for kids, so they can play and have fun together! I have a lot of friends*, followed by „kindness" – *My parents tell me all the time to be kind to the others, so I think it must be important* and „courage" – *When you have courage, you can do a lot of exciting things, like swimming in the waves, but you have to be careful, otherwise you can have a cardio-respiratory stop, if the water is too cold or drown yourself, if the waves are too big*. This last remark on „courage" ignited the debate around the question „When a virtue ceases to be a virtue and becomes a vice?". The answers were formulated around two main directions – when you do too much and when you do too little: *It's not ok to „suffocate" your friend, nor show him/her too little attention either*; *If you give away all your toys to another kid, he may be happy, but you'll not be happy with no toy at all*. In the end, they managed to conclude that one needs to find a middle between *giving all your toys and not giving anything* or *carrying ten bottles of water and not helping at all your mother* – „The moral virtue is a mean, then, and in what sense it is so, and that it is a mean between two vices, the one involving excess, the other deficiency, and that it is such because its character is to aim at what is intermediate in passions and in actions" (EN, II, 1107a).

In the second part of the workshop, considering the moral knowledge children have previously acquired and capitalizing on their life experience, as well as taking into account their capacities, which have been studied in the preliminary phase, two moral experiments were made, to awake moral feelings and to test moral consciousness.

Experiment 1 – „The Spider"

The first experiment, called „The Spider" was designed for the 7-10 years old group of children and addressed the „courage" virtue. At this age, children experience both the desire of showing off their recently acquired physical capabilities (climbing higher, jumping over larger gaps, fighting etc.) to prove courage, sometimes putting themselves in dangerous situations, and a range of fears (fear of dark, fear

of being lonely, fear of heights, fear of bugs etc.). The source of all these behaviors seems to be rather psychological than cognitive. But for a comprehensive profile, mandatory for a successful moral enhancement, other biological, psychological and cognitive aspects should be considered.

Thus, when designing the experiment, I took into account the fact that the cortical brain volume augments and the nervous system increases in plasticity, which favors the receipt of a larger amount of information. However, it's still difficult for them to fix new concepts, because of the relative instability of concentration. Children at their age are in an intense learning phase, often achieved through play. On the other hand, from the psycho-social perspective of Erikson (Poole & Snerey, 2011), they go through the identity crisis called „competence vs. inferiority", trying to answer the existential question „Can I do it?". A proper approach to social comparison will develop a sense of competence, while an unfavorable one deepens the feeling of inferiority and inadequacy. This is highly relevant when the virtue of „courage" is considered to be activated during the experiment. Also, the fact that a dramatic change in self-regulation occurs plays an important role – the children become more and more capable of inhibiting undesirable behavior. Other aspects, theorized by J. Piaget and L. Kohlberg, such as the „trial-error" problem-solving ability, drawing general conclusions from personal experiences and particular facts or the ability to see things from someone else's perspective endorsed the theoretical ground of this experiment.

Summarily, the experiment securely confronted children with one of the most common phobias – the arachnophobia (Curtis et al., 1998), and after going through this experience, the children had to give their definition of courage. Thus, a fake spider was presented in a dark wooden box and the children were invited to introduce their hand in the box. They were aware that was a big spider inside, but they didn't know it was a fake one, and couldn't see through the box. Initially, half of them expressed fear, another significant part disgust, and only very few of them said they are brave enough to do it. Finally, 4 out of 20 refused to put the hand inside the box, the rest of them did it - some from a single attempt, some through a trial process. All of them managed to inhibit objectionable behavior like screaming loud or throwing away the box and for all mattered the reactions of the others. When it was finally revealed that the spider was just a toy, everyone wanted to touch it, included the ones who initially refused to. To the question „Do you think the kids who put their hand in the box were courageous?", the majority response was „Yes". To the question „Do you think the kids who didn't put their hand in the box were cowards?", the majority response was „Yes". But when they've been asked to confront their experience with the definition of „courage" from the dictionary – „the

moral force to face without hesitation the dangers and difficulties of any kind"[8] – they unanimously disagreed, saying that *this is the definition for „bravery"*. When asked to define "courage" in their own words, the majority agreed that courage is *something between cowardness and bravery* – „virtue is a mean between two vices that which depends on excess and that which depends on defect; and again it is a mean because the vices respectively fall short of or exceed what is right in both passions and actions, while virtue both finds and chooses that which is intermediate" (NE, VI, 1107a) and admitted that more information one has on a situation, more courageous can be, in the true sense of the word: *A really wise man should weight the whole situation, to think, not to act without judging the circumstances. Otherwise, you could even die!* and *When it becomes a habit, you don't need to think anymore, you just know what to do.* They also pointed out that small children (toddler and preschool), even if they do things that could seem courageous, they are not, because they don't think; they are not cowards either when they scream – it's just the instinct that protects them.

The main conclusion of this experiment is that children, when properly led, can reach relevant moral knowledge, through own reasoning. Analyzing several times the video recording of the experiment, I am entitled to state that a big part of its success lies in the adequacy of the moral pedagogy methods to the children's specific needs and capacities. Children are not less intelligent than adults, they just think differently and need to be approached accordingly, through attractive content that provides easy bonding and assimilation opportunities. Although at this age hypothetical thinking is not completely developed, children integrate inductive reasoning and they use logic appropriately. Also, even if, to a large extent, at this stage of development, moral judgment of the children is still driven by reward and punishment, they are very sensitive to moral approval or disapproval. Incentive manipulation often turns out to be a trap since „we manipulate moral values by the employment of incentives that are not intrinsically moral themselves" (Cushman, F. et al., 2017). Replacing reward with approval and punishment with disapproval could increase the degree of objectivity of moral reasoning.

Before ending this section, I recall snake-on-a-scanning experiment[9], conducted by Uri Nili at Weizmann Institute of Science in Israel, whose purpose was to

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[8] Dictionary of the Romanian Language, Univers Enciclopedic, Bucharest, 1998

[9] People who were scared of snakes were submitted to brain scanning while, at the same time, they were given the choice to bring a live snake closer to their heads or to move it away, by controlling a conveyor belt; the conveyor belt could be activated to move backward or forward. By setting up a choice like this, the scientists were able to define a particular act of bravery: the decision to move the snake closer. The decision to overcome fear was mainly associated with the activity of the subgenual anterior cingulate cortex, a mid-level layer of the brain that plays a role in guiding social behavior, among others.

discover the basic neurophysiological mechanisms of courage. The conclusion of the experiment validates the premise that behind courage there are complex neurophysiological processes, which must be considered when seeding the virtue of „courage" is aimed.

Also, I would like to quote one of Kant's notes, which inspired me when choosing the spider for this moral experiment (Lectures on Pedagogy, 1803):

> Because many human weaknesses do not often come from the fact that no teaching was given to him, but because only bad impressions were imprinted on him. Thus, for example, the child's nanny makes him be afraid of spiders. The child would undoubtedly seek to touch the spiders, as he does with other things. But as the nanny, as soon as she sees a spider, manifests her repugnance by making disgusted ugly faces, this influences by a certain sympathy the child. Many children keep this fear for life and remain, in this regard, always children.

Experiment 2 – „The Beggar"

The second experiment, called „The Beggar" was designed for the 11-14 years old group of children and addressed the virtue of „generosity". I chose this particular virtue because the subjects were in a superior stage of development – their thinking is completely logical at this age, they are capable of both hypothetical and deductive reasoning, they make use of new tools (such as argumentation or counter argumentation) and they also begin to consider the possible consequences of their actions. But even if their cognitive processes are superior and many of children's behaviors seem to be sourced in cognition (their brain increases in size, up to the weight of an adult's brain), I wanted to establish how much does cognition processes matter and how much does psychological processes matter in moral judgement, if these processes cancel or complement each other.

Summarily, the experiment confronted children with a „street beggar", a disguised professional actor[10]. To resemble a typical beggar, he was poorly dressed and wore a beard. I considered the choice of an actor, and not af a real beggar, more appropriate because of the strong awareness of and concern for a safe environment and for an optimal control of the experiment. Children's parents and Unico workshop's supervisors were informed the beggar was a confederate, and gave their consent. Yet, children themselves didn't know that, neither before nor after the experiment, in order to keep interaction as real as possible. All experimental manipulation

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[10] Special thanks to Alexandru Beteringhe, actor at Anton Pann Theatre, Râmnicu Vâlcea

conditions, such as natural setting or violation of personal space were avoid, to maintain a psychologically comfortable environment – no child felt threatened in any way during the experiment, according to the parents and children's positive feedback.

The discussion was built on the moral issues such a meeting raises in real life, and aimed to encourage pro-social behaviors – social inclusion or willingness to help – and to avoid biased naming and shaming people. In this sense, it is more about mediating an educational experience than setting up a social experiment.

Before inviting the beggar in the classroom, children were asked two questions: „Did you ever see a beggar?" (all children answered *yes*), and „Did you ever approach or talk to a beggar?" (all the children answered *no*). To the question „Why not?", most of the answers were grounded on information received from parents, as children testified themselves:

Beggars are dangerous, they can steal things from you.
They are dirty, they stink, they carry germs, better stay away from them.
They are not poor, they just pretend.
They are lazy, they don't work, they just ask for the money other people work for.

Based on this knowledge, children's attitudes towards beggars were cognitively grounded, but also psychologically reflected through fear or disgust grimaces. They provided many arguments to support their statements with a fervent tone of voice.

When the beggar stepped in the classroom, a wave of emotion shook them all and everyone was silenced. They timidly answered the beggar's greeting and their body language suddenly changed – hands under the desk, less moving on chairs. The beggar started to tell his story – how he left his poor village in search of a job in the city, how he was exploited by his employer and fired, how difficult it was for him to find a place to sleep. Afterward, children were invited to ask the beggar any question. In the beginning, they wanted to know more about his life – how old is he, how does he get food and clothes, where does he sleep, what does he do all day long, a proof that cognitive processes were prevalent. Then, a shift from cognitive curiosity to moral concern occurred – they started to ask if he is ever happy („sometimes, not very often"), if he has any friend („I used to have a dog, called Liviu"), what does he feel when people are generous or, on the contrary, when they avoid or offend him („grateful", „sad"), what's his most precious possession („my shoes – I hold them in my arms, while sleeping, not to be stolen"), if he ever feel like he wouldn't be a human being („never, but some people treat me like this). The children were so impressed by his answers that one of them offered his lunch box and the others followed, bringing money, sandwiches, and a cap.

After the beggar left the classroom and the emotions have subsided, children were invited to express themselves. I will list some of their impressions below:

I think that before judging others, people should judge themselves.
Beggars are humans too. Before being beggars, they are humans.
It is not all about money, but about taking action, the action of giving.
I was silent because I felt a lot of mercy. I'm not happy when I see unhappy people.
If I passed him on the street, I would give him all my piggy bank.
I think he is a good man and deserves better.
I think we should do more for people like him.
If I knew the story, I would try to help. I think you must know the story behind.
I realized it's so simple to help someone.
I was very impressed he accepted to come and he was not ashamed.
I learned that we shouldn't exceed in any direction – not giving at all, nor giving all.
I completely changed my opinion on beggars and now I know that the only way to be really generous is to take interest in them, to be aware of their situations.
Before, I was thinking they only want money. Now, I realize they have other needs...
I think people judge others too easily, they put labels too quickly and they generalize without thinking too much. Some beggars may be liars, but not all of them are.

The emotional switch triggered by the meeting with the beggar and many of their impressions after the experiment can be partially attributed to immaturity and psychic lability, caused by the age-specific hormonal instability (neotenia). However, it seemed to me that, in that particular moment when the beggar stepped in, a conflict has ignited between cognition (their ability to manipulate hypotheses based on all the knowledge they had mostly from their parents) and emotion (genuine feelings of their own when confronted with reality). I stake to approximate that their moral judgment was born specifically from an appropriate resolution of this conflict. As Kohlberg states, in this stage of moral development (conventional morality), children have a type of reasoning in which moral judgment is based on the others' approval and family's expectations. But I was able to observe that children have dared to challenge parental recommendation, to suspend intellectual reasoning and to morally reason out of original knowledge, acquired through their own experience. Thus, they became more empathetic (condition of morality) and with greater chances that the virtues thus acquired to be more stable than the dispositions learned through knowledge transfer.

Although the presented experiment has several important limitations, among which a low external validity, it revealed that orienting children toward experiences likely to generate empathy not only help them to acquire stable moral disposition but also help them to „unlearn" acquired social prejudices (Cushman, F., et al., 2017).

Conclusions

Within the limits of this article, I tried to reveal a way to bring closer to the children the moral philosophy of Aristotle, approached as a form of a quasi-Aristotelian moral technology, which I consider more suitable for children's moral education than the consequentialist or deontologist paradigms, as explained in the theoretical framework section of this paper. I also joined the assessment that moral philosophy should not be taught to children as a simplified version of academic ethics (Mureșan, 2017), but employed as a character-building tool, a practical set of knowledge which mediates the access to a good life and applies in real life and society.

I repeatedly asserted the need for accurately portraying the children, by broadening the approach up to multidisciplinarity, in consideration of the whole range of children's capacities (biological, cognitive and psychological traits harmonized into a comprehensive picture) and to correlate these capacities with engaging educational methods, in accordance with the principle of moral enhancement stage-appropriateness.

Among other intuitions, a main hypothesis was tested during the two age customized moral experiments I designed: children can reach relevant moral knowledge out of their own reasoning, thus challenging the parental authoritative argument, biases or even psychological fears. They only need to be properly led and to be encouraged to reason in fostering moral change by activating the right pedagogical tool, which I grant to be rather non-formal than formal or informal.

In my research, I favored the moral experiment as a didactic method, because I considered it awakens a pronounced affective involvement and allows a deeper attachment in a shorter time. Children's moral knowledge was assessed before and after the experiments and a compelling difference was revealed, mostly within "The Beggar" experiment:

> *Beggars are dangerous, they can steal things from you*. vs. *I think he is a good man and deserves better.*
> *They are dirty, they stink, they carry germs, better stay away from them.* vs. *Before being beggars, they are humans.*
> *They are lazy, they don't work, they just ask for money*. vs. *I completely changed my opinion on beggars.*
> *They aren't poor, they just pretend*. vs. *Some beggars may lie, but not all of them do.*

The results can be objected that the sample is not representative and the groups may not be comparable. For rigor, I intend to extend this research with future workshops on a larger scale and to couple the moral experiment with other methods that moral pedagogy provides, among which moral observation, that can take place in the schoolyard, in parks or sports grounds and gives the children the chance to sharpen their moral sense by scrutinizing and morally evaluating situations that happen under their eyes. Also, the moral example offers behavioral

patterns with an important role in raising awareness and mobilization, guiding the child – the increased tendency of imitation in childhood is a good catalyst in character building. Moreover, real examples influence the behavior more than the abstract ideas or the representations the child may have from the moral stories.

The above considerations and the workshop's outcomes are acceptable, I think, for considering that philosophy, namely moral philosophy for children's education should take a step forward by coming out of the books' covers or classrooms and experiment more, by taking advantage of the results of the many studies which revealed a new understanding of the moral judgment and behavior mechanisms.

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