
At the Heart of Virtue Growth: ‘Self-of-virtue’ and ‘Virtue identity’*

En el corazón del crecimiento en virtud: el ‘yo de virtud’ y la ‘identidad de virtud’

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Resumen: Este artículo explora los conceptos de ‘yo-de-virtud’ e ‘identidad de virtud’ en perspectiva aristotélica realista. Distinguiendo la ‘disposición fundamental’ de crecer en virtud, que define al ‘yo-de-virtud’, de las disposiciones particulares de las virtudes, se conceptualiza el crecimiento en virtud como realidad ‘integradora’ y ‘sistema abierto y libre’, basado en la acción guiada por la frónesis. Se describe la dimensión moral y cognitivo-afectiva del yo, así como la diferencia radical entre ‘identidad de virtud’ e ‘identidad moral’, proponiendo un modelo para el desarrollo del ‘yo-de-virtud’, con sus aspectos pedagógicos. Procurar desarrollar el ‘yo-de-virtud’ evitaría la atomización de la educación en virtudes.

Palabras clave: ‘Yo-de-virtud’, Identidad de virtud, Crecimiento en virtud, Identidad.

Abstract: Within a realist Aristotelian paradigm, this paper explores the concepts of ‘self-of-virtue’ and ‘virtue identity’, its correspondent self-concept. Distinguishing the ‘fundamental disposition’ to virtue growth, which defines a self-of-virtue, from the particular dispositions of virtues, we conceptualize virtue growth as an ‘integrative’ and ‘open free systemic’ reality based on phronesis-guided action, and we describe the ‘unified moral self of rationally grounded emotions’. We address the radical difference between virtue identity and moral identity, and we propose a processual model for self-of-virtue development, unfolding its pedagogical aspects and suggesting that refocussing on the development of self-of-virtue would help to avoid atomized virtue education.

Keywords: Self-of-virtue, Virtue identity, Virtue growth, Selfhood, Identity.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the fundamental problems of virtue education and virtue research is the variety of virtues and the multifaceted nature of virtue. “Evaluating character is currently one of the biggest challenges facing researchers working in the field, partly because ‘character’ and ‘virtues’ are such complex constructs” (Harrison, Arthur and Burn, n.d., p. 19). This study presents an alternative for addressing the “character education’s profoundest problem” (Kristjánsson, 2015, p. 60), based on the concepts of ‘self-of-virtue’ and its concomitant ‘virtue identity’. Instead of using the widely spread analytical approach, which looks at different kinds of virtues and virtue components (emotional, cognitive, behavioural, etc.), we adopt an original synthetic approach, a sort of ‘wisdom inquiry’ (Maxwell, 2009), looking at the depths of person’s self from the lens of virtue development. The underlying conviction of this approach is that the person’s ‘deep disposition’ to grow in virtue is the corner stone on which a virtuous life is built. “Human development towards virtue is a key premise for the Aristotelian telos of happiness, or eudaimonia” (Akrivou and Orón, 2016, p. 231).

Other alternatives to the modernist analytical view of moral development are being developed successfully. For example, within a personalist virtue ethics framework, the inter-processual self (IPS) theory (Akrivou and Orón, 2016; Akrivou, Orón and Scalzo, 2018) is a radical new way of understanding the integration of self and action, as well as personal, relational, and systemic growth. In this study, from an Aristotelian perspective, we will address in detail the concept of ‘self-of-virtue’, its relationship with virtue growth, and the making process of such self. We address also the formation of the self-concept of a self-of-virtue, that we called ‘virtue identity’.

Before formulating the research question, we will clarify the philosophical and ethical perspective of this work. Philosophically, we adopt a realist perspective of the self, instead of the dominant self-antirealism. “According to the anti-realist stance pervading contemporary self research, there is no useful distinction between selfhood and identity/self-concept... The realist alternative is to suppose that one’s identity or self-concept has actual selfhood – one’s de facto states of character – as its cognitive object, and that when it gets things right, one’s identity corresponds with one’s selfhood” (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 20). In coherence with this realist perspective, and in line with a long tradition of moral objectivism theories, we embrace “the psychological assumption” of moral objectivism (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 128): that a person can opt for objective moral values, which are independent of personal points of view, and acquire virtues.

The research questions can be formulated as follows: what is a 'self-of-virtue' and how is it situated in the theories of selfhood? What is virtue identity and how is it related to a self-of-virtue? How these two concepts are interconnected? And, from a practical point of view: what are the components of a model for the development of a self-of-virtue and virtue identity? What are the pedagogical implications of this model? For addressing these questions, we structured this study in four main sections: 'the self', 'the self-of-virtue', 'self-concept, moral identity and virtue identity' and 'the development of the self-of-virtue'.

THE SELF

In this section we address briefly the nature of self and the evolution of self theory, and we discuss the moral and emotional dimensions of self.

The person and the self

When addressing the nature of the self, Kristjánsson opts for a 'Humean soft self-realism' and focusses on our "everyday, emotion-grounded selfhood" (2010, p. 47), avoiding the discussion of its ontological status. The 'everyday self' may be appropriate for addressing the everyday display of virtue. However, the self-of-virtue is characterized by a profound disposition to virtue growth which is situated at a deeper ontological level and needs a sounder anthropology.

Leonardo Polo's anthropology (Polo and Corazón, 2005) acknowledges the relevance of the self and integrates it in a wider understanding of the human beings as possessing three different complementary dimensions, which are called 'radicals': 'a received nature' (the 'classic radical', which recognizes that actions affect the self), 'subjectivity' or interiority (the 'modern radical', that stress the importance of freedom and is the locus of self), and 'relation' or 'co-existence' (the 'Christian radical', which underlines the person's uniqueness and her transcendence to her actions). In this perspective, the virtues (operative habits) perfection the natural radical (Akrivou and Orón, 2016) and enrich the interiority of self of the modern radical. And the 'deep disposition' to virtue growth of a self-of-virtue sees as a virtue-oriented feature of the self. Here it may be useful to note that, in this paper, the focus is on the relationship between the Greek and the modern radical. As an alternative, the IPS chooses the Christian radical as starting point for moral reflection, and it presents itself as a way of integrating all the three radicals (Akrivou, Orón and Scalzo, 2018). Keeping this in mind, we will retain Kristjánsson definition of the self as "set of a person's core commit-

ments, traits, aspirations and ideals: the characteristics that are most central to him or her” (2010, p. 5).

Theories of self

A brief account of the evolution of self theory could be useful to situate historically the concept of ‘self-of-virtue’. During the 18th and 19th century, the modern notion of selfhood was prominent, but at the end of 19th century the interest in self research dwindled. This tendency continued during the so called ‘behaviourism period’ (first half of 20th century), but in the 1960s, with the expansion of humanistic psychology, the concerns about ‘finding’ and ‘actualising’ one’s true self became topical. The positive psychology trend enhanced this interest, and some decades after that, Charles Taylor (1989) could speak of the ‘inward turn’ that led to ‘the age of self’. Relevant sociologists of modernity (e.g., Beck, Giddens, Ziehe), were interested in self research and education. Philosophy also increasingly dealt with self research, but it seems that “philosophers theorising about the self have historically and with rare exception turned a blind eye to empirical evidence about self-beliefs as gathered by social scientists” (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 16).

As regards the moral dimension of self, the relation between moral philosophy and moral psychology (“the most natural provinces of self research” (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 7)) followed a different path: it moved from mutual indifference during the behaviourist years, to active appropriation of ethical theory by developmental science during the Kohlbergian period, to the present active collaboration (Lapsley, 2016, p. 36), which produced a large amount of academic research about the psychological foundations of moral behaviour (e.g., Aquino and Reed, 2002; Blasi, 1980, 1984; Kohlberg, 1981; Nucci and Narváez, 2008; Lickona, 1994). In the realist paradigm adopted in this paper, the concept of ‘self-of-virtue’ is at the crossroad of morality, psychology and sociology. It addresses the moral dimension of self from the perspective of virtue growth and recognizes the social dimension of its development. We will now describe the moral core of self and its relationship with the emotional life of the person.

The moral core of self and self-relevant emotions

The distinction between personality traits, character and self helps to grasp the moral nature of self. “*Personality traits* involve our temperaments, moods, habits, skills and dispositions, not all of which are reason-responsive or identity conferring... *Character traits* penetrate deeper to the core of a person’s self” (Kristjánsson,

2008, p. 60), and they distinguish themselves from other personality traits in “being potentially reason-responsive and having to do with a person’s moral worth... (The self) encompasses those and only those character traits that are literally speaking self-shaping... (core commitments, traits, aspirations and ideals)” (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 27). In this understanding, the self cannot be separated from morality: “the way we think morally about other people is predominantly in terms of what kind of person they are, and only secondarily about their actions in abstract” (Fatic, 2016, p. xi). The ‘moral self’ is “the self as the subject of moral agency and the object of moral evaluation” (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 5). However, it should be noted that, for Aristotle, moral virtue is a superior superordinate aspect of personhood, not a reduced or collateral aspect of it.

In an Aristotelian understanding, the organismic way in which a virtuous person displays virtue requires the integration and mutual support between moral knowledge and moral emotions. Moral emotions are cognitively imbued, because they have at their origin a kind of moral cognition (a judgement or a belief) about the reality provoking it. Moreover, “on Hume’s account, the moral self is not only constituted, but also originally created, by emotion” (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 21). However, the self is not constituted only by emotions, even if they are a significant aspect of it (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 76).

Some emotions are particularly relevant for the self. Among them, ‘self-constituting emotions’ (which define who we are, and flow from deep commitments and aspirations) are particularly important in the perspective of the theory of the self-of-virtue: the *desire* of growing in virtue is a *self-constituting* emotion, a constitutive part of the fundamental disposition to grow in virtue that characterises a self-of-virtue. Another kind of self-relevant emotions, namely, *self-conscious emotions*, are closely related to self-concept and will be discussed in the third section.

Based on this realist understanding of a “unified moral self of rationally grounded emotion” (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 97) we will unfold in the next section the concept of ‘self-of-virtue’.

THE SELF-OF-VIRTUE

The key feature of a self-of-virtue is its deep disposition to virtue growth. In this section we unfold this concept addressing three questions: 1) on which grounds ‘self’ and ‘virtue’ can be considered as conceptually compatible realities? 2) how virtue growth can be conceptualized? and 3) what is the scope of the fundamental disposition that that characterises a self-of-virtue?

The self and the virtue

It seems that ‘self’ and ‘virtue’ might be conceptually opposed: on the one hand, virtue is a ‘stable disposition’ enrooted in the ‘classical radical’; and, on the other hand, we situated the self within the ‘modern radical’, where humans experience freedom and subjectivity. Exploring the nature of virtue may help to find out on which grounds ‘self’ and ‘virtue’ can be integrated.

Is virtue a ‘dynamic’ or a ‘stable’ concept? In other words, does a virtuous person display ‘standardized’ responses, or, on the contrary, is virtue responsive to situations? Personality psychologists stress the stable character of human traits. But “social psychologists are famously sceptical of the conceptual repertoire of personality psychologists, especially with respect to ‘static’ human traits” (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 9). Without embracing the moral relativism of radical situationism, relevant virtue ethicists have also argued that virtue is a contextually responsive construct. For example, Koehn stated that virtue ethics, in its present form, is not “sufficiently nuanced” and that “the theory overlooks how politicized our perceptions of situations frequently are” (1998, p. 509). More recently, Hartman has argued that habituation will not create virtues that carry over from one sort of situation to another, because not all instances of a virtue are psychologically similar (2013, p. 142).

Aristotle, who uses the term *hexis* (‘state of character’) to point to the stability of virtue, stresses that *phronesis* is the key for maintaining the unity of virtue in response to various situations and to act taking carefully into consideration the particulars. *Phronesis* is the point of articulation between virtue stability and dynamicity. Thanks to *phronesis*, a virtuous character maintains the ‘unity of virtue’ in new, unforeseen situations. *Phronesis* is like the door through which the ‘stable virtue’ can enter the realm of the ‘dynamic self’ and originate a self-of-virtue.

The stability of virtue and virtue growth

Aristotelian virtues are stable, robust dispositions that are neither easy to acquire nor easily transformable. To understand nature of virtue growth, which central in the definition of a self-of-virtue, the concepts of ‘integration’ and ‘system’, as explained Leonardo Polo (2007), can be useful.

An integrative reality (as opposed to a relational reality) belongs to the order of what is provoked (not necessary). It is optional (not compulsory) and possible, but not automatic, and it preserves unity in diversity (Orón, 2015, p. 116). Virtue conceived as an integrative reality allows to understand that growing in virtue is

a personal decision, it is not compulsory. Virtue growth is not automatic, but it is attainable with effort, and it preserves the unity of virtue.

Polo conceives human reality is an 'open free system'. In an open system, "the relations between its elements are ever more intense and integrated... and its growth can be unrestricted" (Polo, 2007, p. 123). In a free system "the direction of growth is not predetermined... Positive growth is an integrating growth; negative growth is disintegrating" (Orón, 2015, p. 119). Virtue can be understood as an open free system, in which different virtues are systemically interconnected and can develop organically without restriction, but in a non-necessary, unpredictable way.

The scope of the 'deep disposition' of a self-of-virtue

The concept of 'self-of-virtue' captures a kind of fundamental disposition that is different from the 'states of character' of the different virtues. It is the person's 'deep disposition' to acquire and develop all these tendencies or virtues, and it could be called a *meta-disposition*: the 'fundamental disposition to acquire virtuous dispositions'.

The phenomenology, within the limits of its methodology, provides insights for understanding the scope of this fundamental disposition. Scheler spoke of 'disposition of the spirit' or 'spiritual posture' (*Gesinnung*), which defines the person most radically and it has a marked moral character (Sánchez-León, 2009, p. 210). It is situated "at a more profound level than mere intentions, resolutions and decisions" (p. 149), making an action predictable without denying freedom.

What makes the *Gesinnung* conceptually close to the fundamental disposition of a self-of-virtue is that, for Scheler, the *Gesinnung* is a 'direction to the value', but it does not possess a representative content (Sánchez-León, 2009, p. 225). Similarly, the deep disposition of a self-of-virtue is a general orientation to virtue growth as a fundamental value, whereas the tendencies that characterize the different virtues have their own 'representative content' delimited by the object of the concrete virtue.

Summarizing, a self-of-virtue is defined by its free fundamental orientation to virtue growth. This disposition implies the correspondent rational emotions, knowledge, commitment and *phronesis* guided behaviour leading to a life of virtue. The self-of-virtue is the self of someone who is 'on his/her way' to acquire a virtuous life, not of the (ideal) person who possesses already all the virtues. We address below the self-concept corresponding to a self-of-virtue.

SELF-CONCEPT, MORAL IDENTITY AND VIRTUE IDENTITY

In this section we will unfold the concept of virtue identity. After a description of the understanding of identity and self-concept in the antirealist and realist self paradigms respectively, we address the relationship between moral identity and virtue identity and we propose a definition of virtue identity.

Self-concept and identity: two different paradigms

For situating Aristotelian virtue identity, background knowledge about the recent evolution of the concept of identity may be useful. In industrial society, identity was conceived as identification with social models, but in the post-modern society (Lyotard, 1979) “as an individual process” (Keupp, 2002). Later, radical postmodern philosophers (Derrida, Foucault, Bauman) denied the existence of a person’s inner essence and conceived identity as a fluid and evolutionary psychological construct which is communicated through social interactions. In this ‘dominant paradigm’, identity is socially constructed, the social excludes the personal, and the personal is seen as merely inner psychological.

In contrast, the ‘alternative realist paradigm’ adopted in this paper acknowledges both the social and the personal and claims an ontological status for the personal (Baker, 2002). The personalist philosopher Mounier stated that “my person is not the consciousness that I have of it” (Mounier, 1936, p. 51). For Flanagan (1991), whereas ‘represented identity’ is a construction, the ‘actual self’ is not; and for Kristjánsson, “self-concept... when it gets things right, has an actual self as its cognitive object: the referent to which it corresponds” (2010, p. 29). In this paper, ‘self-concept’ is understood as “the set of a person’s self-conceptions or beliefs about his or her self” (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 5), which could be true or not; and we reserve the word ‘identity’ to capture the antirealist position that considers the self and self-concept as being basically the same and thus self-concept being ‘necessarily true’.

Self-concept matters epistemologically for the definition of the self-of-virtue, because it can be considered also as a part of the actual full self: “Watching and trying (successfully or not) to know oneself –and the conclusions of that watching– become, in part, constitutive elements of selfhood” (Joplin, 2000, p. 65). For Kristjánsson, “one’s self-concept forms part of one’s self, if perhaps not... its most significant part” (2010, p. 32). Realistic self-understanding matters also pedagogically, because it provides first-hand knowledge about human nature and enhances *eudaimonia* (Badhwar, 2014).

The explanations of the making of self-concept differ in the 'dominant' and 'alternative' paradigms. If the self as such does not exist, as posited by radical post-modern philosophy, then acquiring self-knowledge means constructing 'knowledge' about the self, adopting a subjective 'self-theory' (a process called 'selving'), or even 'deciding' about what self is (self-knowledge as rationalization of self-choice). In the alternative realist paradigm, the self-concept is formed by 'watching' at the actual self: "The self is not only the stage; it is on stage" (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 77).

Capturing one's self is not a purely cognitive activity, but an emotionally grounded process, which provokes 'self-conscious emotions', such as hubristic pride (about the self as excellent) and shame (about the imperfect self), which "are simultaneously part of the actual full self... and about the self" (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 233). The cognitive-emotional dimension of the self is reflected in self-conscious emotions. Similarly, the moral dimension of self impregnates self-concept with morality. In the next section we address moral identity theory and its position in the dialogue between ethics and psychology.

Moral identity and virtue identity

Historically, moral identity theory enhanced the dialogue between ethics and psychology (outlined in the second section), particularly since the moral psychologist Blasi, detecting a gap between moral cognition and moral behaviour, argued that the moral self is even more important for understanding moral behaviour than moral emotions and moral understanding (Blasi, 1980, 1984, 2005). The problem is that Blasi's moral-self solution "is really just a moral-identity solution. Although Blasi and his colleagues prefer, for some reason, to use the former term, they mean the latter" (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 94). This confusion between 'self' and 'self-concept' is typical of the antirealist self paradigm. As a result, even if Blasi was not radically antirealist, his terminological ambiguity popularized a constructivist (Hardy and Carlo, 2005) and social cognitive (Lapsley, 2016) understanding of moral identity which obliterates the difference between the moral self and moral identity.

In this context, when virtue ethics theory become one of the major players in the dialogue between ethics and psychology (Lapsley, 2016, p. 38), efforts were done to close the gap between Aristotelian research and moral identity theory. For example, Jeong and Han, after a theoretical review of the relationship between virtue ethics and moral identity, concluded that they "can be characterized as 'co-constructive,' 'interactive,' and 'interdependent' " (2013, p. 53). However, these efforts risk to conceptualize virtue identity as a sub-construct of moral identity, and

to bring about a view of virtue identity close to the post-modern paradigm. But *is virtue identity a sub-construct of moral identity or a stand-alone concept?*

The construct of moral identity has a number of assumptions that seem to make it irreconcilable with Aristotelian virtue theory and therefore with virtue identity. Postmodern ‘moral identity’ is part of a subjectively constructed ‘self-theory’ (or ‘self-decision’) without reference to an actual moral self. It assumes moral relativism, where the individual chooses autonomously a subjective understanding of happiness (as subjective well-being, self-enhancement, self-expansion, etc.) and the moral values leading to it. Virtue identity is conceptually distinct from the moral identity construct: it is based on virtue ethics, which embraces the existence of an actual moral self and moral objectivism (*eudaimonia* as the ideal of happiness), and considers virtues as constitutive of and conducive to it through *phronesis*-guided action (Kristjánsson, 2015, pp. 24-33).

In addition to these fundamental disagreements, other differences can be mentioned: moral identity looks for *retaining consistency* between self-concept and thoughts, feelings and behaviour... (and) enhances *resistance to situational factors* that encourage immoral behaviours” (Morgan, Fowers and Kristjánsson, 2017, p. 7), while Aristotelian virtue identity leads to *strive for cultivating* thoughts, feelings and behaviours leading to virtue, and disposes the person to *take advantage of situational factors* that challenge virtue for growing in virtue. In addition, moral identity is formed through inner *coordination* of personal and moral goals (Colby and Damon, 1993), while virtue identity is formed by *‘watching’* emotionally at the actual self-of-virtue.

Therefore, if moral identity is understood in a postmodern sense, then Aristotelian virtue ethics and moral identity theory are not compatible, and Aristotelian virtue identity should be considered as a conceptually distinct, stand-alone concept, not a sub-construct of moral identity.

Definition of virtue identity

Virtue identity captures the ‘self-concept’ of a self-of-virtue disposed to grow in virtue. In the expression ‘virtue identity’, we use the word ‘identity’ in the realist sense of ‘personal identification with a value or ideal’, commonly used in everyday language (as in ‘professional identity’, ‘national identity’, ‘ethnic identity’ etc.), not in the antirealist sense. Therefore, ‘virtue identity’ is defined as the deep-down understanding of self as profoundly disposed (emotionally, cognitively and conatively) to virtue growth. Based on this understanding, we present in the next section a processual model for the development of a self-of-virtue and its concomitant virtue identity.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SELF-OF-VIRTUE: A PROCESSUAL MODEL¹

Among the different conceptualizations of the development of selfhood, Taylor's approach can be useful for understanding the making of Aristotelian self-of-virtue. Charles Taylor's anthropology of the self (Taylor, 1989) is based on the concept of 'meaningful values' that can be taken as a life goal and thus orient the definition of a person's selfhood and a concrete lifestyle. While he acknowledges the socio-cultural sources of self (Taylor, 1991), he argues that personal agency and freedom are the crucial elements in this process: this 'socially situated freedom' (Taylor, 1997) allows one to critically assess his/her assumptions, transform them, and hence, reconfigure his/her own selfhood. Based on previous work (Fernández González, 2010, 2018), we build on Taylor's conception for proposing a processual model for developing an Aristotelian self-of-virtue. This model aims to cover in particular the integration of Aristotelian and modern radicals while recognizing the relational aspect of the development of the moral self. It intends to be a useful support for other moral education models integrating the three human radicals (Akrivou, Orón and Scalzo, 2018).

The components of the model can be synthesized as follows: (1) shaping of a cognitive-emotional ideal self-of-virtue; (2) committing to virtue development; (3) *phronesis*-guided involvement in virtue growth; and (4) developing virtue identity. We address below each element, including its relational and pedagogical aspects.

1) Shaping an emotional and cognitive image of an ideal virtuous person

Moral education involves "sensitisation to and instillation of the correct habits in the young: teaching them how to act and how to feel" (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 16). The development of a self-of-virtue starts with a feeling of admiration. For Annas, "virtues are dispositions worthy of a distinct kind of admiration, which inspire us to aspire to them as ideals" (Annas, 2011, p. 6). This is the 'enchanted version' of Aristotelian flourishing (Kristjánsson, 2016). The image of a self-of-virtue has also concrete cognitive contents (JCCV, 2017, p. 7): knowing how virtue develops, and the belief that virtue growth is possible (having a 'virtue growth mindset', in reference to Dweck's (2000) 'growth mindset').

Relational and pedagogical aspects: Internalization and personalization of the cognitive-emotional image of virtue self happen through active critical assessment

¹ This model addresses a different process (the making of a self-of-virtue) than the 'A Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development' (JCCV, 2017, p. 6), which describes different pathways of moral development in a broader sense.

of other's "systems of significance" (Taylor, 1989), because children "are likely presented with conflicting value messages depending on context and relationship (i.e., parent-child; teacher-child; peer group etc.) ... and negotiate, reject or accept them" (Morgan, Fowers and Kristjánsson, 2017, p. 17). At school, direct teaching of the cognitive contents of a self-of-virtue is most important to avoid a distorted and incomplete understanding and the rejection of virtue as an ideal (Annas, 2011, p. 119). But the emotional aspect should not be neglected. Contact with real role models of virtue growth (teachers, parents, siblings) help to 'catch' emotionally what is a self-of-virtue at school and in the family. Inspiring ideal heroes from literature or cinema can spark interest and mimetic admiration, and moral exemplars of conversion after moral failure are particularly important because the essence of a self-of-virtue is the disposition to grow in virtue, not the actual possession of virtue.

2) *Commitment to virtue development*

This component captures personal agency as the central element of the making of an Aristotelian self-of-virtue. Admiration can lead to aspiration to virtue growth (Annas, 2011, p. 6), and to the decision of living a virtuous life. There is a general agreement among virtue scholars on the relevance of commitment (not fickleness or whim) to virtue growth. For Peterson and Seligman, "the good life reflects choice and will" (2004, p. 10). Annas states that "a virtue requires a commitment to value" (Annas, 2011, p. 6). And the JCCV acknowledges that "self-determination is foundational to the development of good character." (JCCV, 2017, p. 8). This decision and commitment are emotionally laden and spring from (and perfection) the person's fundamental disposition (*Gesinnung*) to virtue growth. "Only the person who is able to decide to live a particular way of life, whatever it is, would be able to produce authentic deliberate decisions about a particular course of action" (Vigo, 2008, p. 61).

Relational and pedagogical aspects. Taylors' 'socially situated freedom' (Taylor, 1997) captures the relational dimension of personal choices. From the perspective of the human 'Christian radical', commitment to virtue growth can find in others a 'transcendental motivation', realizing that the most important thing in the action is not even its relation to virtue but to the others (Polo and Corazón, 2005, p. 52).

In an integrative view of virtue growth, this commitment is not compulsory. However, respecting personal freedom, it can be facilitated at school and in the family. Educational programs such as UpToYou (Orón, 2016)² are working in the sense of the integration of emotions and decisions in an interpersonal perspective.

² <http://www.uptoyoueducacion.com/en/>

Scheler believed that the *Gesinnung* cannot be educated, but that it develops by 'following a prototype' (Sánchez-León, 2009, p. 376), a moral exemplar which can be proposed to youngsters and adults. Personal friendly conversations with youngsters about growing in virtue is another direction for reflection: one-time interview about purpose has been proved to have long-term positive impact on youngsters' self-determination (Wandeler and Bundick, 2011).

3) *Involving in virtue growth through phronesis-guided actions*

The fundamental disposition that characterizes a self-of-virtue is not created just by a voluntarist decision, but through an organismic acquisition based on action and habituation: "one's action returns to affect the core of the self: a person can become what his/her actions are" (Akrivou and Orón, 2016, p. 232). *Phronesis* is crucial for choosing and using the appropriate means for growing in virtue: virtue growth "involves ongoing selective and differential engagement with the world, not a repetition of a routine once learned and then safely relied on" (Annas, 2011, pp. 73-74). In this path, failures are also important, because, faced with them, the self-of-virtue can reactivate his/her deep disposition to virtue growth to find there the necessary emotional and psychological resources for recommencing the struggle for a virtuous life without discouragement.

Relational and pedagogical aspects. Gee has stressed the importance of the interaction with others within 'affinity groups' (Gee, 2000, p. 3) for developing the self. The school and the family can be 'communities of virtue' which provide challenging opportunities for developing virtue in a reflective, phronimous way. Schools could address the 'transcendent motivation' for virtue growth by including service learning and creating a culture of service and care for each person, instead of focusing only on knowledge transfer or development of professional competences. In this perspective, the work of initiatives integrating the personal-Christian radical in their character education programs (Church of England, 2015; Devanny, 2018) should be celebrated. Nevertheless, a qualitative teaching and learning process itself is the natural context in which students can find many opportunities to grow in virtue. The JCCV project "Teaching character through subjects"³ is an example of good practice in this direction.

3 <https://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/1676/character-education/resources/teaching-character-through-subjects>

4) *Developing an Aristotelian virtue identity*

This component of the model captures the importance of self-concept in the making of a self-of-virtue. Virtue identity integrates a cognitive-evaluative and an emotional-reactive component. The evaluative component should look at the increase (or decrease) of the disposition to grow in virtue, instead of assessing the attained level of flourishing. It should be noted that the realistic perception of our self-of-virtue, including acceptance of our (moral) limits, can be endangered by self-deception, a “falsification of the memory” (Pieper, 1965, pp. 14-15). The emotional aspect of virtue identity includes “the reactive attitudes the person experiences after the decision (to act or not to act) has been made” (Kristjánsson, 2008, p. 75). In particular, some self-conscious emotions, such as shame and guilt, include in themselves a motivation to self-change.

Relational and pedagogical aspects of virtue identity. “A social dimension is built into the very mechanism for forming self-conceptions; how others understand me is central to how I do and should understand myself” (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 48). Positive social recognition includes ‘good reputation’ and feedback and support from significant others, including parents, teachers and friends (JCCV, 2017, 9).

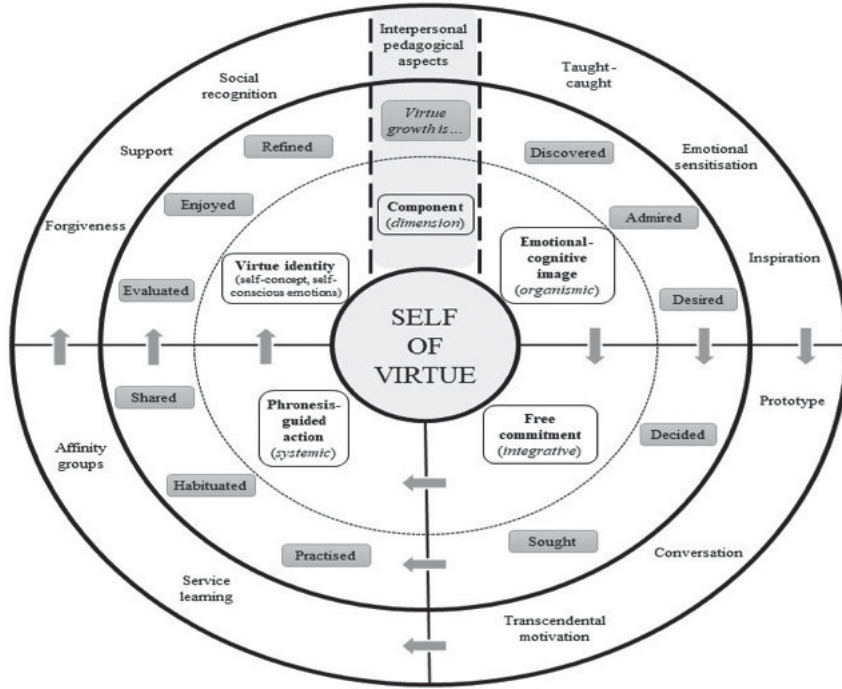
Pedagogically, although realistic self-understanding is not necessarily pleasant, it is highly valuable. One of the purposes of a legitimate evaluation of character education should be “the *self-reflection* on ‘personal’ character and virtues undertaken by students themselves” (JCCV, 2017, p. 9). Annas explains that, “How I progress, or regress, to or away from being a virtuous person will depend... on the frequency and depth with which I examine myself and ask about the way I am living” (Annas, 2011, pp. 150-151). At school, students can learn “to view themselves from the outside, as it were: to observe their own emotions and behaviour and make reasoned inferences about its sources” (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 51).

However, encouraging *self-reflection* can sometimes lessen accuracy in self-understanding by prompting rationalisation (Gasper and Robinson, 2004, p. 147). According to Aristotle, sustained serious engagement with others is most appropriate for gaining self-understanding. Educators, paraphrasing Dweck (2000), should praise effort for growing in virtue, rather than praising virtuous behaviour. And a family and school culture of understanding, patience, ‘second chances’ and forgiveness strengthens children readiness to develop virtue despite difficulties.

The personal and relational aspects of virtue identity feed and refine the making process of an Aristotelian self-of-virtue: cognition and emotions about virtue growth are re-questioned and integrated deeper; commitment to virtue growth is refuelled; and self-shaping *phronesis*-guided action receives internal and external

recognition. (See in Figure 1 a visualization of the model and its relational and pedagogical dimensions).

Figure 1: The building process of on Aristotelian self-of-virtue and virtue education



Source: The author

DISCUSSION

In the two first sections of this essay, based on an Aristotelian understanding of virtue, we developed the concept of 'self-of-virtue', which captures the dynamic, agentic aspect of selfhood, and the developmental aspect of virtue. In the third section we explored the concept of 'virtue identity' and its radical difference with moral identity theory. In the last section, we presented a processual model for developing an Aristotelian self-of-virtue and virtue identity, and described the per-

sonal, interpersonal and pedagogical aspects of each component. In this discussion we address the Aristotelian character of the model and some of its limits.

Can this account of a self-of-virtue be considered as an Aristotelian one? Two difficulties (historical and conceptual) could be argued: first, the concern about a person's self and self-concept started with the modern philosophy, and the exploration of the relations between ethics and psychology is even more recent. Nevertheless, the strong relation of this account with many features of Aristotelian virtue (e.g., ontological realism, *eudaimonia* as ideal, virtues as constitutive of and conducive to it, the role of emotions and *phronesis*, the relational dimension of virtue, and an interest in how virtue arises; see Kristjánsson, 2015, pp. 24-33) points to its Aristotelian affiliation. For Aristotle there is always room for improvement since the interior growth of each individual that enables one to live well can always be perfected (Naval and Bernal, 2001).

A conceptual difference of this account of self-of-virtue with Aristotelian flourishing theory is that, even if it acknowledges the necessity of *phronesis*-guided virtuous action, the central role is given to the person's fundamental disposition to virtue growth. This feature of the model might be influenced by the author's Christian (catholic) background and understanding of moral life, in which deep dispositions (authentic desire and commitment manifested by efforts for growing in virtue) and permanent conversion have the priority over irreproachable moral behaviour, because God looks at the heart of the person, knows her weakness, and will recompense her good will (Council, 1994, n° 2016). Anyhow, the version of self-of-virtue presented at this stage is intentionally more Aristotelian than Christian: a Christian understanding of a self-of-virtue should include also God's agency, for avoiding falling into Pelagianism (Council, 1994, n° 406); and the description of its building process would recognize, to mention only some aspects, that God's universal call to sanctity (Council, 1994, n° 2013) shapes the ideal of an eudemonic life, and that charity, rather than *phronesis*, is crucial both in the commitment to virtuous life as a response to God's call (Council, 1994, n° 1742), and in giving virtues their highest form (Council, 1994, n° 1827), as well as God's help in the struggle for virtue (Council, 1994, n° 2013).

This account of the self-of-virtue and virtue identity has several limits. It does not address the issue that human perfectibility does not necessarily enforce virtue growth. If virtue growth (as an integrative concept) is optional, why should one engage in virtue growth? In a Christian perspective, a direction for answering to this question is the understanding of the 'desire of sanctity' (not a whim, but a fundamental disposition) as a possible and free loving answer to God's 'call to sanctity'. Both (call and answer) are framed in the view that, on earth, the person is in a *status*

viatoris (Pieper, 2011, p. 91), on the way to a kind of excellence (sanctity) that gives a subjective and objective sense to existence, because we are “created for greatness” (Havard, 2017).

Another limitation is that the developmental model of a self-of-virtue does not explain radical conversions, sudden changes in the disposition to virtue growth. Certainly, the development of the moral self is most often a gradual process, but it can also be provoked by triggering events (e.g., intense aesthetic, traumatic, or religious experiences) that push to re-questioning one’s life goals (Colby and Damon, 1993, p. 354). Similarly, the arising of a self-of-virtue may also be provoked by a specific kind of triggering event (e.g., experiencing a moral failure or the positive influence of someone’s virtues in our lives), which help to grasp or actualize the necessity (or enlightens the desire) of growing in virtue.

Finally, this conceptualization of an Aristotelian self-of-virtue integrates the classic and modern radical or human beings but does not address in-depth the Christian radical (co-existence), even if it acknowledges the person’s relational dimension. The model presented here could be improved further in relation with IPS theory (Akrivou and Orón, 2016), for example, by developing the concept of “relational-self-of-virtue” which could capture the centrality of interpersonal relations for developing the person’s deep disposition to virtue growth, which characterizes the self-of-virtue.

CONCLUSION

Why the concept of ‘self-of-virtue’ matters? Several reasons can be put forward. First, conceptually, this model of developing a self-of-virtue “promotes the unity of virtue”: it integrates (at the level of the deep disposition of the person) rationally grounded moral emotions, personal and socially situated commitment to virtue growth, virtuous behaviour guided by situation-responsive *phronesis*, and virtue identity, a self-knowledge about the self-of-virtue which is acquired through reflection and social interaction.

The concept of a ‘self-of-virtue’ is an original contribution to the theory of virtue. It captures how the ‘classical radical’ and the ‘modern radical’ interact in a life of virtue: the ‘virtue’ perspective of moral life (classical radical) stresses dispositional stability without denying freedom and growth; and the ‘self’ perspective (modern radical) stresses the person’s agency and freedom, recognizing the stability of the fundamental disposition to grow in virtue.

The concept of ‘self-of-virtue’ is particularly relevant in the field of education. Virtue is a free open system which, “if it disintegrates or dissipates, is disoriented

and acts in a random and capricious way” (Polo 2007, p. 124). This observation describes well the inner situation of many youngsters nowadays. A moral education that addresses particular character strengths or virtues in a random way, would probably not bear long-lasting fruits. It seems necessary to avoid dispersion in different atomized virtues and to refocus moral education on the making of a fundamental disposition to grow in virtue. Educating a self-of-virtue is a long-term process that demands a patient dedication, but it is worthy to work on this deep disposition from where all virtues spring at their time, giving youngsters’ inner harmony and unity and sense of purpose in life. The educational proposal presented here could be developed further in the light of IPS pedagogical insights (Akrivou, Orón and Scalzo, 2018, pp. 194-236). It could be argued that developing students’ self-of-virtue might be a step forward towards the development of an inter-processual self. But more research is needed to explore this hypothesis.

Many questions remain open for further inquiry, such as the temporization of the making of an Aristotelian self-of-virtue and a virtue identity through the life span, or the operationalization of these concepts for virtue research. It can be expected that, through this work, the importance of ‘lifelong growing’ in virtue will become widely recognized in society, as it already happens for lifelong learning.

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