

Moral Education, Character Traits and Reasons for Action

Paul O'Leary

university of western ontario

This article takes exception to L. Kohlberg's claim that the aim of moral education is the development of reason, not character. Although the development of reason is important, if we assume that any morally educated person is able to act in morally appropriate ways in varying circumstances, it becomes central to inquire into the conditions under which reason can move an agent to act. This article claims that reason cannot move an agent to act unless conjoined with certain desires. Furthermore, this conjunction is not an unhappy marriage of two independent forces (i.e., reason and desire) which continually threaten to do battle with one another, but rather is something we can call moral character. To describe a person's moral character in terms of certain traits is to indicate the kind of reasons he or she usually has for acting. Moral education in being concerned with the development of reason is likewise concerned with the development of certain kinds of character traits known as the virtues. Character education is necessarily a part of moral education.

Cet article trouve à redire à l'affirmation de L. Kohlberg que le but de l'éducation morale est le développement de la raison et non du caractère. Quoique le développement de la raison soit important si nous admettons que toute personne, ayant une éducation morale, sache agir d'une façon moralement convenable selon les circonstances variables de la vie, il est indispensable d'examiner les conditions où la raison peut pousser un agent à agir. Cet article soutient que la raison ne peut pousser un agent à agir à moins qu'elle ne soit accompagnée de certains désirs. Par ailleurs, cette union n'est pas un mariage mal-assorti de deux forces indépendantes (i.e. de la raison et du désir) qui menacent constamment de luter l'une contre l'autre; c'est plutôt, ce qu'on appelle le caractère moral. Si l'on décrit le caractère moral d'une personne en fonction de certains traits, on indique les sortes de raisons qu'elle a pour agir. L'éducation morale tout en s'intéressant au développement de la raison s'occupe également du développement de certaines sortes de traits de caractère qu'on appelle les vertus. L'éducation du caractère moral est ainsi indispensable à l'éducation morale.

Does the development of moral character have any significant role to play within moral education? If we listen to Lawrence Kohlberg the development of those character traits which are distinguished by traditional terms such as "honest," "courageous," "malevolent," etc., has no justifiable place within a coherent program of moral education. In Kohlberg's scheme of things, character education receives the final coup de grace by being firmly placed within that bag of educational vices known as indoctrination (Kohlberg, 1975, p. 67).¹ Rather than uselessly tinkering with moral character traits Kohlberg proposes looking at the aim of moral education in terms of the development of the student's capacity to make moral judgments. That is, the aim of moral education is the development of reason, not character. But is this consignment of moral character traits to some educational "Devil's Island," justified? I think not. If we assume that any morally educated person is able to act in morally appropriate ways in

varying circumstances, one important initial question to ask of anyone who, like Kohlberg, stresses the development of moral reason, is, under what conditions can such reason move an agent to act? I shall argue that reason cannot move an agent to act. I shall argue that reason cannot move an agent to act unless conjoined with certain desires. Furthermore, this conjunction is not an unhappy marriage of two independent forces (i.e., reason and desire) which continually threaten to do battle with one another, but rather is something we can call moral character. To describe a person's moral character in terms of certain traits is to indicate the kind of reasons he or she has for acting. Moral education, in being concerned with the development of reason, is likewise concerned with the development of certain kinds of character traits known as the virtues. Character education is necessarily a part of moral education.

My argument will have three stages. First, I will show the conditions under which reasons for deciding on a course of action become reasons for action. At the second stage of the argument desire is introduced, not as a reason for action, but as a necessary, therefore enabling, condition for possessing reasons. Finally, I introduce a schema for the analysis of certain of those character traits normally thought to pertain to moral education. The schema interprets such traits in terms of desire as well as ability to rightly characterize actions, thus allowing the conclusion that the development of character plays an important part in moral education.

DECIDING AND DOING

Consider the following case: suppose, after much soul searching, I finally decide to refrain from punching a colleague on the nose. Nonetheless, the next time our paths cross, he so infuriates me that I strike him squarely on his offending part. In so doing, have I changed my mind about my decision, or was my action simply impulsive and now, after the act, I am filled with remorse? In cases like this where there is a disparity between an agent's decision and his action, the need to give special explanations for the failure seems to presuppose the idea that normally there is no logical gap between decision and action so that whatever reasons bring an agent to a decision likewise bring that agent to act. Such a view is substantially correct although it needs considerable qualification before the relation between decisions, action and the possession of reasons can be properly understood.

One way of treating the relation between decision and action is to regard them as logically identical, so that every decision to do *is* the doing.² Such a view has some plausibility since it seems to fit a certain kind of case. For example, suppose I am sitting at my desk doing some work, feel somewhat chilled, and go over to close the window. Or, to take another example, perhaps I am dashing to class but suddenly realize that

in my haste I forgot my lecture notes. I do a quick turnabout and head back to my office to get them. Neither my closing the window nor my returning to collect my forgotten (but unforgettable) lecture notes can be regarded as a reflex action on a par with a facial tic. Nor does the spontaneity of each action give sufficient grounds for regarding either one as impulsive. In automatically doing something the agent may show that he had no problem about what to do and no need to deliberate. But having no need to deliberate does not mean that no reasons could be given by the agent for each action. Such spontaneous actions may be considered decisions in that after their enactment they could be explained by reasons.

Such an argument in support of the identifying decision with action hardly fits all cases, especially those in which there is a space of time between the decision and the action. Thus in the middle of a winter of discontent I may zestfully decide how to spend my summer holidays, and indeed I may spend them exactly as planned. Although the reasons behind such decisions may account for my actual summer activities, they bring on neither the summer weather nor my actual trekking about on holiday. So obviously not every relation between deciding and doing is to be accounted for by assuming a logical identity between them. But there is a more important point to be made here; the logical compulsion that decisions exercise over deeds is not to be explicated either in terms of logical identity or entailment between deciding and doing, since the latter items cannot have logical relations. Although actions may result from decisions, literally speaking such actions do not follow or fail to follow logically from a decision since logical relations obtain only between sentences.³ Nonetheless it is possible to explain the relation between deciding and doing in terms of the logical relation between sentences serving as descriptions of an agent's decisions and true descriptions of the agent's action. I plan to examine three such relations: (1) cases in which an agent's action fails to comply with his decision; (2) cases in which an agent's action results from his decision but is not explained in terms of the reasons leading to that decision; (3) cases in which an agent's action not only results from his decision but is likewise explained in terms of his reasons for deciding on a given course of action. By considering such cases I hope to show the logical conditions which must exist before reasons for deciding to do something become reasons for action.

The case of the colleague's bruised nose is clearly an example of an agent failing to comply with his decision. Logically such a failure is explicated in terms of an inconsistency between a true description of a decision's content and a true description of the action. Thus "refrain from striking him on the nose" – a correct description of my decision – is incompatible with at least one correct description of what I did. Of course other correct descriptions of my action may apply equally (e.g., venting my frustration) but when the desired item is an explanation of the failure to act in accordance with my decision, what is needed is something

which will account for the inconsistency. The reasons for the decision to refrain could hardly do that, since they could only give an account of the decision but not of the relevant inconsistency. They are, as it were, part of the problem, not a means to its solution.

What does prove adequate as an explanation of such a failure may vary considerably. Thus some failures may be due to a lack of co-operation (e.g., a teacher decides to teach his students calculus but fails to do so since his every attempt is met by exhibitions of neo-neanderthal behaviour); others, however, may be due to lack of ability (e.g., after seeing a particularly spectacular film, a particularly naïve film goer decides to "leap tall buildings in a single bound," but fails lamentably). Some failures may be due to lack of opportunity (e.g., a child decides to learn to play the piano but fails to do so because of a lack of money or willing teachers), or particular failings in the agent (e.g., I decide to attend an important meeting in Toronto but fail to do so because I give way to the temptation to attend to more alluring enterprises while in Toronto). Whether such explanations can be successfully botanized into various types is an important issue, especially in the case of those failures ascribable to weakness on the part of an agent. However, although it may be a failing of an agent to decide to do something for bad reasons, this cannot be used to explain an action's failure to comply with an agent's decision.

Suppose we now consider the second class of cases. An obvious example would be the following; suppose Sherlock Holmes is playing his violin in order to help him think about a case he is presently working on. Dr Watson, who is within hearing distance, is beginning to show acute signs of discomfort. Unfortunately for Watson, Holmes, being totally preoccupied, does not take any notice of the squirming Watson and continues to play.

How can we explain such a case in order to show how, although a certain action results from a decision, it nonetheless is not to be explained in terms of the reasons which led the agent to decide on a given course of action? There are at least three correct descriptions of Holmes's action: "Holmes is playing the violin," "Holmes is annoying Watson" and "Holmes is thinking about a case." Our explanation of Holmes' action is relative to the description being applied and in the present case we are interested in an explanation of the action under the description "Holmes is annoying Watson." Obviously Holmes's violin playing is relevant to any explanation since Watson's annoyance results from the playing of the violin. A logical explication of how one action results from a decision would be: that at least one true description of the action is identical to the description under which an agent decided to act. Thus the action described as "Holmes is annoying Watson" results from Holmes decision to play the violin since "Holmes is playing the violin" is true of that action and is also the description under which Holmes decided to act. The reasons which led Holmes to decide to act under a certain description,

although they would explain the decision, could not explain the action of annoying Watson, since such an explanation must account for the discrepancy between a true description under which the action is to be explained and the description under which the decision was reached. No doubt it is Holmes's ignorance of the effect his violin playing is having upon Watson that accounts for this difference in descriptions.

When we reach cases in which an agent's reasons explain an action resulting from a decision, one condition to be met is that of an identity between a true description under which the action is to be explained and the description under which the agent decided to do as he did. If for example we want an explanation of why Holmes is playing the violin, rather than why he is annoying Watson, although he is undoubtedly still doing so, any proffered explanation does not have to account for the difference or incompatibility between the relevant true description of what Holmes did and what he intended to do. Thus the reasons which explain such a decision will also suffice to explain the action which in turn allows us to view those reasons as moving an agent to act. From this we can draw one important moral; whatever enables an agent to have reasons likewise enables him to act for those reasons. In the next section I want to show how desire enables an agent to have reasons for action.

DESCRIBING, DESIRING, AND DOING

So far the discussion of how reasons move an agent to act has restricted itself to the logical relations between descriptions of decisions and descriptions of actions. Obviously something must be said concerning logical relations between what functions as a reason for the agent and the decision he or she reaches about what action to do or avoid. Suppose we initiate examination of this latter issue by returning to Baker Street. Holmes is still playing his violin while Watson, apparently immobilized, still shows acute signs of discomfort. This time, however, Holmes notices his friend's condition and realizes that it is his violin playing which is producing this unhappy effect. Holmes hesitates – should he continue playing even though it annoys Watson or should he stop thus giving up a valuable aid to his thinking?

How would Holmes look for reasons in deciding whether to continue to play or not? One obvious suggestion is that he should first try to discover whether he wants to continue his effective thinking more than he wants to avoid annoying Watson. Once he discovers this, then his wanting one thing more than the other is his reason for deciding on a given course of action. The trouble with this is that not all desires can be regarded as given facts which we discover about ourselves prior to any decision we have made about what to do. Indeed some desires can only be known by an agent after deciding what to do. Since Holmes does not know whether he

prefers to think effectively about a case rather than avoid annoying Watson, he is required to deliberate. Moreover, he won't know until after he has made a decision about what to do. In such cases, the fact that something is desired cannot be a reason for acting since it is the consequence rather than the predecessor of a decision.

But not all cases are like this since it often transpires that an agent's desires and aversions not only are unproblematic but also precede a particular decision. Consider for instance the case of Oedipus, who through his ignorance killed his father and married his mother. As later events reveal, Oedipus's aversion to incest is just as strong as his aversion to patricide. Although Oedipus's desire to marry Jocasta results from his decision to do so, his abiding aversion to incest means that even though Jocasta is his mother, Oedipus does not want to marry his mother. If Oedipus had decided to marry her and also knew her true identity, then we could hardly say he had an aversion to incest. It is his ignorance about the identity of Jocasta that prevents Oedipus from seeing his relations with her as incestuous. If he had been convinced that such a description of his actions applied to this case, then, given his aversion to incest, Oedipus would have had good reason to avoid marrying her.

Although this is an *ex post facto* case, it reveals the sense in which desire, coupled with convictions concerning the description of a situation, can provide an agent with a reason to act or to avoid acting. Perhaps, in cases like this, where unproblematic desires are antecedent to a particular decision, "because I want to" serves as an expression of the agent's reason. Although desire does have a role to play in what an agent takes to be a reason, it cannot function as a reason.

But why is the phrase "because I want to" excluded from being an agent's reason when it occasionally seems to do so? For example, suppose I suddenly stick my tongue out at a student to be later questioned by a surprised colleague asking why I did this. My reply – "because I want to" – although an apparent reason is either a covert way of telling my colleague to mind his own business, or an admission of the presence of certain underground urges that appear occasionally. If the latter applies, then further inquiry may reveal certain lawlike generalizations which apply in similar cases. Such explanations, however, show the action to be precluded from being the result of an agent's deliberation. On the other hand, if my action is a result of deliberation, my reply – "because I wanted to" – is an attempt at discouraging any further inquiry into my reasons.

So far we have considered three types of cases where a desire cannot function as a reason for an action: (1) when it results from a decision; (2) when it precedes an action but is connected with it by way of law-like generalizations; (3) when "because I wanted to" functions as a way of discouraging inquiry. But can we extend this by showing that no actions exist for which "because I wanted to" is adequate as a reason? Since the giving of reasons can simultaneously function as an explanation as

well as an agent's justification for a given action, if desires can be reasons then they must likewise be capable of explaining an agent's choice of an action. But can they do so?

Suppose we reconsider that uncomfortable *ménage à trois*, Holmes, Watson and the violin. The dilemma over whether to continue playing the violin arises for Holmes because of a conflict between his aversion to causing discomfort to his friend and his desire to solve a problem. In resolving this dilemma Holmes does not turn to his insides so as to measure how the force of his desire compares with the force of his aversion, but rather considers how the action of playing the violin may be further characterized. The explanation of why Holmes continued to play the violin might then proceed as follows: Holmes admitted to himself that Watson was showing signs of distress; although this was indeed unfortunate, Holmes believed that the good Doctor had a tendency to over-react every time Holmes even looked at his violin. In any case a good cup of tea would soon settle Watson's overwrought nerves. Besides, the crime which had to be solved was exceptionally intriguing due to the genius of its undoubted perpetrator, Dr Moriarty. No detective with an ounce of ability could seriously be dissuaded from seizing any opportunity to bring such an evil genius to justice. The violin must be played.

In this proposed explanation of Holmes's decision to continue to play the violin, we must consider how Holmes characterized the situation which in turn led to further redescription of the action of playing the violin. By virtue of Holmes's considerations, the action now is thought of as minimally distressing to Watson while at the same time being indispensable to the demands of curiosity and justice. Nowhere does the desire for or aversion to the action function as a reason. It is only characteristics of the situation as seen by the agent which are cited in the explanation. In the context of explanation by reasons, "because I want to" only shows the limits of an agent's ability to explain his or her action.⁴

But if "because I want to" cannot be a reason for acting, then how do desires function to create a condition in which an agent is persuaded to act or refrain from acting in a given way? Let us suppose that Holmes is not an especially curious person but nonetheless maintains a state of benevolence towards his friend Watson. That is, Holmes does not particularly want to solve problems and is averse to causing any distress to his friend. Under these conditions the decision about whether to continue playing the violin takes an entirely different shape. For even if it is true that violin playing, even for such a pre-eminently uncurious person as our hypothetical Holmes, does help him to think, this carries no weight in Holmes's deliberations. However, his recognition that his music-making causes Watson to squirm becomes a sufficient reason for Holmes to put the offending instrument down. If someone is not especially curious, characterizing an action as one satisfying curiosity will not necessarily give that agent reason for such action. To a benevolent person, however,

characterizing an action as causing distress to others would have weight as a reason for avoiding said action. For someone indifferent to the welfare of others, characterizing actions as beneficial has no weight at all, i.e., cannot become a reason for him to do those actions so described. Desires and aversions, then, even though they are not reasons, become a condition for persuading an agent to do or avoid actions in that they indicate the sort of characterization an action would have to have to give that agent a reason to do or avoid that action. An agent's desires and aversions convert a description of an action into his or her reason for acting. Desires and aversions are at least necessary conditions for possessing reasons for actions.

REASON AND DESIRE

The argument so far shows that an agent's ability to act reasonably depends on his having desires antecedent to a particular decision being made. Given the connection between deciding and doing, in enhancing a person's ability to deliberate well, a teacher likewise enables him to act well in those various circumstances which require deliberation. To deliberate well, however, an agent must not only have reasons for deciding on a course of action, but good reasons. If a person must acquire certain desires in order to acquire the power of deliberation, then the quality of what serves as an agent's reasons depends in part upon the quality of what he or she has come to desire. In this section I will further explore the connection between reason and desire. I shall not, however, pay much attention to what is required of a reason before it becomes a good one although this would be important in forging a distinction between those character traits which are virtues and those which are vices. The main thrust of what follows is to show that the development of character has cognitive features, some of which clearly require teachers to enhance a child's cognitive powers.

Earlier on, I said that some desires can be treated as the results of deliberation. For example, one can treat Holmes's decision to continue playing his violin as a decision concerning a preference between solving a problem or preventing a friend from feeling some discomfort. Similarly, Oedipus's decision to marry Jocasta can be described as a matter of determining whether he wants to marry her. Obviously some desires can result from deliberation and therefore reasons can be given for having them. At this point it may be useful to introduce a distinction between deliberative and non-deliberative desires. Deliberative desires are those for which reasons can be given, although they may never have been deliberated on by the particular agent who possesses them. Thus Holmes's desire to continue his violin playing is clearly deliberative since he did actually have reasons for continuing to play the violin. However, Holmes's desire to solve problems and his aversion towards causing a friend dis-

comfort may never have resulted from his deliberation about the excellences of curiosity and friendship. What makes these latter desires deliberative is not that Holmes did at some time deliberate about them, but rather that they could be deliberated about with reasons offered for or against them. Although a person may have acquired deliberative desires without ever deliberating upon them, they are not precluded from doing so and indeed certain circumstances may require them to do so and change may result. With non-deliberative desires the matter is otherwise; with these desires we are precluded from accounting for their occurrence or any changes which may take place among them by way of reasons. An example of a non-deliberative desire might be the desire in humans for food.

It hardly needs saying that the distinction between deliberative and non-deliberative desires, as well as presumed examples of each, is a controversial one. My present interest in the distinction is not so much in its defense as in pointing out the sense in which attitudes towards actions need not be construed in non-cognitive terms. Since there can be reasons for possessing desires, such desires are cognitive. Similarly, if character traits can be interpreted in terms of deliberative desires, then character too has cognitive characteristics. Furthermore, insofar as there are non-deliberative desires, these may be useful in describing those features of personality and temperament which affect the difficulty or ease with which one can acquire certain traits of character. This is not the place to explore the distinctions and relations between personality, temperament, and character.⁵ All I wish to claim at this point is that a class of desires exists characterizable as deliberative and therefore cognitive.

There is yet another connection between reason and desire that is important to our understanding of the cognitive features of character traits. I have claimed that description of action plays a very important part in persuading an agent to do or avoid certain actions given the desires and aversions already possessed. One can more generally characterize the relation between an agent's desires and descriptions of action by saying that one must know how to characterize an action in order to know whether to continue such an action. For example, suppose that I am a somewhat benevolent character but my modesty prevents me from recognizing this feature. For years I have visited my ancient Aunt Agatha every Sunday in order to read to her her favourite detective stories. This undertaking of mine has not been done out of benevolence, however, but from a severe form of conscientiousness instilled in me since my youth. But by now, the pin pricks of conscience have almost faded after the constant reading of the same stories over and over again, and I am severely tempted to cease my weekly visits. A cousin of mine gets wind of my deliberations, and persuades me that such an action would be extremely cruel. If my cousin had not persuaded me of my contemplated action's cruelty, I might not only have done something to which I have a strong

aversion, but would not have discovered that indeed I am averse to such actions. But there is a further possibility. My "discovery" of my aversion to cruelty is not of some rationally immovable non-deliberative item but of an aversion which one can have reasons to change. Indeed, my cousin's very convincing argument that my failure to visit Aunt Agatha is an instance of cruelty may lead me to revise my aversion either in its strength or presence, if going to Aunt Agatha's is what it takes to avoid being cruel. The important point, however, is that recognition and change in desires and aversions both presuppose the ability, on the part of the agent, to characterize actions correctly.

There are, I believe, at least two important considerations in the development of character to be derived from this somewhat abstract investigation into the connection between reason and desire. The first is that insofar as character traits not only involve the development of deliberative desires but also the ability to characterize actions correctly, then character development is necessarily and doubly cognitive. In the next section I want to defend the view that character traits can best be analyzed in terms of both desire and the ability to characterize actions correctly. But insofar as the acquisition of character traits has this double feature, the vexatious question concerning whether virtues can or cannot be taught may not receive a single answer since one but not the other of our two features may be teachable.

The second consideration involves the role of giving reasons within an attempt to develop a person's character. Insofar as those desires which form part of a person's character are deliberative, reasons can be given for such desires although the agent may have none, let alone any good ones. Indeed the kind of considerations which go into showing the desirability of a character trait may be beyond the cognitive grasp of many who nonetheless manage to acquire those traits.⁶ This does not mean that children in acquiring traits of character cannot be given reasons for persuading them to act in a way in which a person having that trait would act. However, such persuasive reasons may differ from but not necessarily conflict with justificatory ones, thus leaving us with a distinction between the pedagogical order in giving reasons and the order of justification. But within this pedagogical order, the sort of considerations which may persuade one to act, depend, in part, upon a child's existing desires and aversions. Because a child is not a moral *tabula rasa* a teacher is caught in a situation not entirely of his or her own making and thus is required to begin development at a point where he finds the child. If these desires and aversions are deliberative they perhaps can be changed by way of "Aunt Agatha" cases. But if such desires and aversions are part and parcel of a child's personality and temperament, then any appeal to the reasons for changing these states is pretty much beside the point. Thus a teacher's effect upon the development of a child's character may be limited depending upon the nature of the starting point. In conceptualizing such

things as personality, temperament and character, we take an essential step towards determining factors which can inhibit or enhance the development of various character traits. I will now turn my attention to the analysis of the latter.

CHARACTERIZING CHARACTER

Examples of character trait terms are as follows: courage, justice, benevolence, honesty, compassion, truthfulness, generosity, and self-control.⁷ Although these terms can be considered virtues, character trait terms are not limited to these. Thus cowardice, injustice, malevolence, dishonesty, indifference, mendacity, stinginess, and self-indulgence normally count as character traits, but moral book-keeping usually puts them on the deficit side of the ledger. These examples should not be considered as an exhaustive list of such traits, nor should it be assumed that none of these various character traits overlap with any others. As to the latter point such traits as honesty and truthfulness could be construed as sub-species of justice, while generosity and compassion may be distinctive forms of benevolence. Any full-fledged theory of moral education seeking to give the virtues and vices a central place should attend to an analysis of individual virtues and vices as well as to the sort of questions raised in Plato's *Protagoras* about the unity of the virtues. The examples given do not reflect such a position but rather assumptions about the terms normally used to describe moral character.⁸ In what follows I want to work out a schema for the interpretation of character trait terms which will at least fit such obvious examples and have some degree of generalizability. I shall start by considering alternative ways of viewing character traits, which, for various reasons, I take to be unacceptable. In doing this I shall gradually move towards one which I regard as satisfactory.

One way of looking at character traits is to regard them as a species of habit. Several reasons exist for regarding the assimilation of character traits to habits as at least a plausible one. First, both character traits and habits are relatively permanent personal states and while not impossible to change, are not easily changed. Second, character traits and habits are closely connected to the kind of action a person is liable to do. Thus a talkative person is one who frequently talks while a generous person is noted for frequency of generous activity.

Despite the initial plausibility of assimilating traits of character to habits, there is at least one fatal objection to it. Although all habitual actions are done automatically, this is not the case with many actions stemming from traits of character. Consider the case of someone who is talkative. Although a person with such a trait does not talk constantly, one can presume that the only condition required to set off a torrent of words is the presence of someone else capable of hearing. Indeed, if a talkative

person begins to deliberate about whether the other person should be given a few more chances to get in some words, this may be the beginning of the end for that habit. But where deliberation is more or less precluded in the exercise of a habit, this is not the case with character traits. To be sure there are cases involving character where an action is done automatically with no reflection required on the part of the agent. Thus if invited by someone to pilfer a few pennies from poor Aunt Agatha's purse, being honest, I automatically refuse to do so. But even though such cases exist, there are many others in which reflection is required of the agent. Suppose, for example, I am not given to over-indulgence when it comes to matters of food although I do have a rather robust appetite. At a dinner party I am offered a third slice of my favourite, though rarely seen, dessert – Gâteau St-Honoré. I hesitate. However, in thinking things over, I am not considering (though I could be) whether to swap my self-control for the glories of gluttony, but rather whether taking this third piece would be too much. Unlike habits, then, the link between character traits and actions is often obtained by way of an agent's ability to deliberate on how certain actions are to be characterized. Since people with a certain character trait perform actions of that character (e.g., generous people do generous actions, honest people do honest actions, etc.), then this ability to characterize actions must be one in which the agent knows how to do it correctly, though not infallibly. Thus if a person usually misunderstood what actions were required under a certain characterization then that person could not have the corresponding character trait, although sometimes being wrong leads to uncharacteristic actions without loss of the corresponding trait.⁹ The upshot of all this is that any schema for the analysis of character trait terms must refer to the agent's ability to characterize rightly actions corresponding to that trait.

So far in broaching the problems involved in developing a schema for the interpretation of character traits, I have assumed that any characterization must show a connection between the trait and an agent's actions. Since an agent with a certain trait can act uncharacteristically without losing that trait, then the connection is not explicable in terms of lawlike generalizations. Thus character trait terms are unlike dispositional terms like "soluble" and "brittle."¹⁰ But if actions characteristic of a certain trait are not necessitated by that trait, how do the latter effect the sort of actions an agent is prepared to do? Explaining a given action in terms of a character trait does more than characterize an action for it also indicates the kind of considerations which have weight in a person's deliberations. It is not enough to say, for example, that self-controlled people do not act self-indulgently since these latter actions can be done for reasons unconnected with that particular trait. For instance, I may very noisily turn down that third offering of dessert not because I act from self-control but because I wish to secure the admiration of others. In short, my restraint of appetite is explained by my vanity, as are many of

my other actions. Since any correct ascription of traits indicates the sort of reasons which move an agent to act, then part of the analysis of such traits involves seeing them in terms of a desire to do actions of a certain character. While such desires are not themselves reasons they function as a necessary condition for converting a certain description of an action into a reason. Moreover, since reasons can change character, the desires which constitute character traits are deliberative.

Character traits are neither habits nor dispositional properties which allow for lawlike generalizations about the sort of actions an agent would do under certain conditions. They are to be analyzed in terms of deliberative desires plus the ability to characterize actions rightly, thus making character traits doubly cognitive. Moral education, when viewed as consisting in the development of a person's reason, must necessarily involve the development of those character traits known as the virtues for, given the interpretation of character traits offered here, in doing this we enable a person to act for good reasons. But, to *identify* moral education with the sort of character education indicated by terms like "courage," "justice," "benevolence," etc., we would have to go beyond the motivational considerations raised herein, to show how actions described by such virtue terms can indeed be good reasons for action. However we finally resolve this latter issue, at least one thing is clear – a consideration cannot be a reason for an agent unless it is capable of moving that person to act. To do this it must be linked to an agent's desires.

Enough has been said I think, to show why character traits should be characterized in terms of deliberative desire plus the ability to characterize actions rightly. Before calling things to a halt, however, there is one further distinction involved in interpreting character traits that bears upon two different senses in which we describe a person's character. In doing the latter we may either (1) set out a list of traits possessed by that person or (2) indicate that person's distinctive trait (if there is one).¹¹ When we ascribe a character trait to a person our interpretation of that trait in terms of either desire or aversion varies according to whether we treat that trait as distinctive or as one among several. Suppose, for example, that I am regarded as distinctively benevolent. In terms of the proposed schema this means that I want to do any action which furthers the well-being of others and am able to characterize rightly such actions. But of course I may not have any such burning desire but also be neither malevolent (wishing others harm) nor indifferent to their welfare. In cases like these, whatever benevolent actions I do undertake are not explained by my desire to do such actions but rather by my aversion to malevolence and indifference. In short I have the trait of benevolence but since acting in a manner characterized as benevolent is not one of the standing aims of my life, it is best to interpret that trait in terms of my aversion to any actions which are the opposite of benevolent ones.

Although aversion is a form of desire (i.e., a desire to avoid) and thus

allows us to see what kind of considerations move an agent to act, it seems to me significant to distinguish these considerations from desire when interpreting those character traits which we call the virtues. The distinction gains its importance not only because it bears upon the two different ways in which a virtue might be ascribed to a person, but also because it opens up a fundamental question about the aims of moral education. Insofar as moral education necessarily requires the development of some character traits, do we seek to instill such traits so that they become the overriding concerns of a person's life or do we seek the development of character only to the extent that people have a profound aversion to vice. To answer this we should consider the reasons which make certain character traits worth possessing: Are they somehow good in themselves or are they good because their possession is indispensable to the attainment of that sort of life which characterizes human well-being.

A LOOSE END

Moral education is concerned with the development of reason and of a person's ability to act in morally appropriate ways. These, however, are not two separate enterprises but rather linked by way of traits of character. In developing those traits of character known as the virtues, moral education enables a person to act for good reasons. In trying to establish this conclusion, although this article no doubt has left many loose ends to be considered at some other time, I hope it has at least done something to restore to moral education some of its character.

NOTES

- ¹ To be fair to Kohlberg, however, it should be said that he does not entirely jettison the notion of character. For our purposes it is enough to note that he rejects attempts to construe character in terms of the traditional virtue and vice terms used for its description (cf., Kohlberg, 1964: 385–392).
- ² Aristotle seems to have taken the view that actions can be viewed as conclusions of deliberation and thus are decisions (Aristotle, 1973: 230). This claim about Aristotle is not without its problems. See Kenny, 1975: 97–98. See also Ackrill, 1973: 272.
- ³ Some of these comments derive from Edgley, 1969: 28–31.
- ⁴ The last few paragraphs are indebted to Abelson, 1965: 540–553 (cf. Melden, 1961: 160–162).
- ⁵ A proper exploration would have to take into account distinctions between such things as moods, desires (more narrowly construed), likes and dislikes, emotions, etc., and how these help us to characterize personality, temperament, and character. On the distinction between character and personality traits see Brandt, 1970: 23. On the distinction between character and temperamental dispositions, see Hunt, 1978: 179).
- ⁶ This does not mean that the sort of reasons which would show whether a given character trait is a good one to have are forever beyond the grasp of many people. So far as I know, there is no *a priori* way to establish that. All this means is that acquiring character does not depend upon one's being very good at philosophy.

- ⁷ I use the term "self-control" in preference to "temperance" since the latter has something of a Carrie Nation ring with its suggestion of abstinence. On the other hand "self-control" is not an entirely happy choice either, since other distinctive virtues (like courage) can be construed as forms of self-control (i.e., the control of fear) thus leaving us wondering about the characteristic domain for the distinctive virtue of "self-control." However, as I have used it here, self-control refers only to regulating desires for food, drink and sex, and does not entail anything about abstinence.
- ⁸ Nor have I worked out any view about what makes a character trait a "moral" one.
- ⁹ Being wrong about the characterization of an action is but one way in which an agent with a certain trait may do something uncharacteristic. To explore other ways would involve us in that tangle of issues which bears the title "weakness of the will."
- ¹⁰ This claim, like the analogous claim that there are deliberative desires, would require more extensive analysis than can be undertaken here (cf., Brandt, 1970: 20–37; Powell, 1959: 492–509; Davidson, 1980: 14–15).
- ¹¹ For this difference in describing character see Peters, 1974: 247–248.

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Paul O'Leary is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario N6G 1G7.