Rewards and Justice:

Addressing the Dilemma Inherent in the Neo-Aristotelian Model of Moral Development

I will argue that the Jubilee Centre's (2022) neo-Aristotelian model of moral development presents a dilemma for classroom teachers. Furthermore, I will propose that this dilemma could be mitigated by addressing issues of justice explicitly in the classroom.

I define "dilemma" in virtue ethical, developmentally focussed terms as a situation where an agent must choose between two or more courses of action, all of which equally seem to stall or reverse the internalisation of virtues. A virtue becomes "internalised" as the motivation for its associated behaviours shifts from *extrinsic* (i.e., performed instrumentally) to *intrinsic* (i.e., performed for its own sake).

The neo-Aristotelian model of moral development (Jubilee Centre, 2022) describes two pathways to virtue: an upper and lower trajectory. Children on the upper trajectory are primarily intrinsically motivated, while children on the lower trajectory require more extrinsic motivation, often in the form of rewards (Watts et al., 2021). The impact of rewards on unmotivated children remains debated (Berkowitz, 2022; Watts et al., 2022). However, rewards have been shown to undermine intrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 1999; Gubler et al., 2016).

Thus, the neo-Aristotelian model of moral development (Jubilee Centre, 2022) poses the following dilemma for any teacher with a *mixed*-trajectory class: Should lower-trajectory children be rewarded for virtuous (or non-vicious) behaviour, or not? Rewarding them may risk undermining the intrinsic motivation of upper-trajectory children, while not rewarding them may risk stalling their progress along the lower trajectory (Figure 1).

Figure 1

The dilemma inherent in the neo-Aristotelian modal of moral development (Jubilee Centre, 2022)
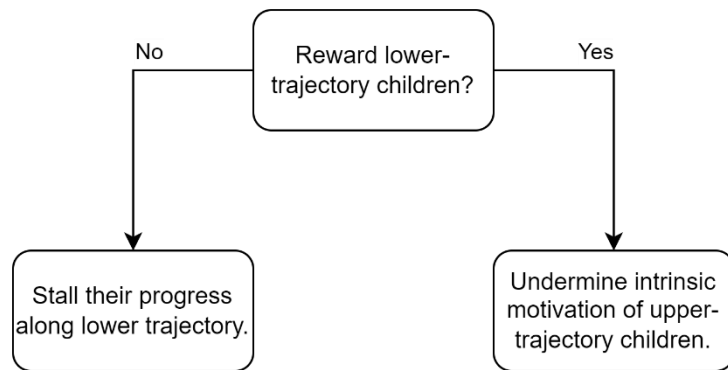
I have experienced the effects of this dilemma firsthand in my role as a classroom teacher, particularly as a Year 9 tutor. An award programme was introduced to recognise good behaviour across the year group. Staff could nominate students, who would then be entered into a prize draw. Lower-trajectory students were disproportionately nominated, and often for merely non-bad (rather than good) behaviour. Many upper-trajectory students perceived this as unfair, leading to an increased focus on rewards. Indeed, intrinsic motivation can be undermined by perceptions of injustice (Chory-Assad, 2002; Gubler, et al., 2016; Kazemi, 2016).

However, our perceptions are shaped by our concepts (Hansen et al., 2006), and our concepts evolve over time. Within the framework of neo-Aristotelian character education, justice is considered a virtue, and virtues are *educable* (Kristjánsson, 2017). If one conception of justice is producing negative effects, it makes sense to consider educating a different conception. According to Rawl's (1971) difference principle, inequalities in the distribution of goods can be just, as long as they are to the benefit of the least advantaged. This suggests a compelling and original hypothesis: Instilling a Rawlsian conception of justice in intrinsically motivated students could reduce their susceptibility to the undermining effects of extrinsic reward programmes, and thus potentially resolve the dilemma. In my own practice, I have found that having conversations about justice with upper-trajectory complainants often has a placating effect.

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