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Cultivating the Virtuous Researcher

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Cultivating virtues: interdisciplinary approaches
Cultivating the virtuous researcher: From research integrity to researcher integrity

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Introduction

In recent years there has been an increasing concern with ethics in the conduct of research, resulting in a growth of ethical codes, guidance and policies for good conduct and governance. Often framed under the heading of 'research integrity', we find principles, policies and procedures covering issues of plagiarism, fabrication and falsification of data as well as protection of research participants from harm and ensuring their rights to privacy and informed consent are respected. Most policy and practice guidance takes the form of prescriptions for action and adopts a regulatory approach to ensuring good conduct through requiring researchers to submit applications to research ethics committees for approval and show evidence of following essentially rule-based codes.

This paper will consider what a virtue-based approach to research ethics might look like, exploring what might be the virtues of the good researcher and how these might be cultivated. This entails a switch of attention from 'research integrity' to 'researcher integrity'. I will discuss what is meant by researcher integrity, including weak and strong versions of the concept (conduct according to extant standards, versus reflexive commitment to ideals of what research should be at its best), and how character-based approaches to ethics complement and extend conduct-focussed, regulatory approaches. This is an area that has been under-explored to date, although the work of Macfarlane (2009) offers a useful starting point from which to build. I will consider how 'training' and education of researchers and university students might focus on cultivating virtuous researchers rather than ensuring rules are followed and risks minimised. I will outline several approaches to research ethics education, including the use of Socratic dialogue to engage people in practising the virtues of attentiveness and respectfulness whilst discussing substantive ethical issues in a group; and participatory theatre to act out and rehearse different responses to ethical challenges in research.

Regulatory ethics

Since the publication of the Nuremburg Code (1947), which laid down ethical principles for medical experiments, there has been a gradual development of codes of conduct for research, systems for reviewing research proposals and frameworks for the governance of research. New measures have often been introduced as a result of widely publicised cases of research that has caused severe harm to human or animal participants or has involved fraudulent claims based on falsified or fabricated findings or plagiarised work. The Nuremburg Code was developed at the end of the trials of doctors under the Nazi regime, who conducted cruel and inhumane medical experiments on people from Jewish and other ethnic backgrounds (Mitscherlich and Mielke, 1949). Other major scandals in the USA (most notably the Tuskegee syphilis experiments involving black African men without consent), led to the creation of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research in 1974. The process of subjecting research proposals involving human beings to ethical review began to develop in the USA in the late 1970s, with the introduction of institutional

review boards (Iphofen, 2011, p. 156). Gradually this practice has spread from health-related research to other sectors, including universities, in many countries across the world. In recent years concern has grown about falsification and fabrication of data and plagiarism. Cases of high profile researchers and research teams implicated in such practices are increasingly in the news. Taking just one example, a widely reported case was that of the Korean stem cell researcher, Hwang Woo-Sak, whose claim to have cloned a dog was found to be based on fabricated research findings, published in the journal *Science* (The Guardian, 2005). The responsibilities of scientific journals to ensure that the research reported is scientifically valid and ethically sound have also come into focus. The Committee on Publication Ethics was founded in 1997 to promote good practice in publishing (Iphofen, p. 141).

The individuals involved in the dubious research practices mentioned above clearly did not display the virtuous behaviour expected of good human beings (trustworthiness, respectfulness, courage), let alone of good researchers. In some cases the institutions and professional communities within which they worked may have promoted, condoned or encouraged bad practice. So the response of research funders, institutions and professional associations has been to develop principles and rules to guide and regulate behaviour and institutional frameworks to ensure compliance. Research funders now require institutions to implement increasingly detailed research governance frameworks and researchers need to obtain approval from research ethics committees prior to commencing research involving human and animal participants (for example, Research Councils UK, 2013; Economic and Social Research Council, 2015).

However, as the codes and approval processes become lengthier, concern is being expressed about the delaying and damaging effects of excessive regulation, particularly amongst some prominent academics in the social sciences (Dingwall, 2008; Hammersley, 2009; Hammersley and Traianou, 2011; Dingwall, 2012; van den Hoonaard, 2013). They suggest that an inflexible focus on the protection of 'human subjects' and minimising of risk has spread from medical research to the social sciences and humanities, resulting in constraints often regarded as inappropriate, unjustified or even 'unethical'. Common arguments against current levels of regulation include that it: undermines the autonomy and expertise of social science researchers; delays and curtails important research as members of research ethics committees lack competence in specialist areas of social science; is disproportionate for social science and humanities research, where potential harm to participants is much less than in medical research; will more likely worsen rather than raise ethical standards (see Dingwall, 2008; Hammersley, 2009).

These issues prompted the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) in the UK recently to instigate a series of symposia to develop a set of generic ethical principles for social scientific research, one aim of which was to highlight the distinctiveness of social science research and the need for flexibility and creativity as opposed to simply rule-following (Academy of Social Sciences Working Group, 2014). In May 2015 a symposium was held on virtue ethics in the practice and review of social science research (for a summary, see Emmerich, 2015), based on a recognition that a virtue-based approach shifts the emphasis from regulation of the conduct of researchers to the character, dispositions and motivations of researchers. This paper draws on a presentation I prepared for the symposium.

In this paper I will focus on the ethical implications of the ‘research integrity boom’ – picking up on Hammersley’s (2009) comment that ‘increasing regulation is more likely to worsen rather than raise ethical standards’. This might come about because researchers unthinkingly follow rules; they ‘do’ research ethics by completing a form and ticking boxes; and they are not encouraged to develop creative responses to particular situations that fall outside the rules. Hence there is a paradox that as a focus on conduct and compliance becomes more developed, there is a danger that this undermines the development of the character and commitment of researchers, which arguably contributes as much to good research practice as codification and regulation.

The turn to virtue

The dominance of principle-based ethics in biomedical research, which has also transferred to research ethics in general, is well-rehearsed (Beauchamp, 2003; Beauchamp and Childress, 2009; Macfarlane, 2009). Virtue ethics might be developed as an alternative to a principle-based theoretical framework, or virtues might be regarded as supplementary or complementary to principles in a pluralist theoretical approach to ethics. I will take the latter approach. My aim here is not to develop a virtue ethical theory for research, but rather to explore how a shift of focus from abstract principles and specific rules for research practice to the virtues of the researcher might help in improving ethical practice. There is considerable debate about what counts as a virtue, including whether it consists in good motives, good ends/effects or whether both are required (Battaly, 2015; van Zyl, 2015). Given the focus here on improving ethical practice, I will use the term ‘virtue’ to refer to a moral disposition to feel, think and act in such a way as to promote human and ecological flourishing, entailing both a motivation to act well and, typically, the achievement of good ends. Virtues are often described as excellent traits of character, entailing a reliable disposition to act in certain predictable ways across contexts. In response to empirical research suggesting that the concept of robust, enduring character traits may be more of a moral fiction or folk concept than a reflection of reality (Harman, 1999; Doris, 2002; Merritt *et al.*, 2010; Alfano, 2013), we may conclude not that the concept of a virtue is untenable, but that becoming and being virtuous requires considerable work. The fact that people whom we would expect to be caring or honest may act in cruel or dishonest ways in certain contexts can lead to several conclusions, including that virtues are rare, or that character traits (and hence virtues as excellences of character) are not just qualities of the individual, but rather the interaction between person, social milieu and circumstances (Lapsley and Narvaez, 2004; Alfano, 2013; Miller, 2015; Russell, 2015b). Given the focus of this paper on cultivating virtues, the responses to the situationist critique that I find most helpful are those that conclude that in order to become virtuous we need to pay particular, conscious attention to situations where virtue may be hard to achieve. The analogy between virtues and skills may be particularly helpful here (Annas, 2011; Russell, 2015a). As Russell (2015b, p. 105) comments: ‘it [virtue] is the sort of achievement that takes time, effort, and focused, directed practice. Virtue is like a skill, but it is like the sorts of skills it takes a lifetime to master’.

Research integrity and researcher integrity

The term ‘research integrity’ is in increasingly common usage in the context of research ethics and governance. In several countries agencies have been set up specifically to promote good conduct in research, which have ‘research integrity’ in their names (e.g.

Offices of Research Integrity in the USA¹, UK², Austria³ and Holland⁴) and there is a European Network of Research Integrity Offices⁵.

What is covered by the term 'research integrity'? 'Integrity' literally means wholeness. It is about parts fitting together, and the whole being complete, undamaged or uncorrupted. It can be applied to people, objects, practices or institutions. It can also be applied in several different domains: for example, aesthetic, intellectual, scientific or moral, where it has different meanings. As James Parry (2013) points out, the term 'research integrity' is used in many different and confusing ways. Sometimes it is used as an overarching concept that includes all aspects of good research – scientific standards, ethical conduct and good governance. On other occasions it may be used just to refer to one aspect of good research – either scientifically good or ethically good research. Clearly scientific and ethical integrity are inter-related – for example, research based on falsified data lacks both scientific and ethical integrity. And since 'integrity' is about wholeness, there is an argument that separation of scientific from ethical aspects would in itself damage the integrity of the research. Certainly several of the significant codes or guides current in the UK that have 'research integrity' in the title, or are produced by an organisation with 'research integrity' in its name, embrace both scientific and ethical integrity (for example, UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO), 2009; Universities UK, 2012). Surprisingly few of these documents, however, give a succinct description of what is meant by 'integrity'. We have to discover by looking at the content – which includes principles and standards of good scientific and ethical practice. In these kinds of documents (codes and guidelines), 'research integrity' has a primary focus on *research practice* – what is actually done and achieved. Obviously it is people who do the research, hence attention is paid to the conduct of researchers. For research practice to have integrity, we would expect the researchers who conduct it to do so with integrity. Hence 'research integrity' includes researcher integrity. Similarly the research practice is influenced by the ethos, policies and procedures of the organisation or discipline within which it takes place, while in turn the integrity of the organisation and/or specific academic or professional discipline is influenced by the practices that go on within its realm and the researchers who belong to it. Figure 1 illustrates this relationship between these elements of research integrity, offering examples of what each of the elements might mean in practice in relation to scientific and ethical integrity.

¹ The Office of Research Integrity (ORI), <https://ori.hhs.gov/>

² UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO), <http://ukrio.org/>

³ *Österreichische Agentur für wissenschaftliche Integrität* (OeAWI, Austrian Agency for Research Integrity), <http://www.oewi.at/en/>

⁴ Landelijk Orgaan Wetenschappelijke Integriteit (LOWI, National Board for Research Integrity) <https://www.knaw.nl/en/topics/ethiek/landelijk-orgaan-wetenschappelijke-integriteit-lowi/overzicht>

⁵ European Network of Research Integrity Offices, <http://www.enrio.eu/home>

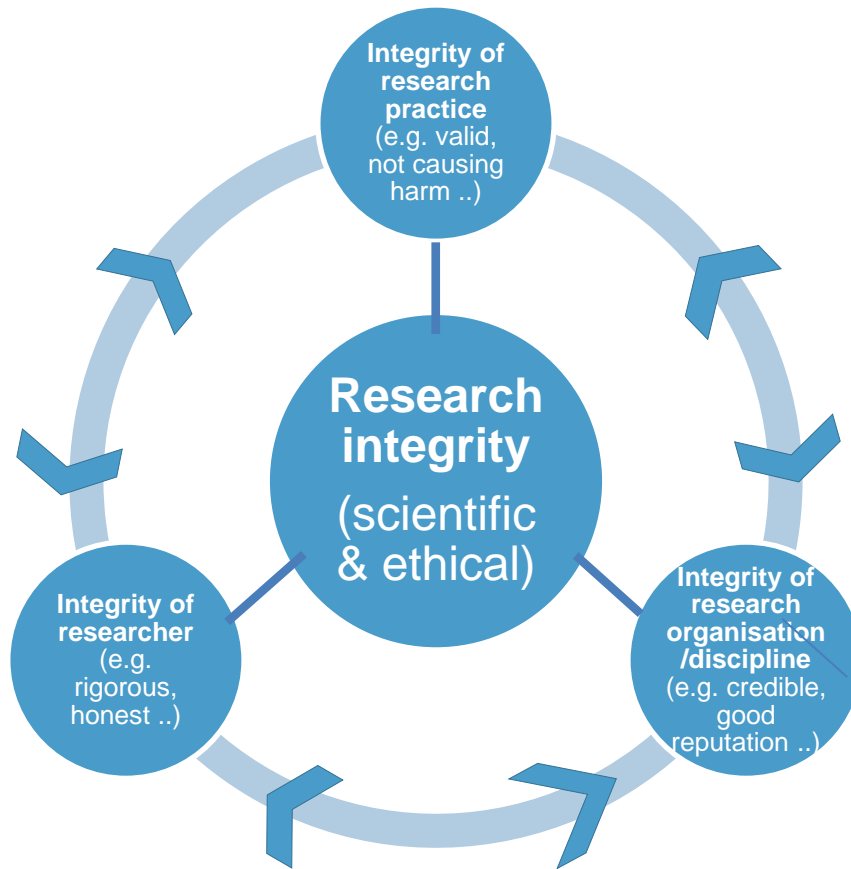


Figure 1: Elements of research integrity

Researcher integrity

In this paper I will focus on what it means for a researcher to be regarded as a person of integrity. I will identify a ‘thin’ conduct-focused version of researcher integrity and a ‘thicker’ character-focussed version. It is the latter that would be regarded as a virtue. Starting with the thin version, integrity in a work context is often taken to involve the person (practitioner/ worker/professional) being aware of, and acting consistently with, generally accepted norms and standards of their occupation/area of work. In a research context, this is exemplified by one of the seven principles listed by UKRIO (2009, p. 7) in their code of practice for research:

INTEGRITY: *organisations and researchers* must comply with all legal and ethical requirements relevant to their field of study. They should declare any potential or actual conflicts of interest relating to research and where necessary take steps to resolve them. [emphasis in the original]

This description of integrity is at the extreme end of conduct-focussed integrity. The use of the term ‘compliance’ is noteworthy, as it leaves no room for critical consideration of ethical requirements, context-related variations or flexibility. Arguably this is a regulatory and managerialist version of integrity. It makes no reference to the researcher as a critical actor. Indeed, it could be viewed as a co-option or even corruption of the concept and practice of integrity for managerialist ends.

What would a thicker, character-focussed version look like? Cox et al. (2003, p. 41) talk of integrity as involving a capacity to respond to change and a continual remaking of the self. They suggest it may be instructive to think of integrity as a virtue in Aristotle's (350 BCE/1954) sense, as a mean between two excesses (or vices). In which case, it may be described as standing between qualities associated with inflexibility (such as arrogance or dogmatism) and those associated with superficiality (such as weakness of will or hypocrisy). They talk of people of integrity living their lives in a 'fragile balance' between these traits. This characterisation of integrity emphasises the psychological and practical work that people need to do to maintain their integrity and is particularly pertinent for integrity in professional life. It also has resonances with Walker's (2007) characterisation of integrity as 'reliable accountability', requiring a kind of moral competence in resolving conflicts and priorities, readjusting ideals and compromising principles (although Walker does not characterise integrity as a virtue). Walker argues that the point of integrity is 'to maintain – or reestablish – our reliability in matters involving important commitments and goods' (Walker, 2007, p. 113). It is based on the assumption that human lives are changing and are deeply entangled with others. We are often seeking, therefore, a local dependability (rather than global wholeness) and a responsiveness to the moral costs of error and change rather than consistency.

What would researcher integrity look like on the basis of this description of integrity? Researcher integrity, in its thick sense, is about researchers being aware of, and critically committed to, the purpose, values (including virtues), ethical principles and standards of their discipline and/or broader research field; making sense of them as a whole; and putting them into practice in their research work, including upholding them in challenging circumstances. Stated in this way, researcher integrity is an over-arching, complex virtue. It entails not just upholding and acting upon all the values of the profession, but also working to revise, re-evaluate and hold them together as a whole. This clearly entails some effort on the part of the research practitioner, not only to understand and commit to the purpose and values of the discipline/research area, but also to negotiate contradictions and conflicts in theory and practice. This requires other intellectual and moral virtues, including practical wisdom and moral courage. By practical wisdom I mean a capacity to see ethically salient features of a situation and make discerning judgements about what is the right course of action in the context of particular circumstances (Banks and Gallagher, 2009, pp. 72-95; Bondi *et al.*, 2011). This entails a high degree of criticality and reflexivity on the part of researchers. By criticality, I mean not taking for granted the values, principles and standards as found in codes of ethics or current practice, nor features of situations as they first appear. Having a critical stance entails closely examining and questioning a situation and people's perspectives on it, uncovering hidden assumptions and unspoken implications and placing the situation in a bigger political and social context. By 'reflexivity' I mean researchers putting themselves in the picture – seeing what roles they are playing *qua* researchers and what are the effects of their positionality in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age and so on. 'Moral courage' involves being willing and able to act on one's moral judgements when facing situations of risk or danger, being neither cowardly nor over-confident (Banks and Gallagher, 2009, pp. 174-94).

Taking a critical stance towards the principles and standards in extant codes of conduct/ethics/integrity also requires a reference point outside current norms and laws.

In their brief discussion of professional integrity as a virtue, Cox et al (2003, p. 103) talk about practitioners committing themselves to a 'semi-independent ideal of what the profession might be at its best'. In the literature on professional ethics, this is sometimes referred to as a 'service ideal' or 'regulative ideal' (Oakley and Cocking, 2001, pp. 25-31; Banks, 2004, pp. 53-8). As an ideal, it can be regarded as providing a vision towards which to work. It is 'semi-independent' in that whilst it may be defined and given meaning in the context of current professional practice, it is also aspirational and goes beyond current practice. According to the traditional view of professions, all professions have a service ideal, which encapsulates their roles in contributing to human flourishing. Service ideals are very general and abstract, such as the promotion of health for the profession of medicine, justice for law and social welfare for social work (Banks and Gallagher, 2009, pp. 20-27). Whilst 'research' is not a unified, distinct profession in the same way as medicine, law or social work, it can take this form within particular disciplines or disciplinary areas. In the AcSS discussion document *Towards Common Principles for Social Science Research Ethics* (Academy of Social Sciences Working Group, 2014), the elaboration of the first principle (about a free social science being fundamental to the UK as a democratic society) makes reference to 'the core mission of all social science disciplines to better inform public debate and public policy actions' (p. 4).

The idea of a 'semi-independent ideal of research at its best' also links with another aspect of integrity in professional life – namely its relationship to practitioners' personal lives and commitments, and their integrity as whole people across all areas of life. This raises many complex issues and debates that cannot be covered here. However, it is worth noting that Macfarlane, in his book on researching with integrity, adopts the idea of integrity as 'the integration of a person's true self and linking their values and identity as a person with their practice as a researcher' (Macfarlane, 2009, p. 45). For Macfarlane, it seems, integrity is not a virtue per se (it does not feature in his list of virtues for research), but rather an over-arching concept that frames the discussion in his book and perhaps covers the ways researchers hold together and make sense of the virtues of the good researcher and integrate this into their characters. This is not dissimilar to Aristotle's account of integrity – as holding together the other virtues as a whole.

The virtue-based account of 'researcher integrity' as an excellence of character is relatively demanding on the researcher. In Table 1, I also include a version of researcher integrity as an ordinary quality of character (rather than an excellence), as well as the 'thin' conduct-focussed version of researcher integrity.

	Researcher integrity as a complex virtue	Researcher integrity as an ordinary quality of character	Researcher integrity as good conduct
<i>A researcher exhibits</i>	excellence of character	ordinary good character	professional conduct
<i>by showing</i>	critical and reflexive commitment	ordinary commitment	conformity/compliance
<i>to</i>	a semi-independent ideal of research at its best	the mission, values, principles and standards of codes of ethics, etc	current standards
<i>and</i>	a capacity to reason and act in a way that contributes to the flourishing of self and ecosystem	a capacity to interpret and act on principles, etc	a capacity to take action in accordance with standards

Table 1: Versions of researcher integrity

The virtues of the researcher

The next step for anyone writing about virtue ethics in a professional context is generally to offer a list of relevant virtues and then elaborate upon what they mean in practice. Macfarlane (2009, p. 42) does this, with his choice comprising courage, respectfulness, resoluteness, sincerity, humility and reflexivity. There are many others that could be identified as relevant and useful for researchers. Will van den Hoonard (2013, p. 27) has compiled a list of 23 virtues exemplified in Canada's Tri-Council policy statement on ethical conduct (2010) that he has inferred directly or indirectly from the text. Top of the list is 'respect', followed by a cluster called 'openness, transparency, honesty', then 'sensitivity', 'trustworthiness', 'responsibility', 'justice' and so on. Interestingly only one of the top six identified by van den Hoonard ('respect') features in Macfarlane's list. Furthermore, in neither list is there any mention of virtues such as benevolence, care or compassion – which arguably are particularly pertinent in social scientific research, and above all in qualitative research where the relationships between researchers and participants may be sensitive and generate and draw on emotions. Similarly in much participatory research (where the people who are usually regarded as subjects of research often play a role as co-researchers), feminist research and other forms of committed action research, care has been identified as a key virtue. Here care ethics and other situated approaches to ethics are also relevant, as well as virtue ethics (Banks *et al.*, 2013).

Any list of virtues is selective, and many virtue concepts over-lap with each other. The fact that different authors select different virtues, most of which would apply equally to ordinary people living their everyday lives, and certainly to many other occupations in

addition to research, suggests that simply producing and studying lists of virtues may not be particularly useful in helping us to identify what counts as a good researcher (as opposed to a good nurse, or a good human being). Unless they are carefully elaborated upon and contextualised in practice, then lists of virtues can be criticised in the same way as lists of principles – as being abstract and unhelpful in guiding practitioners. Macfarlane (2009) does elaborate on each of his chosen virtues in depth, and in relation to many practice examples. So I will not engage in a similar exercise here. Instead I will focus attention on educating the virtuous researcher. In a brief chapter ‘Learning about the virtues’, Macfarlane (2009) considers approaches to teaching postgraduate research students about research ethics. He criticises current education and training as focusing on discourses of compliance, extreme examples of wrong-doing and theoretical approaches drawn from principle-based ethics. He argues for more ‘fine-grained’ scenarios, including students’ own stories and use of narratives, but does not develop these ideas in any detail (Macfarlane, 2009, pp. 156-58). I will consider what might be involved in cultivating researchers of integrity and illustrate with examples from university-based education.

Cultivating researchers of integrity

I have described integrity as a complex, overarching virtue. In the context of research, it might be regarded as the reliable disposition of researchers to hold true to the values of the research discipline or field and to balance the specific virtues relevant to research, enabling them to make sense of and critically re-evaluate their ideals and actions as a whole and act accordingly. We might expect a researcher of integrity to have at least the following characteristics:

- **A *situated understanding*** of the ideals and values of good research and the nature of the virtues relevant to the role of researcher. For example what is meant by respectfulness, courage, honesty, trustworthiness, justice and care in a research context and how do they relate to each other?
- **A *critical and emotional commitment*** to these ideals, values and virtues – sincerely and wholeheartedly believing in the value of respectfulness, honesty, etc, and being motivated to cultivate and enact these virtues.
- **A *developed capacity*** to: recognise situations where virtues are relevant; see the ethical issues at stake from multiple perspectives; manage and engender emotions; work on ethical identity (e.g. becoming and being a respectful/honest person); work on relationships with research participants and other stakeholders; undertake practical reasoning, including working out how to act; take action; question critically the currently accepted values and standards of research.

If this is what it means to be regarded as a researcher of integrity, how are these qualities cultivated? There are many approaches to virtue cultivation in life in general (see Snow, 2015) and in the context of informal and formal education (e.g. Carr, 1991; Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, 2013; Carr and Harrison, 2015). I will briefly offer a few specific examples of approaches in supervision and teaching in universities, with a slightly more detailed discussion neo-Socratic Dialogue and Forum Theatre.

Supervision and critical dialogue with peers in a research team – for research students and inexperienced researchers, the role of the supervisor is crucial in encouraging critical reflection. Even experienced researchers benefit from dialogue with

their peers and exposure to questioning and new ideas. Such people can fulfil the role of moral exemplars or role models, which is often regarded as crucial in developing virtues, although not without its pitfalls (Lockwood, 2009). But above all it is the challenge and exposure to new perspectives that can aid researchers in understanding themselves, and developing critical reflexivity. Writing a research journal or diary and then sharing with supervisors or tutors is a particularly effective way of developing reflexivity.

Working with longer, real life cases – typical textbook cases tend to be relatively short, abstracted from context and often constructed for teaching purposes to exemplify a dilemma or difficult choice (Chambers, 1997; Banks and Nyboe, 2003). This tends to encourage discussion and interpretation in terms of principles and rational decision-making. Real-life, longer cases can also be used, which give more information about political, social and geographical context, about the emotions, motivations and dispositions of the teller and other key actors, and which tell a story that might not culminate in an action-focussed question: ‘what would you do?’ or ‘did the researcher do the right thing?’ This encourages consideration of the character of the people involved, and their interactions with the situations in which they find themselves (see Banks and Armstrong, 2012, for a collection of longer cases).

Moral case deliberation, dilemmas cafés – these methods involve people working in groups exploring a case presented by a member of the group (Molewijk *et al.*, 2008; Weidema *et al.*, 2012; Centre for Social Justice and Community Action, 2015). Here the cases are not only ‘real life’, but the protagonist is present and can benefit from gaining multiple perspectives on the situation described. The participants have a degree of distance from the case and may approach it from the ‘impartial spectator’ perspective. But because the teller of the case is present, more details of context can be given, the character and emotions of the teller are drawn out and consideration given to the response of this person in this context.

Neo-Socratic dialogue – this approach was developed in Germany by philosopher Leonard Nelson and later modified and developed by several of his students (Nelson, 1940; Saran and Neisser, 2004). It involves taking an abstract philosophical question (e.g. ‘What is integrity/honesty/respectfulness?’ or ‘What can we know together?’) and starting by asking participants to give specific examples from their own experience relevant to the question (Van Hooft, 1999, 2003; Saran and Neisser, 2004; Banks, 2013). One example is chosen for deeper analysis, with the aim of the group working together slowly and deliberately to answer the question in relation to this example, before moving to the more abstract level. A facilitator guides the process, which encourages members to engage collaboratively in analysis and logical philosophical argument, but also requires a great deal of attentiveness to each other, respectfulness to alternative views, and careful listening. Group dynamics are very important and the process involves engaging with emotions as well as cognitions. As with moral case deliberation and dilemmas cafés, the presence of the example-giver (teller) stimulates the empathy of the participants. In one version of Socratic Dialogue participants are asked by the facilitator to put themselves in the shoes of the example-giver. After the example-giver has fully elaborated the example, and the facilitator has noted key points on a flipchart (usually dictated by the example-giver) then the example starts to belong to the group, taking on a life of its own, partially abstracted from the ownership of the

example-giver. This enables the example-giver to distance herself from the example and look at it with fresh eyes as she hears the analyses and evaluations of others about what was at stake.

Forum theatre - this is based on the work of Augusto Boal, Brazilian theatre director, as part of his theatre system known as 'Theatre of the Oppressed' (Boal, 1985, 1992). Forum Theatre involves a group of people working together to produce a performance of a scenario showing an 'oppression': a difficulty or obstruction - a problematic or unjust use of power. The scenario may be generated by participants in the workshop or performed to participants by others. The aim of the work is creatively and often entertainingly to resolve, or review and re-frame, issues participants may not have previously analysed or expressed clearly. The structure needs to focus on a protagonist, a baffled but determined hero, 'the oppressed'. The scene is played once through. It is then re-enacted. Members of the 'audience', the group, become 'spect-actors', spectators and actors combined. They call out 'stop' to signal that they would like to try another strategy. Another person then, classically, replaces the hero, or 'oppressed', to explore a new approach. Boal coined the term 'spect-actor' to refer to the fact that the audience (so often condemned to passivity in the theatre) can also become actors, both in the theatre and back in the 'real' world. They play a role in the performance as a 'rehearsal for change' and also reflect on and learn from the experience. As Babbage (2004, p. 45) comments: 'Empathic identification and distant observation exist alongside each other'.

Forum theatre can be used to work on ethically challenging situations encountered in the research process. I have used this to work with people who are engaged in community-based participatory research, involving university and community researchers working together to undertake a research project (Banks *et al.*, 2014). Here ethical issues relating to the use and sharing of power, ownership of data and findings, communication, inclusivity and reciprocity can be particularly challenging (Banks *et al.*, 2013) and participatory theatre can be a very useful way of exploring these and developing participants' skills, confidence and, arguably, virtues to tackle ethical difficulties. If an ethically challenging event and the associated relationships are acted out, with participants representing different characters and groupings, then the possibility for empathy and wider understanding is enlarged. Participants can explore the emotions triggered by the situations. The ethical aspects of a situation can be understood as embedded in the broader context, while embodied by the people in the scenario. This helps develop ethical awareness, enabling people to reframe and re-enact situations and experience how they might achieve different outcomes and work for social change. People can also see and feel successes, injustices, oppressions and indignities that they may not have noticed or fully appreciated before. In short, working with participatory theatre to explore ethical issues in research offers many possibilities, including:

- Developing attentiveness, noticing a key point when something could be done differently; focussing in on a particular feature of the situation.
- Being an external critic – looking at the whole picture from a distance.
- Empathising with the protagonist, feeling what it is like to be that person, and getting the chance to take the place of the protagonist.
- Reframing, repositioning characters, configuring the scene differently.

- Repetition, rehearsal, how to challenge the oppressor; often being courageous, motivated by witnessing injustice.
- Dialogue, sharing perspectives regarding what is going on, how to interpret, possibilities for action.

Concluding comments

There are many reasons to be wary about a focus on the character of the person as moral agent. In a research context, it can reinforce a culture of responsabilisation and blaming the individual researcher for bad practice, when often the institutional conditions are significant contributing factors. This suggests we should exercise some caution in seeing the promotion of virtues in the researcher as the solution to bad practice in research, and not lose sight of institutional and structural constraints. There is also a question about how the notion of moral character, and educating for character, can be co-opted and used as a way of moulding people into a desirable form. The idea of character-building raises the question of in whose interests and according to what role model? None of the approaches discussed in the previous section is directly aimed at developing specific character traits per se. Nevertheless I believe they offer a relevant mixture of opportunities for exercising and developing practical wisdom and rehearsing the right emotions and responses according to context to make them relevant as a contribution towards cultivating rather than indoctrinating virtues.

A virtue-based approach is a good corrective to the tendency to adopt a rule-based approach to research ethics. We want researchers to become more than simply rule-following automata. We want them to be people who respect confidentiality because they are the kind of people who are trustworthy and respectful in all aspects of life, not just because their employer, disciplinary or professional body has laid down a rule to this effect. Yet not everyone is virtuous, and it is not as easy to change or develop people's characters as it is for people to be required to follow a rule. Rules are action-oriented and take account of the fact that people in the role of researcher should behave in certain kinds of ways, even if they do this out of duty rather than because they have a considered commitment to act in such ways. Specific rules are needed precisely because people are not always virtuous and because they may not always have the capacity (or be trusted) to make good judgements. But the growth of more and more rules should not lure us away from the need to develop researchers of integrity. This is why consideration of virtue ethics is important, because it emphasises the moral education and development of the researcher as opposed to simply training in research methodology, methods, skills and 'ethics compliance'.

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