



# Character, Wisdom, and Virtue in the Philosophy of Maria Montessori

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## Character, Wisdom, and Virtue in the Philosophy of Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori describes our “greatest social problem” as the need “to reconstruct the character of individuals,” saying that “here lies the source of those moral and intellectual values which could bring the whole world on to a higher plane” (1:218-9<sup>1</sup>). While emphasizing its importance, she also notes that the *concept* of character has been poorly defined:

Old time pedagogy has always given a prominent place to character training, though it failed to say what was meant by character ... Certain virtues have always been highly valued: courage, perseverance, the sense of duty, good moral relationships with others ... But this notwithstanding, ideas remain vague in all parts of the world as to what character really is. (1:175)

One central goal of Montessori’s ethics is to articulate this “character” that grounds the virtues and is a central goal of education. Montessorian character ends up quite unlike Aristotelian notions prevalent in many contemporary theories. Character is first and foremost “a tendency ... to raise oneself up” (1:191), to “gravitate toward ... perfection” (1:219). Its “roots” lie essentially in human “creativity” (1:177). More Nietzschean than Aristotelian or Kantian, character does not arise from habituation (as in Aristotle) nor consist of principled action (as in Kant), but is an active “drive” (1:190) to become more than one already is, a striving distinctively each one’s own. Particularly important in this context from an educational perspective is Montessori’s optimistic view that character is an innate tendency of children that requires only room to manifest itself, in contrast to many philosophers who have seen character as something to be instilled into children, for example through habituation.<sup>2</sup> As she puts it, “children construct their own characters” (1:190).

After an initial sketch of Montessori’s distinctive concept of character, this paper discusses the relationship between character, wisdom, and virtue. Like Aristotle (and others) Montessori sees these three concepts as closely linked, but on her account, both wisdom and virtue emerge *from* character. As a tendency to self-perfection involving concentration and persistent work, character is itself an intellectual virtue that gives rise to wisdom, and it highlights the central roles of concentration, creativity, and drive to improve in bringing about overall epistemic excellence (wisdom in an epistemic sense). Moreover, one with character has “a *true* wish to become better” that gives rise to virtue as that which “satisfies [one’s] deepest longings” (1:193-4). Not only does character directly give rise to virtue as a form of self-perfection, Montessori also argues that those with character naturally develop distinctively *social* virtues of respect for human dignity. In this way, Montessori unites a broadly Nietzschean conception of character as strength with the Kantian virtues of respect for others.

### 1. Montessori’s concept of character

The central phenomenon of Montessori’s pedagogy is a concentration of attention in focused work that arises from an inner impulse to activity, an active responsiveness to one’s inner impulses that Montessori calls “character.” Character in this sense is the central feature of

ethical life, wherein “lies the source of those moral and intellectual values which could bring the whole world on to a higher plane” (AbsMind 239). Character involves several related components, starting with “the power ... to concentrate”: “The first essential for the child’s development is concentration” (AbsMind 209, 222). Partly implicit in concentration and partly following from it, character involves a capacity “to do [one’s] work carefully and patiently” (AbsMind 209). It thus requires persistence, but this persistence is neither a habitual disposition (as in Aristotle) nor a principled and reflective commitment (as in Kant).<sup>3</sup> Instead, it is a capacity for sustained, attentive work, an ability to set oneself tasks and follow through on those tasks: “A person of character is able to finish the work he begins. Some people begin a dozen different things and do not finish any of them. They are incapable of making a decision” (17:236). The impossibility of “making a decision” is reflected, for Montessori, in the lack of perseverance in chosen work.

The connection between perseverance and “making a decision” introduces a new and important element of character. For Montessori, character is *autonomous* in that those with character “are driven by their own motors” (7:86). Partly, her claim here is empirical; the sort of intense and prolonged concentration that defines character occurs only (or at least primarily) when one works on projects chosen by oneself (see AbsMind 202; 1913:135). In addition, however, Montessori sees autonomy as an *intrinsic* part of what character actually *is*. Thus she distinguishes those with character – who have become “absorbed in ... work that attracts them” – from two “abnormal” types, two “simple headings” under we can group various “defects of character”: “*strong* children ... and ... *weak* children” (AbsMind 201, 197)

In the first [*strong*] group are capriciousness and tendencies to violence, fits of rage, insubordination and aggression. ... Children of the *weak* type are passive by nature and their defects are negative ... [T]hey cry for what they want and try to get others to wait on them. They are always wishing to be entertained and are easily bored. (Abs. Mind 197)

For Montessori, *both* sets of children suffer, not from any “problems of moral education, but of character formation,” and in both cases, the essential cause is a “starved mind” that lacks opportunities for sustained “work at an interesting occupation” (199-200). Of the two, the weak type are typically regarded as “good (passive) and to be taken as models” (AbsMind 201), but they are in many respects *further* from true character because they lack even the autonomous interest that provokes attention. The addition of autonomy is not merely ad hoc but an essential part of having a character *of one’s own*.<sup>4</sup> Insofar as character is, most basically, an *internal* drive towards self-perfection, one whose drive for this or that perfecting activity must be externally imposed lacks character properly speaking. Character, in that sense, is the trait by which one is able to really *be* an agent, through choosing work of one’s own and then constraining oneself to carry out that work. In explaining the right environment for the development and flourishing of character, then, Montessori emphasizes the importance of both freedom and appropriate opportunities for work: “we give these children the opportunity to exercise their patience, to make choices and persevere – every day of their life. They must have the opportunity to exercise all these virtues that, together, form character” (1946:236).

Crucially, character is not the capacity for concentration on just *anything*. Attentive work is normatively-loaded in that it requires internal – and, particularly as one grows older, external – standards of perfection to which one aspires. Character involves “a natural attraction ... *toward perfection*” (AbsMind 210, emphasis added), “a tendency, however vague and unconscious, to *raise themselves up*” (AbsMind 209). Character requires not merely persistent concentration, but persistent activities that increase or promote one’s *perfection*. This reference to perfection inherently appeals to normative standards, to “virtues, carried to the highest level” (AbsMind 213). So what are these standards, these virtues, this “highest level”?

To some extent, Montessori refuses to answer the question of what perfection(s) those with character seek. There are no fixed and determinate goals towards which those with character must aim.

Man does not have a precise heredity to do one special thing ... he is not obliged to do just one thing ... Man is capable of everything but has no heredity for anything. This sounds like a strange fact. But from this stems the obvious fact that every man must prepare in himself an adaptation that is not hereditary. He must prepare his own adaptation ... Does he have a cosmic task ...? The great man with his great intellect, with his special adaptation, does he have a purpose on this earth or is he here only to enjoy it? (1946:91)

While other animals have specific and determinate “perfections” of their nature, human beings have none. As with Aristotle’s concept of eudaimonia, Montessori’s concept of perfection lacks a precise formula or determinate state of affairs that fully determines the content of her ideal. The variability in Montessori’s case, however, is not due merely to the changing conditions under which human being must act. Montessori’s point is that human beings lack and predetermined ideal even of the general sort that falls under Aristotle’s concept of the mean. There are two important reasons that she rejects such a preset standard. First, this character is always the “character of individuals” *qua* individuals (1:218). In principle, one might develop a Kantian account of autonomous character according to which all people autonomously choose in ways that are universal. But for Montessori, not only does character involve self-directed work, but human beings are naturally drawn to different things: “Every individual has different powers to bring to fruition” (AbsMind 74). Thus what counts as “perfection” for any given individual will differ from what is “perfect” for another. Second, human beings are constantly *progressing*. As each generation further develops human excellences, the human race as a whole changes. The new child in each generation “must be considered as a point of union, a link joining different epochs in history” (AbsMind 66), for the child “absorbs” the level of culture attained thus far and provides the basis for reaching a new, hitherto unknown, level of human perfection.

Even while reject a “heredity to do one special thing,” however, Montessori does not leave the concept of perfection *wholly* without meaning. For one thing, perfection involves the execution of a “task,” or tasks, and an “adaptation” to the world, even if not any determinate one. It is thus sharply distinguished from a conception of humans’ end that would identify it with mere *enjoyment*. To achieve perfection is to become more capable of *action*, not simply to become happier.

Elsewhere, Montessori further develops several elements of this perfecting of agency. For one thing, it requires increased “independence.” One with character is “*independent* in his powers and character, able to work and assert his mastery over all that depends on him” (AbsMind 170). Early childhood is fundamentally a “conquest of independence” (see AbsMind 83-96). Thus the child’s “attraction towards . . . manipulative tasks has an unconscious aim. The child has an instinct to co-ordinate his movements and to *bring them under his control*” (AbsMind 180, emphasis added).<sup>5</sup> Children – and all human beings with character – seek more and more to bring themselves and their environment under their agential control, from early developments such as learning to walk or grasp through adolescence and adulthood, as one develops a desire for such goods as “economic independence” that allow one to “make himself feel capable of succeeding in life by one’s own efforts” (Adol 64, see too AbsMind 83-96).<sup>6</sup>

Beyond independence, perfection involves *precision*. Montessori identifies her insight about the importance of precision as having come to her from observations of children<sup>7</sup>:

In thousands of cases we have seen that the child not only needs something interesting to do but also likes to be shown exactly how to do it. Precision is found to attract him deeply . . . It happens no differently with ourselves in sport . . . [T]his feeling of enhancing our abilities is the real source of our delight in the game. (AbsMind 180, cf. 186, 210, 212)

Whether one eats food or writes letters or composes poetry, one with character aims to engage in the activity with exactness. To some extent, “this precision itself seemed to hold their interest” (AbsMind 186), so that the requirement of precision is both necessary and even sufficient for the exercise of attentive concentration. Precision, here, can more broadly be seen as the need for *internal normative standards*. Perfection is a normative concept, so whatever one with character does, she aims to do it *well*, which means that there need to be exact – and demanding – standards of excellence in order for the work . . . to constitute a character. Precision thus provides a basis for attraction to activity, normative guidance within that activity, and a means of increasing self-enhancement.

All these features of perfection – independence, precision, and normative standards – underdetermine the object of character-driven work. When she turns to consider *what* we do independently, with precision, and so on, Montessori simply points to the need to “make progress.”

By character we mean the behavior of men driven (though often unconsciously) to make progress. This is the general tendency. Humanity and society have to progress in evolution. There is naturally an attraction towards God. But here let us consider a purely human center of perfection, the progress of mankind. Someone makes a discovery and society progresses along that line. The same thing happens in the spiritual field, a person reaches a high level and gives society a push forwards . . . If we consider what is known of geography and history, we see this constant progress, because in every age some man has added a point to the circle of perfection which fascinated him and drove him to action . . . Admiral Byrd undertook the humiliating task of collecting money in order to explore the South Pole. Then he exposed himself to all the torments of a polar expedition. But all he felt was the

attraction of doing something never before done, and so he planted his banner among the others in the zone of perfection. (AbsMind 213)

Beyond “perfections” internal to particular activities and the general perfections of precision, integrity, and independence; there is a general striving for improvement *as such*. As she explains elsewhere, “The brain always asks for work which becomes more complex. A child with intelligence will have the desire to climb higher and to better things” (7:89). This ideal is necessarily indeterminate, and it will vary from one person to another. But it provides a constant impetus to move on to new tasks and challenges, with their concomitant new particular standards.<sup>8</sup>

Montessori’s conception of character thus rightly draws attention to the need for a kind of pursuit of perfection that is life-enhancing, agency-promoting, and authentic, even if ultimately deeply indeterminate. In this moral ideal, her moral theory reflects a Nietzschean dimension, one she is – at least at times – willing to admit and embrace, and that is reflected quite broadly in her accounts of character. She approvingly quotes Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, saying, “I wish the man who has conquered himself, who has made his soul great ... who desires to ... create a son ... better, more perfect, stronger, than any created heretofore!” (MM 69). Echoing Nietzsche’s emphasis on the “overman” or the one whose true nature likes “immeasurably high above you” (Nietzsche 1997: 129), she emphasizes the need to “enhance our abilities” (AbsMind 180) and exhorts,

man can reinforce his own strength by other powers which will urge him on upwards towards the infinite..., that is, towards the supernatural life. Yes, to be *more* than man. This is a *dream* to him who lacks faith; but it is the realizable goal, the aim of life, to him who has faith. (9:266)

Citing Dante, she refers to the human being as “the chrysalis destined to become the angelic butterfly” who “must either *ascend* or *die*” (9:266, cf. Dante, *Purgatorio*, X:124-6). Montessori fully endorses the Nietzschean ideal of raising oneself – and thereby the species<sup>9</sup> – to something higher that has heretofore been.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, as in Nietzsche, Montessori’s perfectionism of self-transcendence includes an emphasis on individual uniqueness. The truly excellent human being is the one who has “added a point to the circle of perfection which fascinated *him* and drove *him* to action” (AbsMind 213, emphasis added). Just as Nietzsche’s ascend to something higher is based not on what is common to humanity but on one’s own distinctive loves and drives, so, too, each individual child, once he has developed character, “makes, to a certain extent, a selection of his own *tendencies* ... It is remarkable how clearly *individual differences* show themselves, if we proceed in this way; the child, conscious and free, *reveals himself*” (MM 94-5). Thus in pedagogy, for example, she emphasizes that she and the teachers influenced by her method “have made an effort to recapture the true human level, letting our children use their [own] creative powers” (AbsMind 214). And she generalizes this point to people in general.

[N]o human tends to laziness if he is truly happy, but his concern is to find his own work ... [T]oday people who achieve their destiny are privileged beings, people of genius, who have known how to struggle against great odds and cruel difficulties, and have finally overcome these and found their own individual work ... [W]e envy them only for the fact that they have been able to do what their inner life led them to do. (18:137)

While not using the word “character” here, the emphasis on finding and persisting in one’s individual work is precisely a recognition of the way that lifelong character takes on an individual aspect, a persistent concentration on tasks *of one’s own*.

We will see in section three that Montessori’s moral theory incorporates non-Nietzschean emphases on mutual respect and egalitarian respect for human dignity, and in the context of those elements of her theory she sharply criticizes Nietzsche’s particular account of the “superman” as “strange and erroneous even by the very theories ... that inspired him” (9:266). But in its primary emphasis on self-cultivation through the pursuit of higher and higher levels of perfections that are distinctively one’s own, towards the aim of ultimately giving rise to a new and higher sort of human being, her basic account of character is deeply – and self-consciously – Nietzschean.

This conception of character as a striving for one’s distinctive perfection, where this perfection aims to elevate the species itself through the development of one’s own human capacities, provides an extremely valuable focus for contemporary moral sensibilities. We arguably live in the era of “the ethics of authenticity” (Taylor 1992), within which being “true to oneself” is one of, if not *the*, highest ethical ideal. Montessori’s concept of character involves just such an emphasis on authenticity. The “good” person is the one who is able to pursue her own passions. And the indeterminacy of the “perfection” towards which one with character aims fits well with the widespread embrace of individuality in contemporary culture. The perfection that one pursues need not be the perfection pursued by others. But Montessori’s notion of character corrects this contemporary focus on individuality and authenticity in several important respects.

Most fundamentally, she insists that character is *normative*; it depends upon ideals of perfection towards which one strives. These ideals need not be universal or external to the particular activities of self-perfection in which one engages, but to express oneself with character is to strive for perfection, in accordance with norms that one prescribes to oneself through the activities one engages in and the capacities one cultivates. Relatedly, *hard work* is the proper locus of self-expression. In contemporary culture, people too often seek to express themselves through consumption, but Montessori rightly notes that consumptive<sup>11</sup> activity cannot be a form of self-perfection because consumption, however self-directed, is fundamentally a matter of external goods. Moreover, not only is character oriented towards work, but it takes work to *develop* character. Too often, authenticity is seen as being true to some “self” that one just happens to find oneself to be, and more and more people find themselves at a loss both to discern who they are and to be “true” to that self. But Montessori recognizes that the “self” worth being true to is a self that emerges through what Nietzsche calls “obedience over a long period of time

and in a single direction” (Nietzsche 1966:101).<sup>12</sup> And Montessori recognized that this process of authentic self-overcoming depends upon a strength of character that can only (or at least, primarily) be cultivated in childhood, because authentic self-overcoming – like the moral sense itself – is a capacity that depends upon *early exercise* for healthy development. In a culture that increasingly – and rightly – values authenticity, the recognition that the good of authenticity depends upon its normative orientation towards the work of self-perfection is an invaluable clarification of this moral ideal. And given the widespread malaise caused when people find themselves unable to realize this ideal, attention to the processes by which children’s capacities for character can be cultivated marks an essential contribution to solving some of the most important moral crises of our contemporary – post-Nietzschean – world.

The centrality of character within her philosophy does not mean that Montessori neglects the value and importance of wisdom, justice, or other traditional virtues. In the next section (§2), I discuss the relation of character to wisdom and the intellectual virtues more generally. And in section three, I turn to social virtues (particularly respect for persons). In both cases, character can be seen as *a* virtue, but it is better seen as the basic foundation and wellspring of all other virtues.

## 2. Intellectual Virtues: Character first, then wisdom.

The intellectual virtues have become a major topic within contemporary epistemology and are gaining increasing importance within the philosophy of education.<sup>13</sup> In the context of a discussion of character, virtue, and wisdom; it is natural to focus on “wisdom” as an intellectual virtue. In this section, after first narrowing the scope of what “wisdom” might refer to, I argue that character as defined in section one is necessary in order to come to have wisdom, and that this character is partly constituted by at least three distinct intellectual virtues: love, patience, and autonomy.

First, a bit on terminology. While Montessori occasionally uses the term wisdom (“sappezza”) in her writings,<sup>14</sup> such as when she mentions the patient “wisdom which so characterized the tillers of the soil in the time when they still kept their primitive simplicity” (MM 159), the term she typically uses for intellectual excellence is “intelligence” (*intelligenza*, see e.g. MM 221; 9:151-85). “Wisdom” is a prominent concept particularly in ancient Hebrew literature (as “chokmah חכמה”) and ancient Greek philosophy (particularly as σοφία). Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, for example, catalogs five distinct intellectual virtues – techne, phronesis, episteme, nous, and sophia – at least three of which (episteme, sophia, and phronesis) have been translated using the English term “wisdom” in various editions of his works. Some meanings of wisdom, including Aristotle’s *phronesis* or the Hebrew chokmah, are very nearly moral virtues in the proper sense, dealing at least as much with choice and action as with knowledge or cognition. Other senses of wisdom are more narrowly epistemic, sometimes identified with wide knowledge of relevant and important truths, other times associated with a broader sort of cognitive engagement with the world. For the purposes of this paper, and because I discuss moral virtues in the next section, I focus on “wisdom” in a relatively narrow epistemic sense.



My concern is with the relationship between “character” in Montessori’s sense and wisdom as a term referring to the possession of sophisticated understanding and knowledge of the world. In that sense, “wisdom” includes both the knowledge and understanding that are outcomes of intellectual inquiry and the properly intellectual virtues that should guide such inquiry. And my key claim is that for Montessori, character is the fundamental basis for all other intellectual virtues and the precondition of gaining any knowledge worth having.

Before turning to a brief discussion of how character relates to other “epistemic virtues,” I start here with the connection between character and “knowledge” understood in something like the sense of Aristotle’s *sophia*, “wisdom” in the sense of a sum of proposition truths ordered into a coherent science.<sup>15</sup> For many, knowledge is the ultimate goal of epistemic activity, the end-product to which epistemic virtues should give rise, and the sum of properly epistemic “wisdom” (as opposed to morally loaded *phronesis* or *chokmah*). Thus for Ernest Sosa, distinctively *epistemic* normativity is precisely “a status by having which a true belief constitutes knowledge” (Sosa 2007:88-9). And Bob Roberts and R. Jay Wood allow that, with a suitably broad sense of knowledge (one I share here), their study of intellectual virtues reflects an interest “in the role of character traits in facilitating the acquisition, transmission, and application of knowledge” (Roberts and Wood 2007:57-8). However one traditionally understands the nature and importance of knowledge as an ultimate goal of epistemic activity, Montessori has three fundamental claims about the relationship between “character” and that ultimate epistemic goal:

1. *The Empirical Claim*: It is an empirical fact that epistemic activity grounded in character is most conducive to maximizing wisdom in the sense of knowledge.
2. *The Constitutive Claim*: It is a constitutive fact about knowledge that in order for a person genuinely to *know* something, she must know it for herself, and this requires character as a matter of principle.
3. *The Value Claim*. Insofar as knowledge is *worth having*, its value arises from the fact that it is the fruit of character-driven activity.

Montessori’s Empirical Claim is simply that as children are provided with opportunities to “relate to their environment according to their natural impulse,” they will begin to develop character, and then “as certain aspects of their character (such as patience...) [are] developed” they develop “a great impulse ... of inquiry” on the basis of which children make significant intellectual growth and discovery (18:192). Montessori even points out that very basic intellectual accomplishments, such as making clear distinctions amongst different colors, come only with the sort of concentrated work that expresses character:

[When] children [merely] see all these marvelous colors around them ... they have an impression of all this, but nothing remains – no knowledge, no interest, no concentration, no detail, no exactness ... But if the children can move objects with their hands, their movements become correlated with their senses and their intellect develops accordingly. We have seen children become concentrated and interested [through working with their hands] and noticed that afterwards their senses were educated. (17:168)

Based on her observations of children, Montessori simply reports that character-driven activity is the best way to establish lasting wisdom-as-knowledge. Likewise, the difference between the scientist and the layman, according to which “the layman [literally] cannot see ... stellar phenomena by means of the telescope or the details of a cell under the microscope,” is due to the *character* of the scientist, whereby she “begins to *feel interest*, and such *interest* is the motive power which creates the spirit of the scientist” (9:102; see too 18:191). For Montessori, it is simply a fact that character is the most effective way to come to have knowledge.

Montessori’s Constitutive Claim goes further. According to this claim, in order for *me* to know some truth, in order even for *me* to assent to some belief, I must persistently attend to that belief or truth *for myself*.

There is ... a fundamental difference between understanding and learning the reasoning of others, and being able ‘to reason,’ ... Between ‘understanding’ because another person seeks to impress upon us the explanation of a thing by speech, and ‘understanding’ the thing of ourselves, there is an immeasurable distance (9:165-66)

Genuine knowledge is always *one’s own*. The point here is not that one cannot trust others’ testimony or cannot draw from others’ insights. Rather, the point is that even in those cases, one must personally appropriate that knowledge. One can parrot back spoken explanations, but this repetition is no more “knowledge” than comparable recitations by an actual parrot. To know something for oneself, one must actively concentrate on it; and to actively concentrate, I must employ at least degree of character.<sup>16</sup>

The work of the mind ... must necessarily be *active*; it analyses the object, extracts a determinate attribute therefore, and under the guidance of this determined attribute makes a synthesis associating many objects by the same medium of connection ... [T]his is intellectual work in reality, because the essential quality of the intelligence is not to “photograph” objects, and “keep them one upon the other” like the pages of an album, or juxtaposed like the stones in a pavement. Such a labor of mere “deposit” is an outrage on the intellectual nature. The intelligence, with its characteristic orderliness and power of discrimination, is capable of distinguishing and extracting the dominant characteristics of objects, and it is upon these that it proceeds to build up its internal structures. (9:162)

The point here is that wisdom – in the sense of an orderly edifice of knowledge and understanding – is *essentially* the fruit of *active work* on what is given. Without character, human beings have only the image or veneer of knowledge, an ability to use words in conversation that imply or suggest assent and understanding but without any internal appropriation of the implications of those words. Humans without character, whether defiantly contrarian or passively conformist, fail to think for themselves, and thereby fail to really *think*, and thereby fail to have wisdom.

In one sense, Montessori’s Value Claim follows from her Constitutive Claim. If knowledge acquired without character fails even to be genuine knowledge, then it cannot have whatever value knowledge has. But there is more to the value claim than this. Roberts and

Wood have helpfully pointed out that one who is epistemically virtuous “loves and desires knowledge according to the discriminations of significance, relevance, and worthiness” (Roberts and Wood 2007:155). Often, however, distinguishing knowledge worth having from other knowledge is made without much reflection, or – at best – in terms of the crudely pragmatic benefits of that knowledge. Thus Michael Bishop and J. D. Trout claim that epistemic “significance” should be determined by what “conditions ... promote human welfare” (Bishop and Trout 2005:156). For Montessori, however, what makes knowledge worth having at all is that it provides a focus for character-driven activity. Pushing the frontiers of knowledge is one among many ways that human beings make *progress*, and the increased acquisition of knowledge provides normative standards of success, increasingly refined standards of precision, and the possibility for persistent effort towards self-perfecting. In that way, knowledge is valuable as an end-goal towards which one with character aims.

Furthermore, knowledge is valuable as a *means* towards the further expression of character. Montessori insists that understanding of the world for oneself is always related (as both cause and effect) to making that understanding a “fulcrum” for one’s own “creation[s]” (9:165). Knowledge, and particularly *worthwhile* knowledge, is active in that it should be incorporated into one’s overall framework for acting and living in the world.<sup>17</sup> Thus Montessori rejects those “mere speculations” that leave one’s “environment ... unchanged,” insisting that “when imagination starts from contact with reality, thought begins to construct works by means of which the external world becomes transformed” (9:186). She exhorts, “We should study for the sake of creating, since the whole object of taking is to be able to give again” (PA 31). Any knowledge that should be considered “intelligence” is not mere justified true belief but that appropriation of sensory material that “enable[s] the mind to put... it[self] into relation with the environment” (9:153). Thus Montessori’s primary locus of epistemic assessment – “intelligence” – is *essentially* valuable in that it is conducive to activities in which one is interested.<sup>18</sup> Intelligence as an orientation towards the world that involves consistent attention with an end of activity, is also essentially a component of character. And the knowledge that emerges from intelligence is the product of successful expression of character.

This centrality of character for wisdom-as-knowledge can shed light on various other intellectual virtues. Montessori frequently discusses different intellectual “virtues” that, she says, “are the ... *methods of existence* by which we attain to truth” (9:106). Elsewhere, I discuss several of these epistemic virtues in more detail (see especially Frierson 2016 and Frierson in process). For the purposes of discussion here, it will be helpful to focus briefly on just three representative intellectual virtues: intellectual love, patience, and autonomy. The first point to emphasize is how Montessori’s conception of character includes and clarifies the nature of these virtues as subordinate (component) virtues.

Once we see love, patience, and autonomy as among those “virtues that, together, form character” (17:236), the importance of character for knowledge-formation shows how and why these virtues can be properly *epistemic*. Moreover, we can come to a clearer understanding of

the nature of each virtue by seeing it as a component of character. In the case of intellectual love, for example, we can see the love of knowledge as part of a more general striving towards precision, progress, and the achievement of normative goals. The constant striving for greater precision in the sciences, for example, is not merely due to the instrumental value of that precision, but can be understood as a “love” of knowledge “for its own sake” *in the sense that* come to a more and more accurate grasp of the world is a way of being more precise, more perfect, and raising the bar of shared human projects to a higher level.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, “patience” as a component of character is reflected preeminently in the persistence that is involved in attentive work. This conception of patience not only provides substance to the virtue, but it helps reconcile Montessori’s emphasis on patience with her emphases elsewhere on quickness of intellect. Patience as persistence in attentive work requires and fosters the acuity that allows one to patiently – that is, persistently – pursue one’s tasks with celerity and skill. And the intellectual autonomy that is a constituent of character must include not only a commitment to pursue one’s chosen inquiries in the light of one’s own best insights, but also a fortitude to resist attempts to force one’s thoughts and actions into paths not of one’s choosing and a willingness to accept and embrace the uniqueness of one’s intellectual talents and predilections.

Not only does character thus include several intellectual virtues as constituent elements, it also fosters the further development of those virtues. Those with character come more and more to love knowledge for its own sake, and even to love the objects of their inquiries:

In the ... child [with character],<sup>20</sup> his freedom to take an interest in all kinds of things leads to his focusing his attention not on the things themselves, but on the knowledge he derives from them. Hence his longing to possess undergoes a transformation ... If the passion to possess is dictated by an intellectual interest, we may say it has been raised to a higher level and this will lead the child on towards knowledge. Instead of possessiveness there is, in this higher interest, an aspiration to know, to love, and to serve. (AbsMind 219-20)

Here Montessori describes the development of intellectual love (and even moral love) as an *effect* of the expression of character. As one concentrates on active intellectual engagement with objects, the desire simply to take hold of those objects gives way to more refined desires, for virtuous loves for knowledge and the objects of one’s attention. Similarly, while some degree of patience is necessarily in order to attentively work at all, the development of character gives rise to an ever-increasing capacity for more and more sustained efforts; one cultivates patience *through* work. Thus Montessori explains, for example, how elementary children’s experiments in chemistry

are very simple but ... require [one] ... to wait patiently while the liquids settle, while substances, dissolve, or while liquids evaporate. Calm and attention are required. The psychological effect produced on the children at this age may be compared to that of [other] lesson[s] on younger children. The ... older children must measure their movements and must pay concentrated attention to them. (12:39)

A character-driven interest in scientific exploration gives rise, in a carefully constructed environment, to an effort of patience that one might not have hitherto been capable of. Similarly,

Montessori describes Admiral Byrd, who “undertook the humiliating task of collecting money” and then “exposed himself to all the torments of a polar expedition” because “he felt was the attraction of doing something never before done [going to the South Pole] and so ... plant[ing] his banner among the others in the zone of perfection” (AbsMind 195). Again, character oriented towards a challenging task that requires persistent and norm-governed activity generates further virtues of humility, fortitude, and patience.

Finally, the threefold way in which character relates to wisdom-as-knowledge can shed important light on a similar three-fold way in which intellectual virtues *in general* can relate to the knowledge to which they (often) give rise. Within much contemporary virtue epistemology, particularly of a reliabilist bent, there is a tendency to see the relationship between intellectual virtues and knowledge as one according to which “knowledge” is “belief that results from acts of intellectual virtue” (Battaly 2008:641; see too Zagzebski 1996:271; Sosa 1991:131). In one sense, this view recognizes the important point that intellectual virtues are partly constitutive of knowledge. A true belief does not count as “knowledge” unless it arises as a result of the exercise of some intellectual virtue. But in another important respect, reliabilist epistemologies, and even responsibilists like (early) Zagzebski, still privilege true belief; a virtue just is *whatever* reliably gives rise to true beliefs. For Montessori, by contrast, character – and the virtues that, “together, form” it – is defined in terms of the way in which a human being is active. Thus when *Montessori* sees true and worthwhile knowledge as depending upon the virtues causally, constitutively, and evaluatively, her claim involves *devaluing* those true “beliefs” (if we can even call them beliefs) that do not express human agency in the right way. This deeply agent-centered approach to virtue epistemology arises from appreciating the centrality and primacy of character in Montessori’s approach to wisdom, and the centrality of agency within her account of character.

### 3. Character and virtue.

In one sense, character is *a* virtue. Moreover, given that character consists of patience perseverance in work directed towards self-chosen and self-perfecting activities, we can see character as a sum of “all these virtues that, together, form character” (1946:236). One might thus discuss the relationship between character and virtue by carefully describing what character is and why it is a virtue, or by cataloging the virtues that partly constitute it. For the purpose of this section of this paper, I focus on character neither as a singular virtue of its own nor as a collection of virtues but rather as the fundamental basis from which other virtues spring. The basic structure of her account involves the “extraordinary manifestation” that follows from the establishment of character.

[The child] showed extraordinary spiritual qualities, recalling the phenomena of ... conversion ... as if in a saturated solution, a point of crystallization had formed, round which the whole chaotic and fluctuating mass united, producing a crystal of wonderful forms. Thus, when the phenomenon of the polarisation of attention had taken place, all that was disorderly and fluctuating in the consciousness of the child seemed to be organizing

itself into a spiritual creation, the surprising characteristics of which are reproduced in every individual. (9:53-4)

The “crystal of wonderful forms” to which concentrated attention on self-perfecting work gives rise is Montessori’s poetic way of referring to the whole set of what we would call (and she elsewhere calls) “virtues.” In particular, Montessori often discusses the relationship between character as such and what she calls the “social virtues” of justice and respect for other persons (18:260).<sup>21</sup> For Montessori, character is not only the most fundamental aspect of moral life but also provides for the “sense of justice and ... sense of personal dignity” that are the key “noble characteristics that would prepare a man to be social” (12:63). These are paradigmatic “modern” virtues, showing how character relates to the virtue of respect for persons will illustrate her insights into virtues essential to the functioning of societies that depend, among other things, upon widespread mutual respect.<sup>22</sup>

For Montessori, while character as concentrated work leading to self-perfectionment is the primary ethical ideal, ethics does not *end* with that ideal.<sup>23</sup> One of the most interesting phenomena in Montessori classrooms is the way in which focused work in response to a child’s *own* inner impulses leads that child to a new kind of relationship with others, a relationship of genuine respect:

Another thing that comes as a result of the phenomenon of concentration is an easy adaptation to the social environment. The school is a society. When men are together, they are in a society ... These *new children* adapt easily to everything, to work and to contact with others. (17:233)

From these social interactions, in the context of that sense of dignity that comes with character, children develop that “noble characteristic” of social life, “a sense of justice” (12:63).

It is after these manifestations [of character] that a true discipline is established, the most obvious results of which are closely related to what we will call “respect for the work of others and consideration for the rights of others.” Henceforward a child no longer attempts to take away another's work; even if he covets it, he waits patiently until the object is free; and very often a child becomes interested in watching a companion at work on some object he would like to use himself. Afterwards, when discipline has been established by these internal processes ... there is a mutual respect ... between the children ... and hence is born that complex discipline which ... must accompany the order of a community. (9:73)

Character-based striving towards perfection involves a quickening rather than deadening of one’s sensibility to the needs of others. Montessori emphasizes that the discipline and social harmony established in a classroom of children with character emerges naturally from their activity rather than being imposed from without:

The children then are orderly and have a harmonious discipline, a discipline in which each has his different interests. It is different from the discipline of a soldier, with his forced obedience, when all have to do the same thing at the same moment ... What is known as discipline in ordinary schools is a social error. It is the discipline of the school, but not a

preparation for social life, because in society each person chooses his work – each must do different things – but all must work in harmony. (17:235)

The “normalization” of a person that occurs when she is able to engage in sustained and self-chosen work includes the development of “normal” social awareness. And central to that social awareness is mutual respect, where doing one’s own work involves leaving others to do theirs.

At one level, Montessori’s claim that respect is observed to emerge along with character is a mere empirical fact,<sup>24</sup> but some elements of character make respect for others a particularly natural, and perhaps even essential, development. For one thing, character involves a pursuit of *perfection*, which largely eliminates the *possessiveness* and *envy* that Montessori rightly sees as fundamental threats to mutual respect. Given scarcity of goods, possessiveness is a threat to mutual respect as each seeks to take and hold as many goods as possible. But insofar as one seeks materials only as a means towards self-perfecting activity, there is little incentive to hold onto materials one is no longer using or waste energies by taking materials from another child already working on them. For one with character, “his freedom to take an interest in all kinds of things leads to his focusing attention not on the things themselves, but the knowledge he derives from them. Hence his longing to possess undergoes a transformation” (1:199).<sup>25</sup> A child who hoards both diverts his energy from perfection-conducive activity and fails to work well even with the material he hoards. Likewise, simply *taking* from another child is coarse, crude, weak, and disruptive. One with character requires time, space, and psychological peace to work diligently on the material, and violent seizure of another’s goods precludes these necessities. For one with character, protecting or taking property is pointless and boring. What is more, in a community of normalized kids, each child can wait because she knows that the wait will not be too long, and in the right environment, he also knows there are other things he can do.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, since one’s goal is perfecting oneself rather than proving one’s merits to others, there is no basis for envy. Envy can often lead to disrespect or social conflict, as people see esteem or even perfection itself as something that one can have only at the expense of another. But those with character seek *progress* in perfection, rather than *superiority* of it. That is, one compares one’s present perfection to one’s past performance, not to the performance of others. In that context, others’ superiority to oneself become a reassurance that progress is possible, rather than a threat to one’s sense of self (see AbsMind 231-2).<sup>27</sup> Finally, precisely because it involves an ability to focus on *work*, character prevents the sort of competitive or hostile attention to others that often leads to interference with their exercises of agency.

Moreover, as the pursuit of excellence or perfection, character requires and fosters a conception of what is genuinely admirable. In order to have character, one must come to appreciate the value of norm-governed work towards ideals of perfection, and while character is specifically oriented towards one’s *own* pursuit of perfection, those who aspire for perfection themselves come naturally to admire and thereby respect others’ similar pursuits. This is neither a conceptual argument like the Kantian-Gewirthian insistence that “a claim on the part of the agent that he has a right to perform his action” is both “an essential feature of [one’s] action” and a claim by which “he is logically committed to the generalization of this right-claim to all

prospective agents” (Gewirth 1974:62-3) nor even a Kantian-Korsgaardian claim about what is constitutive of human reasoning as such (see e.g. Korsgaard 1996, 2009). Even as a “merely” psychological claim, it describes the dictates of the moral sense as it develops in children in the conditions most conducive to its exercise.<sup>28</sup> But it also highlights how the structure of striving towards perfection pushes beyond each given individual. We naturally see others’ pursuit of perfection as equal in value to our own, and this gives rise to a commitment to respect (and even admire) it. This vision is a *moral* vision, a sense of what is good and right in the world. It is a recognition that respect is morally excellent and morally required.

Thus while endorsing Nietzsche’s emphasis on human self-overcoming towards ever higher ideals, Montessori rejects his failure to connect the over-man with genuine concern for others. For her, this is not merely a failure of opportunity, but a blindness to the implications of his own ideal:

To Friedrich Nietzsche, the superman was an idea without practical consequence, strange and erroneous even when tested by the very theories ... which inspired him. His conception offered no help in overcoming the ills of humanity; rather was it as a chain binding man to earth, there to seek means to create of himself the man superior to himself; and thus leading him astray into egotism, cruelty and folly. (SA 266)

The failure to extend striving towards *individual* perfection with a broader interest in others is an “egotism” that sets its sights too *low*, binding itself to all-too-narrow scopes for its agency. Moreover, Montessori emphasizes that the inner impulse to self-perfection is an impulse *of life*, and life’s striving for growth and development is not limited to the boundaries of any particular organism. The pre-eminent forms of progress and growth are those that enhance life *for all*:

It is enough that souls should “feel.” How, then, could they live quietly amidst evil? If under the windows of our house people were piling up refuse until we felt that the air was being vitiated, could we bear this without protesting, and insisting on the removal of that which was causing us to suffer? If, moreover, we had a child, we should clamor still more loudly, and should even set to work to clear away the nuisance with our own hands, in our solicitude for his health. But if the bodies of mother and child lay dead, they would no longer be conscious of the pestilential air. It is characteristic of “life” to purge the environment and the soul of substances injurious to health. . . . And this is the morality that springs from sensibility: the *action* of purifying the world, of removing the obstacles that beset life, of liberating the spirit from the darkness of death. The merits of which every man feels he owes an account to his conscience are not such things as having enjoyed music or made a discovery; he must be able to say what he has done to save and maintain life. These purifying merits, like progress, have no limits. (SA 265-6)

The same inner forces that push each individual towards perfection also equip them with a “feeling” for the ills and potentials of others. The ideal of striving towards perfection, an ideal rooted in the deepest inner impulses of human beings, thus naturally realizes itself in a project of liberating others.<sup>29</sup>



Moreover, given that character essentially seeks *perfection*, where the *object* of that perfection is indeterminate, social life *itself* can – and does – become such an object, such that among the perfections that one seeks – or at least can seek – is perfection *in social intercourse itself*. Binding oneself to perfections of merely individual scope limits the degree to which one’s own agency can truly soar. Again, Montessori draws explicitly on “the ideal love made incarnate by Friedrich Nietzsche, in the woman of Zarathustra, who conscientiously wished her son to be better than she” to explain how and why “the goal of human love is not the egotistical end of assuring its own satisfaction—it is the sublime goal of multiplying the forces of the free spirit, making it almost Divine, and, within such beauty and light, perpetuating the species” (MM 69). As those with character become more and more aware of the strength of their wills, they look more and more for worthy foci of activity. Even in children, the disciplines of mutual respect – waiting one’s turn, interacting with others courteously, and so on – require exertions of will in ways that are normatively governed, precise, and provide opportunities for perfectionment. In adults, active mutual respect continues to require conscientious work that can support the actualization of character. In both contexts, those with character who are actively involved in social life – as all in a Montessori classroom are – will seek to engage in that social life with greater and greater excellence. And this gives rise to a desire to know and conform to standards of excellence for such interactions. Preeminent amongst those standards, as one comes to see, is mutual respect.<sup>30</sup> Thus agents seeking perfection seek to perfectly contribute to a community of mutual respect. This locus of activity particularly well suited to the exercise of character because of its complexity, inescapability,<sup>31</sup> and – most of all – its potential.<sup>32</sup> Thus the “life” that strives for self-perfection is also essentially interested in greater health, vitality, and perfection *in general*. Character thereby expresses itself through the social virtue of mutual respect.<sup>33</sup>

Because respect originates from participation in society, an essential characteristic of and justification for respect is that it secures harmony amongst free individuals. Montessori explains how “Studying the behavior of these children and their mutual relationships in an atmosphere of freedom, the true secrets of society come to be revealed” (AbsMind 228) such as that “Society does not rest on personal wishes, but on a combination of activities which have to be harmonized” (AbsMind 224). But crucially, this society is one of *character*, that is, of norm-governed *activity* towards perfecting oneself. Montessori’s “social contract” is one within which *harmony of activity*, rather than maximization of preference-satisfaction or even securing of rights to choice as such are the fundamental good of – and basis for – society. Respect, as the means for securing this harmony, is morally required.

The origin of respect in character helps Montessori clarify the precise nature of morally worthy respect for others. Given its focus on harmony of *activity*, the fundamental object of respect is the activities – not the wishes or preferences – of others. It is a respect for the “different interests” of each, where “each must do different things – but all must work in harmony” (1946:235). Interference or interruption, even in order to provide assistance,<sup>34</sup> paradigmatically illustrates disrespect. The fact that respect is first and foremost for activity

rather than preference or satisfaction is one of the things that Montessori claims to have discovered largely through observation of children:

Children ... solve their own [social] problems, but we have not yet explained how. If we watch them without interfering, we see something apparently strange. This is that they do not help one another as we do. If a child is carrying something heavy, none of the others run to his aid. They respect one another's efforts, and give help only when it is necessary. This is very illuminating, because it means they respect intuitively the essential need of childhood which is not to be helped unnecessarily. (AbsMind 228)

Throughout her pedagogy, Montessori emphasizes that interruption and unnecessary help are among the most severe errors that teachers and caregivers make in dealing with children.<sup>35</sup> And in her moral philosophy, she explains why. The exercise of one's own efforts towards achieving worthwhile goals is the core of character. The most basic form of moral respect, then, is precisely respecting others *in their effortful work*.<sup>36</sup>

Character is thus the basis of respect in two senses. First, the establishment of character naturally gives rise to respect, as those who are capable of freely engaging in concentrated and persistent work come to feel a need to respect others. Second, character is the ultimate end and object of respect. What one respects when one respects another person is precisely her capacity to engage and persist in attentive work that interests her. For both reasons, character is a more basic moral good than respect for others; it is the best foundation and the ultimate end of respect.<sup>37</sup> But the concept of respect adds to what is a broadly Nietzschean perfectionism a deeply Kantian commitment to the equal dignity of human beings, and a distinctively Montessorian conception of what respect for that dignity involves. Character is a perfectionist moral ideal; respect for the freedom of others to develop their own characters is a categorical imperative.<sup>38</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

In her *Spontaneous Activity in Education*, Montessori articulates a vision of a unity between scientist and saint, between intellectual and epistemic virtue, that reflects an overriding passion of her "scientific pedagogy" from her earliest days through the end of her life.

There is a real mechanism of correspondence between the virtues of the man of science and the virtues of the saints; it is by means of humility and patience that the scientist puts himself in contact with material nature; and it is by means of humility and patience that the saint puts himself in contact with the spiritual nature of things, and ... mainly with man. The scientist is virtuous only within the limits of his material contacts; the saint is "all compact" of such virtue; his sacrifices and his enjoyments are alike illimitable. The scientist is a seer within the limits of his field of observation; the saint is a spiritual seer, but he also *sees* material things and their laws more clearly than other men, and invests them with spirit. (9:107)

At first blush, this can sound like a mystical appeal to a scientist-seer, but Montessori's fundamental point is that the intellectual virtues by means of which scientists come to knowledge of the material world are but more limited versions of the complete virtues by which the most noble amongst us can engage with the whole world – including especially the world of our fellow human beings – in the richest way. Wisdom in the purely intellectual sense and social virtues are both born of the same root.

While she does not highlight it in this particular passage, Montessori's corpus as a whole reveals the common root of scientists, saints, and seers as *character*, understood in a very specific sense. Character partly consists in and partly gives rise to the intellectual virtues and the worthwhile knowledge that is their fruit. And it is the wellspring from which the social virtues arise. Moreover, character is not simply a fuzzy term of praise or ambition. Montessori identifies character as the foundation of a very specific phenomenon of perseverant, concentrated, attentive work oriented towards self-perfection in accordance with normative standards. This ideal of character is at once empirically tractable – something one can observe and towards which one can orient programs of cultivation and development<sup>39</sup> – and morally admirable. In itself, the ideal of character is perfectionist in a Nietzschean vein; it marks an effort of self-overcoming rather than a consistent habit of behavior or principled basis for action. But unlike Nietzsche (and even Aristotle), Montessori links this perfectionist ideal with common intellectual virtues and with social virtues that embody a Kantian commitment to human dignity and mutual respect.

For Montessori, previous approaches at moral education fail not only because their central concepts are vague, but also because, even insofar as they seek to define what character is, “all of them start with grownups, with adult man” and “generally overlook the little child” (AbsMind 193). By contrast, Montessori claims, “our own studies ... allow us to visualize the development of character as a natural sequence of events resulting from the child's own individual efforts” (AbsMind 193). This privileging of the child both in practice and as a source for thinking through and articulating the concept of character we should set as our ideal gives rise to a distinctive and important “Montessori” approach to character, wisdom, and virtue.

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<sup>1</sup> References to works by Maria Montessori are to *The Montessori Series* (currently 19 volumes), Amsterdam: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company, 2007—. References are to volume and page number. *The Secret of Childhood* has not been published in this series, so references to that work are to page numbers in the edition published by Orient Longman (Hyderabad, 1996). *The Montessori Method* is published as part of the series only in its later edition (entitled *The Discovery of the Child*). When I reference the original *Montessori Method*, I use the abbreviation MM and give page numbers in *The Montessori Method* (trans. A. E. George, New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1912).

<sup>2</sup> Against Aristotle, she makes character the *precondition* of the acquisition of habits, rather than a consequence of (or condition of) habits. Habits do play an important part in human life, from habits of grace, courtesy and mutual respect to cognitive “habits” such as the motor memory involved in writing and reading or the habitual recollection of mathematical techniques. These habits even facilitate the self-directed and persistent effort in which character consists. But these habits all first *arise through* persistent, self-directed work. That is, they all depend upon antecedent character.

<sup>3</sup> Against Kant, who famously claims that “there are few who have [character] before they are forty” (7:294), Montessori insists that character is present even in the youngest children, beginning in infancy.

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The task of the educator is not to create or even, strictly speaking, cultivate character. Rather, educators' task is to provide a context within which character can express itself and embark on its normal process of development and growth. Moreover, while this character can become reflective and highly self-conscious, particularly in the setting of long term goals and ideals, it is initially and for the most part pre-reflective and un-self-conscious, the sort of self-directed persistence involved in countless "flow" activities of children and adults alike (see Csikszentmihalyi 1990).

<sup>4</sup> There is another reason that the addition of autonomy is not *merely* empirical or ad hoc. Montessori sees certain sorts of empirical correlations as clues to the intrinsic nature of certain values. Her moral epistemology is based on drawing moral conclusions from carefully observation, informed by one's moral sense, of actual conditions of lived human lives. Thus insofar as children maintain persistent and sustained attention only or primarily insofar as they choose their own tasks, this empirical fact indicates something more, an intrinsic connection between self-direction or autonomy and concentration on self-perfection. (For further discussion of Montessori's moral epistemology, see Frierson 2015.)

<sup>5</sup> Relatedly, perfection involves an *integration* of previously separated aspects of oneself, a "unity of personality" (1946:139). This emphasis on integration is consistent with Montessori's broader metaphysical concept of higher forms of agency emerging from the harmonious relation of lower forces (see Frierson, under review). In the human case, it means that one with character strives not only to perfect various particular powers but also to integrate these into a coherent individual personality:

The ... development of each of its [psychological] parts, which is at first carried on separately from birth till three, must in the end become integrated, when it will be so organized that all of these parts act together in the service of the individual. That is what is happening during the next period, from 3 to 6, when the hand is at work and the mind is guiding it. If outer conditions prevent this integration from occurring then ... [t]he hand moves aimlessly; the mind wanders about far from reality; language takes pleasure in itself; the body moves clumsily. (AbsMind 203)

One who strives for "perfection" strives for a dexterous hand capable of moving food to his mouth and a sensory acuity capable of recognizing that food, but also for the hand-eye-stomach-mind coordination that brings these perfections together. She strives not only for strong fingers, visual-cognitive recognition of letters, and trained motor skills in hand and arm, but also for an integration that brings these together into an ability for writing. Over time, she seeks to develop further capabilities, such as that independence of mind that lets her consider new food sources or think new thoughts, and further integration, such that she can cook and eat those new foods, write down her new thoughts in creative stories, or compose poetry about tasteful delights.

<sup>6</sup> At the same time, this independence is an independent *adaptation* to the world. No one is *wholly* independent of their environment, including their social environment. The goal of independence is to increase one's control over "all that depends on him." Relatedly, independence does not imply going-it-alone. As I indicate in notes 29 and 38, social solidarity is an important moral ideal. But such solidarity is only a moral ideal with it is solidarity *of independent agents*.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. notes 4 and 28, and Frierson 2015.

<sup>8</sup> One might raise important objections to this conception of character at the heart of Montessori's moral philosophy. For one thing, the ideal seems very self-centered, in sharp contrast to ethical theories that emphasize social relations. This concern is addressed directly by further elements of her theory, some of which I discuss in §3. But there seem to be intrinsic problems with the notion of character itself. In particular, the notion that we can aim for progress *as such* might seem incoherent, without some

determinate telos that can orient this conception of progress. What distinguishes “progress,” in this case, from mere “change”? And even if we can make sense of what “progress” as such would *mean*, there is a further question about why such progress should be considered *good*.

There are several important ways in which Montessori can address this challenge. For one thing, she might rightly point out that the more determinate goals typically proposed as the “end” of moral life are shallow and erroneous. On the one hand, utilitarian dreams of maximizing happiness founder almost immediately on “the light in which childhood revealed itself,” that evident, and evidently good, tendency of children to pursue an “independence” that gives the ability “to work and assert mastery” *rather than* mere “happiness” (AbsMind 170). On the other hand, Kantian and virtue ethical accounts that typically emphasize *how* to engage in activities (in accordance with respect for humanity, or with various virtues) are even emptier than Montessori’s with respect to the *particular ends* and consequently *particular activities* that one should pursue. And in the present world, where people have considerable choice not only about how to fulfill assigned roles but also which roles to assume, such ethical theories often leave under-theorized how people should make important choices about ethical life. Kant’s own theory is representative here; where his relatively thin moral principles does not specify one’s ends, one is largely left making decisions about particular ends in terms of the “principle of happiness” (5:35). Even if Montessori’s notion of progress is ambiguous or problematic, it is at least as substantive as many virtue ethical or Kantian ideals, and it is not so specific as to be false (as in utilitarian accounts).

But Montessori can say more, even about her relatively indeterminate ideal of progress. She might, and occasionally does, invoke theological norms, suggesting that “there is naturally an attraction to God” (AbsMind 213) and linking other forms of progress towards this moral ideal. More importantly, she might rightly emphasize the culturally-situated and historical dimension of our character. One with character may have “added a point to the circle of perfection which fascinated him” (AbsMind 213), but this fascination was formed in a particular cultural context. Admiral Byrd went to the South Pole because this *kind* of striving for perfection was comprehensible *as* a form of progress given his historical-cultural context. Insofar as our character is rooted in our absorption of our cultural heritage, the norms of perfection internal to that cultural heritage are norms in terms of which we can progress. The writer, or dancer, or explorer, or scientist, all work in the context of a history of excellent exemplars and seek specifically to add to that repertoire of excellence, starting with the effort to do what has already been done more and more excellently and rising to the desire to do something new, something recognizably more perfect from within the existing norms of their circle.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., the following: “We want to help the autoconstruction of man at the right time, so that mankind can go forward to something great” (AbsMind 215).

<sup>10</sup> As we will see shortly, however, she disagrees with the hierarchical and anti-democratic thinking that pervades much of Nietzsche’s thought.

<sup>11</sup> Pun intended. From the standpoint of agential excellence, a life of consumption (in the sense of modern consumer culture) is akin to a life of consumption (in the sense of tuberculosis that saps one’s life).

<sup>12</sup> Choice of and endurance in work are themselves perfections that require practice and attention. This is particularly true because, like Nietzsche, Montessori sees authenticity and self-*overcoming* as intrinsically linked. While one might think that *overcoming* oneself and being *true to oneself* would be opposed, both Montessori and Nietzsche recognize (albeit in different ways) that the human “self” is a teleological self,

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one that aims for perfections whereby it transcends itself, such that “your true nature ... lies immeasurably high above you” (Nietzsche 1997:129).

<sup>13</sup> For the intellectual virtues in general, see the helpful if somewhat dated bibliography in Greco and Turri 2011. For a sample of recent work on virtue epistemology in relation to education, see Baehr 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Even English translations that refer, for instance, to the “wisdom of the teacher who decides when it is necessary to encourage a child” (MM 291; cf. DC 2:225) are often translating other terms (in this case “*arte*”) loosely.

<sup>15</sup> For the present context, I do not distinguish between knowledge of particular and changeable things and knowledge of universal and eternal things. (For Aristotle, *sophia* was limited to the latter.)

<sup>16</sup> For other contemporary theorists who emphasize epistemic agency, see e.g., Elgin 2013 and Sosa 2015. For an account of the importance of testimony in early learning that wrongly criticizes (and grossly oversimplifies) Montessori on this score, see Harris 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle had already claimed that “the soul of an animate organism ... is nothing other than its system of active abilities to perform [its] vital functions” (Lorenz 2009, quoted in Sosa 2015:138). Ernest Sosa applies this to his own view by claiming that “the importance of knowledge derives in good measure from how it relates to human achievement generally” (Sosa 2015:142). Others have gone further, arguing that knowledge should be understood as a “basic ... attunement” to the world (Ward and Stapleton 2012:96) or a “mode of coupling with one’s environment” (Thompson 2005:407). Montessori, like Ward, Stapleton, Thompson, and arguably Aristotle, sees knowledge as a part of an overall life directed towards excellent activity; thus the relevance of knowledge is built into what it means for a thought to actually count *as knowledge*.

<sup>18</sup> Insofar as she is concerned with the contemporary question of the value of knowledge, the question for *her* is whether and to what extent propositional knowledge might play special roles in our cognitive interactions with the world. Those interactions are epistemically primary and intrinsically significant; propositional “knowledge” is a derivative concept.

<sup>19</sup> For the sake of this paper, I take “intellectual love” to include “love of knowledge.” Elsewhere (Frierson 2016) I have emphasized that, for Montessori, the love of knowledge is at best a secondary sort of intellectual love. While this would have implications for the present account, a full discussion and defense of that point is beyond the scope of the present paper.

<sup>20</sup> She says “In the normalized child” here, but the concept of “normalization” in this chapter is virtually synonymous with the concept of character.

<sup>21</sup> She also often highlights a third social virtue – social solidarity – which goes beyond mere justice and mutual respect to encompass a unity of will with others by which we engage in projects as a group, or as a society, rather than merely as mutually respectful individuals. While this important social virtue also arises from character and has intrinsic connections with it, a discussion of social solidarity is beyond the scope of this paper. Montessori also periodically describes other virtues such as courage, moderation, and generosity; again, a full discussion of how character relates to *all* virtues is simply too involved for this paper.

<sup>22</sup> In this way, her theory is better suited to thinking about virtues in the contemporary world than those of either Aristotle or Nietzsche, both of whom – in different ways – cultivate and arguably rely on an aristocratic social structure incompatible with modern conceptions of equal human dignity.

<sup>23</sup> Note too that the development is *mutual*. The patience that is part of character makes it possible to respect others, and the need to respect others cultivates the “virtue of patience” (AbsMind 224).

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<sup>24</sup> That is to say, it is portrayed as a fact according to Montessori's observations. My purpose here is not to decide whether or not these observations are ultimately supportable, but to lay out the structure of Montessori's approach. For a collection of evidence that supports Montessori's empirical claims, see Lillard 2007.

<sup>25</sup> This is not to deny that there is no need for external goods in the pursuit of perfection. Admiral Byrd needed resources to get to the South Pole, and Montessori emphasizes how the right environment is needed for children to pursue perfection. But one with character does not seek external goods *for their own sakes* nor even merely *for the sake of pleasure*; and it is typically these motives that generate conflict over external goods.

<sup>26</sup> This development of the moral sense does not imply that children operate in a complete vacuum, however. In the right environment, a child is confronted with constant *models* of respect, and she comes to see how the mutual respect amongst her peers, and well as the universal respect shown by the teacher, give rise to a community of peaceful pursuit of perfection. For all children, there is an attraction to such a community, and for one with character, this vision contributes to her greatest aspirations for herself.

<sup>27</sup> Carol Dweck echoes similar points in her discussion of those who have growth mindsets, and who therefore have no need to prove their superiority to others and are not intimidated by others who are, for now, better than them at something. See e.g. Dweck 2006:30.

<sup>28</sup> For discussion of the central role of the moral sense in Montessori's moral epistemology, see Frierson 2015.

<sup>29</sup> This particular passage goes beyond mutual respect in the direction of Montessori's conception of social solidarity. It's not *merely* that we respect others and thereby help them. We also come more and more to identify with the task of raising the community (and ultimately the species and even the planet) to a higher level of perfection.

<sup>30</sup> While mutual respect is the most important social virtue, Montessori emphasizes other social virtues as well. For one thing, as discussed in notes 21, 29, and 38, she emphasizes the virtue of social solidarity, a sort of cooperation that goes beyond mere mutual respect. For another, Montessori highlights the importance of what she calls "grace and courtesy," her terms for culturally specific norms of polite behavior. Respect for others – both other individuals and one's community as a whole – can and should manifest itself in adherence to social norms of propriety and good manners. These social norms specify and make precise otherwise general and vague requirements of social life, and they make what would otherwise be neutral forms of activity into normative requirements of polite society in a particular context. For many theorists, these norms of polite society are sharply distinguished from moral norms, and in some cases – most famously Rousseau – they are seen as fundamentally *opposed* to moral life. But Montessori treats them as essential components of socially-situated respect. In the context of emphasizing that children should be left in perfect liberty, she emphasizes that this liberty must be constrained by respect for others:

The liberty of the child should have as its *limit* the collective interest; as its *form*, what we universally consider good breeding. We must, therefore, check in the child whatever offends or annoys others, or whatever tends toward rough or ill-bred acts. (2:51; MM 87)

While the "collective interest" along with "offense" and "annoyance" fit well within the role of the teacher in ensuring that all in the classroom are free of interruption, the reference to "good breeding" and "rough or ill-bred acts" draw attention to the need to engage with each other in terms of socially accepted norms of polite society. Thus among adults, not only will morally excellent people refrain from "pay[ing]



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a certain visit” to a friend when it is “not her day for receiving,” but we also “rise to our feet” when “a venerable person enters” (SA 133). Social life is made up not merely of abstract norms of respect but of specific and culturally-local requirements of civility, and the respectful person will bring herself into accord with both sets of requirements. See too note 32.

<sup>31</sup> The notion of inescapability raises one further point regarding the place of respect in Montessori’s moral philosophy. Thus far, this section has focused on the way in which respect for others emerges from the primary individual good of Montessori’s moral theory, character. But precisely because her moral theory is developed in the context of pedagogy, character is a moral good that teachers must work to protect and promote. And that gives rise to a new relationship between respect and character: acting respectfully towards others is a necessary and even enforceable moral good, since it is required for the creation of a social context within which character can be protected and promoted. Thus teachers have an obligation to ensure that children respect each other (in their actions) *even before* they have developed character; she “must not only not interfere when the child is concentrating, she must also see that [the child] is not disturbed,” which will require that she “be a policeman” with respect to children that are interfering with others (1946:229). This teacherly emphasis on respect as a condition of possibility of cultivating character has two important implications. First, it shows that respect is an *independent moral good*. Those without character have a moral obligation to respect others, even if this respect does not flow from their deepest personality. Such moral agents will be incomplete and conflicted; they will never have the thoroughgoing respect for others of one with character. But they must exhibit as much respect as they can, for the sake of those others. Second, as I will emphasize more below, the *focus* of respect is on human agents *as attentive workers*. The object of respect is not human “choice” per se, but specifically – at least for the most basic forms of respect – the exercise of choice in concentrated work.

<sup>32</sup> To a considerable extent, both forms of respect are developed simply through life in a community of others. In the case of general respect, the basic facts of the environment – such as scarcity of materials – combined with the spirit of respectfulness engendered by the development of character can take students a considerable way towards understanding and practicing respect. But some explicit instruction in respectful interaction is an important part of Montessori’s pedagogy, and this is particularly important with respect to norms of propriety and good manners, which are culturally-relative and in that sense arbitrary (recall note 30). All such lessons in mutual respect, grace, and courtesy are offered to those with character in a helpful rather than disciplinary spirit; they are responses to children’s already-present desire for specific norms to which they can aspire in their efforts to show respect to their peers.

<sup>33</sup> Moreover, character is particularly conducive to mutual respect in the context of a properly prepared environment. Essential to this environment is that it be *social*. “Our [children] live always in an active community” (AbsMind 225), and they are thus forced to learn the virtues needed for such a life:

Many people object that my method does not educate the social sense. They argue that if children instruct themselves individually, later on they will never be at ease in society, for they must live in society, not in solitude ... These are unfounded objections, for what do the children do in our schools? Do they not live together; do they grow up in solitude? ... The children come to our schools and together grow up well equipped for social life. If social virtues need to develop, they will do so at that moment which children must of themselves adapt themselves to these virtues. Rather, I would make this objection: How can you wish to prepare children for social life by leaving

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them seated in benches and forcing them to do what you command? What will these children do when they go away free? (1913:265)

The environment is specifically set up to encourage the sorts of “conflicts” that prompt awareness of the need to respect others, and in those contexts, one can largely trust children with character to develop their own moral sense. Montessori explains the effects of scarcity of materials, for example, in a well-ordered classroom:

There is only one specimen of each object, and if a piece is in use when another child wants it, the latter – if he is normalized [that is, has character] – will wait for it to be released. Important social qualities derive from this. The child comes to see that he must respect the work of others, not because someone has said that he must, but because this is a reality that he meets in his daily experience. There is only one between many children, so there is nothing for it but to wait. And since this happens every hour of the day for years, the idea of respecting others, and of waiting one’s turn, becomes an habitual part of life which always grows more mature. (AbsMind 223-24)

Given a lack of materials, there is “nothing for it” but to respect others work. Of course, there are other options. A child could seize another’s materials by force or hoard material for himself even when not using it. But for a “normalized” child, one with *character*, these are not real options. There is no motivation for hoarding, not only because the effort of protecting one’s goods would be wasted from the stand-point of attentive work, but also because the norms internal to work with material include the precise replacement of the work to its proper place after one’s activity.

<sup>34</sup> At least, when this assistance is unnecessary. Assisting a person who is genuinely in need of help can be respectful, but even in those cases, help should always be given in a way that maximizes the contribution of effortful work by the person one helps.

<sup>35</sup> While avoidance of interference and interruption captures the core concept of respect, it also involves affective dimensions. Thus respect includes a feeling of mutual esteem for others *qua* agents, what Steven Darwall has called “recognition respect” (Darwall 1977). As Montessori puts it, “Finally, the children come to know one another’s characters and to have a reciprocal feeling for each other’s worth” (AbsMind 227). Respect also brings an absence of envy and jealousy, and even that “appraisal respect” (Darwall 1977) that consists in “admiration for the best. Not only are these children free from envy, but anything well done arouses their enthusiastic praise” (AbsMind 231, cf. MM 347). For those who lack character, even when such peers express disrespect for others and “disturb the class,” the dominant mood is pity rather than resentment: “[the respectful child] has felt pity for [the disruptive one],” and Montessori suggests that this is a childish insight from which we should learn: “How the world would change if wickedness always awakened pity” (AbsMind 229-230).

Moreover, besides paradigmatic and negative forms of respect as non-interference with the free activity of others, Montessori adds that respecting others’ work can, at times, involve directly helping them. Because of the dangers of unnecessary assistance,<sup>35</sup> she distinguishes between “service” and “help.” Service involves doing something *for* another, and it “suffocates their useful, spontaneous activity” by treating them like “puppets [or] dolls.” Help, by contrast, is always directed towards “*helping him* to make a conquest of such useful acts as nature intended he should perform for himself” (MM 97). We all too often serve in place of helping:

The mother who feeds her child without making the least effort to teach him to hold the spoon for himself and to try to find his mouth with it, and who does not at least eat herself, inviting the child to look and see how she does it, is not a good mother. She offends the fundamental human dignity of

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her son,—she treats him as if he were a doll, when he is, instead, a man confided by nature to her care. (MM 98)

By contrast, one who keeps the centrality of character in mind will offer only such assistance as can enable another to exert himself in persistent, concentrated, and norm-governed activity.

<sup>36</sup> Relatedly, one ought to care for the environment in a way that avoids inhibiting the self-directed work of (oneself and) others (see AbsMind 220 for how this flows directly from character). In the case of children, this means putting work back where it was found and in good order for the next child to take it up. In the case of adults, this would mean working in the world in a way that leaves the world in a condition in which others can also thrive. One ought not overuse scarce resources, etc.

<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless (recall footnote 31), respect is a more necessary good, in that mutual respect provides a condition for the possibility of the establishment of character. For that reason, some degree of respectful action can be required and enforced within communities.

<sup>38</sup> The universal nature of this respect also marks a contrast between Montessori and the more communitarian and aristocratic perfectionism of Aristotle. And the emphasis on respecting each individual person as a unique individual engaged in her own unique projects aligns this aspect of Montessori's views with Kant's rather than, say, with utilitarian moral theories. Like Kant, then, Montessori insists that one's actions – including one's pursuit of perfection – be harmonized with the requirement that one respect others. Just as, for Kant, one ought always “so act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in that of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (G 4:429), so with Montessori one must respect the activities of others even while one pursues one's own. Her two-fold emphasis – on *not infringing* on others' humanity and on *directly promoting* others' humanity – even fits Kant's own distinction between perfect and imperfect duties (in G 4:422) or between duties of right and duties of virtue (see MS 6:239-40). And while the requirements of character are psychologically more fundamental within Montessori's ethical ideal, respects “trumps” character both in that people must show respect whether they have character or not (see note 33) and in that even when people are exercising their characters – pursuing their chosen perfections – they ought not do so in way that disrespects others. In that way, respect is a categorical imperative.

Montessori's conception of respect differs from Kant's, however, in several respects. For one thing, Montessori includes both *Kantian* and what we might call *communitarian* conceptions of respect (see discussion in note 32). Respect for others requires conformity to a universal principle of respect for humanity but also incorporates particular norms of individual societies. Montessori can thereby make sense of why diverse individuals feel the ethical pulls of diverse traditional values in the deep ways that they do. Without conflating norms of grace and courtesy with universal forms of respect necessary for any social life at all, she can and does give them moral importance.

More importantly, Montessori's conception of the “humanity” that one must respect is importantly different from than Kant's. In one important respect, her notion of humanity gives a *narrower* scope for respect than his. For Kant, one ought to respect others' capacities for choice and thus not interfere with or compromise others' ability to pursue objects of their choice in the ways they choose to pursue them (as long as they do not wrong others). Further, one ought to make some efforts towards positively advancing others' happiness, that is, the sum of objects for which they “wish and will” (CPrR 5:124). For Montessori, however, there is an important distinction within “objects” of choice between *actions* – and particularly the norm-governed, progress-oriented actions in which work consists – and mere *preferences for ends*. Thus Montessori would distinguish between a child's choice to work with a

particular material and that same child's choice of a particular flavor of ice cream or particular TV show to watch. There might be contexts in which individual's choices of mere *ends* are worthy of respect, but in general, respect for others fundamentally involves respect for their *work*, not for choice as such. Thus we ought avoid interference with the *work* of others, not their mere preferences, and we should actively promote others' opportunities for work, not their mere happiness. There is a fundamental difference between a person's choice of *ice cream*, which is a mere preference, and her choice of a particular occupation, hobby, or project. In that sense, Montessori's respect for others has a narrower focus than Kant's.

In another important respect, however, Montessori's conception of humanity is *broader* than Kant's. For Kant, we ought to respect only agents that have a capacity for reason-guided reflection, and – on some readings – only those choices made or endorsed in the context of that reflection. Thus for him, there would be a fundamental difference between a *child's* choice of ice cream, which need not be respected, and an *adult's* choice, which must be, because the adult, but not the child, makes the choice in the context of (a capacity for) reason-guided reflection. Relatedly, one ought to respect adults' deliberate choices made in the context of reflection more than (or even rather than) their immediate intentions, even when those immediate intentions are part of attentive work (or flow). Montessori does distinguish between choices rooted in reason and reflection and those that are not, and she even allows that that adult agency is fuller than children's, in some respects, by virtue of its greater reason-guidedness. But for her, the bare capacity for norm-governed work is, for her, an agency worthy of direct respect, even without any invocation of reason or reflection.<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, not only does the proper *object* of respect not require reflection, the *nature* of respect is not first and foremost a matter of *maxims* endorsed on reflection but rather of a set of *patterns of respectful behavior* (waiting patiently, helping, etc.) and *feeling* (esteem, admiration, patience, etc.). As the child matures, these patterns of behavior become incorporated into reflectively endorsed principles and explicit codes, but those laws are only a way of making explicit what is already implicit in well-governed behavior, and they never exhaust what is required by respect. One with coarse or envious feelings towards others, clumsy interactions with them, and habits of interference, even should he have the best maxims, fails to “respect” them in Montessori's sense. Respect is not a commitment made in reflection but a whole way of life, and it is directed not only towards rationally guided and reflectively endorses choices but towards any manifestation of character is sustained, concentrated, freely-chosen, effortful activity.

Finally, Montessori rejects Kant's account of obligation as requiring inner conflict. In keeping with Romantic and later Idealist critiques of Kant (e.g. Schiller, Hegel), Montessori sees respect for others as a natural outgrowth of character, so that one with character need not feel inner conflict about respect.

[P]ersons of strongest character ... feel in themselves a natural attraction toward perfection; [others] are always feeling tempted ... Therefore they need moral support to protect them from temptation..., which demands a constant struggle and defense. The effort to resist evil is regarded as virtuous because it does in fact prevent us from falling into the moral abyss. These sufferers impose rules upon themselves to save them from falling. They attach themselves to someone better than themselves. They pray Omnipotence to help them in temptation. More and more they clothe themselves in virtue, but it is a difficult life. (AbsMind 210)

Like Kant, Montessori sees deference to superior authorities (including God) as a sort of heteronomy, but unlike Kant, she sees the imposition of rules, even a categorical imperative, as equally heteronomous. For

those with character, “Perfection attracts them because it is in their nature. Their search for it is not sacrificial, but is pursued as if it satisfied their deepest longings” (AbsMind 212). In Kantian terms, Montessori respect is a natural *inclination* that arises for one with a properly cultivated character.

In this turn towards a more integrated and unified conception of agency, Montessori can rightly be seen as akin to Aristotle’s virtue ethics, wherein true virtue is distinguished from mere self-control precisely by the lack of inner conflict. But unlike Aristotle, for whom respect for others is at best a component of virtues of justice or generosity, she shares with Kant an insistence that respect is the most important social virtue and must extend to *all* other human beings, treating them as capable agents equal in dignity to oneself. In its content, her virtue ethics is much closer to Kant’s, but in its moral psychology, it is closer to Aristotle’s.

One final difference between Kant and Montessori on respect is worth noting in closing. For Kant, “respect” encompasses the whole of moral theory, and from respect all other virtues derive; for Montessori, it is merely *one* element of a broader ethical vision grounded in character.<sup>38</sup> Thus Kant can say that *the* single categorical imperative is that we “treat humanity ... always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (4:429). Partly this difference is due to Montessori’s Nietzschean conception of character as self-perfection. Merely treating one’s humanity as an end does not quite capture the nature of one’s duties to self, and the need for character cannot easily be reduced to an obligation to cultivate talents as part of some broader self-respect.<sup>38</sup> But even in the context of specifically *social* virtues, Montessori’s moral theory emphasizes not merely *respect* for others but also what she calls “social solidarity,” a deep form of *positive cooperation* with others that extends one’s agency. This aspect of her ethics is more like that of Hegel (see especially his *Philosophy of Right*), with whom she shares a project of incorporating a basically Kantian moral theory into a more comprehensive ethical whole.<sup>38</sup>

Alongside the respect embodied in “a discipline in which each has his different interests” where “each person chooses his work” and “each must do different things ... but ... in harmony” (1946:235), she posits a social solidarity that involves “a true brotherhood ... cemented by affection,” (AbsMind 227), “something that allows easy communication between individuals – sympathy, cooperation, ... *society by cohesion* (1946:233). “[V]italized by a social spirit,” at this stage “It is normal for children to join together” (AbsMind 232; 1946:233) into something akin to a single organism, such that the children can be “compared to the ... cells in ... an organism” (AbsMind 232; cf. EP 25, 62-3). As with the relationship between character and respect, Montessori describes how “Little by little a development occurs in these new children” where mutual respect gives rise to a tendency to “absorb the prevailing sentiments of his group” and give rise to “a more complex kind of unity ..., a higher sentiment like the love we have for a city or a nation” (1946:235-6).<sup>38</sup> For Montessori, in fact, social solidarity is a fruit of character that both relies on and extends it, bringing about a new sort of character, one that is at once social and individual, and a full discussion of social solidarity would involve showing how *this* virtue relates not only to respect but also to character. For the present, however, it is sufficient to note that just as character provides the context for the cultivation of mutual respect and a sense of justice, so too it provides a context for various other social virtues, foremost among which is social solidarity. And in this way, Montessori not only integrates a broadly Nietzschean foundation with Kantian commitments to equal dignity and mutual respect, but incorporates a Hegelian and Marxist commitment to greater social wholes as a fruit of character and respect.

<sup>39</sup> But see Frierson 2015b for discussion of the nuances of Montessori’s approach to empirical psychology.