

# THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHARACTER: EMOTION, IDENTITY AND PHRONESIS

## ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Psychological Development of Character project aims to investigate the factors that motivate moral action in adolescents. Specifically the project will focus on the 'gappiness problem'; addressing what bridges the gap between virtue literacy (knowledge of virtues) and virtuous moral action (acting in a virtuous way). Existing theories of moral action suggest three main factors that may mediate this link; moral identity, moral emotions and moral reasoning. Typically, moral identity refers to how important moral traits are to one's sense of self, moral emotions reflect emotional capacities such as empathy and the ability to comprehend another's emotional state, and moral reasoning refers to the discernment and application of moral principles.

While there is a general consensus that these factors play a role in motivating moral behaviour (with the empirical evidence strongly supporting the first two), it remains unclear how these factors relate to each other and how important they are in predicting moral behaviour, particularly in relation to moral development. In addition, moral reasoning tends to be equated and measured using Neo-Kohlbergian methods, which from an Aristotelian perspective does not necessarily reflect the reasoning suggested by *phronesis* (practical wisdom) which emphasises the ability to integrate and adjudicate moral conflicts.

The project will therefore seek to address the following questions:

- What motivates virtuous behaviour in adolescents? Is it moral emotion, moral identity or moral reasoning? Or a combination of all three factors?
- How do these factors develop between early and late adolescence?
- Does the moral reasoning associated with *phronesis* better predict virtuous moral behaviour and does it help to integrate the existing factors?
- Can these factors be cultivated to enhance moral development, e.g. through school-based interventions?

This research will involve a mixed methods approach using questionnaires, dilemma based tasks, Experience Sampling Methods (ESM), as well as the development of a new *phronesis* measure.

For more information about the project please go to

[www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/phronesis](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/phronesis)

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