A Model of Personality, Temperament and Character.
Brought – Caught – Taught Sought

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Abstract

Despite growing international interest in character education, conceptual confusion persists regarding the relationship between personality, character, and temperament. In both scholarship and educational practice, terms such as *character* and *personality* are often used interchangeably, and their boundaries remain poorly defined. This ambiguity is especially problematic in German-speaking contexts, where *Persönlichkeitsbildung* ("personality education") appears to conflict with psychological accounts that treat personality as largely innate and only minimally educable. At the same time, neo-Aristotelian approaches view character as a morally evaluable and malleable subset of personality, generating a tension: How can character be cultivated if it is embedded within a predominantly inborn personality structure?

This article proposes an integrative model that resolves this contradiction by drawing on Cloninger's psychobiological framework. Personality is conceptualised as comprising two main components: temperament—the primarily heritable, automatic dispositions individuals *bring* into life—and character, the intentional, self-regulatory, and morally evaluable domain shaped through educational processes. This view aligns with behavioural-genetic findings that around half of personality variance is genetically influenced, leaving substantial room for nurture.

By interpreting personality development through the familiar categories of *caught*, *taught*, and *sought*, alongside the *brought* dimension of temperament, the model provides a possible foundation for character education and offers an interpretation of *Persönlichkeitsbildung* that might be more compatible with neo-Aristotelian character education theory.

Introduction[1]

Despite growing international interest in character education, conceptual clarity regarding the terms *character*, *personality*, *temperament*, and related concepts remains underdeveloped in both educational discourse and professional practice, as has been pointed out in the last years: Terms such as *character* and *personality* are frequently used interchangeably (Banicki, 2017), and their relationship "remains poorly defined" (Aluri & Le, 2022, 1), a lack of clarity that might have consequences since teachers, parents and policymakers often misunderstand the concept of character, leading to conceptual ambiguities and recurrent controversies (Arthur, 2019, 5). The challenge is particularly pronounced in German-speaking contexts, where the dominant educational term *Persönlichkeitsbildung* ("personality education") contrasts with the English-speaking world's term *character education*.

A widely held assumption is that personality is not an object of education. In psychology, personality is often conceived as a constellation of relatively stable, partly inborn dispositions (e.g. Neyer & Asendorpf, 2018; Roberts & Yoon, 2022) that "are probably not modifiable through mere acts of reason" (Kristjánsson, 2010, 26). Character-education scholarship, however, conceptualizes character as a morally evaluable subset, subclass, or dimension of personality (Arthur, 2017, 36; Kristjánsson, 2015, 18; Kristjánsson, 2010, 27). At the same time, neo-Aristotelian accounts insist that character is malleable, which raises an intuitive tension: if personality is not educable, but character is a component of personality—and if character is educable—how should educators make sense of this relationship?

How might this be resolved? There is a conceptual framework in character education literature in which personality forms the outermost layer, within which character is situated, and at an even deeper level is the self located. The difficulty with this model lies in the fact that the notion of personality is often derived from a value-free psychological tradition, particularly from trait theory, which explicitly excludes moral evaluation. If one adopts this value-neutral psychological understanding, personality cannot meaningfully serve as the overarching category for character.

At the same time, alternative psychological accounts exist that treat personality as a broader, explicitly value-laden construct encompassing both temperament and character. These more holistic approaches may provide a more coherent and fruitful foundation for contemporary character-education scholarship. Thus, drawing on existing literature from both character education and personality psychology, this paper critically examines these traditions and proposes an integrative conceptual model of personality that incorporates character and temperament in a way that might be educationally

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[1] AI tools were used for language refinement and editorial assistance; all conceptual content was developed by the authors.

practical. In addition, it extends the familiar triadic framework of *caught, taught, and sought* by introducing a fourth dimension—*brought*—which refers to temperament.

Personality, Character, Temperament and the Self

The study of personality, character, temperament, and the self is carried out in several academic disciplines. In philosophy, especially within neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics, renewed attention has been given to character and its cultivation (Kristjánsson, 2015). Personality psychology, by contrast, focuses on describing the distribution of individual differences—particularly the Big Five personality traits—across populations (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2018). Positive psychology has contributed large-scale conceptual and empirical work on virtues and character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), while genetics and biophysiology have developed temperament–character models such as the Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI; Garcia et al., 2022). Clinical psychology and psychiatry investigate pathological personality patterns (Moreira et al., 2020; 2021), educational psychology examines for example how personality traits relate to performance (Meyer et al., 2019), and economics studies how personality predicts socio-economic outcomes (Roberts et al., 2007; Eley et al., 2022). Finally, in education, character has experienced a significant revival over the past decades (Arthur, 2019; Arthur et al., 2017; Berkowitz et al., 2020; Fernandez et al., 2024; Kristjánsson, 2015, 2020; Lickona, 1993; McGrath, 2018).

In the English-speaking world, considerable conceptual clarification has been achieved concerning the nature of character and the practice of character education (Arthur et al., 2017; Jubilee Centre, 2022; Kristjánsson, 2015). It is now well established that character is *caught, taught, and sought*—character develops through cultural immersion and role-modelling (*caught*), explicit instruction and guided practice (*taught*), and the individual's own motivation, reflection, and aspiration (*sought*). What remains less clearly articulated, however, is how the concept of personality fits into this educational framework, and how the more genetically rooted components of personality—often referred to in the psychological literature as temperament—shape or constrain the character education of young people.

Layers of Personhood in the Character-Education Literature

Character-education theorists have proposed a typology of personhood that distinguishes three overlapping levels: personality, character, and the self (Arthur et al., 2017; Kristjánsson, 2010). In this model (Figure 1), personality constitutes the broadest outer layer; character forms an inner layer within personality; and the self occupies the deepest level.
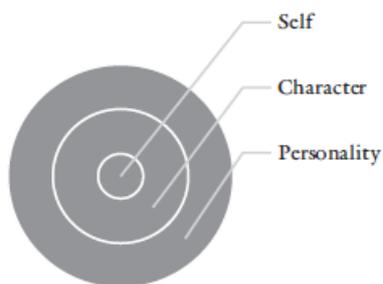
Figure 1: Three layers of personhood, Arthur et al., 2017, 36.

As Arthur et al. (2017, 36) state: "Character traits form a subset of the general personality traits, and the most highly developed of those are the so-called virtues." Character is thus associated with what is central to a person—their evaluative commitments, beliefs, and feelings—making it "deeper" than personality (Arthur, 2019, 9). The self is understood as even more fundamental, since it is the domain of genuinely self-shaping traits, choices, and commitments (Kristjánsson, 2010). Character education, by definition, addresses the character layer and "rarely penetrates to the deepest level of personhood" (Arthur et al., 2017, 37). Nevertheless, it has been argued that in early childhood development, character education may influence all layers of personhood.

In German-speaking contexts, the dominance of the term *Persönlichkeitsbildung* (personality education) sits uneasily with the idea—common in some psychological traditions—that personality is largely innate and therefore not readily modifiable. Kristjánsson (2010, 26) indeed describes personality traits as "hard to educate into or out of people"—in saying this, he seems to start from a value free idea of personality that exists within psychology and that is operationalized mainly through descriptively defined traits such as the Big Five.

However, if personality includes general dispositions, while character includes morally evaluable traits (virtues and vices), and character is said to be a subset of personality, does this imply that virtues are also part of personality? Historically, psychology avoided such questions. Allport famously argued that character belonged to philosophy rather than psychology (Allport, 1921; 1937), which contributed to the dominance of value-free personality research. Traits were treated as descriptive and morally neutral, aligning psychology with logical positivism (Arthur, 2019). As a result, character "fell out of favor" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, 55), leaving its study primarily to philosophy, since character, unlike personality, is inherently normative. It concerns the moral worth, responsibility, and evaluative excellence of a person (Banicki, 2017). It has been pointed out that the problem of psychological models that aim to be "value-free" or "amoral"—such as those focusing exclusively on non-moral personality traits like the Big Five—is that they cannot distinguish between a moral person and an unscrupulous one—e.g., a clever but unscrupulous drug baron who possesses emotional intelligence admirably, or the grit of a repeat offender (Kristjánsson, 2015, 4).

However, within psychology there are alternatives since the strict value-neutral stance in psychology has softened. Positive psychology reintroduced character, virtues, flourishing, and well-being—explicitly moral and evaluative constructs (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Similarly, in the psychobiological Cloninger model, the "character" domain of personality is explicitly value-laden and oriented toward defining and promoting human flourishing, describing "the dispositions to the good and joyful life" (Cloninger & Cloninger, 2020, 78). These developments raise the question, if such an integrative model—where personality includes both temperament (predominantly innate), and character (malleable and value-laden) align better with the conceptual needs of contemporary character-education theory.

The following sections explore this possibility by proposing a model of personality, drawing on the Cloninger model.

The psychobiological model of Personality: Character and Temperament

Although we—the authors—do not claim any particular expertise in Cloninger's framework, we propose that his model might provide a more promising foundation for an integrated, non–value-free conception of personality that is more compatible with Aristotelian character education and thus might work for an integrated model easily understandable for teachers.

We begin by pointing to the fact, that behavioral-genetic research frequently concludes that approximately 50% of the variance in personality traits is attributable to genetic differences (Neyer & Asendorpf, 2018). Large-scale twin and adoption studies find up to 50% of the variance in Big Five traits genetically influenced (Wiltink et al., 2006). Zwir et al. (2018) reports heritability estimates between 30% and 60%, which means that between 40% and 70% of personality can be attributed to nurture. This dual influence accords well with Cloninger's two-domain structure of personality. The psychobiological model (Cloninger, 1994; Cloninger, Svrakic & Przybeck, 1993) that is explicitly normative rather than value-neutral, has been designed to measure qualities associated with psychological health, moral functioning, and human flourishing (Cloninger, 2004, 2006; Cloninger & Zohar, 2011), aligning it with virtue ethics and with strands of positive psychology that examine character strengths, well-being, and human potential. In this sense, Cloninger's framework provides conceptual space for evaluating what kind of personality constitutes a good or flourishing human life.

The model divides personality into two interacting domains associated with distinct learning systems:

1. Temperament, which refers to automatic, emotionally driven dispositions that are largely heritable or established early in childhood

2. Character—as the intentional, self-regulatory, value-laden capacities of a person

Together, temperament and character form a dynamic system in which temperament provides the biological "energy" or tendencies of behavior, while character provides the moral and psychological "governance". Temperament is seen as moderately heritable, develops early in life, and remains meta-stable across the lifespan (Eley et al., 2022). Cloninger identifies four temperament dimensions, each associated with specific emotional systems and neurobiological pathways—Novelty Seeking (NS), Harm Avoidance (HA), Reward Dependence (RD), and Persistence (PS) (Moreira et al., 2020). Temperament thus provides the biologically grounded "raw material" of personality—the tendencies and sensitivities through which character must operate.

Character, by contrast, can be understood as the deliberate, value-oriented dimension of personality, reflecting the aspects that individuals purposefully shape and develop through intentional and creative effort (Cloninger & Cloninger, 2020,78, Cloninger, 1994). Character regulates and integrates temperamental impulses by aligning them with goals, values, commitments, and moral ideals and it is structured into three dimensions—Self-Directedness (SD), Cooperativeness (CO), and Self-Transcendence (ST) (Garcia et al., 2022)—dimensions seen as the psychological processes necessary for mental self-government and the formation of a mature identity.

Personality, in Cloninger's model, emerges from the dynamic interaction of temperament and character and can be defined as "one´s characteristic way of thinking, feeling, and behaving" (Moreira et al., 2021, 856). Moreira et al. (2022a, 1248) emphasize that the development of personality is shaped by complex, non-linear interdependencies between these the two components: temperament and character. Thus, temperament provides the impulses, character provides the governance—and in this sense, the model integrates biological, psychological, and moral dimensions into a coherent psychobiological system. Personality is not merely descriptive; it is inherently developmental and evaluative, aiming at well-being, maturity, and virtue.

An Integrated Model: Personality as Brought, Caught, Taught, and Sought

Building on the analysis that was made so far and consistent with the character-education literature, we propose an integrated model of personality that includes temperament, character, and the self, and that interprets personality development through the fourfold framework of *brought, caught, taught,* and *sought*.
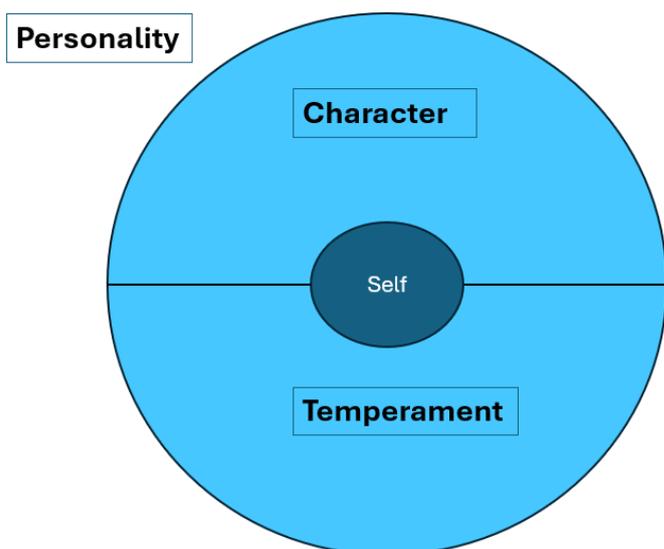
Figure 2: Relation between personality, character and temperament, own illustration.

We understand personality as the overarching concept encompassing both temperament (dispositions that are largely heritable or established early in childhood) and character (the intentional, morally evaluable, and educable domain), with the self as the innermost evaluative core. The fact that the line between temperament and character is drawn roughly through the middle of the model reflects the above-mentioned findings in personality psychology indicating that approximately 50% of personality variance is genetically influenced, while the remaining 50% is shaped by environmental, social, and developmental factors (Cloninger, 1994; Neyrer & Asendorp, 2019).

Temperament forms the foundation and constitutes what individuals bring into life by their genes and early childhood experiences. It can be called the raw material upon which individuals work when shaping their character. Temperament lacks "intentional self-control or self-awareness" (Cloninger et al., 2019), which means that it is automatic, reactive and not reason responsive. We might say, drawing on the *caught, taught, and sought* framework, that temperament is predominantly *brought*—the biologically grounded set of emotional and behavioural predispositions which individuals bring with them—it cannot be taught or sought, however, it may somewhat be—as mentioned above—caught in early childhood, but for school based character education, this is not relevant.
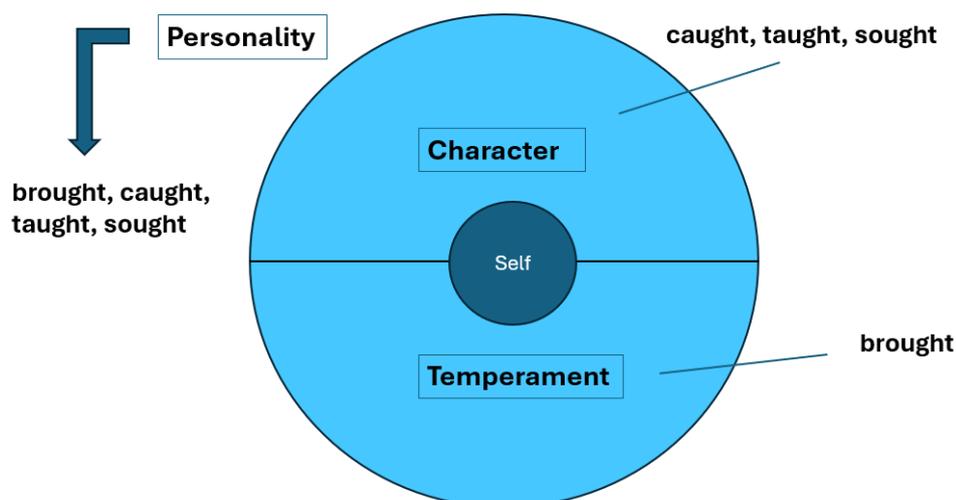
Figure 3: An Integrated Model of Personality, own illustration.

Within personality, character constitutes the intentional, self-regulatory, and morally evaluable domain. It is the arena of free will, moral agency, and self-governance— character is "what individuals make of themselves intentionally in terms of goals and values" (Cloninger, 2003, 160). Character is also the domain that enables the modification and integration of temperamental impulses. In this sense, character regulates temperament (Moreira et al., 2021) through effortful control, the capacity to shift attention, inhibit prepotent responses, and sustain goal-directed action (Wiltink et al., 2006). Stronger effortful control allows individuals to regulate negative affect and channel temperamental tendencies toward constructive and prosocial behaviour.

This conception resonates, in our view, far more strongly with the character-education literature than value-free, positivist accounts of personality. In both traditions, character is explicitly normative and evaluative: it is "morally evaluable and supposed to provide persons with moral worth" (Arthur et al., 2017, 35) and is "potentially reason-responsive" (Kristjánsson, 2010, 27). Character involves "choice and autonomy— to freely choose a way of life is to ensure our actions are guided by intelligence and reason" (Arthur, 2019, 11). It is the "product of reason and freedom" (Arthur, 2019, 13) and "requires sustained effort of the will to act deliberately" (Arthur, 2019, 11). As Arthur observes, our deliberate actions are "acts of self-determination; in them we not only reaffirm what we have been but also determine what we will be in the future" (2019, 159).

On this view, character traits—especially the virtues—orient thought, emotion, and action toward moral excellence. Virtues dispose individuals to respond "at the right times, about the right things, toward the right people, for the right end, and in the right way" (Lamb et al., 2022, 117). Emotional dispositions are thus "reason-responsive and educable; the individual is not simply prey to ungovernable passions" (Kristjánsson, 2015, 28). This explains why individuals who "know and do the right thing but lack the firm and

settled character to do it reliably and consistently" (Lamb et al., 2022, 117) must initially rely on self-control as a temporary substitute for fully developed virtue (Kristjánsson, 2020, 21). The development of character is therefore directed toward a gradual transformation of the emotional make-up (Kristjánsson, 2015), ultimately aiming for a state in which individuals not only act rightly but also desire the good (Arthur, 2019, 29).

Consequently, character can be conceptualised as the morally evaluable and educable dimension of personality—the part that can be caught, taught, and sought. And importantly, the conceptual convergence becomes clear: contemporary personality theories such as Cloninger's and the character-education literature fit together better than value-free conceptions. Both recognise that temperament provides the "brought" emotional baseline of personality, while character represents the intentional, value-laden, and developmentally open dimension through which individuals shape these dispositions toward flourishing. However, the final educational goal, must be to move from mere self-control to genuine virtue, where responses have been trained and harmonised with moral inclinations, such that individuals not only act rightly but also desire the good (Arthur, 2019, 29).

Then there is the self, the innermost layer. The notion of the self penetrates even more deeply into the core of personhood than character, encompassing a person's core commitments, traits, aspirations, and ideals—those aspects of identity that are literally self-shaping (Kristjánsson, 2010). In our model, we locate the self at the very centre of personality. Conceptually, it touches both the temperamental and character dimensions, although the precise boundaries of this relationship may be debated. This is because the self encompasses basic desires, emotional tendencies, and motivational orientations that have biological and temperamental roots, while at the same time being developmentally shaped by moral learning, reflection, and identity formation. In this sense, the self unifies the affective foundations of temperament with the evaluative commitments of character: identity is shaped both by innate tendencies and by chosen, endorsed commitments. Accordingly, the self includes values, ideals, and long-term aspirations that belong to the domain of character. The self is relatively stable across time, yet it remains capable of radical transformation, albeit rarely—through dramatic reorientations of life commitments (Arthur et al., 2017).

Thus one might say that personality is what is brought, caught, taught and sought—temperament being the brought element of personality whereas the morally evaluable part of personality—the character—is caught, taught and sought.

Conclusion

This paper set out to address a conceptual challenge in educational discourse, namely the often cited unclear relationship between personality and character. Traditional trait-theoretical approaches to personality, grounded in the value-free, positivist tradition initiated by Allport, have offered limited usefulness for character education because their

descriptive, morally neutral definitions cannot meaningfully accommodate virtues, moral agency or the development of practical wisdom. As a result, educators—particularly in German-speaking contexts where *Persönlichkeitsbildung* dominates the vocabulary— face an internal contradiction: On the one hand, personality is treated as largely innate and stable, while character is understood as educable, but on the other hand, we are talking about "personality education"—and this tension has perhaps hindered conceptual clarity and pedagogical coherence.

When personality is understood not as a value-free concept, but in line with more recent psychological approaches that are explicitly value-laden and incorporate character—it seems that personality can be integrated into a coherent framework that is perhaps more useful for the character education community and help to understand a person's overall psychological and moral makeup. By drawing on Cloninger's psychobiological model and integrating it with insights from contemporary character-education scholarship, we have proposed an alternative conception of personality that is developmentally oriented. In this integrated model, personality consists of three interrelated components: temperament, which is largely heritable or established early in childhood and captures primarily automatic, emotional dispositions; character, which encompasses the intentional, self-regulatory and morally evaluable domain; and the self, the innermost locus of identity, agency, and aspirational commitments.

Situating temperament and character within a single personality framework resolves the apparent contradiction between what people "bring" with them and what is educable. Temperament forms the biologically grounded raw material—the *brought* element of personality—which cannot be "taught" or "sought" but provides the emotional and motivational substrate on which character builds. Character, by contrast, is the caught, taught, and sought dimension, shaped through culture, instruction, habituation, reflection, and personal aspiration. The self integrates both layers, unifying biological tendencies with endorsed values and long-term commitments.

The model allows educators to acknowledge both the constraints and possibilities inherent in human development in the sense of while temperament sets parameters for emotional reactivity, character enables individuals to regulate, transform, and direct those tendencies toward becoming virtuous. Furthermore, including a *brought* dimension through the concept of temperament may help educators adopt a more realistic and developmentally informed approach to character education. Not everything can be educated. Temperament represents the biological dispositions and emotional–behavioural styles that children bring with them when they enter school; acknowledging this prevents the unrealistic, "rose-tinted" and voluntaristic assumption that character formation is simple or equally within reach for anyone who simply wants it. Recognizing the brought dimension might encourage schools to move beyond one-size-fits-all character programs and toward more individualized and differentiated approaches—

approaches that acknowledge that not all children are the same, nor do they start from the same temperamental foundation.

And finally, this integrated framework may offer a way to conceptually rehabilitate the German term *Persönlichkeitsbildung* (personality education). If personality is understood as comprising both a non-educable dimension (temperament) and an intentional, educable dimension (character), then *Persönlichkeitsbildung* can be interpreted as referring specifically to the development of the educable parts of personality—namely character—through *caught, taught,* and *sought* processes. For this reason, we propose refining the widely used but "far from being clearly defined" (Budde, et al., 2019, 7, translated by the authors) concept of *Persönlichkeitsbildung* so that it explicitly refers to the character-related dimension of personality. Under this clarified definition, *Persönlichkeitsbildung* does not seek to reshape the entire person in an unlimited or perfectionistic manner; rather, it aims at cultivating character virtues within the developmental part of personality set by temperament and individual life history.

By reframing personality as a morally meaningful, developmentally open construct, this model might bridge a gap between different understandings of character and personality. In doing so, it might support a philosophically grounded understanding of what it means to educate the whole person.

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