Journal of the American Philosophical Association (2021) 133–154 © American Philosophical Association
DOI:10.1017/apa.2019.41

The Moral Philosophy of Maria Montessori*

ABSTRACT: *This paper lays out the moral theory of philosopher and educator Maria Montessori (1870–1952). Based on a moral epistemology wherein moral concepts are grounded in a well-cultivated moral sense, Montessori develops a threefold account of moral life. She starts with an account of character as an ideal of individual self-perfection through concentrated attention on effortful work. She shows how respect for others grows from and supplements individual character, and she further develops a notion of social solidarity that goes beyond cooperation toward shared agency. Partly because she attends to children's ethical lives, Montessori highlights how character, respect, and solidarity all appear first as prereflective, embodied orientations of agency. Full moral virtue takes up prereflective orientations reflectively and extends them through moral concepts. Overall, Montessori's ethic improves on features similar to some in Nietzschean, Kantian, Hegelian, or Aristotelian ethical theories while situating these within a developmental and perfectionist ethics.*

KEYWORDS: Maria Montessori, moral philosophy, respect, character, solidarity, Kant

Philosophers have increasingly become interested in voices traditionally marginalized from our canon. Feminist philosophy and race theory provide central perspectives within the discipline. Interest in early modern women philosophers and non-Western philosophy has blossomed. The present essay further broadens the philosophical canon by discussing an insightful early twentieth-century philosopher: Maria Montessori (1870–1952). This essay provides preliminary exposition and analysis rather than critique or exhaustive treatment. Moreover, I freely draw from writings that focus on pedagogy, curriculum, and classroom design; these may not fit common assumptions about philosophical genre, but they offer substantive contributions to philosophical issues. As Lisa Shapiro argues, broadening the canon often requires rejecting the methodological assumption that 'a legitimate philosopher must have written a proper philosophical work, where a proper philosophical work is taken to be a work of a particular genre, the genre of the other great works' (Shapiro 2016: 370).

Despite graduate work in philosophy (Trabalzini 2011) and engagement with philosophers and philosophical themes (Frierson 2014, 2015), Montessori's philosophical thought has not been taken seriously. Some investigate her philosophy

* This article is the eighth in a special series of commissioned articles on women in the history of philosophy. The seventh article 'Émile Du Châtelet on Illusions', by Marcy P. Lascano, appeared in Volume 7, Issue 1, pp. 1–19.

https://doi.org/10.1017/apa.2019.41 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of education, feminism (Babini and Lama 2000), or place in the history of psychology (Babini and Lama 2000; Foschi 2012; Kramer 1975; Trabalzini 2011). But Montessori makes valuable contributions to epistemology (Frierson 2014, 2020), metaphysics (Frierson 2018), philosophy of mind, political philosophy (Adams 2006), and even philosophy of technology. This article focuses on her moral theory. Based on a moral epistemology wherein moral concepts are grounded in a well-cultivated moral sense (Frierson 2015), Montessori develops a threefold account of moral life as requiring individual character (section 1), respect for others (section 2), and social solidarity (section 3). Partly because she attends to children's ethical lives, Montessori highlights how all three elements appear first as prereflective, embodied orientations of agency (section 4). Full moral virtue takes up prereflective orientations reflectively and extends them through moral concepts (section 5). Overall, Montessori's ethic improves on features similar to some in Nietzschean, Kantian, Hegelian, or Aristotelian ethical theories while situating these within a developmental and perfectionist ethics.

1. Character, Work, and Perfection

At its core, Montessori's moral theory is based on an ideal of individual self-perfection through effortful work, which she calls 'the character of individuals' and identifies as 'the source of those moral . . . values which could bring the whole world to a higher plane' (1:217).[1] Character consists in concentration of attention in focused work that arises from an inner impulse to activity and 'gravitates toward the center of perfection' (1:217). Character in this sense is the central value of her moral theory. Consistent with her emphasis on learning moral values from children, she notes that previous moral theories fail to understand properly 'what was meant by character' because 'all of them start with grownups, with adult man' and 'generally overlook the little child' (1:174). By contrast, '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' (1:174).

1.1. Basic Elements of Character

Character essentially consists of the exercise and enhancement of one's individual agency, where *concentration* and *work* are the core expressions of agency. Character requires 'the power . . . to concentrate' and its exercise consists in a 'deep concentration on some activity' that arises when one 'become[s] absorbed in a piece of work that attracts' (1:187, 182, 181). Unlike approaches to agency that emphasize second-order reflective self-governance (e.g., Frankfurt 1971; Korsgaard 2009), Montessorian agency is essentially and primordially a matter of first-order concentration through active engagement in some work to which one is attracted. Rather than a capacity to reflect on whether or not to act on a particular interest, character, for Montessori, is a capacity to act on interests in a

[1] References to Montessori's works are to volume and page number in Montessori (2007–), except where a particular text has not been published in that series.

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focused way. Perfecting 'character', understood as the actualization of this agency, is the goal of both moral life and pedagogy.

Given a pedagogy that emphasizes how 'children construct their own characters' on the basis of an already existent 'tendency, however vague and unconscious, to raise themselves up' (1:187–88), Montessori sees character as such as a 'normality' to 'preserve' rather than as a nonexistent state to bring about (1:217). The establishment of character is a process of 'normalization', 'a psychological recovery, a return to *normal conditions*' (22:133–34, throughout this article, italics in original). 'Normalization' can make Montessorian virtue sound standardizing or repressive, but her point is precisely the opposite. Humans normally have character, but 'abnormal conditions' prevent them from 'giv[ing] expression to the creative energies that naturally belonged to them' (2:41). The results are various 'psychic deviations' or 'repressions' that suppress and stunt character (22:136–37). Creating contexts within which children freely choose and diligently pursue interesting work 'normalizes' them such that already existent character expressed thereby further perfects itself (22:185).

Montessori describes as '*the most important single result of our whole work*' the fact that 'once the children begin to concentrate' 'a unique type of child appears, a "new child" but really the child's true "personality" allowed to construct itself normally' (1:183). Concentration brings normalization; exercising character fosters and strengthens character. The relevant concentration arises in environments that provide developmentally appropriate *work* children choose for themselves: 'Among the revelations the child has brought us, there is one of fundamental importance, the phenomenon of normalization through work. . . . The child's attitude towards work is a vital instinct; for without work his personality cannot organize itself and deviates from the normal lines of its construction' (22:165). While acknowledging that adults often 'want less work', Montessori notes that in her schools, 'we observe something strange[;] left to themselves, the children work ceaselessly . . . [and] after long and continuous activity, the children's capacity for work does not appear to diminish but to improve' (4:86–87). Cultivating character here consists of preventing deviations arising from repressions of character.

The work on which character focuses is 'purposeful activity' (4:86): 'When the attractions of the new environment exert their spell, offering motives for constructive activity, all [the child's] energies combine and the deviations can be dispersed' (1:183). Montessori often contrasts children's work with adult work (21:18–19; 22:161–84); adults, for instance, typically work toward external ends according to a 'law of least effort by which man seeks to produce the most he can working as little as he can', while children have a different 'rhythm' because theirs is 'the work of producing man' (22:166–69). Nonetheless, child and adult are each essentially 'a worker and a producer' (22:169); for both, perfecting character consists in perfecting agency expressed through concentration on purposeful work.

Character includes persistence, 'do[ing] work carefully and patiently' (1:187). Unlike those who 'flit incessantly from one thing to another' (9:51), 'a person of character is able to finish the work he begins' (17:236). Montessori identifies this capacity to 'finish' with the capacity to 'mak[e] a decision': 'persistence [is] the true foundation of

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the will' (17:236, 9:134). The importance of persistence is not unique to Montessori. Aristotelian virtue theories emphasize habits that make up virtuous dispositions, and Kantians argue that agency requires stable principles. Montessori's argument for persistence in self-governance even anticipates contemporary Kantian accounts.

> This quality ['persistence'] is really the exponent of the uninterrupted concord of the inner personality. Without it, a life would be a series of episodes, a chaos; it would be like a body disintegrated into its cells, rather than an organism which persists throughout the mutations of its own material. This fundamental quality . . . is what we have called *character*. The man of character is the persistent man, the man faithful to his own word, his own convictions, his own affections. (9:133; cf. 15:148–49)

Just as Tamar Schapiro claims that only 'a unified, regulative perspective . . . counts as the expression of [one's] will' (1999: 729) and Christine Korsgaard objects to 'particularist willing' (2009: 75–76), so too Montessori requires that the concentration intrinsic to character reflect one's own directed attention and *therefore* be a consistent orientation of the will. Unlike Kantians, she requires neither that persistence involve second-order reflection nor that it extend—or even aim to extend—over one's whole life. Also unlike Kantians, Montessorian persistence is as much about convictions and affections—'the sentiment of the individual and direction of his ideation' (9:133)—as about volitional commitments. But like Schapiro and Korsgaard, Montessori makes persistence central for constituting the self that governs its own work.

Character is not the capacity for persistent concentration on just anything. Attentive work is normatively loaded; it requires standards of perfection to which one aspires. The centrality of standards internal to one's work is reflected in a central feature of Montessori's pedagogy: 'control of error' (1:224). Montessori designed classroom materials such that those using them (usually young children) could discover for themselves how well they use these materials. For example, 'one of the first exercises done by our children is that with a set of cylinders . . . which fit into corresponding sockets in a block of wood. . . . The child begins by fitting them in one at a time, but finds when he comes to the end that he has made a mistake [because] one cylinder is left which is too large for the only remaining hole' (1:225). These materials provide activities wherein error—and thus meaningful success—is recognizable by the agent himself. 'Work', in Montessori's sense, is activity where the agent governs himself by norms for success.

This striving for perfection is not 'dutiful' in the Kantian sense. While requiring '*serious work*' with '*maximum effort*' (9:77), those with character are wholeheartedly 'attracted by perfection' because 'it is in their nature' (1:190):

> There is no force of gravity [against which they must struggle], but a *true* wish to become better. Often there is aspiration without the prospect of absolute perfection, but in any case these people are drawn towards perfection, naturally and without effort. . . . Their search for it is

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> not sacrificial, but is pursued as if it satisfied their deepest longings. (1:189–90)

Wholeheartedness does not imply that pursuit of perfection is easy; precisely the *challenge* of pursuing perfection attracts the children. But this challenge consists in overcoming difficulties of the work, not overcoming conflict among volitions, concerns, or loves. In that way, Montessorian character is more like Aristotelian virtue than mere continence or Kantian duty. Relatedly, young children fitting blocks into holes govern themselves by standards of success while remaining unreflective both in that they do not explicitly articulate those standards and in that they do not reflect on either their interest in this activity or the standards by which it is governed. First-order attention to working well actively conforms to norms without second-order reflection *on* the norms governing the work (cf. Frankfurt 1971; Korsgaard 2009).

1.2. Open-ended Perfectionism

Within Montessori's moral theory, perfection plays several important roles. First, her moral theory is perfectionist in that human excellence 'consists in the development and exercise of one's natural or essential capacities' (Dorsey 2010: 59), in particular one's capacity for self-chosen work, or character. Second, what each individual can and should perfect—character—consists in an orientation toward work that itself seeks perfection. One with character seeks to perform each particular work more perfectly by standards internal to that work. She also seeks, through her work, to increase her own perfection, her own capacity for further self-chosen work. And she seeks progress—including social progress—through her individual efforts. Unlike the perfectionisms of Aristotle or Aquinas—or even Marx or Green—Montessori's is open-ended; that we can and should perfect agency in self-governed work does not dictate *what* work or what kinds of self-governance to perfect: 'Man does not have a precise heredity to do one special thing . . . he is not obliged to do just one thing. . . . Every man must prepare in himself an adaptation that is not hereditary. He must prepare his own adaptation' (17:91). While other animals have specific and determinate 'perfections' of their nature, human beings have none; perfecting one's character involves setting for oneself a determinate 'task' (17:91) that is not itself determined by one's nature.

Open-endedness is not mere situation-dependence. In Aristotle, perfect virtue does not dictate a course of life because what is fitting for a given situation depends upon specific features of that situation. A virtuous person uses phronesis to discern what to do in that situation; indeterminacy arises from situation-dependence. For Montessori, in contrast, character is open-ended; even in a fully specified situation there is no specific course of action that the person with character would follow. Admiral Byrd, one of her exemplars of character, first set foot on the South Pole because he 'felt . . . the attraction of doing something never before done, and so planted his banner among the others in the zone of perfection' (1:191–92). There were, however, other things that had never been done before. Character requires pursuing perfection through work with

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normative standards to which one persistently attends. Adventuring to the South Pole, excelling in portraiture, seeking new principles of chemistry, or investigating moral philosophy can all manifest character.

Despite being open-ended in this way, however, character requires several features. 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' (1:151). 'Normal' childhood is fundamentally a 'conquest of independence' where the child seeks 'to co-ordinate his movements and to bring them under his control' (1:161; see 1:75–86). To have character is (increasingly) to bring oneself and one's environment under agential control.

Beyond independence, perfection includes orientation toward precision: '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. . . . This feeling of enhancing our abilities is the real source of our delight in the game' (1:161). Whether moving blocks or playing sports or composing poetry, one with character aims to engage in activities with exactness. To some extent, 'precision itself . . . hold[s] . . . interest' (1:166), but 'precision' also depends on—and in Montessori's writings stands in for—*internal normative standards* of a particular work. Those with character seek to work *well* (section 1.1), which requires work with demanding internal standards of excellence.

Beyond adhering to internal standards for performing each task well, those with character in the fullest sense seek to perfect *themselves* and even humanity as a whole; they have 'a natural attraction . . . toward perfection', 'a tendency, however vague and unconscious, to raise themselves up' (1:189, 188). Many activities have internal normative standards, but human beings with character seek activities in which they can '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. . . . Someone makes a discovery and society progresses along that line. . . . 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. (1:191)

Beyond 'perfections' internal to particular activities and general perfections of precision and independence, those with character strive for improvement as such (cf. Cavell 2004; Guyer 2014).

Independence, precision, normative standards, and even striving for progress underdetermine character-driven work. 'Progress' varies from person to person and from culture to culture. Admiral Byrd went to the South Pole because this kind of striving for perfection was comprehensible as progress given his individual personality and historical-cultural context. Character-driven writers, dancers, explorers, or scientists all work within a history of exemplars and seek to add to that historic repertoire of excellence, starting by doing what has already been done

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more excellently and rising to desires for new accomplishments recognizably more perfect within existing norms of their 'circle of perfection'. While open-ended in many ways, 'progress' provides an impetus for new tasks and challenges with new internal standards.

This open-ended conception of character provides a valuable focus for contemporary moral sensibilities. We arguably live in an era of 'the ethics of authenticity', wherein 'people are called upon to be true to themselves' (Taylor 1992: 14). Montessorian perfection emphasizes authenticity; the 'good' person pursues his own passions to 'add a point to the circle which fascinate[s] *him*' (1:191; emphasis added). This moral ideal of agency-promoting and authentic but deeply indeterminate pursuit of perfection consists in 'multiplying the forces of the free spirit' in a way that 'is made incarnate by Frederick Nietzsche, in . . . Zarathustra' (Montessori 1912: 69–70; cf. Conant 2010). Like Nietzsche and Emerson (cf. Cavell 2004), Montessori emphasizes how the perfection one pursues need not be 'universal':

> The child . . . makes . . . 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*. (Montessori 1912: 94–95)

However, Montessorian character corrects contemporary emphases on authenticity in several important respects. Most fundamentally, character is normative; it depends upon ideals of perfection. These ideals need not be universal or external to particular activities of self-perfection, but expressing oneself with character is striving for perfection in accordance with norms. Relatedly, hard work is self-expression's proper locus. In contemporary culture, people too often express themselves through consumption (Gilmore and Pine 2007), but Montessori rightly notes that consumptive activity cannot be a form of self-perfection because consumption, however self-directed, fundamentally emphasizes passive enjoyment rather than active work. Moreover, not only is character oriented toward work, but it takes work to develop character. Too often, authenticity is seen as being true to some 'self' one just happens to find oneself to be (Taylor 1992); increasingly, people find themselves at a loss to discern who they are and to be 'true' to that self. 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), that is, consistent and sustained effort toward tasks one considers worth pursuing. Choice of and endurance in work are perfections requiring practice and attention. This is particularly true because, like Nietzsche, Montessori links authenticity and self-*overcoming*. 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' aims for perfections whereby it transcends itself: 'Your true nature . . . lies immeasurably high above you' (Nietzsche 1997: 129). And Montessori recognizes that this process of authentic self-overcoming depends upon strength of character that develops only (or primarily) in childhood because

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authentic self-overcoming—like the moral sense itself (Frierson 2015)— manifests a capacity dependent upon *early exercise*. In a culture that rightly values authenticity, recognizing how authenticity requires normative orientation toward the work of self-perfection invaluably clarifies this moral ideal. Given the widespread malaise when people find themselves unable to realize this ideal, attention to processes by which children's capacities for character can be cultivated contributes to solving important moral crises of our contemporary—post-Nietzschean—world.

Montessori also clarifies and refines her broadly Nietzschean perfectionism by rejecting certain features of Nietzsche's overall approach to morals as 'strange and erroneous even when tested by the very theories . . . which inspired him' (9:257). For instance, she emphasizes how people develop through absorbing and adapting to environments, including cultural environments. Distinctive characters arise from different ways individuals adapt and absorb values. Creativity is never *ex nihilo*.

Even more important, while Montessori endorses a broadly Nietzschean emphasis on self-overcoming toward higher ideals, she sharply rejects Nietzsche's (perceived) failure to connect his *Übermensch* with genuine concern for others. For her, this is not merely a failure of opportunity, but blindness to implications of Nietzsche's own ideal:

> To Friedrich Nietzsche, the superman was an idea without practical consequence. . . . His conception offered no help in overcoming the ills of humanity; rather was it 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. (9:257)

For Montessori, Nietzschean 'egotism' sets its sights too low, binding itself to all-too-narrow scopes for agency rather than taking on the work of overcoming humanity's ills. When considering the attunement that active concentration requires, she asks,

> How could [those with character] 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? . . . It is characteristic of 'life' to purge the environment and the soul of substances injurious to health. . . . . 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. (9:256–57)

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The drive to personal perfection equips individuals with 'feeling' for ills and potentials of others. Striving toward perfection, an ideal rooted in human beings' deepest inner impulses, naturally realizes itself in a project of liberating others.

2. Respect for others

The core value of Montessori's moral theory is character. While it can and should be perfected, preserved, and realized, character is what Kantians call an 'existent end' (Wood 1999: 116) that provides 'personal dignity' worthy of respect (12:60). As character is the fundamental value in Montessori's moral theory, respect is the proper attitude to take toward that value. Section 1 emphasized respect for one's own character in the form of striving for self-perfection. In this section, I show how Montessori extends respect's scope to include others' character-driven activities.

2.1. From Character to Respect

As the most fundamental aspect of moral life, character provides the 'sense of personal dignity' that is one of two 'noble characteristics that would prepare a man to be social', where the second characteristic is 'a sense of justice' (12:60). Ethics does not end with self-perfection through character. Montessori's critique of Nietzschean egoism integrates egalitarian, universal concerns into her ethics. In moral life, 'two things are necessary: the development of individuality and the participation of the individual in a truly social life' (10:52). Character leads to participation in social life, and those with character who find themselves in society develop a sense of justice.

To some extent, Montessori describes the connection between character and respect as an 'experimental fact' (9:52): 'easy adaptation to the social environment' arises 'as a result of the phenomenon of concentration' (17:233).

> After these manifestations [of character] . . . 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. . . . When discipline has been established by 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. (9:70)

'Normalization' generates respect for others. For philosophers like Kant, who see human nature as radically evil (see Formosa 2018; Wood 1999), this empirical claim about effects of character might seem overly 'romantic' or mere wishful thinking. Montessori provides evidence for her empirical claims, and recent work provides further support for them (see Lillard 2007), but further empirical work needs to be done.

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Beyond straightforward empirical correlation, some features of character lend themselves to the extension of respect. Because character is a pursuit of perfection, it requires and fosters conceptions of what is admirable. Those with character value norm-governed work toward ideals of perfection, and those who aspire to perfection come to admire, respect, and be inspired by others' similar pursuits. Montessori offers neither a conceptual argument like Gewirth's 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: 62–63) nor even a Korsgaardian claim about what is constitutive of human reasoning as such (Korsgaard 2009). Her essentially psychological claim lays out perceptions of moral sense as it develops in children in conditions conducive to its exercise (see Frierson 2015). Like Gewirth and Korsgaard, however, she highlights how striving toward perfection pushes beyond each individual. We naturally see others' pursuit of perfection as equal in value to our own, which gives rise to a commitment to respect and admire it.

Moreover, because character seeks perfection with an indeterminate object, social life itself can become its object; one can seek perfection in social intercourse. Those with character actively involved in social life seek to engage in that life increasingly excellently. They seek to know, conform to, and improve standards of excellence for social interactions, preeminent among which are norms of mutual respect.

Character particularly promotes respect given properly prepared social environments where daily life provides opportunities to exercise social virtues. Montessori described 'the meaning of morality' as 'our relation with other people and our adaptation to life with other people'.

> If the different individuals have to live harmoniously in one society, with a common aim, there must be a set of rules which we call morality. . . . [Morality is] . . . a technique which allows us to live together harmoniously . . . a form of adaptation to a common life for the achievement of a common aim. (Montessori 1984: 15)

Children learn this morality through actually living together (1:203), and Montessori designed her classroom environment to encourage the 'conflicts' that prompt awareness of the need to respect others (see Krogh 1981). In those contexts, normalized children develop their own moral sense: 'If social virtues need to develop, they will do so at that moment when children must of themselves adapt themselves to these virtues' (18:265). Montessori defends scarcity of materials, for example, in moral terms:

> 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—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 he meets in his daily experience. There is only one between many children, so there is

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> 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 a habitual part of life which always grows more mature. (1:202)

Given scarcity, there is 'nothing for it' but to respect others' work. Respect describes how a community of character-driven activity functions; it is not a command from God or parents, an abstract requirement of practical reason, or a way to promote hedonic happiness.

2.2. The Nature of Respect

For Montessori, 'studying . . . these children and their mutual relationships in an atmosphere of freedom, the true secrets of society come to be revealed' (1:206), such as that 'society does not rest on personal wishes, but on a combination of activities which have to be harmonized' (1:202). Within what we might call Montessori's 'social contract', the fundamental good of society is harmony of activity, rather than maximization of preference-satisfaction or even securing of rights to choose as such. Respect, as the means for securing this harmony, is morally required.

Because Montessorian respect focuses on harmony of activity, its objects are activities—not wishes or preferences—of others. Interference and interruption, even to aid, are paradigmatic forms of disrespect. Montessori compares interruption of the child to 'the manner of masters to slaves who have no human rights' (9:15). She insists, 'He who interrupts children in their occupations in order to make them learn some pre-determined thing . . . confuses the means with the end and destroys the man for a vanity' (9:134). Throughout her pedagogy, Montessori describes interruption and unnecessary help as among the most severe errors caregivers make with children. Her moral philosophy explains why. Exercising effort toward achieving worthwhile goals is the core of character. In 'those marvelous moments when their attention is fixed', children who are 'roughly interrupted' can rightly object that their *wills* are thwarted (9:16). When 'interrupted . . . they lose all the characteristics connected with *an internal process regularly and completely carried out*' (9:74). Most basically, moral respect is respecting others in their effortful work.

Besides noninterference with others' free activity, respecting others can, at times, involve directly helping them. Highlighting dangers of unnecessary assistance, Montessori distinguishes 'service' from 'help'. Service consists of doing something *for* another; it 'suffocates their useful, spontaneous activity' by treating them like 'puppets [or] dolls' (Montessori 1912: 97). Help, by contrast, '*help*[*s*] *him* to make a conquest of such useful acts as nature intended he should perform for himself' (Montessori 1912: 97); it responds to an urge that became an articulated request among children in Montessori's schools: 'help me to do it by myself' (22:175; cf. 4:6; 10:97). Unfortunately, adults 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 . . . is not a good mother. She offends

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> the fundamental human dignity of her son,— she treats him as if he were a doll, when he is, instead, a man confided by nature to her care. (Montessori 1912: 98)

By contrast, normalized children 'respect one another's efforts, and give help only when it is necessary', such as when 'there is a mishap, like the breaking of a vase', and 'the child who has dropped it is desperate [and] . . . feels ashamed' (1:207–208). In a healthy environment conducive to character, children show respect. This respect is agency-centered, offer necessary help but not service, condemns interruption, and protects each child's ability to do his own work. Montessori's experiences and experiments throughout the world showed this 'normal' form of mutual respect as a universal feature of healthy social life.

Montessorian respect for others has affective dimensions. Respectful people esteem others *qua* agents with 'recognition respect' (Darwall 1977: 38): 'Children come to know one another's characters and to have a reciprocal feeling for each other's worth' (1:205). Free from envy or jealousy, respect also includes that 'appraisal respect' (Darwall 1977: 39) that consists in 'admiration for the best. Not only are these children free from envy, but anything well done arouses their enthusiastic praise' (1:209). Finally, as we will see in more detail in section 3, character-driven respect is infused with 'affection' and 'true brotherhood' (1:205).

2.3. Montessori and Kant on respect

While Montessori's character-based emphases on individuality, progress, and perfection resonate with Nietzschean perfectionism, her conception of respect, like Kant's, requires one to subordinate one's actions—including one's pursuit of perfection—to obligations of respect for others. Just as for Kant, one ought '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' (Kant 1900: 4: 429), so with Montessori one must respect others' activities even while pursuing one's own. Her two-fold emphasis—not infringing on and directly promoting others' agency—even fits Kant's distinction between perfect and imperfect duties (4:421–23, cf. Guyer 2014: 13).

Moreover, while character is the fundamental value in Montessori's moral theory, respect 'trumps' character in that people must show respect whether they have character or not. Because Montessori develops her moral theory in the context of pedagogy, she emphasizes that teachers must protect and promote character. Teachers—and others with responsibilities for protecting human rights—must ensure that even individuals without character respect others in their actions; the teacher '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 those who interfere with others (17:229). Even if mere respectful behavior is not real respect, Montessori also describes people who 'impose rules upon themselves to save them from falling', and while such people fall short of her moral ideal, Montessori nonetheless describes them as having 'virtue' (1:189). Respectful moral agents without character are incomplete and conflicted, but they

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still ought to exhibit respect for others. Character is a perfectionist ideal, while respect is a categorical imperative.

Montessori's conception of respect differs from Kant's, however, in several respects. Kantian moral respect encompasses the whole of moral theory, while Montessorian respect is one element of a broader theory. Kantian respect is also broader than Montessorian when identifying what in others should be respected. For Kant, one ought to respect others' capacities for choice and thus not interfere with or compromise their ability to pursue objects of their choice in ways they choose (as long as they do not wrong others). Further, one ought to make some efforts toward positively advancing others' 'happiness', understood as the sum of objects for which they 'wish and will' (Kant 1900: 5: 124). Montessori distinguishes, among 'objects' of choice, between actions—particularly norm-governed, progress-oriented actions—and mere preferences for ends. Thus, she would distinguish a child's choice of a particular work from that same child's choice of a particular TV show or flavor of ice cream. In some contexts, we should respect individual choices of mere ends, but respect for others fundamentally requires respect for their *activity*, not mere choices. In that sense, Montessorian respect for others has a narrower—and different—focus than Kant's.

In another way, Montessorian respect has broader application than Kant's; she insists on respect for all expressions of character, while Kant requires respect only for agents with a capacity for reason-guided reflection, and—on some readings—only for those choices made or endorsed in the context of that reflection. Thus for Kant, there is 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) reflection governed by a second-order faculty of practical reason (see Schapiro 1999; Grenberg 2018). 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. As we will see (section 5), Montessori distinguishes between choices rooted in reason and reflection and those that are not, and she even allows that adult agency is fuller, in some respects, because guided by more abstract rational considerations, but the bare capacity for norm-governed activity is nonetheless agency worthy of direct respect. We can and should respect children's character-driven work, and we should respect adults' unreflective activities, when—as in cases of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990)—these activities express character.

Relatedly, as we will see (section 4), Montessorian respect is not foremost a matter of maxims but of patterns of respectful behavior (waiting patiently, helping, etc.) and feeling (esteem, admiration, patience). As children mature, these patterns become incorporated into laws and explicit codes of behavior, but those only make explicit what is implicit in well-governed behavior, and they never exhaust what is required by respect. One with respectful maxims but coarse or envious feelings, clumsy interactions, and habits of interference, fails to 'respect' others in Montessori's sense. Respect is not a commitment made in reflection but an embodied way of life.

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Finally (cf. section 1), Montessori rejects accounts of obligation that require inner conflict. In keeping with Romantic and later idealist critiques of Kant (e.g., Schiller, Hegel), she sees respect for others as a natural outgrowth of character. Because respect is necessary for all, those who lack character must make an 'effort to avoid evil' and 'impose rules upon themselves to save them from falling' (1:189), but these are second-best measures to preserve social goods given the lack of a sufficiently well-developed character that would immediately and wholeheartedly respect others.

3. Social Solidarity

3.1 From Respect to Solidarity

Respect moves Montessori's moral theory beyond the egocentrism that many (including Montessori) associate with Nietzschean perfectionism. Even with the addition of respect, however, her moral theory might seem overly individualist, as though our responsibilities are to promote our own perfection, avoid interfering with others, and provide limited but necessary help to others pursuing their individual projects. The third feature of Montessori's moral theory shatters this individualism by highlighting deep forms of shared agency beyond mutual respect or even mere cooperation. This 'third thing' is 'harmony between people who work together' and 'work in a group' (17:234–35). As children develop morally, they embrace social ideals of solidarity such as positive cooperation, a 'real harmony' that goes beyond mere 'patience and respect' (17:234). This development of character beyond the individual, however, comes not as a limitation to individual agency but rather as an extension, broadening, and deepening of agency. While not yet the social organization of adults (see section 5), early social cohesion provides an affective and active foundation for shared agency.

To return to a quotation already examined above in the context of respect, Montessori notes that as character develops, 'there is a mutual respect *and affection* between the children, a *sentiment which unites* instead of separating' (9:70; emphasis added). Earlier, I highlighted the respect whereby children work side by side, but Montessori also highlights an 'affection' that binds children together into a single social unit. Respect involves 'a discipline in which each has his different interests', 'each person chooses his work', and 'each must do different things . . . but . . . in harmony' (17:235). Social solidarity, by contrast, involves 'a true brotherhood . . . cemented by affection' (1:205), 'something that allows easy communication between individuals—sympathy, cooperation, . . . *society by cohesion* (17:233). 'Vitalized by a social spirit', at this stage 'children join together' into something that can be 'compared to the . . . cells in . . . an organism' (1:211; 17:233; cf. 10:22, 94).

3.2. Solidarity and Character: The 'Silence Game'

Montessori's paradigmatic example of social solidarity is the 'lesson of silence' or 'silence game' (Montessori 1912: 212–13, 364; 1:237–38). Despite many variations, the game's basic element is the establishment, as a class, of the most

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perfect possible silence. The teacher directs the class—often with a whisper or a word written on the board—to be silent, and silence gradually sweeps across the room; ultimately, 'fifty or sixty children from two and a half years to six years of age, all together, and at a single time know how to hold their peace so perfectly that the absolute silence seems that of a desert' (Montessori 1912: 116). At one level, the game is one of many that attract children's attention and provide for norm-governed activity. But unlike many other forms of work, the lesson in silence cannot be done without cooperation from everyone. Complete silence depends not only upon one's own self-control, but upon the self-control of everyone, in unison. It is thus 'an excellent *lesson in co-operation*' (7:53) because 'a single person can break it' (1:237). In the silence game, one practices social solidarity, which depends upon 'everyone's consent'; 'the whole class must *want* to be silent' (7:54). Moreover, such consent is not *mere* consent, but shared interest: 'The children all have the same aim and work together in order to achieve it. They all aim at perfect silence. . . . The aim brings perfect cooperation. It unites the individuals' (17:234). This 'conscious and united action' gives rise to and depends upon 'a sense of social solidarity' (1:237; cf. 7:49–56; 17:234). Children feel united in a common task, and as they engage in it, they come to feel united as a common body. They work together, striving for perfection together. Attuned to one another in a way that goes beyond mere cooperation or mutual respect, they come to have a common character.

Just as respect grows out of and shapes character, solidarity relates to character in several ways. First, solidarity requires character because to have solidarity, each must have a strong will of her own. Second, like respect for others, solidarity naturally grows from character. Finally, solidarity gives rise to a new conception of character, the 'character' of a community.

First, one might think that conformity to a group would conflict with individual agency, but Montessori insists that genuine solidarity—even in children—requires strong, antecedent, individual character: 'the freedom of the individual . . . is the basis of human society' (10:98). The game of silence illustrates this relationship. This game is quite unlike the 'order' of 'Silence!' given in 'traditional schools' that is easily 'confuse[d] with a general reduction in noise' and a way of 'reduc[ing] disorder' (7:50). Silence is often commanded in order to stifle children's distracted impulses, decrease their activity, suppress their inclinations, and make them receptive to instruction by an adult. In the silence game, by contrast, 'normalized' children with strong characters are invited to a more thoroughgoing 'activity', one that engages their entire body and is 'very difficult', just as all engaging tasks are difficult (7:53). The silence game happens '*spontaneously*' and depends for its exercise upon silence being something '*interesting*' (7:54, 55, emphases in original).

> In order to have [perfect] silence, you must simply *not move*. And *in order not to move, you must think about everything that could possibly move.* So you must keep your legs and feet quite still, and your hands, and your whole body. You have to control your breathing. (7:52–53)

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This silence is not passivity before an adult instructor but an intense, social form of autonomous group *activity*, one that requires strength of will and even 'offers a means of testing the children's will-power' (1:237). Because silence is a further outlet for strong wills rather than a limitation of them, 'very young children of three or four . . . [or] even two *love silence to an extraordinary degree*' (7:51). Similarly, for adults, coerced cooperation, well-regulated communities, and calculating forms of reciprocal altruism are not expressions of social solidarity. In order to 'hold the mass of men together and make them act in harmony', one requires not only 'good laws and a good government' but also 'masses' that 'are . . . strong and active . . . according to the level of development, and of inner stability, of the personalities composing them' (1:215). Solidarity as moral ideal arises when strong individuals combine autonomously into a greater whole to pursue shared ends through a united will.

Second, the silence game illustrates how solidarity naturally grows from character. Pursuit of perfection in general generates desires to be perfect as a member of society, and as one recognizes feelings of unity that facilitate deeper forms of cooperation, people who have character naturally desire to perfect, strengthen, and refine these feelings. Moreover, people with character aim to perfect agency, to extend capacities to act in and on the world. The cooperation of genuine solidarity makes human beings more capable of such action.

Finally, as strong-willed individuals identify with a social group, a new entity can emerge, a community with its own goods and its own 'character'. Just as strong organs within the body unite to form an even stronger body with goods distinct from those individual organs', so too diverse individuals in a community unite to form a whole that pursues its own perfection. Like individuals, communities can be repressed or defective, caught up in infighting, or pursuing merely external goods such as wealth or prestige. But healthy communities can have a norm-driven striving for increased perfection distinctive of the group, that is, character. We can seek to become a more respectful and courteous community, with greater harmony and sympathy among ourselves. We, as a community, can stretch our powers, developing technology to put people on the moon or discovering new facts about the universe or combating disease, poverty, or ignorance. Some such goods can be accomplished by mere collections of individuals who happen to share goals or who agree to work together. But all these goods will be better accomplished by strong and mutually respectful individuals who feel themselves bound together into a group by sympathy and a sense of solidarity, and some of these goods require this kind of unity.

3.3 The Moral Importance of Solidarity

Connections between character and solidarity highlight ways in which solidarity is morally important. As a capacity of individuals for unity with others and a capacity of a group for agency, solidarity offers a focus for self-perfecting powers of individuals and eventually for groups. Work done in solidarity can be done with greater or less precision; it requires attention and work, includes internal norms, and increases agential efficacy at both group and individual levels.

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As I become more unified with others, I become individually more perfect. And as *we* become more thoroughly unified—while retaining individual character and mutual respect—we become more perfect as a community. Solidarity also contributes to further goods, both concrete external acquisitions—the silence we achieve, the bridges we build, etc.— and internal developments of intelligence, strength of will, etc. Given the perils and possibilities made available by global interdependence, along with human beings' innate need and desire to live and work with others, the full realization of our highest capacities for excellence depends not merely on being left alone and given occasional 'help' but also on actively working *together* toward shared goals (see vol. 10 of Montessori 2007).

Solidarity is also a central feature of Montessori's political theory. The ability to feel solidarity with others is necessary for truly successful states, organizations, communities, and social life. Societies require laws, organizations, and structures, but those societies whose formal structures manipulate selfish individuals into cooperative behavior fundamentally differ from those whose laws articulate and structure genuine commitments to a social whole.

> Society does not depend entirely on organization, but also on cohesion, and of these two the second is basic and serves as the foundation for the first. Good laws and a good government cannot hold the mass of men together and make them act in harmony unless the individuals themselves are oriented toward something that gives them solidarity and makes them into a group. (1:215)

Just as individuals without character can 'impose rules upon themselves to save them from falling' (1:189), so too societies can exist and even amass external goods without social solidarity. But as in the individual case, such societies will be plagued with internal tension and never rise to the perfection of which they are otherwise capable.

Finally, Montessori at times suggests that human beings have a 'cosmic task' (17:91) in which social solidarity is an essential constituent. Consistent with her open-ended conception of character, she discusses this task in an indeterminate way, but hints that our capacity for reconstructing the world as a built environment—what she calls a 'supra-nature' (10:62, 87–93)—encourages and depends for its moral value on social solidarity. The human being's profound capacity to 'exert a "modifying function" upon nature' makes him 'the most active of agents who are designed to modify and perfect it' (7:105–106). The built environment 'leaves a trace of his existence' in many 'enchanted' changes, such as 'flowers [that] became more beautiful' or 'chemical substances . . . in the earth . . . used for new compositions' (7:105). But this same capacity has generated a moral crisis wherein the human individual 'feels overwhelmed by the [constructed] world in which he lives' (10:24), and 'either mankind as a whole will organize and master the mechanical world, or the mechanical world will destroy humanity' (10:xii). At the same time that technological development poses a problem that requires human unity for its solution, 'Arts, sciences, and products of industry unite' human beings into 'a living organism' (6:47; see also 10:22, 61–63).

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Montessori develops a complex metaphysics of this unity and sophisticated economic and social accounts of ways we are materially unified whether we accept that unity psychologically or not (see Frierson 2018). The key point, however, is that material conditions create a context within which we 'communicate with one another with amazing ease' and 'no phenomenon can affect one human group without affecting others,' but we do not yet *feel* the fact that 'all mankind forms a single organism,' and so 'man continues to live in an emotional world that is outdated' (10:94). Social solidarity, beginning in small communities and extending to a felt sense of 'common function' and shared 'interest' among human beings as a whole (10:94), is both an emotional possibility and, given the problems posed by technological development for the world, a practical necessity. In that sense, social solidarity represents 'a higher stage of [moral] development' within which individual moral character participates in 'something that unites all mankind' into 'a single universal mission' (10:61).

4. Embodied Ethics

Montessori's threefold appeal to character, respect, and solidarity combines elements that play important roles in other moral theories, particularly in those of Nietzsche and Emerson (character), Kant (respect), and Hegel, Marx, and Labriola (solidarity). Much more than any of those theorists (or virtually any theorists today), however, Montessori emphasized the essentially *embodied* nature of ethical life. Even her most basic discussion of the character of individuals highlights human open-endedness by observing that 'the *muscles* of man are not directed just by instinct, as are those of other creatures. The individual himself must animate *his motor powers* . . . [to] . . . prepare for his own individuality' (7:95; emphasis added). Her pedagogical concerns and conception of the mind as embodied (see Frierson 2020: 48–57) lead her to emphasize bodily comportments necessary for and partly constitutive of moral life. She compares 'character formation' to learning the piano (17:236–7) and emphasizes the importance of *bodily* repetition and practice for moral virtue. A child who must 'wait for [a work material] to be released . . . every hour of the day for years . . . respecting others and . . . waiting one's turn' learns 'patience' in an embodied way. He engages in bodily practices—standing, diverting attention to avoid interruption, speaking softly if necessary to get attention, and lifting the replaced material with care and without rushing or bumping into the student who has just finished working it—until these postures and movements 'become an habitual part of life' (1:202).

Montessori particularly emphasizes embodiment when discussing the 'grace' children learn as part of mutual respect. Such respect is, for Montessori, as much about bodily comportment—moving out of others' way, for instance—as about mere attitudes and intentions. She notes, for instance, the importance of having light furniture for cultivating graceful bodily self-control. She contrasts children forced by desks and furniture 'nailed to the floor' to maintain 'immobility and silence', with those in Montessori schools with light furniture and fragile materials, who

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> will not only learn to move gracefully and properly, but will come to understand the reason for such deportment. The ability to move which he acquires here will be of use to him all his life. While he is still a child, he becomes capable of conducting himself correctly, and yet, with perfect freedom. . . . [Such a] child has not only learned to move about and to perform useful acts; he has acquired a special grace of action which makes his gestures more correct and attractive, and which beautifies his . . . body now so balanced and so sure of itself. (Montessori 1912: 84, 353)

From discussing a relatively mundane sense of 'graceful' movement, she transitions to claims about 'correct conduct', 'freedom', and someone 'sure of [him]self'. The 'methodical exercises' that cultivate 'exactitude and grace of action' also develop 'will-power' and teach a child 'how to become his own master, how to be a man of prompt and resolute will' (Montessori 1912: 365–66; cf. 17:139). Relatedly, when a teacher must 'be a policeman' to ensure that children without character respect one another externally, she fosters bodily habits by which children more easily conduct themselves with mutual respect out of character later (17:229; cf. section 2.3 above).

In fact, even to have a 'will,' 'some mastery of the body is also necessary' (9:137). 'Voluntary action . . . increases in degree as its dependent muscles perfect themselves and so achieve the necessary conditions for seconding its efforts' (9:140). Moral virtue is a realized capacity for virtuous activity.

> There can be no manifestation of the will without completed action. . . . To think and to wish is not enough. It is action which counts. 'The way to Hell is paved with good intentions.' The life of volition is the life of action. (9:127–28)

One with excellent resolutions but lacking dexterity and poise for what is required is not morally excellent. One with a strong desire for perfection who lacks physical ability to work toward it lacks character. Character requires being able to 'make a selection among the muscular coordinations of which he is capable, persist in them, and thus begin to make such coordinations permanent' (9:129). Moreover, 'When [one] begins to respect the work of others', he must be able to 'walk about without knocking against his companions, without stamping on their feet, without overturning the table' (9:129–30; cf. 17:139). A loud and clumsy boor, whatever his feelings of affection toward others, fails to show respect. One who cannot control his movements to accord with the needs of the group cannot exhibit—and thus cannot have—social solidarity. The body is the organ of moral virtue. (For discussions of how Montessori's emphasis on embodiment relates to physical disability, see Frierson [2020: 161–74] and Hellbrügge [1982].)

Moreover, much moral virtue is almost entirely bodily. Many moral situations call for rapid or uncontrived responses that precede reflection. Often, morally excellent agents act with moral 'flow' whereby they immerse themselves in moral tasks without self-conscious reflection.

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> The person who has not been brought up to observe certain rules, but has been hastily instructed in the knowledge of them, will too often be guilty of blunders and lapses, because he is obliged to 'perform' there and then all the necessary coordination of voluntary acts, and there and then direct them under the vigilant and immediate control of the consciousness; and such a perpetual effort cannot certainly compete with the 'habit' of distinguished manners. (9:128)

Even to play tennis excellently, one often needs to stop thinking and trust bodily reactions to perceived (often unconsciously) nuances of the ball's motion. Similarly, much moral life consists in habitual reactions. In a paradigmatic example of social courtesy and appropriate respect, Montessori describes how we might be 'comfortably seated in a corner of the drawing-room, but a venerable person enters, and we rise to our feet' (9:128). A young child may need to be reminded that this behavior is appropriate. Someone adapting to a new culture may need to think about whether standing is called for in the situation. But for a morally excellent, culturally well-situated agent, rising at the sight of a venerable person should be etched into muscle memory and unconscious motivation.

5. Concepts and the Completion of Conscience

Montessorian character and respect emphasize the value of human agency, where the agency one respects in oneself and others, perfects in character, and develops in the context of social solidarity is an agency preeminently expressed in attentive work. Particularly given the central role of embodied comportment, moral agency need not involve self-conscious reflection, principles of practical reason, or abstract reasoning. Adult ethical life, however, is often reflective, involving abstract principles or values and perspectives one takes on oneself. Montessori highlights these features of mature moral life through a developmental account of moral maturation that culminates in deliberate and self-consciously reflective moral ideals.

The period from age six or seven through adolescence marks a gradual shift in work and learning 'from the sensorial, material level to the abstract' (12:5). Morally, children transition from well-cultivated moral sensibility and bodily patterns of respect to understanding and applying moral concepts (1:175; 12:7). Intellectually, older children and adults become capable of more expansive imagination and abstraction, which allow them to understand moral relationships rather than merely cultivate good moral habits and sensitivity to particulars. The shift from sensory and bodily to abstract does not abandon former ways of engaging with the world. Even for adults, 'it is not by philosophizing or discussing metaphysical conceptions that the morals of mankind can be developed: it is by activity, by experience, and by action' (12:83). But older children and adults extend sensed and experienced insights into universal principles, imagining how they apply in distant, imagined contexts and abstracting general concepts and rules.

Increased abstraction is manifest in all three fundamental aspects of moral life. While young children choose work based on their immediate interest, older children

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with character self-consciously aim for increased perfection, deliberately and consciously pursuing goals even beyond the point at which felt interest would hold them to an activity. Likewise, the younger child who respects others because it is an immediately felt reality of living in a communal classroom becomes an older child and adult who articulates policies for effective governance of a community and works for the rights and dignity of those in broader or more distant communities. And while younger children experience solidarity in tangible, sensory cooperative activities—setting a table together, cleaning up a mess together, being silent together—older children and adults conceive of themselves as in solidarity with others through abstract social relations. They find 'joy' in 'feeling useful and capable of production' (12:82), explicitly recognizing the cooperation involved in playing an important part in a great whole. Solidarity and mutual respect also become more structured and organized as a result of abstract reflection, transitioning from an 'unconscious' 'society by cohesion . . . [which] is characteristic of little children, for they are naturally full of love and sympathy and help for others' to 'another kind of social organization' 'ruled by laws and controlled by a government which all obey' (1:216, 17:237–38, 1:215; cf. Krogh 1981).

6. Conclusion

Montessori builds her moral theory around a distinctive concept of agency, drawn from the lives of young children, that consists in persistent concentrated attention on norm-governed and self-perfecting activities that one chooses for oneself. This agency is the basis of individual character, the proper object of respect, and the foundation of social solidarity. Individual perfection of agency in this sense constitutes Montessori's ethical ideal, and such perfection depends upon respect for others and realizes itself in part through solidarity with others. Individual excellence of character, respect, and solidarity all essentially require cultivation of bodily skill, and at their most basic levels none require refined reflection or abstract reasoning. Reflection and abstract reasoning, however, help complete and perfect human moral life, allowing a formal structure that stabilizes, broadens, and makes self-conscious the intrinsic values to which those with well-formed characters are committed.

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