Cultivating researcher integrity: virtue-based approaches to research ethics

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Abstract

This chapter presents a virtue-based approach to research ethics, which both complements and challenges dominant principle- and rule-based ethical codes and governance frameworks. Virtues are qualities of character that contribute to human and ecological flourishing, focusing on the dispositions and motivations of moral agents (in this case, researchers) as opposed to simply their actions. The chapter argues for the usefulness of 'researcher integrity', in the context of increasing interest internationally in 'research integrity' frameworks for regulating research practice. 'Researcher integrity' is analysed, including weak and strong versions of the concept (conduct according to current standards, versus reflexive commitment to ideals of what research should be at its best). Researcher integrity in its stronger sense is depicted as an overarching complex virtue, holding together and balancing other virtues such as courage, care, trustworthiness, respectfulness and practical wisdom. Consideration is given to educating researchers and university students as virtuous researchers, rather than simply ensuring rules are followed and risks minimised. Several approaches are outlined, including Socratic dialogue to develop attentiveness and respectfulness and participatory theatre to rehearse different responses to ethical challenges in research. Some limitations of virtue ethics are noted, including dangers of reinforcing a culture of blaming researchers for institutional failings, and its potential to be co-opted by those who wish to indoctrinate rather than cultivate virtues. Nevertheless, it is an important counter-weight to current trends that see research ethics as entailing learning sets of rules and how to implement them (to satisfy institutional research governance requirements), rather than processes of critical and responsible reflection.

Key words

Research ethics, research integrity, researcher integrity, virtue ethics, Socratic Dialogue, participatory theatre.

Introduction

In recent years there has been an increasing concern with ethics in the conduct of social research, resulting in a growth of ethical codes, guidance and policies for good conduct and governance. Furthermore, the discourse of research ethics has developed in such a way that the notion of 'research integrity' has emerged to offer a broader framework for understanding and governing the practice of research. Under this heading we now find principles, policies and procedures covering issues of plagiarism, the fabrication and falsification of data as well as protection of research participants from harm and efforts to ensure their rights to privacy

and informed consent are respected. Most policy and practice guidance takes the form of prescriptions for action and adopts a regulatory approach to ensuring good conduct through requiring researchers to submit applications for review by Research Ethics Committees (RECs). In such applications researchers are expected to evidence their knowledge of, and an intention to follow, what are essentially principle- or rule-based codes of ethical research.

This chapter will discuss the concept of researcher integrity in the context of this rapidly growing concern with research integrity. I will explore the notion of researcher integrity as a complex quality of character or 'virtue', which has a focus on the motivations and commitments of the researcher as a *practitioner* and a member of a research community. This contrasts with the common focus of research integrity, which usually considers the integrity of the research *practice* – although clearly the integrity of the researcher and of the research organisation influences the conduct of research. I will discuss the nature of virtue ethics and what it might contribute to the field of research ethics, before exploring what is meant by researcher integrity, including weak and strong versions of the concept (conduct according to extant standards, versus reflexive commitment to ideals of what research should be at its best), and how character-based approaches to ethics complement and extend regulatory approaches focused on the conduct of research.

In the light of this discussion, I will consider what the virtues of the good researcher might be, and how these can be effectively cultivated. This is an area that has been under-explored to date, although the work of Macfarlane (2009) offers a useful starting point on which to build. I will consider how education of researchers and university students might be configured so as to focus on the development of virtuous researchers, rather than simply ensuring rules are followed and risks minimised. I will outline several approaches to research ethics education, including the use of Socratic dialogue to engage people in practising the virtues of attentiveness and respectfulness whilst discussing substantive ethical issues in a group; and the use of participatory theatre to act out and rehearse different responses to ethical challenges in research.

Virtue ethics

Virtue ethics is a philosophical approach that focuses on the excellent qualities of character or moral dispositions (virtues) of moral agents. Examples of virtues might include trustworthiness, courage or compassion. Often linked in Western philosophy with Aristotle (350 BCE/1954), virtue ethics is experiencing a recent revival in moral philosophy (Foot, 1978; Crisp and Slote, 1997; Hursthouse, 1999; Swanton, 2003; Adams, 2006;, 2015), and a number of different theoretical perspectives have been developed. It is often contrasted with principle-based ethics (including Kantianism and utilitarianism), which focuses on abstract, general principles of action that pertain to right conduct, and questions of how moral agents ought to act and what they ought to do. In contrast, the key ethical questions in virtue ethics are: 'what kind of person should I be?' or 'how should I live?'

A virtue-based approach to ethics can be regarded either as an alternative, or as a supplement, to principle-based ethics. In this chapter I will take virtue ethics as supplementary to a principle-based approach rather than as an alternative. Virtues can then be regarded as either subsidiary or complementary to principles. If virtues are subsidiary, then one approach is to take the principles and ask 'what virtues can we derive from these principles?' For example, taking the principle of respect for autonomy, we might ask what it

might mean for someone to be respectful towards the autonomy of others. This is one useful way of starting to think about how to put the principles into practice. On the other hand, if virtues are regarded as complementary to principles, then this entails extending the concept of ethics from a narrow focus on abstract moral principles implemented by a process of deductive reasoning, to include a range of different types of elements including a person's moral character, as well as the principles that should guide their actions in a particular domain. On this view of ethics, virtues and principles are not in direct competition with each other. Rather, they are fundamentally different types of value that are not commensurable with each other. This kind of pluralistic ethics eschews the search for a foundational ethical theory (like Kantianism or utilitarianism) and acknowledges that there are several different types of value that cannot be ranked or weighed against each other on a single scale, nor derived from each other (Nagel, 1979). It is interesting that Beauchamp and Childress (Beauchamp 2003; Beauchamp and Childress, 2009), who have been very influential in the development and sustaining of a principle-based approach to research ethics, nevertheless reject the assumption that one must defend a single type of moral theory that is solely principle-based, virtue-based, and so forth. They express this view in the fifth edition of their text on biomedical ethics as follows:

> In everyday moral reasoning, we effortlessly blend appeals to principles, rules, rights, virtues, passions, analogies, paradigms, narratives and parables…. To assign priority to one of these moral categories as the key ingredient in the moral life is a dubious project of certain writers in ethics who wish to refashion in their own image what is most central in the moral life.

(Beauchamp and Childress, 2001, p. 408)

Virtues are also required to specify, interpret and implement principles. Indeed, in the fourth edition of their book, Beauchamp and Childress introduced a whole chapter relating to virtues in professional life and acknowledged that:

> Principles require judgement, which in turn depends on character, moral discernment, and a person's sense of responsibility and accountability ... Often what counts most in the moral life is not consistent adherence to principles and rules, but reliable character, moral good sense, and emotional responsiveness.

(Beauchamp and Childress, 1994, p. 462)

Retitled 'Moral Character' in the fifth and sixth editions of their book, this chapter acts as a precursor to their account of the principles of biomedical ethics (Beauchamp and Childress, 2001; 2009).

Whether we regard the virtues as primary, or as one among many sources of moral value, there is clearly scope to explore the nature of virtues and the role they play in the ethical life of researchers. The discussion that follows will be illuminated by insights from virtue ethics, although this does not necessarily entail subscribing to virtue ethics as an ethical theory. Indeed, some philosophers distinguish 'virtue theory' (a theory about the nature of virtues) from 'virtue ethics' (a theory or theoretical approach to ethics that places virtues at the heart of ethical life). Therefore my aim here is not to develop a virtue ethical theory for research, but to explore how a shift of focus from abstract principles and specific rules for research practice to the virtues of the researcher might help in improving ethical practice.

The nature of virtues

In the philosophical literature there is considerable debate about what counts as a virtue, including whether a virtue consists in good motives, good ends/effects or whether both are required (Battaly, 2015; van Zyl, 2015). Given the concern of this chapter – understanding and improving ethical practice in social research - I will use the term 'virtue' to refer to a moral disposition to feel, think and act in such a way as to promote human and ecological flourishing, entailing both a motivation to act well and, typically, the achievement of good ends. Virtues are often described as excellent traits of character, and entail a reliable disposition to act in certain predictable ways across contexts.

One of the recent challenges to virtue ethics, known as the 'situationist critique', draws on empirical (largely psychological) research to argue that the idea that human beings embody robust, enduring character traits may be little more that a folk concept, better thought of as a moral fiction rather than a reflection of reality (Harman, 1999; Doris, 2002; Merritt *et al.*, 2010; Alfano, 2013). For example, whether people respond in a caring way to a person in need seems to depend on whether or not they are in a hurry. Furthermore, as Milgram's (1974) experiment infamously demonstrated, the majority of people seem to be prepared to torture others if instructed to do so by an authority figure. However, rather than conclude that the concept of a virtue is untenable, we could equally use this 'evidence' as part of an argument that becoming and being virtuous requires considerable work. The fact that people whom we would expect to be caring or honest may act in cruel or dishonest ways in certain contexts can lead to several conclusions, including that virtues are rare, or that character traits (and hence virtues as excellences of character) are not just qualities of the individual, but rather the interaction between person, social milieu and circumstances (Lapsley and Narvaez, 2004; Alfano, 2013; Miller, 2015; Russell, 2015b). Arguably the most useful responses to the situationist critique for the purposes of this chapter are those that conclude that in order to become virtuous we need to pay particular, conscious attention to situations where virtue may be hard to achieve. The analogy between virtues and skills may be helpful here (Annas, 2011; Russell, 2015a). As Russell comments:

> [Virtue] is the sort of achievement that takes time, effort, and focused, directed practice. Virtue is like a skill, but it is like the sorts of skills it takes a lifetime to master.

> (Russell 2015b, p. 105)

Research integrity and researcher integrity

I will now move on to consider ethics in the practice of research, with a particular focus on research integrity. In recent years the term 'integrity' has moved from relative obscurity to becoming almost commonplace in codes and guidance for conduct in public and professional life (Banks, 2010). With the emergence of well-publicised cases of politicians over-claiming expenses, systematic child abuse and high-profile scientists falsifying research results, integrity is on the socio-political agenda. In several countries agencies have been specifically set up to promote good conduct in research, and have 'research integrity' in their

names (e.g. Offices of Research Integrity in the USA[1], UK[2], Austria[3] and Holland[4]). There is even a European Network of Research Integrity Offices.[5]

Nevertheless, it is worth considering what, exactly, is covered by the term 'research integrity'? I will start by considering 'integrity'. Taken literally, 'integrity' means wholeness. It is about parts fitting together, and the whole being complete or in some way unified, as well as being undamaged or uncorrupted. It can be applied to people, objects, practices or institutions. It can also be applied in several different domains: for example, aesthetic, intellectual, scientific or moral, where it can have different meanings.

Indeed, as James Parry (2013) points out, the term 'research integrity' is used in many different and confusing ways. Sometimes it is used as an overarching concept that includes all aspects of good research – scientific standards, ethical conduct and good governance. On other occasions it may be used just to refer to one aspect of good research – either scientifically good or ethically good research. Clearly scientific and ethical integrity are inter-related – for example, research based on falsified data lacks both scientific and ethical integrity. And since 'integrity' is about wholeness, there is an argument that separation of scientific from ethical aspects would in itself be damaging to the integrity of the research, or to research in general. Certainly several of the significant codes or guides current in the UK that have 'research integrity' in the title, or are produced by an organisation with 'research integrity' in its name, embrace both scientific and ethical integrity (for example, UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO), 2009; Universities UK, 2012). However, surprisingly few of these documents give a detailed, substantive description of what is meant by 'integrity'. Instead, we have to discover its meaning by looking at the content of such documents – which includes principles and standards of good scientific and ethical practice.

In these kinds of documents (codes and guidelines), 'research integrity' is primarily focused on *research practice* – what is actually done and how it is achieved. Obviously it is researchers who actually do the research, hence attention is paid to their conduct. For research practice to have integrity, we would expect the researchers who conduct it to do so with integrity. Hence any conception of 'research integrity' ought to include some notion of researcher integrity. Similarly the actual practice of research is influenced by the ethos, policies and procedures of the organisation or discipline within which it takes place, while in turn, the integrity of the organisation and/or specific academic or professional discipline is related to the practices that go on within its realm, and the researchers who belong to it. Figure 1 illustrates this relationship between these elements of research integrity (practice, research, organisation), offering examples of what each of the elements might mean in practice, and in relation to scientific and ethical integrity.

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[1] The Office of Research Integrity (ORI), https://ori.hhs.gov/
[2] UK Research Integrity Office (UKRIO), http://ukrio.org/
[3] *Österreichische Agentur für wissenschaftliche Integrität* (OeAWI, Austrian Agency for Research Integrity), http://www.oeawi.at/en/
[4] Landelijk Orgaan Wetenschappelijke Integriteit (LOWI, National Board for Research Integrity) https://www.knaw.nl/en/topics/ethiek/landelijk-orgaan-wetenschappelijke-integriteit-lowi/overzicht
[5] European Network of Research Integrity Offices, http://www.enrio.eu/home
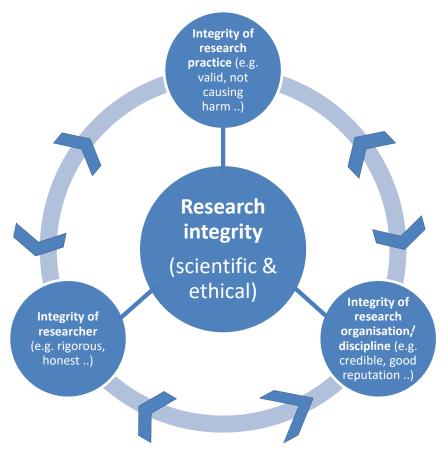
Figure 1: Elements of research integrity

Researcher integrity

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

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

> (UKRIO 2009, p. 7)

This description of integrity is at the extreme end of conduct-focussed integrity. The use of the term 'compliance' is particularly noteworthy; use of the term suggests that there is no room for any critical consideration of ethical requirements, nor any non-codified context-related variation or flexibility. Arguably this is a regulatory and managerialist version of integrity. It makes no reference to the researcher as a critical actor. Indeed, it could be

viewed as a co-option or even corruption of the concept and practice of integrity for managerialist ends.

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

What would researcher integrity look like on the basis of this description of integrity? Researcher integrity, in its thick sense, is about researchers being aware of, and critically committed to, the purpose, values, ethical principles and standards of their discipline and/or broader research field; making sense of them as a whole; and putting them into practice in their research work, including upholding them in challenging circumstances. Stated in this way, researcher integrity is an over-arching, complex virtue. It entails not just upholding and acting upon all the values of the profession, but also working to revise, re-evaluate and hold them, and the profession, together as a whole.

This clearly entails some effort on the part of the research practitioner, not only to understand and commit to the purpose and values of the discipline/research area, but also to negotiate contradictions and conflicts in theory and practice. This requires other virtues, including practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and moral courage. By practical wisdom I mean a capacity to perceive the features of a situation that have ethical salience, and to make discerning judgements about what the right course of action might be, given the context and particular circumstances at hand (Banks and Gallagher, 2009, pp. 72-95; Bondi *et al.*, 2011). This entails a high degree of criticality and reflexivity on the part of researchers. The notion of criticality entails researchers not taking the values, principles and standards found in codes of ethics or current practice for granted, nor taking features of situations as they first appear. Having a critical stance also entails closely examining and questioning a situation and people's perspectives on it, uncovering hidden assumptions and unspoken implications and placing the situation in a bigger political and social context. Similarly, 'reflexivity' means researchers should endeavour to put themselves in the picture – seeing what roles they are playing *qua* researchers and what are the effects of their positionality in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age and so on. 'Moral courage' involves being willing and able to act on

one's moral judgements when facing situations of risk or danger, being neither cowardly nor over-confident (Banks and Gallagher, 2009, pp. 174-94).

Understood as a complex virtue, or excellence of character, 'researcher integrity' is a relatively demanding phenomenon. Critical reflexivity entails that researchers have sophisticated abilities to reflect on how they themselves perceive and think about the principles and rules of their organisations and disciplines – which requires what some organisational theorists call 'triple loop' learning (Yuthas *et al.*, 2004). It also assumes a high degree of ethical expertise, with researchers able to take responsibility for going beyond extant principles and standards and offering alternative visions of good practice (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1986; Dreyfus *et al.*, 2009).

Taking a critical stance towards the principles and standards in extant codes of conduct/ethics/integrity requires a reference point outside current norms and laws. In their brief discussion of professional integrity as a virtue, Cox et al talk about practitioners committing themselves to a 'semi-independent ideal of what the profession might be at its best' (2003, p. 103). In the literature on professional ethics, this is sometimes referred to as a 'service ideal' or 'regulative ideal' (Oakley and Cocking, 2001, pp. 25-31; Banks, 2004, pp. 53-8). As an ideal, it can be regarded as providing a vision towards which to work. It is 'semi-independent' in that whilst it may be defined and given meaning in the context of current professional practice, it is also aspirational and goes beyond current practice. According to the traditional view of professions, all professions have a service ideal, which encapsulates their roles in contributing to human flourishing. Service ideals are very general and abstract, such as the promotion of health for the profession of medicine, justice for law and social welfare for social work (Banks and Gallagher, 2009, pp. 20-27). Whilst 'research' is not a unified, distinct profession in the same way as medicine, law or social work, it can take this form within particular disciplines or disciplinary areas. In the AcSS discussion document *Towards Common Principles for Social Science Research Ethics* (Academy of Social Sciences Working Group, 2014, reprinted in Iphofen, 2017), the elaboration of the first principle (regarding a free social science being fundamental to the UK as a democratic society) makes reference to 'the core mission of all social science disciplines to better inform public debate and public policy actions' (p. 4 of the original document).

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

Versions of researcher integrity

Understood as an excellence of character, the virtue-based account of 'researcher integrity' is quite demanding of researchers. It may therefore be useful also to outline a version of researcher integrity as an ordinary quality of character (rather than an excellence). In my view this can be positioned between the 'thin' conduct-focussed version of researcher integrity that is assumed in some of the codes of practice mentioned earlier (e.g. UKRIO, 2009, p. 7), and the notion of integrity as an 'excellence of character' that I have outlined. These are depicted in Table 1 as three possible versions of researcher integrity.

Table 1: Versions of researcher integrity

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

Insofar as research ethics committees or institutional review boards pay any attention to researcher integrity (they usually focus on the integrity of the research practice as this is the main 'evidence' available to them), then it would tend to be researcher integrity as good or professional conduct (column 1). Research ethics committees are concerned that researchers follow the minimum standards that are laid down in relevant codes of practice or are currently accepted practices in research institutions or disciplines. Paradoxically, it is only after there is a complaint or allegation of misconduct (e.g. breach of privacy, use of questionable data) that the investigating agency (such as the employer or professional body) may take account of the ordinary good character of the researcher (column 2). Questions may be asked, such as: was this an isolated incident of breach of privacy, or is the researcher routinely cavalier in storing data and using names; do their colleagues regard them as generally reliable according to ordinary conceptions of trustworthiness? Finally, researcher integrity as a complex virtue or excellence of character (column 3) tends to be the concern of educators, research supervisors and researchers themselves, and is a quality

to be worked on and cultivated, entailing what I have called elsewhere 'ethics work' (Banks, 2016).

The virtues of the researcher

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

Any list of virtues is selective, and many virtue concepts overlap with each other. The fact that different authors select different virtues - most of which would equally apply to ordinary people living their everyday lives, and certainly to many other occupations in addition to research - suggests that simply producing and studying lists of virtues may not be particularly useful in helping us to identify what counts as a good researcher (as opposed to a good nurse, or a good human being). Unless they are carefully elaborated upon and contextualised in practice, then lists of virtues can be criticised in the same way as lists of principles – as being abstract and unhelpful in guiding practitioners. However, Macfarlane (2009) does elaborate on each of his chosen virtues in depth, and contextualises his discussions in relation to many practice examples.

In my work with Ann Gallagher on virtues for health and social care practitioners (Banks and Gallagher, 2009), we identified seven virtues and discussed each one in detail. Many of these are equally relevant to good research, and I will briefly list them here, adapted to the research context. This gives a feel for what such a list of virtues might look like, and may serve as a starting point for discussion of how useful such an exercise might be, and what might be included and excluded.

> ***List 1: Some virtues for researchers*** (adapted from Banks and Gallagher, 2009)
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> *Researcher integrity.* In Aristotelian ethics, integrity was not regarded as a virtue *per se*, but as something that held all the virtues together as a whole. In the context of research, it means the overarching capacity or disposition to hold true to the values

of the research discipline or field, and to balance other virtues as necessary. It might be regarded as a kind of moral competence or capacity that researchers use to make sense of their ideals and actions as a whole and act accordingly.

Practical wisdom ('phronesis') is the excellence by which researchers deliberate well about what to do in their research practice. A person of practical wisdom has a capacity to engage in practical reasoning, which includes: the ability to perceive and appreciate ethically salient features of situations; the exercise of ethical imagination; reflective and deliberative capabilities (to make judgements and act). This process of reasoning is used to make the appropriate practical choices that constitute good research.

Courage is, according to Aristotle (350 BCE/1954, 1115a6), 'a mean with regard to feelings of fear and confidence'. By this he means that a courageous person, when facing situations of risk and danger, is neither cowardly and lacking in confidence, nor foolhardy and over-confident. We need to know what is the right thing to fear and how much to fear. Courage is a complex virtue – with distinctions often being made between moral, physical and psychological courage, for example. Moral courage may be required as a researcher to face dangerous and risky situations or to communicate unwelcome research findings to research commissioners or funders.

Respectfulness towards someone or something entails acknowledging the value of the person or thing, preserving and/or not destroying it and engaging with what is valued. Respectful researchers make use of the self in developing relationships and getting to know and understand the perspective of those people with whom they work, respecting their dignity, privacy and choices as far as possible.

Care is about how one person relates to others, related to the goal of enhancing the existence of the others. A caring person in a research context is one who has a motive of attentiveness towards particular others for whom the researcher enters into relationships of responsibility.

Trustworthiness is about not letting others down. A trustworthy researcher is someone who behaves as relied upon; is aware and accepts that they are liable to be held responsible for this behaviour; and is able to give a plausible performance as a reliable and responsible person.

Justice is associated with the fair allocation of benefits and burdens, and relies upon a capacity to make good judgements in weighing up how people should be treated. A just researcher is someone who has a disposition to act fairly in relation to individuals to whom she or he owes a particular obligation and to act in a way that promotes and reflects just social arrangements.

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In a brief chapter 'Learning about the virtues', Macfarlane (2009) considers approaches to teaching postgraduate research students about research ethics. He criticises current education and training as focusing on discourses of compliance, extreme examples of

wrong-doing and theoretical approaches drawn from principle-based ethics. He argues for more 'fine-grained' scenarios, including students' own stories and use of narratives, but does not develop these ideas in any detail (Macfarlane, 2009, pp. 156-58). I will consider what might be involved in cultivating researchers of integrity and illustrate with examples from university-based education.

Cultivating researchers of integrity

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

- *A situated understanding* of the ideals and values of good research and the nature of the virtues relevant to the role of researcher. For example, what is meant by respectfulness, courage, honesty, trustworthiness, justice and care in a research context, and how do they relate to each other?
- *A critical and emotional commitment* to these ideals, values and virtues – sincerely and wholeheartedly believing in the value of respectfulness, honesty, etc., and being motivated to cultivate and enact these virtues.
- *A developed capacity* to do 'ethics work' (Banks, 2016), which entails: recognising situations where virtues are relevant; seeing the ethical issues at stake from multiple perspectives; managing and engendering emotions; working on ethical identity (e.g. becoming and being a respectful/honest person); working on relationships with research participants and other stakeholders; undertaking practical reasoning, including working out how to act; taking action; questioning critically the currently accepted values and standards of research.

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

Supervision and critical dialogue with peers in a research team – An important part of educating for the virtues is having role models - teachers in both academic institutions and practice settings. According to Statman (1997, p. 13):

> Becoming a good person is not a matter of learning or 'applying' principles, but of imitating some models. We learn to be virtuous in the same way we learn to dance, to cook, and to play football - by watching people who are competent in these areas and trying to do the same.

This gives an important mentoring role to teachers, research supervisors and research leaders. For research students and inexperienced researchers, the role of the supervisor is crucial in encouraging critical reflection. Even experienced researchers can benefit from dialogue with their peers and exposure to questioning and new ideas. Such people can fulfil

the role of moral exemplars or role models, which is often regarded as crucial in developing virtues, although not without its pitfalls (Lockwood, 2009). Above all it is through being challenged and/or exposed to new perspectives that researchers develop their understanding of themselves and their research practices. It also contributes to the critical reflexivity that is a mark of quality social research. Writing a research journal or diary and then sharing with supervisors or tutors is a particularly effective way of developing such reflexivity. In collaborative and participatory research, this sharing of a range of perspectives from peer/co-researchers is built into the process and is both challenging and productive (Banks, Armstrong et al., 2013).

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

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

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

group, taking on a life of its own, partially abstracted from the ownership of the example-giver. This enables the example-giver to distance herself from the example and look at it with fresh eyes as she hears the analyses and evaluations of others about what was at stake.

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

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

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

- Dialogue, sharing perspectives regarding what is going on, how to interpret, possibilities for action.

Concluding comments

This chapter has suggested that there is value in the field of research ethics in shifting focus from the integrity of the research practice to paying at least equal attention to the integrity of the researcher. This is an important counter-weight to current trends that are turning research ethics in to a matter of learning a set of rules and how to implement them (so as to satisfy institutional research governance requirements), rather than a process of critical and responsible reflection.

Nevertheless, there are many critiques of virtue-based approaches to ethics and important reasons to be wary about an excessive focus on the character of the person (in this case the researcher) as moral agent. I have already considered the situationist critique (questioning the notion of virtues as enduring character traits), which can be answered partly by adopting a more social constructionist account of the nature of virtues. Another difficulty with a virtue-based approach in a research context is that it can reinforce a culture of responsibilisation, where individual researchers are blamed for bad practice when it is often the case that institutional conditions are significant contributing factors. This suggests we should exercise some caution in concluding that the promotion of virtues in individual researchers is the solution to bad practice in research; we should not lose sight of institutional constraints and structural contexts that shape the conduct of research and the formation of researchers. There is also a question about how the notion of moral character, and educating for character, can be co-opted and used as a way of moulding people into a desirable form. The idea of character-building raises the question of in whose interests and according to what role model? We need to take care that we are cultivating rather than indoctrinating virtues. That is partly why none of the approaches discussed in the previous section is directly aimed at developing specific character traits *per se*. Nevertheless I believe they offer a relevant mixture of opportunities for exercising and developing practical wisdom and rehearsing the right emotions and responses according to context.

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

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