Character self-construction and moral principles — general theoretical framework[1]

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Abstract: The study starts from the premise that within the dynamic of personality system character is mainly an acquired subsystem that is the outcome of self and social construction. On a continuum that represents the interaction between innate and acquired factors the study posits that character is mostly constructed while temperament is mostly given.

The research is focused on long-term personal experiences that aimed explicitly to develop one's own character. Taking into account the theoretical framework of Petersen and Seligman (2004) that distinguishes between strengths and virtues the present model of character includes three dimensions and an orienting principle. The three dimensions are: a) strength-weakness; b) goodness-evilness; c) transparency versus opacity. A strong character could be good or evil, transparent or opaque. All these dimensions are related to self-tested orienting principles such as (Truth, Love, Justice, Non-violence).

Keywords: dimensions of a character, moral death, self-tested orienting moral principles, transparent integrity, vectorial model

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Historical roots of the problem: beyond the classical sources used by modern research[2] are other classical sources. For instance, Theophrastus' ideas on character's types have both practical and theoretical value and have been developed in his work *Characters* (316 B.C.)[3]. Theophrastus considers that character is meaningful both for "superior' (good) and "inferior" (bad) people. In his approach he focuses especially on the negative types of character that can be observed in daily life situations through their doings, sayings, possessions. He distinguishes 3 types that are clearly the result of experience, learning and one's own choices and ways of behaving; due to repetition, these forms are "engraved" in one's own individuality. The Greek term *charattein* means "*to engrave*". This acquired form is evident in character's traits such as: **Arrogance -** "a sort of contempt for anyone other than oneself"[4]; **Authoritarianism** - " a desire for office that covets power and profit"[5]. He knows only one line from Homer: "More than one leader is bad; let one alone be our ruler." "Either they must run the city or we must!"[6]; **Squalor** - defined as "neglect of one's body which produces distress"[7].

These types are focused on the negative side of the character, which makes sense from an educational and moral viewpoint. They cover types that are focused on the individual state as it is the **Squalor** to types that concern the entire community and its relation to power as it is the case with the **Authoritarianism.**

There are other ancient sources that are relevant for the issue of character, especially the *Analects of Confucius*, that reveal the interaction between character and environment. Within the *Analects* Confucius approaches a number

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[1] For instance, Aristotle – as his ideas on virtues are integrated in the landmark work *Character strengths and virtues. A handbook and classification* by C. Peterson & M.E.P. Seligman, Oxford University Press, Washington 2004.

[3] Theophrastus, *Characters*, Edited and Translated by J. Rusten, I.C. Cunningham, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2002.

[4] C. Peterson & M.E.P. Seligman, *Character strengths and virtues*, op. cit., p. 121.

[5] Ibidem, p. 125.

[6] Ibidem, p. 127.

[7] Ibidem, p. 125.

of essential themes of character. For instance, the good character is expressed by a gentlemen, importantly, through acquired features: "A gentleman is ashamed to let his words outrun his deeds"[8] (consistency words- facts). But "From a gentleman consistency is expected, but not blind fidelity"[9]. "A gentleman does not grieve that people do not recognize his merits; he grieves at his own incapacities"[10] (autonomy and self-regulation). About the knight of the Way: "When the Way prevails in the land, be bold in speech and bold in action. When the Way does not prevail, be bold in action but conciliatory in speech"[11]. The interaction between character development and expression on one hand and social order/power on the other is a core dynamic feature of Confucian conception on character.

The Christian experiential idea about the vital function of the *triad thoughts-speech-deeds*. The intrinsic coherence of this triad is considered as an essential test of character and as mean to educate it. The issue of character has been approached by many other thinkers, as the French writer La Bruyère (Les Caractères, 1688/1951). For the present study a dominant question is that of imaginative and practical techniques designed to construct a good and strong character. Such a technique is, for instance, what the present study calls *B. Franklin's matrix of character formation* (presented in his *Autobiography*). This will be discussed later on.

Psychological approaches: Wundt's conception about character represents, from a psychological viewpoint that is at the same time focused on ethical issues, a crucial moment that explores and clarifies an essential tension that is implied in the development of character: the conflict between interests, and especially between selfish goals and societal and altruistic goals. Whenever and individual must make a choice that involves this conflict of interests

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[8] Confucius and Lao Tzu, *The Analects of Confucius. Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching,* translated with notes by Arthur Waley, Barnes & Nobles, New York 2005, p. 139.

[9] Ibidem, p. 153.

[10] Ibidem, p. 139.

[11] Ibidem, p. 130.

Wundt considers that a test of character is at work[12]. Wundt's assumption is supported by the crucial choices made by numerous moral exemplars, i.e., strong and good characters that served high human goals for the sake of common good. Without even thinking that justice can be done to most, or many of such characters, I will dare to mention a few: Socrates, Jan Hus, Martin Luther, J. Palach, M. Gandhi, M. Luther King, D. Tutu, Mother Teresa, A. S. S. Kyi or J. Patočka. Destinies that are presented in some paradigmatic narratives might be of great methodological, theoretical and practical help. Such a landmark example is Oedipus. Oedipus faced terrible trials in his life, starting with his mortal exposure on a mountain, as baby, due to the appalling prophecy of the Oracle and the irresponsibility and disordered love (in Augustine's sense) of his biological parents. It is important to notice that "untaught by birds" means, from an epistemological perspective, using a different way of knowing than that used by Oracle, i. e., it is a knowledge which is not based on the expertise of an external authority but is based on one's own cognitive skills, interest to search and experience. This type of knowledge is at the same time rooted in epistemic abilities, holistic experiential resources due to many hurdles overpassed by Oedipus and in the moral strength, especially within respect to justice beyond personal and narrow group interests. This is supported by the fact that Oedipus, after a carefully conducted inquiry on the killing of Laius, punishes himself. Oedipus represents a holistic moral ability that has been considered impossible as Confucius expressed this: "In vain I have looked for a single man capable of seeing his own faults and bringing the charge home against himself" (Book 5,26)[13]. Oedipus searches for truth and not only finds out his own errors but has the power to acknowledge them publicly and to punish himself. Let us remember that at that time he has been

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[12] W. Wundt, *Ethik, eine Untersuchung der Tatsachen und Gesetze des sittlichen Lebens. Dritter Band: Die Prinzipien der sittlichkeit und die sittlichen lebensgebiete,* Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, Stuttgart 1912, pp. 81-82.

[13] Confucius and Lao Tzu, *The Analects of Confucius. Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching. Translated with notes by Arthur Waley.* Barnes & Nobles, New York 2005, p. 56.

a leader, The King. How many politicians nowadays do bring charges against their own honest or intentional errors? It seems that Confucius' observation might be more realistic than ever. Within the framework of Oracle-Sphinx model[14] this means that Oedipus searched for truth with love, even while his search has been clearly against his own interests, and had the will power to recognize his tragic findings, to share them publicly and to punish oneself. Oedipus strives toward a symbiosis between the need for truth and the moral principles; Oedipus accepted physical injury (pulling out his own eyes), becoming a social outcast after being a king, and he even contemplated physical death. This seems possible mainly because Oedipus *has the will and wisdom of preempting his moral death.* He is ready for accepting physical punishment (self-punishment included), even (physical) death but strives with all his resources to preempt his moral death, avoiding to become a morally degenerated person as he calls his beloved sons.

Cloninger worked an integrative model of character and temperament. The temperament and character inventory (TCI) worked by Cloninger, Przybeck, Svrakic & Wetzel (1994) is a result of this integrative model and attempts to measure the two major subsystems. For instance, Cloninger's model distinguishes among specific dimensions of character and temperament:

Temperament	Character
Novelty seeking	Self-directness
Harm avoidance	Cooperativeness
Reward dependence	Self-transcendence

Cloninger's model has the great advantage of an integrative approach that considers temperament and character within their interaction.

The question of character has been approached by many different authors either in a direct mode, as it the case with studies on political behavior (Rubenzer & Faschingbauer;

[14] C. Mamali, *Oracle-Sphinx complex: Oedipus's quest for truth and love.* Manuscript: University of Iowa, Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry. Iowa City –Dubuque 1992/2000, p. 237, p. 557.

2004) or an indirect mode by studies son moral development (Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Lind), on mature defense mechanisms and life trajectories (Vaillant, 1971, 1977, 1994) or on delay gratification (Mischel, 1982, 1994). However, an original work that achieves at the same time a complex synthesis of many of previous studies did come relatively recently and this belongs to Peterson and Seligman (2004). Before discussing a few ideas of the landmark work carried out by Peterson and Seligman I would like to mention a fact that has been a part of my cultural shock while immigrating in the U.S.A from a former communist country. I enjoyed the high quality and the variety of psychological textbooks for various psychological fields (introductory psychology, life-span psychology, adult development, psychology of aging and social gerontology, social psychology). There are so many excellent textbooks that are making the choice of one textbook quite difficult. I experienced this intellectual richness in contrast with my experience in Romania where many times there were no textbooks, or just one per course during my college years. The wonderful textbooks I had the chance to choose from are excellent resources for the teaching-learning process. I noticed with surprise, first for few psychological textbooks, that the *concept of character* was missing. During years, while I had to move to different teaching places, and using various textbooks I realized that the missing concept is not an exception, but a rule for the following areas: introductory psychology, life-span psychology, adult development, psychology of aging and social gerontology, social psychology. Observing this conceptual neglect I surveyed from 1992 to 2011 - 478 textbooks of psychology (introductory psychology, life-span development, adult development, psychology of aging and social gerontology, social psychology) by taking into account that many of them have over 12 editions, and that each new edition, which is counted as a different textbook, gives the chance of improvements. None of these textbooks introduces the concept of character. I ask students, forced by the same conceptual omission, to search for the concept of character and to discuss what do they think about the fact that it is missing. This conceptual hole continued 7 years or so after the crucial work on *Character Strengths and Virtues* carried out

by Peterson and Seligman (2004), and after other influential studies on character have been published, for instance that of James and Johnson (2000) and it is still in place. If for many future psychologists the intro-courses are the only courses that provide a *chance to acquire concepts of general use and value* then this omission could be considered as having long term consequences.

Peterson and Seligman developed a comprehensive model on character that posits that *"Character strengths are the psychological ingredients – processes or mechanisms-that define the virtues…they are distinguishable routes to displaying one or another of the virtues. For example the virtue of wisdom can be achieved through such strengths as creativity, curiosity, love of learning, open mindedness, and what we call perspective – having a "big picture" on life"*[15].

The model developed by Peterson and Seligman has a set of distinctive philosophical, theoretical and methodological features such as:

1. It is achieved within the framework of *positive psychology*: which means that it is "*as focused on strengths as on weakness, as interested in building best things in life as in repairing the worst, and as concerned with fulfilling the lives of normal people as with healing the wounds of the distressed*"[16].

2. Takes into account the universal virtues that are practices in most cultures and proved by scientific empirical studies[17].

3. It worked out and uses a comprehensive and valid set of criteria for assessing each strength of character[18].

4. It developed a valid and comprehensive classification of Linnaean type that ranges from "concrete and specific (the individual organism) through increasingly abstract and general categories (population, subspecies, genus, family, order, phylum, kingdom, and domain)"[19]. The model includes: *Virtues, Character Strengths* and *Situational themes*.

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[15] C. Peterson & M.E.P. Seligman, *Character strengths and virtues*, op. cit., p. 13.

[16] Ibidem, p. 4.

[17] Ibidem, pp. 35-48.

[18] Ibidem, pp. 16-30.

[19] Ibidem, p. 13.

5. *Virtues* – morally and religiously grounded.

6. *Character strengths are*– psychological ingredients – processes or mechanisms- that define the virtues (wisdom belongs to virtues while creativity, curiosity, love of learning, are strengths). The classification includes 24 strengths. The person is considered to have a good character if one "displays but 1 or 2 strengths within a virtue group"[20].

7. *Situational themes*: "specific habits that lead people to manifest given character strengths in given situations"[21].

The model also poses some questions that deserve further attention. For instance, courage is classified as virtue while valor, persistence, integrity (honesty) and vitality as strengths[22]. If persistence and vitality are without doubt strengths, it is less clear if honesty is a strength. Also integrity is considered a positive feature neglecting that its main source is the consistency among thoughts (feelings) – speech – acts. This is to say that in some cases violent cynics could display consistency with hatred rooted in immoral principles. This becomes more evident if we consider personality from Sullivan's perspective as "*the relatively enduring pattern of recurrent interpersonal situations which characterize a human life*"[23].

Regarding the intersection between moral development and character the present approach takes into account Bandura's theory of social learning and Wundt's classical idea that the conflict of interests represents a crucial test for one's own character. Following Bandura's fertile concepts of "spiritual models" and "agency" and his comprehensive theory of moral disengagement[24] the present approach is aiming to explore tensions and intersections between the strengths and virtues on one side and weaknesses and vices of character on the other side. The dialectical model on character assumes that besides goodness/evilness, strength/weakness, transparency (opacity) that are bipolar dimensions of character are

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[20] Ibidem, p. 13.

[21] Ibidem, p. 14.

[22] Ibidem, p. 29.

[23] Sullivan, H. S., *The theory of interpersonal psychiatry*, edited by H. S. Perry & M. L. Gawel, With and introduction by M. B. Cohen, W.W. Norton, New York 1953, pp. 110-111.

[24] Bandura, A., *Moral disengagement. How people do harm and live with themselves,* Worth Publishers, New York 2016.

not only expressed within a given situation, as it is assumed in a productive mode by the model developed by Peterson and Seligman but are also expressed in accordance to a guiding principle that is voluntarily selected and respected by the person (Fig. 3, 4, 5).

Blasi (2005) developed the concept of moral character that is conceived as being the result of three "mutually related constructs: the moral will, or will structured around desires for what is morally good; willpower, or capacity for self-control; and integrity in its various forms"[25]. Blasi considers that there are two types of virtues: higher and lower order virtues[26]. His model assumes that the higher order virtues might be conceived as being composed by a "will cluster", which includes perseverance, self- discipline, self-control and will power and an "integrity cluster", which includes responsibility, self-consistency, principledness, autonomy and integrity. Blasi's model advances the understanding of character especially by its explicit exploration of "moral character". From this perspective his model is in tune with in-depth studies of moral exemplars (Colby, Damon, 1992). Blasi's model invites, at least from the perspective of the present approach, a few questions, and mainly the following two: (1) are always the will features (such as self-control, preseverance) used by all social actors only for good moral goals and by respecting high moral principles? The answer is evidently no. Are many social actors who have a high will power (discipline, self-control) and have been or are serial killer, tyrants, dictators; (2) are self-consistency and transparency, as basic components of integrity, always in the service of goodness? how can this differentiate between actors who harbor hatred, deliver hate-speeches and engage in violent and exclusivist actions, so being violently cynical, and actors who have loving intentions and feelings, deliver positive messages and engage in actions that serve the common good? Based on a dialectic and vectorial model, which

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[25] Blasi, A., "Moral character. A psychological approach". In D. K. Lapsley & F. C. Power (Eds.), *Character psychology and character education*. University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame Indiana 2005, p. 95.

[26] Ibidem, pp. 70-73.

first has been developed for the exploration of love and hate (Mamali, 1992, 2001, 2003), the present model starts from the basic assumption that character itself has a dialectical and vectorial nature and that it is self-constructed and socially constructed. Character includes tensions between its strengths (strong versus weak: self-control versus impulsive, endurance versus to give up/abandon, resilience versus rigidity), virtues (compassion, fairness, moderation, love, non-violence) and vices (envy, unfairness, hate, violence), balance between integrity and fragmentation, and relation to moral or immoral guiding principles. It means that the chances to have a perfectly good (strong, virtuous, transparent and guided always in all life-situations by high moral principles) are extremely small as there are the chances to have a perfectly bad character. However, the model assumes the existence of significant thresholds, which are observable by the actors and by others, that distinguish between evil and good characters and among various levels of goodness and evilness. The dialectical and vectorial model opens the possibility to explore the tensions between the main dimensions of the good and strong character and of the bad and strong character, including the various patterns of combinations between these forces.

All abilities (cognitive, emotional, physical, and combined) are potential resources of character strength. However, abilities as such do not guarantee that the intentions, the talk and the actions of any person are rooted in universal values and moral principles. In some cases abilities, such as intelligence or self-control, can be intentionally used to accomplish evil goals and to design and resort to violent means.

General theoretical framework: character is considered to be a dynamic sub-system of personality (related to temperament, cognitive abilities, motives and values) that is able of self-construction within specific social conditions. It takes into account Janet's perspective that considers that personality is the result of individual's work to "construct one's own unity and difference with the world"[27]. Within the personality system, as the present study assumes, character

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[27] Janet, P., *L'évolution psychologique de la perosnalité,* Editions Chahine, Paris 1929, p. 9.

is a subsystem that can be at the same time constructed and could help to the transformation of other subsystems. Within the present theoretical framework the tensions between the self-construction of character and the social construction of character become open to exploration. Jung (1932/1978), based on his productive construct of collective unconscious, argues that large cultural groups, such as nations, develop during periods of time and under specific environmental, social and cultural conditions a "national character". In the case of Swiss Jung makes the crucial comment that the national character might lead, as in the case of many other nations as I would add, "to act as Europe's [for other countries one could add Africa's, America's, Asia's or World's] centre of gravity"[28]. For Jung the national character, which is the result of long term and macro-forces, represents also a formation matrix for the construction of the individual's character: "The national character is imprinted on a man [human], as a fate he has not chosen – like a beautiful or ugly body. It is not the will of the individuals that moulds the destinies of nations, but suprapersonal factors"[29]. However, according to Jung every change, especially those who break the abuse of power "begins with the individual"[30]. Such changes of character are triggered by experiences that "threaten the structure of consciousness"[31]. The individual faces two tasks: first "the creation o will-power", the second is "the free use of it"[32]. One is responsible for one's character. The self-construction of character takes place within a given cultural and historical context (see Fig. 1, Mamali, 1996). Fromm, based on Freud's concept of dynamics nature of personality, which however is mainly under the influence of unconscious forces, argues that social character is not an individual feature but a common structure to most people who belong to the same

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[28] Jung, C. G. (1932/1976), *Symbols of transformation: An analysis of the prelude to a case of schizophrenia*. In *Collected works of C. G. Jung H. Red, M. Fordham. G. Adler & W. McGuire (Eds.), translated by R.F. C. Hull, Volume 5, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1976, p 486.

[29] Ibidem, p. 487.

[30] Ibidem, p. 27.

[31] Ibidem, p. 130.

[32] Ibidem, p. 353.

social group or class within a given society. It helps to identify sadistic, hating hoarding tendencies (Fromm, 1941). Later on Fromm & Maccoby (1970) studying a Mexican village defined the social character as a "matrix" that incudes "a syndrome of character traits which has developed as an adaptation to economic, social and cultural conditions common to that group"[33]. The model of social character[34] includes four major orientations, each with a positive and negative side: a) receptive (adaptable-unprincipled); b) exploitative (active-exploitative;); c) hoarding (reserved-cold;); d) productive (creative-destructive). While this model incudes features such as "mother fixation", "rebellion toward mother" or "sadism/masochism" it misses essential features of character virtues and character strengths. The model as such invites questions about the individual's resources, choices and responsibilities within various societies and life conditions to develop character's strengths (self-control, resilience, courage, will power) and virtues (love, justice, non-violence, altruism) and to use them intentionally accepting high personal costs and confronting strong and principled vicious characters.
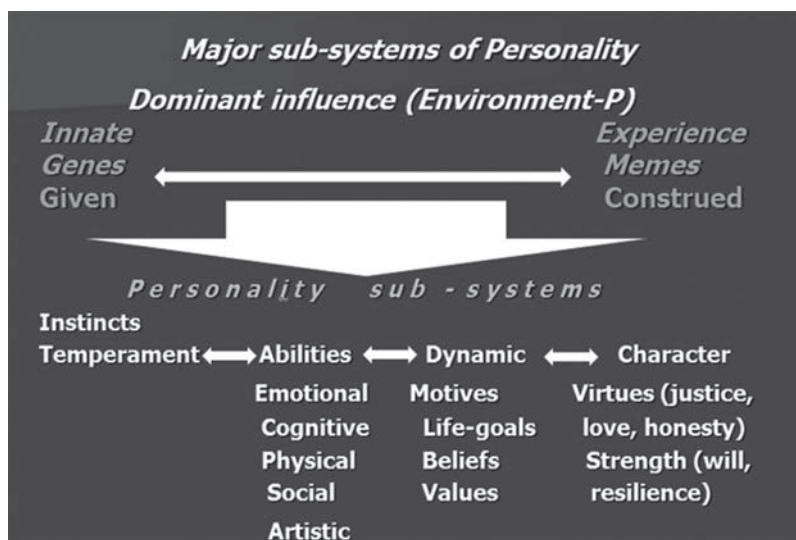

Fig 1: Experience and environment and their relation to character, as a personality's subsystem.

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[33] Fromm, E. & Maccoby, M., *Social character in a Mexican village: A sociopsychoanalytic study*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs 1970, p. 16.

[34] Ibidem, pp. 69-74, pp. 79-80, pp. 101-102.

A democratic culture could enhance specific traits of character (more frequently the positive traits) while a repressive (totalitarian) culture will enhance those traits of character that serve its functioning (more frequently negative traits). However, even within difficult social conditions some individuals (spiritual models in Bandura's terms, 2003) will freely accept huge personal costs while developing strong, good, transparent traits of character that are put into practice guided by high moral principles. This has been the case of personalities such as Franklin, Gandhi, Thoreau, Martin Luther King, Mandela, and under the communist regimes of personalities such as Patočka, Havel, Michnick, Monseigneur Ghica, Steinhardt, Constante, Goma and many others. On the other hand the series of strong and evil characters is very long; Napoleon, Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Mao, Osama bin Laden, Nero, Genghis Khan (see Hanke, Liu et al., 2015) being just a few. One of the difficult problems related to "Villains of World History" is that the selective list does not include the much longer list of the executors of hatred acts; such a list might represent just the *peak of the iceberg of Evilness (strong and evil characters).* This evaluation is rooted in the assumption that both Good and Strong Characters as well as Evil and Strong Characters are the result of self and social (political) construction. In some cases there are explicit political manifestoes, as it is the Manifesto of the Communist Party (Mamali, 2009), that prescribe the roles of strong and violent (evil) characters motivated by hatred. At the same time the communist regimes during long periods (50 or more years) did put to a great political and existential pressure the transparency of individual's character making the double-speak the rule, and officially denying any attachment to moral principles that did not belong to communist ideology. In these cases even the national character has been repressed by a social character that is explicitly grounded in a political ideology.

I consider that character is the outcome of the individual's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, moral, spiritual/religious and relational efforts during one's own life. It is not a given sub-system. Character is a self-constructed personality subsystem within a cultural and historical context and in interaction with given personal data of biological,

social, and cultural nature and within the interaction processes with others, including their character. The tensions between the strong/weak and good characters on one side and strong/weak and evil characters on the other side and resulting patterns should be explicit in a model of character. Also a model of character must account for the motivational vectors implied by this sub-system of personality:

1.	**Strength (persistence, willpower, resilience, courage, capacity to delay gratification, self-control)**	- **Weakness**
2.	**Goodness (virtues)**	- **Evilness (vices)**
3.	**Transparent coherence (thinking/feeling-speaking - acting): it can good be good or cynically evil**	- **Opaque incoherence**
4.	**Self-directedness, self-selected, self-accepted - and tested/experienced principles, goal values' immoral purposefulness guided by high moral principles such as truth (do not lie), love your enemies, non-violence, altruism**	- **Diffused/disoriented or guided by self-selected principles such as manipulation, violence, cynicism, autocentrism at the expense of the development even the survival of other individuals and groups**

Strength is defined as the power of an individual to overcome internal and external obstacles, limitations, to face challenges, to fulfill one's own goals against opposition from others (friends, neutral and enemies), opposition from dominant norms, customs and mentalities, and ones' own present resources. It means to persist in one's work against pain, deprivation, derogatory attitudes, threats and all kinds of handicaps (physical, social, situational, natural etc.).

At the character level goodness is defined by the moral values and ethical principles that are embodied in one's own

behavior, thinking, intentions, feelings, speech and ways of relating.

Among the basic *virtues* that are widely practiced and accepted are: love, justice, humility, wisdom, temperance, gratitude, charity and transcendence. As long as virtues are dominant one's character is good, and as long as their opposites are dominant (hate, injustice, arrogance, etc.) one's character is evil. Both the evil and the good characters could be either strong or weak, or in between.

Coherence is generated by the degree of *correspondence* among – *what one knows, feels, intends and can - what one expresses, speaks – what one does, acts, behaves*. In a simplified mode it is the correspondence between *thinking (feel- ing) – speaking - behaving*. High consonance among these three different components indicates character coherence/integrity.

Fig 2: Transparent integrity

From an ethical view point the coherence could be either good (virtuous) or evil (vicious). This would be consonant with the cynical worldview that accepts to think, express and behaves in violent ways (Sloterdijk's analysis of the cynical reason, 1987). The major types that could be generated by the transparent coherence are the virtuous character or the cynical (vicious) character. Both are open and display

high levels of coherence, but in different moral directions. The opaque incoherence can generate the structural manipulative character (the deceiver) or the structurally non-reliable character.

Self-directedness: self-selected, self-accepted and self-tested principles, basic values. The oriented nature of a character is provided by the principle(s) (or basic values) treated (cognitively, emotionally, behaviorally) by the person as being cardinal for the meaning of human life. Such principles could have different moral content and various ethical values. For instance: truth could be such a cardinal principle (like Allport' cardinal traits), love, non-violence, cooperation or violence, using others as tools, competition, dominance.

The character's self-directedness/orientation can be assessed in two major ways:

a. the ethical value of the cardinal principle(s)

b. the degree in which one respects across time and situations the self-selected principle(s)

There are diffused characters, i.e. characters that do not select one or more basic principles for guiding one's actions.

The self-directness is mainly expressed in time (when and hoThe self-directness is mainly expressed in time (when and for how long a certain principle such as justice, or violence, or love, or Machiavellian orientation has been self-selected). The character has a dynamic character and could be represented in a vectorial mode. Visual representations of the model are provided by Figures 3, 4, 5.

Basic questions: Essentially the concept of character helps us to answer to the questions: what and how much one does with one's innate and acquired resources? What are the moral/social/religious principles that guide one's own behavior and make one feel satisfied with one's thoughts, feelings, speech, behaviors and ways of relating with others, nature and transcendental? What and how much one succeeds to fulfill one's duties, rights, potential (innate and acquired) and life goals within a given social context?

Character is mainly the result of self-construction and social construction and much less the result of innate components. Also internal and social limitations and/

or adverse forces challenge the goodness and strength of character.

The project attempts to identify basic character traits of well-known personalities. The main polar elements will be strong and good character versus strong and evil character without neglecting that there are overlapping areas between virtues and vices, and strengths and weaknesses across various life areas and experiences. Such contradictory patterns might emerge even in the case of major dilemma faced by moral exemplars who are confronted by new major decisions, as it is the present situation in Burma/Myamar (Kyi's position toward the questions of minorities). It is a**ssumed that crucial experiences might trigger a threshold transformation within one's own character.** Not always a strong character is a good character as the following cases suggest:

Strong and Good	*Strong and Evil*
Vasco da Gama	Cortez
Newton	Marquis de Sade
Jeanne d'Arc	Lucretia Borgia
George Washington	Napoleon
Marie Skłodowska Curie	E. Bathory
Ludwig Wittgenstein	Lenin
Gandhi	Hitler
Martin Luther King Jr.	Stalin
Mother Teresa	Idi Amin
John Paul II	Pol Pot
Lena Constante	Ana Pauker
Nelson Mandela	Fidel Castro
Auung S. S. Kyi	Enver Hoxha
Tutu	Bokassa

However, the model is able to identify mixed types such as "Weak and Good Characters" and their choices in relation with corrupting macro-social forces. The proposed model includes the following dimensions of character: a) goodness (honesty, altruism, love); b) strength (perseverance, endurance, order); c) transparency (mainly the consonance among thoughts, speech and acts); d) basic guiding principles. At the same time all o them could be reversed into evilness, weakness and opacity as it is presented in the following 3 figures.
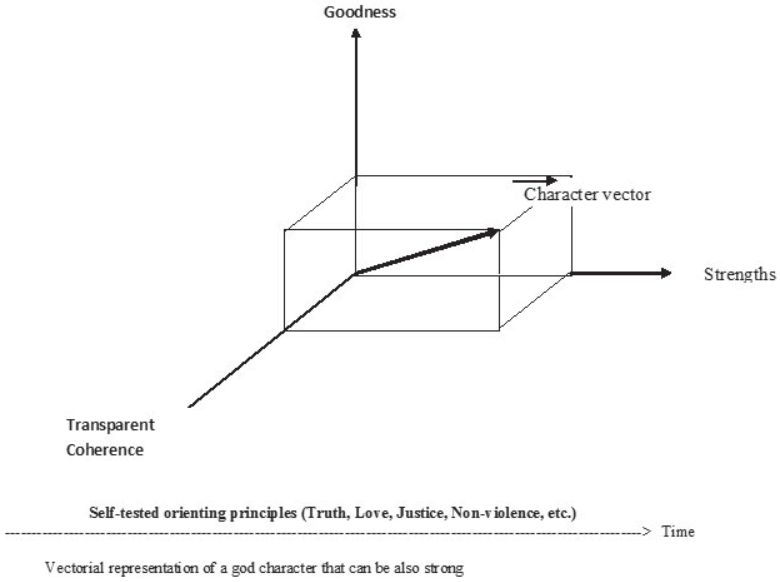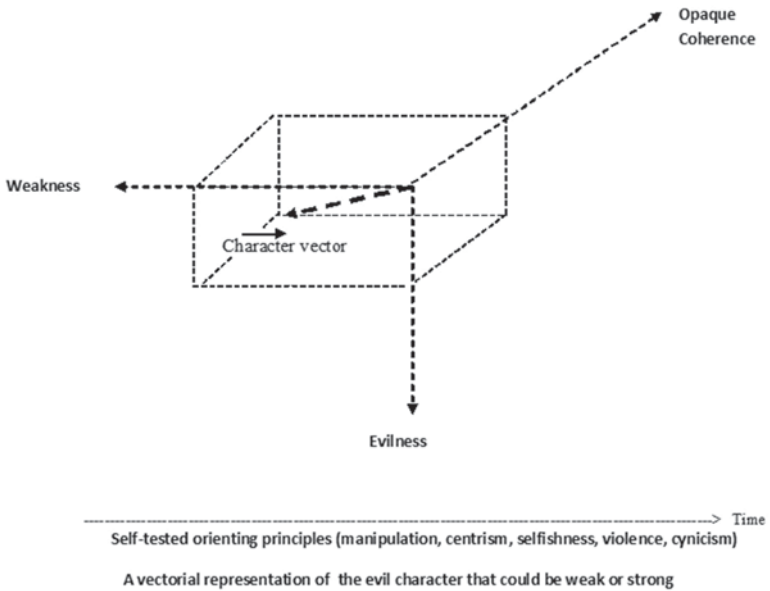
Goodness

Character vector

Strengths

Transparent
Coherence

Self-tested orienting principles (Truth, Love, Justice, Non-violence, etc.)
--> Time

Vectorial representation of a god character that can be also strong

Fig. 3

Opaque
Coherence

Weakness

Character vector

Evilness

--> Time
Self-tested orienting principles (manipulation, centrism, selfishness, violence, cynicism)

A vectorial representation of the evil character that could be weak or strong

Fig. 4

A dialectical representation of character (good or evil, and strong or weak)
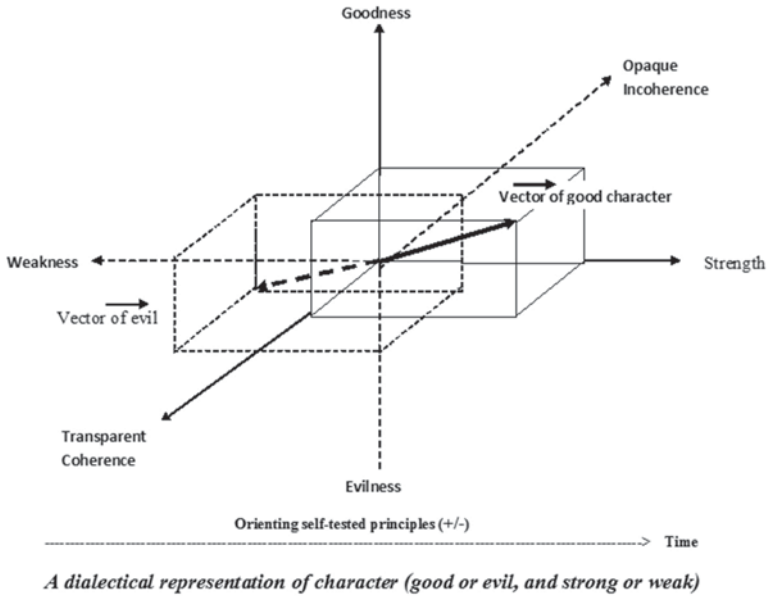
Fig. 5

The dialectical model of character suggests that besides the classical stages of moral development in the Piagetian (1932, 1962) conception and especially in Kohlberg's (1969, 1981, 1984) conception might exist a moral decay also rooted in social learning and in one's own experience and choices.

A comprehensive model of moral development should be able to explore at the same time the moral development as well as the moral degradation, or the growth of immorality at all levels of social complexity. The Kantian maxim "Act only on that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" and especially its practical imperative that asks to "act as to treat humanity" as an "end" never "as means only" suggest that the relationship means-ends could be an important criterion in assessing both the moral development as well as the moral decay (the immoral development). Gandhi's solution to the means-ends puzzle is radically opposed, from amoral perspective, to Machiavelli's solution (Mamali, 1998). Theoretically and empirically such orientations must be accounted for. For instance, how could be assessed morally those individuals who intentionally try to transform others in simple tools,

objects or instruments that can be removed or destroyed? Where might be located on a scale of moral development those who intentionally and even by principle (race-hatred, class-hatred, violence for the sake of violence, etc.) dehumanize others? The present approach assumes that immoral behavior is learned also and, much more, it can develop. Are there six negative stages (or stages of immoral development)? It seems that a wide range of appalling behaviors produced during human history and some that develop today might fit into a reverse scale of moral development (or a scale of immoral development). Moral disengagement as conceived by Bandura (2016), might become a road, not the only one, toward principled immoral development.

Lind's critical studies (2002, 2003) prove the important role of education, of learning in the moral development. Also there is historical evidence that immoral behavior was systematically taught, as is the case in point with Makarenko's re-education method (1929/1973, 1963) that alternates revenge and suffering till the end result is completed and blind obedience to evil authorities and immoral principles is ensured. This method was used in what is known as *"Piteşti experiment"* (Bacu; Goma, Ierunca) with devastating consequences on the inmates identity.

The model assumes that autonomy, self-direction guided by self-selected and practiced high moral principles is a core factor within the self-construction of character mainly due to the motivational quality and strengths it involves.

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