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The educational salience of emulation as a moral virtue

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ABSTRACT

A foundational principle of neo-Aristotelian character education is that virtue can be cultivated, in particular through the emulation of moral role models, such as teachers. Yet despite the pedagogical appeal of role modelling, what emulation involves remains methodologically unclear. In this paper, I suggest that part of this ambiguity lies in a category mistake: the misconceptualisation of emulation as a mere emotion, rather than, as I argue, a virtue in its own right. Predominantly composed of virtuous emotion and necessarily entailing virtuous action, I propose a componential account of the virtue of emulation which I synthesise with Aristotle’s theory of “four causes”. Through doing so, I make visible how emulation operates in different ways depending on one’s degree of *phronetic* development and suggest a new concept—entangled *phronesis*—as the mechanism underpinning emulation. I then consider what these insights illuminate about role modelling in classroom contexts.

KEYWORDS

Role modelling; emulation; character education; moral development; Aristotle’s four causes

1. Introduction

Respected educationists have long championed role modelling, or learning from exemplars, as a method of virtuous character development (e.g., see Carr, 2012; Engelen et al., 2018; Kristjánsson, 2015, 2018, 2020; Lickona, 1992; Miller, 2014, 2017; Sanderse, 2012, 2013; Vaccarezza & Nicoli, 2019; Warnick, 2008; Zagzebski, 2017). Indeed, the pedagogical appeal of role modelling has made it a prominent feature of neo-Aristotelian character education (ACE), a form of moral education rooted in neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. The idea is that through exemplifying moral virtue, role models inspire others to emulate their character. In both virtue ethics and ACE, virtues such as generosity, honesty and justice are broadly defined as *acquired stable traits of character*, with character conceptualised as ‘the integration of a constellation of virtues within personality’ (Wright et al., 2020, p. 9). Furthermore, virtues are a product of *phronesis*—the integrative intellectual (and thus rational) meta-virtue of practical wisdom which, amongst other functions, works to identify the salient features of any situation to enable deliberation and choice regarding the appropriate course of virtuous emotion and action. Proponents of ACE make the normative claim that teachers specifically ought to be moral role models to pupils, and further that, as important
sources of emulation, teachers may also benefit from having role models themselves (Kristjánsson, 2020, p. 139; Sanderse, 2013). Whilst there already exists a lively discourse on emulation in the Journal of Moral Education (e.g., see Athanassoulis, 2017; Kristjánsson, 2006; Osman, 2019; Sanderse, 2013), I intend this paper to contribute to it by ameliorating a, largely methodological, gap in the field. More precisely, despite ACE endorsing emulation qua role modelling as a didactic method, there remains a lack of clarity regarding what the emulation of role models involves (Kristjánsson, 2020, p. 136), and little consensus regarding how it works in classroom contexts (Vos, 2018). Ultimately, this methodological issue means that questions regarding how role modelling does or should take place remain open.

In this paper, I therefore seek to disambiguate the process of emulation qua role modelling, by unpacking the concept of emulation itself. I argue that the aforementioned methodological issue is grounded in, and exacerbated by, a more substantial conceptual issue. More specifically, I suggest that much of the ambiguity surrounding emulation qua role modelling lies in a category mistake: the misconceptualisation of emulation as a mere emotion, rather than, as I will argue, a virtue in its own right. Indeed, in both the Rhetoric (2001, pp. 75–76) and the Nicomachean Ethics (1926, p. 1105b22). Aristotle (2001), defines emulation as an emotion, characterised by distress at the realisation that one person has acquired ‘good things that are highly valued and are possible’, i.e., virtues, that the moral learner lacks, which makes said learner feel deficient and inspired to emulate them (p. 75). This has led many neo-Aristotelians to follow suit in this categorisation (e.g., see Croce, 2019, p. 238; Kristjánsson, 2006, 2018; Osman, 2019, p. 318; Sanderse, 2013, p. 36; Steutel & Spiecker, 2004, p. 545; Vos, 2018, p. 6). As an emotion, essentially a phronetically informed disposition to medial feeling, emulation would comprise: perception, thought, physical feelings and a behavioural suggestion (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 13). However, if emulation is merely an emotion, then this behavioural suggestion is not synonymous with full virtuous action, which I will argue is a logically necessary element of virtue. Due to emulation’s explicit association with virtue development, I maintain that action is also essential to being emulous.

In what follows, I thus propose a reconstructed neo-Aristotelian account of emulation as a moral virtue. I will first situate my argument within the ongoing discourse regarding the prevailing understanding of emulation as an emotion (Section 1). I will then advance my thesis by proposing that because emulation necessarily entails virtuous action, it is not merely a virtuous emotion, but better categorised as a virtue in its own right—albeit one which is predominately comprised of virtuous emotion (Section 6.2). Having argued for emulation as a virtue, I then proceed to operationalise it into its component parts and, though doing so, make visible how role models stimulate the perceptual, cognitive, attitudinal (including motivational) and behavioural elements of virtue development (Section 6.3). I then add further methodological rigour by systematising this componential account with Aristotle’s understanding of causation in his Metaphysics (1999, p. 1044a32–4): the four causes (Section 4). Here, I introduce the concept of entangled phronesis – a process that I suggest is unique to the (ultimately) educational virtue of emulation, which enables a moral learner to share in the phronesis of the role model and thus also their blueprint of the good life. Finally, once a four-causal componential account of the virtue of emulation has been established, I apply these new insights to role modelling in the context of ACE (Section 5).
Before we proceed, I must take a moment to clarify the scope of virtuous character development I intend this analysis of emulation qua role modelling to encompass. More precisely, I propose that understanding emulation requires both investigating how it would operate in an early-years context (what I later term ‘habituated emulation’) and how it does once phronesis is developing (what I later term ‘true emulation’). I acknowledge that Aristotle was primarily concerned with the former, which is a key sense in which my argument should be considered a neo-Aristotelian reconstruction, rather than exegesis, since my interest in this paper goes beyond his. I do, however, maintain that synthesising much of what is to come with Aristotle’s ethics and metaphysics can meaningfully augment our understanding of the emulation of role models in ACE.

2. Emulation as an emotion

Although I will later argue against understanding emulation purely as an emotion, or more specifically a virtuous emotion, it is first instructive to expound the prevailing neo-Aristotelian view in order to provide a more substantial springboard for my own position. On this account, not only do moral role models help others become virtuous by developing their emotional dispositions, but they motivate this development through emotion itself, specifically the emotion of emulation (zélos in Greek).

As mentioned, emulation, according to Aristotle’s Rhetoric, is a painful emotion characterised by distress at the realisation that one person has acquired ‘good things that are highly valued and are possible’, i.e., virtues, that the moral learner lacks (2001, p. 75). This means that as said learner becomes aware that their affective behaviours fall short of the role model’s ideal, they will feel anguish at their own deficiency and be motivated to overcome this lack through emulation. Here, it is important to conceptually and morally distinguish distress from envy. The latter has immoral connotations, implying that A has something which gives them an advantage over B, that B wants to remove from A, to gain the advantage for themselves (Kristjánsson, 2006, p. 42). By contrast, emulation is a distinctly moral emotion, expressing admiration at the thing which A has and B wants, without any intention to deprive or compete with A (Kristjánsson, 2006, p. 42). Therefore, in addition to distress, Aristotle maintains that those who are emulous must, as a matter of logical necessity, consider themselves ‘deserving of the goods that they do not have’ (2001, p. 75). To summarise, then, recognising a role model’s virtuous actions and corresponding affective responses as representative of an ideal, and considering themselves deserving of such goods, causes learners to feel deficient and inspired to emulate them (1926, NE, pp. 1180b3–8). However, simply feeling deficient is surely not enough to lure moral learners into emulating role models; further methodological clarity is needed.

In an effort to add nuance to the process of emulating role models, moral philosopher Kristján Kristjánsson has sought to categorise what has so far been termed ‘the emotion of emulation’ as either 1) a freestanding ‘emotional virtue’ in its own right (Kristjánsson, 2006), or 2) a ‘virtuous emotion’ which is a component of other general virtues (Kristjánsson, 2018). I will now briefly problematise both, before offering a third option—albeit one which departs somewhat from a classical reading of Aristotle—that emulation is better categorised as a virtue in its own right.
First, whilst I concede that understanding emulation as an emotional virtue opens up the possibility of illuminating aspects of it as one would any other virtue, for example by dividing it into components of the affective, conative, cognitive and behavioural (Kristjánsson, 2006, pp. 44–46), in blurring the boundary between emotion and virtue, and suggesting that some emotions just are virtues, I argue Kristjánsson goes beyond what an ‘emotional virtue’ can accomplish. This is because, if some virtues are synonymous with emotion, then one cannot validly include the final behavioural component in the categorisation. More precisely, because emotions are to do with feeling, but not necessarily doing, they may include a behavioural suggestion, but not full virtuous activity, which is a necessary component of virtue. This said, Kristjánsson seems to be on the right path in the sense that emulation must include activity for the moralleaner to actually develop virtues, yet in classifying emulation as an emotional virtue he claims too much.

Kristjánsson himself acknowledges a further problem in blurring the emotion-virtue boundary, which concerns how virtues cannot simply be emotions in a mean (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 22). Whilst Aristotle explicitly rejects episodic emotions as virtuous in his Rhetoric, Kristjánsson extends this claim to dispositional emotions too, i.e., to emotions that we express frequently and consistently as opposed to unique episodes (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 22). He contends that the classical Aristotle ought to be interpreted as supporting that dispositional, morally optimal, emotional traits are elements of virtue, i.e., virtuous emotions, but do not fully constitute virtue (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 22); an interpretation which correlates with Aristotle’s position supporting a distinction between emotion and virtue (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 15). However, if virtues are not simply emotions in a mean, then the emotion of emulation cannot be a full virtue, but if it is not a virtue, then it cannot include action—which seems essential to being emulous.

Taking these considerations into account, Kristjánsson revises his stance on emulation, preferring instead to term it a ‘virtuous emotion’ (Kristjánsson, 2018). What this implies is that, as an emotion, emulation is a component of virtue, rather than a full virtue itself. Importantly, whilst there are numerous ways to define emotions, for example via a Darwinian perspective which conceptualises them as primarily bodily feelings, Kristjánsson proposes an Aristotelian componental view of emotions as essentially cognitions (evaluative thoughts) (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 5). More specifically, he argues that emotions involve: perception, thought (cognition), physical feelings and a behavioural suggestion (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 13). They are therefore not mere feelings, but evaluative thoughts which distinguish one emotion from another (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 7). For example, pity concerns a thought about the deserved misfortune of another, whilst compassion concerns a thought about another’s underserved misfortune (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 7).

If virtuous emotions are, in part, cognitive ingredients of virtues, this further entails that, like virtue, they be medially felt ‘at the right times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end and in the right way’ (1926, NE, pp. 1106b17–35). Correspondingly, Kristjánsson proposes that experiencing emotions medially, rather than excessively or deficiently concerns: ‘(a) occasions, (b) objects, (c) people, (d) motive (i.e., goal), and (e) way (i.e., degree)’ (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 20). If dispositional emotional traits ought to be felt medially in these ways, then this implies that for each emotion there is a morally ‘right’ way to feel, which further supports how virtuous
emotions are not purely perceptual but also cognitive. This is because moral accountability and responsibility are usually tied to our cognitions, thus, in order to be morally relevant, emotions must include a cognitive element. In light of this, Kristjánsson suggests that an emotional failing, i.e., experiencing an emotion deficiently or excessively rather than medially, can evidence a moral failing (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 2). Furthermore, for obvious reasons, if dispositional emotions have a cognitive core, they are also, like virtue, reason-infused, that is ‘grounded in sound facts and good reason’ (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 18). I specify dispositional as one can readily imagine an episodic emotion being driven by impulsive passion, which would not qualify it as rational. Overall, this cognitive componental view of virtuous emotions correlates with Aristotle’s (emotion infused) ‘soft’ rationalist stance (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 18) and represents a serious departure from the Kantian idea that emotions have no part in ethics (Kant, 2018).

Having explained what is meant by a virtuous emotion, I must now begin the task of evaluating what this means for emulation specifically. Ultimately, the main contention I have with defining emulation as a virtuous emotion is similar to that faced when defining it as an emotional virtue, in that it concerns action, or in this case, inaction. Previously, I objected that Kristjánsson, in blurring the emotion-virtue boundary, over-defined the emotion of emulation as a virtue, which negated the possibility of virtuous action, which I maintain is an integral component of virtue. Approached from a different direction, I now make a similar objection to under-defining emulation as a virtuous emotion. If it is a virtuous emotion, then even if it can be helpfully divided into components of perception, thought (cognition), physical feelings and a behavioural suggestion, the latter remains a suggestion and, as I will argue, does not constitute activity. Explaining why this lack of action is particularly problematic for emulation, in the way it may not be for the other virtuous emotions cited by Kristjánsson (2018), requires first adding clarity by fleshing out this final component—the behavioural suggestion—further. In essence, Kristjánsson conceptualises this as the final cause which concerns a disposition to goal-directed activity (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 13), and in doing so draws upon Knuuttilla’s notion of a ‘behavioural suggestion’ as an ‘impulse towards action’ (Knuuttilla, 2004, p. 32). Crucially for present purposes, this behavioural suggestion is explicitly distinguished from behaviourism (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 13), clearly indicating that behavioural activity is not a necessary condition of virtuous emotion and that the emotion could be behaviourally inactive. Take compassion, for example: Kristjánsson suggests that feeling compassion towards another’s underserved misfortune may compel one to offer help; yet equally, if one is incapacitated from engaging in the activity of help, perhaps due to being in a wheelchair, one can still be considered compassionately ‘goal orientated’ except the goal lies beyond one’s reach (Kristjánsson, 2018, pp. 13–14). In essence I agree with this point, yet suggest that in the first case one is talking about compassion as a virtue, whilst in the second compassion as a virtuous emotion, with the distinction between the two located in activity.

In light of this, I propose that whilst virtuous emotions can generate an ‘activity impulse’ or ‘behavioural suggestion’, this is not synonymous with virtuous activity, with the latter being a logically necessary condition of virtue, and consequently its acquisition and development. For emulation, under-defining it as a virtuous emotion is therefore problematic primarily because in order to acquire virtues, in addition to developing the
appropriate virtuous emotions, one must explicitly and habitually practice them. For example, even if one perceives the exemplar’s virtues as representative of a moral ideal, thinks that they are worthy of emulation and possible to acquire, and physically feels the distress and zeal associated with one’s lack of the desired quality, unless one is moved to activity, i.e., to actually putting the virtue into practice in one’s own context, one cannot be considered emulous. Thus, whilst for a virtuous emotion a ‘suggestion’ towards activity may be enough, for a virtue this is better conceptualised as a motivational element of distress and ambition, with the true final cause involving virtuous activity. In light of this, I argue that activity matters for the efficacy of emulation and that without it the emulation of role models is an impotent form of moral development. Of course, given the persuasiveness of Kristjánsson’s position that virtuous emotions are the central ingredients of virtue, I support that they are also the central ingredients of emulation. Yet because emulation—as I will reconceptualise it for the purpose of character developmental theory—must include activity, it cannot be purely a virtuous emotion and is better categorised as a virtue in its own right.

3. Emulation as a moral virtue

Now that I have problematised why emulation is not an emotional virtue, nor a virtuous emotion, I must justify conceptualising it as a virtue—albeit one which is predominately composed of virtuous emotion. In making such a move, I cautiously suggest that Aristotle is guilty of a category mistake when defining emulation purely as an emotion in the *Rhetoric* (2001, pp. 75–76), which could partly account for the historical confusion regarding what the emulation of role models involves. This said, as Nussbaum elegantly remarks, whilst Aristotle’s support of something does not make it true, it does mark it out as a ‘plausible candidate for the truth’ (1988, p. 5). Therefore, in making this claim, I will endeavour to raise the credibility of my position by aligning it with other elements of Aristotelian thought as far as possible. In the interests of clarity, I will now proceed to formulate my argument in standard form:

1. Virtuous emotions are components of virtues.
2. Therefore, virtues and virtuous emotions are intrinsically related but distinct.
3. Virtues are distinguished from virtuous emotions by activity, with virtuous activity being a necessary condition of virtue, but not of virtuous emotion.
4. This entails that, in order to become virtuous, one must put virtuous emotions into practice by exercising virtuous activity.
5. The central way to become virtuous is through emulating moral role models.
6. This implies that, in addition to virtuous emotion, the emulation of role models must include activity.
7. If emulation must include activity, it cannot be purely a virtuous emotion.
8. Therefore, emulation is better categorised as a virtue.

Since this is not purely a deductive argument, at best my conclusion (8) can be highly probable. In light of this, and to make my argument as persuasive as possible, I shall now proceed to defend the most contentious premises. As I have already appealed to Kristjánsson’s (2018) position in support of premises 1 and 2 I shall not reiterate these
arguments here and instead focus on defending those which most require further support. In doing so, I shall also acknowledge and respond to possible objections.

Premise 3: ‘virtues are distinguished from virtuous emotions by activity, with virtuous activity being a necessary condition of virtue, but not of virtuous emotion’, can be supported by appealing to Aristotle and his neo-Aristotelian sympathisers. For example, Aristotle seems to unambiguously imply that virtue includes an explicitly behavioural component:

\[\ldots \text{to virtue belongs virtuous activity} \ldots \text{one who has the activity will of necessity be acting and acting well. And as in the Olympic Games it is not the most beautiful and the strongest that are crowned but those who compete} \ldots \text{so those who act win, and rightly win, the noble and the good things in life.}\]  
(Aristotle, 1926, NE, 1098b30-1099a6).

This insistence is reinforced at multiple other junctures in his writing (e.g., see 1926, pp. a33-1103b1; 1103b20–32; 1104b13-15; 1105b5-10). A move which is supported by contemporary neo-Aristotelian philosophers and moral psychologists who all include a behavioural element in their quadripartite componential accounts of virtue (e.g., see Curren & Kotzee, 2014; Fowers et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2020). Interestingly, in the Rhetoric Aristotle explains emotions not in four, but in three ways, (Aristotle, 2001, p. 55), which could support that the additional component of action is what distinguishes a virtuous emotion from a virtue.

If we also inspect a definition of virtue offered by Rorty, it is also clear that virtue includes action:

Virtue (arete) is that sort of active disposition (hexis) which sets a person to act or react in a mean, in situations involving choice (prohairesis), following reason (logos) as the person of practical wisdom (phronimos) does in matters concerning pathe and actions.
(Rorty, 1984, p. 535).

Pathe and actions. Rorty can be interpreted as following Aristotle and others in proposing that virtue must include both emotion (pathe) and action. As regards the pathe element, Rorty makes explicit that to contribute to virtue these emotions must be voluntary, appropriate and appropriately understood, i.e., deliberate, medial and rational (1984, p. 537). In terms of action, Rorty further emphasises that ‘Aristotle characterises each of the virtues as dispositions to typical actions and reactions’ (1984, p. 537), whilst maintaining there is a relationship between virtuous emotions and virtue (1984, p. 538). Overall, these considerations support the link between virtue and action, and therefore Premise 3.

However, the move that full-blown virtue necessarily involves action has been criticised as ‘misguided’ by Kristjánsson’s (2018, p. 18). He claims that, where virtues conflict, phronesis acts as an adjudicator to assess which one takes precedence. This does not mean that the other virtue has not been felt, but that on phronetic reflection a different virtue was deemed the most appropriate (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 18). He cites the example of deciding to tell an upsetting truth to a friend, despite knowing that it will cause them pain, and argues that the virtue of compassion is still there ‘in full force’ even though it was overridden by the virtue of honesty and did not actively express compassionate behaviour (Kristjánsson, 2018, p. 18). In response to this objection, I offer the following rejoinder which concerns distinguishing between the virtuous emotion of compassion
and the virtue of compassion. I contend that, in this example, the *virtuous emotion* has indeed been felt, but that in order to claim the *virtue* of compassion has been displayed ‘in full force’ it must result in compassionate behaviour. This retort still allows me to maintain that a virtuous emotion can be morally credible, whilst upholding the distinction between virtue and virtuous emotion. In response, critics could further object that a virtue experienced internally still counts as a virtue. However, I argue that, in the case of competing virtues, the person concerned experienced the virtuous emotions associated with compassion, but cannot be credited with the virtue of compassion. Instead, the virtue of honesty was *phronetically* considered the appropriate course of virtuous action, which resulted in honest behaviour that in this case superseded compassion. Ultimately, without behaviour there is very little to distinguish a virtuous emotion from a virtue; I therefore hold strong in preserving the distinction in this way.

Now to a justification of Premise 4: ‘in order to become virtuous, one must put virtuous emotions into practice by exercising virtuous activity’. First, that virtuous activity evolves a virtuous emotion into a virtue is a point that appears to gain support from Aristotle himself. Indeed, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* he posits that the ‘the virtues are concerned with actions and passions [emotions]’ (1926, pp. 1104b13–15) which indicates that both action and dispositional emotion are necessary for virtue. The act alone is not sufficient for virtue (1926, p. 1105a28), nor is an emotion a virtue (1926, p. 1105b29). Therefore, even if acts are in accordance with virtue, to count as virtuous they must be performed when the agent is in ‘a certain condition’ (1926, p. 1105a30). This ‘certain condition’ can be interpreted as being largely driven by dispositional medial cognitive emotions, which are informed by practical wisdom, which then enables active choice. To explain how, I appeal to Fortenbaugh who posits that Aristotle treats practical wisdom (*phronesis*) as something which both follows emotion and controls emotion (2003, p. 238). In terms of the latter, he claims that the virtuous person subjects their emotions to reasoned, i.e., *phrnetic*, reflection (2003, p. 238). In addition, *phrones* can be taken to follow emotion in terms of means-end deliberation about virtuous choice (2003, p. 238). I interpret this virtuous choice to concern behavioural activity. This makes visible the dual purpose of practical wisdom—it is involved in medial emotions and directs these emotions to the virtue. Importantly, Aristotle (1926), claims that ‘virtue makes the goal correct, and practical wisdom makes what leads to it correct’ (NE, pp. 1144a8–9). I interpret this as supporting that moral virtue is a perfected disposition to act, driven by *phronetically* informed emotion. This interpretation allows me to maintain that *phronesis* is involved in virtuous emotions, and that the transition to fully-fledged virtue requires *phronetically* informed active choice, driven by *phronetically* informed virtuous emotions.

A possible objection to this interpretation concerns whether my argument entails that all virtuous emotions have a corresponding virtue which requires action. In short, my response is that they do not. Indeed, to claim otherwise would be too demanding a position and certainly not one I wish to argue for. As previously explained, leading minds in emotion scholarship support how emotions can lead to an activity impulse or behavioural suggestion, but avoid the claim that active behaviour must result (e.g., see Flanagan, 2016; Fortenbaugh, 2003; Knuuttila, 2004; Kristjánsson, 2018). For example, the emotion of shame could silence one to stop contemplating something disgraceful. My argument is compatible with this position. That said, in the converse case of virtue, which
as I have argued entails virtuous activity, it is necessary for it to be motivated by virtuous emotion. Thus when Aristotle (1926), remarks ‘... we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts’ (NE, pp. 1103b1–2), I suggest that these ‘acts’ must be motivated by virtuous emotions in order to count as just, temperate or brave. That said, Aristotle does make an exception to this in the case of the social-glue virtues: wittiness, agreeableness and truthfulness. These virtues need not be motivated by virtuous emotion, since they concern conflictless encounters in non-personal contexts; for example, conversing with new acquaintances at a party. Returning to my argument, a further issue could also be raised regarding how those who have not yet developed phronesis might be expected to infuse both emotion and virtuous action with it. The answer lies in the emulation of role models, notably Premises 5 and 6.

Premise 5: ‘the central way to become virtuous is through emulating moral role models’, I have already made reasonable in the introduction, as it is the only premise which is inductive and relies on empirical evidence, so I shall not reiterate my position again. Instead, I defend Premise 6: ‘in addition to virtuous emotion, the emulation of role models must include activity’. Let us consider two situations, in the first a pre-phronesis or low-phronesis moral learner perceives the exemplar’s virtues as representative of a moral ideal; thinks that they are worthy of emulation, possible to acquire and deserved; physically feels the distress and zeal associated with one’s lack of the desired quality; and perhaps a suggestion to behaviour. In this case the learner may begin to acquire a virtuous emotion but cannot be said to acquire a virtue. This is partly due to the compelling account of habituation prophesised by Steutel and Spiecker—guided by a role model, virtue must be practiced frequently and consistently to facilitate virtue acquisition (Steutel & Spiecker, 2004). Imagine a second situation involving a similar process but instead the behavioural suggestion motivates the learner to practice virtuous behaviour. As a result, whilst it may be perfectly reasonable to conceive of virtuous emotions without behaviour, because emulation is explicitly associated with virtue development, the same cannot be said for virtue. This entails Premise 7: ‘if emulation must include activity, it cannot be purely a virtuous emotion’, and subsequently the conclusion, that in light of the essential behavioural aspect, it ‘is better categorised as a virtue’. This conclusion can be taken to support that the emulation of role models is essential for both the development of virtuous emotions and for virtues, given that virtues are predominately composed of virtuous emotions. Having justified my argument in favour of the virtue of emulation, I can now proceed to add further conceptual and methodological clarity to its components.

4. Operationalising emulation

Specifically categorising emulation as a moral virtue opens it up to a wealth of research regarding the constitutive components of virtue—a move which will eventually enable me to illuminate, and justify empirically, how emulation as a virtue works. For reasons of space, I will just briefly outline my empirical influences, before moving on to the more challenging endeavour of aligning these with Aristotle’s four-fold account of causation. In essence, empirically extending our knowledge of virtues requires operationalising these stable traits of character into components which enable measurement (e.g., see Fowers et al., 2021; Morgan et al., 2017; Wright et al., 2020). This is made possible due to
the ontological reality of virtue which is grounded in ethical naturalism, specifically psychological virtue-based naturalism (as it is beyond our present purview to explain this here, I direct the reader to the following scholars for reference: Kristjánsson, 2010, 2018; MacIntyre, 1981; Sanderse, 2012). Broadly speaking, the components of virtue encompass the cognitive, affective, attitudinal (including motivational) and behavioural (Morgan et al., 2017, p. 4). Whilst there is some nuance in the exact categories different scholars support, an analysis of the measurement literature suggests that the majority of elements fall into those cited, indicating that any attempt to measure or explain virtue must acknowledge these. For example, Wright, Warren and Snow propose that our social-cognitive system is comprised of interrelated cognitive, affective and motivational elements which interact with our perceptual, rational and behavioural capacities to enable us to cultivate virtue (2020, p. 58). More specifically, they argue that virtue manifests as 1) ‘inputs’ – the perception of virtue-relevant stimuli; 2) ‘intermediates’ – various social-cognitive systems processing these stimuli; and 3) ‘outputs’ – the production of situation-specific virtuous behaviour (2020, p. 8). These scholars align themselves with ‘modified Aristotelianism’ and situate their account of virtue within Fleson and Jayawickreme’s Whole Trait Theory (2020, p. 7).

To make credible a philosophically discerning and empirically realistic componential account of the virtue of emulation, I combine and synthesise these influences—particularly those of Morgan et al. (2017) and Wright et al. (2020)—with Kristjánsson’s (2018) Aristotelian componential view of emotions as essentially cognitions comprising perception, thought, physiological feelings and behavioural suggestion. Yet given my argument in favour of emulation as a virtue, I forgo the final element and replace it with virtuous action. I further endeavour to align this with Aristotle’s theory of causation: the four causes. Indeed, given that in the Metaphysics Aristotle explicitly states that we should strive to investigate all four causes of a thing (Aristotle, 1999, p. 1044a32–b20), it is perhaps surprising that very few scholars have attempted to integrate his quadiropartite explanations with virtue ethics. A survey of the literature highlights just one explicitly Aristotelian ethical endeavour (Kristjánsson, 2018), one non-moral causal account of emotions (Rossi, 2018), one applied to action more generally (Reece, 2019), and one applied to Aquinas’ cardinal virtue of temperance (Austin, 2010). I aim to ameliorate this lacuna in the field by reconstructing the four causes of moral virtue.

5. The four causes of emulation

Whilst I have developed a full four-causal account of the virtue of emulation, I here seek the reader’s patience with what will presently be—for reasons of space—a deliberately brief outline of the central ideas.

As regards Aristotle’s Four Causes, understood as four kinds of explanations, these have traditionally been employed to explain substances, such as artefacts (Falcon, 2022) and natural changes, such as respiration (Evnine, 2016). As discussed in Aristotle’s Physics (1936, pp. 194b21–35), and Metaphysics (1999, pp. 1044a32–4), they comprise:

- the material cause: ‘that out of which’ something comes to exist;
- the formal cause: ‘the form’ that distinguishes one thing from another, and acts as a paradigm for something becoming that thing;
• **the efficient cause**: the catalyst or primary source of change;
• **the final cause**: the end ‘for the sake of which’ something comes about.

Take Aristotle’s famous example of a bronze statue: the artefact’s material cause constitutes the bronze, the formal the planned-for shape, the efficient the action of the sculptor and the final the purpose of production (Aristotle, 1999, pp. 1013b6–9). As I too seek to achieve explanatory adequacy for the virtue of emulation, I see great benefit in reconstructing Aristotle’s four causes and applying them to virtue. Furthermore, as I am specifically interested in understanding how the process of emulating role models enables us to acquire moral virtue, it is also supremely important to get the order of these causes right. For this I look to Kristjánsson who, in the case of virtuous emotions, adds a potential temporal order: 1) efficient, 2) formal, 3) material, and 4) final (Kristjánsson, 2018, pp. 8–13).

In my temporally ordered four-causal account of virtue, I therefore argue that the four causes of emulation comprise:

• **the efficient cause**: the moral agent’s perception of the exemplar’s virtues as representative of a moral ideal;
• **the formal cause**: the phronetically informed evaluation that these ideals are worthy of emulation and possible to acquire;
• **the material cause**: physically feeling the distress and admiration, associated with one’s lack of the desired quality, i.e., the role model represented ideal;
• **the final cause**: virtuous action concerning ends—putting the role model represented ideal of virtue into practice.

Given Aristotle’s insistence that moral goodness ‘in the strict sense’ requires phronesis, and phronesis requires moral virtue (e.g., see 1926, NE, 1144b30–23), as moral learners have not yet acquired phronesis, appealing to emulation as a method of virtue development may appear misguided. In response to this specious paradox, I propose the concept of ‘entangled phronesis’ as the underlying mechanism in emulation qua role modelling. In short, this concerns the role model as a substitute for phronesis, thus enabling the learner—by virtue of association—to be emulous by sharing in the phronesis of the role model and thus also their blueprint of the good life. Importantly, I argue that the entangling process works differently according to one’s degree of phronetic development. This requires dividing emulation into two types: ‘habituated emulation’ and ‘true emulation’. The former is pre-phronetic and directly guided by the role model’s phronesis; whilst the latter is also informed by the learner’s own developing phronesis.

However, in light of the Aristotelian truism that pre-phronetic, i.e., non-rational, habituation is insufficient for full-virtue, since virtue entails one is in a certain—phronetically informed—state (1926, NE, pp. 1105a30–32; 1144a17–21), one may question the extent to which, particularly habituated, emulation can be considered virtuous. I argue that the role model’s substituted phronesis means that habituated emulation can be considered virtuous in a very weak and indirect sense. The virtuosity of true emulation is slightly more complicated, partly because once phronesis is fully developed, emulation becomes superfluous, since fully-developed phronesis enables a person to autonomously practice virtue, rather than doing so via the emulation of...
role models. In light of this, and going beyond Aristotle's own texts, I propose that ‘true’ emulation should be understood as a virtue which, unlike other virtues, requires only developing, rather than fully-developed phronesis, because of its entangled association with the role model's phronesis. This point also entails that the moral virtue of emulation is essentially educational, and as such prior to all other moral virtues. Ultimately, in my dual account of emulation, habituated emulation evolves into true emulation as phronesis develops.

Going further, it should be noted that my concept of entangled phronesis bears some resemblance to philosopher Bryan Warnick’s proposal that role modelling is a form of rational moral communication, whereby the role model grants the learner ‘epistemic access’ into the ideals they exemplify, in order to help cultivate their ‘normative future self’ (2008, p. 36). This access involves the role model acting as a specific point of reference for a virtuous ideal, such as generosity, in order to convey what this entails to the learner (2008, p. 36). Warnick contends that exposing learners to a role model’s moral reasoning enables them to develop their own moral reasoning (2008, p. 124), a process which serves to initiate them into the moral community of which they are part (2008, p. 125). In this sense, emulation (or in his terms, ‘imitation’) is a collective endeavour which takes place within and through ‘communities of learning’ (2008, p. 105). It is important for the moral development of the individual and for the moral community, because it helps to construct and regulate their way of seeing (2008, p. 105). Applied to my argument, this extends the concept of entangled phronesis by illuminating it as a form of rational moral communication between the learner and role model, where epistemic access takes the form of sharing the latter’s practical wisdom and blueprint of the good life. Furthermore, emphasising how this process takes place within communities makes visible the context sensitive nature of emulation—role models facilitate an understanding of virtuous ideals, but do so in a way which is attuned to particular situations.

6. Educational implications

The focus of this paper has so far been largely theoretical and it is now time to attend to the important consideration of what, practically speaking, my account of emulation can contribute to role modelling in classroom contexts. To do this I ask: How does understanding emulation as a virtue, rather than merely a morally salient emotion, change how teachers should use emulation as a method of virtuous character development? Whilst by no means exhaustive, in response, I outline three educational implications concerning the teacher as role model.

6.1. Emphasise modelling emotion and action

Firstly, a componential account of emulation as a virtue makes role modelling more structured by helping teachers understand what exactly they are meant to be a model of and how the process works. If emulation is composed of virtuous emotion and action, teachers should be mindful to model both and pay particular attention to the explicitly behavioural component by encouraging pupils to ‘follow through’ with their virtuous actions.
6.2. Adjust modelling according to a pupil’s degree of phronetic development

Secondly, as a pupil’s degree of phronetic development requires different degrees of phronetic entanglement, teachers ought to adjust their modelling accordingly and create opportunities for developmentally appropriate emulation to occur. Take early-years habituated emulation: as this is predominantly behaviourally conditioning, the role model’s phronesis directly substitutes the learner’s, which demands the role model be directly present. If a learner’s classmate is playing alone at breaktime for instance, the role model could encourage her to join in, explain why, and praise her for it, thus jointly engaging in the virtue of compassion. True emulation is different; as phronesis begins to develop, perhaps from late primary education onwards, I suggest the learner shares in the reasoning of the role model by applying it in the same context. This time a teacher might exercise compassion by bringing in old clothes for the school to donate to a charitable cause, which then inspires the learner to do the same. As the learner’s phronesis evolves further, it becomes less entangled with the role model, which enables the learner to exercise it more independently and in slightly broader contexts. Here, the role model’s compassion inspires the learner to consider other ways to help, such as raising money through a cake sale, and, importantly, to do it! Eventually, in the course of moral development, phronesis will disentangle to such an extent to enable the learner to apply it independently, thus marking the transition from, in this case, the emulation of compassion to the true virtue of compassion.

6.3. Share a blueprint of the good life

Finally, a central element of entangled phronesis concerns the role model sharing their blueprint of the good life. Indeed, without such a blueprint, the virtuous actions embodied by the final cause would be unable to ‘aim at ends’ at all, thus negating a fundamental component of phronesis. This implies the role model is a sort of prime mover in the sense that they facilitate the learner’s journey from moral potentiality to actuality, partly through their motivational vision of the good life. To grant learners epistemic access to their blueprint, teachers could give reasons as to how modelled virtues contribute to the bigger picture; emphasise the importance of intrinsic, as opposed to purely instrumental, goods; and encourage pupils to reflect on their own developing moral identity by facilitating discussions on what constitutes a virtuous life. However, the ability to do this necessitates teachers having an established blueprint to begin with and a sufficient degree of phronesis to enable it to entangle. Professional development which focuses on cultivating phronesis in both pre-service and in-service teachers, perhaps by providing teachers with role models themselves, ought thus to be a central focus of ACE.

Importantly, these three educational implications advance the educational discourse on emulation which has been conducted in previous papers in the present journal, by foregrounding more precisely how emulation works in practice in a way which is both theoretically rich and empirically informed. Indeed, whilst there have been some valiant efforts to overcome the methodological problem of what emulation involves (in particular Kristjánsson, 2006; Sanderse, 2013), these have either sprung out of, what I have argued to be, an Aristotelian misconception of emulation as an emotion (Kristjánsson, 2006, p. 45); been directly inspired by the latter misconception whilst remaining neutral
as to whether admiration, elevation or emulation ‘inspire’ emulation (Osman, 2019, pp. 318–320); or been more explicitly focused on assessing existing pedagogical and psychological literature as justification for role modelling recommendations, whilst also endorsing Kristjánsson’s (2006) account of emulation (Sanderse, 2013). Of course, all these papers have contributed greatly our understanding of role modelling in ACE, however as I consider their accounts of emulation to be either partially misconstrued, underdeveloped, or taken for granted, the issue of reaching a consensus regarding how emulation works in practice persists. As a result, if my argument in this paper is convincing, it makes a practical contribution to this journal’s existing literature primarily because it enables us to understand better and more clearly how emulation is implicated in virtuous character development.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I proposed a reconstructed neo-Aristotelian four-causal account of emulation as a moral virtue and, through doing so, sought to add explanatory power, methodological clarity and philosophical vigour to emulation qua role modelling in ACE. By illuminating emulation as a two-step developmental process involving entangled phronesis, I made visible its practical salience for understanding how role modelling operates in classroom contexts. Ultimately, these are the first steps in constructing a more substantial ‘theory of emulation’, through which I hope to raise the profile of role modelling as a, perhaps even the, central method of virtuous character development.

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