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## A Philosophical Approach to Talent Development

Anne Van de Vijver  and Sven Mathijssen 

### ABSTRACT

High ability and talent development literature present different and sometimes competing or contradictory goals for talent development. One side emphasizes that talents should be developed to enable individuals with high abilities to make societal contributions, while the other side focuses on the individual's personal life goals. This article investigates how the philosophical theories of Aristotle and Kant can contribute to a better understanding of talent development and its goals. Both of these theories provide a normative basis for an ethical duty to develop one's talents and suggest that the dichotomy between societal and personal interests should not exist. Talent development should aim for realizing one's potential and contribute to a meaningful way of living driven by self-determined goals that integrate personal interests and societal contributions. It is suggested that talent development should include a wide range of talents, including moral talents.

### KEYWORDS

Aristotle; happiness; high ability; Kant; self-actualization; talent development

High ability and talent development literature present different and sometimes competing or contradictory goals for talent development (Dai & Chen, 2013). One side emphasizes the importance of talent development for society. According to Subotnik et al. (2011) for example, talent development is crucial for meeting society's need for future innovators who can improve our lives through the creation of innovative products and services. They also emphasize the importance of creative thinkers in addressing major societal problems. Similarly, Dai (2015) highlights the necessity of an education system that cultivates talented individuals capable of generating new ideas, innovative systems, and services to enhance human conditions in the contemporary knowledge economy and high tech information age. The other side justifies talent development from the perspective of the talented individual. Persson (2014) states that giftedness can be acknowledged and supported without any other agenda than meeting the aspirations of talented individuals who may have unique social and emotional needs. Also, Hoogeveen (2022) focuses on "talents" needs: what do talents/talented people need to flourish, to develop themselves" (p. 7). The critique of the latter side is that the focus on societal contributions does not necessarily align with what makes the concerned individual happy. As such, this potentially undermines respect for the individual's personal life goals that may be more self-oriented or exhibit an altruistic dimension limited to family or close friends (Gagné, 2007).

Like everyone else, individuals with high abilities need sufficient challenge and flow to flourish (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). The term "high abilities" is used as a generic term referring to individuals with high cognitive ability or special intellectual gifts and talents (Zeidner, 2021). Focusing on these individuals, however, brings with it the criticism that the pursuit of happiness often occurs at the expense of others in society. There is a tradeoff between societal or environmental sustainability and personal happiness (Zeidner, 2021). According to Ambrose (2002, 2003) too much focus on self-actualization may encourage individuals to become selfish.

In light of this dichotomy, Zeidner (2021) highlights the need to investigate the goals of talent development from a philosophical perspective. Is the pursuit of happiness an appropriate goal for talent development? This theoretical paper answers this call and explores how philosophical perspectives may advance fundamental understanding of whether talents should be developed and what should be the underlying goals. As such this article intends to build a bridge between normative philosophical research and high ability and talent development theory. From a practical perspective, a better understanding of the goals of talent development may also bring new ideas for the design of talent development programs.

Philosophy is a vast field and includes many categories of ethical theory including for example virtue, deontology, utilitarianism, justice, and care. For this

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contribution, Aristotle's and Kant's ethical theories and views on talent development are examined. The selection of these two philosophers is based on the consideration that these theories each reflect one side of the dichotomy discussed above. Aristotle's virtue ethics emphasize "happiness" and provide guidance on what an ethical, "happy" life exactly means (Steyl, 2020), while Kant proposes a duty-based ethics, which is helpful for answering the question to what extent individuals with high abilities have a duty to develop their talents for society's benefit. Although these two theories have different starting points ("happiness" versus duty), the two philosophers nevertheless both provide a normative basis for an ethical duty to develop talents and provide arguments for the suggestion that the above-mentioned dichotomy is nonexistent. Building on these ideas we argue for a reconciling position that talents should be developed for self-actualization in the meaning of realizing one's potential and contributing to a meaningful way of living driven by self-determined goals that integrate personal interests and societal contributions.

The research question of the present study is: How can philosophical perspectives of Aristotle and Kant contribute to a better understanding of talent development and its goals? To answer the research question, we first address the goals that can be identified in studies on high ability and talent development. Our research is based on an exploratory literature review that aims to capture current positions taken in the field, and is not exhaustive. Next, we explore the views of Aristotle and Kant on talent development. The writings of Aristotle and Kant are very extensive. In order to adhere as much as possible to the original views of the philosophers, we limit ourselves to those writings in which Aristotle (*Nicomachean Ethics*) and Kant (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and *The Metaphysics of Morals*) themselves explicitly philosophize about talent development and we do not expand to other writings, such as Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. These findings are then compared and integrated into high ability and talent development theory. To conclude, limitations of the present study and suggestions for future research are discussed. Although especially Kant's theory has proven to be hard to implement in practice, we try to derive practical implications for talent development programs.

### **Goals in high ability and talent development literature**

High ability and talent development literature investigate the concept of talent and describe how talent develops (e.g., Dai, 2017, Gagné, 1995, 2018, Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2016, 2022, Renzulli & Reis, 2018, Sternberg, 2017,

Ziegler & Stoeger, 2017). Typically, philosophical questions like *why* talents should be developed receive less attention. Nevertheless, some publications highlight the opinion, mainly expressed outside the gifted education community, that talents of individuals with high abilities should not receive any special attention. These authors hypothesize that this may be largely in part because of a philosophically inspired argument that gifted education would be elitist or likely increase rather than narrow inequality in educational and life outcomes (Cross et al., 2010, Gross, 1999, Wai & Guilbault, 2022). Conversely, driven by a similar social justice concern other publications seem to support equal opportunities for individuals with high abilities, especially for those that are underrepresented in gifted education (Ambrose, 2002, 2003, Callahan et al., 2022, Dai, 2015, Giessman et al., 2013, Peters & Engerrand, 2016, Robinson et al., 2018, Worrell & Dixon, 2022).

In addition, varying goals of talent development are discussed in introductory or closing sections in order to justify the importance of the conducted research (e.g., Giessman et al., 2013, Lee, 2015, Makkonen et al., 2022). Also, researchers explain how goals of talent development have indirectly guided the design of their talent development models (e.g., Sternberg, 2017). This section provides an overview of these goals of talent development: making societal contributions, personal happiness, and outstanding achievement.

### **Contribution to societal benefit**

A strand of the literature seems to emphasize that talent development aims to prepare individuals with high abilities for making societal contributions (Abunasser & AlAli, 2022, Lee et al., 2021, Makkonen et al., 2022, Meyer & Rinn, 2022). Governments and educators should support individuals with high abilities to develop their talents so that they can contribute to society by producing new knowledge, ideas and concepts (Gierczyk & Pfeiffer, 2021, Shemuda, 2018), solving complex problems (Ambrose, 2021, Bruce-Davis et al., 2017, Gierczyk & Pfeiffer, 2021) or, in general, making social life better and improving human conditions (Dai, 2015, Lee, 2015, Rosselli, 1998). According to Subotnik et al. (2012), talent development should lead to eminence in the sense of maximizing lifetime contributions to society. Similarly, Chandra Handa (2023) stresses the importance of wisdom development, that guides students in the meaningful use of their talents by contributing to the lives of others in society. Sternberg (2017, 2022) argues that society needs individuals with high abilities to address the great problems society is facing (e.g., global warming, wars, and increasing levels of air pollution). According to him, talent development programs should produce the next generation of active

concerned citizens and ethical leaders and should lead students to make a positive, meaningful, and lasting difference to the world, at some level (family, community, state, nation or many nations). Building on this work he introduced the concept of transformational giftedness as giftedness that by nature seeks to positively change the world, as opposed to transactional giftedness that has a tit-for-tat nature (Sternberg, 2020). The goal to prepare individuals with high abilities for making societal contributions is also reflected in the design of talent development models. For example, Sternberg based his choice of talents to be included in his model of active concerned citizenship and ethical leadership (ACCEL) on the skills needed to solve the great problems society is facing (Sternberg, 2017). Sternberg (2022) also argues that courage should be a focus of the study of giftedness for its role in making contributions to the world.

Some publications add a political-driven dimension: individuals with high abilities represent human capital that can contribute to a nation's competitiveness, economically (Lee et al., 2021), in sports (Tranckle & Cushion, 2006), or in music (Ho & Chong, 2010). Different publications with geographical scope situated in Asia stress the role of talent in local economy development and building an innovative country (Yanli, 2000; Zhou et al., 2018). Lee et al. (2021) note that in a context where gifted education receives strong financial and/or administrative support from the government, like in South Korea and Singapore, there may be some pressure to demonstrate what has been accomplished with this support. Similar reasoning is found in other parts of the world (Colombia: Parra-Martínez & Pereira, 2021; Denmark: Rasmussen & Lingard, 2018; Saudi Arabia: Abunasser & AlAli, 2022; United States: Wai & Worrell, 2020; Yang & Gentry, 2022).

Other studies take the perspective of businesses and focus on workforce and human capital needs or shortages. The reasoning seems to be that talent development should serve to develop a workforce that can address these needs or shortages. Several studies refer to the rapid rise in the number of job openings that require advanced STEM knowledge, and the urgent need for students to engage in educational opportunities to prepare them for this workforce (Ihrig et al., 2018; Mullet et al., 2017). Some studies suggest that focusing on talent development of underrepresented groups may be part of a solution to address these workforce concerns (Yang & Gentry, 2022).

### Personal happiness and well-being

Personal happiness and well-being of individuals with high abilities seem to be less addressed in the literature.

This person-driven approach seems to be considered secondary to societal interests (Dai & Renzulli, 2000; Gierczyk & Pfeiffer, 2021). Renzulli (2012) argues that talent development of individuals with high abilities should benefit society, as human interests and the common good should prevail over materialism and ego enhancement. However, at the same time he acknowledges that personal goals and self-actualization also should be considered. Similarly, Gagné (2007) notes that in addition to considering individuals with high abilities as national resources, the personal goals of persons with high abilities should be considered. Several authors note that while the focus should be on societal interests, contributing to society may also lead to high levels of self-actualization. Consequently, this goal of talent development may not be completely at odds with the self-actualization goal (Meyer & Rinn, 2022; Subotnik et al. 2012).

Fewer publications seem to build on the assumption that personal happiness and well-being are not ancillary to societal interests but constitute self-contained goals (Burkett McKee et al., 2021, Cash & Lin, 2022, Shaunessy-Dedrick & Lazarou, 2020, Wai & Worrell, 2020). Some publications even consider personal happiness and well-being as the ultimate goal of talent development. For example, Mammadov and Ward (2023) stress that maintaining positive well-being during college or university years is important for being able to function as a healthy and well-adjusted adult in later years. Fredricks et al. (2010) explore the role of passion in talent development of individuals with high abilities, as developing a passion can increase motivation, enhance well-being, and result in a more positive affect. Baum et al. (2014) refer to their ultimate research goal to enable individuals to build a happy and successful life.

### Talent development as the main goal

A lot of studies, however, do not comprehensively address the underlying goals of talent development and merely refer to, for example, cultivating talent (Assouline et al., 2013, Dai, 2020, Moon et al., 1994, VanTassel-Baska, 2005), maximizing students' potential (Cross & Cross, 2017, Dixson et al., 2020, Lavrijsen et al., 2022), growth (Baum et al., 2014), or achieving excellence or outstanding performance (Calderon et al., 2007; Dai, 2017; Dai & Renzulli, 2008; Gagné, 2004, 2010, 2015; Garrett & Moltzen, 2011; Hébert, 2019; Jaap & Patrick, 2015; Kiewra & Rom, 2020; LeBeau et al., 2020; Lockhart et al., 2022; Nokelainen et al., 2007; Putallaz et al., 2005; Tordjman et al., 2020; Yewchuk et al., 2001), as goals of talent development. Some of these studies aim to contribute to a better understanding of how

excellence or outstanding performance can be achieved in school (Almukhambetova & Hernández-Torrano, 2020, Blaas, 2014, Gubbels et al., 2022, Jarvin & Subotnik, 2015, Lockhart et al., 2022, Phelps, 2022) or in professional careers (Hua, 2002, Reis & Ruban, 2005, Wilgosh, 2001, Yewchuk et al., 2001). Several studies focus on talent development and achievement of underrepresented groups (Callahan et al., 2022, Foley-Nicpon et al., 2017, Gentry et al., 2014, Olszewski-Kubilius, 2003, 2005, Olszewski-Kubilius & Corwith, 2018, Peters & Engerrand, 2016, Reis & Ruban, 2005, Robinson et al., 2018, Swanson, 2016).

The goal to achieve excellence or outstanding performance is also reflected in the design of many models. For example, in Renzulli's three ring conception (Renzulli & Reis, 2020) gifted behavior reflects interactions among above average ability, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Ziegler and Stoeger (2017) have opted for "excellence" as outcome variable of their actiotope model of giftedness. Gagné (2004) uses "talent" as an outcome variable of his model. According to him, talent stands for:

the outstanding mastery of systematically developed abilities (or skills) and knowledge in at least one field of human activity to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10 per cent of age peers who are or have been active in that field or fields. (Gagné, 2004, p. 120)

Cross and Cross (2021) suggest a school-based conception of giftedness in order to acknowledge the practical boundaries that schools may face when supporting talent development. In this model "students who do not move beyond potential to actual performance after being given sufficient opportunity to develop in a domain are not considered gifted in the school-based conception" (p. 86).

In the aforementioned publications the underlying reasons why talents should be developed or why excellence or (outstanding) performance should be achieved, are not necessarily made explicit. This observation might be the result of educational sciences' focus on the construct development of talent, how talent develops, and what are enhancers and delimiters of the process. The questions *whether* and *why* talents should be developed however is a philosophical research question. This question is addressed by both Aristotle and Kant.

## **Philosophical theories by Aristotle and Kant**

### **Aristotle's virtue ethics**

Through his writings, Aristotle seeks to answer what is right and wrong (Aristotle, 2009). Aristotle starts from the *τέλος* (*telos*) of any existence. In contemporary

language, *telos* can be translated as the ultimate goal (Moriarty, 2020), "that for the sake of which" (Hauskeller, 2005, p. 67), or the end purpose of something or someone (Harfeld, 2013). For example, the end purpose of an eye is to see, and the one of a knife to cut. This is "that for the sake of which" the eye and the knife exist, a goal that is pursued in itself and thus needs no further justification. According to Aristotle, acting, behaving or being in accordance with this inherent purpose leads to an ethical life of *εὐδαιμονία* (*eudaemonia*), which is translated as "happiness" or "well-being" (Steyl, 2020). Neglecting this ultimate goal, on the contrary, is not ethical.

According to Aristotle, the *telos* of man is the activity of the soul in which it functions optimally in accordance with its ultimate goal. Just as the ultimate goal of a shoemaker or a carpenter is to function optimally in their respective crafts, it is also the ultimate goal of humankind to function optimally in their characteristic function. Aristotle furthermore claims that the ultimate goal of man is not merely to be alive (as according to him is the ultimate goal of plants), but to have a well-defined form of life, namely, activities and actions of the soul in accordance with typical human virtues. These, according to Aristotle, are intellectual and moral virtues. The ethical, "happy" life implies that we develop our virtues (i.e., our talents) so that we can live as much as possible in harmony with our *telos*. Hence, "happiness" has a specific meaning in the philosophy of Aristotle, and does not simply refer to maximization of pleasure, satisfaction of desires or preferences, or a positive attitude toward life (Steyl, 2020).

This normative foundation for talent development leads Aristotle to reflect further on what precisely then are the characteristic virtues (or talents) of human beings (Aristotle, 2009). He distinguishes five types of intellectual virtues: scientific knowledge, art, practical wisdom, intuitive reason, and philosophical wisdom. According to Aristotle, intellectual virtue finds its origin and further development largely in education. Aristotle also attributes great importance to moral virtue, which he considers to be a state of character, a disposition to choose the intermediate, the golden mean. For example, courage is the golden mean between cowardice and recklessness. Aristotle identifies a number of important virtues that involve interests of others, such as kindness, justice and generosity. This also implies that pursuing purely selfish goals does not generally lead to a "happy" life. Moral virtue comes from habit and is thus acquired by repetition of the actions corresponding with morality and therefore needs experience and time.

To summarize, having an ethical, “happy” life implies that we nurture and develop our intellectual and moral virtues (i.e., our talents) so that we can live as much as possible in harmony with our *telos*.

### ***Kant's duty-based ethics***

Kant, too, seeks an answer to what is right and wrong. In the tradition of duty-based ethics, Kant proposes a principle to settle this issue: the categorical imperative. Its basic formulation is the principle of universality according to which one must act “only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it becomes a universal law” (Kant, 2019, p. 34). This imperative holds two requirements: (a) the maxim is *capable* of becoming a universal law, and (b) it is possible that you *want* this maxim to become a universal law. He derives this principle from the fact that humans are rational beings and have a free will. A maxim refers to a reason for acting. Actions driven by maxims based only on reason and free from all other influences, are necessarily valid for any rational being and as such can become a universal law. According to the universality test, such maxims are ethical. From this principle of universality, Kant derives for everyone the duty toward themselves to develop their natural predispositions and capacities (i.e., talents; Kant, 2018). Note that the term “natural” is meant to contrast with “moral” (Maskivker, 2014). Kant considers that you cannot possibly want a universal law that provides that your talents are not developed at all, since these talents also benefit you and can serve you for all kinds of purposes. Developing your talents is thus a command of practical reason (Maskivker, 2014).

Humanity is the second formulation of Kant’s categorical imperative. For Kant, humanity is our rational nature, existing as an end in itself. The humanity principle encourages us to “act [so] that you use humanity, in your own person as well as in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means” (Kant, 2019, p. 41). In other words, one must respect every human being, including themselves, as an end in itself. Kant further reasons that every human being has certain natural predispositions and capacities (or talents) that make it possible to achieve their goals. To respect yourself as an end implies that these talents are further developed to achieve these goals (Kant, 2018). Ergo, failure to develop one’s talents implies a lack of respect for oneself as an end goal. Kant also provides more guidance on what should be considered as the “end” of a person. First, as free will is a central concept in Kant’s philosophy, it is not surprising that Kant

argues that human beings are free to choose their ends and the sort of life they want to live. Second, at the same time he argues that anyone also has the duty toward themselves to be a useful member of society, since this belongs to the value of humanity in anyone’s own person and thus is inherently part of anyone’s end (Kant, 2018).

Kant clarifies that the duty of developing one’s talents is not a perfect duty, but a broad and imperfect one (Kant, 2018). This implies room for free choice about which talents should be developed and to what extent. Such choice should be guided by the individual’s own considerations about the kind of moral life they want to lead. According to Maskivker (2014), a person may even have good reasons for not developing talents, concluding that while developing talents is *worthwhile*, there is no *duty* to develop one’s talents. For example, Maskivker refers to situations in which a person encounters serious obstacles such as in case of adaptive preference, i.e. “the adaptation of desires to what is possible” (p. 141). However, these circumstances do not invalidate the basic idea that talent development is an imperfect duty. In defining the scope of that duty, Kant indeed explicitly takes into account the context in which a person finds himself and “whether he has the powers necessary for it” (Kant, 2018, p. 210).

Kant (2018) explores what talents people should consequently develop to meet “the end of their existence.” He distinguishes between natural dispositions and moral feelings. Natural dispositions are powers of the mind (reason), powers of the soul (e.g., memory and imagination), and powers of the body. Moral feelings are “the susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being aware that our actions are consistent with or contrary to the law of duty” (Kant, 2018, p. 171). Although an examination of human history may show tendencies of selfishness, rivalry, and oppressive social inequalities, according to Kant, it should be assumed that the human race is constantly progressing and human beings have a duty toward themselves to cultivate their moral feelings. Cureton (2018) explains how Kant’s idea is based on a reasonable hope for striving for moral perfection as a continual progress.

To summarize, both Aristotle and Kant find the goal for talent development in the uniqueness of human beings, their *telos* (Aristotle) or the end of their existence (Kant). The basic idea is that human beings should live in accordance with this uniqueness. Building on this goal, both philosophers describe a wide range of talents, including moral virtues, that are characteristic for human beings, that can capture this uniqueness, and that should be nurtured and developed to live an ethical, “happy” life.

## Discussion

### Comparison and integration

Compared to the philosophical perspectives of Aristotle and Kant, the talent development and high ability literature seem to have a more instrumental paradigm. Either the underlying reasons for talent development are not made explicit, or the focus is primarily to prepare individuals with high abilities to address societal challenges. This finding is consistent with the trend described by Persson (2014) that researchers increasingly advocate for gifted education in economic terms and emphasize the societal need for high achievement, especially in the subjects of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. This contrasts with the person-centered approach of Aristotle, who proposes that individuals develop their talents in order to have an ethical, “happy” life. With Kant, the obligation to develop talents follows from the requirement that each person must regard oneself as an end in itself. In both views, talent development concerns everyone. Accordingly, talents of individuals with high abilities should also be addressed, without having to be elitist. This, of course, includes individuals who are underrepresented in gifted education and talent development programs.

The instrumental paradigm is also reflected in the conceptual design of talent development models. In line with our study, Zeidner (2021) notes that research has mainly focused on achievement, and cognitive and information processing variables, while research focusing on the happiness of individuals with high abilities is more limited. Aristotle’s notion of *telos* and Kant’s suggestion that developing our talents is part of the end of our existence, on the contrary, suggest to focus not necessarily on being successful in society but on self-actualization. Building on Aristotle and Kant, self-actualization can be defined here as realizing one’s potential and having a meaningful way of living driven by self-determined goals that integrate personal interests and societal contributions. This finding resonates with earlier work of Roeper (1993, 1995, 1996), Piechowski (1978), and Grant and Piechowski (1999), who argue for a person-centered approach with self-actualization as the ultimate goal of talent development.

This view on why talents should be developed has implications for identifying what talents should be nurtured. Research devotes a lot of attention to talents that are useful and contribute to being successful in society. For example, Gagné’s (2018) model describes the development of natural abilities into competencies in academic and occupational fields, such as academic, technical, administrative, and sales. The aim was to

cover all relevant human occupations (Gagné, 2010). Other studies focus on talents for which a job market shortage has been identified, for example STEM profiles (Ihrig et al., 2018, Mullet et al., 2017). Our study, however, suggests to consider the uniqueness of each individual and to include a wide range of intellectual as well as moral talents. More recently, system theories also adopt such an open, person-centered approach. These theories describe how each individual develops talents as a result of a unique interaction between systems (Dai, 2017, Olszewski-Kubilius et al., 2016, 2022, Ziegler and Stoeger, 2017). Aristotle and Kant offer a normative foundation for such a person-centered approach. The difference, however, is that their philosophical theories lead to self-actualization as an ultimate driver of talent development, while in current system theories outstanding achievement is the pursued outcome (Subotnik et al., 2011, 2012).

Moral talents in particular have, with a few notable exceptions (Ambrose, 2017, 2023; Grant & Piechowski, 1999; Roeper, 1995, 1996), so far received less attention and have been understudied in talent development models. Sternberg’s (2017, 2020) work is an exception to this observation, as it also focuses attention on wisdom, ethics, and transformational giftedness that by nature seeks to positively change the world. Sternberg notes that moral talents are necessary to solve society’s problems. Viewed in this way, Aristotle’s and Kant’s theories provide a normative foundation for talent development and concepts of giftedness that include a moral dimension such as Sternberg’s concept of transformational giftedness. Both philosophers argue that moral talents have to be nurtured because these talents belong to our *telos* (Aristotle) or the end of our existence (Kant). Consequently, an ethical, “happy” life implies the development of these talents. It seems that the lack of extensive discussion on moral talents in scientific literature has made it unclear that positively contributing to society is an essential characteristic of man. Both philosophers argue that such moral virtues are inside each of us and need to be nurtured. Accordingly, the dichotomy between making societal contributions and personal happiness is nonexistent.

In conclusion, the question about how the philosophical perspectives of Aristotle and Kant can contribute to a better understanding of talent development and its goals can be answered as follows. From the theories of Aristotle and Kant we derive three elements that contribute to the understanding of talent development. First, an argument for talent development is that talents should be developed as this is our *telos* and we have to respect ourselves as an end in itself. Second, this ultimate goal implies that talent development should strive

for self-actualization in the meaning of realizing one's potential and contributing to a meaningful way of living driven by self-determined goals that integrate personal interests and societal contributions. Third, from this perspective talent development design should be concerned with a wide range of talents, including moral talents, in order to be able to capture the uniqueness of each individual.

### **Theoretical and practical implications**

Our study has a number of theoretical implications. First, when developing theories and models of talent development, it seems useful to consider underlying assumptions about talent development goals and how these assumptions may influence theory building. It also seems appropriate that these assumptions be made explicit. Second, this contribution suggests exploration of a greater emphasis on the concept of self-actualization. Many models include more person-centered variables as enhancers of talent development. For example, Gagné's (2018) model suggests that self-awareness and autonomy are catalysts of talent development. Similarly, Subotnik et al. (2011) suggest in their talent development megamodel that self-perception can either enhance or delimit talent development. The trait-complex approach has a focus on the interaction of personality, ability, and privilege in the development of talent (Kerr et al., 2020). Sternberg (2017) and VanTassel-Baska (2020) emphasize the importance of passion. Also in Dai's (2017) evolving complexity theory finding a life passion, self-exploration, and the self-conscious construction of what one can be, are important elements in the talent development process. In all these models, these person-centered elements are variables that have an influence on the outcome of the talent development process. The philosophical perspectives of Aristotle and Kant, however, suggest self-actualization as the outcome variable of the model, namely what talent development leads to. Such a model could then serve to understand what the construct self-actualization means, how it can be measured, what is the process of self-actualization, and what are the enhancers and delimiters of self-actualization.

For educational institutions, too, our study suggests that they consider the underlying goals of their talent development programs and align these programs with these goals as much as possible. Is the emphasis of the educational institution rather instrumental, focusing on talents that are directly useful for current society or business? Or is the starting point the uniqueness and self-actualization of each

individual? Taking into account the uniqueness of each individual may unlock a pool of currently unidentified or unknown talents. Of course, broadening the curriculum to enable such a person-centered approach, may present theoretical and practical challenges. As Cross and Cross (2021) note: "schools may be overwhelmed by the task of supporting the many forms a students' giftedness can take" (p. 84).

### **Limitations and future research**

In this study, the goals of talent development were identified based on an exploratory study of high ability and talent development literature. However, in these publications the identification of goals of talent development was not the central research question. We consequently had to derive these goals from explicit or implicit assumptions made by the authors, in introductory sections for example. Therefore, this may not always reflect the authors' full understanding. In addition, it is possible that in practice the goals of talent development may be different from what is echoed in published scientific literature. Based on a systematic literature review, Faber et al. (2022) suggest that talent programs in practice also seem to be primarily focused on the pursuit of excellence. This seems consistent with our theoretical findings. It may be worthwhile in future studies to empirically explore these goals and to investigate the implications of different talent development approaches.

The present study is based on the work of two Western philosophers (Aristotle and Kant). We acknowledge that insights from other philosophers, such as Nietzsche or Marx, may lead to complementary or contrary conclusions and call for further research on this topic at the intersection of philosophy and talent development. More specifically, the question also is to what extent our findings are culturally influenced. In the literature, well-established differences were noted between individualistic and collectivistic cultures in terms of whether personal choice and identity take precedence over societal interests and this also seems to influence the role of self-actualization (Lee et al., 2022). Future research could explore the understandings about talent development based on philosophical theories originating from other cultures.

### **Conclusions**

The philosophical theories explored in this article offer an ethical normative foundation for the argument that talents should be developed, as this is our



*telos* (Aristotle) and we have to respect ourselves as an end in itself (Kant). Accordingly, the ultimate goal of talent development is self-actualization in the meaning of realizing one's potential and having a meaningful way of living driven by self-determined goals that integrate personal interests and societal contributions. This also implies that a wide range of talents should be nurtured and developed, including moral talents, in order to be able to capture the uniqueness of each individual.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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