# EDUCATING THE VIRTUES

An essay on the philosophical psychology of moral development and education

David Carr

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DAVID CARR

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An essay on the philosophical psychology of moral development and education

*David Carr*

To the memory of
Alderman Alfred Carr J.P. 1893–1960.

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# PREFACE

Two of my previously published papers were in fact the sur-
vivors of an abortive attempt in late 1982 to compose a full
length work on moral education focused on the nature of the
virtues. The first of these, which was published in *Educational
Philosophy and Theory* (1983) under the title 'Three approaches to
moral education', led to further work on moral education – in
particular, to a paper 'Aristotle and Durkheim on moral educa-
tion' which I was invited to read at a conference on moral
education and character organised by the US Department of
Education in Washington during the summer of 1987. I am
grateful to the US Department of Educational Research for
allowing me to use parts of that paper for the writing of chapters
5 and 11 of the present work.

The second paper which survived the debacle of my 1982
project was presented to a London meeting of the Aristotelian
Society in the autumn of 1984 and subsequently published in the
*Proceedings* under the title 'Two kinds of virtue'. Again,
I am very grateful for permission to use much of that paper
(© The Aristotelian Society 1984, reprinted by courtesy of
the editor) as the basis of chapter 9 of this work. I have also
drawn in this work on ideas from several other previously
published papers on moral philosophy and education written in
the wake of these two earlier ones, of course, but in this respect
I am particularly indebted to the Philosophy of Education
Society and their publishers Carfax for permission to reproduce
parts of my 1985 article 'The free child and the spoiled child' in
chapter 6.

The present work, then, is the product of a renewed attempt,
in response to a publisher's invitation, to accomplish what

I started out but failed to do almost a decade ago. During the eighteen months or so I have spent on this task I have, of course, benefited from the co-operation, inspiration and assistance of very many people. First of all, I am most grateful to Principal Gordon Kirk and the Research and Development Committee of Moray House College for their enthusiastic response to my request for time for writing and research and also to my many colleagues who shared and bore the burden of my administrative and teaching duties during a term of sabbatical leave I was kindly granted for the autumn of 1988. I am also profoundly grateful to the Department of Moral Philosophy at the University of St Andrews for their kind and most unexpected offer of hospitality during that term as a research fellow in their Centre for Philosophy and Public Affairs. In particular, I am indebted to Dr John Haldane, then director of the Centre, for his constant support and encouragement of my work, then and since, and for his eleventh hour advice on a final title for this book.

My time at the St Andrews' Centre also provided me, via several kind invitations to speak in various Scottish Universities, with valuable opportunities to test out some of the more controversial ideas aired in Section III of this work. Chapter 10, then, is a remote and several times revised descendant of a calamitous paper on moral motivation which I presented to the Dundee philosophers in early autumn and they are due both my apologies for such a poor show and my thanks for the courteous way in which they gave me the benefit of the doubt. Chapter 11, however, is more closely related to a much happier and more successful presentation on virtue and wisdom which I gave to the philosophers in the University of Aberdeen in December and once again I am grateful both for the splendid critical response and – especially to Dr Nigel Dower – for the hospitality I received at that time.

During the winter and spring of 1988–9, I was also privileged to come to know two other St Andrews' Centre fellows – Professor Richard Brook of Bloomsburg, PA, and Professor Rick Werner of Hamilton College, NY – to whom I also owe an immense debt of gratitude for their moral support, their encouragement of my work and, above all, their friendship. I am extremely grateful for all the critical responses of those who have been exposed to the ideas and reflections which have

contributed to the making of this book but especially to my friend and erstwhile colleague Dr Ieuan Williams of University College Swansea who kindly and patiently read through the entire typescript of this work. Last but not least I am profoundly indebted to Sheila, Claire, Gladys and other members of the office staff in Moray House College at Cramond for their meticulous, tireless and uncomplaining secretarial assistance with respect to the transcription of this work during a very busy term. Finally, it goes without saying that the final responsibility for any confusions and mistakes in this work lies entirely with me.

David Carr                                          Moray House College,
                                                    December 1989

# INTRODUCTION

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that we do not live in an age of moral certainty. In the so-called multi-cultural and pluralist societies which characterise much of the modern world it has become standard practice to submit traditional moral, religious and social beliefs or values to rigorous scrutiny; a particular attitude of rational scepticism appears to have become the order of the day. It is also sensible to concede, moreover, that there is much about this modern scepticism which is reasonable enough and that we should be foolish to regret the passing of precisely some of the moral certainties of earlier human societies and epochs. The cruel and oppressive fanaticisms which, it will be said, have stained the childhood and adolescence of human evolution with the blood of innocents and martyrs are no longer to be tolerated at the coming of age of civilised man. Thus a degree – even a large degree – of healthy scepticism about traditional moral, religious and social beliefs is the most valuable weapon we have in the fight against the exploitation, injustice and oppression that some of those beliefs have endorsed.

But it is also clear – from the history of philosophy for example – that scepticism can be taken too far, to extremes that are themselves not just irrational but dangerous. So whereas it was largely the aim of past great moral philosophers up until the early modern period (let us here regard Kant as the high water mark) to give an account of the conceptual or epistemological basis not just of our moral disagreements but also of our moral *agreements*, it seems to have been the aim of some of the moral sages of middle and late modernity (the first crucial figure here, I suppose, is Nietzsche) to drill out the very foundations of our ordinary moral thinking by arguing that all our basic beliefs and

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values are in principle suspect or susceptible of revision. This more radical scepticism concerning the possibility of any objective basis for our common moral values, practices and judgements has, especially when reinforced by the modern encounter with cultural diversity, gradually filtered down in modern times not only into the work of academic moral philosophers but into the attitudes and beliefs of ordinary popular consciousness.[1]

But whilst it seems to be a reasonable enough human procedure to question traditional moral values, beliefs and practices wherever they may seem to be suspect, it is also arguably little short of insane to embark on an enterprise of questioning *every* moral value or practice on principle. Thus I am inclined to the view that the older moral philosophers like Plato, Aristotle and Kant were right to believe that there must be some ground of moral certainty or at least of objectivity even if, as I shall argue, some of them looked for it in unlikely places. This view seems to me to rest on a simple logical or conceptual point; just as there can be no counterfeit coins unless there are also real ones there can be no morally suspect or disreputable points of view unless there are also morally sound or reputable ones.[2] Moreover, we could not reasonably enter into intelligible disagreement about moral questions in the absence of some background of moral agreement shared by the opposed points of view.

It is common for philosophers of science to refer to a famous metaphor or analogy used by the Austrian logical positivist philosopher Otto Neurath to illustrate the nature of scientific progress.[3] With respect to his scientific theories, then, the scientist is roughly in the position of a sailor at sea in a leaky ship. Since it is not possible for him whilst he is afloat to dismantle his ship and rebuild it entirely, he must locate the leaks as best he can and patch the boat where they occur. The analogy is usually construed as a direct attack on epistemological foundationalism in science, as expressive of a perspective which regards it as futile for scientists to search for fundamental and incorrigible principles, laws and procedures upon which an absolutely certain and foolproof science might be constructed. Scientific theory and practice is a complex web or network of principles and procedures of varying degrees of soundness and reliability which it makes little sense to try to test or revise all at one go. Much the same point, I believe, can be made about our

moral perspectives and practices; these too comprise a compli-
cated network of principles and procedures which – like the
sailor at sea in his leaky boat – we are stuck with and which
we must adjust where necessary in a piecemeal fashion because
we cannot overturn the lot all at once.

But what this image also suggests is that although it is only
sensible to admit that there is considerable uncertainty in
moral life, this cannot mean that there is *total* uncertainty; like
the seaborne sailor we must trust that some planks are water-
tight or will bear our weight – in this case the planks, as it
were, of moral thought and practice – in order to be able to
replace the rotten ones. In fact, however, the radical moral
scepticism which affects or infects popular modern thought
has usually taken two principal forms – the subjectivism which
says that since there are no objective moral truths I must make
up my own and the relativisim which maintains that since there
are no absolute or universally valid moral principles or truths
we might as well stick with the social and moral customs we
already have.[4] The moral subjectivist is a bit like the sailor who
tries to reconstruct his ship whilst still at sea and the moral
relativist stands in considerable danger of being like one who
turns a blind eye to the leaks and neglects to maintain his ship
at all.

The problem seems to be, oddly enough, that both these
kinds of sceptic – the subjectivist and the relativist – share a
common ideal of certainty, though it is a certainty for which it is
not really reasonable to seek; they both require a kind of fully
comprehensive moral insurance which will guarantee them
totally against unforseen disasters – new moral 'leaks' in
unexpected places. Like the older natural philosophers who
sought for an incorrigible system of ground rules or principles
upon which the whole edifice of scientific enquiry and practice
might be rationally constructed, the modern moral sceptics have
sought in vain for a foundational set of hard and fast principles
on the basis of which the whole of human moral life might be
constructed or from which all moral precepts might be derived.
Being unable to discover such hard and fast or incontrovertible
principles in any realm of human experience they have resorted
either to making them up – abandoning objectivity and under-
writing certainty with personal commitment – or abandoning
certainty they have clung onto what objectivity they could find

by committing themselves to the social conventions and moral codes nearest to hand.

In fact, however, these ways of proceeding have got things almost entirely the wrong way round, for we do not start with moral principles and proceed to moral practices, but – like the pilot of Neurath's craft – we find ourselves involved in a going concern, landed with certain moral practices and relationships, enmeshed in a complex web of ties of human community and association, in relation to which our moral codes represent an attempt to make some sort of sense. The moral principles that we have, then, are the product of a fallible human attempt to understand the web of moral association by reference to consideration of both a general and a particular kind about what sorts of conduct conduce to good and ill, wellbeing and harm, in human affairs; in short, the principles are underwritten by the practices, not the practices by the principles.

At this point two possible misconceptions about what has been said so far may need guarding against. First, it should be re-emphasised that the use of Neurath's metaphor to criticise foundationalism in moral thinking should not be construed as tantamount to a denial that there *can be* any moral certainties – that it is just not possible to form judgements of an objective character concerning what is morally right or wrong. To attack moral foundationalism is merely to reject the view that it is possible to discern any hard and fast incontrovertible *axioms* or *principles* from which our particular moral judgements might be deductively inferred or upon which our moral conduct might be rationally based. To affirm that the rough and ready moral principles that we have are underwritten by our actual moral practices, however, is precisely to acknowledge that there are genuine if general criteria of moral right and wrong, good and evil, to be discovered in the rough and tumble of human interpersonal relations and conduct.

Precisely they are to be discovered in those general human dispositions to good and ill, excellence and baseness, which are ordinarily called virtues and vices and with the nature of which this work is centrally concerned. It is the familiar enough human discourse of virtue and vice, in terms of which we ordinarily characterise human moral character and conduct, which is our best guide to the formulation of reliable moral precepts and principles. As we shall see, however, the moral virtues are very

definitely not hard and fast principles which may be applied to any conceivable circumstances but general patterns or tendencies of conduct which require reasonable and cautious adjustment to particular and changing circumstances and which may even, in some situations, compete with each other for preference and priority. They are not so much the foundations of morality, then, if by this is meant a hard bedrock of principles upon which all moral conduct is based – rather they are the templates upon which the general contours of moral life are modelled; precisely, they are *criteria* rather than *axioms*.

The other possible source of misunderstanding concerning these observations about the pre-eminence of concepts of virtue for our thinking about the nature of moral life and ideas of right and wrong arises in relation to the notion of relativism. If, as appears to be widely believed, the notions of virtue and vice are socially defined and the practice of the moral virtues is a social phenomenon, must not any concepts of virtue and moral practice generally be relative to particular societies? In short, doesn't the attempt to explain moral life in terms of such heavily socially-implicated dispositions as the virtues, simply readmit the bogy of moral relativism by the back door? I think that the short answer here – we shall have much more to say in due course – is that it does not. It is clear enough that concepts of virtue and vice – however they may be differently interpreted in different societies – are nevertheless employed by all human agents to submit the range of available social, religious and political practices to question as unjust, self-serving, exploitative or whatever.

The crucial point is that although the moral virtues are often if not always socially-implicated dispositions, they are so in the very general and innocuous sense in which *all* human conduct is social, but not necessarily if at all in the very narrow or dubious sense of being ideologically or doctrinally biased. It is clear that the moral virtues operate at a much more fundamental level of human life, experience and interpersonal dealings than that with which particular religious or political creeds are concerned. To be sure, then, we live as human beings in a variety of different ways and according to diverse social customs but it is also true that fundamentally we all share a common physical or biological nature which inclines us to find pleasure, hurt, wellbeing, security and love in roughly the same places; so

though it is easy enough to recognise two different interpreta-
tions or expressions of courage or charity in two different
societies (or, for that matter, in the same society) it is hard to
envisage a human community in which these qualities are not
needed, recognised or held to be of any value at all.

Thus, though in one sense there are different versions of
virtue – different ideas about how courage might be expressed,
for example, by war or through pacifism – in another more
profound sense it is certainly not true that we count *any* quality
as courage except that which involves remaining resolute or not
losing one's nerve in dangerous, difficult or painful circum-
stances and that must logically be the case for any human
agent (as well as what renders rational debate about the nature
and value of courage possible between members of different
societies).

At any rate, in this work I have taken the view that some
definite initiation into those virtues or qualities ordinarily
acknowledged in the familiar human discourse of fundamental
human association must lie at the heart of the moral education
of *all* children and that parents and teachers who fail to acquaint
their children with these fundamental dispositions of moral life
are seriously reneging on the full educational implications of
their roles as parents and teachers. It is clear enough, however,
both from much recent literature about education and on the
basis of observations of much contemporary social life that the
various agencies of education *have* wavered about this – scared
off perhaps by various bogies of indoctrination or illiberalism.
Perhaps the most influential perspective on moral education
of modern educational thought is one that explicitly
disparages and rejects what it calls the 'bag of virtues' approach
and which is inclined rather, it seems, to try to get children
thinking for themselves, more or less from scratch, about moral
questions; other very influential brands of modern educational
progressivism have in the name of some liberal notion of
tolerance repudiated the idea of moral education altogether.[5]

It is my belief that these various views which cast suspicion on
the idea of a basic moral education of the virtues are merely
symptomatic of a failure of nerve on the part of moral educa-
tionalists which is itself the result of their subscription to certain
dubious doctrines about moral life of a foundationalist nature.
But be that as it may, it seems to be no more than a matter of

common sense to recognise that most of the modern reserva-
tions about a basic moral education of the virtues under the
influence of the bogy of indoctrination are just confused any-
way; there is nothing but a dangerous muddle in the wake of the
view that teaching, even instructing, a child in self-control is a
matter of indoctrination or of a serious curtailment of his
freedom.

The present work is intended to be one of moral education
rather than moral philosophy – or, at any rate, it is intended as
a contribution to the conceptual geography of problems about
moral education from which the efforts of a more obviously
practical kind of parents, teachers and other educationalists
might derive some heart or inspiration. To that end, although I
have not been able to avoid fairly protracted discussions of past
and present moral philosophical theory, I have also engaged in
equally extensive critical discussions of several important views
of moral education and child development hailing from the
social sciences.

I trust that it will be clear enough without much need for
elaboration here why some discussion of various classical
theories of morality and virtue is a prerequisite of any satis-
factory treatment of moral education – it is roughly, of course,
because we need to understand what kinds of items moral
values, attitudes and dispositions are before we can see clearly
what may be required to promote their growth. All the same, it
should be said that I have here pursued the enquiry in my own
highly idiosyncratic and selective way and students in search of
an introductory text to the history of moral philosophy might be
well advised to look elsewhere than to this volume; my survey
of moral philosophies probably excludes more than it includes
and so I doubt whether any very clear view of the history of the
subject could be gained from this work.

But if the present work is undeniably unsatisfactory from this
more refined theoretical end of things it is also very likely to be
regarded as unsatisfactory from the more practical end as well.
Many a professional educationalist approaching this book in the
currently rather untheoretical climate of thinking about educa-
tional questions is bound to be struck by the observation that
whilst purporting to be an essay concerned with the practical
business of education, it nevertheless eschews any discussion of
the practical apparatus of pedagogy and curriculum that might

be considered necessary for implementing programmes of moral education.

Thus, this essay includes no attempt to develop a formal programme of study, contains no lesson plans, engages in no discussion of teaching methods, techniques, skills or strategies and the currently fashionable educational talk of 'management skills', 'delivering the curriculum' and so on is studiously avoided. Concerning these alleged omissions, however, I remain obstinately unrepentant. In fact, if the general drift of the present work is understood at all, it should also be grasped that nothing of this nature has here been omitted that does not trade in either the largely vacuous or the downright fatuous.

My basic view is that *all* the major mistakes about the moral educational role of the teacher with respect to the moral development of others to which people are nowadays inclined are based on *misconceptions* or *misunderstandings* of the nature of moral life from which have followed certain failures of nerve concerning the legitimacy of a fairly familiar and informal sort of enterprise. In short, teachers fail in the task of moral education not primarily on account of their lack of any pedagogical skill or technique or of a coherent curriculum theory, but rather because they have only an uncertain grasp of what moral life actually means.

There is a crucial sense, moreover, in which adequately grasping what moral life means is hardly consistent with failing to construct or reconstruct one's personal relations with others in a manner from which the only moral educational effects that we can reasonably hope for follow naturally enough. To be sure, merely being able to recognise what a morally decent life looks like is hardly of itself enough to turn us into the kind of people who are shining examples to others – for most of us much effort is still required to acquire the honesty, tolerance, self-control and so on which are at once both instrumental to and constitutive of such a life – but to understand adequately what a morally good life is, is to grasp that that life is worth aspiring to and also to acquire *some* insight into the right direction in which one should proceed.

But to recognise this is also to comprehend that a morally sound life is essentially a matter of *personal* effort and aspiration – not 'personal', of course, in the sense of 'subjective' or 'idiosyncratic' – but personal meaning that no one can do it for

us. To this extent, however, all talk in relation to moral education of pedagogical skills, strategies and techniques, of management styles or delivering the curriculum becomes not just beside the point but runs *counter to* the point; a life characterised by those human excellences called the moral virtues is precisely not something which we accept because it has been required of or imposed on us, but something to which we aspire when we too have discerned the great value of those qualities of integrity, honesty, discipline, tolerance, care, courtesy and so on which shine forth in the lives and conduct of those who, with luck, have been charged with the task of instructing us.

What, of course, all this means is that moral education cannot be regarded as just another subject in the curriculum like physics or maths and that any pedagogy appropriate to its promotion is hardly susceptible of analysis in terms of techniques for the transmission or communication of academic theories or information. The supreme human value and significance of the moral virtues can be recognised only in their power to transform lives for the better in terms of individual character and social relations; we appreciate the worth of qualities of moral character by observing how they operate in the lives of others – admiring Miss Smith for her honesty and concern for others at the same time as we despise Mr Jones for his meanness and ill-temper.

But it follows also from this that the fundamental moral virtues cannot be learned in any context of socialisation or education apart from the example of those parents, teachers and friends who are able to exhibit to some degree how they work for the good in human life. Moreover, lacking the example of those who possess positive moral qualities, young people may well take as their models of behaviour those who possess only negative qualities – Mr Jones who is shifty, sarcastic and bullying.

So far, then, I have argued that proper moral education requires a full or adequate appreciation of the important contribution that certain basic moral dispositions have to make to any worthwhile form of human life, that the only sure indicator of such appreciation is that a person clearly aspires to possessing the qualities in question and that the example of such aspiration (none of us can hope to afford much more than this) is the *sine*

*qua non* of effective moral instruction. In short a good moral educator can only be one who himself aspires to the achievement of some degree of moral excellence characterisable in terms of such attitudes and dispositions as honesty, courage, self-control, integrity, benevolence and so forth.

I am not unaware, moreover, of the extreme and far-reaching, not to say disquieting consequences, that this line of argument might be held to have for education, especially the professional preparation and training of teachers. It may well be said, for example, that it must if true have quite radical and far-reaching consequences for the business of teacher selection and appraisal. I am bound to concede that this is a distinct possibility, aware as I am of the quite serious potential that exists for the possible institutional abuse of this observation; it is also with some relief, however, that I am able to say that it is quite outside the scope of this book to examine this question here.

But whatever the consequences of my arguments so far for teacher appraisal, it is nevertheless clear enough that the drift of my discussion has profound and immediate consequences for teacher *education*. From this point of view I do regard it as a matter of grave concern that the relatively recent attacks of irresolution on the part of professional educationalists concerning the question of values education (following from the fear of indoctrination and the like) appear to have led to something approaching a conspiracy of silence among teacher educators on this topic. In an educational climate currently unconducive to the airing of any sort of difficult theoretical or conceptual problems about the purpose and conduct of education, it would appear that the college training of many student teachers has been focused well nigh exclusively on the procedural or mechanical aspects of teaching to the virtual neglect of any considerations concerning the ethical or moral dimensions of the teacher's role. To my mind, this circumstance is nothing less than a scandal and a disaster and I dread to see what such teacher educators will shortly be reaping from what they have already sown.[6]

For if it is true that the area of values education *is* generally problematic, it is equally clear that it just will not do *either* to bury one's head in the sand *or* to sit on the fence with respect to this question. Neither evasion nor neutrality over the question of values is a live option for educationalists simply because *all*

education – not just moral education – is a value-laden matter. Unless one is an A.S. Neill content to leave children to their own devices – and the majority of professional educationalists employed in state educational institutions have little or no room for manoeuvre here since their general practice is at serious variance with Neill's at precisely this point – one is as a teacher constantly making choices about what is or is not good for children in educational terms and requiring them to abide by those choices.

It is also reasonably clear, moreover, that if student teachers are not required to address in a rational and honest way these thorny questions concerning the moral dimensions of the role of teaching – to try to see precisely where their moral responsi-bilities to children do or do not lie – they may be ripe for hijack or manipulation by various extreme forms of fanaticism about values of either an authoritarian–repressive or a permissive–libertarian kind. Where only an intellectual vacuum occupies the place of sensible reflection upon the moral character of human life and experience, the nature of values and the ethical aspects of the educationalist's role, the territory is fair target for invasion by the morally 'loony' right or the equally morally 'loony' left.

We do our student teachers in the colleges no great favours, then, by proceeding as though education and learning to teach are matters only of the mastery of certain pedagogical skills, knacks or strategies apt for the successful transmission of value-neutral knowledge or information. Worse still, we do the pupils in our schools an even more lamentable disservice by providing custodians of their development who view schools not as communities or cultures in which children can be nurtured to some kind of moral and spiritual growth, but as factories or assembly lines with respect to which the dominant value is productivity. Thus I believe that the contentious questions of value cannot and should not be shirked in teacher education and yet, so far as I can see, the opportunities for addressing such questions are widely on the decline in institutions con-cerned with teacher training and they may well in some places have disappeared altogether.

The present work, then, is not an educational essay con-cerned with the development of skills or techniques which lend themselves to direct practical application in the classroom – it is not a handbook of simple practical tips for teachers. Indeed, in

the area of educational endeavour with which we are here concerned I think that it is not to be expected that we can discover any simple practical tips that are not of a highly general and largely unhelpful nature. The moral–educational authority of the teacher consists not so much in his effective employment of practical strategies as in his efforts to understand the value of moral life, not at all in his arranging behavioural schedules of reinforcement but more in his demonstrating to children through his own conduct what decent and principled attitudes and behaviour towards others are like and how they enrich a human life.

The most urgent problems about moral education with which teachers, parents and other educationalists are faced, then, are precisely not pedagogical or technological but moral–philosophical and conceptual. Once we understand the nature of moral life and experience more clearly we can see that there are no pedagogical problems about moral education of a technological kind – in the sense that there are, say, about how best to teach long division; thus the only practical moral educational problem – though it is one of supreme difficulty – is that of how to engage with and relate to our pupils in as wise, principled, decent and responsible a way as possible. We might express this by saying that whereas the major pedagogical problem about science education may concern how to get Faraday or Einstein into the heads of our pupils, the main pedagogical problem about moral education concerns how as teachers to get decency, integrity, virtue and justice into our own hearts.

This work, then, is concerned with understanding the implications for education of a particular perspective on the nature of moral life – a perspective which is preferred over others for reasons which I have also tried to indicate in the book. In general, I have tried to start from scratch – to work from a position which assumes little or no prior knowledge on the part of anyone of moral and social theory or problems of moral education as such – and to proceed via critical appreciation of the work of some very great moral and social thinkers of past times towards a relatively original and distinctive perspective on the nature of moral life and virtue.

I say 'relatively original' because although the view I have tried to present in section three of this work is obviously heavily

indebted in all crucial respects to the influence of such past figures of genius as Plato and Aristotle as well as to several more recent moral philosophers of far greater stature than the present author, the last four chapters of this work do nevertheless attempt to express points of view that are not to my knowledge *widely* aired, if at all, in the currently available literature of contemporary moral–educational philosophy.

It is worth re-emphasising here that although I have adopted the fairly standard procedure, at least in the first two sections, of discussing the work of great thinkers of the past, this essay should not be approached as an introductory text to historical problems of moral theory and moral education – or, at least, not one of a conventional or systematic kind. My choice of theorists and theories for discussion in this work is fairly personal and selective and I could not claim to have done adequate justice to every figure and every view of importance for the development of moral theory and moral education; anyone searching for a complete treatment of this matter must be struck, for example, by my *almost* complete neglect of any reference to the philosophy of utilitarianism.

Again, although many of the obvious great names of ethical theory such as Plato, Aristotle and Kant and many of the almost as well known prominent theorists of moral education like Durkheim, Piaget and Kohlberg are here, others may to some readers seem unaccountably missing. I must also plead guilty to some fairly unorthodox and idiosyncratic treatments of some of the thinkers and their theories which I have discussed. I am well aware that I do not quite share the views of many of the great philosophers and social thinkers of the past which are widespread among present-day philosophers of education of the so-called liberal traditionalist persuasion. Thus, I have been almost perversely unsympathetic to some people and sympathetic to others in cases where it has seemed to me that the current orthodoxy of educational philosophy has leant too far in the other direction. What, however, has turned out to be the general form or plan of the book?

I have attempted to explore the problems which interest me in three main sections, each of which contains four chapters. In the first section I have set out to offer accounts of the ideas on moral life and virtue of some great philosophers of ancient to relatively recent times. It is worth noting here that although this work

contains critical comment on all the philosophers I have tried to discuss, either directly or by implication, I have not indulged in the practice, fairly standard among recent educational philosophers, of first describing past views, then listing a number of possible criticisms of them. Instead, I have just been concerned to sketch – at least in the first three chapters – my own views of certain great past thinkers which highlight what I take to be of importance and originality about their contributions to our understanding of moral life; it is really necessary to read the rest of this work in order to discover and appreciate clearly what are my final judgements on the moral positions which I believe them to represent.

In the first chapter I have started – I do not really see how it would be reasonable to start anywhere else – at the very source of contemporary western moral philosophy, with the views of Socrates and Plato. From my earliest days as a student of philosophy I have been under the spell of Plato, I continue to return to his works for insight and I probably enjoyed writing this first chapter of the present work more than any other; irrespective of its doubtless defects, this chapter was written in a spirit of deep reverence for the author who first attracted me to philosophy and who has sustained my interest through the years. Moreover, although it is true that the particular line of enquiry concerning virtue and moral life which appears to have been initiated by Socrates and Plato is ultimately rejected in this work in favour of that developed by Aristotle, it is nevertheless also true that Platonic insights have informed the perspective of this work at various points and the Socratic influence is, for example, quite decisive for the argument of chapter 10.

It is my second chapter on Aristotle which is in general the most crucial for this work, of course, since I am ultimately concerned to defend something like an Aristotelian conception of moral life, moral education and the nature of virtue. All the same, however, I am inclined to regard this chapter as somewhat less successful than the first and as rather less well tied together. The basic and I suspect insuperable problem here, of course, is that there is just too much of importance in Aristotle's *Ethics* to deal with in the space of a short chapter. Thus, although it may seem extremely remiss to omit from a work on moral education any protracted discussion of, for

example, Aristotle's important observations on the psychology of moral motivation, this is precisely what I have had to do.

The chapter concludes, then, with little more than a tanta-lising hint as to the importance of these sections of the *Ethics*; to have gone further would have taken me into the deep waters of some extremely abstract and complex metaphysical issues about freedom and so on and too far away from the rough path I have already had enough trouble clearing. Needless to say, the principal issues and topics which I have discussed in this chapter are re-examined and elaborated throughout the rest of this work – especially in the final section.

My third chapter on the ideas of Rousseau and Kant is concerned precisely to identify those views of the nature of moral life and experience to which the present work is largely antipathetic. All the same, my concern has still been to expound these highly influential doctrines which underpin modern liberalism as clearly and sympathetically as possible. Kant is, of course, a notoriously difficult philosopher to ex-pound and that is one good reason for approaching his ideas through the influence on them of the more accessible doctrines of Rousseau. As in the case of the chapter on Aristotle the first problem I faced about giving an account of Rousseau and Kant was to avoid either leaving too much out or putting too much in.

The second problem was to avoid the various caricatures and distortions to which interpretations of both these thinkers are prone when authors are anxious to contrast their views reason-ably sharply with those of other people. In the light of some very recent first rate work on the philosophy of Rousseau, I am not at all satisfied that I have managed to avoid a degree of distortion – particularly in relation to the alleged 'anti-social' elements of Rousseau's philosophy. Thus, for those who require a rather more accurate and sensitive account of Rousseau than I have been able to give in this work I cannot recommend too highly the fine recent study of him by Nicholas Dent.[7]

In the fourth and final chapter of the first section, I have attempted to draw up some initial battle lines by tracing the origins of various disputes of modern moral philosophy back to their sources in the conflicting perspectives of those past philosophers already discussed. In general, I have traced the modern orthodoxies of liberal thinking about moral education back to Kant and his Rousseauesque roots and the more recent

discontent with modern liberal perspectives which we find expressed in neo-naturalism and allied doctrines to its fundamentally Aristotelian source.

As well as nailing my own colours to the mast at this point I have concluded this chapter with attempts at short accounts of two significant recent thinkers of a neo-Aristotelian turn of mind – Alasdair MacIntyre and John McDowell. The work of both these men is not greatly known beyond mainstream moral philosophy and has not yet been widely discussed by educational philosophers (MacIntyre somewhat, McDowell hardly at all). Given the immense difficulty of the thought of both these men, I also cannot feel sure that I have precisely or completely understood them, but it does seem right to have made the attempt.

In the second section, I have set out to discuss the ideas on moral life, education and development of a number of well-known theorists hailing from areas of social science rather than philosophy. It will hardly come as much of a surprise that I have taken a largely critical view of most of these ideas in the light of what I discern in the way of the frequent conceptual short-comings of much of this (allegedly) empirically based work. All the same, I have still sought to be sympathetic where possible and to acknowledge the many occasions when at least people's hearts seem to have been in the right place.

With regard to my fifth chapter on the work of Durkheim, it still seems to me that despite the fatally flawed nature – from a philosophical point of view – of the French sociologist's work on moral education, his famous essay is nevertheless a civilised and serious work which contains many shrewd and insightful observations on moral life and deserves to be more widely read. It is certainly true that there is much to be learned about moral life from the peculiar character of Durkheim's conceptual errors.

In fact when we turn to the chapter on Freud and his influence on Homer Lane and (less directly) A.S. Neill, it may well be thought that I have been rather *too* sympathetic both to psychoanalysis and progressivism. My main aim in this chapter, however, has been to try to illuminate certain rather unorthodox views about moral education to be encountered in the theory and practice of some colourful modern representatives of progressive educational theory by tracing the influence on them of Freudian and psychoanalytic theory. I have also suggested that

a certain degree of light on the origins of some 'problem' behaviour has been cast by such figures as Lane and Neill; the progressive interpretation and extended application of such psychoanalytic ideas as those of repression and sublimation has, I believe, afforded insight into the provenance of some morally problematic behaviour.

It does not seem to me that this observation is at all exceptionable especially as I conclude the chapter by insisting that neither Freud, Lane nor Neill should be understood as having discovered the *causes* of virtue and vice. Thus my sympathetic endorsement of the Lane–Neill observations about how some conditions of socialisation might serve to stunt moral development in certain respects should not be taken to imply sympathy towards any general metaphysical doctrines concerning the causal determination of human behaviour. I am also not at all inclined to the view that all bad behaviour is mad behaviour and that all wickedness should be seen as an illness to be cured. In fact I hold the common-sense view that most of us are for most of the time quite responsible (in the sense that, amongst other things, we could have chosen to do something other than what we actually did) for the wrong-doing we commit – but this does not invalidate the Lane–Neill point that some children might well have turned out rather better given a better upbringing.

Since the Piaget–Kohlberg view of moral development as largely a matter of the growth of moral reasoning constitutes, on the other hand, something like the orthodoxy of modern liberal thinking about moral education, and as its origins lie so clearly in the philosophy of the high enlightenment (particularly in the views of Kant), it is only to be expected that I have been highly critical in chapter 7 of what I take to be a potentially dangerous line of thought about the moral upbringing, training and education of children. I am reasonably satisfied, moreover, that the thought of this chapter or something like it is largely on the right lines about what is wrong with much of both modern psychology and modern educational thinking.

In the eighth and final chapter of the second section I am concerned to explore the significance of these various social theoretical perspectives on the nature and origins of moral concepts and dispositions with respect to that familiar dichotomy of educational-philosophical thought known as the traditional–progressive distinction. I argue that the distinction

in question is ultimately and properly to be understood in terms
of a conflict between two different and opposed theories of the
relationship between human nature and society which, though
they cannot both be true, might nevertheless both be false.
In fact, I am inclined to the view that these two different
and crudely oversimplified pictures of human nature, social
influence and the origins of virtue and vice urgently require
replacement by a single new but more complex view of human
nature, society and virtue which would allow us to form a
clearer and more realistic picture of the proper direction of
moral education.

It is precisely to an attempt to sketch the outlines of an
account of moral virtue based on a more complex but also more
realistic view of human nature and the individual and social
dimensions of moral life that I turn in the third section of this
work. The first three chapters of this section are concerned to
explore the implications of the basic idea that a moral virtue is a
distinctive kind of human disposition which is appropriately
construed as a complex of reason, feeling and will.

To put the point another way, no explanation of the nature of
moral virtue should be considered complete without some
reference to the natural affective life of human agents, some
account of the role that practical reason plays in the moral
discipline of human sentiments and some reasonable story
about the nature of moral motivation or of what inclines or
disinclines human agents to the decent or principled conduct
of their affairs. Thus the first three chapters of the third section
cover the topics of feeling, motivation and reason in relation
to virtue and each of them, it should be noted, is concerned to
argue against what I take to be widespread misconceptions
about these aspects of moral life.

In the ninth chapter I set out to argue against the common
view (deriving originally perhaps from Platonic sources) that the
moral virtues are concerned exclusively with the control or
suppression of unruly instincts, inclinations and passions of a
largely negative and destructive character. Undoubtedly this
idea rests on a one-sidedly pessimistic view of untutored human
nature which does not seem to be generally sustainable. In fact it
seems clear enough that many moral virtues are founded upon
natural human sentiments of a largely positive and constructive
kind – sentiments which certainly require rational direction and

discipline in order to count as virtues – but not necessarily, if at all, repression or subjection. In short, I argue that such altruistic virtues as charity, compassion and benevolence concern the disciplined *expression* of natural human sentiments rather than their firm *suppression*.

Likewise, I have tried to argue in the tenth chapter against another familiar and widespread view to the effect that moral motivation is to be understood largely as a matter of obligation or duty. Although I readily agree that on many of the occasions when we act in ways that may be considered to have moral significance we do so in recognition of particular duties and obligations, much if not most moral conduct is not appropriately regarded as obligatory behaviour. For my argument in this chapter I draw heavily for inspiration on an idea which seems to be common to all the great Greek philosophers of classical antiquity – Socrates, Plato and Aristotle – that genuine motivation with respect to the acquisition of the virtues should be regarded as a matter of personal *aspiration* (more than obligation).

The eleventh and penultimate chapter of this work is probably the most crucial and significant for my general thesis and it was certainly the most rewarding to work upon. In it I take the view that with the notable exception of Aristotle, moral philosophers of past times appear to have seriously misunderstood the nature and function of wisdom or deliberation with respect to moral life; specifically, they have construed moral reason and reflection as principally concerned with determining or establishing (from some Archimedean point of rational neutrality) the ultimate aims, goals and ends of moral life, whereas in reality the proper function of moral deliberation is to identify what constitutes moral conduct in particular circumstances of human indecision and uncertainty.

There is, then, a genuine sense in which the final goals of moral life are not matters to be decided by individual judgement or social consensus – a sense in which they are already *given* for human wisdom, reason or deliberation to work upon or in terms of. It is not for us to decide via some process of neutral rational reflection whether or not charity or courage are qualities of genuine moral value, only how to be rightly charitable or generous.

The twelfth and final chapter of this work is concerned to