

Education, Professionalism and the Quest for Accountability

Hitting the Target but Missing the Point

Jane Green



**Education,
Professionalism,
and the Quest for
Accountability**

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For Matthew and Rachel

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Third, the late Professor Terence McLaughlin for the fruitful conversations I had with him about Aristotle. They indirectly helped to shape the argument of the original PhD thesis, on which this book is based. I am thinking in particular of his insistence that the right way to understand the notion of (what he called) ‘*pedagogic phronesis*’ is to model it on ethical *phronesis*. Drawing upon this point, I saw a way of extending his idea, to argue that professional formation be modelled, analogously, on Aristotle’s notion of ethical formation (*ethismos*).

I need to make it clear, however, that in the interpretation and translation of Aristotle that I offer in this book, I lay no claim to originality. My reading derives from interpretations of several Aristotelian scholars. Those to whom I am most indebted and would like to acknowledge are (i) Elizabeth

Anscombe who emphasizes the perception/discernment—*aesthesis*—of an agent in a specific context that is recorded in the minor premise of the agent's practical syllogism; (ii) David Wiggins who effectively continues and develops that theme; (iii) Myles Burnyeat who helpfully explains the crucial role of *ethismos* (ethical formation) in the development of the intellectual virtue, *phronesis*, practical knowledge; (iv) Sabina Lovibond who draws attention to the close relationship between *ethismos* and *phronesis* and also to the element of uncodifiable knowledge which lies latent in both of these ideas; and (v) John McDowell who, in drawing on the German idea of *Bildung*, helps to explain how the 'second nature' that develops through a human being's upbringing (*Erziehung*) is not a 'mysterious gift from outside nature', but an 'actualization of some of the potentialities we are born with'.

Earlier, abridged versions of many of the central themes of this book appeared in the following articles from which I am grateful to John Wiley and Sons Ltd, and to Taylor and Francis, for granting permission to reproduce extracts:

- 2004 *Educational Philosophy and Theory* (Special Issue: *Work-Based Learning*), 36 (5), 549–562: 'Managerial Modes of Accountability and Practical Knowledge: Reclaiming the Practical'
- 2004 *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (Special Issue: *Conformism and Critique in Liberal Society*), 38 (3), 511–525: 'Critique, Contextualism and Consensus'
- 2009 *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 3 (2), 115–130: 'The Deformation of Professional Formation: Managerial Targets and the Undermining of Professional Judgement'. <http://www.informaworld.com>.

For reasons of space, I have had to omit three appendices originally included in my doctoral thesis. The thesis is available at the Institute of Education, London University, or at Senate House Library, London University, and is titled *Beyond Managerial Rhetoric: Reclaiming What Is Practical, Personal and Implicit in the Idea of Educational Accountability*.

Introduction

Vague and insignificant Forms of Speech, and Abuse of Language, have so long passed for Mysteries of Science; And hard or misapply'd Words, with little or no meaning, have, by Prescription, such a Right to be mistaken for deep Learning . . . that it will not be easie [sic] to persuade, either those who speak, or those who hear them, that they are Covers of Ignorance . . .

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689)

I.1 PROFESSIONALISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY: SOME TOPICAL QUESTIONS

As a result of the *marketization* of the public sector, a ‘corporate’ form of governance has become the predominant model for judging how professionals account for themselves at work. The rationale of this model, dictating its mode of operation, grounds the idea of what now counts as public accountability: ‘to set clear targets, to develop performance indicators, to measure the achievement of those targets, and to single out, by means of merit awards, promotion or other rewards, those individuals who get “results”’.¹ Aptly described as a ‘market-inspired managerialism’ by Pádraig Hogan (1995: 226), this kind of accountability is also referred to in the literature as ‘New Public Management’ (usually abbreviated to NPM; see Section I.5 for more details).

I question the widely accepted assumption that this NPM, ‘managerial’ model of governance² provides the best *practical rationality* for achieving *public accountability*. I argue that any careful scrutiny of the underlying rationale of this model will show how and why it may be expected, paradoxically, to make professional practices *less accountable* and, when applied to education, *less educative*.

There are numerous critiques of ‘managerial’ modes of accountability in the literature, which highlight the deleterious effects which these modes have had on professional conduct and practice. Many who write on such matters and argue for a renewed notion of professionalism draw on the Aristotelian idea of *phronesis* (usually translated as practical knowledge, wisdom, or prudence), the ability to make practically intelligent and ethically responsive judgments in particular circumstances. So why tread the same terrain that others have trodden so ably? What more is there to be said that has not already been said?

The examination I make of present accountability policies and of their impact upon practitioners in educational and other public institutions goes

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beyond current literature by referring my criticisms back to the *philosophical* foundations of NPM. Exposing the systematic defects of what I refer to as ‘the managerial model’ of practical rationality that rests on these foundations, and carrying Aristotelian exegesis beyond familiar debates about practical wisdom (*phronesis*) into the structure and applicability of Aristotelian practical reasoning, I make the case for an alternative model, one that complements, rather than undermines, professional judgment. There is also a bigger case to make: the need for a reassessment of the kind of practical and public rationality through which professional practitioners are expected to account for themselves.

The overarching aim of the book is to show how and why NPM, through its various ‘managerial’ modes of accountability, has the potential to distort, systematically, *the structure of practical reason of agents* precisely when it is needed: those moments in practice when wise decisions and judgment are called for.

So the scope of the book is intended to relate to professional practices other than those specifically concerned with education *per se*. Included will be the notions *professional education* and *professional practice*. Drawing on the idea that professional education and preparation for professional practice are ‘inextricably linked’ (Drummond and Standish 2007: 1), I aim to show the crucial role which *professional formation* plays in a practitioner’s readiness and capacity to make wise practical judgments. When we understand better the structural, antecedent role which *formation* plays in decision-making, it will become clear why target driven practices can undermine that readiness and capability.

“But how will anyone know what to do unless they have explicit, prescribed targets to aim for?” To meet this challenge, I draw on the model of practical reasoning which Aristotle’s account of practical reason and deliberation in the *Nicomachean Ethics* offers. I suggest that *professional formation* be modelled, analogously, on the account of *ethical formation* which Aristotle provides. Just as someone with ethical formation (*ethismos*) is able to find, through practical reasoning, the ‘right’ ethical end to act on, I show how the non-explicit (‘tacit’, ‘implicit’, ‘non-articulate’) practical knowledge of someone who has developed professional/occupational formation enables that person to find the local and immediately relevant end (what needs to be done there and then) and the appropriate act in the name of that end, simultaneously.

Crucially, in the neo-Aristotelian model I draw, the structure of an agent’s practical reasoning is grounded on the *telos* (i.e., purpose, goal) of the chosen *métier*, (implicitly) understood by that agent as aiming at some fundamental, human good (such as health, safety, education). It is this ‘good’ (however inarticulately understood) which helps the agent find his or her ‘end’ (goal). This kind of goal, unlike a target or objective already pre-specified, is summoned implicitly from a fusion of the agent’s own personal formation (*Bildung*) and occupational formation, which, together, comprise the complex notion *professional formation*.

The neo-Aristotelian model of practical rationality which provides for agent accountability that is advocated in this book points to *the structure* of practical reasoning necessary if ‘ends’ are (i) to be conducive to public well-being and (ii) to uphold the virtue of *responsibleness*—quite different from the idea of simply *having responsibilities*.

Although written from the perspective of the UK, the problems I uncover are not just peculiar to the UK. They need to be situated within a wider, global social-economic context. For they can be found in any country that, as a result of public service policy reform, has adopted similar economic liberal (‘neo-liberal’) policies and management models to those adopted in the UK.

It might seem strange, though, as Walter Kickert (1996: 168) remarks, that, in the 1970s–1980s accountability reform movement, so many different Western states (governments and administrations in the US, New Zealand, Australia, and various European countries), which differed in ‘economic, socio-political, cultural, constitutional and institutional senses’, adopted a seemingly similar kind of NPM to reform their public services. But those countries in which ‘restructuring’ of the public sector took place all shared one thing. After the oil crisis of 1973, they all experienced economic recession and saw themselves as increasingly uncompetitive in international markets.

Educational systems and teachers were in large part held to be one of the causes of economic failure: they were not producing ‘a workforce with the appropriate skills for a rapidly changing world’ (Kickert 1996: 2). The drive for public service reform therefore opened the way for a widespread growth of interest in ‘educational management’.³ Schools in many countries have been restructured in similar ways, in order to meet ever-increasing demands for *accountability*. The introduction of Standardised Assessment Tests (SATs) which measure pupil attainment is just one of the trends which have been shaping educational policies in OECD countries since the 1980s in the name of accountability. SATs in the UK are similar in intent, principle, and practice to assessment tests conducted in the US, mandated in the ‘No Child Left Behind Act’ of 2001. They are used as a way of assessing how teachers account for themselves and of how schools ‘perform’ in performance league tables.

But teachers are not the only ones to have been subjected to ‘performance’ accountability measures. Over decades of reform, implemented across the whole public sector and generated by a policy agenda of ‘raising standards’, all those who are employed in professional contexts have found themselves working in a competitive and, at times, punitive culture (e.g., the ‘naming and shaming’ of ‘failing’ schools, hospitals, social and welfare services, etc.). This culture is characterized by the development of target-setting systems for staff, linked through ‘performance management’ systems, to ‘payment for results’ and ‘continuing professional development’ schemes. A special discourse sustains these schemes which I call *managerialese*. Professionals

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are now managed within an environment that draws on a management discourse originating in systems organization theory, and in business, commercial, and industrial plant enterprises. *Managerialese* is the language in which professional practitioners must now account for themselves. Whenever anyone, working in a school, hospital, police force, or social service, refers to ‘quality assurance’, ‘continuous improvement’, ‘benchmarking’, ‘audit control’, ‘transparency reviews’, ‘performance indicators’, ‘driving up standards’, or ‘delivery’ of a target, they are talking *managerialese* and owe a debt to the influence of management gurus and consultants, such as W. Edwards Deming, in the second half of the last century (see Travers 2007). New management theories, widely disseminated in business schools and later adopted by various governments seeking public service policy reform, brought ‘private’ business management methods—and its accompanying specialized technical language—into the public sector.

One might have thought that the vocabulary of *managerialese* more suited to the production processes of factories than ‘human-service and people-intensive jobs’ (Ingersoll 2003: 32) like teaching, policing, social work, nursing, or medicine. But it would be wrong to assume that such a mechanistic, production-oriented discourse marginalizes questions of ethical import. Judging from the emphasis *managerialese* places on the promotion of ‘best practice’ or ‘excellence in practice’—by the use of *words* that evoke ideas of virtue—present models of management will claim to have virtue on their side. Here, though, as Richard Pring (2004b), quoting Wittgenstein warns, we should beware of ‘the danger of the bewitchment of the intelligence by the use of language’—a language which can so easily separate ‘means’ and ‘ends’, simply through stipulating a ‘statement of aims, broken down with a finite range of measurable objectives or targets’ (164), as the means to the achievement of those aims. Like Pring, I have learned to adopt a wary stance towards managerial rhetoric. For although the rhetoric may speak of ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ practice, it *depersonalizes* the notion of responsibility by framing the arena of public accountability around private sector idealizations of ‘good’ management: goal definition, efficient resource allocation, financial performance and competition (Power 1994a: 302).

In the seventeenth century, John Locke (see the quotation which heads this chapter) puzzled over what he referred to as ‘hard or misapply’d Words with little or no meaning’. Is *managerialese* a language ‘with little or no meaning’? Does the vocabulary of *managerialese* ‘apply’ to anything of substance? It is both necessary and timely to pose such questions. There have been a sufficient number of years now—several decades—to assess the empirical consequences of the target-driven ‘audit’ society which present accountability mechanisms have brought into being. We have seen how managerial forms of regulation, legitimized in the name of accountability, integrate with wider audit and quality assurance accountability practices of performance management. What, then, is the verdict? Have we arrived at an ethically convincing form of accountability which the public can trust?

There is now mounting evidence of professionals being prevented from meeting the ethical demands of their *métiers*. Those now called ‘professionals’, although they can demonstrate (through an audit trail) that they are meeting the necessary criteria in accordance with prescribed benchmarks and indicators of professionalism, they are not always acting *professionally*! Teachers, for instance, are ‘teaching to the test’, to ensure the reputation of their school in ‘performance’ league tables and, inadvertently narrowing the curriculum against their better judgment;⁴ police are ‘policing to targets’, in their efforts to meet political objectives and, in the process, making inconsequential arrests, in order to hit the required number of ‘arrest’ targets;⁵ social care workers and hospital managers are manipulating or ‘hiding behind the data’ in order to be awarded good inspection ratings or to meet shorter waiting list targets.⁶

That professionalism and accountability can so easily become decoupled from each other in this way is taken as a starting point of enquiry. There is a puzzle to unravel. Two senses of professionalism appear to be at war with one another. For although the practitioners I have described are clearly meeting the required, formal standards on paper—the effort of which endorses their ‘professionalism’ within the terms of a ‘performance management’ model of accountability—they appear to be acting in ways which fall far short of what might ordinarily be considered to be *professional* standards. Denied, however, the necessary discretionary authority to act in ways thought appropriate for the context, practitioners will tend to rationalize their actions in terms of their institutional obligations and ‘play the game’.

In all the cases described previously, hitting the target has become *an end in itself*. Given the pressures they face, however, it is not surprising that practitioners become complicit in such a dysfunctional system. In a ‘high-stakes’ accountability system where agents are judged favorably only by conformity to prescribed, pre-specified targets, and where an institution’s reputation is judged primarily on ‘performance’ league table results, there is little option (often for reasons of personal economic necessity) but to work to pre-specified targets (Green 2008).

Teachers, then, for example, may find themselves ‘struggling with authenticity’ (Ball 2003b: 33) as a result of the ‘*values schizophrenia*’ which they experience—a potential ‘splitting’ between the teachers’ own judgments about their students’ needs, on the one hand, and the demands for institutional ‘performance’, on the other. This ‘schizophrenia’ occurs ‘when commitment and experience within a practice’ are ‘sacrificed for impression and performance’ (33). Ball’s analysis of the status quo invites us to ask exactly how such a fractured agency is able to nurture a robust sense of moral and personal responsibility.

The study I make traces these problems back to entrenched assumptions held about the kind of practical rationality now considered appropriate for organizational practices. Because schools, colleges, universities, hospitals,

local councils, probation and health services, and other public institutions appear, superficially, to be like other large, complex organizations, such as corporations or industrial plants, some managers presume they can be managed and controlled in the *same* way, as ‘production-oriented organizations’ (Ingersoll 2003: 218).

There are some who work in the fields of management, policy, and organization studies, however, who are now prepared to discuss the many problems which target-setting practices can cause (e.g., see Brooks 2007: 36). John Seddon (2007), a management consultant who has spent years helping local government organizations to improve their services, is adamant that the target culture is destroying the very service ethos it is meant to foster. He argues tirelessly against the managerial principle, endemic in so many public sector organizations, of judging staff by their adherence to protocols and the requirement to justify deviations from those protocols. This sort of ‘accountability’ is no accountability at all, he argues (216–217). It is worth quoting at length his account of when he was asked in 2003 to give evidence to a Parliamentary Select Committee (in the UK) which was carrying out a review of the impact of targets on public-sector performance improvement:

I was the only person . . . who recommended that targets should be abolished. Nearly everyone gave evidence underlining the shortcomings of targets, but stopped short of the logical conclusion, that they should be got rid of, because they believed . . . ‘there is no alternative’ . . . People who work in public services want to focus on their purpose. Police want to prevent and detect crime; doctors and nurses want to treat patients . . . Managers . . . drive their workers mad. Their purpose has become . . . ‘meet the targets’ rather than ‘improve the work’. This is why public sector workers get disheartened, demoralised and sometimes obstructive. But it is nothing to do with ‘producer interests’. People are prevented from focusing on purpose by the requirement to concentrate on what the hierarchy has decided is important. (204–205)

As Seddon points out, there will always be those who remain wedded to the idea of targets to measure ‘performance’ and ‘productivity’, whatever arguments are provided to show their limitations.⁷ But if this study I make does nothing more than undermine hitherto unexamined assumptions that the *only* way to deal with issues of public accountability and trust is to put faith in the kind of accountability mechanisms now promoted, then I will have accomplished one major purpose in writing this book. Until policy makers wean themselves off their faith in the idea that only the measurable is manageable, we are a long way off a new accountability paradigm becoming a reality (Green 2009a).

Seddon’s persistent criticisms, however, have started to have an influence at a political level (in the UK). Some of those who were once enthusiastic apologists for the ‘target culture’⁸ now concede that target setting as a

routine practice proves too crude a mechanism for ensuring quality of service⁹ and may lead to perverse incentives which distort professional judgment in the here-and-now of real-life work practice.¹⁰ In the UK, a government ‘select’ committee report on school accountability concluded that teachers feel ‘coerced and constrained’ by the current system of regulation.¹¹

With regard to *educational* targets, the National Audit Office (in the UK) reported that there is ‘no quantified evidence’ that exam targets work¹²: people may believe the use of rewards and sanctions in the public sector are effective, but evidence of ‘gaming’ or strategic behavior by agents undermines claims commonly made for the effectiveness of targets. The report concluded that simplistic targets distort teaching. In corroboration with the Audit Office’s findings, articles with captions such as ‘Targets fail our kids’¹³ can appear with frequent regularity in the British media. According to a recent report by a committee of MPs, accountability practices which recommend the wide use of targets are ‘deeply flawed’: they cause barriers to focusing efforts on what *matters*: ‘For too long, schools have struggled to cope with changing priorities, constant waves of new initiatives from central government, and the stresses and distortions caused by performance tables and targets’.¹⁴ So it is no surprise that various politicians of all persuasions, now realizing the limitations of targets, have in fact called for ‘targets to be slashed’ or, alternatively, have pledged ‘more trust’, ‘freedom’, or ‘autonomy’ for professionals.¹⁵

In general terms, such pledges could be seen as a vindication of the critique I offer of the way the present accountability mechanisms have so far shown so little trust in professionals—especially teachers. At last, acknowledgment of the problems which micro-management causes! It might, therefore, be thought that the argument of this book comes too late. For not only has there been a political retreat from the *dirigisme* of early, ‘New Right’ forms of NPM, but also, as I have just indicated, a very public distancing by various policy makers and politicians from reliance on targets as a key managerial tool for reform and accountability.

To this, I respond by asking how far these recent pledges, concessions, and admissions which various policymakers and politicians have made take us. What guarantees are there, even if targets are ‘slashed’, that the same basic ‘managerial’ models, grounded on the same theories of human nature, motivation, agency, and practical rationality—borrowed from economic ‘rational choice’ and institutional ‘principal-agency’ theory—will not still be applied to measure the accountability of professionals? With the same model intact, just ‘slashing’ a few targets can only lead, as Seddon (2007) amusingly puts it, ‘to doing the wrong thing righter’ (8). In Chapter 9, we shall see why “trusting professionals more” is not just a simple matter of shedding a few targets.

So, in spite of recent public admissions, regarding the potentially dysfunctional aspects of target-setting practices, nothing has radically changed. Nobody is really going to the root of the problem. The reductive, impoverished language of *managerialese* that sustains these practices—a

language of ‘outcomes’, ‘indicators’, ‘performance criteria’, and such like—still prevails. The impression given is that all that is needed to make public sector services run better is simply lessening ‘red tape’, as the practice of reducing bureaucracy and target setting is often called. Many attempts have in fact been made to do just this. In the UK, The Gershon Efficiency Review, conducted by Sir Peter Gershon in 2004, was commissioned to review waste and excessive bureaucracy in the public sector;¹⁶ in similar vein, the Regulatory Impact Unit and Better Regulation Task Force was set up to reduce excessive regulation.¹⁷ In Australia, the Productivity Commission started initiatives to combat ‘red tape’. In the US, the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) provided a target of the number of hours needed to meet the Paper Reduction Act (PRA) targets (see Travers 2007:143–144). In the wake of the recent economic recession, talk of ‘efficiency savings’ and ‘cutting bureaucracy’ by politicians has re-invigorated the debate about ‘red tape’.

But those who rail against ‘red tape’ miss the point. It is not bureaucracy *simpliciter* that is the problem. It is something else that critics of the ‘Managerial State’ (Clarke and Newman 1997) are up against, something so ideologically powerful that managerialism within organizational practices remains as yet, in spite of numerous criticisms directed at it, persistent and invincible (Green 2003, 2004b; see also Held 2004).

So although there have been encouraging signs that politicians are now moving on from thinking that centralized targets are the only way to make public services accountable (at one time there were 600 targets, micromanaging every aspect of service delivery in the UK)¹⁸, there has been no sign, to date, of any renouncement of the mode of practical reasoning which has given targets the mandatory power they have so far enjoyed. And in spite of a political rhetoric about devolving more power, freedom and autonomy to schools, to allow curriculum flexibility, there remains still a barrage of centralizing and somewhat contradictory measures relating to how and what to teach and how teachers are to be ‘held to account’. The increasing emphasis in educational institutions, as elsewhere in the public sector, on *management and leadership* (see Preedy et al. 2003; Ranson 2008) only provides opportunities for an extension—and certainly not a contraction—of managerial approaches.

One of the basic assumptions of this book is that every professional domain—if it is to have any identity at all—will have institutional core purposes and internal criteria of practice. It is from these purposes and criteria that an agent understands *the point* of what they are meant to do and, also, what *matters* in that profession. MacIntyre (1999) raises a question pertinent to this very point and which has haunted my thoughts throughout the writing of this book, whenever I have questioned the way in which micro-management shapes and structures organizational activity: ‘... might there be types of social structure that seriously threaten the possibility of understanding oneself as a moral agent and so of acting as a moral agent?’

(314). In the rush to make institutions measure up to the requirements of audit and financial accountability, have we lost sight of what it is to account for oneself in ethical, and not just efficiency and productivity terms?

Although I raise questions about *reform* here, this is the place to make clear that a nostalgic or Luddite polemic, directed against change, modernization, or management, has never been my intention. Nor is the book against the idea of accountability *per se*. The motivation for writing this book started with a philosophical project to understand how we have ended up with the accountability system we have. Before new attempts are made to evolve different systems of accountability, it is important to understand what has gone wrong in our present system.

The purpose of this introductory survey has been to lay bare the kind of issues which need further discussion:

- (i) How is it possible, even when practitioners are conscientiously ‘hitting’ their targets, that the quest for accountability can still remain elusive? Why has the ‘performance’ model of accountability, with its clear, ‘transparent’ accountability lines and grounding principle of pre-specifying outcomes and targets as goals, produced the kind of anomalies and unintended consequences it has? For wasn’t one of the problems, before the introduction of ‘New Public’ managerial modes of accountability, precisely the *lack* of explicitness that defined the work ethos of so many professions—the so-called ‘secret garden’ which the public service reformers in the second half of the last century accused professionals of wishing to perpetuate, for their own self-interest?
- (ii) If, as it seems, the pursuit of explicitness (conveyed through a rhetoric of ‘transparency’) fails to ensure accountability (as in unintended, unwanted consequences), what, then, are the limits to what can, or should, be made explicit in an accountability system? Given that practical knowledge contains implicit components of knowledge, just how ‘transparent’ can one make practices without undermining trust in practical knowledge?

1.2 ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK

The story I want to tell seeks to get beneath the evidence we see around us in so many professional fields, of wasted effort, wasted resources, and wasted ideals.¹⁹ I try to understand better the relationship between the three ideas I set out as follows: we are in search of a *practical rationality* that will translate into a *public rationality* which, in its turn, secures a form of *public accountability* that deserves our confidence.

With that end in view, we shall explore the constraints that are now placed on the practical reasoning of agents at work and the way in which

a quite different kind of practical rationality, one I associate with the work of Aristotle (to be referred to as the ‘Aristotelian model’, in contrast to the ‘managerial model’), might be deployed by agents in their own practice. This is a practical rationality which will not demand of agents that they prove their sense of *accountableness* by demonstrating that some explicit, pre-specified ‘success criteria’ have been met. I shall argue that, ironically, it is precisely the emphasis now placed on *explicitness*—in the name of transparency and accountability—that is so problematic.

But in drawing on Aristotle to help elucidate issues relating to professionalism and accountability, it might still be asked, what relevance has Aristotle to the twenty-first century? First, one of the many complex things that Aristotle invites us to consider in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE) is what it is to make a responsible, practical judgment. This is surely a timeless, philosophical question that cannot be irrelevant to the kinds of questions we may want to raise *now* about the nature of decision-making in policy and political arenas.

The way of proceeding which I propose depends on a philosophical hypothesis about an *ideal of public rationality*, drawn mainly from the work of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. But his *Politics* serves as an inspiration too (once we have extracted those elements which, from a modern liberal perspective, we find offensive, e.g., slavery, the non-emancipation of women, etc.). In the *Politics* (1331b 30–32), for instance, we find the following thought: ‘Sometimes the right end is set before men, but in practice they fail to attain it . . .’.

Aristotle is interested in an agent’s making a right decision and keeping to it (NE 1151a 32–b4) and in why it is that some men ‘act contrary to right reason’ (NE 1151a 21) or ‘go wrong’ (NE 1104b 30–34)—that is, ‘fail’—simply by not acting in the *public interest*.²⁰

In Aristotle, therefore, I suggest we find a model of practical reason that is entirely appropriate for studying matters that relate to public rationality and accountability. A neo-Aristotelian approach to problems of welfare and public service should not, therefore, be automatically written off as either ‘conservative’ or as ‘irrelevant’ to our age. On the contrary, as Martha Nussbaum (1992) shows, such an approach aligns itself well with the pluralist ideals of a liberal polity and the promotion of responsible citizenship (see also Knight 2007). Bent Flyvbjerg (2001), although not focusing specifically on issues to do with public policy, has developed what he calls a ‘*phronetic*’, Aristotelian approach to questions relating to social science. The problems which social scientists now face, he suggests, require consideration, choice and wise judgment (57). Like Flyvbjerg, I am interested in how to situate these three things in social contexts and I, too, draw on the Aristotelian idea of *phronesis*. But my focus is on the relationship between professionalism and accountability, and what factors enable—or disable—an agent’s capacity to act as a responsible agent. My aim is to ‘mine’ those insights in Aristotle’s work which relate to deliberation, practical reason,

and wisdom, and to use those insights to understand better the nature of professional responsibility. It is this concept which is going to give us the link to re-ethicize the notion of accountability and to reclaim it from the world of audit.

Aristotelian conceptions of practical rationality and agency also offer us an *ideal of a kind of living*, a way of being congruent with our ordinary lives. In Charles Taylor's phrase, we might characterize the Aristotelian approach as an 'affirmation of ordinary life' (1989: 14ff). We shall see how far the model of practical rationality that is now promoted within organizational life has diverged from the 'ordinary' way in which human beings tend to deliberate, make choices, and demonstrate that they are responsible agents in their own life.

I shall attempt to show what we may lose by this divergence—*practical intelligence* and the virtue of *responsibleness*, for instance. According to Aristotle, knowledge of how to act and the goals to pursue in particular contexts cannot be acquired by the internalization of policy 'guidelines' or rules found in a training management manual recommending approved principles for decontextualized notions of 'good practice'. For knowledge of how to act in practice and what to pursue as goals emerges out of a person's *formation* (Lovibond 2000), to be explained in Chapters 5 and 6, and cannot be separated from the complex processes through which that person develops as a human being, living and working with others. Personal formation is co-extensive with occupational and professional formation. Moreover, in the Aristotelian picture, the question will not normally arise of an agent's alienation from practices of work, the problem of 'values schizophrenia' I mentioned earlier. For someone's purposes arise from what John McDowell (1996: 24–28) would say is that person's 'second nature'—or *Bildung*—which becomes integrated in his or her own sense of self.

Nowadays, the possibility of such professional integration is highly problematic. Consider how teachers are now expected to demonstrate their professionalism. A teacher, in order to meet present demands of accountability will be obliged to bring about ends that are *already* decided upon (Pring 2004a: 123, 204). These are ends, to be discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, exported into our public sector from the dominant discourses of management theory and neo-liberalism. An agent's 'accountability' now, ultimately, lies in fulfilling the audit and funding requirements which secure an institution's survival (Nixon 2005)—the conditions of which are set by politicians and policy-makers.

1.3 SOME POINTS OF CLARIFICATION

First, the philosophical doubts I raise here about the place of responsibility in managerial cultures are not to be taken as veiled criticisms, to the effect that those who work in managerial cultures are acting *irresponsibly*. The

opposite of a non-robust sense of personal responsibility is not *no* responsibility at all. The claims that I make about the constraints placed upon individual personal responsibility are *conceptual* points that turn on wider, complex philosophical problems having to do with how we understand the nature of *agency* and how we view the relation between *personal freedom* and *personal responsibility*. When a teacher has to make a decision in those ‘now, just-this-minute’ (Loukes 1976) moments, her practical reasoning may be compromised by decisions already made for her by others who may have no practical experience at all of teaching—and who cannot know what is going on in those ‘moments’. This problem I highlight here goes much deeper than an argument about teacher ‘autonomy’. The problem goes to the heart of how we might understand the nature of practical judgment.

Second, I am not saying that managers set out deliberately to diminish the responsibility of all those whom they manage. On the contrary, the rationale that grounds the idea of, say, ‘performance management’ is based on the idea, quite sincerely held, that this form of management will make practitioners *more* responsible and *more* professional (Clarke et al. 2000: 66).

As Alan Cribb points out, the notion of professional responsibility is now ‘taken very seriously’ (Cribb 1998: 19). The problem is rather that the notion has become ‘ethically empty’ (23). The predominant values are now the instrumental goals of demonstrating ‘institutional’ success, or ‘getting things done effectively’ (21–23). Without the benefit of other ‘substantial’ educational goals, the notion of responsibility ‘collapses into the ability to do things’. So my point, like Cribb’s, is conceptual and institutional. It is not, in the words of Zipin and Brennan (2004: 30), to be taken as an ‘indictment’ of the *sincerity* of individual people.

Third, I need to make clear how I see the relationship between educational accountability and public accountability. The problems of *educational accountability* that I identify may be understood as a microcosm of the problems thrown up by the more general idea of *public accountability* as that is now understood. Education is only one among many public service institutions for which some management practices are inappropriate. The micro-management of many teaching activities has helped cement the thought in public consciousness that *acquiring certification* is the same as *education*. What might this same micro-management have inflicted on other professions?

Fourth, a note about the concept *accountability*, itself. Although the questions accountable *to whom* and with respect *to what* can always be raised in particular contexts, the concept of accountability, as we shall discover, is resistant to precise definition. At a conceptual level ‘accountability’ is not a unified concept. It is closely related to the concept ‘responsibility’, itself a complex concept. At the level of policy governance, however, ‘accountability’ has come to have a very specialized meaning, one associated with ‘satisfactory audit’. The concept as we now use it has been co-opted from financial contexts where accounts are audited. *Audit*, according

to Michael Power (1994a), is to be understood as an umbrella term for the ever-expanding practices and ‘technologies’ of managerial accountability. No longer the prerogative of financial audit, when applied to institutions, audit now functions as a constitutive rationalizing principle of social and economic organization and accountability. To describe an institution as *accountable* now means that the institution has produced auditable accounts of all its activities and is run efficiently.²¹

But this particular sense of ‘accountability’, which refers specifically to the management of auditable and efficiently run institutions, rides on the back of a second, broader meaning of ‘accountability’ (Charlton 1999), one allied to the ethical idea of *being answerable to*. There is often slippage between these two meanings, detectable whenever politicians remark (following some wrongdoing or malpractice brought to light in the public domain) that “lessons must be learned”. What “lessons” are being appealed to when this is said? There is clearly more than ‘audit’ at stake here. Acknowledgment of some kind of human error or failure that has taken place, and demands for those responsible ‘to be brought to account’, appeal not just to legal or financial redress on behalf of the wronged parties but also to an *ethical* sense of accountability—as in, “Who should have been watching out to prevent this happening?”

Christopher Winch (1997) comes at the problem of accountability in a different way, but one which triangulates well with the two interpretations of accountability just given. His analysis provides us with a basis for assessing the accountability of a particular public institution, such as education, or the health service. Winch demarcates two distinct, but related, aspects to accountability: (i) ‘constitutive accountability’ is ‘concerned with whether or not goods or services that should be provided actually are provided and to what level’; and (ii) ‘qualitative accountability’ is ‘concerned with seeking ways in which what is provided can be provided in a better form’ (61). The issues I raise in this book range over both these aspects. It is the form in which education is now provided that hampers teachers in finding the pedagogical space and time to teach in ways that provide rich educational experiences for all their pupils/students.²² The pressure placed on educational institutions to link ‘performance’—and pay—to examination results, as a mark of teacher accountability, comes at a cost—an ‘abandoned generation’ (Giroux 2003). We should not be surprised that the so-called ‘problem of NEETs’—those *not in education, employment, or training*—has arisen within the present accountability culture (see Green 2008). There will of course be many complex social, economic, and political reasons why some adolescents and young adults fall by the way, educationally, through exclusions, expulsions, or truancy. But one thing is certain: this is a group which clearly has found little educational nourishment in schools obsessed with testing, certification and ‘performance’.

Finally, a note about the concept ‘professionalism’. The immense literature generated around the subject of professionalism bears out the idea, often

quoted, that ‘a profession’ is an ‘essentially contested concept’, especially when applied to teaching. For Winch (2004), not only is ‘there is no coherent definition of professionalism that can decisively distinguish some occupations from others on the grounds of knowledge, skill or ethical commitment’, but it is also his belief that teachers do not fit comfortably into conventional definitions of professionalism (186). David Carr (2000), on the other hand, argues strongly that there is a sense of professionalism which distinguishes occupations such as ‘medicine, law and (arguably) education’ from ‘trades, manufacturing industries, mercantile enterprises’, chiefly because the former ‘are implicated in questions and considerations of a particular ethical or moral character which are not to the forefront of, for instance, plumbing, joinery, auto-repair, wholesale or retail and hairdressing’ (39).

With such a complex and disputatious literature as background, how, then, to proceed? Perhaps the first thing is to respect the historicity of the terms *profession*, *professional*, *professionalism*, and the late-comer, *professionalization*. These terms do not appear to be static or fixed. They are constantly being re-evaluated in the light of changing social, political, and economic considerations. There have, for instance, been many re-workings of the term *profession* since the time when it referred only to the traditional ‘vocations’: the ministry (divinity), law, and medicine (see Bottery 1998; Burbules and Densmore 1991; Hoyle and John 1995; Perkin 2002), a time when an unambiguous set of criteria would define what counted as a profession: the acquisition of a specialized body of knowledge, the completion of formal qualifications and examinations based upon a set period of education, the existence of regulatory bodies with powers to admit and discipline members, and so on. Because medicine has no trouble in meeting all these criteria, it tends to stand as a paradigm, against which other would-be professions are measured.

Now, the boundaries of once clearly defined professions have blurred, not only as a result of shared electronic data systems of communication, but also as a result of policy initiatives to promote ‘joined up governance’, or ‘networks of partnerships’ (see Goldsmith and Eggars 2004). The *professionalization* of managers and the *managerialization* of professionals now means that the labels ‘a manager’ or ‘a professional’ do not necessarily represent two distinct (and possibly antagonistic) social groups (Exworthy and Halford 1999).

There is one more point to mention, which we shall pick up again in Chapter 9: it was assumed at one time that those who entered professions, ‘professed’ to serve the public. It was this implicit ‘ethic’ of promising—to abide by a ‘public service ethos’—that (at one time) legitimized the professions’ claims for ‘professional autonomy’. In the 1960s, however, many challenged these claims. The professions, it was said, were self-serving, ideological monopolies.

More recently, some organizational theorists wonder if the idea of a ‘profession’ should even be retained: far better to focus on whether people

are effective in what they do (see Koehn 1994: 4). Running parallel to this view, though, is the idea that many occupations, once deemed only 'quasi/semi/para' professions, now have the right to seek full 'professional' status. So, although older, paternalistic conceptions of professionalism have been overturned, the notion of *professionalism* itself has clearly survived and is now very much part of the vocabulary of the modern management practices, with the emphasis placed on the idea of *service provision*.

One effect of understanding professionalism in terms of *service provision* is that it opens up the scope of what *counts* as 'a profession': any 'service provider' who 'performs' competently may now be considered a 'professional', doing a 'professional' job. Some traditionalists will balk at this new gloss on 'professionalism', whereas others will welcome the democratization of the term 'profession' which 'market' forms of accountability have inadvertently brought about. For this latter group, a return to a more exclusive concept would be considered a regressive and an elitist move.²³

So how do I use the terms 'profession' and 'professionalism'? First, this book, focusing on the philosophical relation between professional formation and practical rationality, must leave aside many important issues relating to the historical, political and sociological notions of a 'profession': struggles over the conditions, knowledge, power, and legitimacy of professional authority; reward in relation to professional status; unequal power relations between professional and client—see, for example, Becher (1994: 165), Freidson (1994, 2001), Koehn (1994), Perkin (2002), and Young (2007) who touch on some of these issues. But, although I circumvent such issues, I use the terms 'profession' and 'professionalism' with a special emphasis (explained further in the following section, in the summary outline for Chapter 6) which aims to go some way to addressing, even if obliquely, some of the challenges which those who seek, in spite of the evident erosion of once-clear boundaries between the various professions, to defend the category of a 'profession'. Whatever erosion has taken place need not be something to lament, so long as the core, inner purposes of individual professions remain, and so long as those who work in their chosen *métier* understand the role they play in safeguarding or promoting those core purposes.

The challenge, as Geoff Whitty (2001) sees it, is to find 'a professionalism for new times', 'collectivist forms of association' which may act as 'a counterbalance not only to the prerogative of the state, but also to the prerogative of the market' (170). Whether such a concept is available or even possible is debatable. But if we think an 'ethic of public service' should still feature in a 'professional agenda' (170), then we need to focus on the kinds of things which drive an agent's practical reason to ends that will promote or preserve human well-being—towards what Aristotle calls an agent's aiming for 'the good'. From Aristotle we shall learn why ethical responsiveness and moral imagination should be considered constitutive elements of a public accountability system.