

Liberal Education and the Good of the Unexamined Life

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Abstract

Most philosophers of education assume that the main aim of education is to endow pupils or students with ‘personal autonomy’: to produce citizens who are reflective, make rational choices and submit their values and beliefs to critical scrutiny. The underlying assumption is Socratic: that *the unexamined life is not worth living*, and that goods and forms of perception that cannot be articulated or rationally justified are not worthy of our consideration. The unstated assumption is Plato and Aristotle’s: that the good life is the life of the philosopher and politically active citizen. It is assumed, moreover, that *all* pupils should be so educated on egalitarian grounds.

In this thesis, I dispute these assumptions. I argue that the good life should not be conceived in exclusively ‘intellectualist’ terms but that an ordinary life - an ‘unexamined’ life - is also worth living; that central to the good life in all its forms is the engagement in worthwhile activities or ‘practices’; and that the best way to prepare pupils for their engagement in these practices is to cultivate a range of moral and intellectual virtues.

Instead of foisting on all pupils a universal academic curriculum that produces little more than ‘a smattering of knowledge’, I argue that pupils might (1) cultivate the intellectual virtues through early specialisation in at least one subject, academic *or* practical, that has the characteristics of a practice, (2) develop the capacity to make practical judgements through a study of rhetoric and the stories of human experience of the humanities, and (3) cultivate certain moral virtues through challenging activity and service learning outside the classroom.

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Introduction

This thesis arises out of my dissatisfaction with much of the debate – in philosophy of education, among policy makers and researchers, and in education generally – concerning the aims of education and the nature of the school curriculum that would embody these aims. A series of damaging dichotomies have developed that obscure what I take to be crucial questions concerning the nature of the good life and how pupils might best be prepared for it.

On one side are ranged supporters of the traditional ‘liberal’ curriculum of academic subject disciplines, a curriculum that - it is claimed - trains the intellect, initiates into a cultural inheritance, and prepares for future specialisation. Though some advocates of this curriculum advocate selection on grounds of academic ability, others argue that ‘the best education is necessarily the best education for all’, and therefore that all pupils can benefit from an academic education, at least until the age of 16. On the other side are ranged those who reject the traditional academic curriculum as currently constituted and advocate a variety of alternative (and overlapping) conceptions of education and educational aims: for example (1) that children best learn through active and collaborative enquiry rather than through didactic transmission - i.e. that children should be ‘active’ rather than ‘passive’ learners; (2) that the aim of education is to produce critical thinkers and problem solvers rather than recipients of bodies of subject knowledge; (3) that education should allow children to express their latent talents and potentialities; (4) that education should prepare pupils or students for a flourishing life by equipping them with various life and work skills; (5) that instead of seeking to transmit the ‘dominant culture’ of the ‘dominant class’, schools should seek to affirm local knowledge and a plurality of truths and identities; and (6) that, informed by the insights of ‘critical theory’, education should be a vehicle for the transformation of capitalist society and the elimination of inequality and injustice.

None of these positions is, I think, very illuminating. Traditionalists argue that the liberal curriculum of academic subject disciplines offers ‘intellectual rigour’ and initiates into ‘the best that has been thought and said’; that because it is the education traditionally associated with an elite, it is therefore the best education for all. But it is unclear why the good life - the best life it is possible for anyone to lead - should be the life of the academic, scholar or intellectual; why, or in what sense, the school curriculum of academic disciplines should ‘train the mind’ - as opposed to produce merely ‘a smattering of knowledge’; or why pupils with little or no aptitude for, or inclination towards, academic study should benefit from the experience. Opponents of the traditionalist position (we might characterise them as ‘progressives’) variously argue that knowledge must be ‘constructed’ rather than ‘poured into empty vessels’, that learning must be ‘active’ rather than ‘passive’, and that education should aim to produce ‘critical’ and ‘creative’ thinkers, ‘problem solvers’, and reflective philosophical citizens; but I think this is no more helpful. Terms like ‘active’ and ‘passive’ learning, ‘critical’ and ‘creative’ thinking, ‘independent’ learning and so forth are, in the educational context, little more than slogans to be brandished about; little account is taken (at least by proponents of critical thinking and problem solving) of pupils’ differing aptitudes, interests and needs; and education conceived instrumentally as a preparation or training for life seems a shallow substitute for the riches of a liberal education. It is questionable in any case whether pupils can be prepared for adult life by being equipped with a set of ‘life skills’; and apart from its being a truism, the notion that education should prepare for life begs the crucial question ‘*what is the nature of the good life for which we should be preparing pupils?*’; or, if life is to be conceived as a series of choices between rival conceptions of the good life, ‘*according to what criterion or standard should these to be judged?*’

The problem with conceiving education as instrumental to political and social change on the lines suggested by critical theory is that it is assumed that society *can* be transformed so as to eliminate injustice and inequality. Though the *possibility* of radical transformation, along with the nature of injustice and inequality, are legitimate topics for discussion and enquiry, it is quite another matter to seek to make school education the vehicle for such transformation. It is because people

fundamentally disagree in their analyses of inequality, injustice and poverty, and on how practically to address them, that the premises of critical theory cannot simply be assumed in a democracy. In any case, the absence of inequality and injustice (supposing this utopian state to be attainable without resort to totalitarian oppression) does not in itself guarantee that people would lead fulfilled lives. My worry is that by beginning an inquiry into education with the unmasking of power structures and forms of inequality and injustice, a consideration of the nature of the good life for which school ought to be preparing pupils is neglected; we are in danger of ‘throwing out the baby with the bath water’. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels did sketch out the nature of the good life that would be possible if man were released from enslavement to controlling and exploiting power interests:

... in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society ... makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic’ (Marx & Engels, 1974, p. 54).

In a sense, this whole thesis is a repudiation of this romantic vision of the good life – a vision that bears little relation to real human interests and needs.

A further source of confusion in the debate arises from a lack of clarity regarding what is meant by ‘liberal education’. The modern curriculum of academic subject disciplines is equated by proponents and opponents alike with ‘a liberal education’; and yet this curriculum is only a relatively recent development. For most of its history, liberal education, the education on which Western civilization was founded, was conceived on a quite different model: its central discipline was rhetoric, its subject matter was the humanities, and its aim was to produce not a specialist or a research scientist but an orator and a citizen. Any discussion of liberal education that does not recognise that there are two distinct formulations and traditions involved is fated from the outset to be muddled. And yet the distinction is largely overlooked or ignored by philosophers of education. I shall argue that though both traditions have

been associated with the education of elites, the rhetorical conception of liberal education has potentially more relevance to all pupils.

Among philosophers of education, the central concern might be identified as the promotion of *autonomy*, not in the narrow Kantian sense (though this is not precluded) but in the more general sense that education should aim to produce people who are reflective, make rational choices, submit their beliefs and values to critical scrutiny (as opposed to passively accept the prevailing orthodoxy), and generally live a life they have freely chosen. Here lies the key, on the one hand, to personal fulfilment (a flourishing life) and, on the other, to the active citizenship necessary to sustain a liberal democratic society¹. In one sense, it would be hard to dispute any of this. Nobody would seriously advocate the contrary view that the aim of education should be to produce docile and uncritical subjects of a totalitarian state fitted solely for their allotted roles. The problem is that by conceiving the good life in exclusively ‘intellectualist’ terms, other perfectly valid forms of the good life - in particular, the good of leading *an ordinary life* - have been ruled out. The underlying assumption is Socratic: that *the unexamined life is not worth living*, and that goods and forms of perception that cannot be articulated or justified rationally are not worthy of our consideration. The unstated assumption is Plato and Aristotle’s: that the good life is the contemplative life - the life of the philosopher, or critic, or academic, or researcher. It is assumed, moreover, that *all* pupils should be educated for autonomy in the sense described (1) on egalitarian grounds – to assume otherwise would be anti-democratic, and (2) because the view that some pupils would be limited by intelligence or aptitude is immoral (or at least that notions commonly associated with the view that intelligence is inherited - a stratified society and eugenics – are immoral) and empirically discredited.

Whether this view is empirically discredited or not is a complex and highly politicised question whose proper treatment lies beyond the scope of this thesis. I touch briefly on the ‘nature or nurture’ question in Chapter 6 and at various other

¹ A more radical version of this mainstream view, informed by critical theory, would be that education should aim to produce people who are open to ‘self-transformation’ and the possibility that society might be radically transformed so as to eliminate inequality and injustice; in other words, that education should seek to liberate us from ‘false consciousness’.

points in this thesis, but it is not central to my main argument. My view, as a teacher, is that pupils do *as a matter of fact* differ markedly in their aptitude for academic work regardless of their social background or upbringing (a view that is shared by virtually all my colleagues), just as they differ in personality, but that this need not entail a return to selective education and intelligence testing. In fact, I shall argue that it is *because* the good life need not be ‘the examined life’, but rather is the life in which a person is able to engage in a range of practices and exercise a range of core virtues, that a common school curriculum - a liberal education for all - is possible. The perverse effect of foisting an academic education on all pupils on egalitarian grounds - i.e. on grounds of ‘entitlement’ - is not to institute equal opportunities or equality, but merely to perpetuate and exaggerate a hierarchy of the intellect: a meritocracy.

Whatever the truth of the intelligence question, the unfortunate result of the position adopted by most philosophers of education is that though a traditional academic liberal education is rejected on the grounds that it aims to form the person in a pre-conceived ideal and its methods are didactic (which seems to run contrary to the notion of cultivating autonomy), it is nevertheless envisaged that all pupils will, through their engagement in Socratic dialogue and inquiry, learn to become critical thinkers, problem solvers, literary critics, philosophers and politically-engaged citizens. Practical and craft subjects are disdained (or go unmentioned) because of their past association with a second-rate secondary-modern education, because of their association with a narrow vocational training, or simply because they are menial rather than intellectual². The good life is equated with the philosophical life and the ethical is eliminated from the picture altogether, unless it can be rationally justified. That ‘the unexamined life’ can be worth living – that the person who does not engage in critical reflection or in literary and intellectual pursuits can lead at least as good a life, and exercise at least as good practical and moral judgement, as the philosopher, academic or intellectual - is ignored. And, finally, no account is taken of the possibility that pupils, regardless of their social background or class, differ

² There are, of course, philosophers of education who do recognise the value of practical subjects – John White and Christopher Winch are notable examples; and in *The Educated Person*, D. G. Mulcahy (2008) has sought to incorporate practical education within a liberal conception of education. Nevertheless, I think it is fair to say that the overwhelming emphasis is on the aims I have detailed.

markedly in their aptitude, ‘intelligence’, interests, needs and personality. I shall argue that to want to engage in philosophy or critical thinking or in radical innovation is as much determined by a person’s personality as by any other personal quality or capacity.

The twin purposes of my thesis, then, are (1) to define the aims of education in a liberal democratic society – aims that are justified in the sense that they are underpinned by a coherent view of how a person might be prepared for a fulfilled life, an *ethical* life, as a moral and rational being; and (2) to reconceptualise the idea of a liberal education (i.e. education that in some sense cultivates a person as a moral and rational being) as the best practical means of realising these aims for *all* pupils. The thesis is structured accordingly in two parts. In Part 1 (Chapters 1 to 4), I seek to establish the justified aims of education. In Part 2 (Chapters 5 to 8), I explore the nature of the school curriculum³ that might enable these aims to be realised, with particular reference to liberal curricula of the past.

The chapters are structured as follows. In Chapter 1, I explore the ‘Enlightenment conception of the autonomous actor’ and argue that the values and interests that might enable people to transcend their appetitive desires and lead a worthwhile life – a ‘good life’ - cannot be deduced *a priori* by appeal to pure reason, but are mediated through a social, cultural and linguistic tradition. In Chapter 2, I explore the key Aristotelian concepts *phronesis* and *eudaimonia* and argue that the moral virtues and the capacity to exercise practical judgement must be habituated as part of upbringing and schooling – otherwise people will not be motivated to act on them, or indeed to care about them in the first place. In Chapter 3, I argue that the reflective engagement in the practices of ordinary life simply does not require (and *could not* require) ‘critical’ reflection on the nature of the underlying ‘paradigmatic’ principles, values and goods of these practices; moreover, that it is in the nature of a moral and cultural tradition (particularly when it is liberal and secular, less so when it is tribal or theocratic in nature) that it encompasses people’s experiences of pursuing heterogeneous goods and living with moral conflict. However, a moral and

³ My particular reference is to secondary-level education but there are wider implications for education.

cultural tradition and its component practices need to be able to evolve, in response to changing circumstances and perceived needs, and therefore critical reflection and radical innovation have an important role to play. In Chapter 4, I explore the nature of the goods and associated core virtues that are essential for human flourishing – i.e. for ‘a good life’. In Chapter 5, I provide a brief history of liberal education and argue that it is crucial to distinguish between the old rhetorical idea of a liberal education, which aimed to produce orator-citizens and whose curriculum was centred on the humanities, and the modern ‘research’ ideal of liberal education, which is centred on a curriculum of academic subject disciplines, assumes a rationalist conception of knowledge, and prepares for specialisation. In Chapter 6, I explore the research (or rationalist) conception of a liberal education, and argue that though the curriculum of academic subject disciplines is inadequate as a general secondary education, there is potentially great value in early specialisation in a subject or field in which the pupil has particular aptitude or interest – so long as the subject in question (which might just as well be practical as academic) has something of the nature of a practice, and its study involves the disciplined acquisition of a conceptually procedurally complex body of knowledge and skill. A range of moral and intellectual virtues, particularly the latter, can thereby be cultivated. In Chapter 7, I argue that much was lost when the research ideal of liberal education displaced the old rhetorical ideal; that the humanities (so long as they are conceived as funds of ‘stories of human experience’ rather than as academic disciplines) and rhetoric (so long as it is conceived as an enriched form of literacy and stripped of its classical and literary associations) have much to commend them both as means of cultivating the virtues and of cultivating a form of *phronesis*. However, if certain moral virtues – courage, honesty, justice and the caring virtues – are to be habituated, pupils must have the experience of practising these virtues (mere instruction is not enough); and therefore various forms of challenging experience and service to others should also form a central part of the curriculum. This is the theme of Chapter 8.

1

Enlightenment Rationality: the problem of integrating reason and desire

A concern with discovering the truth through the exercise of reason, with seeking rational justifications for our knowledge, values and beliefs, lies at the heart of philosophy and has done so since Socrates pronounced that the unexamined life is not worth living. But with the advent of Cartesian rationalism and the Baconian (scientific) method in the seventeenth-century, the nature of this concern took on a new form. Man was elevated to the status of rational autonomous actor endowed with certain inalienable human rights and the relation of the individual citizen to the state was conceived not as that of parts to an organic whole but in terms of a social contract (a notion originally formulated by Locke and Rousseau and finding its most notable recent expression in Rawls' Theory of Justice). In the West, we are very much the inheritors of this tradition of Enlightenment rationality, believing as we do in universal human rights, in liberal democracy as the political vehicle for the expression of these rights, and in the triumph of reason over prejudice, superstition and oppression. In philosophy of education, Enlightenment rationality takes the form of a pervasive concern with 'autonomy' as a pivotal educational aim. The autonomous person is the one 'who makes his own choices and subjects them to rational assessment and criticism' as opposed to the person who lives in accordance with 'inarticulate custom and habit, suffocating ideology or religious taboo' (Cuypers, 2004, p. 79).

However, with the advent of Enlightenment rationality and the displacement of Aristotelianism (which had up till then been the accepted form of exercising reason in search of the truth), with the elevation of logic above rhetoric, something was inevitably lost, and man was detached from his social, cultural and historical roots. As Stephen Toulmin notes in *Cosmopolis*, 'the oral, the particular, the local, the timely and the concrete' were devalued in favour of 'a formally "rational" theory

grounded on abstract, universal, timeless concepts' (Toulmin, 1992, p. 75). It is only in the past half century that there has been a reaction in mainstream philosophy against this Enlightenment enthronement of pure reason as neutral arbiter (whether in its rationalist, empiricist or Kantian modes) and that there has been an attempt to recover earlier traditions. This reaction has taken the form of the humanism variously proposed by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Michael Oakeshott, John McDowell¹, Richard Rorty, Charles Taylor and Iris Murdoch among others, with Collingwood, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Dewey in their different ways breaking the mould earlier in the twentieth-century; by those working in the Aristotelian tradition of moral philosophy that has come to be known as 'virtue ethics' – perhaps most notably Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum and Philippa Foot; by communitarians such as Michael Walzer, Michael Sandel (most notably in his critique of Rawls) and, again, MacIntyre; and by those working broadly in the Marxist and critical theory traditions - for example, Habermas, Foucault and Bourdieu. In philosophy of education, a movement to recover the Aristotelian tradition of practical philosophy and emphasise the importance of 'practical reason' has been led by David Carr, Wilfred Carr and Joseph Dunne.

Critics of Enlightenment rationality belonging to this broad humanist-communitarian-Aristotelian revival² generally share the view that deliberative or practical rationality³ – the rationality that issues in action - is not a property that arises (merely) by virtue of an actor being autonomous or self-determining, or possessing 'free will' in the libertarian sense; but rather is a term that describes the

¹ John McDowell argues in *Mind and World* for a 'partially enchanted' naturalism (or 'naturalism of second nature') in contrast to the 'bald' or 'scientific' naturalism prevalent in modern philosophy (McDowell, 1996, pp.73, 84-5).

² This reaction or revival has been characterised in varying terms depending on the commentator in question, but its broad nature is clear enough. Eamonn Callan and John White speak of 'the communitarian revival of the early 1980s' with Alasdair MacIntyre and Michael Sandel the authors of its most influential texts (Callan & White, 2003, p. 105), while Joseph Dunne speaks of 'a retrieval of Aristotle's practical philosophy' and casts the net wider to include Heidegger and Wittgenstein (Dunne & Pendlebury, 2003, p. 201). For Wilfred Carr, philosophers from 'Heidegger to Habermas, Dewey to Derrida, Wittgenstein to MacIntyre' are united in their opposition to 'theoretical philosophy' (Carr, 2005, p. 622), and Hans-Georg Gadamer is the most significant figure in the twentieth-century revival of practical philosophy (p. 624). While for David Carr, Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum and Charles Taylor are the key figures in 'this broad current of Aristotelian and idealist communitarian thought' (Carr, 2003, p. 189).

³ When I speak of Enlightenment rationality in this chapter, I am referring specifically to its application to practical reason (and hence ethics) rather than the 'pure reason' associated with theoretical or scientific knowledge.

behaviour of a person habituated into certain social, cultural and linguistic practices or traditions to whose public norms he adheres and according to which his behaviour is assessed or judged. Perhaps Charles Taylor encapsulates the root deficiency of Enlightenment rationality according to this view when he argues that Kantians, utilitarians and contractarians (like Rawls) *all* share a procedural rather than a substantive conception of ethics. Instead of centring ethics on a shared conception of the good set independently of our will, argues Taylor, primacy is given to the agent's 'own desires or his will' and to some procedure for practical reasoning. The consequence is that most modern moral philosophy has 'a gaping hole' and is rendered powerless to show why it is in anyone's interest to be moral in the first place (Taylor, 1992, pp. 85-7).

In this chapter I shall follow Taylor in arguing that there are serious deficiencies in the Enlightenment conception of rationality and in the associated liberal ideal of the autonomous actor; and I shall question whether Enlightenment rationality and its politics of liberal individualism can, alone, supply the moral norms and wider ethical values necessary for rational beings to lead flourishing lives. But *contra* Taylor and MacIntyre, I shall argue that the universal values and moral norms of Enlightenment ethics (I am thinking particularly here of Kant) are of vital importance because they provide a philosophical and ethical justification of liberal democracy and certain pivotal liberal values; and I shall argue that the Moral Law is central to this justification. Few in the West would seriously criticise the Kantian notion that all people are ends in themselves deserving of dignity and endowed with certain rights by virtue of being rational beings; and few would question the achievement of modern liberal democracy in guaranteeing these hard-won rights, particularly in the light of what we have experienced of alternative political systems. There are few, at least in the West, who would advocate a return to slavery, the persecution of minorities, the subjugation of women or torture. But it is all too easy to take these achievements, these rights and freedoms, for granted.

There has been a great deal of critical analysis of Enlightenment rationality and of the ethical theories of Kant and Hume (including by philosophers of the calibre of Bernard Williams, Alasdair MacIntyre, Iris Murdoch and Charles Taylor) and

therefore it is unlikely that I shall have anything new to say on these subjects. However, there is, perhaps inevitably, a marked contrast between the force and general thrust of the criticism, and the disparate, sometimes rather vague nature of the solutions that are offered – if solutions are offered at all. In particular, there is little sense of how the tensions between Humean and Kantian, and between Enlightenment and Aristotelian, conceptions of practical rationality - and hence of ethics - might be resolved. I do not claim to have a solution to the problem of ethics, and it may well be that it is in the very nature of ethics that it does not admit of ‘a solution’, but I think it is worth exploring whether an accommodation or synthesis between the Enlightenment and Aristotelian traditions might not be possible. My specific aim in this thesis is to explore whether aspects of the two traditions might be synthesised in the concrete form of a liberal-humanist education.

Christine Korsgaard, the prominent Kantian, argues that the central task of moral philosophy is to find the answer to ‘the normative question’; to explain *how* the force of the normative claims morality seems to make on us can be justified (or vindicated) and to explain *where* the sources of this normativity are located (Korsgaard, 1996, p. 13). I agree with Korsgaard here, except that, as we shall see, everything turns on how ‘the normative question’ is framed. I also agree with Kant that a life consisting merely of the blind, slavish satisfaction of sensuous appetites, inclinations and desires produces only a transient series of pleasures, whereas it is a sense of inner-worth and contentment that a rational being seeks (Kant, 1996, p. 143; 2005, p. 137)⁴; and therefore both the source and force of the normative claims morality seems to make on us have their origins in our rational nature. In other words, when people are driven, as they must by their very nature as rational beings, to ask the question ‘what ought I to do?’ they are launched on a quest for higher values and ends - moral, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual - than the merely appetitive; they are engaged in a quest for *the truth*. It is in this sense that the desire, not to eliminate (because that is impossible – even the ascetic has to contend with his body) but to

4 ‘For the inclinations change, they grow with the indulgence shown them, and always leave behind a still greater void than we had thought to fill’ (Kant, 1996, p. 143).

transcend one's instinctive appetites and desires, is intrinsic to rational human nature⁵.

On the other hand, it could be argued that morality is rooted in our natural sympathies and feelings – our benevolence, for example - and that these are as much part of our instinctive nature as our selfish desires. But the problem then is to reconcile our conflicting selfish and altruistic inclinations, which suggests that some over-arching rational perspective, some set of general moral principles and guiding values, is needed after all. However, whether these moral norms must have their source in (or find their expression in the form of) the Moral Law, as Kantians argue, is another matter.

I shall try to locate the source of our moral norms and of our need to live a life that is fulfilled and worthwhile - 'a good life' - in the discussion that follows.

Enlightenment conceptions of practical rationality

The Enlightenment conception of the autonomous actor has its roots in two distinct eighteenth-century conceptions of practical rationality: the Kantian ideal of rational autonomy, particularly influential in justifying our notions of universal human rights, and the Humean conception of instrumental rationality, from which descends our prevailing ethics of utilitarianism.

There are, however, profound problems with both theories.

⁵ Christine Korsgaard goes further and argues that the moral obligations that arise from our rational nature (obligations which are therefore unconditional), from our need to justify our actions with reasons, are fundamental to our personal identity and to our *integrity* as a person; and that a life in which we failed to live up to these obligations would be, literally, a life not worth living (Korsgaard, 1996, pp. 101-2). I agree that a life not informed by moral values - not informed by some conception of the life one ought to lead – is, literally speaking, not worth living. However, whether our moral values need justifying with reasons is, I think, questionable. I shall return to the question of 'critical justification' in later chapters.

(a) *Hume*

For Humeans, normative reasons (the reasons that explain or motivate our actions, and that we recognise as providing a moral justification for our actions) are ‘hypothetical’. In other words, they depend on our arational motivational or psychological states, and our actions are therefore ‘goal-driven’ rather than based on norms that could explain our actions by independently furnishing rational or moral ends (Cullity & Gaut, 1997, pp. 4-6); or as Hume himself famously remarked, ‘Reason is ... the slave of the passions’ (Hume, 2003, p. 236). In other words, reasons are merely rationalisations of our innate passions and desires, not *a priori* principles derived from pure reason. Practical reason is conceived instrumentally as involving the selection of the means by which our ultimate desires, our already given ends, can best be satisfied.

The problem with this conception of practical rationality is that because our needs, interests, desires and ends (or goals) are assumed to come ready-formed, there is nothing to distinguish our instinctive appetites or desires (our natural inclinations) from ‘higher’ interests, commitments, beliefs or values – from the things that might be fostered, or might specially be *worth* fostering, through education and that might be transmitted via a cultural inheritance. We end up with utilitarianism, an empty, instrumental rationality that merely better equips us to satisfy our appetitive desires. The problem is that though utilitarianism need not entail the mere hedonistic pursuit of pleasure but can take account in its calculus of a more complex conception or definition of happiness (one that takes account of the public good, that weighs up long-run costs and benefits, and that seeks to make qualitative distinctions between different pleasures - as John Stuart Mill famously did), utilitarianism says nothing about *how* the higher pleasures and nobler virtues might be cultivated; indeed, it says nothing about whether it is desirable to cultivate them at all. There is, in Aristotelian terms, no conception of what might constitute ‘a good life’. Instead, the standard of morality becomes our *freedom* to pursue our current ends and thereby maximise (individually and collectively) our level of satisfaction, or utility, or happiness. An

ethics of utilitarianism is therefore contingent, even ‘parasitic’, on pre-existing values and moral norms - the ones transmitted as part of a cultural inheritance.⁶

Hume’s theory of the moral sentiments is admirable in so far as it goes, and in its defence of the moral virtues has, on the face of it, much in common with the Aristotelian approach to ethics that I shall attempt to defend in Chapter 2. But because Hume rules out reason as a motive to action, there is nothing to enable people to transcend their appetites and natural inclinations, to prevent them from acting purely out of self-interest (or pure selfishness), other than their natural ‘sympathy’ for their fellows; and this sympathy is left to compete with all the other appetites and desires, including the selfish ones, that naturally motivate human beings. Moreover, Hume provides no account of moral education, no account of how cultural traditions and social practices might play a part in cultivating our moral sense or our disposition to act morally; we must presume that Humean moral education would consist solely of the encouragement of pupils’ natural moral sentiments.

(b) *Kant*

Whereas Hume is all motivation and no reason, Kant might be said to be all reason and no motivation. For Kantians, our actions – or more specifically, our will to act - ought not to be determined by our motivational states, our instinctive, pre-existing needs or appetites, but by rationally conceived ends – by ends conceived by virtue of our nature as rational beings. Normative reasons are non-hypothetical or *categorical* in nature; and this culminates in the Categorical Imperative of the Moral Law. We have the pivotal Enlightenment notion of the morally autonomous individual, the ‘sovereign chooser’ whose reason is sole arbiter, the individual endowed with certain universal, inalienable rights by virtue of his rationality.

⁶ In his classic critique of utilitarianism, Bernard Williams speaks of ‘the illusion that preferences are already given’, the need rather to take account of what people are ‘capable of wanting’ if they ‘became informed’ or had ‘a sense of what is possible’ (Williams, 1973, p. 147). However, whereas Williams speaks in rather abstract terms of peoples’ capabilities being ‘a function of numerous social forces’ (p. 147), I would locate peoples’ capabilities squarely in a cultural inheritance into whose practices they are initiated. I develop this theme further in coming chapters; it is central to this thesis.

Kant has been widely criticised for attempting to eliminate altogether the feelings, emotions and passions from the sphere of morality, for austere insisting that the Moral Law must be experienced as a purely rational intellectual obligation (see, for example, Kant, 1996, pp. 142-4), because this is so obviously contrary to our natural way of thinking and talking about morality, to our sense that a person motivated by feelings of sympathy, benevolence, love, pity and compassion (as opposed to greed and selfishness) is, by virtue of this, a good person whose actions have moral worth. The problem with the Kantian conception of practical rationality, as numerous commentators have remarked, is that that though Kant holds practical reason to be constitutive of our ends rather than merely instrumental to realising them, he supplies us with no positive substantive conception of a person's ends or of the good. As Alasdair MacIntyre notes, 'as to what activities we ought to engage in, what ends we should pursue, the categorical imperative seems to be silent' (MacIntyre, 1989, p. 197). Kant provides little substantive content to his account of the Moral Law, with the result that his actor is divorced from society, culture and recognisably human attributes and concerns (see, for example, MacIntyre, 1989, pp. 197-8; O'Hear, 1999, p. 127; Gaut, 1997, pp. 180-2). The emotions are relegated to 'a by-product of our status as dignified rational beings' (Murdoch, 1985, p. 82) and the Kantian actor is reduced to a state of 'disembodied reason' (Berlin, 1969, p. 155), a transcendental will lying outside time and space (Gaut, 1997, p. 181).

There is much force to these criticisms and I shall return to them later in this chapter, but I think that a powerful case can nevertheless be made for the Moral Law and its Categorical Imperative. I think moreover that the Kantian answer to this question, namely that human beings are subject to the Categorical Imperative of the Moral Law as 'an objective necessity arising from *a priori* grounds' (Kant, 1996, p. 40) by virtue of their very nature as rational beings (i.e. beings subject categorically only to the dictates of pure reason), is unassailable – but only so long as the normative question is framed in a particular way.

The republic of rational beings

If one is seeking a compelling, epistemic, self-justifying account of moral norms – an account that appeals neither to our appetitive desires nor to arbitrary authority (i.e. to sources that would themselves stand in need of justification), and that can survive rational scrutiny taken to its limit – then the Moral Law, or at least something akin to it⁷, is in all probability the inevitable outcome⁸. The Moral Law might very well be the law that citizens of Kant’s notional Kingdom of Ends (the republic of rational beings) would legislate or ‘will’, and submit to on account of their will being determined by pure reason alone and their being subject to no other motivations, desires or impulses. And *in so far as* people are rational beings subject (or at least potentially subject) only to the dictates of pure reason, Kantian morality provides a powerful justification for a set of universal rights or duties that might apply to all people regardless of their contingent circumstances – i.e. to people of all cultures and societies. Rational beings engaged in framing laws on which a civil society of free and equal citizens (equal, that is, before the law) could be founded - in other words, engaged in establishing a social contract – might very well look to the Moral Law for guidance concerning the general moral principles that underlie those laws.

It should be noted that what is considered by many critics to be a central weakness in Kant’s account of the Moral Law – namely its failure to explain how normative reasons for actions can motivate a person to act (as opposed to the desires and inclinations, which count as reasons for action because they are, by definition, motivational) – ceases to pose a problem when the Moral Law is considered at a

⁷ Kant himself offers two formulations of the Categorical Imperative of the Moral Law: the formula of universal law (‘Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law’ – Kant, 2005, p. 97) and the formula of the end in itself (‘Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end’ – pp. 106-7).

⁸ For Korsgaard, for example, the normative question arises from ‘the first-person position of the agent’ and therefore for moral claims to be justified requires ‘transparency’ – i.e. for us to act not ‘blindly or from habit’ but ‘in the full light of knowledge of what morality is’ (Korsgaard, 1996, pp. 16-7). Reflective scrutiny demands *reasons* for our actions as opposed to alien causes, and this in turn requires that ‘the free will must be entirely self-determining’, that it ‘must have its own law or principle’, and because ‘nothing determines what that law must be’ except that *it has to be a law*, we arrive at the formula of the Categorical Imperative (pp. 97-8).

societal level. As Martha Nussbaum argues, all that is required of an ethical theory is, first, that it raises the level of awareness in the population as a whole and, second, that it shapes laws and institutions (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 247). Nussbaum even credits Kant with the view that world peace will come about not because all people abide by the Categorical Imperative but because ‘enough people think this way to make good laws that will constrain the behaviour of other people’ (p. 253). Now whether or not Kant took this view (if he did, he certainly disguised it heavily in his exposition of the Moral Law), it certainly would be a pragmatic view to take as it would go a long way to answering the question of how reason can be rendered motivational; it would, in effect, eliminate the need to answer the question at all at the personal level. But, in fact, not even law-makers need be motivated to abide by the Categorical Imperative in their personal lives; all that is strictly required is that in their *capacity* as law-makers, they believe good law is founded on the Categorical Imperative.

So long, then, as Kant is interpreted as framing the ground rules or ‘original contract’ (Kant, 1983, p. 77) on which a civil society of free and equal citizens could be founded, whether in the form of statute law or in the form of general precepts or codes of behaviour in which the population might be educated, the concept of the Moral Law is a very powerful one. Moreover, I think the parallel between the notional republic of rational beings Kant refers to in his moral philosophy and the real, albeit ideal, republic Kant depicts in his political writings – which is also founded on certain *a priori* principles - is an illuminating one. In the former, it is the mark of rational beings that they submit themselves to certain limits on their freedom of action by only acting on precepts or maxims that can be universalised (so that all gain the freedom contingent on having their ends valued, on being treated as ends and not means); in the latter, it is the mark of the model republic that all citizens are equal before the law (i.e. that the rights and duties prescribed by the law apply universally) and that all citizens are free to pursue happiness as they see fit, provided that the freedom of others to do the same is not violated⁹. The underlying rationale of both republics is therefore that for people to live freely, and hence lead flourishing lives, certain limitations on freedom of action must be observed. The law must be

⁹ ‘... every person may seek happiness in the way that seems best to him, if only he does not violate the freedom of others to strive toward such similar ends as are compatible with everyone’s freedom under a possible universal law’ (p. 72).

universal (i.e. everyone must be equal before the law) if everyone is to be free; equality is therefore the pre-condition for freedom¹⁰. So though Kant deduces the Moral Law by postulating that rational beings must be transcendently free (which leaves Kant open to the criticisms I noted earlier and shall consider in more detail later on in this chapter), the Moral Law can also be derived as the limiting condition necessary for people's freedom of action in the empirical world – i.e. for their freedom to pursue their own ends within a social framework.

It might be objected at this point that Kant's whole purpose is to detach morality *from* our motivating impulses and ends; that according to Kant, we are free not because we pursue our own ends and gratify our desires but because we abide by the Moral Law. But this does not alter the fact that for there to be a Moral Law, there must be maxims to which it can be applied, and these maxims can only be generated by our ends and our desires. Moreover, for the Moral Law to serve a purpose, more than one person must attempt to act on their maxims. In a situation in which our actions affected nobody else - on a desert island, for example - there would be no need for the Moral Law in the first place because nobody else's freedom or ends could possibly be violated. Therefore the purpose of the Moral Law is to guarantee each person's freedom of action in society; to guarantee their freedom to pursue their own ends without hindrance.

Disembodied reason – or the triumph of reason over desire

It follows that because the moral object of the exercise (as I am interpreting it here) is to enable people to freely pursue their own ends, it is only to be expected that the Moral Law has little or nothing to say about the ends people should pursue or about the determining grounds that would guide people's actions within the limits it prescribes. But of course Kant does not intend the Moral Law merely to prescribe limits to people's actions in order to better enable them to pursue their selfish interests and appetitive desires. The Moral Law is meant to transform people from

¹⁰ As Iris Murdoch notes of Kantian moral philosophy, the 'sovereign moral concept is freedom' (Murdoch, 1985, p. 80).

(in effect) animals blindly enslaved to their passions into morally autonomous individuals for whom reason alone is the arbiter; it is meant to represent the culmination of human rationality – ‘*the starry heavens above and the Moral Law within*’ (Kant, 1996, p. 191). But when Kant tries to set out how the Moral Law transforms our will, and therefore transforms our nature, he runs into all sorts of difficulties; and it is here, I believe, that the most commonly levelled criticisms of Kantian ethics find their mark.

The root of the difficulty lies, I think, in Kant’s rigid demarcation between two sorts of determination of the will, and therefore of our actions. First, there is the determination of the will (to action) by pure reason in the form of the Moral Law – the only motive for action that is rationally and hence morally justified. And second there is the determination of the will by ‘material principles’ motivated by the ‘lower’ desire for pleasure and arising out of ‘self-love’ or ‘private happiness’ (Kant, 1996, p. 35). Now Kant is insistent that that the determining principle of the will must be pure reason alone; that the Moral Law ‘*forces itself* on us [my italics] as a synthetic a priori proposition, which is not based on any intuition, either pure or empirical’ (p. 47); that reason ‘determines the will immediately, not by the means of an intervening feeling of pleasure or pain’, and that ‘even the slightest admixture of the motives of the latter [the lower desire for pleasure] impairs its strength and superiority’ (p. 38). But the result is, apparently, to deny the lower desires - and for Kant, all determinants of our actions other than pure reason count as lower desires¹¹ - any determining or motivating role at all in our behaviour in so far as it can be justified on moral grounds. Moral behaviour is detached from the empirical world altogether. As Berys Gaut comments, what we *really* are in Kant’s scheme is a disembodied will floating free of time and space (Gaut, 1997, p. 181).

¹¹ It is extraordinary that Kant lumps together all our appetites, desires, feelings, sentiments (however altruistic or noble), sympathies, interests, dispositions, commitments and obligations (other than those dictated by pure reason and self-willed via the Categorical Imperative) as material principles motivated by the ‘lower’ desire for pleasure and arising out of ‘self-love’ or ‘private happiness’. Even the ‘more refined pleasures and enjoyments’, the ones that cultivate as well as delight, the ones that may involve ‘understanding and reason’ in considerable measure (Kant, 1996, pp. 37-8), are to be regarded as ‘pathological’ (2005, p. 38) because they are ultimately explained, according to Kant, by the same low desire for pleasure (1996, p. 37). However, Kant’s approach is justified if one accepts the limits of Kant’s chosen frame of reference: the notional republic of rational beings.

Gaut further argues that the logical implication of Kant's account of the transcendently free agent is that a rational being must wish to be rid of his inclinations altogether on the grounds that they are a threat to the autonomy of the rational will; and it is true that Kant's disparaging depiction of the lower desires often seems to suggest this. But I think it is clear, even if it is not logically compatible with his account of the rational will, that Kant does recognise, albeit grudgingly, that the original motives and impulses for our actions (the sources of determination of the will) are 'material principles' and 'lower desires'. For example, when Kant writes that 'to be happy is necessarily the wish of any finite rational being' (Kant, 1996, p. 39), he is referring to legitimate *material* principles of determination of the will. And therefore the task is to *apply* the Moral Law to these material principles of action in order to determine which of them can be universalised and therefore morally justified. Indeed, when Kant formulates the Categorical Imperative as 'Act only on that maxim through which you can *at the same time* [my italics] will that it should become a universal law' (Kant, 2005, p.97), this seems implicit in the very phrasing. The maxims that that constitute our original motives and impulses for action exist independently of the Moral Law.

However, this dual-aspect theory of motivation, as Korsgaard terms it, remains highly unsatisfactory. For if the lower desires are to be regarded as supplying the originating cause of (or motive for) the action, then the procedure is simply that of judging whether or not the proposed action is compatible with the Moral Law; in other words, we are back in the position I outlined earlier, whereby the Moral Law can be understood merely as setting limits to our permitted range of actions, limits within which we can lead our lives and pursue our interests, whether they be selfish or altruistic (Kant regards both as ultimately motivated by the desire for pleasure), without hindrance – provided, of course, that we do not infringe the right of others to do the same. And though this is, I believe, a perfectly coherent interpretation of the Moral Law, it is not at all what Kant intends. It is as if Kant is searching for a sort of sublimation in which the action escapes the taint of its original motivating determining impulse, but it turns out to be impossible to detail the process by which this might be brought about without at the same time eliminating the originating cause of the action – a dilemma reflected in Kant's own writing.

The problem is that though the form of the maxim has been specified - i.e. it must be capable of being willed a universal law, its actual content has not. As MacIntyre notes, the Categorical Imperative provides a test for maxims but ‘does not tell me whence I am to derive the maxims which first provide the need for a test’. It tells us, allegedly, what we cannot do – tell lies, break promises and so forth – but ‘as to what activities we ought to engage in, what ends we should pursue, the categorical imperative seems to be silent’ (MacIntyre, 1989, p. 197). In fact, if it is interpreted as a limiting condition on our actions, there is, as I argued earlier, no need for it to tell us what activities we ought to engage in; we are free within the limits of the Moral Law to follow our desires and pursue happiness. But the problem then is that we are free to engage in activities of no value whatever, perhaps even to engage in activities that are destructive of other values and goods in our lives, so long as we are inclined to do so and our inclinations do not transgress the requirements of the Moral Law (see Gaut, 1997, p. 178). The corollary is that actions judged to be of high value or moral worth by any other standard of value or good than that of the Moral Law – for example, actions motivated by feelings of altruism or benevolence or compassion, or by a desire to display the virtues – count for nothing; Kant allows them no moral worth at all.

Moreover, even if we allowed that the Moral Law had substantive content, that it gave us adequate guidance on how we should act, Kant provides no account of *how* a person is to develop the will, or strength of will, necessary to transcend his lower appetitive desires and submit to the Moral Law, other than as a sort of blinding revelation. And yet the existence of the phenomenon of *akrasia* or ‘weakness of will’ suggests that cognition is not enough; a person must also be motivated at a deeper level, either by psychological motives grounded in our biologically evolved human nature (as Humeans would have it) or by habituated, acculturated dispositions - ‘virtues’ - grounded in a shared conception of the good (as Aristotelians would have it). Even supposing that the Moral Law could be made concrete by the study of sufficient numbers of examples of its application in the manner of case law and even supposing that all pupils were up to the task¹², what is to prevent the whole process

¹² The problem here is that regardless of whether the Moral Law has substantive content or not, the very fact that there is a continuing debate on the matter - with, for example, MacIntyre arguing that

from remaining a sterile intellectual exercise? How is the theory to be internalised or habituated so that it becomes motivational? Moral education that emphasised the social value of certain moral precepts in sustaining a civilized society (i.e. that appealed to a sort of enlightened self interest), or that appealed to people's natural sentiments, or that simply cultivated certain dispositions or virtues through practice regardless of justification, would, one might imagine, be at least feasible. But Kantian morality involves none of these. There is a strong sense in which Kantian morality, by its very nature, *could* never be habituated or trained, because it is supposed to be self-willed by the autonomous actor out of rational necessity: the Moral Law '*forces itself on us* [my italics] as a synthetic a priori proposition, which is not based on any intuition, either pure or empirical' (Kant, 1996, p. 47). In this respect, the notion of Kantian moral education is almost a contradiction in terms.¹³

Despite, then, the importance of the Moral Law in helping establish the original contract on which civil society might be founded, the broader ethical questions 'how should I live?' and 'what is a good life?', which are arguably fundamental to moral philosophy, perhaps even definitional of it, are not addressed at all. In fact, by relegating these questions to matters of personal choice and the individual pursuit of happiness, by advocating that 'every person may seek happiness in the way that seems best to him' (Kant, 1983, p. 72), Kantian ethics comes to share precisely the same defect as Humean ethics. In the end, both reduce to utilitarianism, and the defects and limitations of utilitarianism that I detailed earlier therefore apply to Kant just as they do to Hume.

almost any precept can be universalised if formulated carefully enough - suggests that the practical application of the Moral Law is not at all straightforward; that the Moral Law does not determine the will with the force or immediacy Kant supposes.

¹³ In her paper 'Can Kant Have an Account of Moral Education?', Kate Moran argues that contrary to what is implied in his account of the nature of the Moral Law, Kant does believe that pupils, and later students, require 'a kind of formal education in learning and applying the moral law' (Moran, 2009, p. 471). Interestingly, there is much in common between Kant's stages of moral education, as detailed in his lectures on pedagogy and anthropology, and the sort of moral education afforded by a study of the humanities that I describe in Chapter 6. So, for example, Kantian moral education would involve the discussion of 'cases and historical examples', and a process of questioning and dialogue (a sort of 'moral catechism') in which the teacher 'slowly draws out of the student basic moral principles' (pp. 478-9). But what is lacking is any sense that pupils and students need to be motivated at a deeper level or that moral instruction needs to proceed concurrently with practical experience – things, I shall argue in Chapter 2, that might be achieved through a habituation of the virtues. In fact, Kant insists that children should *not* develop habits: 'The more habits that a child develops, the less likely he is to have the experience of deliberately and freely choosing a course of action' (p. 476).

If we are to address these central ethical questions, then we must depart from Kant's notional republic of rational beings and re-introduce into the moral equation the desires, inclinations and impulses that actually do motivate our actions, along with the obligations, commitments, interests and values that derive from our contingent circumstances (from social and occupational roles, from cultural norms, from family attachments and so forth). Another way of expressing this, as we shall see later, is that we must take into account the intrinsic goods (including the virtues) that can only derive from a social-cultural inheritance of practices and traditions. And this, in turn, means that we must abandon Kant's rigid demarcation between reason and desire as determinants of the will, and of our actions.¹⁴

Kant feels compelled to disregard contingent empirical determinants of people's actions as possible sources of morality because he is convinced that the source of moral norms lies in our nature as rational beings. And as I argued earlier, I think that his insight here is essentially correct. The source of our need to submit ourselves to both narrow moral norms and to wider ethical values lies in our very nature as self-conscious beings given to reflecting on our motives and our ends. But Kant is wrong to insist that our submission to these norms must take the form of submission to the Categorical Imperative of the Moral Law. Our search as rational beings for moral norms and wider values (with intellectual, aesthetic, spiritual and moral values all constituting dimensions of a wider ethical system), though it might involve formulating universally applicable principles of morality as a limiting condition on our actions, must embrace the whole range of our interests, commitments, obligations and sympathies. Only then can we begin to answer the greatest questions of moral philosophy; only then can we come to discover how we ought to live, and what, for us, might constitute 'the good life'.

¹⁴ Korsgaard seeks to remedy this deficiency (or deficiency of emphasis as she sees it) in Kant by reinstating desires as legitimate sources of motivation, value and obligation in the form of 'contingent practical identities' (which replace the principle of self-love) and by arguing that the Moral Law might be considered part of a 'double-aspect theory of motivation' (Korsgaard, 1996, p. 243). But the demarcation between reason and desire remains and the defects of Kant's 'double-aspect theory of motivation' that I have detailed still apply.

An Aristotelian synthesis

In summary, the problem with Enlightenment rationality is that because it takes freedom to be the sovereign moral concept, the moral questions ‘how should I live’ and ‘what is the good life for me’ go undetermined. There is no shared substantive conception of the good on which to draw for our moral or ethical norms. And although the public law and the Moral Law prescribe the behaviour we should refrain from so as not to infringe the freedom of others, as to what we positively *should* do with our lives, they have nothing to say. But if Enlightenment rationality is to be rejected as a source of moral norms and ethical values, then we must surely look to the alternative; that *practical* reason is, at least in part and in some sense, habituated; and the classic account of habituated reason is Aristotle’s. Moral excellence is therefore not a matter of reason attaining sovereignty over the will, or over our desires, but is the result of full and harmonious development, initially involving habituation, of the moral and intellectual virtues; and the central virtue in Aristotle’s ethical system is *phronesis*, the ability to make a practical judgement.

It is, I shall argue in the next chapter, the great strength of Aristotelian ethical theory that it provides an account of how people might deliberate rationally on an ethical course of action *and* find the motivation to carry it through. By providing an integrated theory of reason and desire, of morality and action, Aristotle is able to articulate a shared, substantive conception of the good, and supply a clear answer to the questions ‘how should I live?’ and ‘what is the good life?’ In fact, Aristotelian ethics might be regarded as a synthesis of Kantian rationalism and Humean naturalism: by situating human nature in a civilization, ‘higher’ values are incorporated in it; and by situating reason in the practices of a civilization, by habituating practical rationality so that it becomes *second nature*¹⁵, reason is given substance (content) and actualised in concrete human behaviour. The missing ingredient in Kant’s account is the Aristotelian insight that a person must be habituated, cultivated, formed by education and upbringing into a certain sort of person; a person with certain dispositions, desires, interests and values - including

¹⁵ For John McDowell, it is implicit in Aristotle’s account of how the ethical character is formed that ‘the resulting habits of thought and action are second nature’ (McDowell, 1996, p. 84).

the ones necessary for rational behaviour. The missing ingredient in Hume's account (necessary to avert a descent into hedonism) is the Aristotelian insight that human nature – incorporating our instincts, interests, desires, motivational states and goals – is formed in a civilization, a civilization through which higher transcendent interests and values (or norms) are mediated.

However, Aristotle's ethical system raises profound problems of its own and is the object of a series of criticisms from both proponents and critics of Enlightenment rationality, some relating to Aristotle's original account and some relating to the interpretations of neo-Aristotelians. The most commonly raised objections might be detailed as follows:

1 – The problem of habituation: Aristotle argues that moral virtue – and by extension *phronesis* or practical judgement - must be habituated. But this implies an authoritarian view of education, a mindless conditioning that is antithetical to the exercise of critical reason.

2 – The problem of moral conflict: Aristotle argues that moral excellence involves a harmonious balance or 'unity' of the virtues, and a shared conception of the supreme good. But this takes account neither of the moral dilemmas that characterise human life, nor of the plurality of values and goods that exist in a modern liberal democracy. How could any one set of virtues, values or beliefs be selected for habituation?

3 – The problem of relativism: Any *status quo*, however objectionable, would appear to be justified in the Aristotelian system. Traditions, customs, prejudices and superstitions are ethically valid merely by virtue of being handed down and habituated. Enlightenment standards of reason and human rights, that are universal, give way to an extreme relativism between cultures and traditions.

It is to a consideration of the Aristotelian ethical system and to the most commonly raised objections to it that I now turn.

2

Aristotelian ethics: the role of habituation and *phronesis* in moral development

I concluded in Chapter 1 that Enlightenment conceptions of freedom, autonomy and practical reason are deficient because, firstly, they say nothing about the wider values, commitments and interests that might be worth actively cultivating in a civilized society; and, secondly, when moral norms are specified, there is no account offered of why we should feel obliged to abide by these norms - of why we should be motivated to behave morally. In short, there is no shared, substantive vision of the good on which to base, or within which to frame, an answer to the question ‘what sort of life should I lead?’ An adequate account of ethical life must incorporate the whole range of interests, values and commitments that do, or conceivably might, motivate us – including the objects that we designate good, worthwhile, ethical or moral as part of our normal linguistic usage and that by their very nature form part of a social and cultural inheritance. In this chapter, therefore, I continue my search for an ethical foundation for liberal education by turning to Aristotle because his is the classic account of an ethical system in which general dispositions of character – or virtues - are cultivated through a process of habituation; in which ethical judgement (*phronesis*) is cultivated as a mode of deliberation and perception (rather than as a theory of moral obligation) that takes full account of the particularity and complexity of a person’s circumstances, and is (potentially) compatible with the pursuit of a wide range of goods and ends¹; and, finally, in which reason is integrated with desire so as to explain how a person comes to be motivated to live an ethical life in the first place.

¹ Though Aristotle’s conception of the good life – the sort of life in which the virtues can be fully exercised – is limited to the political and the contemplative, I argue in Chapters 3 and 4 that this can be extended to encompass a variety of practices. My concern in this chapter is specifically with the mechanics of moral development – i.e. with how the virtues are cultivated.

In this chapter I shall explore the two pivotal concepts of Aristotelian moral development - 'habituation' and '*phronesis*' - and try to elucidate the relation between them, a relation that is notoriously difficult in Aristotle's account. In particular, I shall try to answer the charge that habituation (the moral formation of character) and *phronesis* (the capacity to make ethical judgements) are antithetical to each other. The difficulty of integrating habituation and *phronesis* into a coherent, unified account of moral development has led many modern-day Aristotelians to foreground *phronesis*, to conceive it as the skill or capacity of a person to rationally 'critically' justify their actions, values and beliefs, and hence to treat *phronesis* as the necessary condition for moral autonomy. However, I shall argue in this chapter that *habituation* is the central fact of moral education and moral development; that the capacity to form ethical judgements, which is usually attributed to a separate stage of *phronesis*, is actually better attributed to the process of moral habituation; and that *phronesis*, if it is to be a fruitful concept, must be conceived in different terms to the ones in which it is apparently conceived by Aristotle.

Though I consider the coherence of Aristotle's ethical system in this chapter, and in particular the central Aristotelian concepts of habituation and *phronesis*, the main purpose is not to try and establish what Aristotle meant to say, or could be interpreted as saying, but rather to take the broad conceptual framework of Aristotle's ethics as the starting point from which an ethics of liberal education might be developed. The implications for education of putting habituation at the heart of moral development, of replacing 'moral autonomy' with the formation of character (which I take here to incorporate the capacity to exercise moral judgement) as a primary aim, are far-reaching.

Aristotle's ethical system

In Aristotle's ethical system, the cultivation of morality through the formation of a virtuous character comprises essentially two stages, the first involving habituation or (non-intellectual) training, and the second involving systematic instruction and

reflection on what has been learned². In the first stage, which begins in childhood, the moral virtues are progressively acquired or engendered in us by practising them (Aristotle, 1976, p. 91); and in the second stage, *phronesis* (variously translated into English as practical judgement, practical wisdom, practical reason, prudence or common-sense³) is acquired. *Phronesis* is the architectonic virtue that enables a person ‘to deliberate [well] about what is good’ and hence act well by taking into account the particular facts of any given situation (p. 209). Developed through a combination of moral instruction and experience, it imbues moral virtue with reason to produce the final harmonious state of moral excellence.⁴

Underpinning Aristotle’s account of habituated virtue is his great insight that moral knowledge (which includes the capacity to deliberate well) is insufficient on its own to explain a person’s actions because it does not explain how a person is to develop the motivation or ‘strength of will’ necessary to transcend instinctive appetites, passions and desires. This is exemplified, on the one hand, by Aristotle’s *akratic* man (the *akrates*) who having deliberated well on a virtuous course of action fails to follow it through - his good intentions giving way unaccountably to instinctive appetites and desires; and, on the other, by Aristotle’s pupil unhabituated in moral virtue to whom moral instruction falls on deaf ears. To act well, a person must be motivated at a deeper psychological and emotional level, and so we have the

² Whether or not these stages should be interpreted in chronological or conceptual terms (or both) is unclear in Aristotle. I shall address this question in the course of this chapter. I have refrained in this chapter from terming the second stage ‘moral education’ because I am following Aristotle in taking moral education to encompass both stages. Admittedly, the terms ‘training’ and ‘instruction’ (as with ‘didactic’ when used to describe teaching) have come to have connotations of learning by rote, but we might note that *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines education as: (1) the process of nourishing or rearing, (2) the process of bringing up, and (3) the systematic instruction, schooling or training given to the young (Onions, 1983, p. 630). For the OED at any rate, there is no such connotation. Henceforth, I shall use the term ‘moral instruction’ to refer to the moral teaching and learning that require formal classroom teaching, and refer to habit formation as moral training - or simply habituation.

³ Henceforth, I shall use the term *phronesis* regardless of the translation from which I have drawn.

⁴ Whether the term ‘moral virtue’ should be confined to virtue in its full sense (to ‘intelligent virtue’), and habituated virtue termed ‘virtuous action’ or ‘unintelligent virtue’ or ‘natural virtue’ in order to distinguish it from virtue in its full sense, is a matter of debate. At the end of Book 6 of *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle slides between describing habituated virtue as ‘natural virtue’ and ‘virtue’. When *phronesis* is factored in, habituated virtue is transformed into what Aristotle terms ‘true virtue’. I shall follow the example of Aristotle in Book 2 and refer to ‘moral virtue’ as being habituated.

Aristotelian notion of habituated, acculturated dispositions or virtues grounded in a shared conception of the good⁵.

However, if one side of the Aristotelian coin is that the desire to lead a virtuous life is habituated, the other is that a person must be able to deliberate well about what is good. It is arguably one of the greatest strengths of the Aristotelian ethical system that the ethical, in the form of *phronesis*, is conceived as a mode of deliberation and perception, and therefore has the potential to encompass a much wider range of human concerns and interests than rival Enlightenment theories of moral obligation and practical reason. The argument for elevating broader ethical above narrower moral considerations, indeed for regarding the very notion of moral obligation as expressive of ‘a deeply rooted and still powerful misconception of life’, has found no more powerful advocate than Bernard Williams in *Ethics and The Limits of Philosophy* (Williams, 2006, chapter 10). Williams argues that ethical considerations are not restricted to the notion of moral obligation, to the categorical moral ‘ought’, but encompass non-moral feelings (e.g. regret, hope, passion and affection), social, cultural and religious influences (including those represented by an inherited catalogue of virtues and vices), personal character or personality, and non-moral or morally indifferent actions. Other factors than the moral will therefore weigh in the balance when it comes to assigning levels of ‘deliberative priority’ (p.183) – for example, the notion of importance arising from a person’s commitments, interests or desires, and even utilitarian considerations of the greatest happiness. Similarly, practical necessity might be determined by considerations other than the moral ‘for reasons of prudence, self-protection, aesthetic or artistic concern, or sheer self-assertion’ (p. 188). The list is potentially almost endless. Moral ‘considerations’, argues Williams, can therefore be seen as only one kind of a larger group of ethical considerations (albeit an important one), a kind that if allowed to displace the others distorts human life by imposing an abstract, restrictive and ultimately impossibly demanding conception of duty. However, *which* interests and commitments would be counted ethically justified, and according to which criteria, is quite another

⁵ It should be noted that for Aristotle, most good people will fall into the category of the *akrates*; few will attain the state of moral excellence in which reason and desire are brought into perfect harmony.

matter; one might, for example, be subject to all sorts of sadistic and perverted desires, but these could hardly be counted ethical.

True, Williams rejects Aristotle's 'teleological universe' in which 'every human being ... has a kind of inner nisus toward a life of at least civic virtue' (p. 44), and argues that Aristotle's view that 'ethical dispositions can be fully harmonized with other cultural and personal aspirations' (p. 52) is no longer tenable, the political assumptions on which it rested long since having collapsed⁶. And yet if the Aristotelian conception of ethics, founded as it is on the apprehension of particulars, is prised apart from Aristotle's metaphysical teleology, I think it contains much of what Williams is looking for. By centring ethics on character training and ethical perception, rather than on moral theory, the individual actor is freed to make his own judgements and to take into account Williams' wider ethical considerations when he deliberates. For Martha Nussbaum the very essence of Aristotelian practical wisdom is 'the ability to recognise, acknowledge, respond to, pick out certain salient features of a complex situation' (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 305). And as Aristotle himself notes, '*phronesis* apprehends the ultimate particular, which cannot be apprehended by scientific knowledge, but only by perception' (Aristotle, 1976, p. 215).

The paradox of moral education

There are, as I have already indicated in Chapter 1, a number of objections to Aristotle's ethical system or theory. I shall address all of these in due course but I would like to begin by considering possibly the most serious objection, the one potentially undermining of Aristotle's whole ethical system. The long-standing charge is that not only is character training authoritarian and anti-democratic (Kristjansson, 2007, p. 31), the very notion that virtue (and hence moral knowledge and understanding) can be habituated is nonsensical; that mindless conditioning in the form of habituation, and reasoned reflection or deliberation in the form of *phronesis*, are antithetical to each other.

⁶ I explore Aristotle's political assumptions in Chapter 4.

Part of the problem (perhaps it is even the whole problem) is that though, in Book 6 of *The Nicomachean Ethics*⁷, Aristotle offers a tantalising account of the symbiotic relation between moral virtue and *phronesis*, between desire and intellect, he never quite seems to adequately define and stabilise his terms or to specify the relation between them. *Phronesis* is variously described as ‘the attainment of truth corresponding to right desire’ (Aristotle, 1996, p.146), the ability ‘to deliberate well about what is good and advantageous’ (p. 149), and ‘a truth-attaining rational quality, concerned with action in relation to the things that are good for human beings’ (p. 150). Of the relation between *phronesis* and moral virtue, Aristotle writes on the one hand that whereas ‘[moral] virtue ensures the rightness of the end we aim at, *phronesis* ensures the rightness of the means we adopt to gain that end’ (p. 158); and, on the other, that *phronesis* is not merely a rational means instrumental to a moral end but is inseparable from moral virtue – that ‘*phronesis* is not merely a rational state’ (1976, p. 210). Though I think it is clear that Aristotle accords a certain primacy, conceptual and developmental, to moral virtue (as is clear from his account of the habituation of the moral virtues at the beginning of Book 2), his account does not elaborate the conceptual relation between moral virtue and *phronesis*, which is clearly much more complex than a straightforward means-end relation. Nor does he elaborate the developmental process by which *phronesis* (or reasoned desire) develops out of habituated virtue (or unreasoned but socially directed desire) and ‘imbues’ (if that is the right term) the appetites, desires, emotions and perceptions with reason. And though, according to Aristotle, both moral instruction and experience play a part in the development of *phronesis*, the relation between the two is unclear, as is the form the instruction might take. In part, then, as a consequence of this ambivalence (or straightforward confusion), the interpretation of Aristotle’s account remains a matter of live debate; and no question is more hotly contested than that of explaining how habituated and hence apparently mindless or mechanical virtuous action can be transformed into intelligent virtue culminating in *phronesis*.

In *Moral Development and Moral Education* (1981), R. S. Peters notes that from the beginning there have been two contrasting and diverging accounts of morality:

⁷ Henceforth, I shall omit ‘*The Nicomachean Ethics*’ and refer merely to the book number.

one that emphasises ‘habit, tradition and being properly brought up’ and the other that emphasises ‘intellectual training’ and ‘the development of critical thought and choice’. Aristotle ‘attempted to combine both, but was led into a paradox about moral education which resulted from his attempt to stress the role both of reason and of habit’ (Peters, 1981, p. 45). This encapsulates the problem but we are no nearer to a solution - if indeed there is a solution. Miles Burnyeat remarks that the vexed question ‘can virtue be taught?’ is perhaps the oldest question in moral philosophy (Burnyeat, 1999, p. 69), and the Socratic doctrine ‘that virtue is knowledge’ (p. 70) has found a forceful advocate in recent times in Bernard Williams. Williams argues that a habituation of the virtues, and in particular of *phronesis* (the intelligent virtue), implies a conditioning that is contrary to the notion of free, rational deliberation; that Aristotle’s ‘account of moral development in terms of habituation and internalisation ... leaves little room for practical reason to alter radically the objectives that a grown-up person has acquired’; people are in a sense denied the capability of asking themselves the Socratic question ‘how should I live?’ (Williams, 2006, pp. 38-40).

In a sense Williams’ charge has already been addressed in Chapter 1. The notion of Enlightenment rationality or neutral reason (which we might describe as the heir to Socratic rationalism) together with its complement, the notion of the sovereign chooser or autonomous actor, is at best incomplete, at worst incoherent, because lacking a substantive shared vision of the good, people are unable to answer the questions ‘what ought I to do?’ and ‘how should I lead my life?’ To argue that objective goods or moral norms must be justified on rational and epistemic grounds is to end up in the Kantian impasse I described. Moral norms are emptied of substantive content and detached from motivating reasons or desires - unless we follow Hume and the utilitarians in eliminating moral norms and higher values from the picture altogether (or follow Rawls in identifying goodness with rationality⁸). Therefore we must look to the alternative – namely, that our ethics is founded on a shared conception of the good rooted in our social, cultural and linguistic practices; and the paradigm for this is Aristotle’s ethical system, in which moral virtue is habituated. However, we cannot simply accept Aristotle’s account of moral habituation by default - i.e. accept it on the grounds that we have rejected (or

⁸ I discuss Rawls’ conception of goodness as rationality in Chapter 4.

partially rejected) the Enlightenment account. This is to answer Williams' charge only in a negative sense. If the first principles or premises of ethical deliberation are to be regarded as determined by habituation, there is still an apparent paradox at the heart of Aristotle's ethics. We need therefore to attempt to reconstruct Aristotle's account so as to elaborate, and if possible to clarify, the nature of the relation between habituation and *phronesis*; and in so doing determine whether Aristotle's account is fundamentally sound. And in order to do this, we must begin with the habituation of moral virtue, the notion which Aristotle *apparently* accords primacy in his ethical theory.

The habituation of moral virtue

The notion that moral virtue - and by extension the ends or goods at which people must aim if they are to attain *eudaimonia* - must be habituated lies at the heart of Aristotle's ethical system. The importance accorded the habituation of moral virtue, the formation of virtuous dispositions or right habits, is made clear enough at the beginning of Book 2:

‘Moral goodness ... is the result of habit’

‘The moral virtues, then, are engendered in us neither by nor contrary to nature; we are constituted by nature to receive them, but their full development in us is due to habit.’

‘But the virtues we acquire by first exercising them’

‘So it is a matter of no little importance what sort of habits we form from the earliest age - it makes a vast difference, or rather all the difference in the world.’

(Aristotle, 1976, pp. 91-2)

Now Aristotle's justification for the habituation of the virtues (which he presents when he returns to the theme of the importance of habituation in Book 10) is quite simply that it is *futile* to try and teach the virtues - or to teach the virtue of leading a

virtuous life - to someone who has not undergone a process of prior habituation: ‘the soil must have been previously tilled if it is to foster the seed, the mind of the pupil must have been prepared by the cultivation of habits, so as to like and dislike aright’ (Aristotle, 1996, p. 279). The emotional desire or motivation to lead a virtuous life - the very notion that one *ought* to behave in a certain way because it is intrinsically good and not merely pleasurable⁹ to do so - is not present and no amount of intellectual argument or persuasion can engender this desire. The argument will therefore fall on deaf ears. The very idea of pursuing the good and acting virtuously is foreign to him; the only *pleasure* he can derive is through the pursuit of his appetitive desires and passions. His life being governed by appetite, he has no sense of shame and only the threat of punishment can drive him to virtuous conduct. Such men, remarks Aristotle, ‘have not even a notion of what is noble and truly pleasant, having never tasted true pleasure’. ‘What theory’, Aristotle goes on, ‘can reform the natures of men like these? To dislodge by argument habits long firmly rooted in their characters is difficult if not impossible’ (p. 279).

But though we might agree with Aristotle here (and Hume is surely making the same point when he argues that reason is the slave of the passions), it is still unclear in Aristotle’s account how the charge of mindless conditioning can be refuted. For many commentators generally sympathetic to Aristotle¹⁰, the key to explaining how virtue can be rendered intelligent is the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* - the intellectual virtue that integrates all the others. Aristotle argues at the end of Book 6 that *phronesis* and moral goodness are inseparable, that ‘it is not possible to be good in the true sense of the word without *phronesis*, or to [exhibit *phronesis*] without moral goodness’ (Aristotle, 1976, p. 224). And though he says in the very same passage that goodness ‘identifies the end’ and *phronesis* ‘makes us perform the acts that are means towards it’ (p. 225), Aristotle’s distinction between ‘natural virtue’ and ‘virtue in its full sense’ (pp. 223-4), the latter requiring intelligence, only makes sense on this view if *phronesis* encompasses deliberation about ends as well as

⁹ Pleasurable in the sense of satisfying one’s appetitive desires.

¹⁰ Jessica Moss details this ‘formidable array of interpreters’ as including John McDowell, Terence Irwin and David Wiggins (see Moss, 2011, p. 205). It also includes Myles Burnyeat, Kristjan Kristjansson and Wilfred Carr.

means¹¹. We must recognise, as David Wiggins argues, that Aristotle's account is confused, his ideas are 'inchoate' and 'sketchily and obscurely' expressed; and that it simply would not make sense for him to confine practical reason to deliberation about means (Wiggins, 1980, pp. 232-4). Our understanding of the virtues, the good life (and of the *eudaimonia* that is consequent on this) and our ends is therefore not 'merely habituated' (i.e. mindlessly conditioned) but is the outcome of rational reflection¹². We must distinguish, with Myles Burnyeat, the desire to be virtuous engendered by habituation from the 'reasoned desire' that arises 'from a reflective scheme of values'; hence the need for 'a course in practical thinking to enable someone who clearly wants to be virtuous to understand better what he should do and why' (Burnyeat, 1999, pp. 80-1).

The problem with this view, cogent as it is, is that it does not accord with the primacy Aristotle clearly accords habituation in Book 2. As Jessica Moss notes, Aristotle states *again and again* that it is moral virtue that makes the goal right. Moss argues that there is simply no evidence that 'he characterizes *phronesis* in such a way that it must include a grasp of ends' (Moss, 2011, p. 206):

Virtue makes the goal right; *phronesis* is responsible only for what contributes to the goal. That is, practical intellect does not tell us what ends to pursue, but only how to pursue them; our ends themselves are set by our ethical characters. (p. 205)

But do we take Aristotle's remarks on habituation in Book 2 at face value? Richard Sorabji suggests they are not in accord with Aristotle's other writings because read in isolation, they would make the rest of *The Nicomachean Ethics* – which includes a detailed account of the separate virtues, of finding virtue in accordance with the mean, and of *phronesis* as the culmination of moral virtue - redundant (Sorabji, 1980, pp. 214-18); and therefore we should take Aristotle as arguing that instruction

¹¹ It is in fact unclear in this passage of Aristotle's whether virtue in its full sense is meant to develop out of natural virtue or whether the two exist contemporaneously as conceptual qualities.

¹² I shall return to Wiggins' argument (that deliberation about means cannot be detached from deliberation about ends) in Chapter 3, when I consider moral development in the context of initiation into the practices that make up a moral tradition.

(and hence *phronesis*) is essential to completing the work begun by habituation - is essential to developing a clear conception of the good life.

In fact, I am not sure that either of these apparently opposed views says anything that is fundamentally different. Both are compatible with the basic assertion that ‘habituation of moral virtue supplies the ends and *phronesis* supplies the means’, because for the end to actually be attained, both means *and* end - both teaching *and* habituation - are necessary. Moral virtue is no use if it does not translate into virtuous action, and since all action is necessarily particular in nature, it must be directed by practical reason; and so we might agree with Burnyeat that deliberation ‘articulates a general good’ and ‘focuses it on a particular action’ (Burnyeat, 1999, p.82). The real point at issue arises when it is argued, as most commentators I think do, that the ends or ethical first principles can only be justified, and hence only established to begin with, by a process of rational and critical reflection; and therefore that though habituation may be necessary as part of moral education (and justified on psychological and motivational grounds), moral education that consisted ‘merely’ of habituation, that even incorporated a prior stage of habituation, would amount to mechanical or mindless conditioning¹³.

I shall attempt in the course of this chapter and the next to refute this view. I think that Aristotle does accord primacy, conceptual and developmental, to moral virtue and its habituation, even if this causes him problems later on when he comes to try and define *phronesis*. I think, moreover, that the primacy of habituation can be rationally justified and the charge of mindless conditioning refuted in a very strong sense - sufficiently, that is, to reject the notion that moral education must involve, or even could involve, the rational justification of the first principles of ethics.¹⁴

¹³ I do not think Sorabji does, in fact, argue this. Wiggins and (as we shall see later) Kristjansson do argue it.

¹⁴ Jessica Moss and Jeannie Kerr argue that the real problem with Aristotle’s account of habituated virtue, for most commentators who are critical of it or seek to amend it, is the belief or prejudice prevalent in moral philosophy since Kant that moral norms must be rationally justifiable (the outcomes of a process of practical reasoning) – i.e. that there is a rationalist or ‘intellectualist’ bias against accounts that involve the emotions or desires (Moss, 2011, p. 207; Kerr, 2011, pp. 646-7). This is, of course, the belief or prejudice that I argued against in Chapter 1.

To begin with, there are, I think, two parts to a defence against the charge of mindless conditioning: the first concerns the substance of what is being habituated (the epistemic aspect) and the second concerns the actual process of habituation (the psychological or motivational aspect).

The key to the first part of the defence (here I follow Vasiliou, Moss, and Kerr – see Vasiliou, 1996; Moss, 2011; Kerr, 2011) lies in recognising, crucially, that the first principles of ethics, the (ethical) goods or ends at which people aim, can by their very nature only be apprehended non-rationally. By non-rational apprehension (here I follow Moss) I mean specifically the repeated perceptions and experiences of the world from which empirical knowledge of that world is necessarily derived (Moss, p. 255). Just as our empirical knowledge of the natural world is founded on our repeated experiences and perceptions of that world¹⁵, our knowledge and beliefs concerning the behaviour that is expected of us are founded on the repeated experiences and perceptions (some pleasurable, others painful) of the human world produced by habituation¹⁶; and so habituation in the moral virtues produces the first principles or starting points (and therefore the ends) of ethics. However, though they are non-rationally apprehended – they cannot be rationally deduced any more than can the empirical data of the natural world - there is nothing arbitrary or irrational about them. The virtues and social norms being habituated (here I go a step further than Moss) are *publicly* constituted and recognised; they form part of a social, cultural and linguistic inheritance that defines our very nature, our ‘second nature’, as human beings. They are, in this sense, objective and hence perfectly justifiable on rational and epistemic grounds, though not of course by *a priori* appeal to pure reason.^{17 18}

¹⁵ Inductive reasoning is no more than generalisation from repeated particulars.

¹⁶ Our scientific knowledge of the human world – the knowledge represented by the social sciences – clearly belongs to the former category, because the aim is to produce law-like generalisations. By contrast, the humanities would seem to be an accumulation of knowledge and belief of the latter kind.

¹⁷ It should be noted that this argument does not as it stands amount to a defence against the charge of relativism – against the charge that even though the values transmitted might not be mindless or arbitrary, they might still be abhorrent. I explore how such a defence might be mounted in Chapter 3.

¹⁸ MacIntyre is making essentially the same argument in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988) when he speaks of a moral tradition as necessarily forming the locus of rational inquiry. To be outside the tradition is not to be granted a privileged neutral ‘Archimedean’ vantage point, but rather to be excluded altogether from rational debate. I shall consider MacIntyre’s conception of a moral tradition in Chapter 3.

The second part of the defence, the other thing that saves the experience of habituation in moral virtue from being mindless conditioning in the Pavlovian sense, is that upbringing is conducted within the frame of a loving family and a supportive community. What motivates the pupil is the desire that is natural in all children to emulate their elders, and by pleasing them to gain approval, praise and recognition - all of which are pleasurable. It is much more than a question of reward and punishment, stimulus and response - though of course these play a part too. Aristotle himself recognises this when he notes in Book 10 that

... the instruction and habits prescribed by a father have as much force in the household as laws and customs have in the state, and even more, because of the tie of blood and the children's sense of benefits received; for they are influenced from the outset by natural affection and docility. (Aristotle, 1976, p. 339)

Much the same could be said to apply to adults, for whom an important motivating factor is the desire for approval and recognition by family, friends, peers, and (in some cases) the public at large, and the sense of satisfaction and fulfilment that follows on this. I do not think that we are invoking some mysterious metaphysical or psycho-physical property of 'intrinsic goodness' nor are we invoking the production of quasi-perceptual images, as some Aristotelians claim¹⁹. We are simply recognising that certain forms of behaviour have, on social, cultural and straightforward evolutionary grounds, come to be regarded as specially desirable and praiseworthy; that they have come to be regarded as the standard by which we should be judged.

¹⁹ For example, Jessica Moss argues that 'repeated perceptions give rise, via *phantasia* (at work in memory) to a generalized but not yet explicitly universal representation' (Moss, 2011, p. 255); and Jana Noel argues that '*phantasia* in the image-producing sense, provides the means for individuals to produce in their thinking and reasoning the end good' (Noel, 1999, p. 283). However, the pitfalls of conceiving the linguistic terms 'thought', 'perception' and 'imagination' in terms of mental objects (or images) have been devastatingly detailed by Bennett and Hacker in *Philosophical Foundations of Neuroscience* (see in particular chapters 5 and 6, Bennett & Hacker, 2003). They note tersely that it is not the brain but *the human being* that thinks, perceives and imagines. When we speak of human beings thinking, perceiving and imagining, we are using the resources of language to describe the complexity of human behavioural and emotional responses, not identify some parallel inner mental phenomenal life going on in the brain.

I shall return in Chapter 3 to the crucial notion that it is only with reference to a moral tradition and wider cultural inheritance into which we are habituated that our values and moral norms are validated. However, I would like to continue this chapter by exploring the implications of my account of habituation for the other pivotal concept of Aristotelian ethics - *phronesis*; for if habituation supplies the first principles of ethics, the question naturally arises ‘what role is played by *phronesis*?’

Phronesis

The precise relation between habituation and *phronesis* remains very much a matter of debate. Aristotle’s own account of *phronesis* is, as we have seen, confused and sketchy; and therefore there are conflicting interpretations of what Aristotle meant, or meant to say, or even ought to have said, but did not. Moreover, there is a curious lack of continuity in Aristotle’s account, so that after having emphasised the crucial importance of habit formation at the beginning of Book 2, Aristotle makes no mention at all in Book 6 of how habituation might relate to *phronesis*, or of how habituated virtue might develop into intelligent virtue. All we have are the twin assertions, first, that ‘natural virtue’ and ‘virtue in the full sense’ (intelligent virtue) are two distinct ‘qualities’ and that the latter ‘implies *phronesis*’ (1976, p. 224); and, second, that whereas moral virtue (which, following on from Book 1, we presume has been habituated) supplies the end at which we aim, *phronesis* supplies the means (p. 222).

However, there is a fundamental problem with this notion that habituation supplies the ends and *phronesis* the means. How can the virtues be habituated other than through repeated practice in exercising the virtues *and hence* in exercising practical judgement (*phronesis*) concerning the exercise of the virtues? Surely it is only through some experience of the means that we can have any genuine appreciation of the ends. The problem is even more marked when we consider that *phronesis* is supposed to enable us to ‘hit the mean’ with regard to virtuous action (p. 101). How can a virtue be regarded as having been habituated in any meaningful sense unless our knowledge of that virtue includes knowledge of how the mean is

observed in the case of that particular virtue in that particular situation? An example might illustrate the point. An important aspect of team games is to develop pupils' appreciation of how to behave towards teammates who 'let the team down'. The teammate who is trying their hardest but either through lack of skill or bad luck allows the opposition to score is to be treated with tact and sympathy, to be encouraged rather than blamed and humiliated, but also to be given realistic advice concerning how to do better next time both in the interests of the team and in order to build their own confidence and self-esteem. On the other hand, the teammate who makes no effort might more reasonably be blamed and held to account, but there are circumstances (one's teammate might be very upset over something) in which assigning blame would be wrong as well as counterproductive. There are subtle distinctions and practical judgements to be made here that involve the exercise of a range of virtues, such as honesty, compassion, tolerance and respect, but that also require considerable situational perception. The very notion that there are two distinct stages of moral development, habituation and *phronesis*, therefore appears problematic.

Another problem is that though it is generally (and surely rightly) assumed by commentators on Aristotle's ethics that the development of *phronesis* requires moral instruction, the form this instruction might take and its relation to habituation are keenly debated. Aristotle has nothing to say about it at all and concerns himself instead in Book 6 almost entirely with what it means to deliberate well. The nearest thing we get is the remark that *phronesis* is not 'knowledge of general principles only: it must also take account of particular facts' (1996, p. 152), from which we might infer that *phronesis* involves, at least in part, knowledge of general principles, and hence the development of *phronesis* requires instruction in general principles – for example, it is logical to assume, the study of Aristotle's own manual of ethical principles, *The Nicomachean Ethics*.²⁰

The relation between moral instruction and experience is likewise unclear. For example, Aristotle first says (p. 152) that *phronesis* requires a knowledge of *both*

²⁰ Kristjánsson suggests that Aristotle's silence on the matter of 'moral didactics' might be explained by the fact that most of Aristotle's writings on education have been lost (Kristjánsson, 2007, p. 42).

general principles (presumably the fruit of instruction) and particular facts (presumably the fruit of experience); and then says (p. 153) that a young man *cannot* have *phronesis* because he lacks the experience necessary for a knowledge of particular facts. The latter does not necessarily negate the former, but it does leave us unclear about the role of moral instruction in the cultivation of *phronesis* and about the form it might take: for example, should it be considered a distinct second stage in the development of moral excellence with experience constituting the third and final stage?

In the first part of this chapter I have touched on the purpose it would make sense to attribute to *phronesis* given Aristotle's account of habituation. Now I would like to explore the concept of *phronesis* further, in particular the two factors Aristotle identifies as essential to its development: namely, moral instruction and experience. First I shall explore the nature of moral instruction and its relation to habituation of the moral virtues; then I shall explore the nature of the experience Aristotle also regards as essential to produce *phronesis*, and consider how it relates to moral instruction.

Moral instruction

I argued earlier that the non-rational process of habituation supplies the first principles or ends of ethics. Now the implication of this is that habituation or 'good upbringing' must precede moral instruction. Burnyeat and Vasilioiu both argue (as indeed, I think, does Aristotle) that the desire to be virtuous must first be engendered by habituation; and Martha Nussbaum makes the point forcefully when she agrees with Aristotle's insistence on 'a firm basis of good character *before* [my italics] the application of philosophical medicine' and hence on 'a sharp distinction between character training and the philosophical study of ethics' (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 318). But then we are faced with the dilemma (or apparent dilemma) highlighted by Bernard Williams, namely that habituation in the first principles of ethics rules out subsequent critical reflection on those principles and thereby renders people powerless to ask themselves the Socratic question 'how should I live?' (Williams,

2006, pp. 38-40). Habituation is, on this argument, little more than mindless conditioning.

We have here two diametrically opposed positions. The first is that habituation or ‘good upbringing’ must *precede* moral instruction because (1) knowledge of ethical first principles or ends can only be apprehended non-rationally (the epistemic argument); and (2) to try to instruct pupils who have not *already* been habituated will, in any case, be futile (the psychological or motivational argument). The second is that habituation, in so far as it is deemed necessary at all, must proceed *pari passu* with moral instruction, because unless accompanied by rational reflection on the first principles or ends of ethics, habituation amounts to little more than mindless conditioning. On the one hand it is argued that without prior habituation, moral instruction is rendered futile; on the other hand, it is argued that *with* prior habituation, moral instruction is rendered futile.

How do we resolve these contradictory positions? For when they are taken at face value, both lines of argument are, I think, persuasive.

At one level, the answer is straightforward, for I think it is fairly clear that there is an element of moral instruction - admittedly highly didactic - from almost the very beginning as the desired behaviour is pointed out and described in simple terms to the young child: ‘don’t pull her hair, it hurts’ or ‘you could share your sweets, couldn’t you’ or ‘that was kind of you, what a good girl’ or even ‘what a horrible thing to do!’ How else would the given behaviour be recognised as right or wrong, as good or bad? And inevitably with description comes explanation; and with explanation comes the invitation to deliberate. As Nancy Sherman notes, the child ‘can legitimately ask “why”, and some description and explanation will be in order’ (Sherman, 1999, p. 243); indeed, the child frequently does ask why – and from quite an early age. Elements of deliberation are therefore involved from quite early on as the child begins to recognise which behaviour will be judged right or wrong in a given situation, and learns to override first impulses. Moreover, as the child begins to consider the feelings of *the other person* as well as their own, we have the

beginnings of deliberation and reflection proper. Inviting the child to consider how the other person would feel or be affected, to consider the consequences of their actions, forms an indispensable part of moral upbringing from almost as soon as they can talk. I think therefore that Kristjan Kristjansson is right when he argues that habituation must involve the cultivation of ‘heightened discrimination’ (Kristjansson, 2006, p. 109) and ‘the training of perceptual capacities’ (p. 113); and Sherman is right when she argues that the emotions ‘cannot be shaped without some simultaneous cultivation of discriminatory abilities’ (Sherman, 1999, p. 243). Habituation is never mindless or mechanical.

In fact, formal moral instruction in the classroom could be regarded as a natural extension and enrichment of this process. The consideration through a study of history and literature of how people, real or imaginary, have exercised the virtues and dealt with conflicting goods and moral ends provides further experience, albeit vicarious (in the sense that deliberation need not issue in action), of exercising practical moral judgement. Once again, habituation and moral instruction - instruction in both the complex nature of our ends and the practical means to attaining those ends - can proceed *pari passu*.

My point here is that the process of habituation of any given set of moral principles or virtues necessarily involves both the experience of having to exercise practical judgement (under the guidance of elders), and moral instruction (both formal and informal). The crucial question is whether moral instruction should, or conceivably could, extend beyond an exploration of the complex nature of socially accepted ethical principles (e.g. universal human rights) and core virtues to the attempt to provide a *rational justification* of those ethical first principles and cultivate in pupils the capacity to *critically reflect* on those principles. It is generally accepted by Aristotelians that the latter is indispensable to the development of full virtue, to the ‘imbuing of virtue with reason’, and that that it belongs to a later, conceptually distinct, stage of moral development. So though, for example, Sherman concedes that Aristotle’s conception of habituation involves critical rather than mechanically repetitive practice (in the sense that it involves attending to a goal, learning from mistakes and being sensitive to circumstances – see Sherman, 1999,

pp.246-8), ‘dialectical reasoning’ and ‘rational justification’ are characteristic only of ‘the mature student’ who has made ‘the transition to full rationality’ (pp. 244-5). Kristjánsson argues in similar terms that though habituation cultivates heightened discrimination, it does not develop the ‘critical conception’ of what the end should be that is required for the development of virtue in its full sense (Kristjánsson, 2006, p. 109).

However, the problem with this view, as we have seen, is twofold.

First, there is the epistemological problem that the first principles of ethics and of ethical action cannot be deduced *ex nihilo* by pure reasoning in the manner of *a priori* axioms. It is only in the context of a socially culturally situated moral tradition that such principles can have any significance. True, it is possible (as I argued in Chapter 1) to deduce certain universal human rights from Kant’s categorical imperatives and use these as the basis of a social contract. But these provide only a framework for ethical behaviour, not the substantial conception of the good and of the virtues that might guide a person’s behaviour in any positive sense.

Second, there is the psychological problem that no motive has been supplied for ethical action. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that a set of ethical first principles could be deduced and rationally justified without any reference to the contingent empirical world - i.e. principles could be deduced that were universally applicable. The problem is that one could only engage in the deduction of such principles (and one would only feel the *need* to engage in the deduction of such principles) if it were possible to adopt a neutral Archimedean perspective; and this would be impossible if there had been a prior stage of habituation in some given set of principles or virtuous dispositions, including the ones one that had been deduced as ethical first principles. The clear implication of the notion that people should have a ‘critical conception’ of their (moral) ends and should be able to rationally justify their ethical principles is that if they find they cannot justify accepted norms, they should reject them; that it is ultimately up to individual to *choose* their ethical principles, their moral codes; that ethical principles of action should be a matter not of habituation but rational choice.

And yet without habituation, without any settled disposition to behave according to any given set of ethical principles, what would be the motive to act on them? The exercise of rational justification remains purely academic - an interesting intellectual exercise for those who feel the need to undertake it, but one that remains detached from the needs, desires, passions, interests and commitments that do motivate our actions. One might act virtuously on occasion, but only if the mood takes one - which is to not act virtuously at all.

Some qualification is perhaps needed at this point. It may well be that a moral tradition evolves over time and that rational argument and critical evaluation of inherited moral norms on the part of politicians and philosophers (and any other interested parties) plays an important part in this. Political or natural events might trigger this re-evaluation, or social and economic change, or the ideas of great thinkers, or some combination of all these things. My point is that it is only when people are habituated in these new or revised values through education and upbringing, and when institutions come to embody them, that moral norms can really be regarded as having changed and the moral tradition as having evolved. There must be a 'sea-change' in the culture. However, the status of the individual actor situated within this tradition is quite different. The notion that he can deduce for himself a comprehensive set of principles of moral behaviour, and then, by some supreme act of will, act on them is fanciful. Prophets have sometimes managed this act of will but their inspiration was quite different. A moral code was revealed to them, usually in a desert or on a mountain top. There was no rational deduction: they were *called* to act by God.

I shall develop this argument concerning the rationality of a moral tradition more fully in Chapter 3. My point here is simply to question the premise shared by nearly all commentators on Aristotle that instruction in the first principles of ethics together with critical reflection on those ends is both feasible and essential if moral virtue is to be rendered intelligent, and that the person who has been 'merely' habituated therefore cannot be virtuous in the fullest sense of the term. Though this is the interpretation of Aristotle, or construction put on Aristotle, that is generally thought to make the most sense, I do not think it goes anywhere near doing justice to the

notion that habituation is, as I have argued, the source of the first principles of ethics and therefore cannot be rationally deduced or justified on *a priori* grounds.

Habituation is not merely a psychological or motivational attachment that, perhaps regrettably, has to be appended to any programme of moral instruction; it is *the central fact* of moral education. It follows, I think, that the very notion that moral development must culminate in the capacity to critically justify ethical first principles or ends, and hence in rational or moral autonomy, is mistaken.

I shall return to the question of moral autonomy in the final section of this chapter and I shall develop my argument further in the next chapter, where I explore what it might mean to be morally or rationally autonomous in the context of a moral tradition; but first I would like to consider the nature of the other element Aristotle regards as essential for the development of *phronesis*: ‘experience’.

Experience

In Book 6, Aristotle’s famously says the following concerning the contribution of experience to *phronesis*:

... although the young develop ability in geometry and mathematics and become wise in such matters, they are not thought to develop prudence. The reason for this is that prudence also involves knowledge of particular facts, which become known from experience; and a young man is not experienced, because experience takes some time to acquire (Aristotle, 1976, p. 215)

and then

... error in deliberation is with reference either to the general principle or to the particular fact (p. 215)

Unfortunately, Aristotle says little else and his emphasis on the lack of experience of the young, which in one sense is merely a truism, leaves us wondering *how* and *when*

the other ingredient of *phronesis* – moral instruction – is to be imparted. He does not elaborate the relation, either conceptual or developmental, between moral instruction and experience; nor does he detail the nature of the experience that would develop *phronesis*. So it is left to later commentators to debate what he meant to say and to fill out the detail.

Now, *phronesis*, as conceived by Aristotle, is meant to be the intellectual virtue that enables us to decide how, when and to what degree the various virtues – the virtues that have already been habituated in us²¹ - are to be exercised in practice. It involves the skill, capacity or ability to recognise the aspects of the situation that are ethically ‘salient’ (a sort of ‘ethical perception’), to deliberate well, and to arrive at a practical judgement concerning the right course of action²². The problem is that Aristotle’s account of how experience contributes to *phronesis* reduces to little more than the truisms ‘practice makes perfect’ and ‘there is no substitute for experience’. There is much wisdom contained here but not enough conceptual substance or empirical detail to justify invoking a general skill, ability or capacity of perceiving ethically salient particulars and deliberating on a right course of action – the putative skill of *phronesis*. And though it is perfectly legitimate to speak in general terms of a person’s ability to make judgements (we might, for example, speak of someone as being ‘of sound judgement’), of their practicality, of their ability to solve problems and even of their wisdom, it does not follow that a unitary ability, capacity, skill or faculty of practical judgement exists or can usefully be identified; even less does it follow that this ability can be trained or cultivated.

The general ability of *phronesis*, as Aristotle conceives it, is supposed to enable us - or consists of enabling us - to recognise what is ethically relevant or salient, to ‘hit the mean’ in action, to make judgements and resolve conflicting ends in both the public or political arena and in our personal lives; but what is the nature of the experience that would foster this capacity? Would any experience do? Our

²¹ ‘... the soil must have been previously tilled’; ‘the mind of the pupil must have been prepared by the cultivation of habits’ (Aristotle, 1996, p. 279).

²² It should be noted that because Aristotle does not recognise the possibility that the virtues could come into conflict (his ‘harmony of the virtues thesis’), *phronesis* must include the ability to judge what to do when faced with (apparently) conflicting ends and moral dilemmas. I return to the question of moral conflict in Chapter 3.

experience of practising the virtues, assuming that suitable opportunities arise, and of exercising practical judgement may not be one from which we can learn very much. We may make the wrong judgements or be accused of bad judgement when things go wrong. How are we supposed to know where we went wrong, particularly when our intentions were good ones and we acted for the best? How are we to know when it was our fault or when it was somebody else's or when it was unforeseeable circumstances that were to blame? After all, perseverance when the going gets tough is usually considered to be a virtue. And even if we do think we have learned from our mistakes, what is to stop us from getting things wrong next time given that each new situation is unique in its particulars? The only thing that can guide us in these circumstances, that we can fall back on, is the bedrock of moral judgement afforded by our habituation in the virtues. When, as MacIntyre argues, we are faced with conflicting goods in a unique set of circumstances in the frame of our own unique life narrative, there may well be no optimal rational solution, no right choice. All we can do is to try to behave virtuously and honourably once we have decided our chosen course of action and to fulfil the commitments we have undertaken:

Yet it is clear that the moral task of the tragic protagonist may be performed better or worse, independently of the choice between alternatives that he or she makes ... The tragic protagonist may behave heroically or unheroically, generously or ungenerously, gracefully or gracelessly, prudently or imprudently. To perform his or her task better rather than worse will be to do both what is better for him or her qua individual and qua parent or child or qua citizen or member of a profession, or perhaps qua some or all of these. (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 224)

Kierkegaard is, I think, making essentially the same point when he argues in *Either/Or* that to act ethically is not so much to make 'the right choice' (because quite often there is no such thing) as to make a choice and commit oneself to it; to fulfil the duties, obligations and responsibilities that arise out of one's chosen path to the best of one's ability:

Here again, you see the importance of choosing, and that which is crucial is not so much deliberation as the baptism of choice by which it is assumed into the ethical. (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 487)

Indeed, the very fact that we do learn from our mistakes creates problems for *phronesis*. It is almost a truism that a central part of experience consists of making mistakes and learning from them, from seeing what works and what does not; and that success in life consists not of exercising perfect judgement but of rebounding from failure and trying again. But where does that leave *phronesis*? Is it then the skill of avoiding such mistakes, exercising perfect judgement, and leading a perfectly integrated and harmonious life; or is it the skill that arises out of having learned from one's mistakes? Neither definition seems very helpful. By contrast, the value of the experience afforded by a process of moral habituation, at home and at school, is precisely that our judgement is guided and that our mistakes are pointed out to us by those responsible for our upbringing and our education. We are not left to our own devices, as we are to a great extent in adult life - though, admittedly, neither are we likely to be confronted with the great choices and dilemmas that characterise our lives as independent adults.

Moreover, why do we think that ethical experience and judgement in one field will translate into ethical experience and judgement in a quite different field? Isn't it in the very nature of experience of ethical particulars that the experience is to some extent particular to the field in question – for example, to teaching, medicine, law, soldiering, business or mountaineering?²³ And isn't the ethical knowledge of any given field or practice contingent in turn on a degree of general knowledge and understanding, both practical and theoretical, of that field or practice? And doesn't the engagement in practices of one sort or another constitute a large part of our lives? One could argue that it is precisely through a process of initiation into a practice that the frame is provided in which moral instruction and experience are, under the watchful eyes of the master or expert practitioner, able to reinforce each other, and in

²³ A parallel argument can be made against the proposition that subject specific knowledge can be replaced, or made redundant, by general, all-purpose thinking skills.

which right judgement and the will (or motivation) to act well are simultaneously cultivated.²⁴

But if ethical judgement results from experience and moral instruction proceeding *pari passu*, the one reinforcing and explicating the other, it seems that habituation has accomplished the whole task of moral education. First we have upbringing and schooling, in which a general habituation in moral virtue is accomplished through the concurrent process of experience (i.e. the repeated perception and experience of ends that are socially and culturally validated) and moral instruction; and then we have the habituation of ethical judgement and further refinement of moral virtue through initiation into specific practices (which begins at school and continues into adult life), where, again, experience and moral instruction proceed concurrently. On this argument, it makes no sense to conceive *phronesis* as a distinct conceptual stage of moral development set apart from habituation and from the moral instruction that necessarily accompanies it.

The elusive nature of *phronesis* when it is conceived independently of moral habituation is, I think, strikingly illustrated in Daniel Russell's account (perhaps the definitive one) in *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (2009). Russell notes that *phronesis* 'is not a monolithic virtue of the practical intellect, but includes an array of more practical capacities' (Russell, 2009, p. 20) and then sets out to elaborate what these practical capacities or virtues might be. In particular, he notes of the element of *nous*²⁵ in *phronesis* that it involves

... developed problem-solving ability resulting from experience, and is no more 'intuitive' than the problem-solving abilities of builders, physicians and other technical experts ... Such abilities are analogous to those that differentiate an experienced builder from an apprentice, say ... good patterns of deliberation become habitual and automatic. After all, skills that require complex reasoning and deliberation, such as carpentry or medicine, can with experience take the shape of settled problem-solving abilities that function automatically. (pp. 22-3)

²⁴ I explore MacIntyre's conception of a practice in more detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

²⁵ *Nous* is usually translated as 'intelligence'.

But as to the precise nature of the instruction or experience that would produce this developed problem-solving ability and that would therefore contribute to the general capacity to weigh up conflicting ends and to specify the appropriate ends that *phronesis* demands, Russell is silent. All we are left with is the analogy with initiation (i.e. habituation) into specific practices. Russell goes on to note that *phronesis* is more than the sum of the various practical virtues since ‘it grasps a broad conception of human goods and ends’ (p. 24). But, again, how such a grasp might be developed and the nature of the moral instruction and experience that would be needed to grasp this broader conception is not elaborated.

I would argue that it is only through initiation into practices, together with a process of general moral habituation at home and school, that a person can come to recognise virtues, values, goods and ends, along with the conflicts that might arise between rival ends. There is no ‘skill’ of integrating one’s diverse activities and engagements in practices into a perfectly coherent and harmonious whole; it is only by enduring the hard vicissitudes of life, guided so far as possible by the virtues and our experience of exercising them, that we can come to understand what, for us as individuals, might constitute ‘a good life’.

Phronesis and autonomy

In what sense then – if any – can *phronesis* be usefully defined or conceived? I have argued in this chapter that *phronesis* is simply the capacity to exercise practical judgement (i.e. to apply moral principles and be guided by the virtues), and that it is cultivated by a concurrent process of habit formation and moral instruction (both formal and informal) that takes the form, first, of general schooling and upbringing, and second, of initiation into various practices. It is by means of this initiation into a moral and cultural inheritance that a person cultivates the capacity to make practical judgements within the frame of a moral tradition. However, because it is no more than the outcome of this process of moral training, it is a moot point whether or not *phronesis* should itself be termed a virtue. I would dispute that there is some putative unitary skill, capacity or ability of leading a good life, engaging in ethical perception,

resolving moral conflict and balancing conflicting goods²⁶, because I cannot see what prior experience or instruction could rehearse a person for living the life of an independent adult; nor can I see how a person could conceive the nature of ‘the good life’ for them in advance of the lived experience of pursuing and realising various goods in the course of their adult life – except that they do know it involves exercising the virtues. *Phronesis* is not an architectonic intellectual virtue, rather, merely, the capacity to exercise the moral virtues – a capacity (or skill or ability) that improves and is progressively developed with practice.

However, much more is generally attributed to *phronesis* by those working in the Aristotelian tradition than that a person is able to exercise ethical judgement (or practical reason) and act virtuously. Yes, it is argued, habituation is the starting point of moral education, and Aristotle’s emphasis on motivation and the cultivation of right desire is fully justified; but *phronesis* is the culmination because with it comes the capacity of individuals not merely to act out of habit but to deliberate about ends, which in turn entails the capacity *to critically justify their principles, values and beliefs*. If *phronesis* enables problems, conflicts and dilemmas to be resolved, it is *on account of* this critical capacity and the theoretical understanding of one’s principles, values and beliefs that is thereby gained.

Kristjansson exemplifies this general approach when he argues that the person who has been ‘merely’ habituated cannot be regarded as virtuous in the fullest sense of the term because he does not yet understand the ethical first principles that justify moral virtue as the supreme good, and therefore cannot apply these principles critically in practice; and that only a study of the underlying moral theory together with its practical implications (detailed by Aristotle in *The Nicomachean Ethics*) will reveal these principles - a study that, along with the relevant experience, is central to the development of *phronesis*. Aristotle has, after all, provided ‘a fully fledged moral theory about happiness (*eudaimonia*) as the ultimate good and unconditional end of human beings’ (Kristjansson, 2006, p. 112) - a theory, moreover, in which Aristotle

²⁶ I shall consider the nature of moral conflict and the heterogeneous nature of goods in more detail in Chapter 3.

has demonstrated that it is an empirical fact that the moral virtues are essential to our own good. Hence

With the development of *phronesis*, a qualitative transition from the mere ‘that’ of ethics to the ‘why’ takes place. In other words, the new *phronimoi* perfect and perhaps partly revise their perceptions of the ‘that’ in light of their grasp of the explanatory first principles of ethics, thus reaching the final stage of moral development. (p. 110)

So for Kristjánsson, as for most commentators, Aristotle’s account of ethical development culminates in the *phronimos* who has reached the state of moral excellence. By contrast, the initial stage of moral development is that in which a person (probably a young child, but it could also apply to an adult) is ‘impenetrable to the voice of reason’ and ‘the only teaching method in moral education from which they can learn is habituation’ (2007, p. 20).

This notion that *phronesis* involves an understanding of first principles, which necessarily involves the capacity to critically justify them, could be seen as reflecting a wider concern among philosophers (especially evident among philosophers of education) to promote rational and moral autonomy. The notion of ‘moral autonomy’ is usually associated with Kantian self-determination of the will by appeal to pure reason; but it might be used in a more general sense to describe the capacity of a person to critically justify, and if necessary re-formulate, their first principles, values and beliefs by adopting (in some sense) a rational standpoint outside the moral tradition in which they have been habituated. Moral autonomy in this more general sense merges with ‘personal autonomy’, the notion that a person should be able to choose on rational grounds their principles, values and beliefs. In arguing for the cultivation of the critical capacity of *phronesis*, for ‘critical virtue’, Kristjánsson’s position is not really that far from the position of Christine Korsgaard, the prominent Kantian. Korsgaard writes that we are essentially self-conscious beings who reflect on our perceptions, thoughts and desires; and it is precisely our need to submit our perceptions, desires and impulses to ‘reflective scrutiny’ – to justify our actions and desires to act with reasons – that is constitutive of our moral nature (Korsgaard,

1996, pp. 92-3). The motives for our actions must be ‘transparent’: we must be able to justify the claims which morality makes on us ourselves as individuals (i.e. from the ‘first-person’ position or standpoint) and hence ‘act in the full light of knowledge of what morality is and ... believe that our actions are justified’ (pp. 16-17). David Bakhurst writes in a similar vein, though he differs from Korsgaard in grounding rational autonomy in enculturation rather than in the self-determining law of a free will (The Moral Law). For Bakhurst, we must reflectively endorse the beliefs and values we have inherited (Bakhurst, 2011, p. 151), subject them to ‘critical scrutiny’ (p. 76) and thereby make them our own. Only then are we free – free in the sense of being rational and autonomous.

I think, however, that all these views are profoundly mistaken. As I have argued in this chapter, the first principles of ethics cannot be rationally deduced *a priori* as universal principles but are publicly constituted; they necessarily form part of a social, cultural and linguistic tradition; and moral instruction and experience only have significance when considered part of a process of habituation into this tradition. Moreover, since there is no optimal solution to moral conflict, to the balancing of heterogeneous goods, an ethical or moral life is not so much the life of a person who engages in rational deliberation by applying certain general underlying moral principles as the life of a person who virtuously discharges the duties, obligations and commitments they have undertaken. In any case, as I shall argue in Chapters 3 and 4, it is only by engaging in practices within the unique context of an individual life that the goods of practices can be accessed, and therefore that the nature of the possible conflicts between ‘rival’ goods can be appreciated. On this argument, the notion that *phronesis* can be conceived as an all-purpose moral conflict-resolving capacity is even less plausible. In fact, it is in the nature of a moral and cultural tradition (I have in mind a tradition that is broadly liberal and secular as opposed to totalitarian or theocratic) that it encompasses people’s experience of pursuing heterogeneous goods and coping with moral conflict and moral dilemmas. There is no need to find a standpoint outside the tradition.

And yet notions of rational autonomy, moral autonomy and personal autonomy are central to our conception of what it means to be a citizen in a free society, and

are often held to be central to the aims of education. Can we simply discard them? A much more convincing account of the notion of autonomy is, I think, the one elaborated by Michael Bonnett and Stefaan Cuypers. They argue that instead of trying to conceive autonomy in terms of self-determination or rational choice, it makes more sense to root it in notions of authenticity, personal identity and ‘true self-expression’:

Things matter to us in relation to our authentic concerns, that is, those concerns for the expression of which we are willing to accept personal responsibility, and that constitute our sense of our own existence. It is only by expressing them and feeling the world’s response, either actually or through acts of imagination, that we discover what our thoughts really mean and what the world means to us. In this way we can come to understand our feelings and beliefs, and the things we have learned, in terms of our sense of our own existence (Bonnett & Cuypers, 2003, pp. 330-1).

I am arguing in this chapter (the argument will be more fully developed in the next two chapters) that the autonomy and authenticity Bonnett and Cuypers speak of can only be cultivated in the context of a moral tradition and its component practices, and in the context of an individual life led (and life narrative formed) within the frame of this tradition. And this is the antithesis of the notion that a person can make practical judgements and resolve moral conflict by applying certain ethical first principles - principles that a person can articulate and justify, principles that enable a person to adopt an impartial standpoint from which to adjudicate rival goods. Where I disagree with Bonnett and Cuypers is in their concluding that we need ‘education for authentic development’, education in which the content of the curriculum is determined by the ‘interplay’ of teacher and learner, and in which teachers are facilitators of ‘authentic learning’ (p. 339). The conclusion I would draw is that in order for pupils to learn how to truly express themselves as adults and lead worthwhile lives, they need to be prepared for initiation into a variety of practices – practices that taken together constitute a moral tradition, and the engagement in which is central to living a worthwhile life. On this account, education would aim to prepare pupils for their initiation into such practices, and educational activities might themselves take the form of practices into which pupils are initiated.

In Chapter 3, then, I shall argue that moral development is best conceived as a process of initiation into an evolving moral tradition, a tradition carried on by a moral community comprising families, schools and a variety of institutions and practices. I shall consider the circumstances in which a moral tradition can be rationally justified and how rational reflection can be carried on within that tradition, and so address another of the key objections to Aristotle's ethical theory, namely the 'relativist' charge that it validates the *status quo*, that any tradition, however objectionable, can thereby be justified. In Chapter 4, I shall specifically consider the nature of the goods of practices – goods that are central to a flourishing life. I shall also argue that to have moral knowledge or understanding and to be able to make moral judgements need not involve the articulation of moral principles but rather a kind of moral sympathy or intuition; and therefore that to lead a good life and to be a good citizen need not necessitate the engagement in moral philosophy. In Part 2 of this thesis, I shall explore how educational activities might themselves be conceived as practices into which pupils are initiated.

Concluding note

I would like to conclude this chapter by returning to *phronesis*. I have argued that *phronesis* cannot usefully be conceived, even in some idealised form, as an architectonic intellectual virtue incorporating all forms of practical judgement, because it is impossible to specify the nature of the experience and moral instruction that might produce it in practice. Even a lifetime's experience would be insufficient; one would need, rather, the experience of *all the lives* it is possible to live. However, it is possible to conceive *phronesis* in the more restricted sense of 'political judgement', with politics the practice or 'master-craft' in which it is cultivated. Traditionally, the art of politics was taught to pupils not through the academic discipline of political science but through the art of rhetoric. Rhetoric is usually defined nowadays as the art of persuasive speaking - as in one sense it is; but I shall argue in Part 2 that rhetoric involved something much more substantial than this. It aimed to cultivate the capacity to make practical judgements on human affairs, both

public and private; in other words, it aimed to cultivate *phronesis*. However to achieve this end, it did not try to produce moral or political philosophers versed in the first principles of their respective subjects; rather it aimed to ground pupils in the subject matter of the humanities, particularly history and literature, whose stories of human experience represent a compendium of all the lives it is possible to live and all the moral dilemmas it is possible to face, and thereby provide ethical and psychological insight into human behaviour, human needs and the nature of the moral dilemmas that might be encountered within the tradition. It achieved its ends by initiating into a moral and cultural tradition or inheritance, not by trying to discover an external standpoint from which to adjudicate on moral questions and moral conflicts by appeal to pure reason.

Though the experience afforded by rhetoric of making practical and political judgements is necessarily vicarious, founded as it is not on first-hand experience but on the experience of others, it is experience of a sort. And so though in this chapter I have questioned the value of conceiving *phronesis* as an architectonic intellectual virtue, I shall argue in Part 2 that we have in rhetorical training the makings of a practice that might help cultivate practical judgement - a sort of *phronesis* - after all.

3

The rationality of traditions

In the last chapter, I examined Aristotle's account of moral development, noted the confusion surrounding the respective places of habituation and *phronesis* in this account, and concluded that moral development is best conceived as a process of habituation into a moral and cultural tradition or inheritance. On this argument, *phronesis* is not the critical capacity of a morally autonomous being, but simply the capacity of a person to exercise the virtues in practice - a capacity that is the natural outcome of a process of moral habituation that involves both moral instruction and guided experience. However, I have yet to answer the objection that any system of values, however objectionable, can thereby be justified; that the moral and cultural inheritance in question might well be abhorrent.

In this chapter, I shall try to answer this objection. I shall consider in more detail the nature of moral traditions and argue that for citizens to be able to reflect individually and collectively on their beliefs and values, the necessary condition is not some putative personal autonomy (autonomy in the sense that individuals are able to critically evaluate and choose their moral principles and values) but that the tradition and its component practices have the capacity to evolve, the precondition of which is *a free society*. However, citizens must have been initiated – and therefore or habituated - into the practices that make up that moral tradition in the first place. Similarly, the necessary condition for being able to deal with moral conflict and choose between heterogeneous goods is not the possession of a putative external standpoint from which to adjudicate between rival goods but to have been initiated into the moral and cultural tradition that mediates these goods; for it is only within the frame of this tradition and its practices that its characteristic goods and nature of the conflicts between them can be understood. In making these arguments, I shall attempt to answer the charge that moral habituation is antithetical to rational reflection on moral values, that it serves merely to perpetuate the moral and political *status quo*.

It is all very well to argue that the culmination of moral development and therefore the principal aim of education is personal autonomy, the capacity to subject one's values and beliefs to critical scrutiny and to make rational choices. But in what sense and with reference to what criteria *could* critical reflection on ethical principles evoke an extra-ethical justification (or rejection) of those principles? For an individual acculturated in a tradition and habituated in its values, it is, I shall argue, simply not intelligible to speak of stepping outside that tradition in order to assume an extra-ethical Archimedean standpoint¹ from which to make inter-cultural comparisons and critical judgements. The traditions that mediate our ethical values – let us call them moral traditions - and into which we are habituated are, I shall argue in this chapter, not arbitrary restraints or impositions but generally speaking have evolved over a lengthy period of time in response to people's collective needs², their circumstances, and their perceptions of the world and their place in it – perceptions which, of course, moral traditions serve in part to form. The ethical principles that underlie a moral tradition can never be justified by appeal to reason alone because the source of the original premises or *archai* on which any such justification or argument must ultimately rest, is some shared conception (and perception) of human needs and ends on the part of people who are socially, culturally and historically situated, and whose nature is, in part, biologically determined (i.e. determined by evolutionary forces). It is precisely this shared empirically determined conception of 'the good', of what might constitute 'a good life', which is embodied in a moral tradition. Moreover, if, as Aristotle believes, it is an empirical fact, a fact of human nature, that there exists a set of substantive virtues both conducive to and constitutive of *eudaimonia*, the ultimate human good or *telos*, then the moral tradition that mediates these virtues can also legitimately be regarded as empirically founded – and, in that sense, rationally justified.

Nevertheless, moral and cultural traditions (along with human nature and human needs, goods and ends) do evolve, and therefore the processes of critical reflection and rational justification must, presumably, have a role. If non-rational habituation

¹ An objective vantage point from which something can be observed in its totality.

² By human needs, I mean the need for sustenance in all its forms – material, emotional, psychological and spiritual; not merely the need to satisfy appetitive desires. People's collective needs and ends might even be characterised as incorporating an *ethos* and a *telos*.

were the only source of ethical knowledge and practice, there would be no change, no evolution, and no escape from inherited norms - from the *status quo*. The argument I would like to develop in this chapter is that the sort of rational reflection that contributes to the evolution of a moral tradition and the re-habituating of people's values is not that of an individual exercising his rational autonomy and coming up with new principles and theories *ex nihilo*, but rather of people collectively engaging in practices – for example, in moral philosophy and politics - over a substantial period of time; and the pre-requisite for participating in such practices is precisely to have been initiated – and therefore habituated – into their characteristic modes of thought. For example, profound changes in attitudes over the past hundred years towards women and ethnic and religious minorities have been provoked in large part by rational argument and protest on the part of certain individuals; but it is only when new ethical principles are legitimated as moral norms through a transformation of the wider political culture and its institutions, and through a re-habituating of people's values (in large part through education), that it is possible to speak of the evolution of a moral tradition.

To make sense of the process by which a moral and cultural tradition and its component practices evolve, I shall argue that it is important to make a conceptual distinction between two kinds of engagement in practices: 'normal' or 'ordinary' engagement, in which practitioners work within the frame of the accepted 'paradigm'; and 'revolutionary' or 'critical' engagement, in which practitioners question the paradigm and engage in radical innovation - which is much rarer.

The rationality of a tradition

The notion that rationality must be conceived, in some sense, as situated within a tradition has been argued by – among others - Gadamer, Wittgenstein, Oakeshott and MacIntyre; and in philosophy of science, Popper and Kuhn have also argued it. For Hans-Georg Gadamer, our rationality is irretrievably grounded in 'historically effected consciousness' (Gadamer, 2003, p. 340). A state of perfect enlightenment is chimerical because understanding is essentially a hermeneutic experience in which

truth is something asserted by a linguistic, cultural and historical tradition in the course of the tradition being understood (p. 486). The tradition, practice or conversation involves a whole series of reciprocal dialectical relationships between subject and object, subject matter and language, present and past, and question and answer (pp. 373-9). For Michael Oakeshott, it is ‘only in the practice of an activity that we can acquire the knowledge of how to practise it’ (Oakeshott, 1991, p. 121) and this means that questions and problems can themselves only be formulated from within the activity - they must ‘spring from the activity itself’ (p. 121). To behave rationally, then, is ‘to behave appropriately in the circumstances’ (p. 121), which means to be faithful to the tradition and its idiom, and to exhibit ‘the knowledge of how to behave well that belongs to our way of living’ (p. 130). Oakeshott’s analysis, though it is not derived from hermeneutics, thus closely parallels Gadamer’s.

Interestingly, Karl Popper and Thomas Kuhn have argued that essentially the same view of rationality holds in the natural sciences. For Popper, the knowledge, values and norms of science can be regarded as objective, not in any Platonic sense (there is always the possibility that they may be falsified – at least if the knowledge is empirically founded), but simply by virtue of their being publicly validated within a tradition: ‘It is ... the public character of science and of its institutions which imposes a mental discipline upon the individual scientist, and which preserves the objectivity of science and its tradition of critically discussing new ideas’ (Popper, 1986, pp. 155-6)³. Thomas Kuhn’s notion of a ‘paradigm’ is also tradition-based. Kuhn argues that a paradigm ‘stands for the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the members of a given community’ (Kuhn, 1996, p. 175). Central to Kuhn’s thesis in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996) is the notion that ‘normal science’ can only be carried on within the confines of the paradigms that constitute the current orthodoxy; in other words, without the orthodoxy, there is no science.

Alasdair MacIntyre’s account in *After Virtue* (1985) of the internal goods of practices and the rationality of traditions is particularly germane to this thesis

³ Paul Hirst makes the same point in justifying his ‘forms of knowledge’ thesis: ‘our experiences become structured around the use of accepted public symbols’ (Hirst, 1974, p. 44).

because though it parallels the accounts of Gadamer and Oakeshott in many respects, it is the only one framed explicitly in Aristotelian terms of habituation (or initiation) and of a shared conception the good. However, when it comes to explaining how traditions evolve and to elucidating the nature of the critical reflection and rational justification that are involved, I think that Kuhn's formulation of the rationality of a tradition in terms of its 'paradigm' and his distinction between normal and revolutionary science is the more illuminating. I shall therefore be making particular reference to MacIntyre and Kuhn as I develop the main argument of this chapter.

I shall draw on MacIntyre's account in three important respects in my account of the nature of rational reflection and rational justification: first, that the goods and virtues cultivated within a practice can only be accessed by initiation into that practice; second, that practices embody a living tradition of enquiry in part constituted by 'a continuous argument' as to the nature of the goods 'the purpose of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose' (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 222)⁴; and thirdly, that the sum of the set of shared beliefs, institutions and practices of a given community constitutes a moral tradition, which necessarily forms 'the locus of rational enquiry' - in other words, rational inquiry and reasoned argument can only be conducted by people initiated into and situated within a given moral tradition. The pivotal concept here, I think, is that goods and virtues are internal to the practice in question and constitute ends-in-themselves; that to be initiated into a practice is to undergo an apprenticeship, to submit oneself to the authority of a tradition, and in so doing gain access to the skills, knowledge and standards of excellence that constitute the tradition, as well as develop the virtues (justice, courage and honesty, for example) that both enable us to achieve and are partially constitutive of these goods. All the rest follows from this. And though it is not entirely clear which activities or engagements should count as practices, MacIntyre's conception of human flourishing in terms of the initiation into practices is, I think, a very fruitful one, and accurately reflects our experience of what it is to be, or of what is involved in becoming, a practitioner in any given field.⁵

⁴ The same point is made, as we have seen, by Gadamer and Oakeshott.

⁵ In Chapter 4, I shall explore in more detail the nature of practices and their goods.

However, MacIntyre's notion that a living tradition of inquiry is in part constituted by 'a continuous argument' as to the nature of its goods is a puzzling one given the role he also attributes to internal goods and to initiation on the apprenticeship model. It could be taken to imply that a moral tradition and its practices are in a continuous state of flux; that initiates are engaged in a continual process of critical evaluation and rational justification of underlying goods, principles and values in order that these may be 'reflectively endorsed'. And yet I think it is perfectly clear that the sort of reflection and criticism envisaged by MacIntyre is not that of the rationally autonomous actor adopting some external standpoint but that of the person initiated into the practice applying internally validated standards of judgement and discrimination. What, then, is the nature of the argument, reflection, criticism and innovation that must be carried on if a moral tradition and its component practices are to evolve; that would enable liberal values and human rights to be fostered, as opposed to the abhorrent values that often characterise totalitarian regimes; and yet that does not assume rational or moral autonomy as a foundational principle? In what sense need the argument be a continuous one? Need all practitioners be involved in it all of the time? And if practitioners are agreed on the nature of the inquiry and its goods, and are fruitfully engaged in applying agreed theoretical principles to practical problems, why would an argument need to be carried on at all?

To answer these questions, we might begin with MacIntyre's own assertion in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* that the rationality of traditions has its roots not in 'self-sufficient, self-justifying epistemological first principles' (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 360) but in contingent historical conditions - in 'some condition of pure historical contingency, from the beliefs, institutions, and practices of some particular community which constitutes a given' (p. 354). Even when the adherents of a tradition come to adopt certain truths as 'first metaphysical or practical principles', these principles, argues MacIntyre, will themselves be understood to require a rational justification that is 'at once dialectical and historical' (p. 360). The argument is, I think, a plausible one and seems to fit with our experience of a range of practices that incorporate rival traditions of thought. For example, philosophers will often refer to themselves as Kantian, Hegelian, Wittgensteinian or Marxist for this

very reason, just as economists will often refer to themselves as working within the Keynesian, classical or Marxist traditions. Much of the argument in these subjects takes the form of continuing debate between adherents of these rival traditions and is rooted in differing perceptions of human nature and historical experience – and so we have ‘a continuous argument’ as to the nature of the goods involved. And yet there cannot be rival traditions of thought in the first place without a parent discipline of which certain modes of inquiry, certain standards and norms, certain central questions and an agreed body of knowledge are recognised as definitive. Practitioners cannot ally themselves to any one tradition within the discipline without having first been initiated into the discipline⁶. Moreover, it is because a disciplinary practice encompasses rival schools of thought that it is important that those who would make a contribution are first initiated into the standards, norms, knowledge and accepted modes of inquiry – both those that are accepted and those that are disputed - of the practice. Otherwise, they have no means of appraising rival claims and stand merely to be indoctrinated. As Richard Rorty notes, even the revolutionary or prophet must have first been acculturated, because ‘abnormal and “existential” discourse is always parasitic upon normal discourse’ (Rorty, 1979, p. 365).

However, not all practices encompass rival schools of thought - at least not to this degree. Obvious examples are the natural sciences (except at the very frontiers of knowledge), applied sciences, craft practices and professions. It is unclear why doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses, plumbers and craftsmen, or even research scientists, should feel the need to engage continually - or even to engage at all - in critical inquiry into the goods of their respective practices; even less that they should question the overarching moral tradition.⁷

⁶ For example, Marx had the highest regard for the classical economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo, without whose analysis and analytical tools (the concept of surplus value was developed by Ricardo) he would not have been able to develop his own critique in *Das Kapital*. Even Kant, who deduced his transcendental *a priori* propositions from pure reason, worked within a broad philosophical tradition and famously acknowledged his debt to David Hume for waking him from his ‘dogmatic slumber’ (Kant, 1977, p. 5).

⁷ See appendix for some reflections on why most teachers are not engaged in critical enquiry – and why they need not be so engaged.

A conception of ‘the rationality of a tradition’ that does not require practitioners to engage in continuous argument as to the nature of the goods (moral or otherwise) of the tradition or practice, and yet explains how traditions evolve – even how revolutions are possible – is Thomas Kuhn’s in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996). Though, as its title suggests, Kuhn’s thesis concerns natural science, much of the argument can, I think, be generalised to apply to other traditions, practices and disciplines. Central to Kuhn’s thesis is the notion that ‘normal science’ can only be carried on within the confines of the paradigms that constitute the current orthodoxy. Certain theories, notes Kuhn, *must* become generally accepted as paradigms – as ‘some implicit body of intertwined theoretical and methodological belief’ – because otherwise the scientific community lacks any basis for the selection, evaluation and criticism of factual evidence; one is left merely with a ‘morass’ of facts that ‘seem equally relevant’ (Kuhn, 1996, pp. 15-17). In fact, the paradigm *simultaneously supplies the tools to solve recognised problems within the discipline and defines the problems that might be solved*. In which case, whole periods are characterised not by ‘continuous argument’ as to the nature of the paradigm or the goods of the practice but by orthodoxy and normality, and by progress produced by the application of accepted theory to practical problems - ‘normal puzzle-solving research’ - across a range of fronts (p. 179). Whole periods are characterised by activity carried out within the frame of the paradigm; indeed, it is the paradigm that enables progress to be made. The paradigm change associated with scientific revolution is therefore the exception rather than the rule. However, when revolution does occur, when a new paradigm replaces the old, it is not because the old paradigm and its constituent theories are suddenly proved false and an alternative paradigm proved true, but rather because two conditions obtain. First, the old paradigm proves increasingly unable to explain newly observed observations and does so to such a degree (for there are nearly always some anomalies) that it loses the confidence of the scientific community; and second, an alternative paradigm is available (usually the invention of a person of exceptional imagination and creative power - i.e. a scientist of genius) which can better explain the empirical evidence and provides a more promising basis for future research in the eyes of the scientific community.

Now, Kuhn's account is controversial. There are many lines of criticism, perhaps most notably that by arguing against the notion that scientists make steady progress toward some objective truth, toward a theory that is a better representation of 'what nature is really like' (rather than a better paradigm is simply a better instrument for discovering and solving the puzzles of normal science), Kuhn is subscribing to some sort of relativism - a charge that he, of course, refutes. But I do not think these particularly affect the argument I am trying to develop in this chapter. The criticism that does bear on my argument is that Kuhn over-dramatises the distinction between normal and revolutionary science; that the conceptual change Kuhn characterises as revolutionary and as involving a dramatic shift in paradigm is evolutionary in nature. This line of argument is particularly associated with Stephen Toulmin, who argues that this evolution takes the form of a continual process of innovation and selection, of frequent revision rather than episodic revolution, and of conceptual change rather than 'paradigm-switches' (see Toulmin, 1972, Chapter 1, especially pp. 98-130).⁸ A full discussion of the 'revolution or evolution' question is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the very nature of the controversy and the vast body of critical comment (both for and against) that has been generated and continues to be generated forty years on, suggests in itself that there is truth in both the evolutionary and the revolutionary positions; or to put it another way, that 'normal science' is more innovative than Kuhn takes it to be, and revolutionary paradigm change is more evolutionary in nature.

However, there are I think certain insights contained in Kuhn's thesis that might command more general assent, and that are particularly relevant to the argument I wish to develop here. The first and most important is that for scientific research and applied science to be carried on at all, there must be a generally accepted paradigm – or conceptual system - within which scientists can assess the facts that are relevant, accumulate a body of knowledge and theory, build on previous research, formulate research questions and assess the empirical evidence. Kuhn argues that a shared paradigm or 'disciplinary matrix' involves, in addition, the use of symbolic

⁸ 'Instead of a revolutionary account of intellectual change, which sets out to show how entire 'conceptual systems' [paradigms] succeed one another, we therefore need to construct an evolutionary account, which explains how 'conceptual populations' come to be progressively transformed' (p. 122).

generalizations, beliefs in particular models that supply scientists ‘with preferred or permissible analogies and metaphors’ (Kuhn, 1996, p. 184), standards involved in making predictions, conducting experiments and judging theories, and the tacit knowledge imparted through scientific education (pp. 180-191). The second is that scientists are likely to become dissatisfied with a paradigm when, and only when, it ceases to be of value as a frame within which to carry out research. So long as new observations and experimental findings can be accommodated within the paradigm, so long as it has explanatory value, research can be carried on and there is no need for paradigm change – for ‘scientific revolution’. The third, which largely follows on from the first two, is that most scientific research, most of the time, consists of better articulating and applying the paradigm rather than of questioning it with a view to replacing it; in other words, it does not involve *radical* innovation. The fourth is that radical innovation, whether it contributes to ‘paradigm change’ or concerns the application of existing theory to practical problems, is generally-speaking produced by scientists of exceptional imagination and creative power.

It is in the sense conveyed by these insights that Kuhn’s account of the rationality of a tradition is, I think, more illuminating than MacIntyre’s in shedding light on how a tradition evolves. True, MacIntyre describes the possibility of ‘epistemological crisis’ afflicting an entire moral tradition (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 361); the possibility of circumstances in which the dominant beliefs of a tradition cannot any longer adequately explain the facts of reality (the empirical facts); the possibility that a rival or alien tradition is seen to better explain these and is therefore superior in its truth claims, its ‘standards of rational justification’ (p. 365); and he proposes that because the claims of a rival tradition are not accessible from within the tradition faced with crisis, ‘imaginative conceptual innovation’ (p. 362) is needed for radically new concepts and theories to be devised. There are clear points in common here with Kuhn’s thesis of paradigm change. But Kuhn, I think, better describes the periods of normality in between and gives actual substance to the notion of epistemological crisis.

It may well be that Kuhn’s thesis does not apply in every respect to every practice; and, as I have noted, Kuhn’s thesis is controversial in philosophy of

science. Nevertheless I think there are two things in particular we can take from it that illuminate the nature of the rationality of a tradition and the goods of a practice, and therefore that are relevant to the argument of this thesis. First, that those working within a tradition or practice, even if they are researchers (as opposed to those engaged in professional practice, in the application of existing knowledge and skills), will generally not be engaged in reformulating or critically justifying the underlying principles, values and goods of their tradition or practice; they simply have no need – indeed, it would be counterproductive for them to attempt to do so. Second, that those who are engaged in reformulating a paradigm that better explains the empirical evidence are usually people of exceptional talent and imagination. On both counts, the notion that the individual *must* be rationally and morally autonomous, that he *must* be engaged independently in the critical justification of his values, beliefs and first principles, and that he *must* be involved in a continuous argument as to the nature of the goods of the practices in which he is engaged, must be rejected.

It also follows, I think, that the person who *is* so intellectually engaged, perhaps because of the nature of the practice in which they are involved (the academic disciplines of philosophy and politics are obvious examples), and perhaps because they have the intellectual capacity and the sort of personality that would cause them to *want* to be so engaged, is not by mere virtue of that fact morally superior to the person who is not – superior either in the sense of being a fully fledged morally autonomous citizen or in the sense of leading the flourishing life that only the person endowed with moral and rational autonomy could lead.

I shall return to this question of ‘the value of an unexamined life’ in the next chapter. First, however, I would like to consider another argument commonly adduced in favour of personal and moral autonomy.

Competing ends and moral conflict

I have argued in the last section that it is not possible for a person to stand outside a tradition and critically reflect on its values, and I have attempted to do this by invoking the notion that rationality is internal to a tradition and its practices, that initiation into the tradition is required if the goods of the tradition are to be accessed at all, and that the tradition (or paradigm) provides the frame that makes inquiry possible in the first place. But the case for the rational and moral autonomy of the individual might still be argued in this sense: without personal autonomy and the capacity to engage in critical reflection, how is the individual to choose between competing ends, to judge which ends are relevant or should be given priority in any given situation, and so resolve moral conflict – conflict that might occur within the frame of a given practice or between the rival goods of different practices, whether in public affairs or in the private affairs of an individual? This was supposed to be the great virtue of *phronesis*: that it would enable such deliberation in matters both public and private.

The argument is put forcefully by David Wiggins. An individual must deliberate about his ends because there is very often no way of separating deliberation about means from deliberation about ends: our ends rarely come ready-specified or hierarchically ordered; the ends or ‘concerns’ (as Wiggins terms them) that are relevant in any given situation may not be obvious at all; our concerns may make ‘competing and inconsistent claims’; and even when the concerns do seem clear, there may be no satisfactory means for promoting them. All of this suggests that we are involved in a continual process of evaluating and re-evaluating our concerns, interests and ends (Wiggins, 1980, pp. 232-5). But is this actually the experience of people in their daily lives? One could argue that it is part and parcel of normal life for an individual to have to assess priorities, to choose between rival ends or goods, but that this need not (and generally does not) involve calling into question the underlying values or virtues in which they have been habituated; rather that this process can be accommodated within the bounds of the moral tradition and its practices as they stand. In any case, it is I think doubtful that most people are

involved in a continual process of evaluating and re-evaluating their concerns, interests and ends because the same sorts of conflicts and dilemmas reoccur in the familiar contexts of work and family life; and to have been initiated into a practice - to be professionally competent - is to be able with relative ease to resolve the sorts of problems and conflicts one faces at work and at home. By contrast, the circumstances and situations that might lead a person to call into question their core values and beliefs are exceptional (I shall consider these shortly).

I think, therefore, that Wiggins goes a step too far when he speaks of ‘the indeterminate character of our ideals’ as ‘constitutive of human freedom’; he places too great an evaluative burden on the ‘situational appreciation’ of the *phronimos*, the ‘man of highest practical wisdom’ (p. 234). He speaks of the latter as the man who ‘brings to bear upon a situation the greatest number of genuinely pertinent concerns and genuinely relevant considerations commensurate with the deliberative context’ (p. 234), but how is a person to judge whether an ethical concern or consideration is genuine without recourse to some guiding, foundational set of values and beliefs? Isn’t the purpose of habituation (initiation) into a moral tradition and its component practices to cultivate precisely these shared values or virtues?

Joseph Dunne argues likewise that we very often do not know our ends in advance, that deliberation will very often involve defining or redefining the end; that it is only in action, through experiment and with experience that an acceptable end – an end appropriate to the particular case - can be identified (Dunne, 1993, pp. 352-3). Dunne is particularly concerned to demonstrate that mastery of a practice cannot be reduced to the straightforward application of general rules, procedures and formulae which apply regardless of the particular situation; that the judgement and common sense of the practitioner cannot be eliminated and replaced by a sort of ‘technical rationality’ (pp.197-9). Now I agree with Dunne here; and I agree that bureaucratic attempts to implement ‘a practitioner-proof mode of practice’ are particularly destructive in education. But again, I think that the judgement and discrimination of the practitioner who has mastered a practice reside precisely in his ability to recognise – and recognise without inordinate difficulty – what is ‘ethically salient’ about a particular case or situation in relation to the goods of the practice; and that

this ability need not, and generally does not, necessitate anguished soul-searching or the reformulation of the recognised goods and ends, principles and procedures, modes of thought and expression, of the practice. As I have argued, most practitioners' forms of engagement in their practices are normal and ordinary, not revolutionary or radically critical.

I think it is worth clarifying at this point exactly what is meant and what is implied when we speak of an individual engaging in critical reflection on their principles, values and beliefs. Mere exposure to a reasoned argument, however forceful or cogent, does not in itself provide a motive or reason for us to engage in deliberation or reflection ourselves; even less does it provide a motive or a reason for us to act. There must be some prior interest or need on our part to listen to and engage with the argument; and if reflection is to issue in action, this interest or need must be both intellectual *and* emotional. What sort of circumstances or events might provoke this interest or need, and motivate us to question our deepest principles, values and beliefs? Things that come to mind are the encounter with a moral dilemma, the experience of a personal tragedy or of profound injustice, a dramatic change in personal circumstances or in the wider world (produced, for example, by war or natural disaster), or perhaps even a life-changing encounter with another person, a book or an idea. Such events or circumstances might well trigger profound soul searching and critical reflection on values, ends and ethical first principles, and this reflection might in turn lead to a rejection of existing values and beliefs. But even in these exceptional circumstances, this *need* not follow - particularly if we come to recognise (as Aristotle did not) that moral conflict and tragedy are inescapable features of the human condition⁹; that goods and virtues are essentially heterogeneous in nature and can only fully be appreciated by practitioners engaging in various practices (a point I shall develop more fully in the next chapter)¹⁰; that it is in the nature of a moral and cultural tradition and its component practices that these encompass people's experiences, historical and imaginative, of pursuing

⁹ See MacIntyre, 1985, pp. 142-5.

¹⁰ Martha Nussbaum speaks of them being 'irreducibly heterogeneous in quality' (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 105).

heterogeneous goods and dealing with moral conflict¹¹; and that, as I noted earlier, practices themselves often encompass rival traditions of thought - politics is the obvious example in any liberal democracy. For all these reasons, I would argue that there is no necessary need for an individual faced with moral conflict to question the validity of the over-arching moral and cultural tradition *merely* by virtue of being faced with moral conflict.

In fact, it may well be that the experiences detailed have a transformative effect of a quite different sort - for example, a heightened awareness of certain goods and virtues valued within the existing moral tradition; it was simply that the individual concerned had hitherto not 'lived up to', or had not had reason to live up to, these ideals¹². We might always have desired to behave differently – to exercise more self-discipline in our daily lives, or to act more courageously, or to be more generous, or even to devote ourselves selflessly to some worthy cause; but the will was lacking. A traumatic experience might then have the effect not of causing us to question or even reject our core values but rather of causing us to pursue them with renewed purpose.

A more intractable problem – and a problem that evidently exists in Britain – arises when there is conflict between the values of a minority or faith community and the Enlightenment values of liberal democratic society. Clearly, as I argued in Chapter 1, these Enlightenment values of liberty, equality and human rights take precedence and must be enforced. They are, by definition, *universal* and all members of society must be educated in them (at school if not at home) so that they understand their rights and the rights of others. Of course, the conflict remains real enough for individual members of these communities who feel they have to choose between rival sets of values - values concerning, for example, the place of women in society; and, of course, the consequences can be tragic. There are no simple answers here.¹³

¹¹ I develop this argument further in Chapter 8 in relation to the humanities' 'stories of human experience'.

¹² An attitude of resigned resignation, of stoical endurance, is another possible response.

¹³ The problem then arises of whether human rights, because they are universal, should be enforced internationally. The dilemma is that on the one hand they clearly ought to be enforced (most obviously when a genocide is going on) but on the other, that in countries where there is no tradition

Rival moral traditions and relativism

Up to now I have followed MacIntyre in arguing that for an individual to gain access to the goods of a moral tradition, and to be able to engage in rational inquiry and reasoned argument within the frame of that tradition, he must be acculturated into it. However, it follows from this that there is no ‘extra-ethical’ standpoint, no neutral or Archimedean position, from which the putative morally autonomous actor could make inter-cultural comparisons or critical judgements. It might be objected that this implies that all traditions are morally justifiable and that an extreme relativism is inescapable. Indeed, by in a sense conferring objectivity on a whole cultural inheritance, Aristotelianism (which I take to include MacIntyre’s restatement) is always open to the charge that any practices, values and moral norms are justified so long as they happen to be the prevailing ones; that any *status quo*, however objectionable from a liberal Enlightenment standpoint, can be justified; and that the only guard we have against this is the autonomy (personal, rational and moral) of the individual. I shall now argue that this chain of argument does not necessarily follow and that the charge of relativism can be refuted.

MacIntyre answers the charge as follows. First, he insists that rational inquiry and reasoned argument can only be conducted by people initiated into and situated within a given moral tradition. To possess ‘any concept of truth adequate for systematic rational enquiry’ requires a person genuinely to adopt and be committed to the standpoint of a tradition. We cannot simply move between traditions temporarily adopting the standpoint of one and then another, as if acting a succession of parts; for to imagine this is not to adopt the viewpoint of arbitrator, a neutral view from above, but to exclude ourselves altogether from any conception of the truth and from rational debate (MacIntyre, 1988, pp. 367-8)¹⁴. The ‘neutral standing ground’

of liberal democracy or of universal human rights, people have been habituated into a quite different system of values. Why, then, should they be receptive to Western liberal values? The danger is that we end up trying to enforce liberty and human rights ‘through the barrel of a gun’. I have no answer to this dilemma.

¹⁴ Richard Rorty makes the same point in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) when he argues that education has to start from acculturation and that ‘to attempt abnormal discourse *de novo*, without being able to realize our own abnormality, is madness in the most literal and terrible sense’ (Rorty, pp. 365-6).

(p. 367) from which the charge of relativism must be issued is therefore illusory. It is, as Thomas Nagel famously put it, a ‘view from nowhere’ (Nagel, 1989). But we are still left with the problem of adjudicating between rival moral traditions, some of which may be abhorrent. MacIntyre therefore goes a step further. He asserts that different moral traditions are not in fact insulated from each other; that a moral tradition faced with ‘epistemological crisis’ can transcend itself by drawing on the resources of another moral tradition (MacIntyre, 1988, p. 361). When the dominant beliefs of a given tradition can no longer adequately explain the facts of reality (the empirical facts), it may be that a rival tradition – a tradition which can better explain these facts - will come to be seen as superior in its truth claims, as superior in its ‘standards of rational justification’ (p. 365). However, because the claims of a rival tradition are not accessible from within the tradition that is in crisis, ‘imaginative conceptual innovation’ (p. 362) is needed for radically new concepts and theories to be devised.¹⁵

Now, MacIntyre writes that ‘as a matter of fact for very long periods traditions of very different kinds do indeed seem to coexist without any ability to bring their conflicts and disagreements to rational resolution’ (p. 366); in other words, they coexist without an epistemological crisis being provoked in one or other of them. But then the following questions arise. In what circumstances could traditions that had hitherto merely been in a state of inert coexistence come to interact so as to provoke an epistemological crisis?¹⁶ And what form would this ‘imaginative conceptual innovation’ take given that MacIntyre has defined rationality as internal to a given tradition? In fact, is one all-encompassing tradition not the inevitable outcome in the long run?

Let us consider some possible triggers of an epistemological crisis: a natural disaster; a new scientific or geographical discovery, or explanatory theory; the rise of

¹⁵ MacIntyre addresses this problem of ‘untranslatability’ in Chapter 19 of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* where he argues that the problem might be overcome through the acquisition, so far as possible, of the ‘language-in-use’ of another tradition (language here encompassing the tradition’s whole system or constellation of practices, customs and beliefs) as a ‘second first language’ (p. 387).

¹⁶ When such traditions coexist in a single society, the likelihood of a crisis being provoked would seem to be all the greater.

a new religion; internal strife in which minorities who perceive themselves to be oppressed or dispossessed rise up in revolt; defeat or victory in war; the collision of a peaceable people with a warlike people, or of an innovative people with a tribal people, or of a technically more advanced with a technically less-advanced people; and the confrontation between democracy and dictatorship, secular society and theocracy, capitalism and communism (or pre-capitalistic modes of production). History and the ‘culture clashes’ of the contemporary world provide countless instances of these things. But in considering these examples, in attempting to give concrete form to the notion of epistemological crisis, is it not apparent that we are dealing with events, movements and phenomena that form part of a more complex and dynamic whole? Is it not apparent that these things encompass every aspect of human social, cultural, political and economic life; that, in fact, they constitute nothing less than human history in its entirety? In speaking of epistemological crises, are we not really merely asking the straightforward question ‘which societies have stood the test of history?’

There are all sorts of possibilities concerning the future course of human history but given the fact of modern science (by which I mean the whole body of academic disciplines that employ the scientific method and deal in empirical facts) and its transformation of the world in which we live, it is difficult to conceive of a future in which Enlightenment rational values framed in a liberal, secular society and underpinned by the naturalism of evolutionary biology (which seeks to provide natural as opposed to metaphysical explanations of human values, goods and needs) do not play a central role. The success and dominance *for better or for worse* of Western civilization and its values must surely be attributable in large measure to its better explaining ‘the facts of reality’ (witness the achievements of science and technology) and *apparently* to its better meeting certain fundamental human needs (most notably, for freedom, needs that, as we have seen, arise by virtue of human rationality. By the same token, the art, music and literature of Western civilization (whether ‘high’ or popular) have a unique status on account of their secular nature. In the Renaissance, Western civilization broke free of its Judaeo-Christian religious inheritance (broke free in the sense that man rather than God became ‘the measure of all things’) – Shakespeare exemplifies the change in dramatic form – and

‘humanism’ was born, or re-born, from its classical beginnings. It is precisely because the culture of Western civilization is the culture of *secular* society that its values and its appeal are universal.

On this argument, there is, it seems, a certain inevitability attached to the eventual triumph of Western secular liberal democracy and its Enlightenment rationality (or rationalism) simply because it is the moral tradition that concerns itself with universal values, human rights and the rule of law. I therefore disagree with MacIntyre in his view that liberal individualism and its Enlightenment rationality represents merely another moral tradition, the implication being that it could somehow be dispensed with or replaced by another. For even if it is incoherent as a stand-alone ethical system (as MacIntyre argues, and as I argued in Chapter 1), it answers, I think, to a fundamental human need: *the need of rational beings to envisage the possibility of universal values*. And any future society, any moral settlement will therefore have to incorporate it as a central fact.

In order, then, to refute the charge that Aristotelianism¹⁷ is relativist and justifies any *status quo*, all it is necessary to demonstrate is that a moral tradition can evolve. And MacIntyre has done this (as have Gadamer and Oakeshott) by conceiving of practices as living traditions of inquiry. It could even be argued that there is a certain inevitability that when practices and moral traditions are free to reflect on their own goods, this reflection will eventually encompass the possibility of universal values (values transcending any particular culture or society), that society at large will be led to a certain enlightenment of reason, and that a certain secularisation of society will be the outcome. As Anthony O’Hear writes, ‘in so far as rational reflection is part of our practices, there is within our practices the wherewithal to transcend total particularity, and to move into a more universally acceptable context’ (O’Hear, 1999, pp. 210-11).

¹⁷ I am using the term broadly to denote the view that rationality and morality are contingent on habituation (or initiation or acculturation) into the goods, values and virtues of a tradition, of a cultural inheritance.

True, MacIntyre contrasts his conception of a living tradition to the conservative conception of a tradition as advocated by Edmund Burke¹⁸, but the real power of MacIntyre's conception of a practice as a living tradition lies, I think, in the contrast it invites us to draw between life in a free society (free in the sense that practices are free to evolve) and modes of life in societies that do *not* permit reflection on their goods, values and beliefs in any circumstances – indeed, that do not allow their members freely to engage in practices at all. It is the *status quo* in societies in which tribal taboos or religious dogmas are transmitted without modification or evolution that cannot be rationally justified; and it is when external goods are imposed – as, for example, in a totalitarian state - that objectionable value systems can arise. I am not arguing that people in a tribal society or theocratic state cannot lead lives that are fulfilled and worthwhile; it is conceivable that even slaves in Ancient Greece led perfectly happy and fulfilled lives as slaves - so long as they had good masters who treated them well. The problem is that when it becomes practically feasible for people to lead lives other than the ones they do in fact lead, questions of freedom and justice (or 'social justice') inevitably arise. As soon as reason assumes a central role in practices, there is the possibility of reflection on universal rights and moral imperatives – of something akin to the Moral Law; the possibility of some sort of 'enlightenment' of reason, and with it, inevitably, a measure of disenchantment with traditional customs, beliefs and institutions. On this argument, the crucial distinction to make is between tribal, theocratic and totalitarian systems on the one hand, and secular liberal democracies on the other. For it is only in the latter that practices can

¹⁸ MacIntyre characterises Burke's conception of a tradition as 'dead' on the grounds that Burke exalts habit and prejudice over reflective behaviour (MacIntyre, 1989, p. 230; 1985, p.222) and hence allows no space for rationality. But it is abstract rationality and theory – not rational reflection – that Burke is really arguing against, his point being the pragmatic one that because 'the nature of man is intricate' and involves a 'gross and complicated mass of human passions and concerns', because 'the objects of society are of the greatest possible complexity' and government involves both 'balances between differences of good' and 'compromises between good and evil', and because 'the real effects of moral causes are not always immediate' (Burke, 1968, pp. 152-3), no theory or idealised model could be adequate to the reform of government. And so it could be argued that Burke's view of politics is essentially the same as MacIntyre's – i.e. that it is a practice. Moreover, a notable difference between MacIntyre's conception of a practice on the one hand, and Gadamer and Oakeshott's on the other, is that whereas the former condemns Burke's defence of prejudice in somewhat intemperate terms (culminating in the bizarre observation that 'the true nihilists in history were all kings' – see MacIntyre, 1985, pp. 228-30), the latter regard prejudices as a vital part of a person's being. For Gadamer, the root of legitimate prejudice lies in legitimate authority. The acknowledgement and knowledge that another 'is superior to oneself in judgment and insight' results in the judgment of the other taking precedence; the prejudices of the other are thereby legitimised (Gadamer, 2003, pp. 279-80). A defence of prejudice *so defined* is, I would have thought, implicit in MacIntyre's own conception of a practice and of the process of apprenticeship it involves.

flourish, and the encompassing moral traditions are able to evolve in response to changing human needs, conditions and circumstances.

Concluding note: habituation, reflection and freedom

I have argued in this chapter that habituation into the values, beliefs and practices that together constitute a moral and cultural tradition (along with the institutions that mediate them) is the essential precondition for realising the goods of a flourishing life¹⁹. I have also argued that reflection and criticism (or ‘critical reflection’) have a crucial role to play in enabling a tradition and its practices to evolve - because otherwise, we are condemned to the *status quo*, however objectionable or fossilised from the Enlightenment liberal standpoint. But what form would this reflection take?

My argument is that there are essentially two forms of reflection. The first is carried on within the frame of practices, which supply the tools to engage in a range of inquiries and solve a range of problems - inquiries and problems whose nature cannot be appreciated unless one has been initiated into the practices concerned. Reflection on conflicts between the goods of practices can likewise be carried on within the frame of practices and the overarching moral and cultural tradition, because the tradition and its component practices constitute, in part, inquiries into the nature of these conflicts - conflicts, again, whose nature can only be understood by those initiated into the tradition and its goods. This sort of reflection, I have argued, characterises people’s *ordinary* engagement in practices. The second form of reflection, by contrast, seeks to evaluate, justify and if necessary reformulate the underlying goods, principles and values of practices; in other words, it calls into question the frame or paradigm itself. This sort of reflection, I have argued, characterises people’s *critical* engagement in practices. However, there are two pre-conditions for such reflection to be undertaken. First, that the existing frame or paradigm is widely perceived as inadequate (whether for the purpose of engaging in

¹⁹ I shall consider the nature of these goods in more detail in the next chapter.

inquiry or for defining goods worth pursuing) - in other words, that there is a *need* for radical innovation or revolutionary change²⁰; and second, that practitioners have the combination of aptitude, interest and personality needed to engage in such reflection and radical innovation.

We are now in a position to return to the question originally posed by Bernard Williams – ‘Is later reflection on one’s values precluded by earlier habituation, by an earlier conditioning of the mind?’ Habituation is, I am arguing in this thesis, essential if values are to be transmitted at all. It is the pre-condition for civilized society; and, yes, to be habituated in certain values or virtues is, in one sense, to be conditioned in those values and virtues. But to speak of the *mind* being conditioned or (if we accept that habituation is, necessarily, a sort of mental conditioning) of the mind being conditioned to such a degree that subsequent reflection on one’s values and beliefs is impossible, a requirement of a quite different order must be introduced: quite simply, the possibility of such reflection must be eliminated. There must be no opportunity permitted for argument, debate, or freedom of expression either in public or (if there are sufficient numbers of informants) in private; and all transgressions must be severely punished. We need, in short, the full apparatus of the totalitarian state, or a tribal or theocratic society. The necessary condition, then, for people - individually and collectively - to be able to reflect on their values and ends is simply that the moral tradition in which they have been habituated and its constituent practices are able to evolve; and the necessary condition for such an evolution is not freedom from habituation but a free society.

In this chapter, I have argued the vital importance of being initiated into a moral and cultural tradition. In the last chapter, I argued that the process of initiation begins with the habituation of the virtues, out of which develops the capacity to exercise practical judgement. But what are the core virtues that ought to be cultivated in a liberal society, the virtues that might constitute a substantive moral tradition; and is it possible to identify a corresponding set of goods (or types of good) that all citizens

²⁰ One can of course engage in research and inquiry of a speculative nature at any time. Whether it is of any significance, however, depends on its being judged by others - according to publicly agreed standards and criteria - to meet some recognised need or solve some recognised problem.

would want to pursue in order to lead good and fulfilling lives? The aim of a liberal education would then be to cultivate these core virtues and to prepare pupils for realising the corresponding goods, and thereby prepare them for leading ‘a good life’.

In Chapter 4, I shall consider the core virtues and goods that might be cultivated in a liberal society. In so doing, I shall argue the value – and the good - of leading ‘an ordinary life’.

4

The nature of the good life and the virtues needed to sustain it

In this chapter, I consider the sorts of virtue that are required (1) for people to lead flourishing lives and (2) for the sustenance of the liberal society that provides people with the freedom to lead the lives of their choice. A central task, perhaps the central task, of a liberal education would then be to cultivate these virtues. But is there a set of substantive core virtues that would save liberal society from degenerating into a mere market for consumer choice, a mechanism for satisfying people's current preferences and appetitive desires? Are the virtues required for people to lead flourishing lives the same as the virtues that sustain liberal society? And what are the ingredients of a flourishing life? The key to answering these questions lies, I shall argue, in recognising that central to people's justified self-esteem and self-respect, to their sense of fulfilment, is their engagement in worthwhile activities; and that worthwhile activities are best conceived something along the lines of practices as Alasdair MacIntyre conceives them.

MacIntyre's account of practices has evoked much interest among philosophers of education, but its implications have largely been confined to the question of whether teaching and philosophy of education are practices. In the case of teaching, the broad concern has been to demonstrate that teaching cannot be reduced to a technocratic practitioner-proof 'best practice' formula or set of 'competencies', to a process whose outcomes can be measured and made the subject of performance targets – notions that appeal to politicians and bureaucrats but make teachers' lives a misery; rather, that teaching is an art involving complex judgements on the part of professional practitioners who need to respond to the demands of particular students in particular situations – an art whose goods cannot be measured (or can only partially be measured) by test results. How could we ever measure a student's love of learning, or their self-esteem, or their character? Clearly in these circumstances

MacIntyre's conception of a practice in terms of internal goods and standards of excellence, the virtues, and practitioner autonomy is an attractive one, and provides a framework for fruitfully exploring the nature of teaching.¹

However, though it is a central feature of MacIntyre's conception of a practice that practitioners need to be initiated into them, and that this involves a lengthy process of apprenticeship, the notion that pupils might benefit from being prepared for such apprenticeships through, for example, the cultivation of the requisite virtues, or that their education might itself take the form of being initiated into various practices, or being initiated into a moral tradition, has not to my knowledge been explored. Instead, those philosophers of education who subscribe to what might broadly be termed 'liberalism' - to the core liberal values that according to John White have 'animated progressive British politics since the mid-nineteenth century' (White, 2003, p. 147) - take the prime aim of education to be *personal autonomy*. And, as I argued in Chapter 2, those who work in the Aristotelian tradition believe, by and large, that the cultivation of *phronesis* (or intelligent virtue, or 'critical virtue', as Kristjansson terms it) involves pupils developing the capacity to critically justify their values and beliefs. For example, Wilfred Carr, one of the standard-bearers of the Aristotelian tradition in philosophy of education, argues that *phronesis* must be raised to 'the level of reflective awareness' so that the limits and limitations of practices can be transcended and practitioners can 'confront the limits of their own self-understanding' (Carr, 2004, pp. 62-3). Practitioners must, in effect, be practical philosophers. Besides, the elusive nature of *phronesis* - of the putative general ability to deliberate on and solve practical problems taking into full account the ethical particulars of the situation - makes it difficult to specify the nature of the curriculum that would serve to cultivate it. The traditional curriculum of academic subject disciplines could be conceived as an initiation into various practices, admittedly a very narrow range of practices, but the justification usually proposed is quite different - namely, that the academic disciplines have a unique value in

¹ *The Good Life of Teaching* (2010), Chris Higgins' exploration of how a virtue ethics of teaching might be constructed, is a notable example. Wilfred Carr's seminal paper *Philosophy and Education* (2004), in which Carr argued that education should be conceived as a practice, and philosophy of education as practical philosophy in the Aristotelian tradition, was inspired in part by MacIntyre's conception of practices and internal goods (other key influences were Gadamer and Joseph Dunne).

‘training the mind’². Likewise, many faith schools could be thought of as initiating pupils into moral traditions (as indeed they do), but inevitably the emphasis is on the spiritual nature of a worthwhile life, and teaching takes the form of working out the ethical implications of revelation. There are no particular implications for the wider curriculum, or for the conception of worthwhile activity in terms of practices.

My concern is to follow through the implications of conceiving worthwhile activity on the lines of MacIntyre’s practices (i.e. in terms of various goods and virtues) in a different direction: first, by specifying a central aim - perhaps the central aim - of education to be the preparation of pupils for a fulfilled life by fostering in them the virtues necessary for the engagement in practices, whose goods they will thereby be able to realise; and second, by conceiving the school curriculum something on the lines of a set of educational practices that would best foster these virtues – practices into which pupils would be initiated. In the last chapter, I drew partially on MacIntyre’s conception of a practice in order to argue that moral autonomy was an illusory objective. Here I shall build on MacIntyre’s conception of a practice - being a form of activity whose internal goods can only be realised through a process of initiation - by attempting to shed more light on the precise nature of these goods and thereby identify the virtues that, because they are needed for the successful engagement in practices (whose goods they also in part constitute), are also essential ingredients of a good life. In the process, I shall argue that practices need to be conceived differently in some important respects and I shall draw on the distinction I made in the last chapter between the ordinary and the critical³ engagement in a practice in order to develop more fully the inference I made that ‘the unexamined life is worth living’. I shall argue that a much wider range of activities can be counted worthwhile than Aristotle envisaged - worthwhile in the sense that their goods are conducive to a flourishing life.

² I shall consider the value of the academic subject disciplines together with the notion of mental training as an educational aim in Chapters 6 and 7. Interestingly, MacIntyre himself subscribes to a traditional liberal academic education for all pupils (though extended to encompass practical skills like car maintenance) on the grounds that we need an ‘educated public’. I shall discuss MacIntyre’s position later in this chapter.

³ By critical I mean that justification is sought of paradigmatic principles.

It is crucial for the purposes of this thesis to consider the nature of the good life and the specific goods and virtues that might contribute to it because school curricula have traditionally assume, and for the most part continue to assume, a very narrow conception of the good life concerned almost exclusively with the life of the mind. Pupils have, I shall argue, been prepared for lives as philosophers and orators (politicians), a state of affairs that could have been justified in the context of the Athenian *polis* but cannot possibly be justified today. In this chapter, I shall therefore try to identify the core virtues necessary for all pupils to lead worthwhile lives as adults in a modern liberal democracy – the virtues that the school curriculum ought to be cultivating.

Practices, goods and virtues

What makes an activity worthwhile in the sense that it is conducive to human fulfilment and therefore ‘a good life’? MacIntyre, I believe, comes close to answering this question in his conception of ‘a practice’. A practice is defined by MacIntyre in the following terms:

By a ‘practice’ I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 187).

Initiation into a practice generally takes the form of an extended apprenticeship in which the pupil submits to the authority of the master, who embodies ‘the best standards realized so far’ (p. 190). And the virtues play an important role, being the acquired human qualities or dispositions that enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, and that are partly constitutive of them.

But what *are* the ‘goods’ that are internal to a practice? MacIntyre’s account of the nature of the goods of practices, the goods that contribute toward a flourishing life and produce the state of *eudaimonia*, is painted in fairly general terms, but from it we can deduce that there are, broadly speaking, two kinds of goods involved. First, there is what MacIntyre aptly describes as ‘the good of a certain kind of life’ (p. 190), the good of experiencing a certain mode of being and of possessing a distinct and satisfying identity. It arises out of a commitment to achieve certain ‘standards of excellence’ (p. 187), but also involves association with certain sorts of people and, on the basis of a shared interest or sensibility, the cultivation of certain distinct types or fellowship and friendship. Chris Higgins, I think, encapsulates this good very well when he writes ‘It is inside such worlds of practice that practitioners encounter thick and distinctive notions about what it is worthwhile to participate in, excellent to achieve, and admirable to become’ (Higgins, 2010, p. 240). Second, there is the good of exercising certain moral and intellectual virtues, both as a means and necessary condition of cultivating the good of leading a certain kind of life, and as the result or outcome of engagement in practices – i.e. as an end-in-itself. To be engaged in a practice that requires and cultivates courage, honesty, patience, reliability and generosity (for example) is to be and to have become a courageous, honest, patient, reliable and generous person; and to display these qualities when the situation demands is to possess a set of publicly recognised values and standards (perhaps even to possess transcendent values) that lend purpose and meaning to a person’s life.

Whether the internal goods of practices should be conceived as distinct goods or as aspects or dimensions of the same good can be debated. MacIntyre himself is somewhat ambivalent on the matter; and perhaps it is only a matter of interpretation or exposition. Higgins distinguishes four types of good: ‘outstanding works or performances to appreciate’, ‘a rich moral phenomenology to experience’, ‘excellences of character to display’, and ‘a biographical genre through which to shape a meaningful life’ (Higgins, 2010, p. 250). I have, in effect, grouped the first, second and fourth of these together as inseparable components of the good of a certain kind of life, and detached the third, which concerns the virtues. My reason for

this is that though a virtuous character is developed in large part through the engagement in practices, it is (I shall argue) a virtuous character that sustains us and renders life still worthwhile when circumstances dictate that we cannot realise the goods of practices or the good of a certain kind of life. The important thing, however, is that the goods (if we assume for the sake of argument they are plural) are internal – internal in the sense that initiation into the practice is required to realise them, and that they are ends-in-themselves worth striving for.

There are, however, a number of ways in which I would qualify the picture MacIntyre paints of practices and their goods.

First, MacIntyre conceives internal goods as end-in-themselves, as constituents of a worthwhile life, *because* they embody the virtues – i.e. the goods either comprise the virtues or are of value as ‘arenas’ in which the virtues might be exercised. But though the exercise of the virtues, the leading of a virtuous life, is the good that is most obviously ethical, there is a broader ethical dimension to leading ‘a certain kind of life’ that goes beyond the exercise of the virtues, important though that is. To lead a certain kind of life is to adopt a mode of living, working and being that involves a transcendence of the self and the appetitive desires that is, by its very nature, profoundly ethical. To lead the life of an artist, craftsman, sportsman or professional (for example) is to lead a life that is at once worthwhile, good and ethical. It involves adherence to a range of standards and criteria of value; it involves the mastery of a recognised body of knowledge and skill - i.e. the acquisition of expertise; and it involves corresponding duties, obligations and commitments. These things certainly entail the exercise of certain virtues (particularly courage, honesty and justice – the ones MacIntyre cites as most obviously directly implicated in any practice) but more is entailed than ‘merely’ the exercise of the virtues⁴. I have in mind here something of Kierkegaard’s conception of the ethical life as the life in which a person commits himself to a vocation or profession or to family life, accepts the duties and obligations entailed, and consequently finds meaning in life - as

⁴ There are clearly artists, craftsmen, sportsmen and professionals who have the talent or skill and ‘lead the life’ but do not adhere to some (or any) of the relevant values. On this argument, their access to the goods being discussed is correspondingly reduced. They may gain fame and fortune but their reputation and their sense of leading a worthwhile life are very much diminished.

opposed to the life of the aesthete who tries to satisfy all his desires and remains forever ‘the accidental man’ (Kierkegaard, 1992, p. 157). I also have in mind Bernard Williams’ criticism of narrow conceptions of moral obligation, categorical duty and impartial good on the grounds that a man’s ‘projects’ (comprising coherent sets of interests, concerns and desires) or ‘ground project’ might be in large part be what constitutes his character and gives meaning to his life (Williams, 1981, pp. 5-14). I am taking ‘the ethical’ in the form of the good of a certain kind of life to encompass exactly such projects.

The good of a certain kind of life might also be conceived in terms of meaning or meaningfulness. In *Meaning in Life*, Susan Wolf speaks of activities or projects that are meaningful because as well as wanting to engage in them (i.e. there is an element of subjective attraction), we perceive them as having objective value or worth ‘the source of which lies outside our selves’ (Wolf, 2010, p. 31); and though meaning and morality often complement each other, to engage in an activity because we are passionate about it, to ‘act out of love’, need not entail any sense of acting out of duty or ‘doing good’. Philosophers, argues Wolf, need to recognise that as well as acting out of self-interest in the hedonistic sense) or moral duty, people can act for ‘reasons of love’; that as well as happiness and morality, the engagement in projects or activities from which we derive meaning is also central to a flourishing life. I think this is essentially right, and one way of recognising this is to broaden our conception of the ethical to encompass the value derived from meaningful activity (alternatively we might broaden our conception of self-interest to encompass the ethical). What is lacking, as Wolf herself admits (p. 47), is an account of the nature of the objective value of these projects or activities, an account that would re-assure us that lawnmower racing, for example, has only limited value as a worthwhile activity. Wolf is dubious that ‘a community of valuers’ could be the source of criteria of objective value because ‘whole societies can be wrong’ (p. 46). But if we conceive worthwhile activity in terms of practices rooted in (and in part constituting) a moral and cultural tradition, all within the frame of a free society, then we have, I believe, the criteria we need. Moreover, if we conceive a moral life as a virtuous life (Wolf, by contrast, conceives morality in Kantian terms of equality of respect (pp. 58-9) and hardly mentions the virtues), then the integral part played by morality (i.e.

the virtues) in a meaningful life through its contribution to realising the goods of practices can be much more clearly described. That practices involve a sustained period of apprenticeship, the mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skill, and provide an arena for the exercise of various virtues is, I suspect, more than sufficient to rule out a host of potentially enjoyable but rather meaningless activities - including lawnmower racing.⁵

Second, I think it is important to note that the good of leading a certain kind of life is not exclusively moral or ethical in nature: it incorporates a *subjective* as well as an ethical component or dimension. The person being initiated into a practice must have the requisite aptitude, interest and motivation to engage wholeheartedly in the practice – or in the case of a practice that is one’s occupation, at least to engage in it with a degree of enthusiasm or commitment; otherwise, the goods of the practice will not accrue⁶. Clearly, one must have the requisite aptitude; unless the requisite body of knowledge and skill is mastered, and the requisite expertise is gained, the practice obviously ‘cannot be practised’ and therefore the goods of the practice are denied. But equally, the practitioner who, though he or she has mastered the skills, reluctantly ‘goes through the motions’, perhaps because circumstances gave him or her no choice, cannot lead a fulfilled life except in a very diminished sense. It is the subjective attributes of individual capability and motivation rather than character that are the determining factors here. On the other hand, if there were no ethical or moral dimension to the activity to begin with, there would be no internal goods to access, and therefore no sense of leading a worthwhile or a good life, however pleasurable the engagement in the activity - like eating chocolate, for example.

My point here is that if the practitioner does not *feel* fulfilled, they cannot *be* fulfilled - a point that Wolf makes forcefully (pp. 21-2). The good of leading a certain kind of life can only have any meaning or significance if it is actualised in the

⁵ I consider in more detail how a hierarchy of practices might evolve later in this chapter when I consider Rawls’ conception of self-respect.

⁶ In *An Aims-based Curriculum*, Michael Reiss and John White speak of the need for pupils’ ‘wholehearted engagement’ in intrinsically worthwhile school activities (Reiss & White, 2013, p. 16). I shall consider Reiss and White’s proposals in Chapter 6.

practitioner's sense of satisfaction in doing something worthwhile. It is unlikely that a practitioner would gain no sense of satisfaction at all from engaging in a practice, that they would realise none of the goods of the practice in any measure. But one could well envisage a person feeling a sense of regret, or frustration, or even active resentment because their ambitions had been thwarted, because they had been compelled by circumstances or against their wishes to engage in an activity or an occupation. On the other hand, it may be that one's aspirations are unrealistic (nothing but being an actor or an artist or a film director will do), or that one has psychological problems of a compulsive-obsessive type (perfectionism, for example) that render any occupation less than satisfying. Either way, there is a subjective dimension to accessing and realising the goods of practices. In preparing a person for leading an ethical life, we therefore have also to consider the needs and capabilities of the person concerned.

A distinctive feature of any practice is that particular modes of understanding, perception, reasoning, imagination and judgement are cultivated; but in order for judgement to be exercised, the practitioner must have a large measure of autonomy. Work on a production line, where the worker has to perform a series of mechanical tasks requiring little judgement or autonomous action, and which quite possibly has to be engaged in because it is the only employment available, would therefore seem to be an obvious example of an activity that could not be counted a practice. Both ethical and subjective dimensions, as I have described them, are lacking – unless, perhaps, the person concerned has a special fascination with mechanical processes (perhaps because he or she is autistic) or is incapable of exercising much autonomy, in which case it is conceivable that the job is more fulfilling than it might appear to a normal person. However, the situation is more complex than at first sight, which brings me to my third point. An apparently 'mindless' activity with no obvious internal goods might yet be of vital social or national importance (contributing, for example, to famine relief or the war effort), in which case there would be compensating external goods - *public* goods - that might well make the job seem worthwhile and contribute to a sense of fulfilment, at least in some degree. Many occupations give rise to some such public good and this is often reflected in an element of public recognition and social status that enhances the sense of satisfaction

and self-respect of the practitioner – one thinks of doctors, nurses, firemen, soldiers, policemen and women, and even teachers, all of whose work is in some sense their ‘vocation’. Even when there is little social status or public recognition attached to a particular occupation, or even when it is despised (the tax collector comes to mind), that the work is remunerated (sometimes very well) generally indicates that it has social value⁷. A boring, distasteful or dangerous job might be judged worth doing *solely* for the money, for the goods that money can buy or facilitate. But again, that it is remunerated makes it, generally speaking, ‘an honest job’, a job that needs to be done; and out of this comes an ethical dimension and a degree of self-respect. And therefore I do not think MacIntyre’s hard and fast distinction between the internal goods of a practice, which make an activity ethically worthwhile, and the external goods (he cites prestige, status and money – p. 188), which are of dubious moral value, can be sustained. There is both an internal and an external dimension or aspect to the good of leading a certain kind of life; and both internal and external (public) goods have ethical value in the sense that they contribute to a worthwhile life.

My fourth point, which is closely related to my third point, is that I do not think it is possible to make a hard and fast distinction between activities that count as practices and those that do not. Most occupations lie somewhere between the extremes of ‘mindless’ activity on a production line and complete professional autonomy. An occupation, or at least certain aspects of it, might therefore have some of the characteristic features of a practice but not others, or have the characteristic features but to a lesser degree. Indeed, the engagement in any practice, even one of those cited by MacIntyre as exemplary (football, architecture, chess, fishing, physics and music), necessitates undertaking some routine or mechanical activities that, though essential to the greater good, are in themselves boring or onerous. Paul Hager notes that MacIntyre’s association of practices with games, crafts and traditional occupations, and his neglect of modern occupational roles, points to ‘his somewhat romantic attachment to the pre-industrial past’, a past that pre-dates division of

⁷ It is of course questionable whether the services of financial intermediaries, advertisers, marketing consultants and so forth have much social value. By contrast, tax collectors, accountants and traffic wardens can at least feel some satisfaction in the job they do, even if others do not.

labour and specialisation (Hager, 2011, p. 551). For example, MacIntyre denies that bricklaying can be designated a practice, presumably because it is too specialised and too mechanical; but as Hager argues, there is a rich history and tradition behind bricklaying ‘as is evident from the stunning arches and intricate features of innumerable historic buildings around the world’. MacIntyre’s position would then seem to reflect little more than ‘armchair philosopher ignorance’ combined with unconscious class assumptions about manual work (p. 551). In any case, in judging bricklaying according to external criteria (I am assuming here, of course, that MacIntyre was not trained as a bricklayer) – i.e. that it appears mechanical, repetitive and ‘mindless’ - MacIntyre is failing to apply his own criterion concerning the internal goods of practices, namely that these can only be appreciated by those who have been initiated into the practice: ‘Those who lack the relevant experience are incompetent thereby as judges of internal goods’ (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 189).

Outside the professions, most work in an advanced industrial or post-industrial economy is necessarily highly specialised and offers only a partial opportunity to access the goods detailed above. One is hard put to speak of the good of leading ‘a certain kind of life’ involving the mastery of a complex body of knowledge and skill, or the good of cultivating the virtues, when the occupation in question is that of supermarket manager, cashier, shelf loader, delivery man or security guard⁸. But almost any job, however mundane, repetitive and mechanical, has an ethical dimension in the sense that it is possible ‘to do it better or worse’ and to exercise at least some of the virtues, whether it be in the course of performing the task (i.e. conscientiously rather than negligently) or in the way in which one relates to one’s fellow workers. Nelson Mandela provided a poignant illustration of this when he recounted his experience of prison life:

To survive in prison, one must develop ways to take satisfaction in one’s daily life. One can feel fulfilled by washing one’s clothes so that they are particularly clean, by sweeping a corridor so that it is free of dust, by organising one’s cell to conserve as much space as possible. The same pride

⁸ I have worked as cashier, shelf loader and security guard and can testify that nobody I worked with considered their life to be enriched very much by ‘internal goods’.

one takes in more consequential tasks outside prison, one can find in doing small things inside prison. (Mandela cited in Whitaker, 2013)

The problem is that in the case of activities offering little opportunity for independent judgement or autonomy (prison life being an extreme example), there is no fulfilment to be derived from goods *intrinsic* to the activity - i.e. from internal goods; and though the virtues might be exercised if previously habituated (Mandela, after all, was an educated man of exceptional character), the activity itself does little to foster or cultivate them. Activities other than a person's work occupation, activities that *could* be deemed worthwhile, would then assume all the more importance as sources of fulfilment: leisure activities, hobbies, serious intellectual and artistic pursuits, sport and family life, for example; and the habituation of the virtues in upbringing and schooling would assume paramount importance. The virtues equip us to engage successfully in a range of worthwhile activities (or 'practices'), and when we engage in activities that are not particularly worthwhile in themselves *as we often have to in life*, they help to sustain us by providing purpose and meaning to our lives, by serving as goods-in-themselves worth striving for.

I am not at all arguing that workers should be satisfied with their 'station' or that any occupation can be fulfilling so long as the worker has a sufficiently positive attitude. It is all very well for proponents of positive psychology to argue that it is a matter of what people 'choose to perceive' about their jobs; that work can be made more fulfilling if only workers 'focus on those aspects that are personally meaningful and pleasurable' (Ben-Shahar, 2008, p. 107); and that if such a change of focus is not possible, we simply need to find alternative employment that 'corresponds to both our passions and our strengths' (p. 103). But this is little comfort to those who, because they have to earn a living, are engaged in cleaning the latrines, or stacking shelves, or patrolling the premises at night as security guards – jobs that somebody will end up doing in any industrial society. The onus is then on government, employers and unions to try to improve the working conditions of people who are not engaged in very fulfilling occupations by changing - so far as it is possible - the nature of the job to allow more autonomy, more responsibility, more opportunities for 'professional development' and so forth.

Of course, a more radical transformation of industrial society might also be envisaged. There is a particular problem with utopian solutions on ‘communist’ lines designed to strike at the twin evils (as Marx saw them) of division of labour and specialisation, in that they undermine the very practices (practices necessarily entailing a high degree of specialisation) that mediate the goods of a worthwhile life; and this is apart from the obvious totalitarian dangers. But the position I am defending in this thesis certainly does not preclude a radical transformation of society - a transformation, for example, in which disagreeable tasks are shared out among the population, economic goods are shared more equally, economic growth is managed so that it is ecologically sustainable, and (most radical of all) absolute limits are put on the individual’s consumption of commodities⁹. However, in a liberal society there will always be some onus on individuals to try, on the one hand, to choose (and to train for) the occupations that offer them the greatest possibility of fulfilment; and on the other, to ‘make the most’ of the occupation that they happen to be engaged in, even if it is not the one they would have chosen had they the choice. And here, again, it is the virtues that are of paramount importance.

The good of the unexamined life

Before I go on to consider the precise nature of the virtues that are worth cultivating, I would like to explore further one particular aspect of the argument I have developed above concerning the nature of the goods of practices - one that has significant implications for the nature of the school curriculum. Part of my purpose in attempting to detail the goods of worthwhile activities – of activities that might contribute to a flourishing life - has been to try to demonstrate that a wide variety of activities (academic, practical, artistic, sporting, professional, caring, and so forth)

⁹ In this respect, Ivan Illich’s critique of industrial society is particularly interesting in that it seeks a better balance between ‘industrial tools’ and ‘convivial tools’ so as to maximise the production (or creation) of ‘use values’. Unlike ‘industrial tools’, by which the user is passively acted on, convivial or ‘enabling’ tools are actively mastered by the user, they allow him to ‘express his meaning in action’ rather than satisfy demands created by the producer, and their production and use is practicable for the many and not merely the few (Illich, 1990, pp. 20-26). Illich developed his critique of industrial society in a series of books published in the 1970s, but his critique seems all the more relevant now given that the continuing association of progress with economic growth seems increasingly untenable on ecological grounds.

can count as worthwhile in the sense of having both the subjective and the ethical dimensions that make them conducive to a good life. It also follows that a variety of *forms* of engagement in practices can count as worthwhile - in particular, that to engage in a practice and to access its goods does not, generally speaking, require a person to be ‘critically’ engaged in justifying and reformulating the principles, values and goods that underlie the practice. *Contra* MacIntyre, there is no need for the individual to be involved in a continuous argument as to the nature of the goods of the practices in which he is engaged (this was my argument in Chapter 3).

It is certainly the case that some practices by their very nature lend themselves more than others to critical engagement, to the quest for rational justification and ‘epistemic goods’ (i.e. to quest for ‘the truth’), and to ‘rational autonomy’ on the part of the practitioner. Philosophy is an obvious example, but the engagement in any academic subject discipline with a corpus of pure, theoretical knowledge, will sooner or later involve getting to grips with questions of justification and proof, particularly where there are rival theories and schools of thought to choose from. It is also the case that, regardless of the nature of the practice, most practitioners will want to innovate in some sense of the term (local innovation being part and parcel of the exercise of practical judgement) - but *within* the frame of the paradigm, because it is the paradigm that defines the nature of problems to be solved and their solutions in the first place (as I argued in Chapter 3). Radical innovation or ‘paradigm change’ certainly has its place in a range of practices – and not only the academic disciplines. But as we move from the pure to the applied disciplines, from the academic disciplines to other kinds of practice (the professions, crafts, leisure activities, family life and so forth), the nature of a person’s engagement is less likely to be ‘critical’, and more likely to revolve around the mastery of a recognised body of knowledge and skill (whether articulated or tacit), and the practical exercise of skill and judgement. The engagement might well involve innovation - but at a localised and practical level. For example, the family doctor’s main concern is the treatment of her patients; her interest in medical research, by contrast, is likely to be limited to its applications to current practice rather than the precise nature of the research, the experimental methods employed and the theory underpinning it; and her interest in

the radical re-structuring of the health service or of patient care is likely to be practical in nature rather than involve her in rigorous academic study or inquiry¹⁰.

By the same token, there will be some people for whom the wholehearted engagement in a practice is only possible if the form of that engagement is critical. For them, the life of the academic, philosopher, intellectual, research scientist, radical innovator or reformer will represent ‘the good life’. But such people are suited by their aptitude, interest and personality for this critical engagement. There is no reason to suppose that this is true of all people, just as there is no reason to suppose that everyone would wish to engage in doctoral research if only they had the opportunity¹¹. I am simply arguing that there are many different ways in which people can lead flourishing lives, in which people can lead the best life that it is *ethically* possible for them to lead; and that the ‘ordinary’ everyday engagement in a practice is just as conducive to realising the goods of a practice as the ‘critical’ or radical or even revolutionary engagement on the part of that rare practitioner who has the aptitude, interest and motivation (as well as the opportunity) to institute radical reform or produce radical innovations.

And yet the claim that only ‘the examined life’ is worth living is tacitly implied by nearly all those engaged in moral philosophy. As Iris Murdoch (who is a notable exception) remarks, ‘the fact that an unexamined life can be virtuous’ has been either forgotten or ‘theorized away’ by philosophers (Murdoch, 1985, p. 1). The notion that endowing pupils with ‘personal autonomy’ and the capacity ‘to think critically’ (and hence preparing them for active political and intellectual life) is the central aim of education - that these are essential to human flourishing - is so entrenched that it is worth exploring further the possibility that ‘an ordinary life’, too, is worth living.

¹⁰ Time considerations alone are an important determining factor here. Speaking from personal experience, it is very hard indeed to find the time to engage in serious academic research and simultaneously ‘hold down’ a full time job outside academia *and* have a family, especially when there are young children.

¹¹ Indeed, it might be argued that it takes a certain sort of person to be a philosopher (or academic or researcher), a person not only with the intellectual aptitude but the personality. One clearly needs an analytical mind, but also, I think, a tendency to introspection. The trait that leads a person to need to stand back from life and analyse what others take for granted might even be considered a sign of psychic imbalance, a mental disorder, particularly if the capacity to act or to form normal loving caring relationships with others is impaired as a result.

Can a person be a good citizen and lead a flourishing life without taking an active part in political life or actively deliberating on the political issues of the day? Can a person deliberate well and make good judgements if they have not reflected on their ethical principles - as, for example, they might if they made a critical study of Aristotle's ethical works? Can a person make good moral judgements without deliberating at all in the sense of articulating the ethical principles involved?

Unfortunately, a recurrent concern with the philosophical and political dimensions of ethical life to the exclusion of other conceptions of worthwhile activity and *eudaimonia* has typified thinking on education from classical times to the present day. This is true of Aristotelian inspired virtue ethics, liberal conceptions of education (both the rhetorical and the research traditions), modern civic education, programmes designed to foster 'critical thinking', and virtue epistemology - according to which pupils should be motivated by a love of 'epistemic goods'. The possibility that an ordinary sort of life, the life of a person engaged neither in critical justification nor in active politics, can be virtuous and worthwhile in the fullest sense seems to have been neglected. By contrast, the life of the critical thinker and/or politically active citizen has been held up as the ideal for which all should strive.

This bias against the practices and forms of engagement in practices that typify ordinary life can be traced all the way back to Plato and Aristotle, who believed that the life of the philosopher devoted to the pursuit of knowledge and truth, the contemplative life, is the only one really worth living - or as Socrates famously put it, 'the unexamined life is not worth living'. Aristotle qualifies this by arguing that the active political life - the life in which *phronesis* and the virtues can be exercised to the highest and most harmonious degree - is not only a necessary pre-condition for engagement in philosophy or contemplation (because it sustains the life of the *polis*) but is a good worth striving for in its own right. And so in Aristotle's ethical system, the ideal of the good life and of *eudaimonia* (the condition or state of flourishing that is thereby achieved), the ideal of the most complete life it is possible for any human being to live, requires engagement either in philosophy or in politics.¹² Absent,

¹² Aristotle follows Plato and Socrates in regarding the contemplative life – the pursuit of *sophia* or wisdom - as the highest form and expression of the supreme good; but he differs from Plato in

however, from the Aristotelian ethical scheme is any notion that people might live virtuous lives and contribute to the ethical life of the community - that they might even live ‘the best life it is possible for them to live’ - by participating in a range of practices *other* than politics or philosophy; i.e. that they might lead *ordinary lives*.

How did this state of affairs arise? The answer can, I think, be traced directly to the nature of the *polis* that Aristotle assumed as the frame for his ethical system. Aristotle’s conception of *eudaimonia* and the form of life in which it might be realised depends in turn on certain very specific social and economic conditions obtaining in the *polis*. The conditions are, first, that the population of the *polis* is small enough to allow all citizens to engage actively in politics; second, that there is a large class of slaves engaged in menial activity so as to free an elite of educated citizens (‘free men’) to engage full-time in politics and/or contemplation¹³; and, third, that though people differ in their natural capacities (in their ‘natural virtue’), the virtues can be habituated and something approximating to the ideal citizen formed given the requisite upbringing and education – so that Greek democracy can function effectively.

Now, it is fairly obvious that these conditions bear little or no relation to those actually obtaining in a modern liberal society – indeed in any modern industrial society. In a modern liberal state, the population is vastly greater than in an Ancient Greek city state and so democracy must be representative (in Britain a member of parliament might represent an electorate of anything up to 100,000). Most citizens have to work for a living and they specialise in the fields and occupations in which

regarding an active and virtuous civic life (a political life) as also essential to the attainment of the supreme good, not merely as a means to the former but as an end in itself – hence the subject matter of *The Nicomachean Ethics* and *The Politics*. Moral development therefore culminates in *phronesis*, the architectonic virtue that enables right judgement in both private and public affairs. The debate on whether Aristotle favours contemplation or politics is an extensive one, but I think it is clear that Aristotle himself is somewhat ambivalent on the matter (see Nagel, 1980). I think it is indicative of this that when in *The Politics* Aristotle asks whether ‘the active life of a statesman’ or ‘the contemplative life’ is the better one, and notes how important it is to answer the question, he proceeds not to answer his own question (Aristotle, 1981, p. 395).

¹³ A. N. Whitehead laments the ‘disastrous antitheses ... between mind and body, and ... thought and action’ that characterised the Ancient Greek culture; they had ‘that perverted sense of values which is the nemesis of slave-holding’ (Whitehead, 1950, pp. 77-8). John Dewey talks in similar vein of the existence in Western culture of an indulgent parasitic leisured class made ‘luxurious and effeminate’ because it lacks the discipline of work, the ‘struggle with things’ (Dewey, 1966, pp. 135-6; 192).

their particular aptitudes or interests or motivations gain them the greatest reward; only a very small number will have the opportunity to be engaged in political decision-making or academia. And finally, it is nowadays generally accepted that people differ widely in their aptitudes, personalities, interests and levels of motivation, whereas Aristotle distinguished mainly between those who were capable of exercising the virtues in at least some measure (citizens) and those who lacked the capability altogether (slaves). As soon as we introduce these new factors or variables, the ethical picture changes radically. Aristotle's rigid, idealised conception of the path to *eudaimonia* and the good life via a life of political engagement and contemplation can be rejected in favour of a more flexible individualised conception of the goods and virtues that might contribute to human flourishing. When the nature of social, political and economic life in a modern state is taken into account – in particular, the division of labour and differences in people's aptitudes, interests and motivation – it is clear that for most people, the *eudaimonic* life envisaged by Aristotle is neither feasible nor desirable. Not everyone has the aptitude or (even if they had the aptitude) the motivation or interest to lead a public or a contemplative life. Even if everyone did have the aptitude, motivation and interest, preparation for a life of political and contemplative activity is only going to culminate in a worthwhile life if the virtues cultivated find outlet and expression in a suitable public arena where the art of judgement (*phronesis*) can be developed and actualised through the experience of leading an active political or contemplative life; otherwise, *eudaimonia* is denied. And clearly only a minority of pupils will find this outlet. In any case, as I have argued, there is no reason to suppose that a flourishing life *need* involve either political activity or philosophy.

The problem with liberal education on this account is that it has from the very beginning been conceived as preparing pupils either for a life of political activity (Cicero's *via activa*) or a life of contemplation; and therefore as producing a political administrative cultural and academic elite. It has, in effect, assumed Aristotle's conception both of the *polis* and of *eudaimonia*, and has, as a result, been literary and academic in nature. Moreover, those philosophers of education who conceive the primary aim of universal education to be the development of autonomous citizens and critical thinkers (without which, it is judged that people are both morally

undeveloped and incapable of leading flourishing lives), have unwittingly subscribed to the same conception of liberal education. Even those who wish to replace subject disciplines with programmes to develop ‘critical thinking skills’, didactic methods with ‘communities of enquiry’, subscribe broadly to the same ends. The unfortunate result is that an education designed to produce an elite of academics and orators has been foisted on all pupils regardless of their needs or interests.

However, it could be argued that a degree of rational or intellectual autonomy – the capacity to make up one’s own mind by critically scrutinising an argument and the available evidence – on the part of citizens is essential for the sustenance of the *polis* and liberal democracy; that to lead a good life requires a person to both be fulfilled in their personal life *and* to be active as a citizen. I think there is no doubt that to engage actively in politics, the capacity to engage critically and intellectually is a great advantage. We expect our politicians to make difficult decisions concerning the nature of conflicting public goods and to be able to justify their decisions with rational arguments. But is the academic or intellectual necessarily a better citizen than the ordinary person in the street?

MacIntyre seems to imply that this is the case when he argues that for ‘shared rational deliberation’ in a democracy, an ‘educated public’ is necessary, and that an educated public would be constituted by ‘educated generalists, people who ‘can situate themselves in relation to society and to nature because they know enough astronomy, enough geology, enough history, enough economics, and enough philosophy and theology to do so’ (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002, p. 17). He even argues that pupils should all study mathematics ‘up to and including the differential calculus’ (p. 14) – in other words, to a good A-level standard. But this is fantastic. Even if it were assumed that everyone had the intellectual capability or aptitude for an academic education, which I think is a wildly optimistic assumption made on egalitarian grounds¹⁴, one still has to face the fact that most people do not wish to

¹⁴ I realise that there are many philosophers of education and educationalists who would disagree profoundly with this assertion. Their view is that so long as they are taught by sufficiently competent and inspiring teachers, all pupils can learn philosophy and mathematics (along with other academic disciplines) to a high level. All I can say is that speaking as a mathematics teacher, I profoundly disagree, as do all the teaching colleagues I have ever worked with who have expressed a view on the

engage in sustained critical reflection on their moral and political principles for the simple reason that they lack the desire, interest or need. Indeed, the claim that only those who have a serious interest in moral philosophy or in politics can lead an ethical or virtuous life in the fullest sense, whether as a person or a citizen, would seem, on the face of it, a preposterous one. This scholar's conceit is surely disproved by the exemplary lives and characters of a multitude of good decent people who simply get on with their lives and who find motivation and inspiration in sources other than critical reflection and philosophising.¹⁵

Many people find inspiration in religion - in revelation rather than in rational reflection. Christians, for example, feel *called* to display selfless love (*agape*); no rational justification is required in the sense of the formulation of an ethical theory. Moreover, as I noted in Chapter 2, the emotional capacity to love and to care arises not from rational calculation but from our particular experience of loving family ties, above all from 'the loving relation between parent and child' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 83). Richard Smith writes that analytic philosophy's concern with the 'clear-headed, ratiocinative chooser-as-calculator' neglects 'the manifold ways in which we 'experience our identifications and commitments'', and yet these experiences and callings are sometimes 'in the most important areas of our lives' (Smith, 2003, p. 165). That these other sources of ethical knowledge and motivation can be the most powerful of all is demonstrated by all those ordinary people (ordinary simply in the sense of not being academics, philosopher, critical practitioners or radical innovators) who treat others with notable respect, compassion, generosity and kindness in their daily lives. In any case, as I argued in Chapters 2 and 3, most sorts of deliberation, including on moral dilemmas, are carried on within the practices that together comprise a moral tradition by drawing on the knowledge, values and emotional responses into which people have been habituated.

matter. However, the main arguments of this thesis are not premised on the assertion that there are differences in intellectual ability. I shall address the other shortcomings (as I see it) of a universal academic curriculum in Part 2.

¹⁵ In fact, I shall argue in Part 2 that rhetoric provides a better training for the politician or active citizen than either academic training or a course in 'critical thinking'; and that if we want an educated public in the sense of politically aware and reflective citizens able to make practical judgements, then a training in rhetoric (with stories of human experience as its subject matter) is the better means of attaining this end.

Another way of putting this argument is that moral knowledge can take the form of intuition born of experience rather than of rational deliberation from first principles. Gerald Dworkin warns of the dangers of over-intellectualising our conceptions of moral autonomy: ‘If we think of the process of reflection and identification as being a conscious, fully articulated, and explicit process, then it will appear that it is mainly professors of philosophy who exercise autonomy’ (Dworkin, 1988, p. 17; and cited in Smith, 2003, p. 168). He goes on to cite the example of a farmer ‘living in an isolated rural community, with a minimal education’, who

... may without being aware of it be conducting his life in ways which indicate that he has shaped and molded his life according to reflective procedures. This will be shown not by what he says about his thoughts, but in what he tries to change in his life, what he criticizes about others, the satisfaction he manifests (or fails to) in his work, family, and community (Dworkin, p. 17).

To know that ‘this is good’ and ‘that is right’ by virtue of having been initiated into a moral tradition and its component practices is therefore not to possess some inferior knowledge or understanding – inferior because not subjected to critical analysis and reflection, inferior because not deliberated on or articulated. For Bernard Williams, the crucial distinction is between the form moral knowledge takes at the public level and the form it takes at the private level. At the public and institutional level, there is clearly a need for rational justification because ethical norms and guidelines must be articulated (for example, in medical ethics), even when moral conflict cannot be resolved by ethical theory and when moral uncertainty arises (as Williams believes it must) because our basic values are incommensurable (Williams, 1981, p. 76). Moral philosophy clearly has an important role here in at least clarifying the issues involved. But at the private level, moral sentiment and moral intuition are the characteristic forms of moral knowledge and understanding:

For the intuitive condition is not only a state which private understanding can live with, but a state which it must have as part of its life, if that life is going to have any density or conviction and succeed in being that worthwhile kind

of life which human beings lack unless *they feel more than they can say, and grasp more than they can explain* [my italics]. (p. 82)

By the same token, to be a good citizen need not entail critical analysis and reflection on one's ethical principles. A person can possess good moral judgement and practical wisdom on both private and public matters by virtue of their moral sentiments and moral intuition, as well as by virtue of their experience of engaging in a variety of practices.

There is certainly an important role for philosophers, academics and intellectuals (indeed, for anybody with a serious interest in political and philosophical questions) in framing ethical guidelines and policy at the public level, and in informing and contributing to public debate on ethical and moral issues. But it is quite unwarranted to credit those professionally engaged in philosophy, politics, academia or intellectual life in general with a uniquely privileged position or standing – social, moral or political. Of course, philosophers, politicians and academics have their own special contribution to make to the *polis*, to the well-being of liberal society. But so do other practitioners: those who save or protect lives (including the lives of philosophers, academics and politicians), who engage in scientific research (where the potential for public good is enormous on the part of those rare practitioners with the necessary talent), who farm and produce the food that sustains human life, who through their imaginative power as artists illuminate the human condition, who care selflessly for others - and even those who make us laugh, because they too illuminate the human condition. Indeed, the epitome of a practice that is almost universally accessible, that does not require intellectual engagement or justification, and yet whose goods are of incalculable ethical value both to the individual and the wider community, is 'the family' founded as it is on ties of unconditional love and affection.

In summary, then, the life of the politician or philosopher is not the only form that the good life can take. We can conceive of a range of conceptions of human flourishing and the good life reflecting the range of aptitudes, needs, interests and motivations of individuals and attained or actualised through a diverse range of

practices. A person can be a good citizen and lead a flourishing life by engaging in a range of practices and occupations none of which necessarily requires sustained critical reflection or philosophising on underlying values and principles. In other words, the unexamined life can be worth living. An education conceived primarily as preparing pupils for public or academic life, for producing philosophers and statesmen, is therefore not necessarily the best education for all pupils. What is certain, however, is that the role of the virtues is crucial, both in practices and in those activities and occupations that, on the face of it, offer little in the form of internal or external goods, but which people are compelled by circumstances to engage in.

I shall now consider the core virtues that ought to be cultivated - the virtues that any citizen would need to access at least some of the goods I have identified as essential to a flourishing life; for it is the cultivation of these virtues that ought to constitute the main aim of the school curriculum.

Three models of civic virtue

I have argued that in a modern society, a much broader range of conceptions of *eudaimonia* and human flourishing must be envisaged than was the case in Aristotle's Greek city state, where slaveholders were able - at least in principle - to devote themselves full time to contemplation (philosophy) and politics. Nevertheless, it is the pre-condition for engagement in practices of any kind (as well as for the integration of these practices into a coherent whole) that certain virtues have already been habituated to some degree; and this is the task of education. The questions we must now answer, then, are 'what are the virtues whose habituation¹⁶ is the essential pre-condition for the engagement in practices?' and 'how might these virtues best be cultivated?' It is the cultivation of these virtues that would then be the prime aim of school education. Though we are no longer envisaging *eudaimonia* or

¹⁶ By habituation, I mean a concurrent process of habit formation and moral instruction the outcome of which is *phronesis* – the capacity to exercise the moral virtues in practice. This capacity is refined through initiation into the practices of adult life and through general experience of exercising the virtues as an adult. This follows on my argument in Chapter 2.

the good life in identical terms for all', we can still speak of a core set of virtues into which all should be habituated - virtues the possession of which is the pre-condition both for individuals to engage on their own quests for the good life and for the wider life of the *polis* (i.e. liberal democracy) to be sustained.

Let us first consider three contrasting approaches to identifying and cultivating the core civic virtues of citizens in a liberal democracy¹⁷, and see to what extent they fulfil the requirements identified above.

1 - Rawlsian liberalism and the equality of self-respect

The set of virtues that come to have normative status in a society – the virtues it is deemed are desirable and worthy of recognition in the citizen, and that must therefore be cultivated in succeeding generations – both depends on and is partly constitutive of the wider values (moral, spiritual, intellectual and aesthetic) and political principles on which that society is founded. In a liberal democracy, liberty and justice (or 'social justice') are the paramount principles and therefore a natural approach to formulating a code of ethics and a shared conception of the good in a liberal democracy (assuming this to be our task) is to begin by articulating these principles.

John Rawls has argued that a whole political-social-ethical system can be derived from certain *a priori* principles of social justice, principles that Rawls famously justifies by invoking a notional 'original contract'. Neutral reason takes the form of certain categorical principles of social justice (Rawls regards himself as a successor to Kant in this respect), which provide the framework in which people's diverse interest, beliefs, values and ends are accommodated. For many, not least in the field of philosophy of education, it is egalitarian liberalism founded on Rawls' principles of justice that is the preferred solution to the dilemma of Enlightenment

¹⁷ I take the term liberal democracy here to encompass social democracy. The autonomy of citizens is the crucial concept.

liberalism I discussed in Chapter 1 (that though it provides a frame of human rights, it does not provide us with any substantive conception of the goods worth pursuing within that frame) precisely because it promises to combine liberal autonomy and social justice.

In Rawls' scheme, people are free to pursue their own ends and conceptions of the good – indeed, it is central to the very notion of rational autonomy that they do pursue their own freely and rationally chosen ends (people are 'sovereign choosers'); and so instead of some teleological or perfectionist conception of a shared or 'supreme' good, of an ideal of 'the good life' at which all should aim, we have 'goodness as rationality' in which the fundamental values of freedom (liberal autonomy or freedom to choose one's own beliefs and values) and equality in the form of 'justice as fairness' are combined. The essence of justice as fairness is that people are entitled not only to pursue their own ends but to be accorded an equality of valuation of their differing preferences, accomplishments and ways of life (their own conceptions of the good) on account of their fundamental moral equivalence as citizens and rational beings. And, as a result, qualitative distinctions between practices – distinctions that would imply a hierarchy of goods and values – are ruled out altogether. So whereas I have argued that utilitarianism is deficient on account of its *not* recognising qualitative distinctions between goods (i.e. the 'higher' interests that might exist apart from people's current preferences), for Rawls it is essential that no such distinctions *are* publicly recognised or validated because to do so would be to deny people's moral equivalence as rational beings - beings who are free to pursue their own ends and their own conceptions of the good.

The problem with Rawls' thesis is that it is inevitable that some practices (or communities of interest or 'social unions' as Rawls terms them) will be judged to be of greater social or economic value than others and hence more worthy of public recognition and remuneration. So, for example, though model railway enthusiasts will find affirmation, self-respect and mutual appreciation within their community of shared interest, and shopkeepers will gain self-respect and financial reward through doing 'an honest job', neither group can expect too much by way of public recognition or social and economic status. By contrast, a surgeon, scientist,

philosopher, artist or statesman (for example) may well gain a certain public recognition and status on account of their activities being judged by the community to contribute significantly to the public good - as well as be accorded higher market value in response to forces of supply and demand. Moreover, it is difficult to see how this can be avoided, particularly in a society in which people's aptitudes (Rawls speaks of 'natural endowments'), motivations and achievements differ. Even in a totalitarian state where opportunities and outcomes might conceivably be equalised, it is likely that the doctor who saves peoples' lives would be accorded a respect and public status denied to the shopkeeper.

Rawls even suggests at times that qualitative distinctions between goods, and therefore between people who have attained those goods, within practices must be avoided. For the social union to be consistent with equality of self-respect, it must not be a meritocracy in miniature in which hierarchical values and perfectionism cause some to be excluded or their achievements to be devalued, but must be inclusive and participative. Of course its members will have certain values in common arising from their shared interest, but achievements will be equally valued. This is, I think, what Rawls has in mind when he compares a social union to a game in which 'the sides are more or less evenly matched', 'all sense that they are playing well' and 'a good play of the game is ... a collective achievement requiring the cooperation of all' (Rawls, 1972, p. 526). Indeed, it is implicit in the very term 'social union' that a community of shared interest should be inclusive, should be defined by the interests and enthusiasms of its members, and should encourage all members to participate and value their contributions. Many clubs, amateur societies and voluntary groups would meet these criteria and they perform a valuable social function. But it is central to the notion of a practice as MacIntyre conceives it (and as Rawls himself recognises elsewhere in his work in relation to communities of interest or social unions) that it enables the individual pursuit of a good through initiation into certain values, objective standards and criteria of excellence - i.e. into a *hierarchy* of values - that have their source in the authority of a tradition.

Rawls feels compelled to argue against 'perfectionist' hierarchies of goods on the grounds that people's moral equivalence as rational beings would be denied them

and therefore that equality of self-respect would also be denied them – self-respect being the primary good that, according to Rawls, a rational man desires above all else (p. 440). But the premise is, I think, a false one. The problem is that Rawls fails to distinguish between the public recognition, status and reward that flows from activities and achievements accorded special value by society at large (whether it be exceptional achievement or merely accomplishment in a difficult or specially demanding practice) - a recognition that can, by its very nature, only be accorded relatively few people; and the recognition accorded people by their peers - the recognition that follows on accomplishment in a practice or occupation or activity whose goods are more widely accessible, and that can be accorded all people.

People can of course have self-respect even when denied the respect of others, provided that they have a strong enough personal code of values (values that would themselves be rooted in wider social, cultural, religious or philosophical traditions) – one imagines the situation of dissidents in a totalitarian state. But in normal circumstances, the respect and esteem of others is an important ingredient in a person’s self-respect and self-esteem¹⁸, and it is likely to be accorded anybody who behaves virtuously and responsibly, who abides by accepted norms, displays the recognised virtues and undertakes the requisite duties and responsibilities of the activity they are engaged in. So though commitment to a humble occupation or passion, or to one’s family, may not earn public recognition or status, there is no reason it should not earn people the respect and appreciation of those around them, and hence dignity, self-respect and the sense that one is leading a worthwhile life.

¹⁸ I am distinguishing here between ‘self-respect’ and ‘self-esteem’ on the grounds that a clear conceptual distinction can be made between them (Rawls uses the two terms interchangeably). Self-esteem is a person’s psychological or psycho-emotional sense of worth, the degree to which a person’s feelings towards him or herself are positive or negative. It derives from the attitudes, feelings and reactions you have experienced of other people to you (and the comparisons that are made between you and other people) – a view of you that is incorporated into your own self-image. Self-respect, on the other hand, is a person’s moral sense of worth. Inculcated and developed through upbringing and education, it is gained through a person’s undertaking right courses of action, accepting responsibilities and discharging duties, and displaying virtuous qualities or traits of character. It is therefore self-respect rather than self-esteem that is the concern of this discussion. However, though self-respect and self-esteem are conceptually distinct, and a person might have one without the other, the relation between the two is in practice complex (see Sachs, 1981) with the result that they are sometimes difficult to disentangle.

My argument, then, is that the effect of Rawls' attempting to enforce equality of moral personality and equality of valuation of people's goods in the interests of 'social justice' is to eliminate (or at least deny public validity to) the hierarchy of values, goods and virtues that are fostered by practices; that this in turn undermines practices making them harder to sustain; and that as a result, the self-respect and sense that one is leading a worthwhile life that derive from pursuing the goods internal to practices, from living according to *publicly* recognised norms and displaying *publicly* recognised virtues, is compromised. The attempt to make social justice - conceived as 'justice as fairness' and embodied in 'goodness as rationality' - the foundational principle of liberal society, to in effect make it the architectonic virtue, merely has the result of denying people the possibility of leading a good life at all in any substantive sense. People merely express their current preferences, satisfy their appetites and maximise utility.

2 – Pendlebury's civic virtues and Socratic education

It has however been proposed that the virtues that might sustain a deliberative democracy (and hence sustain the egalitarian liberalism of Rawls, though liberal democracy need not be conceived only in Rawlsian terms) – certain *civic* virtues – might themselves be cultivated. Shirley Pendlebury suggests that the educational task in a deliberative democracy is to develop 'a respect for and capacity to apply rules of evidence and principles of reason, with due regard for accepted general beliefs' (Dunne & Pendlebury, 2003, p. 209) and that the distinctive virtues of 'a deliberative character' might include 'reciprocity, mutual respect, openness, a willingness to give reasons and to listen to the reasons given by others' (p. 208).

Could a set of civic virtues form the core values of liberal society? The problem, I would like to argue here, is that though the qualities or virtues Pendlebury details are laudable so far as they go, they are not the substantive ones pupils need to engage in practices; to treat Pendlebury's 'deliberative virtues' as if they *are* the core virtues to be cultivated in education is therefore to deprive pupils of the means of accessing the goods internal to practices and leading flourishing lives.

There is a strong Socratic flavour to Pendlebury's conception of deliberative democracy and the sort of rationality she takes it to imply. When she talks of 'a respect for and capacity to apply rules of evidence and principles of reason', she is adhering very much to an Enlightenment conception of ethics and rationality, to the view of neutral reason as arbiter that I have argued against in Chapters 1 and 3. She adds the qualification that reasoning be conducted 'with due regard for accepted general beliefs', which presumably means that diverse goods and values can flourish within the frame of liberal democracy and are deserving of respect provided that they do not conflict with the core values of liberal democracy or with each other - i.e. with other people's right to pursue different goods and live by different values. However, a mere willingness to listen (if that is what is meant by openness) and a tolerance and due regard or respect for the goods and values of others can only take us so far. It is in the very nature of commitments, values and beliefs that they are not lightly discarded that they are not diluted or compromised on merely because somebody else does not share them. We might tolerate, and in this limited sense 'respect', the different values and beliefs of others if they do not interfere with our own; but what if we regard the views of others as misguided and profoundly mistaken, even antithetical to or destructive of our own values and beliefs? Could we really respect their views in these circumstances? Of course, civilized debate is relatively easy to carry on in the debating chamber or drawing room; the problems arise when beliefs, values and commitments come into conflict and a course of action needs to be decided on - problems that are particularly acute in a 'multi-cultural' liberal society. If substantive values are fostered in faith communities, for example, how are incompatible ends to be reconciled? How is the community to be integrated?

The tacit assumption is that people do, in fact, share certain underlying values concerning the nature of liberty and justice, and that pure reason together with the resources of empirical science will provide the means to resolve disputes, perhaps even reveal a universally applicable set of values or virtues¹⁹. Indeed, once we get

¹⁹ The advent of 'positive psychology' (or 'the psychology of happiness') - the notion that a scientific formula can be devised to explain human fulfilment - is a striking example of this naturalism.

beyond the basic civilities essential for any conversation or debate to take place, mutual respect and reciprocity are only possible in any meaningful sense if the participants do share certain underlying values. Otherwise, fruitful engagement will be impossible. One could go further and argue that for liberal democracy to work, the *only* values, beliefs and commitments that people hold non-negotiable are the ones that underlie liberal democracy - namely, certain principles of egalitarian justice and liberal autonomy as detailed by, say, John Rawls. In fact, Rawls quite openly argues that for a citizen to adhere *too* strongly to any particular commitment or set of commitments (i.e. to the exclusion of others) is undesirable and unhealthy. But the effect, as we have seen, is to deny people the possibility of leading a good life at all in any substantive sense. ‘Higher’ values, commitments, goods and virtues atrophy as people pursue their appetitive desires and aim to satisfy their ever multiplying and increasingly unsustainable material wants.

The difficulty in seeking to derive the foundational values and goods of a society solely from a core of liberal civic virtues is mirrored in proposals to put Socratic questioning and self-examination at the heart of the educational process. A political commitment to deliberative democracy and Enlightenment rationality finds reflection in education and philosophy of education in the form of a powerful movement to make the promotion of the civic virtues (along with the skills and knowledge) necessary for deliberative democracy a central aim of education; and so we have ‘education for autonomy’²⁰. The result is a broad movement to develop ‘thinking skills’ and ‘thinking classrooms’ (which includes ‘Philosophy for Children’ and a host of other approaches and initiatives²¹) and the notion that at the heart of education in a deliberative democracy should be the cultivation of communities of inquiry in which pupils engage in Socratic dialogue, learn to question their and others’ assumptions, question authority and explore new meanings (Kennedy & Kennedy, 2011, pp. 279-81). In short, we should have ‘Socratic education’.

20 John White, for example, argues that since ours is a liberal democratic society, education must prepare children for membership of this society, and therefore that the fundamental aims of education should derive from the core values of a democratic society: political equality and personal autonomy (White, 2004, p. 21).

21 Carol McGuinness documented these in her review for the DfEE (see McGuinness, 1999).

Interestingly, it is Martha Nussbaum in *Cultivating Humanity* (1997) who has made one of the most powerful pleas for Socratic education. Though she still regards the humanities as an essential component in a liberal education (because they develop the narrative imagination and hence a capacity to empathise with others), she argues that at the heart of a liberal education that ‘cultivates humanity’ should be the development of ‘the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one’s traditions’ (p. 9) and of citizens who can think for themselves. But by arguing that ‘logical analysis is at the heart of democratic culture’ (p. 36) and that ‘Socratic self-examination’ should be central to education, she is adopting the very Enlightenment conception of rationality and the autonomous actor that I have been arguing against in this thesis.²²

The problem is this: is the critical examination of norms and traditions – including those encompassing the natural sciences - not something that is undertaken *and can only be undertaken* within practices? After all, practices are in part constituted by reflection on the nature of their own goods. And isn’t it a pre-condition of engaging in such reflection or argument that one is already initiated and acculturated *into* those practices?²³ As Kuhn argues in relation to the natural sciences, the dominant paradigm supplies both the tools to solve recognised problems within the discipline (or practice) *and* defines the problems that might be solved. Not to be conversant with the concepts and methods of the paradigm is therefore to be left with nothing to think constructively, usefully or fruitfully about²⁴.

²² Indeed, she follows Seneca in rejecting the old Athenian conception of liberal education founded on rhetoric, which ‘emphasised uncritical assimilation of tradition’, in contrast to the Socratic education that really does make its pupils free by making them ‘able to take charge of their own thought and to conduct a critical examination of their society’s norms and traditions’ (p. 30). I shall defend the rhetorical conception of *phronesis* in Chapter 7.

²³ I argued in Chapter 3 that the notion of a neutral Archimedean vantage point from which rival moral traditions might be adjudicated is a fiction. However, it is characteristic of living traditions – traditions in which practitioners are free to reflect on the goods mediated by the tradition – that they are able to evolve in response to changing circumstances and needs.

²⁴ Note that this point, if accepted, demolishes the argument for the teaching of general thinking skills. Without prior subject knowledge, the nature of the problem in question (the aspects of the problem that make it problematical or interesting or fruitful *as* a problem in a given subject discipline) cannot be grasped in the first place. There is nothing to think *about*. The same might be said to apply to ‘Philosophy for Children’ programmes. They might encourage children to play with ideas but the play is necessary only because serious engagement with those ideas is, as yet, impossible. There is great merit in encouraging pupils to play with ideas, to ask questions and to speculate, to develop in them interest and curiosity, as well as certain dispositions or virtues essential to a democratic society. But it is quite another matter to move from this position to arguing (as do some proponents of ‘Philosophy

Moreover, isn't it a central insight of Aristotle's that the virtues must be habituated? If an Aristotelian conception of ethics is adopted, if goods and virtues are regarded as internal to practices, and rationality itself is regarded as internal to a moral tradition as I have argued in Chapters 2 and 3, then Socratic education, education for deliberative democracy, and even Philosophy for Children (in so far as it is justified on the grounds that it contributes to deliberative democracy) are fundamentally flawed.

Communities of inquiry might well have a valuable role to play in cultivating the democratic spirit, in developing respect for the rights of others, and in motivating children to learn. My argument is that as a means of developing 'the capacity for critically examination of oneself and one's traditions', they are misconceived because the notion of the morally and rationally autonomous individual on which they are premised is, as I have argued, illusory. Nussbaum argues that armed with the capability of practical reason or *phronesis*, people are able to come to a reasoned judgement of their best interests. But if this reasoned judgement is to differ from merely working out how to satisfy current appetites and desires so as to maximise utility, then a person's interests, values and beliefs must themselves have been formed or cultivated as part of, or as a result of, the educational process; and for this *formative* education to happen, there must be a set of values or virtues that it is agreed are worthy of being cultivated or habituated - a set of virtues that will, in effect, form part of a shared conception of the good. By educating *for* deliberative democracy and *for* the liberal society, we neglect to initiate children into the practices and traditions that mediate these substantive goods, values and virtues. Deprived of the rationality of a tradition, they are equipped only with the hollow instrumental rationality of the Enlightenment. They are in a sense freed to pursue their own ends (i.e. they have 'freedom of choice') but deprived of access to the internal goods of practices, to the goods that make life fulfilling and worthwhile for a rational being, these ends inevitably reduce to the appetitive and material.²⁵

for Children') for 'the reconstruction of childhood education' (Kennedy & Kennedy, p. 281) or an 'epistemological shift' on the part of educators (Haynes & Murriss, 2011, p. 299).

²⁵ Anthony O'Hear draws attention to the limitations of Socratic Education in 'Education, Value and the Sense of Awe' (O'Hear, 2004a). The Socratic presumption 'that what can't be so expounded and justified should be rejected' neglects that 'not everything in morals, or anything else, can be given an

3 – Patricia White’s civic virtues

In *Civic Virtues and Public Schooling* (1996), Patricia White identifies the ‘democratic dispositions’ necessary for citizenship in a democracy – the dispositions necessary to reinforce and vivify the basic democratic values of justice, freedom and respect for personal autonomy (White, 1996, p. 1). In addition to the ‘bedrock’ democratic dispositions of ‘justice, tolerance and personal autonomy’ (p. 3), she lists the following: social hope - the belief that it is worth striving for ‘a fuller realisation of democratic values’ (and the loss of which produces apathy); courage – especially the courage to speak and act independently, but also the courage to compromise; self-respect and self-esteem; friendship – the recognition of its intrinsic value as a form of commitment; trust, both personal and social (i.e. trust in the institutions of a democratic state); honesty; and decency – or good manners.

White’s conception of the civic virtues is, I think, a more convincing and substantive one than either Rawls’ or Pendlebury’s. It also shows a sensitivity to human nature and human emotional needs that is lacking in more austere accounts that emphasise rationality as the central human characteristic, important though that is. Courage, honesty, decency and friendship are all substantive virtues (and goods) that contribute significantly to human fulfilment and are vital to the sustenance of a civilized society; and yet they are not incorporated by Pendlebury in her conception of the deliberative virtues necessary to sustain liberal democracy. A particular strength of White’s account is, I think, her inclusion of decency as a civic virtue. White notes that decency is often neglected in discourse about democracy or rejected as superficial and *bourgeois*, but it is essential because it enables us to have relationships with strangers – relationships ‘characterised by something like a mixture of goodwill, politeness, helpfulness, and forethought for others’ needs and wants’ (p. 79). It need not imply an inauthentic life, a suffocating *bourgeois*

explicit verbal formulation’ (p. 81) - the point I argued earlier in this chapter. But even more importantly, we can only reason well about value if we are predisposed ‘towards the good and the virtuous’ (p. 81); towards values that are ‘beyond rationality in a formal sense’ but that are mediated by our cultural inheritance, by our very form of life, and that ‘we then learn the meaning of in experience’ (p. 79). By contrast, a prematurely ‘rationalistic and dialectical approach to value’ elevates ‘uneducated preference’ above ‘mature wisdom’ (p. 80) and is likely to destroy morality altogether.

existence; rather, the straightforward desire to express one's goodwill 'in an appropriate way' (p. 85). Seen from this perspective, the manners and rituals of polite society are not arbitrary restrictions on our behaviour running counter to our notions of moral and rational autonomy, but rather means of expressing our goodwill to others and our concern for their feelings, and they can be habituated from an early age²⁶. As such, they have a vital role to play both in facilitating civil life and in paving the way for the more substantive 'caring virtues' that I shall discuss in the next section.

Where I think White's account is deficient is in its paying insufficient attention to the vital importance of engagement in worthwhile activity (or 'practices') in directly cultivating the virtues through a process of habituation, and hence in fostering self-esteem and self-belief²⁷; and in its correspondingly putting too much emphasis on the role of discussion, reflection and analysis, valuable though these are. It is all very well to 'encourage students to believe they can accomplish worthwhile projects and become admirable people' or 'seek to give them the intellectual tools with which they can take charge of their lives' (p. 34) or to encourage 'an exploration into the individual's own personal bases of ... self-esteem' (p. 36), and these things certainly have their place; but it is ultimately only through concrete experience, real social interaction and worthwhile achievement that the virtues are habituated, and a real sense of self-esteem and self-belief is constructed or discovered. Though courage, honesty and decency are all necessary in some degree to the successful engagement in practices, and ought therefore to be fostered as part of the school curriculum preparatory to adult life (in part through the engagement in educationally worthwhile activities), a range of other virtues not mentioned by White are of at least equal importance in this regard and therefore need incorporating in any scheme of civic virtues. These are the virtues of work - the

²⁶ A striking example is the formal manner in which even quite young French children are expected to present themselves to guests. This is regarded as at least as important as saying 'please' and 'thank you', because it teaches early on that the feelings and needs of others have to be taken into consideration – a process that begins with the formal acknowledgement of the presence of the other person. Pamela Druckerman documents this in *French Children Don't Throw Food* (Druckerman, 2012). This is certainly my experience of numerous family introductions in France.

²⁷ Practices assume even more importance if it is recognised, as White rightly points out, that the virtue of courage is crucially dependent on people having a sense of competence and confidence in themselves - the sense of 'confidence in competence' (p. 25) that comes of mastery and achievement in some field.

‘intellectual virtues’ - comprising industry, application, perseverance, concentration, attention, care, accuracy, exactness, and so forth.

Drawing in part on White’s scheme of civic virtues but making practices and the virtues cultivated through them central to ethical life, I would like to conclude this chapter by proposing a set of core virtues that a liberal education might seek to foster.

The core virtues of ordinary life

As we have seen, Patricia White has identified a series of ‘democratic dispositions’ and these are a good starting point. However, I would categorise them rather differently. Self-belief and self-esteem are *eudaimonic* states of mind (or aspects of well-being) that arise in large measure out of worthwhile activity and are contingent on the exercise of a range of virtues; they are goods rather than virtues or dispositions. Likewise, social hope, confidence and trust in democratic institutions are in large measure contingent on the sense of having a stake in society that comes from leading a fulfilled and flourishing life; in other words, they are contingent on possessing self-belief and self-esteem as a citizen. Friendship and personal trust *involve* the virtues rather than constitute virtues themselves, though they are clearly goods of great value. White follows Aristotle in noting the particular value of ‘character friendship’ where ‘the bond is the other’s character and the good that the other instantiates’ (p. 41) and where the relationship involves ‘mutual well-wishing and well-doing’ (p. 42) – the active mutual exercise of good will. Likewise, personal trust and loyalty arise when individuals are honest, decent and courageous. And finally, ‘personal autonomy’ is not in itself a virtue or a good, but rather an umbrella term that describes a person’s pursuit of goods through their engagement in practices and their exercise of habituated virtues including *phronesis* (if we are to term that a virtue). It does not, I think, make sense to speak of personal autonomy as a general capacity or disposition to pursue goods and exercise virtues because it is only through the initiation into practices and by the habituation of various virtues that these goods can be accessed; rather, it is the outcome of all these things. To possess

personal autonomy is not a precondition for leading a good life; it *is* to lead a good life.²⁸

That leaves courage, honesty and decency, along with justice, as the genuine ‘first order’ dispositions or virtues. Now, I would certainly categorise justice, courage, honesty, and decency as core virtues (with courage and honesty being grouped together as comprising the virtues that contribute to moral integrity’); but I would, in addition, incorporate two other important categories of virtues - the ‘caring virtues’ (including decency) and the ‘intellectual virtues’; and I would add temperance – the capacity of a person to exercise restraint in the satisfaction of their appetitive desires.

In summary, I am tentatively proposing five broad categories of virtues that together *might* be deemed to constitute the core virtues essential for human flourishing in a liberal democracy and therefore that ought to be cultivated, so far as possible, in school as part of a liberal education: (1) the ‘intellectual’ virtues; (2) the ‘caring’ virtues; (3) justice; (4) courage and honesty; and (5) temperance.

These categories are certainly not intended to be definitive or exhaustive. Any number of lists of virtues can be constructed and categories defined, beginning with Plato’s four cardinal virtues, three of which appear above²⁹. Rather, my purpose here is to give some indication of the virtues that would need to be cultivated to prepare pupils for their engagement in practices in order that they may access the goods I detailed at the start of this chapter, the goods that they must access if they are to lead flourishing lives, as well as to prepare them for their role as citizens in a liberal democracy. As a consequence, there are some differences in emphasis between my

²⁸ In Chapter 2, a parallel difficulty arose in defining *phronesis* – the capacity to exercise the virtues in practice - as a virtue. I suggested that it might be better to regard it as the outcome of a process of moral training. In fact, it could be argued that the concepts ‘personal autonomy’, *phronesis* and ‘the good life’ are all one and the same.

²⁹ Sincerity and loyalty, for example, do not fall easily into any of the categories in my list – and yet they are plainly virtues. The virtues I have included in my list could be categorised quite differently. For example, in Sikhism, righteousness, honesty and justice are incorporated under *Sat*, the virtue of truthful living. The absence of vice can also be conceived as a virtue. To take another example from Sikhism, freedom *from* the vices of ambition, envy, greed and jealousy constitutes *Santokh*, the virtue of contentment. I am treating the fourth Platonic virtue – wisdom - as a good rather than a virtue.

list and the list constructed by Katherine Dahlsgaard (in Seligman, 2007) as representative of the virtue catalogues of all the major religions and philosophical traditions - which comprises (1) wisdom and knowledge, (2) courage, (3) love and humanity, (4) justice, (5) temperance and (6) spirituality and transcendence³⁰. I am not incorporating wisdom or *phronesis* as virtues themselves, rather as goods that arise from the exercise of other virtues and out of the engagement in practices (the good of achieving mastery in a particular field along with the capacity to exercise judgement in that field being one of the goods I detailed earlier in this chapter as contributing toward a flourishing life). I am also treating transcendence and humility, which are often designated core virtues, as goods that may be sought through particular kinds of practice (for example, through religion or art) rather than as core virtues. I think that to do the latter would be inappropriate in a liberal secular society. In any case, to expect schoolchildren and teenagers to exhibit genuine humility or ‘transcendence’ would, in my experience, be to expect too much; these are the fruits of adult experience. And finally, I am including the ‘intellectual virtues’.³¹

In what ways then do the virtues I have detailed contribute to realising the goods of practices and to sustaining liberal democracy - the precondition for practices to be freely engaged in at all? Let us consider them in turn.

I have incorporated the intellectual virtues, by which I broadly mean the dispositions governing our attitude to work (industry, application, perseverance, concentration, care, accuracy, exactness and so forth), as core virtues because they

³⁰ Katherine Dahlsgaard and her team (which included Martin Seligman) found that almost every one of these traditions endorsed these six virtues: ‘So we see these six virtues as core characteristics endorsed by almost all religious and philosophical traditions, and taken together they capture the notion of a good character’ (Seligman, 2007, pp. 132-3).

³¹ The University of Birmingham’s ‘Jubilee Centre for Character and Values’ distinguishes three categories of virtue: civic character virtues (examples: service, citizenship, volunteering), moral character virtues (courage, self-discipline, compassion, gratitude, justice, humility, honesty), and ‘performance character virtues’ (examples: resilience, determination, creativity, confidence, teamwork) – see Jubilee Centre for Character & Values (n.d.). I would categorise service, citizenship and volunteering more as activities that a virtuous person would engage in, as ways in which the virtues can be exercised, as goods rather than as virtues themselves; and I would question whether the suggested performance character virtues or ‘performance traits’ (traits that enable people to ‘manage their lives effectively’) should all be characterised as virtues, as opposed to attributes of personality and aptitude in which people naturally differ. I shall discuss how the intellectual virtues might be defined in more detail in Chapter 6, and explore the question of personality further in Chapter 8.

are essential for undertaking the lengthy period of apprenticeship training that is needed if a practice is to be mastered; and they are therefore essential for realising the goods of practices.³²

A sense of justice (along with tolerance and respect for the autonomy of others) is clearly a crucial virtue to foster in a liberal democracy. Kant's Moral Law is one source of our belief in the principle of universal human rights but is more in the nature of a rational justification; it is of great value in framing a social contract but, as we saw in Chapter 1, not so obviously a source of motivation for the individual to behave morally³³. The belief and motivating impulse on the part of the individual that all people have an equal right to be valued is a disposition that needs to be habituated from an early age – a laborious process involving continual reinforcement, as any teacher will testify. Even though the average 13 year-old (say) has a much more developed sense of justice than the average five or six year-old, and has a particularly keen sense of perceived *injustice*, there is still a long way to go. Casual prejudice, bullying, belittling of others, and general thoughtlessness when it comes to giving others their due are all too common unless checked by a responsible adult – and this is despite what has been taught on the subject, and discussed and reflected on, in PSHE and RE lessons or in school assemblies.³⁴

The caring virtues are clearly essential to sustaining good relations and healthy relationships with others, both within practices and in people's personal lives, and therefore are also essential to leading a flourishing life. They include kindness, compassion, empathy and generosity. Whereas justice is directed toward humanity as a whole (i.e. it is political), the caring virtues are directed toward individuals. Decency might also be incorporated under this category because it involves showing consideration for the feelings of others in the rituals of everyday life. And though decency can be exhibited independently of the other caring virtues (one can be a well-mannered villain, a cultivated criminal), they are, as I have argued, more likely

³² I shall consider in detail how the intellectual virtues might best be cultivated as part of the school curriculum in Chapter 7.

³³ Religious beliefs in justice – the belief that all are equal in the eyes of God - are particularly potent in motivating people to act precisely because they are founded on faith, and therefore involve a large measure of habituation. The Christian belief in *agape*, the love of humanity, is an example.

³⁴ I speak from experience as a form teacher of 13 year-olds.

to reinforce each other.³⁵ The caring virtues assume even more importance if it is recognised that political justice (which, in a sense, is the virtue of care directed toward humanity as a whole) often has its origins in the individual's experience of caring for others at a personal level. For Thomas Lickona, perhaps the best known exponent of traditional character education, educating caring public-spirited citizens encompasses care for others at both a personal and a political level; it encompasses both 'works of mercy' and works of justice. Educating pupils or students to care for others (for example, through community service programmes) leads naturally to 'educating them in social justice' (Lickona, 1992, pp. 319-22). Otherwise, the danger is that calls for 'justice' or 'social justice' amount to little more than hollow slogans; or are accompanied by hatred and resentment and degenerate into retribution and totalitarian repression. It was Nelson Mandela's humanity that enabled him to turn righteous indignation and anger at injustice, ultimately, into a positive force for justice, just as it had done for Mahatma Gandhi before him.

Courage and honesty are the ingredients of moral integrity, and therefore also vital to a sense of self-belief. Without moral integrity, a person cannot deliberate well or act as a responsible practitioner or deal with the moral conflict that arises when, for example, the demands of different practices need to be reconciled; nor is a person likely to enjoy the character friendships that Aristotle highlighted. In a variety of ways, direct and indirect, courage and honesty reinforce and complement the other categories of virtues.

Temperance – the capacity to restrain one's appetitive desires - is clearly essential both for the engagement in practices and the exercise of the other virtues. To seek hedonistic pleasure at every opportunity, to be ruled by one's appetitive desires, is clearly antithetical to the pursuit of higher goods, which necessarily involves a sustained period of apprenticeship and the disciplined acquisition of a body of knowledge and skill; and it is antithetical to the exercise of the virtues, which by its very nature involves sacrificing or at least suspending selfish interests

³⁵ I shall consider in more detail how these caring virtues might be cultivated as part of the school curriculum in Chapter 8, where I also consider Nel Noddings' ethics of care.

and appetitive desires. There is an important connection here with the virtue of decency in that the habituation of temperance is to a great extent mediated through manners, customs and social rituals. For example, to have learned as a child that one should serve others before oneself, that one should not help oneself to the largest slice of cake and that one should not gorge on sweets between meal times, is to have begun to learn the virtue of temperance.

In fact, it is significant that a degree of selflessness – Iris Murdoch speaks of a ‘disciplined overcoming of self’ (Murdoch, 1985, p. 95) - characterises all these virtues. Whereas the intellectual virtues are selfless (or self-transcending) in the sense that they are directed toward works and achievements, the caring virtues are selfless in the sense of being directed toward other people. We might even seek to integrate or unify the virtues into an architectonic virtue or ‘supreme good’ - we might call it love, *agape*, selflessness, service, duty or even humility - that would permeate the political life of the *polis* as a foundational value and guide individuals in their quests for a good life. Though I argued earlier that humility was better classified a good than a core virtue on account of its religious associations, Iris Murdoch argues that at heart it amounts to an acceptance of death, which is in turn ‘an acceptance of our own nothingness which is an automatic spur to our concern with what is not ourselves’ (p. 103). For Murdoch, this rare and unfashionable virtue is as good a candidate as any in terms of which to define ‘the Good’. She writes of the humble man that ‘although he is not by definition the good man perhaps he is the kind of man who is most likely of all to become good’ (p. 104). Whether this degree of selflessness is compatible with the qualities needed to ‘get on’ in a secular liberal democratic society, particularly when it is founded on a market economy (one thinks of ambition, drive, assertiveness, confidence, sociability, charisma and so forth – qualities that are now held in such esteem that they might be termed the virtues of the market), is, however, quite another matter.

Concluding note to Part 1

I think it is clear that the core virtues or dispositions necessary for human flourishing and the core virtues necessary for the sustenance of liberal democracy are essentially the same. They have little to do with rational or moral autonomy, but much to do with the engagement in the social practices of ordinary life. They are the virtues that enable citizens to engage in practices (and that are cultivated in part through the successful engagement in practices), and at the same time to integrate the practices in which they are engaged into a coherent whole.

How a liberal education might best foster these core virtues is therefore of crucial importance. For those who choose to engage in political or intellectual life, special skills, qualities and attitudes will be needed in addition to these core virtues, not the least of which is the *desire* to pursue a political or an intellectual career. Liberal education has traditionally put great emphasis on preparing pupils for one or other of these callings, which has led many critics (most famously John Dewey) to condemn it as an elite education. There is much truth in this criticism. But there is also, I think, much that can be learned from a study of liberal curricula, past and present, about the cultivation of the core virtues and ‘character building’ (traditionally a particular concern of English public schools) that is applicable to ordinary life. A consideration of how liberal curricula have sought to cultivate the virtues and to build character will, in turn, shed more light on the nature of these virtues. By the same token, the rhetorical conception of liberal education, which aims to produce the politically active citizen who can deliberate wisely on matters of practical human affairs by cultivating, humanising and moralising within a tradition, has a much wider value and relevance than might superficially be obvious - particularly if traditional associations with literary culture and aesthetics are stripped away. In fact, if *phronesis* is conceived in this sense rather than as involving critical justification or as contributing to some putative moral and rational autonomy, then we have in rhetoric the means by which it might be cultivated.

I shall explore all these themes in Part 2.

5

Two traditions of liberal education

John Henry Newman's celebrated vision of liberal education as involving a cultivation of the mind or intellect – 'it is an end in itself ... it is an acquired illumination, it is a habit, a personal possession, and an inward endowment' - is widely regarded as definitive of the idea (Newman, 1982, p. 85). Newman contrasted liberal education with education that aims explicitly to prepare for life or work by equipping the pupil with various skills – i.e. that is instrumental to some other end. The crucial distinction to make was the one between education that 'rises towards general ideas' and education that 'is exhausted upon what is particular and external'; the one whose end is 'philosophical' and the other whose end is 'mechanical' (p. 85). But perhaps a better definition – better because it elaborates what is meant by 'an end in itself' – is this: liberal education is an education that cultivates or forms the person in the image of an ideal – moral, intellectual, and aesthetic – of what it is to be human. A liberal education will therefore seek to initiate into a moral, cultural and intellectual inheritance, and its pedagogy will be correspondingly didactic. It is *formative* education. As such, it can be contrasted on the one hand with vocational education or training, and on the other with 'progressive' education – i.e. education that seeks to enable pupils to creatively express their inner selves.

In the modern age, the idea of liberal education has come to be associated with an academic curriculum of subject disciplines: disciplines that together encompass the knowledge it is thought most worthwhile for pupils to possess, disciplines that introduce pupils to the range of distinct 'forms' that knowledge can take¹, disciplines that it is believed best develop the mind. And yet this modern academic curriculum bears little relation, either in its content or its philosophical justification, to the old

¹ I shall discuss Hirst's celebrated 'forms of knowledge' justification of liberal education in Chapter 6.

liberal ideal of education that predominated for some two thousand years in the West - from Classical Rome right up to the mid nineteenth-century English public school.

Though the old liberal education also aimed, in a sense, to ‘train the mind’, it took the specific form of producing an orator – a person who could deliberate well, speak eloquently, and by persuading others carry through his judgements into action. This ideal required in turn that school education concern itself with two things: first, a systematic training in the art of rhetoric; and second, an initiation into a moral and cultural inheritance centred on the humanities - the subjects that together encapsulate our collective experience of the human condition, our values, feelings, interests, ideals, beliefs, fears and imaginings. By acquiring a personal culture or *paideia*, a person was formed in a certain image or ideal – at once, civic, moral, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual - of what a human being could be. Moreover, though this education sought to cultivate and form the intellect, of equal importance was that it cultivated and formed a person’s character: an orator had to be *a good person*, not merely somebody who could rouse the crowd. From its beginnings in Isocrates’ school of rhetoric, through Cicero’s extolling of the Roman orator and Castiglione’s depiction of the perfect Renaissance courtier, right up to the ethos of the modern-day English public school, there has been something of this concern to produce a good citizen, a person of integrity who can take on responsibility and act in the public arena. To this end, liberal education in its older sense has concerned itself with the cultivation and formation of the character of the whole person, the person who can both make a wise judgement *and* carry it through into action; and this in turn has necessitated attending to the habituation of the moral virtues and the inculcation of a moral code of conduct through, for example, the notion that a school must have an ethos and through physical activity, team games and service to others (these last things representing the distinctive contribution of the English public school).

I shall begin this chapter with an outline of the history of liberal education that recognises this fundamental fact that there are two traditions of liberal education. I shall try to explain how these two distinct conceptions or strains of liberal education - the rhetorical (or ‘oratorical’ or ‘liberal arts’) and the ‘research’ (or ‘philosophical’ or ‘academic’) traditions - came to emerge and evolve; and how a curriculum of

academic subject disciplines embodying the ‘research’ ideal came to supplant the old liberal education founded on rhetoric, the classics and the humanities. In the process, I shall explore how these rival traditions represent quite different and distinct philosophical and political ideals.²

A brief history of liberal education

The vital importance of education as a means of forming a person’s mind and character, of cultivating the moral and intellectual virtues, was recognised by both Plato and Aristotle. When we speak of liberal education in its old rhetorical sense, it is Aristotle who is of particular interest for his emphasis on practical reason or *phronesis* (right judgement, practical wisdom or prudence), whose cultivation requires in turn that the moral virtues be habituated. But whereas Aristotle emphasises the habituation of the moral virtues, he has little to say about how moral or ethical knowledge might be cultivated. He regards the cultivation of *phronesis* as necessitating some combination of moral instruction and life experience, but, as we saw in Chapter 2, he does not elaborate the sorts of experience or instruction that would cultivate *phronesis* in practice. Moreover, like Plato before him, he is disparaging of the claims of teachers of rhetoric (the Sophists) to be able to teach pupils the art of politics – the capacity to exercise practical judgement or *phronesis* in public affairs: ‘It is only the experts in a given art who can judge its products correctly and understand by what means and methods perfection is achieved’ (Aristotle, 1976, p. 341). And yet Isocrates, his great rival, claims precisely this - and puts rhetoric at the very heart of the educational endeavour. For Isocrates, rhetoric is not merely the art of speaking persuasively (which, if unqualified, would be of dubious ethical value); it is the art of making right judgements about practical, political and human matters. Educated people are those who ‘can form an accurate judgement [*doxa*] about a situation and in most cases can figure out what is the best

² I am much indebted to Bruce Kimball’s seminal study *Orators and Philosophers* (1995) in the discussion that follows. The term ‘research ideal’ is Bruce Kimball’s. In this thesis, I shall distinguish the Roman (rhetorical) and classical humanist variants of the ‘old’ liberal education, and contrast these with the curriculum of academic subject disciplines, the modern-day embodiment of the ‘research’ ideal, which constitutes the ‘new’ liberal education. Broadly speaking, I shall distinguish the ‘rhetorical’ from the ‘research’ tradition or ideal of liberal education.

course of action' (Isocrates, 2004, p. 177). For Isocrates, eloquence is the outward expression of inner thought and wisdom. To form right judgements necessitates, in turn, the cultivation of a personal culture or *paideia*, the understanding of people as social, political, historical and cultural beings - the sort of understanding that a study of the humanities might develop. Self-knowledge and practical wisdom together constitute the knowledge of how to live.

It is therefore Isocrates and the Sophists who, by undertaking to teach the art of politics (political oratory or rhetoric) and humanise in a literary cultural inheritance, are the founders of the Western tradition of liberal education – not Plato, Socrates or Aristotle (see Castle, 1961, pp. 49-60; Jaeger, 1939, pp. 283-328; Marrou, 1964, p. 120³); for it was the study of grammar, rhetoric and classical literature rather than dialectic and philosophy (as Plato and his successors conceived it) that formed the basis of liberal curricula in the West for some two thousand years. It is clear that by cultivating the capacity to deliberate on right courses of action, the old liberal education founded on rhetoric actually cultivated - or, at least, *aimed* to cultivate - the elusive architectonic virtue of Aristotle's ethical system, *phronesis*; and did so systematically through a carefully and elaborately devised programme of education.⁴

In Ancient Rome, the teaching of grammar and rhetoric was developed in impressive detail and the Roman curriculum was to remain the exemplar of a liberal education, still recognisable in the curriculum of the Elizabethan grammar school and even the nineteenth-century English public school. The technical devices of poetry and prose were studied systematically so that pupils might express their thoughts and feelings with eloquence, and a whole series of preliminary exercises in

³ 'On the whole it was Isocrates, not Plato, who educated fourth-century Greece and subsequently the Hellenistic and Roman worlds' (Marrou, p. 120). Werner Jaeger traces the 'cultural ideal' of humanism squarely to Protagoras and the Sophists: 'We are ... using the word *humanism* ... in its basic sense, to connote the cultural ideal which after long incubation in the mind of Greece came to birth at last in the teaching of the Sophists' (Jaeger, p. 298).

⁴ It remains a puzzle why Aristotle, who wrote a whole treatise on rhetoric (*The Art of Rhetoric*), was unable to see, or to acknowledge, that the systematic teaching of rhetoric might have educational value; indeed that the object of rhetoric could be construed as *phronesis*. *The Art of Rhetoric* and *The Nicomachean Ethics* seem to be worked out in total detachment from each other, with the ethical and educational implications of the first left unexplored. One possible explanation is political: that Aristotle's school of philosophy was in direct competition with Isocrates' school of rhetoric (see Miller, 2007, pp. 189-90; Lawson-Tancred, 1991, pp. 4-8). Another is simply that Aristotle's didactic writings have been lost.

composition – the *progymnasmata* – culminated in ‘the Praise and Denunciation of Laws’ in which pupils had to deliberate on the merits and demerits of an imaginary piece of new legislation or an existing law - ‘was the law honourable and just, was it expedient, was it practicable, and was it necessary?’ (Bonner, 1977, p. 272) – and then propose a course of action. For Cicero, whose *De Oratore* (‘On the Ideal Orator’) was the definitive statement of the idea of a liberal education, the purpose of a liberal education was not *merely* to cultivate the mind (though that was important and provided solace in old age) but to equip the orator-statesman with the eloquence and practical judgement (or wisdom) he needed to serve his country⁵.

In the late Roman, early medieval period, the curriculum was formalised into the so-called ‘seven liberal arts’ comprising the *trivium* of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric (which came to form the basis of the grammar school curriculum) and the *quadrivium* of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy (which were, at least in principle, studied in the medieval university), with philosophy and theology (the ‘queen of the sciences’) studied last of all (see Curtis & Boulton, 1965, pp. 91-2). With the advent of medieval scholasticism and the re-introduction into Europe of the works of Aristotle, dialectic assumed a greater role, with the ‘syllogistic activity’ of disputation becoming the dominant teaching method (p. 108), and rhetoric lapsed; the emphasis in Western Christendom was on theological exegesis rather than the production of orator-statesmen. But with the re-discovery of classical literature and the advent of Renaissance humanism came a recovery of rhetoric and a curriculum centred on the humanities – particularly on literature and history, with some moral philosophy sometimes added. As well as the study of Christian texts, classical Latin and Greek were learned so that pupils might develop literary appreciation, learn to compose poetry and prose themselves, *and* be inspired by the virtuous actions, thoughts and sayings of exemplary figures from classical history. So was born the *studia humanitatis* or *artes liberales* curriculum (Kimball, 1995, pp. 78-80).

From the Renaissance, through the Enlightenment, and right up to the early nineteenth-century, the study of the classics formed the heart of a liberal education

⁵ I shall consider the Roman curriculum in more detail in Chapter 7.

throughout Europe. However, with the advent of the Enlightenment and the scientific method, and the explosion of knowledge that accompanied it, particularly in the sciences, it was inevitable that change must come; indeed, it is remarkable how long the old liberal curriculum survived. It had also been noted by increasing numbers of critics that the classical curriculum had degenerated for most pupils into little more than a 'grammar grind' (the tendency had been apparent from the beginning; even Erasmus had argued against the rote learning of grammatical rules). By the early nineteenth-century, reforms had been instituted in France by Napoleon, who declared both literary culture and exact science (in the form of mathematics) to be indispensable elements in a liberal education; and in Prussia by von Humboldt, who ensured that mathematics, natural science, German and the classics were given equal weight (Parker, 1868, p. 68).

However, the classical curriculum continued unchanged in England in the great public schools right up until the latter half of the nineteenth-century, by which time the demand for change (reinforced by concerns at the growing technical superiority of rival nations, particularly Germany) had become irresistible. Finally, the public schools along with the new state secondary schools followed continental Europe in incorporating the sciences and a range of other 'modern' subject disciplines (English, history, geography and so forth) into their curricula. English literature came largely to replace classical literature, and the classical languages, having lost their original justification, soon disappeared altogether from the curricula of state schools. The new liberal curriculum of academic subject disciplines was born and the ideals of the old liberal education were soon forgotten.

The research ideal and the rhetorical ideal

The story so far could be characterised simply as a natural process of evolution in which modern subjects were gradually incorporated into the curriculum and the classical languages were displaced. On this argument it was inevitable that modern literature would eventually find its place in the curriculum - that Shakespeare would be judged as worthy of study as Virgil; that modern history would be judged as

worthy of study as classical history; and that the importance of the natural and social sciences would be recognised. In outlining a brief history of liberal education, I have correspondingly limited myself largely to an account of the rhetorical tradition (the scholastic detour warranted only a line) because it is the rhetorical tradition that has predominated for most of the past two thousand and more years. It was Isocrates and the Sophists, not Plato and Socrates, who founded the Western tradition of liberal education; it was grammar, rhetoric and classical literature that formed the school curriculum, not philosophy and logic.

But this is not the whole story. The new liberal curriculum of academic subject disciplines represented a quite new conception of the nature of knowledge and the purpose of education - in fact, it represented an alternative conception of liberal education that had been present from the very beginning in classical Greece. I would argue that there have been two distinct conceptions of liberal education and two quite distinct philosophical justifications - two rival strains or traditions – identifiable throughout the past two thousand years. And though I have argued that, historically, it was inevitable that the modern liberal curriculum should emerge (or evolve) in the end, this is not quite the same as offering a philosophical justification; and it does not explain how the ideals of the old liberal curriculum came to be so totally eclipsed within such a short space of time – or indeed why they survived for so long.

The only coherent attempt at providing a philosophical justification for the new liberal curriculum of academic subject disciplines was produced as recently as the 1960s by Paul Hirst. But this ‘forms of knowledge’ justification (that each subject discipline or group of subject disciplines has a characteristic ‘form of logic’ associated with it and that a complete education of the mind should involve a pupil’s initiation into all of these forms of knowledge⁶) is the subject of continuing controversy in philosophy of education, and does not satisfy the many critics who argue that the modern curriculum of academic subject disciplines has no overarching educational aim at all other than to prepare a minority of pupils for

⁶ I shall consider Hirst’s ‘forms of knowledge’ justification of liberal education in greater detail in Chapter 6.

specialisation and hence for higher education. John White is perhaps the most notable of these critics and argues that the modern curriculum is not ‘an aims-led curriculum’ but ‘a subject-led curriculum’, a curriculum that instead of having a proper rationale simply prescribes a list of academic subjects to be taught (see Reiss and White, 2013; White, 2004). The purpose of school education, then, is to get these subjects taught and known at some elementary level as part of ‘a broad and balanced curriculum’. But as John Dewey noted, pupils who study a curriculum segregated into specialist subjects ‘such as is appropriate to the man who wishes to become an expert in a given field’ too often emerge from the process with ‘a smattering which is too superficial to be scientific and too technical to be applicable to ordinary affairs’ (Dewey, 1966, pp. 286-7). A further consequence is that because the academic curriculum of subject disciplines has come to be synonymous with ‘liberal education’, critics of the former naturally reject the latter, and the ideals of the old liberal education come also to be rejected – ideals that deserve serious consideration on their own merits.

However, there are merits in the study of subject disciplines that also deserve serious consideration (merits that relate not to their purported value as ‘forms of knowledge’ but rather to their value as specialist studies⁷) and these are, I think, best brought out if we consider the new liberal curriculum as the latest manifestation of a long-standing tradition in liberal education, a strain in liberal education with its own distinct political-philosophical justification.

In *Orators and Philosophers* (1995), his seminal study of the evolution of liberal education, Bruce Kimball argues that the modern academic conception of liberal education (he terms it the ‘liberal-free ideal’) can, in the first instance, be traced specifically to certain Enlightenment ideals of rationality and intellectual freedom. The term liberal became associated for the first time with an open-ended sense of freedom, with freedom from constraint and prejudice and, above all, with the relentless quest for the truth that was embodied in ‘the New Science’. Its methodology, whether rationalist or empirical, was ‘critical and open-ended’

⁷ I shall develop this theme fully in Chapter 6.

(Kimball, 1995, p. 118), and appeal was to reason and to empirical sense data, not to historical precedent. However, argues Kimball, the displacement of the old liberal ideal (the ‘*artes liberales* ideal’) by the modern liberal ideal can only fully be understood in the light of a tension that was apparent from the very beginning in a dispute between Plato and Isocrates over the nature of knowledge. On the one hand, there is Plato following Socrates in extolling *philosophia* - the critical rationalist quest for the truth - and damning the Sophists (the travelling exponents of rhetoric); and on the other, there is Isocrates extolling *Sophia* - a kind of political wisdom that is the fruit of a training in rhetoric and the acquisition of a personal culture or *paideia*. And this tension between the philosophers and the orators has manifested itself over two thousand years, with sometimes the former and sometimes the latter conception predominating (though never exclusively so), right up to the present day. So, for example, medieval scholasticism, the Enlightenment, the research ideal of the nineteenth-century German university taken up in America in the 1860s and 1870s (first at John Hopkins, Cornell and Harvard), and the modern-day academic curriculum are representative of the former ideal; and the Roman oratorical education, the early Christian ‘liberal arts’ curriculum, Renaissance humanism, the classical humanism of the late 18th and 19th centuries (sparked by the revival of classical studies in Germany) and the modern-day ‘classical Christian’ revival in America⁸ are representative of the latter ideal.⁹

Socrates might even be described as the ‘folk hero’ of the Enlightenment (Kimball, 1995, p. 116), the epitome of moral and intellectual integrity; and the

⁸ The classical and classical Christian revivals aim to revive the old liberal curriculum centred on the *trivium* (as conceived by Dorothy Sayers in her essay ‘The Lost Tools of Learning’ (1948)), but still adhere to the research ideal of a curriculum of academic subject disciplines – and hence arguably fail to make the crucial distinction of Kimball.

⁹ I described essentially the same fault line in my 2007 paper ‘Rhetoric, *Paideia* and The Old Idea of a Liberal Education’ (Miller, 2007) before I became aware of the work of Kimball, which though it has transformed the study of liberal education in America, remains relatively unknown in Britain. Though our main line of argument is essentially the same, my paper focuses on the different schools of thought in classical Greece (between Isocrates and Cicero on the one hand, and Plato and Socrates on the other), whereas Kimball documents the evolution of liberal education from Classical Greece all the way through to modern America (where the fault line has been more visible and the debate perhaps more revealing than in Britain). Also, the contrast I draw is between *doxa* (mere opinion) and *episteme* (pure knowledge), rather than *Sophia* and *philosophia*. The only reference I know of to Kimball’s work in Britain is in the work of D. G. Mulcahy, whose re-assessment of Newman’s theory of a liberal education was recently published in the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* (Mulcahy, May 2008b) and whose book *The Educated Person* explores the possibility of a new paradigm for liberal education (Mulcahy, 2008a). I consider Mulcahy’s overall thesis in the Conclusion.

Socratic ideal of intellectual independence and moral autonomy, of ‘rationality, open mindedness and critical thought’ (Hardarson, 2012, p. 229) - the view that education is about emancipation ‘conceived in terms of something like the promotion of critical (rational) open-mindedness’ (Carr cited in Hardarson, p. 227) - remains very much the ideal in the world of education, even among those who question the curriculum of academic subject disciplines. Cicero, on the other hand, has served as the model for those who conceive the aim of education as initiation into a cultural inheritance.

Kimball identifies seven characteristics of the liberal-free ideal: (1) freedom from *a priori* standards; (2) an emphasis on intellect and rationality; (3) critical scepticism; (4) the ‘new virtue’ of tolerance; (5) a tendency toward egalitarianism; (6) an ethic of individualism; and (7) the pursuit of knowledge and truth as an end-in-itself (Kimball, pp. 119-23). The *artes liberales* ideal has, by contrast, the following characteristics: (1) ‘the goal of training the good citizen to lead society’; (2) ‘the prescription of values and standards for character and conduct’; (3) respect for and commitment to these values and standards; (4) a recognised canon of classical texts to provide ‘both stylistic and ethical models’; (5) the identification of an elite who embody the prescribed personal and civic virtues; (6) ‘a dogmatist epistemology’ as opposed to a Socratic approach to enquiry; and (7) the attainment of this liberal ideal of personal development as an ‘end-in-itself’ (pp. 37-8). Looking at these lists, it is striking how closely the conclusions of Part 1 of this thesis concerning the aims of school education match the *artes liberales* or old liberal ideal as articulated by Kimball. However, one of my conclusions was that a liberal or ‘free’ society was the essential pre-condition for the aims of liberal education to be realised, and in this respect it is the liberal-free ideal that would seem better matched. There is a distinct air of Plato’s *Republic*, of totalitarianism, about the *artes liberales* ideal; and this suggests that a modern liberal education could not be modelled exclusively on either ideal.

The only significant instance of the research tradition manifesting itself in school education before the advent of the modern curriculum of academic subject disciplines is the scholastic education of the medieval era. But in accounts of the history of education, there has been a tendency (one might even speak of a tradition)

to denigrate Scholasticism for its over-concern with dialectic and hair-splitting – something exemplified by the question ‘how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?’; for its narrow concern with theological exegesis; and for its downgrading of literary study. It has been compared unfavourably with the humanism that followed, regarded even as something of an aberration in the evolution of liberal education.

Perhaps it is only to be expected that, viewed from a modern secular perspective, the humanism of the Renaissance, which put man unequivocally centre stage¹⁰, is more attractive than the medieval scholastic concern to reconcile Christian dogma with the logic of Aristotle. But a strong case can be made that, despite its shortcomings, scholastic education was a coherent programme well suited to its time; that in many ways it exemplified the research ideal. In *From Humanism to the Humanities*, Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine argue that by providing students with basic literacy in Latin, ‘a lively and rigorous training in logic and semantics’, and even the skills of the notary, the scholastic curriculum ‘equipped students with complex skills and fitted them to perform specialised tasks’ (Grafton & Jardine, 1986, pp. xii-xiii). It was, moreover, an education that was ‘open to the low-born of high talents’, in contrast to the new humanism, which stamped an elite with ‘an indelible seal of superiority’ and fostered a docile attitude towards authority (p. xiv).

Though teachers and students were limited to a Christian frame of reference, there was considerable freedom within that frame. The overriding concern was to reconcile Church doctrine and dogma with the newly rediscovered logic of Aristotle – in particular, to collect and reconcile a diverse, often contradictory mass of Church Council decisions and papal decrees by means of reasoned inquiry. The result was a series of systematic expositions or *summae* of human knowledge, incorporating theology and a range of other subjects, and a formalised method of teaching centred on the *lectio* and the *disputatio*. Though the process began with the master reading and explaining the text to his students, the discussion that followed involved students raising any objections they could think of to the thesis – objections would have to be raised in syllogistic form – and the master resolving them in similar fashion. The

¹⁰ The Sophists, the original humanists, had been the first to do this. The humanist motto ‘man is the measure of all things’ is attributed by Plato, in *Theaetetus*, to Protagoras - a Sophist.

objection or problem might be raised by the master himself in the form of a *quaestio*, and the resolution of this problem would then be the focus of the disputation¹¹.

In time, new forms of knowledge came to be recognised as valid, as did new justifications, rational and empirical, of that knowledge (perhaps most importantly, Francis Bacon's new method of induction); and so the scholastic method came to be superseded as a mode of inquiry. Nevertheless, there is much that can be said in its favour. As Curtis and Boulwood remark, an important educational principle was established, namely 'that every weighty question has two sides and that a rational decision can only be reached by a careful study of both of them' (Curtis & Boulwood, 1965, p. 101). And though it was assumed, as it had to be at the time, that the teachings of the Church could ultimately be validated, these teachings were not merely to be accepted 'on authority' but to be justified by rational inquiry in pursuit of the truth.¹²

Just as it can be argued that scholasticism has been unfairly maligned, a strong case can be made that the humanism that succeeded it has been correspondingly 'idealized and romanticized' (Oakley, 1992, p. 72). Grafton and Jardine complain of 'a mystification of arts education' that 'has clouded our intellectual judgement of the progress and importance of the liberal arts' down to the present day (Grafton & Jardine, 1986, pp. xiv-xv). They argue that the actual classroom practice of Renaissance humanist teaching was far removed from the ideal, and that the outcomes claimed for it were largely illusory – with the exception of a small number of brilliant scholars. Humanism was supposed to cultivate, mould character and produce leaders of integrity; but in practice, for most pupils, the relentless grind and 'ruthless drilling' necessary to produce a degree of fluency in Latin and Greek, left little time for wide reading in the exemplary classic texts (p. 27). Instead, the effect of the teacher attempting to discuss 'every phrase, almost every word, that presented a problem of interpretation or revealed a novel shade of meaning' produced not a

¹¹ I draw particularly here on Curtis and Boulwood's account of the scholastic method (see Curtis & Boulwood, chapter 5).

¹² Curtis and Boulwood quote from Peter Abelard's prologue to his treatise *Sic et Non*: 'For the first key to wisdom is called questioning, diligent and unceasing ... By doubting we are led to inquiry; by inquiry we perceive the truth' (p. 101). These could have been the words of Socrates.

rich familiarity with antique culture or a coherent set of values, but rather an ‘accumulation of fragments’, a ‘profusion of tiny details’ (p.20). This judgement is certainly borne out by the nineteenth-century contributors to Frederick William Farrar’s *Essays on a Liberal Education* (1868), who are (with one exception) scathing about the claims made for an education centred exclusively on the classics. While admitting that future scholars may be superbly served by a classical education and that some elements of a classical education might train the mind, they argue that the results for the majority of pupils are dismal – that those who had been forced to endure a classical education were, as Lord Houghton noted in his concluding remarks, apt to regard the toils of their boyhood ‘with unmitigated disgust’ (Houghton, 1868, p. 384).¹³

In *Community of Learning* (1992), Francis Oakley¹⁴ argues that the elective system (in which undergraduates chose the subject or subjects they wish to study for their degree) – a system much criticised in America by proponents of the old rhetorical liberal ideal - has, despite its shortcomings, much to recommend it; that it should not be judged, as scholasticism (which was, in a sense, its precursor) has been judged, against ‘noble humanist ideals’ that bear little relation to ‘actual humanist pedagogic practice’ (Oakley, 1992, p. 72). His argument is, I think, a persuasive one. But two things should, I think, be noted. The first is that Oakley’s concern is with higher education – with the university, not the school (or ‘high school’). One might perfectly well argue that the research ideal is appropriate for higher education but not, or at least not exclusively, for school education. Now, it could be argued that if we accept the research ideal of the university, it follows (though Oakley himself does not follow this argument through) that the central task of school education must be to provide a grounding in and exposure to a range of subject disciplines so that pupils can identify their area of future specialisation. But this would be to assume, first, that all pupils will go on to specialise - and specialise, moreover, in academic subject disciplines; and second, that school education should have no other aim than preparation for higher study – neither of which assumptions is, I think, tenable.¹⁵ The

¹³ I shall consider these essays in more detail in Chapter 7.

¹⁴ Francis Oakley was president of Williams College, one of America’s oldest and best known liberal arts colleges.

¹⁵ I consider the value of specialisation in school education in Chapter 6.

second thing to note about Oakley's argument is that in criticising an over-romanticised view of humanism, he is taking aim at the pedagogic practice of the Renaissance, at a literary curriculum centred on the classics. I shall argue in Chapter 7 that a much better exemplar of the liberal rhetorical tradition – better in the sense of exemplifying the educational aims defended in Part 1 of this thesis – is the old Roman education, whose aim was to produce the orator-citizen, and which (because Latin was the vernacular) was not encumbered to the same degree as its humanist successor with the task of having its students master 'dead languages'.

Concluding note

The critical importance of distinguishing these two traditions, conceptions and ideals of liberal education – the research and the rhetorical – should now be clear, as is the importance of considering what they achieved in practice. The questions I would now like to pose are these: 'which conception of a liberal education (if any) best embodies the educational aims defended in Part 1 of this thesis?' and 'what form would a modern liberal curriculum take that did embody these aims?'

In the next two chapters, I shall attempt to answer these questions by considering the research ideal and the rhetorical ideal in turn.

6

The research ideal: a justification of specialist study

This chapter considers whether, or to what extent, secondary school education should be founded on the research ideal¹. Central to the research ideal is that the truth can only be established - that knowledge can only be justified as valid - if we submit our beliefs to a continual process of critical and rational examination. Only that which passes the test, which is not refuted, can be accepted (or at least provisionally accepted) as justified knowledge or truth. Implicit in this is that knowledge cannot be justified merely by reference to *a priori* standards or sources of authority, because these would themselves stand in need of rational justification. Another way of stating the research ideal is that the aim of education is, in some sense, to develop or cultivate the powers of the intellect - to *train the mind*. As we saw in the last chapter, this accords with a conception of liberal education that is in direct line of descent from Plato, Socrates and Aristotle; a conception that derives from the Greek belief that the ultimate good is the cultivation of the rational mind through the pursuit of truth. The best-known formulation of this ideal in modern times is probably John Henry Newman's, according to which the aim of a liberal education is to cultivate the mind:

This process of training, by which the intellect ... is disciplined for its own sake ... is called Liberal Education. (Newman, 1982, p. 115)

In practice, the research ideal is pursued through the division of knowledge into academic subject disciplines, each with its own characteristic methods, mode of discourse, terminology and standards. This chapter explores the nature of the educational benefits that arise from engaging in specialist study and how these

¹ So far as higher education is concerned, the question in large measure answers itself: it is the nature of the subject specialism (philosophy, law, nursing, engineering, car mechanics, beauty therapy – and so forth) that will determine the answer. The problem arises when we consider the nature of the school curriculum prior to specialisation, the nature of the general education a pupil will receive.

benefits might be conceived – for example, as ‘mental training’, the acquisition of various intellectual virtues, or as initiation into ‘forms of knowledge’; it considers the level of study that is necessary for these benefits to accrue; and it asks whether non-academic subjects might not do just as well as academic subjects for the purpose of deriving these benefits, even if they are not pursued in the name of the research ideal. It considers the extent to which a ‘broad and balanced’ curriculum of subject disciplines (i.e. the study of a range of subjects to GCSE level) can deliver these benefits, and whether the modern secondary school curriculum of academic subject disciplines can be regarded as constituting a liberal education in itself; or whether it is merely of preparatory value to those going on to specialise in higher education. The chapter concludes by questioning whether liberal education should be conceived at all in the spirit of the research ideal.

The academic curriculum

The modern curriculum of academic subject disciplines could be seen as standing in direct line of descent from the so-called ‘seven liberal arts’ of the late classical and early medieval periods, which comprised the subjects of the *trivium* (grammar, logic and rhetoric²) and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and musical theory) with the *trivium* broadly speaking encompassing the humanities and the *quadrivium* the sciences. Except that the two were sharply distinguished. The *trivium* formed the core of school (and higher) education, and the subjects of the *quadrivium* together with philosophy might be studied if the student progressed to university - though the student could opt instead to continue his study of rhetoric, or to study theology, medicine or law. Moreover, even within the *trivium*, the subjects were logically arranged so that the study of grammar and logic in the earlier years preceded the study of rhetoric. Rhetoric - the capacity to argue a case and come to a reasoned judgement - represented the culmination of school education. The notion that school education should comprise all these subjects (or their modern

² By the Renaissance, logic (‘dialectic’) had dropped out of the picture. It was only in the middle ages, with the rise of medieval scholasticism, that it ever played a significant role in the curriculum.

equivalents), and that they should be taught and studied simultaneously, involves a quite foreign conception of liberal education.

I shall return to the justification of the old liberal curriculum, specifically the *trivium*, in the next chapter. But how is the modern curriculum of academic subject disciplines to be justified? Specifically, *how* does it encapsulate the ‘research’ ideal?

In the first half of the twentieth-century, the study of the academic disciplines was justified on the broad grounds that collectively they are the ‘storehouses’ of knowledge (Mulcahy, 2008a, p. 74), and that acquaintance with them will best enable us to cultivate our minds and understand the world³. This line of thought is exemplified in Matthew Arnold’s famous formulation of liberal education as involving a study of ‘the best which has been thought and said in the world’ (Arnold, 1993, p. 190), which is still invoked by those who conceive (liberal) education primarily as a means of transmission of a cultural inheritance centred on a canon of great books and great works – for example, Anthony O’Hear and Chris Woodhead⁴. But a more closely argued justification of the curriculum of academic subject disciplines – indeed, the most famous defence of liberal education conceived in this disciplinary sense – is Paul Hirst’s. Hirst’s thesis is that the academic subject disciplines (the ones that largely make up the modern school curriculum) constitute a complete liberal education by virtue of their acquainting pupils with the major disciplines or ‘forms of knowledge’ necessary for a complete development of mind. Each discipline can be justified as a distinct means of structuring experience, each involving its own characteristic publicly constituted methods, symbols and modes of reasoning. The outcome of liberal education conceived as an acquaintance with the forms of knowledge is ‘the growth of ever clearer and finer distinctions in our

³ In America, this became associated particularly with the ‘Great Books’ movement (Mortimer Adler and Robert Hutchins of the University of Chicago were the prime instigators) of the first part of the twentieth-century. The ‘classical education’ and ‘classical Christian education’ movements continue to make the study of a canon of great books central to their programmes (see, for example, Bauer & Wise, 2004; Wilson, 2003).

⁴ See, for example, O’Hear & Sidwell, 2009, p. 7.

experience' (Hirst, 1974, p.52); and through it we 'come to have a mind in a fuller sense' (p.40). In other words, the aim is to cultivate the mind.⁵

This emphasis on subject disciplines structuring experience by means of a conceptual scheme or cognitive framework has the result that that the subject matter of the disciplines is typically theoretical rather than practical, pure rather than applied, and analytical rather than descriptive. Central to Hirst's conception of liberal education is the pursuit of rational knowledge and the development of rational mind. True, not all the subjects typically studied in the modern academic curriculum involve the strict application of deductive and inductive forms of reasoning – literature and the arts are obvious examples. But, as Hirst argues, even literature and the arts can be considered as producing rational knowledge in the disciplinary sense that their pursuit is carried on within a certain conceptual apparatus or cognitive structure – i.e. their pursuit is structured round the use of public symbols and involves accepted standards and modes of discourse. The aesthetic is itself a mode of reasoning, thinking and understanding, and involves definite criteria of judgement and standards.

However, there are a number of objections that can be raised against the school curriculum of academic subject disciplines. The first concerns the abstract theoretical nature of the subject disciplines, which makes them simply too difficult for many pupils; in other words, not all pupils possess the aptitude for academic study (or, let us say, the aptitude necessary to make academic study worthwhile). The second concerns the level of specialised study that is needed for the mind to be developed (or the intellect 'formed' or 'cultivated') in any sense, which makes it unlikely that the educational benefits envisaged by Hirst relating to the initiation into various 'forms of knowledge' would be realised as part of school education – even among pupils with the aptitude for academic study. The third is that the aims of the research ideal can just as well be realised by specialisation in subjects that are not academic in nature – i.e. practical subjects. And the fourth is that there are other legitimate

⁵ O'Hear writes of the disciplinary 'forms of knowledge' that they are embodiments and expressions of 'our existence as self-conscious agents' and they comprise canons of masterpieces that represent 'what has been best thought and best expressed' (O'Hear, 2004b, p. 100). The formulations of Arnold and Hirst are thereby combined.

educational aims, other goods, than those represented by the research ideal; and that these goods are neglected when the curriculum is limited to the study of academic subject disciplines. I shall argue that, taken together, these objections count decisively against the universal academic curriculum.

The fourth objection forms the subject matter of Chapter 7, where I consider the goods associated with the rhetorical ideal of liberal education, and Chapter 8, where I consider character education. In this chapter, I would like to consider the nature and value of the goods specifically associated with the research ideal, and how these goods might best realised in the curriculum. I shall begin by arguing the limitations of the curriculum of academic subject disciplines as a means of realising the goods associated with the research ideal (the goods in whose name the academic curriculum is usually justified) – which is the theme of the first two objections. And I shall go on to argue that the research ideal might be just as well be realised in several important respects through the specialised study of practical subjects, when I consider in the second half of this chapter what exactly is meant by ‘mental training’ (or ‘the cultivation of the mind’), and consider how this notion might fruitfully be conceived.

I shall take the first two objections in turn.

The ‘aptitude’ objection

The first feature of the research ideal that makes it an inappropriate model for a school curriculum applicable to all is that the rewards of academic disciplinary study, of research and scholarship motivated by a desire to attain the truth, are ultimately, by their very nature, open only to those who have the necessary aptitude for it; and because this may be a minority of pupils, the danger is that the academic curriculum serves only to produce ‘an intellectual aristocracy’. Of course, proponents of the academic curriculum have been aware of the problem of pupils’ differing aptitudes for academic study and so their argument has taken a particular

form. The view put forward by R. S. Peters and David Carr in Britain, and Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler in America (to name some of its most prominent advocates), is that a ‘liberal’ curriculum of academic subject disciplines, because it is the best education and the best means of training the mind, is necessarily also ‘the best education for all’ (Adler cited in Mulcahy, p. 76). In fact, it is nothing less than a moral entitlement (see Carr, 2003, pp. 208-211). All pupils can benefit from travelling *at least some of the way* along the path. As Peters notes, ‘it is a question of how far the individual child can go in developing a theoretical structure for practical activities rather than a question of which children can do this and which children cannot’. Peters adds for good measure that ‘a quality of life is not the prerogative of an intellectual elite’ (Peters, 1970, pp. 177-8).

But the argument that all pupils can move some way along the same track, though at different speeds and needing different amounts of support - that, as Adler puts it, it does not matter whether a half-pint or gallon container is being filled so long as each container is ‘filled to the brim with the same quality of substance’ (Adler, 1984, p. 3) - is a very crude argument indeed; and though laudable in its concern to produce equality of opportunity, takes no account of the nature of pupils’ differing aptitudes, motivations and needs⁶. The fallacy inherent in this argument was recognised in the mid-nineteenth-century by the contributors to Farrar’s *Essays on a Liberal Education* (1868) in relation to the study of the classical languages, the favoured discipline of the time for training the mind. Henry Sidgwick describes the problem in forthright terms:

It is not surprising that simple-minded people have thought that since a complete study of Latin and Greek was felt by some of those who had successfully pursued it to have been ... a fine literary education, therefore half as much Latin and Greek ought to produce about half as much of the same kind of effect ... (Sidgwick, 1868, p. 129)

⁶ Nor does it take account of the possibility that there are other goods than ‘the cultivation of the mind’, or that there are other ways of cultivating the mind – a possibility I shall return to later in this chapter.

The problem, noted Sidgwick, was that many pupils had been ‘so exhausted with linguistic struggles’ that they were ‘not in a state to receive delicate literary impressions’ (p. 116). And because, for one reason or another, they did not ‘last the course’, they finished not with ‘half a literary education’ but with next to none at all.

The problem with this objection (and indeed this whole discussion) is that any suggestion that pupils differ in academic ability and, critically, that these differences are *qualitative* rather than merely quantitative in nature – that it is not simply a question of some pupils having to work harder than others to achieve the same learning objectives⁷ (or of pupils differing merely in their aptitude for particular subjects or activities - something that most people would probably not dispute) - raises immediately a host of highly contentious and politicised questions that are almost impossible to resolve through rational debate⁸. These include the problematic nature of intelligence as a concept (especially ‘general’ intelligence or ‘IQ’), contested empirical evidence concerning the relative influences of inheritance and environment (the ‘nature versus nurture’ debate), and the nature and validity of the egalitarian assumptions underlying our chosen educational aims. We might agree with D. G. Mulcahy that equality of opportunity can just as well be taken to justify pupils being given different programmes of study so that their differing needs – intellectual, social, emotional and cultural - can be met; that Adler’s argument is not founded on some ‘self-evident principle’ but is merely a slogan, a claim for which no evidence is provided (Mulcahy, 2008a, pp.84-5).⁹ But to argue that pupils’ differing needs can be identified is to invite these same objections, even if teachers (unlike philosophers) are continually engaged in the practical task of identifying and catering to pupils’ differing needs.

⁷ Taking mathematics as an example, it is blindingly obvious to most teachers of mathematics (I include myself and my colleagues, past and present) that pupils differ in their capacity not merely to do mathematics or to grasp new concepts; they differ in their capacity *to think mathematically*. Really able pupils think in a quite different way to their average or below-average peers.

⁸ A good example is the debate between Hans Eysenck and Leon Kamin. Eysenck and Kamin, both leading professors of psychology, both immersed in the research on intelligence, disagree on almost everything, including on how particular studies should be interpreted (see Eysenck & Kamin, 1981). As Ian Deary remarks, they seem further apart at the end of the debate than they were at the beginning (Deary, 2001, p. 114).

⁹ Mulcahy also notes the presumption that the intellectual life represents the perfection of life, that the life devoted to caring for others (for example) is somehow inferior. This argument that the intellectual life is synonymous with the good life is the one I attacked in Chapter 4.

The legitimate concern here is that any attempt to identify or measure pupils' aptitudes or academic ability too early – in effect, to institute selection or streaming by aptitude or ability – is likely to reinforce advantages and disadvantages of background and upbringing (social, cultural, ethnic and other); and that school education should be centred on a common curriculum for this reason. But we might accept the need for a common curriculum on these grounds (we might even adhere to the belief that pupils do not differ in their 'innate' academic ability or potential – i.e. believe that academic ability is not innate) and yet question the assumption of Peters et al. that the intellectual life is the ideal after which all should strive and its corollary that practical and craft subjects should be excluded from a liberal education. The notion that the intellectual life - the contemplative life - represents the greatest good, and that the life devoted to practical pursuits or merely caring for others (for example) is somehow inferior, is one that I disputed in Chapter 4 and will return to later in this chapter when I consider the value of practical pursuits in relation to specialist study. First, however, I would like to consider the other objection to the academic curriculum - one that renders it inadequate as a means of cultivating the mind *even if* it is assumed that all pupils are equally capable of academic study.

The 'superficial knowledge' objection

Even if one does assume that all pupils are capable of academic study and research (the implication being, for example, that anyone can become a physicist or mathematician so long as they devote enough time to the study of physics or mathematics), the problem remains that it is necessary to go a considerable way along the road of specialised disciplinary study before the rewards or goods specifically associated with the development of mind or 'mental training' (including an acquaintance with Hirst's 'forms of knowledge') accrue in any degree. Pupils who study a given academic subject discipline merely to GCSE level and no further as part of a broad and balanced curriculum (which necessarily includes most pupils in most subjects), therefore gain none of these things, or at least gain these things in only a very limited sense, from their study. What they do, in fact, gain was aptly

described by John Dewey: ‘a smattering which is too superficial to be scientific and too technical to be applicable to ordinary affairs’ (Dewey, 1966, p. 287).¹⁰

Paul Hirst’s seminal ‘forms of knowledge’ justification of liberal education has been the object of intense debate since it was proposed in the 1960s. The debate has centred on problems of selection (i.e. which subjects or groups of subjects are to be judged representative of distinct forms of knowledge), number (i.e. how many distinct forms of knowledge can or should be identified) and conceptual (i.e. can forms of knowledge, as Hirst defines them, usefully be distinguished at all). But I think there is a much more basic practical flaw in Hirst’s thesis. Even if we accepted that the acquisition of Hirst’s ‘forms of knowledge’ were a legitimate educational aim, that the concept were a fruitful one, this basic problem remains: to study an academic discipline at an elementary level, in the manner that academic disciplines are currently taught, is to begin an apprenticeship or a process of training that will culminate in mastery of the parent discipline – its characteristic vocabulary, methods, theories and body of factual knowledge - *if one goes on to specialise in the subject concerned*. An elementary programme of study, by contrast, can generally do little more than introduce the pupil or the student to the basic vocabulary and syntax of the subject. The notion that an introductory course - a GCSE, for example - can initiate pupils into a form of knowledge is, I think, hopelessly unrealistic.

Hirst appears to recognise the dilemma that ‘some specialist study within a discipline’ is ‘necessary to understanding the form of knowledge in any developed sense’ – and yet specialist expertise in all the disciplines is a practical impossibility; and so he argues that acquaintance with ‘at least paradigm examples’ of the forms of knowledge of the disciplines – for example, gravity in physics and photosynthesis in biology – will be sufficient to initiate pupils into the characteristic modes of thought of the disciplines, and hence educate the mind (Hirst, 1974, p. 48). But I think this is equally unrealistic. Let me illustrate my argument with reference to examples from

¹⁰ Inevitably, one’s own experience colours one’s attitudes here. My experience is precisely that of gaining ‘a smattering’. I would add that most of what I learned was quickly forgotten for precisely the reasons Dewey gives. For the subject matter to be rendered memorable and meaningful, it would either have to be useful (or topical or relevant or interesting) or studied in depth.

the natural and social sciences¹¹, which constitute two of Hirst's stated forms of knowledge¹².

Economics makes an interesting case study because though not a mainstream subject at GCSE, it is increasingly popular (as is its social science cousin 'psychology') as a specialist subject at A-level - being seen as relevant, interesting and as possessing academic rigour. Now the purpose of studying economics is clearly to be able to answer, or at least have some notion of what is involved in answering, questions of the following type: 'how can unemployment be cured without creating an inflationary spiral?', 'what is the best way to get out of a recession?', 'does higher government borrowing force up the rate of interest?', 'is a policy of 'monetary easing' inflationary?', 'under what circumstances are floating exchange rates preferable to a single currency?' and 'how can a debt crisis be resolved?' But to even begin to answer these topical questions requires an understanding of some basic macroeconomic theory – for example, Ricardo's doctrine of comparative costs (the justification for international free trade), Keynes' multiplier (how changes in savings, investment or consumer spending produce multiplied effects on National Income and employment that end when equilibrium is restored), the classic Hicks-Hansen 'IS-LM' model that synthesises the fiscal and monetary sectors of the economy (together with an awareness of its limitations), and what is meant by 'the money supply'¹³; together with some knowledge of the historical background and political context of these elements of economic theory. The problem is that much of the theory is only introduced at first-year undergraduate level. Some of it may be touched on at A-level, but it will certainly not be developed

¹¹ I have chosen here subjects I have studied formally - to A-level in the case of physics and to degree level in the case of economics – so that I have (or at least once had) some first-hand acquaintance with the subject matter I am discussing.

¹² Hirst classifies the distinct disciplines or forms of knowledge as 'mathematics, physical sciences, human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, philosophy' (p. 46).

¹³ 'The money supply' is a good example of a basic term that can be given a technical definition at an introductory level, but that is conceptually highly complex. It does not refer to the printing of bank notes and their scattering by helicopter across the population (Milton Friedman was once much criticised for proposing this crude 'helicopter' transmission mechanism); rather it involves such factors as the growth of bank deposits, the level and structure of government borrowing, the availability of private credit, the level and structure of interest rates, and judgements concerning the overall 'liquidity' of the system. However, it is only when we come to consider its relation to other economic variables and its place in economic theory (for example, whether the money supply should be considered as exogenous or endogenous to the economy) that we begin to engage in economic discourse - to *think* as economists might.

at a theoretical level. An introductory GCSE course, by contrast, will, necessarily, concern itself largely with familiarising the pupil with the extensive technical vocabulary of the subject, with the structure of the economy and the banking system¹⁴. Now, to successfully complete this introductory course is itself a major undertaking requiring considerable application on the part of the student. Study skills will be developed, general knowledge gained and the appetite may well be whetted for more specialised study. But there is no way that this introductory study can, in itself, develop the capacity *to think economically* or *to apply economic theory* in answering economic problems. It is hard therefore to see how the introductory or GCSE-level course could serve as ‘mental training’ or as acquainting pupils with Hirst’s ‘forms of knowledge’ in any shape or form.

Likewise, an elementary GCSE-type course in physics will typically introduce a whole range of topics, an extensive technical vocabulary of terms and symbols, various rules and conventions (for example of diagrammatic representation and experimental procedure) and begin to develop the conceptual language of the subject. Explanation at this stage will be largely descriptive. For example, the concepts ‘gravitational force’, ‘centripetal force’, ‘weight’ and ‘weightlessness’ will be explained in simple terms and Newton’s law of universal gravitation will be mentioned (though not necessarily stated). However, the concepts will only be developed theoretically (i.e. mathematically) at A-level, where it becomes possible for students to apply a range of theories and formulae in conjunction with each other to solve problems such as calculating the force of gravity at the Earth’s surface and the ‘speed of escape’ from the earth’s gravitational field. True, the concept of gravity is introduced in the elementary course, but then it is already familiar to pupils through the story of an apple falling on Newton’s head and their experience that what goes up must come down. A limited number of elementary principles, laws and equations are introduced and applied to solve elementary problems - for example, the equations of motion and Ohm’s law. But most of what is introduced is descriptive

¹⁴ For example, the nature of the difference and the relation between national income, gross national product and gross domestic product; between the ‘current’ and ‘capital’ accounts of the balance of payments; between the public sector borrowing requirement and the national debt; and between fiscal and monetary policy – the list could be extended indefinitely. All these must be covered as part of an introductory course. But though technical, the treatment will be descriptive rather than conceptual or theoretical in nature.

and definitional. Consider, for example, the following elementary terms or concepts relating to the single topic of ‘electricity and magnetism’: magnetic flux, magnetic field, magnetisation, static electricity, electric charge, insulators and conductors, electric discharge, potential difference, capacitance, electric cells, electric circuits (series and parallel), electric current (AC and DC), resistance, electromagnets, electrolysis, devices for measuring current, voltage and resistance, types of electric light and domestic electric installation, magnetic forces on conductors, electromagnetic induction (the principle of the electric motor), dynamos and transformers. The question is ‘does this mass of information constitute *as it stands* a coherent body of conceptual and theoretical knowledge?’ Does it give us an insight into how physicists (or scientists more generally) structure experience and engage in a distinct world of discourse involving ‘high critical standards according to complex criteria’ sufficient to ‘form the mind’ (Hirst, 1974, p. 45)? Has there been ‘sufficient immersion in the concepts, logic and criteria of the discipline’ to enable the pupil’s ‘experience ... to be widely structured in this distinctive manner’ (p. 47)? The answer, I would suggest, is ‘clearly not’.

Hirst recognises that ‘some specialist study within a discipline’ would be necessary to understanding the form of knowledge ‘in any developed sense’; and suggests that the study of ‘at least paradigm examples’ of the forms of knowledge would do provided that the study is ‘sufficiently detailed and sustained to give genuine insight so that pupils come to think in these terms, using the concepts, logic and criteria accurately in the different domains’ (p. 48). He does not elaborate on these paradigm examples but earlier has given as examples of the ‘central concepts’ peculiar in character to the form of the sciences those of ‘gravity, acceleration, hydrogen and photo-synthesis’ (p. 44). Let us, then, consider ‘gravity’ as a core concept and paradigm example of the natural sciences.

There are immediately two problems here. The first is that gravity is not a concept that one can consider in any developed sense in isolation. Some topics - electricity and magnetism, waves, particles and materials, for example - are not particularly relevant and could probably be safely ignored. But to understand why

gravity is a central concept in physics, would require an extensive conceptual knowledge of space, forces and mechanics, not to mention an understanding of the relation between space and time (Einstein's theory of general relativity), and even the relation between general relativity and quantum mechanics (the quest for a unified theory of 'quantum gravity'). One would, in effect, be doing A-level work, and more, though in a more restricted field. The second problem – of course - is that the other topics of physics (along with chemistry and biology) could not just be dropped from the curriculum. This would be to deprive the pupil, first, of an adequate general knowledge, and second of the broad introduction necessary for future specialisation.

The point I am making is that what is of practical value or general interest in physics (which might range from applied mechanics in the form of 'how a car engine works' to general questions concerning the nature of the universe – questions of the sort that fascinate children) is better introduced in the form of general knowledge and given a descriptive treatment with minimal theoretical underpinning; and it is probably better introduced in contexts that make it more interesting, more memorable and more applicable to everyday 'real-life' application, including through 'popular science', television documentaries and film dramatisations. The rest is of little or no value *unless* it is developed theoretically - and hence mathematically – at a higher level. And unless theoretical concepts are developed to the level at which they can be applied, and to the level at which they can be *related to each other* to form an overall view, it is difficult to see what in the way of 'thinking skills' is developed or 'mental training' effected in the Hirstian sense. One is left with a mass of disconnected half-digested technical information that cannot be integrated into a meaningful whole, that cannot be applied practically or to solve problems, and that is likely to be forgotten as soon as the course is over.

I am not arguing here that knowledge below a certain threshold is worthless; merely that mental training in the Hirstian sense is unlikely to be effected. There is, in fact, a strong case for delaying the theoretical treatment of subjects and making introductory courses general and descriptive in nature. David Ausubel argued the case in the 1960s and took biology as an example:

By any reasonable pedagogic criterion ... high-school biology should concentrate on those broad biological ideas that constitute part of general education – physiology, evolution, development, inheritance, uniformities and diversities in life, ecology, and man’s place in nature – rather than on a detailed and technical analysis of the physical and chemical basis of biological phenomena or of the morphology and function of intracellular microstructures. This is particularly true for the substantial number of students who will receive no further instruction in biology. (Ausubel, 1968, p. 355)

There is great value in the sort of general education (or general knowledge education) Ausubel is advocating here - so long as it is structured coherently by topic. Clearly, as I argued earlier, application is required and study skills are developed; and pupils have the opportunity to think reflectively, reason well and argue a case. In fact, what is being developed here is not ‘critical’ or ‘creative’ thinking’ (because, as I argue in Chapter 7, that requires specialist subject knowledge), nor various mental faculties, nor even the intellectual virtues (I shall return to these later in this chapter in relation to specialist knowledge), but rather *rhetorical* skill. I shall argue in Chapter 7 that the acquisition of general knowledge is an important component of rhetorical training. But clearly we have moved a long way here from Hirst’s conception of the value of a liberal curriculum of academic subject disciplines.

The value of specialised study

I have argued that an academic curriculum of subject disciplines is an inadequate basis for secondary education, even for those with the aptitude for it, because the educational benefits claimed for specialist disciplinary study – benefits or goods usually conceived in terms of some sort of development of the mind or ‘mental training’ (I shall return to the precise nature of these shortly) - only accrue in any significant degree when the pupil studies a subject to quite an advanced level; and clearly not all pupils will go on to specialise, certainly not in academic subject disciplines. Moreover, any benefits that do derive from this specialist study will not be the ones envisaged by Hirst in his forms of knowledge thesis (i.e. the complete

development of mind through an acquaintance with all the forms of knowledge) because it is not possible to specialise in all the disciplines.

However, a quite different justification of the study of the academic disciplines, of liberal education conceived as a means of pursuing the research ideal, can be argued - namely, that the main value of a 'broad and balanced' curriculum of academic subject disciplines is that the disciplines are studied at an introductory level preparatory to selection and specialisation. The real value of GCSE courses then lies in their being first stages towards the acquisition of a body of knowledge that will only be complete on graduation from university. A broad range of subjects is therefore necessary pre-16 to enable selection and the subject matter must be determined 'top-down' by the entrance requirements of universities. On this argument, the full benefits of a liberal education only accrue to the graduate who has engaged in specialised study and has mastered a discipline – or at least mastered it to a high degree.

In *The English Tradition of Education*, Cyril Norwood¹⁵ writes that central to a liberal education is the acquisition of precisely this specialist knowledge. His words, written in 1929, are, I think, worth quoting at length:

If you have once gained sound knowledge on anything, however limited in range it may be, you have a standard, and you know what knowledge is. And in a world of many opinions, you will have the standard which will enable you to judge between them. You will know that you have to ascertain what the facts are, which is in itself not an easy process, and then, facing those facts, and giving to each its proper value, form a deliberate judgement. To ask the right questions, and from the answers to form a right judgement, that is the rare fruit of a good education.

That is the justification of the modern curriculum which on the basis of a common general education offers to each boy who is fit for it a specialized course in the subject for which he has the most capacity. It is based on the

¹⁵ Sir Cyril Norwood was a prominent English public school headmaster and author of the influential Norwood Report of 1943, which recommended the institution of a tripartite system of secondary education.

hope that by the acquisition of true knowledge in one portion of the field, he will know that it is to be looked for in every other ... and that what matters in life is sound judgement based on ascertained truth. (Norwood, 1929, pp. 93-4)

For Norwood, to know ‘the value of knowledge’ is to have had one’s mind and one’s powers of judgement trained, developed and formed; and to have had one’s mind trained through specialised study is to have learned the value of the pursuit of true knowledge. This is a quite different justification of the modern curriculum to that of Peters and Hirst, or indeed to that of Newman, and it is often overlooked, even though I think it is the more coherent justification.

However, if there are significant educational benefits to be derived from engaging in specialist study – benefits that go beyond the ‘mere’ acquisition of subject knowledge and expertise in that subject area - then this would constitute a powerful argument for allowing all pupils to specialise early in at least one subject (i.e. to study it in depth) as part of their general secondary education. Moreover, it is conceivable that the benefits of specialisation would accrue, not only from the study of academic subject disciplines pursued in pursuit of the research ideal, but also from the pursuit of a range of other subjects and from the engagement in other forms of activity.

In the remainder of this chapter, I shall therefore attempt to answer the following questions: In what sense (if any) does specialised study cultivate or ‘train’ the mind? Are some subjects better for the purpose of ‘mental training’ than others? Do specialist subjects need to be academic in nature – or might practical subjects also do the job? Is ‘mental training’ not better conceived in terms of the cultivation of certain values and virtues, and of practical judgement? What are ‘the intellectual virtues’? And finally, should liberal education be conceived at all in the spirit of the research ideal?

Mental training and the intellectual virtues

There are different ways of describing and conceptualising the educational benefits or goods that might accrue from specialised study. We might speak of specialised study in terms of engagement in a practice, and of certain virtues (moral and intellectual) being cultivated by initiation into that practice; or of the mind being educated or cultivated - of its cognitive faculties being trained; or of certain ‘thinking skills’ being developed, including the ability or capacity to reason well and develop an argument; or we might emphasise the disciplined acquisition of an organised body of knowledge¹⁶ and skill, and speak of the wider value (moral, intellectual, epistemic) of having acquired expertise in one particular area - even of the transformation of the person and his perception of the world.

The notion that education can ‘train the mind’ carries connotations of the somewhat discredited ‘faculty psychology’ of the nineteenth-century (the notion that the mind can be regarded as comprising several distinct faculties, each of which is capable of being developed or trained as if it were a muscle) but when interpreted in the currently fashionable terms of ‘thinking skills’, or the cultivation of certain ‘intellectual virtues’, there appears to be no such connotation. There is, I think, no question that specialised study *in some sense* ‘trains the mind’ provided that this study involves the disciplined acquisition of an organised body of knowledge (understanding, skill, know-how), and provided that this knowledge has ‘a certain structural complexity a grasp of which requires sustained effort, reflection, concentration, persistence, and the like’ (Baehr, 2013, p. 251). It is because specialised study, by its very nature, requires concentration, persistence, attention to detail and so forth, that the engagement in it must, to some degree, cultivate these qualities or capacities – cultivate them *in so far as* they can be regarded as habits or dispositions (rather than innate qualities) and *in so far as* the student has the aptitude, interest and motivation to engage in the particular subject (a point to which I shall return later). These attributes, qualities or capacities are the ones we might usefully designate ‘the intellectual virtues’. Likewise, it is because specialised study involves

¹⁶ By knowledge, I mean also conceptual understanding – not merely the memorisation of factual information.

the disciplined acquisition of a body of knowledge and skill involving concepts and procedures of some complexity, and because it requires relevant facts to be ascertained or categorised, and agreed standards and criteria of judgement to be applied (as opposed to merely mechanical procedures being followed), that more general powers of reasoning, judgement and discrimination are likely to be cultivated. Even if a person lacks the expertise necessary to form a judgement, to ascertain the relevant factors in a particular case, he is able - as Norwood argued - to appreciate the value of the expertise possessed by others.

It seems to make sense here to distinguish the general capacity to reason well (to argue a case, to form a judgement) from the capacity to exercise the ‘intellectual virtues’ associated with the capacity of a person to acquire a body of knowledge and expertise in some particular area, because although both might be cultivated through specialised study (especially academic disciplinary study), there are other factors affecting the former. First, it could be argued that students differ in their capacity for academic study precisely because they differ in their capacity for logical reasoning of an abstract theoretical nature – in other words, it could be argued that this capacity is, in some degree, innate¹⁷; whereas the intellectual virtues are dispositions that can be cultivated by all. I recognise that this proposition is a highly contentious one but I think it does need to be stated, and that the possibility needs to be given serious consideration¹⁸; however, as it is not central to the argument of this thesis (and would be impossible to adequately address in this thesis), I shall leave it to one side.

17 By innate, I mean simply that there is a general factor (‘g’) of cognitive ability or intelligence on which human beings differ, that IQ tests can measure this difference, that IQ scores are stable over most of a person’s life, and that this general factor of intelligence is substantially heritable. Of course this set of assertions is highly contentious and would probably be disputed by most educationalists. However, it is generally accepted by those engaged in the field of psychometrics and therefore deserves proper consideration (see American Psychological Association, 1995; Deary, 2001; Herrnstein & Murray, 1996, pp. 22-3).

18 As I have alluded in the last note, there is a staggering gulf in this respect between educationalists, who mostly subscribe to an egalitarian ideal, and those engaged in psychometric research. The two groups might as well exist on different planets. For example, the claim of those engaged in psychometric research that intelligence is substantially heritable is particularly contentious for many educationalists who view social and economic disadvantage as the main cause of pupils’ poor academic performance – of their apparently low IQ. And yet the psychometric evidence is that though environment has a significant effect on human intelligence differences, ‘by far the largest part of the environment’s influence can be traced to the non-shared unique environment. Families [our shared environment] have little effect.’ (Deary, p. 79; see also American Psychological Association, pp. 88 & 96) Since families mediate social and economic factors in the lives of children, this ought to be cause for thought for educationalists.

Second, and more germane to this thesis, the general capacity to reason and form judgements is closely bound up with the verbal or linguistic capacity of being able to express oneself clearly, concisely and logically – the very capacity or skill that the old liberal education sought to cultivate through the study of grammar and rhetoric, but that is less likely to be cultivated through the specialist study of practical or craft subjects.

I shall therefore delay a consideration of the capacity to reason well and how it might best be cultivated to the next chapter when I consider liberal education conceived in the light of the rhetorical ideal. The focus of the remainder of this chapter will be the goods and virtues that are cultivated by specialised study – specifically, the intellectual virtues.

Educationally worthwhile activities

The intellectual or epistemic virtues might include such things as ‘curiosity, open-mindedness, creativity, reflectiveness, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual courage, intellectual rigour, and intellectual honesty’ (Baehr, 2013, pp. 248 & 258); or alternatively ‘disinterested curiosity, patience, intellectual honesty, exactness, industry, attention, concentration, doubt, courage, discrimination and the recognition of excellence in thought and conduct’ (Oakeshott, 2001, pp. 59 & 74). The corresponding goods might include an appreciation of the value of knowledge (and of its acquisition) in all fields; heightened powers of perception, cognition and imagination; the capacity to reason well and arrive at a wise (practical) judgement; the possibility of leading ‘a certain kind of life’ – the life of an artist, a physicist, a craftsman or a teacher, for example (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 190); ‘the gift of self-knowledge and of a satisfying intellectual and moral identity’ (Oakeshott, 2001, p. 72); and, finally, the good of leading a virtuous life – the life of a person who possesses a range of moral and intellectual virtues – as an end in itself.¹⁹

¹⁹ This catalogue of goods represents an expansion of the ‘two goods’ model I proposed in Chapter 4 as arising specifically from the engagement in practices. All the goods I have detailed here would, I

But what are the subjects or activities best suited to the purpose of developing and cultivating these intellectual virtues? Which subjects or activities have educational value as means of cultivating these virtues, and are therefore *intrinsically worthwhile*? Three contrasting perspectives that might shed some light on the nature of an educationally worthwhile activity are those of Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Peters, and Michael Reiss and John White – and I shall consider these in turn.

First, the engagement in specialist study might be conceived in terms of engagement in a practice on the apprenticeship model as conceived by Alasdair MacIntyre. I have already discussed the nature of practices in some detail in Chapter 4 in relation to the goods that might constitute a worthwhile life but it might be worth summarising here their key features. Practices are coherent complex socially established forms of cooperative activity; their scope is wide and they range from sports, crafts, arts, trades and professions to academic subject disciplines; to engage in them requires an extended period of apprenticeship; engagement in them involves the realisation of goods and standards of excellence that are internal to the activity concerned; the goods of practices might broadly be characterised as being of two kinds – (1) the good of leading a certain kind of life and (2) the good of leading a virtuous life; as well as being partially constitutive of these goods, various virtues (moral and intellectual) must be exercised in realising them; and, finally, a practice embodies a living tradition of enquiry into the nature of its goods.

The difference is that here we are considering goods that are specifically educational rather than goods that make an adult life worthwhile; activities that are worthwhile in the sense that they prepare pupils for leading worthwhile lives as adults (which includes preparing pupils for their successful engagement in practices as adults) rather than activities that are necessarily worthwhile in themselves – though of course the former does not preclude the latter. We might therefore be more concerned to cultivate the widest possible range of moral and intellectual virtues (and put a premium on those activities that best meet this requirement) than to

think, arise from the engagement in practices, because to engage in a practice necessarily entails ‘specialised study’ – except that the verbal capacity to reason well is less likely to be developed in practices that are of a practical nature.

cultivate the good of a certain kind of life in the sense of providing a vocation – though, again, vocational aims are not precluded by educational aims. We might also be concerned to encourage engagement in activities that, after a period of apprenticeship, give the greatest scope for the exercise of responsibility, discrimination, judgement and imagination. None of these considerations would apply if the aim were simply to provide vocational training²⁰. Nevertheless, practices as MacIntyre conceives them – and occupational vocations often are good examples of practices (and might well fulfil all the desirable criteria I have just specified) - possess many characteristics that would mark them as educationally worthwhile. They certainly possess intrinsic value (i.e. they are worth engaging in for their own sake); they cultivate particular modes of understanding, perception, reasoning, analysis, imagination and judgement; they involve the disciplined acquisition of a body of knowledge and skill, whether practical or theoretical; and they cultivate a range of virtues. The problem is that a very wide range of activities can count as practices. Are football, chess, farming, physics and literature (all of which MacIntyre counts as practices) equally suited to specialised study as part of the school curriculum? Do they have equal educational value? Some of the selection criteria I have just detailed might need to be brought into play here.

In *Ethics and Education* (1970), Richard Peters sought to answer the problem of curriculum selection by drawing a sharp distinction between worthwhile activities and the ‘serious pursuits’ he judged suitable for incorporation into the school curriculum. Worthwhile activities, which are roughly analogous to MacIntyre’s practices, are defined as those activities pursued for the sake of ends intrinsic to them; whereas serious pursuits, in addition to possessing intrinsic value, have ‘a wide-ranging cognitive content’, ‘illuminate other areas of life and contribute much to the quality of living’ (Peters, 1970, p. 159), and ‘thus insensibly change a man’s view of the world’ (p. 160). This leads Peters to agree with Hirst that academic subject disciplines – subjects involving ‘science, history, literary appreciation, philosophy and other such cultural activities’ - are of the greatest educational value and should constitute the school curriculum. But though literature clearly

²⁰ Note that, generally speaking, the qualifications to MacIntyre’s conception of practices that I detailed in Chapter 4 do not apply here because we are concerned with the engagement in practices for educational reasons, not as occupations or vocations.

illuminates many areas of life (because in a sense its subject matter is life itself), is this true of, say, mathematics or physics? And can't the disciplined study of a craft or engagement in a trade or profession (say farming), which does not have 'a wide-ranging cognitive content', nevertheless 'change a man's view of the world' in a variety of ways, even if these are not always articulated? Are certain moral and intellectual virtues not equally well, or even better, fostered through the engagement in practical activities? Peters and Hirst seem here almost exclusively concerned with the life of the mind as if the only life worth living is that of the philosopher, academic or researcher. The ordinary life, the 'unexamined' life, seems to be of very limited value – a view I argued against in Chapter 4.

However, I think Peters is much more interesting when he departs from Hirst to consider the educational value of absorbing and worthwhile pursuits that have 'limited cognitive content' but may hold great interest (particularly though not necessarily only) to pupils 'who are ... not very interested in the more theoretical types of pursuit' (p. 176). Likewise, he notes, 'more intelligent children' should not be excluded from such practical activities (p. 177). For example, Peters writes of cooking that

... it can be delighted in for the opportunities for skill and ingenuity which it affords ... It will, of course, be enhanced as an art if understanding develops about its underlying principles and if it is not just conducted on a rule of thumb basis. But in so far as it tends to become pursued for its own sake, for the values intrinsic to it, rather than purely instrumentally, it can come to contribute substantially to a quality of living. (Peters, 1970, p. 177)

He goes on to qualify his earlier argument concerning the educational value of serious (i.e. academic) pursuits:

It was argued in the first part of this book that 'education' implies both cognitive content and the disinterested pursuit of what is worthwhile. If activities such as cooking come to be practised in such a way that they satisfy the second criterion but the first only to a limited extent, they should not be

despised on that account. But if [the cognitive perspective] cannot be [developed] in the case of some children, that is no reason for concluding that such activities have no educational value. (p. 177)

I would simply take the argument one step further and argue that since the good life need not centre on ‘the examined life’ or ‘the life of the mind’ (the argument I proposed in Chapter 4), educational activities need not possess ‘a wide-ranging cognitive content’. However, I think Peters’ suggestion that practical centres of interest might serve as the starting point for explorations of the relevant history and literature (i.e. for study that is more ‘cognitive’ or ‘intellectual’ in nature, though not necessarily highly theoretical) is very interesting:

It may be that a boat is an exciting centre of interest that will provide an incentive for sustained effort. But the effort need not be directed simply toward building better and better boats. It can also be directed outwards towards history ... towards literature and poetry which abound with tales of boats, and to elementary science which provides theories about the tides, winds, and oceans which constitute the relevant environment. (p. 178)

The danger of a topic centred or integrated theme approach is that because it is not centred on a recognised subject (or practice), it may lack rigour or ‘real academic discipline’; that, at worst, it may degenerate into ‘a pot-pourri of trivia’ chosen because of its supposed interest to the young (Shipman, 1971, p. 103). I think it is important therefore to draw a sharp distinction between ‘general knowledge’ and ‘specialist knowledge’, both of which have educational value, but which serve conceptually quite distinct educational ends or aims. General knowledge encompasses subject knowledge at an introductory and largely descriptive level and might well be organised by cross-curricular theme or topic to make it interesting and/or relevant to the pupil. As well as serving to introduce subjects that might later be specialised in as part of higher education or be specialised in as part of general secondary education, it forms (I shall argue in the next chapter) a vital part of rhetorical training – of liberal education conceived in the spirit of the rhetorical ideal. This is particularly true of history and literature when conceived, not as academic

disciplines, but as funds of stories of human experience. In fact, I shall argue that rhetoric can provide the conceptual frame that integrates and unifies the ‘general knowledge’ curriculum. Specialist study, on the other hand, cultivates a range of virtues and goods, not because of its subject matter, but on account of the process by which a complex body of knowledge and skill is mastered. Is the topic of ‘boats’, then, an example of a general knowledge topic or a specialist subject? The answer is ‘both’. In so far as boats are ‘a centre of interest’, we are speaking of general knowledge. However, the craft of boat-building and the art of sailing (for example) are specialist practical subjects with the characteristics of practices. Of course, the study of a general knowledge topic may provoke an interest in the study of a related specialist subject; they may complement each other. But educationally, they serve quite different ends.

In *An Aims-based Curriculum* (2013), Michael Reiss and John White argue that central to school education should be the pupil’s ‘wholehearted and successful engagement’ in intrinsically worthwhile activities. Since the sense of ‘personal fulfilment’ essential for a flourishing life arises out of ‘wholeheartedness of involvement’ in intrinsically worthwhile activities in later life (Reiss & White, 2013, pp. 14-15), it makes sense that pupils experience this sense of engagement by way of preparation. Reiss and White spread the net wider than MacIntyre and incorporate any activities that can be engaged in wholeheartedly and with utter absorption – hence, cookery, pigeon racing, physical exercise, travel and writing novels are all cited. But though there should be an element of choice, there is a case for making compulsory those worthwhile activities that (1) are less likely to be engaged in outside school – for example, a foreign language and religious belief (including atheism); and (2) are judged beneficial for every student’s flourishing in later life – for example, literature, basic mathematics, the non-literary arts, aspects of history and a wide range of ‘background’ knowledge in the physical and social sciences. Some subjects might be introduced as ‘taster courses’ leaving further study optional. But it is crucial, argue Reiss and White, that for at least some of the time students are able to choose to engage in the activities that are most likely to give them the experience of wholehearted involvement, whether it is ‘gardening, studying architecture, exploring transport systems, or taking further some specialized aspect

of science, engineering, literature, or art and design' (p. 19). The obvious question here, I think, is do activities have educational value *merely* on account of their being absorbing? An activity might be absorbing but lack the characteristics of a practice – that is, lack the complex body of knowledge and skill whose mastery both requires and cultivates a range of moral and intellectual virtues.

What can we learn from these varying perspectives on educationally worthwhile activities? There are, I think, three things. First, that an educationally worthwhile activity has something of the nature of a practice and involves an extended period of apprenticeship (hence the need for specialisation); second, that it must (as I noted above) involve the disciplined acquisition of a body of knowledge and skill involving concepts and procedures of some complexity, and requiring the exercise of judgement, discrimination and imagination; and third, that for the benefits or goods to accrue, the pupil or student must have the capacity, aptitude, interest and motivation to engage in the practice – and that they must therefore be allowed to choose the activity to be pursued. The second criterion would seem to count against the inclusion of sports and games, but not rule them out altogether. Clearly sports and games involve judgement in game situations, but there is little in the way of conceptual or relational knowledge, and the procedures and skills involved tend to be mechanical ones requiring a vast amount of repetitive practice or 'drill' in order to perfect. An analogy might be drawn with music, but though the instrumental player needs to put in hours of practice, there is potentially vast conceptual complexity – technical, intellectual and imaginative - involved in composition, interpretation and performance. Similarly, the first criterion would seem to rule out the acquisition of general knowledge of a descriptive nature, valuable though this is in other respects. Though an integral part of education (particularly, as I shall argue, rhetorical education) and of subject knowledge in any field, the acquisition of general knowledge in a particular field does not, in itself, constitute initiation into a practice because it does not involve the acquisition of a complex body of knowledge and skill. So, to take an example from Reiss and White's list, the study of transport systems would be a doubtful candidate for inclusion, unless informed by conceptual knowledge from other disciplines (history, economics and engineering, for example) – or indeed by technical know-how and practical experience.

Applying the criteria I have outlined, I think it is clear – and this is the crucial point - that practical as well as academic subjects can count as educationally worthwhile activities, and hence as subjects worthy of inclusion in the curriculum. The acquisition of a body of practical or craft knowledge and skill, though rooted in engagement with materials rather than abstract concepts and theories, involves the development of judgement, discrimination and imagination to a very high degree; and though concepts of an abstract theoretical nature might not be involved, relational knowledge – the understanding of how more concrete concepts relate to each other – certainly would be, and this knowledge might well be highly complex in nature²¹. Moreover, practical subjects are potentially accessible on grounds of aptitude, interest and motivation to a much wider range of pupils than the academic disciplines. As Richard Sennett argues, ‘nearly everyone can become a good craftsman’ because ‘the rhythm of routine in craftsmanship’ and ‘the dialogue with materials’ have their root, not in abstract reasoning, but in experiences (he notes particularly the childhood experience of play) and sensations common to all people (Sennett, 2009, p. 268). Christopher Winch notes that though there is a tacit dimension to craft knowledge, so that one could never acquire it merely from the study of a textbook or manual, the exercise of a craft can be appraised and evaluated according to the established standards of a tradition involving a publicly constituted language; in fact, it is often appraised and evaluated according to a highly complex set of criteria involving a complex evaluative vocabulary. ‘Know-how’ (as craft knowledge might be termed) ‘occupies a conceptual space which is partially constituted by talk about the skill, including descriptions of it’ (Winch, 2013, p. 286). The same could be said of the performing arts. Complex evaluative (though never exhaustive) vocabularies have arisen in art, music and dance precisely to try to do justice to the conceptually complex - though often tacit - nature of the subject matter.

Would apprenticeship training on the Continental model fulfil these criteria? Provided that the process of initiation into the occupation in question fulfilled the

21 The argument is harder to sustain with regard to the verbal capacity to reason well, to construct and justify an argument, because of the non-verbal nature of much of the subject matter. In this case, academic disciplines are probably to be preferred (though mathematics would be of limited value). However, I shall argue in the next chapter that the verbal capacity to reason well is best developed and cultivated in a liberal education informed by the rhetorical ideal.

above criteria, I see no reason why not²². The important thing is that apprenticeship training is carried on alongside general education²³ and that it is distinguished sharply from the sort of low-level task-based or ‘on the job’ training that has often characterised English training programmes – for example, National Vocational Qualifications (Wolf, 2002, p. 166). The success of the German system²⁴ lies precisely in that upper-secondary general education continues in tandem with the apprenticeship (the ‘dual system’), and that apprentices are trained thoroughly by skilled masters ‘partly in workshops, classrooms or laboratories’ sponsored by employers over a three-year period, not just ‘on the job’ or for a few hours a week in a school workshop (pp. 162-3). It is also worth noting that there is no expectation that apprentices will stay in their apprenticeship trade. Though many will have gained a vocation, the value for others lies in the experience of mastering a skill or craft and of having been socialised into adult working life (p. 167). In fact, there is no reason that pupils should not specialise in a craft or an art form that probably will not provide them (or provide them directly) with a vocation so long as the above criteria are fulfilled; though, in practice, it is unlikely that pupils will take no account at all of possible future vocations, just as it is unlikely that a pupil’s passionate interest in a particular field will have no relevance at all to some future occupation.

In summary, the educational value of the research ideal lies in the virtues that are cultivated as a result of the engagement in specialised study together with the experience of what it is to exercise judgement and discrimination in a particular field (because to be able to exercise judgement and discrimination in one field is to appreciate the value of knowledge generally). However, there is no particular need for specialised subject knowledge to be academic or theoretical in nature. For pupils

²² Even Cyril Norwood, one of the great advocates of a liberal education, concedes ‘I see no reason why, if the ideal of knowledge for its own sake is preserved, if the general culture of the boy is assured, his further studies should not have direct reference to the special occupation which he is afterwards going to take up. I do not see why these studies may not also be “liberalising”, capable of setting the mind free’ (Norwood, p. 90). As I have argued, I would interpret mental training and the desire for knowledge and truth in terms of the acquisition of various virtues (predominantly intellectual but also moral) and the associated goods rather than the intellectual’s quest for critical and rational justification, but I think Norwood is essentially right.

²³ I shall consider the nature of this general education in the next chapter in the context of the rhetorical ideal

²⁴ I refer here specifically to the German system, but vocational education on the apprenticeship model has formed an integral part of upper-secondary education in most European countries (Wolf, p. 88).

not academically inclined – whether by aptitude, motivation or interest - there would therefore be no point engaging in specialised academic study. Wholehearted involvement and absorption are, as Reiss and White suspect, crucial to engagement in intrinsically worthwhile activity, so long as the activity fulfils the criteria I have outlined. The mind, then, *is* cultivated, not in the sense of producing a philosopher or academic or researcher motivated by the need to furnish explanatory theories and critical justifications, but in the specific sense of cultivating the moral and intellectual virtues necessary for the successful engagement in the practices of adult life – and hence for living *a good life*. It is in this sense that the research ideal has educational value for all pupils.

Epistemic autonomy

Serious confusion arises, however, when the benefits of specialised study are conceived, not as virtues constitutive of the internal goods of practices, but as means to the achievement of an epistemic end – namely ‘epistemic autonomy’; and when, to this end, a raft of conceptually quite distinct attributes or capacities (some of which I listed earlier) come to be conflated under the rubric of ‘intellectual virtues’. The project of ‘virtue epistemology’, increasingly influential in philosophy of education, amounts, in effect, to a new justification of liberal education – liberal in the research sense that though little attention is paid to its practical curriculum implications, the overall aim is epistemic. It counts the dispassionate pursuit of the truth, the cultivation of the intellectual virtues, and the development of mind as an end-in-itself as the highest aims of education. In other words, it makes Aristotle’s (mistaken) assumption that the contemplative life, the life of the philosopher or academic or intellectual, is the only one worth living. However, it also involves, I shall now argue, a series of profound and educationally damaging misconceptions.

By relating the intellectual virtues to ‘a ‘love’ of epistemic goods’ (Baehr, 2013, p. 250) and hence to the pursuit of the truth, to ‘deep understanding’, ‘strong cognitive achievement’ (Kotzee, 2013, p. 165; Baehr, 2013, p. 251) and ‘epistemic autonomy’ (Pritchard, 2013, p. 241), and by making the cultivation of the intellectual

virtues so conceived a central educational aim (perhaps even the overriding one), several related problems arise. First, education is reduced to the narrow pursuit of academic subject knowledge informed by the research ideal. Second, no account is taken of the possibility that people differ in their aptitudes, interests and motivations – including in their aptitude for academic study. Third, it is assumed that only the examined life – the life of the intellectual or philosopher – is worth living (an assumption I argued against in Chapter 4). And fourth, by emphasising cognitive agency at the expense of cognitive achievement (i.e. ‘deep understanding’ rather than mere subject knowledge), the central role of the disciplined acquisition of subject knowledge in cultivating the intellectual virtues, and the practicalities of pupils attaining the requisite subject knowledge, are not addressed; so, for example, Baehr outlines a range of classroom strategies for developing the intellectual virtues, but has nothing to say about how the ‘deep understanding’ of ‘epistemically worthy subject matters’ (Baehr, 2013, p. 251) he argues is necessary for developing these virtues is to be attained in practice at secondary level (the very problem I highlighted earlier in this chapter).

In fact, the notion that intellectual virtues are *means* of achieving some putative epistemic ends (Baehr, 2013, p. 250) is, I think, fundamentally opposed to MacIntyre’s conception of a practice (a conception I have argued in this thesis is essentially the right one) according to which the goods internal to the practice, including certain virtues, are only revealed in the course of initiation into the practice. Moreover, by setting up the life of the intellectual (who seeks continually to rationally justify his beliefs and actions, possesses the whole gamut of intellectual virtues and an insatiable desire for knowledge) as an end in itself, as the epitome of the good life rather than recognising it as something sought after by a certain sort of person²⁵ (as I proposed in Chapter 4), the more limited but realistic aim of

²⁵ For example, the introverted intellectual: introverted because he needs to impose structure on experience in order to derive meaning and hence is more disposed to engage in speculation, critical reflection and self-questioning; intellectual because he has the aptitude to engage in abstract theoretical study.

cultivating in the normal pupil (or person) *some* of the intellectual virtues *to some degree* through engagement in more practical fields of endeavour is closed down.²⁶

I would like to focus on two particular misconceptions that I think underlie the virtue epistemology thesis. First, a false distinction between knowledge (factual, mechanical, passive) and understanding (conceptual, flexible, active) that has its roots, on the one hand, in a certain ‘progressive’ narrative of educational pedagogy, and on the other, in a longstanding bias against practical or craft activities; and second, the lumping together of a range of conceptually distinct qualities and attributes under the rubric ‘intellectual virtues’, and the consequent association of these qualities and attributes – apparently by little more than word association – with an intellectualised conception of the aim of education. I shall consider these in turn.

Deep understanding, epistemic ends and craft knowledge

First, proponents of virtue epistemology draw a sharp conceptual distinction between *mere* subject knowledge and the sort of deep knowledge or understanding sought (and acquired) by the person endowed with the intellectual or epistemic virtues. For Wayne Riggs, the latter derives from the epistemic trait of ‘searching for pattern and coherence in one’s experiences and beliefs’ (Riggs, 2007, p. 223), from truth-directed virtues ‘aimed at making sense of our world, or of some part of it in which we have a specific interest’ (p. 234). Duncan Pritchard distinguishes different grades of cognitive achievement ranging from ‘weak cognitive achievements’ that involve knowledge that is ‘merely acquired’ to ‘strong cognitive achievements’ that involve ‘cognitive agency’ and ‘cognitive autonomy’, and hence ‘understanding’, on the part of the pupil (Pritchard, 2013, pp. 239-242). The ultimate aim of education is, on this account, not ‘knowledge’ but ‘understanding’:

²⁶ It also ignores the possibility that a person might be passionately interested in and hugely knowledgeable about mathematics (say), but have little intellectual interest in or curiosity about much else.

Rather than transmit information to passive minds, what serious education sets out to do is to enhance the cognitive agency of the child. (Kotzee, 2013, p. 165)

But is this distinction warranted? Clearly the memorisation of times tables, for example, involves rote learning - the acquisition of information rather than knowledge - and does not *in itself* imply or involve any conceptual understanding of multiplication. But has anyone ever argued or supposed that the acquisition of knowledge, whether ‘actively’ acquired *or* ‘passively’ transmitted, could involve *merely* such rote learning? Is the distinction between ‘passive’ and ‘active’ learning – the former associated with didactic ‘transmission’ and the latter with collaborative, investigative and discovery pedagogies – justified?

The notion that knowledge is ‘actively constructed’ by the learner and that as a consequence, learning is only meaningful if conducted through a process of guided discovery is, on the face of it, an implausible one. As the cognitive psychologist David Ausubel argued back in the 1960s, ‘meaning can never be anything more than a personal phenomenological product that emerges when potentially meaningful ideas are integrated within an individually unique cognitive structure’ (Ausubel, 1968, p. 475). Meaningful learning can just as well be produced by didactic exposition as by discovery or investigation. The active-passive distinction involves, on this account, a basic misconception. Besides, notes Ausubel, the notion ‘that every man must discover for himself every bit of knowledge ... is, in essence, a repudiation of the very idea of culture’. The miracle of culture is precisely ‘that the accumulated discoveries of millennia can be transmitted to each succeeding generation ... and need not be discovered anew by each generation’ (p. 475).

At the very least, then, we must distinguish (meaningful) knowledge from information. But what of the distinction between knowledge and ‘deep’ understanding – is this valid? The problem is that virtue epistemologists distinguish understanding from knowledge on the grounds that the learner who attains the former is motivated by a love of epistemic goods, a quest for the truth (the sort of thing that characterises the intellectual, the academic researcher or the philosopher)

whereas the learner who attains ‘only’ the latter is not; which would seem to rule out altogether more prosaic ends such as gaining a vocation, mastering a craft or practice, and generally taking pride in doing a job well. But does it really make sense to characterise the knowledge of a person who has mastered the body of knowledge and skill needed for professional practice (for example, a doctor, nurse, engineer, lawyer, architect, dancer or builder) but has no particular inclination to engage in the quest for deeper truths, explanations, patterns or ‘coherence’ (i.e. who has not engaged ‘in research’) as, on this account, *deficient* in their cognitive agency – as *deficient* in the epistemic virtues? The absurdity of this position is epitomised by Riggs, who cites Aristotle, Newton, Galileo and Einstein as ‘such exemplars of epistemic virtue’ precisely because ‘they all directed their intellectual energies towards making sense of it all’, because they were the kind of people ‘who sincerely and conscientiously attempt to find out the truth ...’ (Riggs, 2007, pp. 224-5). Is the aim of education really to make of each pupil an Aristotle or a Newton? And are Aristotle, Newton and the like the only exemplars of a fulfilled life?

For those who are not motivated in the main by ‘pure intellectual curiosity’ (p. 223) and feel no need to philosophise, but rather find meaning and fulfilment in work, in recreation and in their social engagement with others (which includes most people, including many who are highly intelligent in the academic sense), it makes little sense to speak of epistemic ends. A more fruitful approach, I think, is to adopt the analogy of the craftsman motivated by the desire to do a job well for its own sake and to realise the goods of a practice. The most illuminating account of the practice of the craftsman in this regard is Richard Sennett’s in *The Craftsman* (2009). I noted earlier (citing Christopher Winch) that craft knowledge or know-how, though often tacit in nature, can nevertheless be conceptually highly complex and might well involve the exercise of judgement, discrimination and imagination to a high degree. Sennett takes the argument a step further by elaborating a philosophical and epistemological justification of craft practice, not merely as a vocational necessity (a means, regrettably necessary, of earning a living), but as an end in itself, a mode of living and engaging with the world²⁷. For Sennett, the central distinguishing feature

²⁷ It is worth noting that Sennett sees himself very much as residing within the pragmatist tradition: ‘craftsmanship finds a philosophical home within pragmatism’ (p. 286).

of craft practice as opposed to intellectual endeavour is ‘a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking’ mediated by ‘sustaining habits’ that ‘establish a rhythm between problem solving and problem finding’ (p. 9), and involving ‘a constant interplay between tacit knowledge and self-conscious awareness’ (p. 50). In fact, any practice might be seen to involve this central distinguishing feature of the craft workshop:

... the absorption into tacit knowledge, unspoken and uncodified in words, that occurred there and became a matter of habit, the thousand little everyday moves that add up in sum to a practice. (p. 77)

It is not a weakness of craft practice that it involves tacit knowledge (knowledge that cannot (fully) be codified or verbalised), that it involves trial and error, or that it begins with the concrete and the particular; rather, this is its strength. By contrast, to be motivated by an epistemic end would involve the attempt to conceive in advance a rational solution, to construct a theory or model that would explain the empirical facts and serve as a comprehensive plan or ‘blueprint’ for action. The dangers of a ‘disconnection between head and hand’ are, however, all too obvious, whether they take the form of utopian planning, computerised design²⁸ or the bureaucratic attempt to impose on practices (teaching and nursing are good examples) managerial solutions that identify optimal outcomes, best practice procedures and targets in detachment from the day-to-day experience and judgement of individual practitioners. Even though quantifiable gains in efficiency are possible, there are potentially appalling costs – as, for example, when health care is modelled on a system originally devised by Henry Ford for maximising the production of auto parts (p. 47). Both the quality of the service or product and the motivation of the practitioner (no longer an autonomous professional or master of his craft, but a functionary) suffer as managers concern themselves with measurable outputs and targets.²⁹

²⁸ Sennett cites ‘CAD’ (computer aided design) as a potentially powerful but dangerous tool in this respect. However exhaustive the specifications, it can never fully replicate the lived experience, the situational perspective of the person ‘on the ground’ (pp. 39-45).

²⁹ In his paper ‘Virtue Epistemology and the Acquisition of Knowledge’, Duncan Pritchard agrees that practitioners’ expert knowledge cannot be codified, even by the agent himself, because it involves

The intellectual virtues misconceived

The second misconception that, I think, underlies the virtue epistemology thesis lies in its conjoining a range of conceptually distinct qualities, attributes and capacities under the rubric ‘intellectual virtues’. In modern virtue epistemology, the intellectual virtues are the ‘dispositional properties of persons that bear on the acquisition, maintenance, transmission, or application of knowledge and allied epistemic goods such as truth, justification, warrant, coherence and interpretative fineness’ (Roberts & Wood, 2007, p. 257). The fact that some of these virtues ‘tend to the moral’ and could just as well be accounted moral virtues, is judged, rightly, I think, to be of subsidiary interest; the important thing, from the perspective of virtue epistemology, is that they make people ‘better or worse epistemic agents’. Yet it is curious that though a great deal of literature has emerged in virtue epistemology concerning such highly technical, even esoteric, matters as the nature and value of knowledge, the difference between true belief and knowledge, the relative merits of internalism, externalism and agent reliabilism, the nature of virtuous motivation, and the regulative role of the virtues, hardly any thought has been given to the nature of the virtues themselves³⁰. Hardly any thought has been given to whether a long list of qualities, attributes and capacities – including such nebulous ones as curiosity, open-mindedness, creativity and autonomy – can usefully be lumped together and designated ‘the intellectual virtues’, or indeed to whether the cultivation of these ‘virtues’ in the name of attaining some epistemic end should be, or could ever practicably be, the prime aim of education.

Proponents of virtue epistemology usually include at some point in their writings a list of the intellectual (or epistemic or cognitive) virtues – for example, curiosity,

precisely this tacit knowledge, a sensitivity ‘to the concrete facts of the situation’ and a repertoire of ‘rough-and-ready rules of thumb’ drawn from years of experience (Pritchard, 2005, pp. 236-7); and he cites empirical evidence concerning the diagnostic strategies employed by medical practitioners. But his conclusion is only the limited one that virtue epistemology should be conceived as a form of ‘reliabilism’ and hence ‘epistemic externalism’ – not as a form of ‘epistemic internalism’; in other words, that the epistemic goal of forming true beliefs need not involve the subject’s validation of his judgements through rational reflection. I would draw a more radical conclusion – namely that it makes no sense in these circumstances to speak of epistemic ends or goals at all.

³⁰ As Linda Zagzebski and Michael DePaul note, virtue epistemologists ‘have not gone very far in investigating the individual intellectual virtues’ (Zagzebski & DePaul, 2007, p.3).

open-mindedness, creativity, reflectiveness, attentiveness, intellectual carefulness, intellectual courage, intellectual rigour, and intellectual honesty,' (Baehr, 2013, pp. 248 & 258); or intellectual carefulness, thoroughness, humility, courage, trust, autonomy, and fairness (Zagzebski & DePaul, 2007, p. 3). But two things seem to be neglected. First, that the qualities or attributes cited are conceptually quite distinct (or that, at the very least, they stand in need of careful definition before any use could be made of them) and therefore cannot be conflated under a general heading; and second, that the capacity of a person to develop any particular 'virtue' depends on a complex range of factors: the nature of the subject being studied or activity undertaken, the depth of study, and the aptitude, interest, motivation, personality and circumstances of the person in question.

Let us first attempt to categorise the intellectual virtues cited above according to their familial likeness as descriptors of certain qualities or attributes.

First, there is curiosity. Here, I think, two distinct senses of the term need to be identified. On the one hand, there is the straightforward everyday sense of having an interest in or a passion for a particular subject. On the other, there is curiosity in the sense of possessing the intellectual desire to explain, to question, to criticise, to reflect on the significance of the facts, to generalise and formulate hypotheses, and to engage in 'research' – in other words, *intellectual* curiosity. This in turn demands the capacity to be able to engage in abstract reasoning, in theorising (i.e. it requires a certain level of 'intelligence') together with the sort of personality (introverted, perhaps) that would dispose or motivate a person to engage in solitary intellectual endeavour to begin with. This second sense of curiosity is, I think, clearly distinct from the first. The problem is that curiosity in this second sense tends to be used by virtue epistemologists in a more general overarching sense as a quality that all ought to possess or would possess if only properly educated – i.e. as a quality whose deficiency would mark a person as falling short of an ideal – rather than as something that merely characterises the state of mind and personality of a certain sort of person ... namely, the intellectual or scholar. This assertion will be regarded as contentious by some philosophers of education and as being contrary to educational aims framed in egalitarian terms; but not, I suspect, by classroom

teachers. My experience and the experience of my colleagues over 20 years is that intellectual curiosity, the desire to pursue the truth for its own sake (as opposed to the possession of mere interest in a topic or subject), is a rare attribute.³¹

Second, there is ‘creativity’. Creativity is often cited in lists of the intellectual virtues but clearly is not limited to intellectual or cognitive endeavour but can be manifested in a range of artistic, practical and craft activities, in business innovation - indeed in any activity involving management, planning or design. Therefore creativity, along with its close relations ‘innovation’ and ‘problem solving’, need not necessarily be conceived as serving (or as being motivated by) epistemic ends. To be intellectually creative, on the other hand, probably does involve epistemic ends – but then one would probably not be intellectually creative unless one were not also intellectually curious.

Third, there is a range of character traits relating to a person’s capacity to engage in work: industry, application, perseverance, concentration, attention, care, accuracy, exactness and so forth. But these can just as well be cultivated through practical or craft activity as through academic endeavour. The same applies to a range of moral traits, or traits tending towards the moral, that also serve ‘epistemic ends’: courage, honesty, temperance, patience, humility, integrity, open-mindedness, tolerance and so forth. All of these can just as well be cultivated (to a lesser or greater degree) through practical or craft activity, or through vocational endeavour, and therefore need not be regarded as serving epistemic ends.

Surveying this classification of the virtues, a clear distinction emerges, I think, between the qualities or attributes of character that can be cultivated by all people;

³¹ In independent schools, this is recognised, indeed institutionalised, in the form of ‘scholarship’, the notion that a small select group of pupils - ‘scholars’ - are suited by aptitude, interest and motivation to the pursuit of a significantly more advanced and intellectually demanding programme of study than is the norm. The scholar is typically the pupil who will stay behind at the end of the lesson to ask questions, take the discussion further or propose his or her own theories and hypotheses – i.e. who possesses intellectual curiosity to a high degree. Though scholars will invariably possess high academic ability, the mere possession of academic ability (or ‘intelligence’) does not make a pupil a scholar.

and the specifically *intellectual* qualities or attributes that will be cultivated by the relatively few and that are in large measure innate – innate in the sense that they are determined by the individual’s aptitude, motivation, interest, personality and circumstances. Though there is no doubt an innate element in the traits of character listed (characteristics that are sometimes apparent from an early age and are apparently unrelated to background or upbringing), they can probably be *habituated* to a considerable degree in most people - even though there will always probably be individual differences. And this task is all the easier in that they can be cultivated through a variety of activities and engagements, practical as well as academic. These, I would argue, are the qualities or attributes properly designated virtues. And it is precisely because these desirable dispositions or virtues *can* be habituated (or cultivated or fostered), as Aristotle envisaged, that there is no necessary connection with epistemic ends or with ‘a love of epistemic goods’ (Baehr, 2013, p. 248).

Much the same applies to creativity. Though people differ in their innate capacity to come up with ideas, to solve problems, to innovate or to formulate new theories (not everyone is an Einstein³²), creative thinking and problem solving can be carried on in a vast range of practices, activities and engagements, at all sorts of different levels, and in relation to all sorts of problem, practical and theoretical. Moreover, in the practice of craft activity, there is no strict demarcation between creative endeavour and the routine exercise of skills. To have mastered a craft is to be engaged in a continual process of problem solving and problem finding, as Sennett has pointed out: it is simply that the engagement involves knowledge that is tacit rather than explicitly formulated in abstract theoretical terms.

In summary, the project of virtue epistemology, by designating a range of desirable dispositions, attributes and qualities ‘intellectual virtues’ and then conceiving these as serving specifically epistemic ends, serves - in effect - only to justify an academic ‘intellectualist’ conception of liberal education. Whereas, as I

³² Even if one were to subscribe to the ‘ten-thousand hour rule’ – the notion that genius is a myth and that outstanding performance and achievement in any field are the result of some ten thousand hours of concentrated purposeful practice (Syed, 2001) – there is still the possibility that people differ in their capacity and motivation to undertake ten thousand hours of practice. All we have done (it could be argued) is to redefine genius, or exceptional talent, as the innate capacity to engage in ten thousand hours of concentrated purposeful practice.

have repeatedly argued through this chapter and thesis (particularly in Chapter 3), not everyone has the mix of aptitude, personality, interest and motivation necessary to engage in academic study to a high level; and even if we did suppose equality of academic aptitude or capability on egalitarian grounds, there is no *need* to engage in academic study in order to develop the virtues necessary to lead a fulfilled life and to play one's full role as a citizen in a democracy.

Conclusion

Though the research ideal has merit for the small minority of pupils with the aptitude and inclination for sustained academic study culminating in higher-level study or research (i.e. for those for whom the pursuit of knowledge and truth as an end-in-itself can serve as a motivating ideal), a host of wider educational benefits in the form of intellectual virtues and associated goods can be gained by all pupils from the engagement in specialised study, academic or practical. This engagement need have little to do with the cultivation of the mind in an intellectualist sense, or the pursuit of 'epistemic goods', but rather is motivated by the desire to access the goods of a practice and gain the sense of justified self-esteem and self-respect that accompanies mastery of that practice. There is therefore a powerful argument for pupils being allowed to specialise early in at least one subject of their choice at secondary school and pursue that subject to a higher level than would normally be the case. A range of intellectual virtues can be developed and the mind can, in this sense, be trained – so long as the subject or activity in question has something of the nature of a practice, its study involves the disciplined acquisition of a conceptually and procedurally complex body of knowledge and skill, and the pupil or student has the interest and motivation to 'engage wholeheartedly' in it.

Though the existing secondary curriculum of academic subject disciplines has preparatory value for those going on to specialise in one or more of those disciplines, the notion that it constitutes a complete liberal education in itself by virtue of its cultivating the mind in various forms of knowledge (a variant on the research ideal) is both incoherent and unrealistic. A higher level of study and specialisation would

be required for anything like an understanding of the respective forms of knowledge to be developed; and one could not in any case specialise to the required level in all the subject disciplines.

However, there remain important educational aims that cannot be developed merely through specialist study (whether or not it is motivated by the research ideal, unless it takes the form of a study of the humanities undertaken in a humanistic spirit. By contrast, the old liberal education founded on grammar and rhetoric, and drawing on the humanities for stories of human experience, as well as a range of topical general knowledge, simultaneously aimed (1) to cultivate in a moral and cultural inheritance, and (2) to cultivate the capacity – at once verbal, humane and moral – of being able to reason well, structure an argument and form a wise judgement (Aristotle's architectonic virtue '*phronesis*') on matters concerning human and political affairs. I turn to the rhetorical ideal of liberal education in the next chapter.

7

The rhetorical ideal: a justification of rhetoric and the humanities

I argued in Chapter 4 that central to a fulfilled life are the goods that are realised through the engagement in practices – in particular, the good of leading a certain kind of life and the good of leading a virtuous life. In the last chapter, I argued that liberal education conceived in the spirit of the research ideal (i.e. as a sort of mental training) had value if this mental training was conceived in terms of cultivating the intellectual virtues necessary for the engagement in practices, something best effected through the specialised study at school of at least one subject - a study that would itself represent an initiation into a practice. Various moral virtues would also be cultivated to some degree.

However, though pupils would thereby be well prepared to engage in practices as adults, and to realise the goods associated with them, to lead a virtuous life requires more than just the habituation of the virtues (which I take to incorporate habit formation, moral instruction and guided experience - initially as part of upbringing and school education, and later through the engagement in various practices as an adult). To lead a virtuous life requires *practical judgement* in the exercise of the virtues, not only within the frame of practices, but also concerning one's personal life and the political life of the community, where there will frequently be conflicting goods to reconcile. The problem, as I noted in Chapter 2, is that people cannot be trained to resolve the moral conflicts and dilemmas that life will 'throw' at them, particularly when, as MacIntyre reminds us, it is in the very nature of heterogeneous goods that they admit of no rational or 'optimal' solution to conflicts between them. One can only fall back on the virtues and such experience as one has been able to muster; and though a prior habituation in the virtues involves 'guided experience' in exercising practical judgement (at home, at school, and within practices as part of the process of apprenticeship), there can be no such preparation

or rehearsal for the conflicts and dilemmas of adult life - for balancing or reconciling the conflicting goods of different practices (for example, work and family life), and for balancing or reconciling duty, self-interest and the interests of others.

It is here, however, that liberal education conceived in the rhetorical sense has its value. In the humanities, which form the subject matter of rhetoric, we have a compendium of stories of human experience that, though 'second hand', will shed some light on the nature of the moral conflicts and dilemmas (both public and private) that people have had to face or could conceivably face in their lives (both public and private), together with the conflicting nature of the goods they might strive for and the nature of the virtues they might exercise. And in the exercises of rhetoric training, we have practice - albeit vicarious - in articulating these goods and exercising practical judgement in a range of complex situations involving conflict between them. Rhetoric cannot produce in any developed sense the capacity to resolve moral conflict, to lead a good life, or to exercise ethical perception, but it can certainly enhance our capacity to make good judgements and lead good lives. A *sort of phronesis* might then be cultivated.

We saw in Chapter 5 that the rhetorical (or *artes liberales*) ideal could be identified as having characteristics ranging from the provision of a canon of exemplary texts and a dogmatist epistemology to the prescription of civic values and the training of a political elite; but I shall argue in this chapter that if the aim of rhetorical education were encapsulated in a single idea, it would be to cultivate the capacity to make political judgements; indeed, if political is interpreted in a broad sense, it would be to cultivate the capacity *to make practical judgements on human affairs*, both public and private. As a consequence, the structure and content of the curriculum will be radically different from that of the modern liberal curriculum of academic subject disciplines.

The best historical exemplar of liberal education conceived in the rhetorical ideal is not the so-called classical humanist curriculum of the nineteenth-century (which is sometimes regarded as a sort of culmination or high-point in the history of liberal

education), nor even the humanist curriculum on which the Renaissance was founded and which saw Shakespeare educated at his Elizabethan grammar school, but the curriculum of ancient Rome. Apart from being worked out, as we shall see, in remarkable pedagogical detail, the Roman curriculum was the only one informed consistently throughout by the overriding aim of producing a citizen and an orator, a person who could make practical judgements on human affairs. It is also significant that whereas curricula of subsequent periods were dominated by the perceived need to effect a training in the ‘classical’ languages (to some extent in Greek but primarily in Latin), in the Roman curriculum rhetoric was studied *in the vernacular*, because, of course, Latin was the language of everyday life.¹ In this chapter I shall describe the Roman curriculum and show how it differs markedly from the modern academic curriculum in its subject matter, in its manner of treatment of this subject matter and in its concern with means of expression. I shall argue in the process that the systematic study of grammar and rhetoric (conceived in the modern sense of prose rather than oratory) might form the core of a curriculum that aims to cultivate, or at least to improve, the capacity to make practical judgements on human affairs.

However, the rhetorical training of the Roman orator was a demanding one – probably at least as demanding academically as the specialised study of any of the modern academic subject disciplines. It might reasonably be argued that to foist a rhetorical training on all pupils would be as counterproductive as subjecting them all to the current academic curriculum; that not all pupils have the aptitude, interest or motivation to engage successfully in rhetorical training. I shall therefore seek to draw a distinction between rhetoric conceived as formal training for political life, which would involve deliberation on complex political matters (for example, through highly structured essays); and rhetoric conceived as initiation into a fund of stories of human experience, with emphasis on the issues of ordinary life as well as the major political issues of the day, and perhaps involving more informal approaches to discussion and debate alongside basic literacy conceived on the rhetorical model. By the same token, stories of human experience need not be mediated only through history and literature; popular media such as film and television would serve just as well.

¹ Grammar was studied in both Latin and Greek – and therefore, at least in part, in the vernacular.

The Roman curriculum

The Roman curriculum had a clear aim - to produce an orator who could deliberate well and argue his case with eloquence; and it was accordingly structured around the core disciplines of grammar and rhetoric (with grammar studied preparatory to rhetoric). Literature, history and myth were all taught but they were integrated into the curriculum rather than taught as separate subject disciplines. Their value lay in their providing the subject matter - the stories of experience and moral exemplars - on which grammar and rhetoric could draw; and in the case of literature, in cultivating knowledge of certain canonical texts (with Homer and Virgil heading the list) and thereby developing the literary culture also thought essential for the complete orator.

Moreover, this integrated curriculum was structured in remarkable detail². Grammar centred on the pupil learning verse scansion, parsing (the analysis of sentences into their component parts involving recognition of the eight parts of speech, declension of noun cases and conjugation of verb tenses) and the correct use of speech (divided into faults in the use of single words - or 'barbarisms', and faults in syntax - or 'solecisms') with reference to the usage of educated speakers and to literary authority. The grammar stage also involved the study of the poets: reading aloud, memorising, and commentary both on their subject matter (including on any moral to be drawn) and their literary style. Literary analysis and criticism involved, in turn, a systematic study of poetic devices (most notably of tropes and figures³); of allusions (particularly to mythology but also to legend, historical figures, customs and geographical locations); etymology; arrangement or structure; and propriety - the sense of appropriateness to the character or occasion.

Rhetoric, which followed grammar, centred on a carefully graded series of preliminary exercises in composition, or *progymnasmata*, that began with maxims

² I draw particularly in this section on Stanley Bonner's *Education in Ancient Rome* (1977), which is probably the definitive account of the Roman curriculum.

³ Tropes included metaphor, metonymy, antonomasia, synecdoche, onomatopoeia, periphrasis, anastrophe, hyperbole and allegory; the most notable figure was simile.

and fables and culminated in the thesis (in which the pupil had to argue both sides of a question) and the ‘Praise and Denunciation of Laws’ (in which the pupil had to offer reasoned advice on the merits and demerits of an imaginary piece of new legislation) (Bonner, 1977, p.272). The exercises began with instructive sayings, maxims, fables and mythological narratives, which pupils had to reproduce in their own words, explain in short essays or argue for or against with regard to their plausibility. There followed commonplaces, panegyrics and invectives, speeches in character, descriptions and comparisons. Last came theses, the discussion of laws, the *suasoria* (in which the student was required to offer advice to a famous historical figure or body of people facing a critical situation or dilemma) and the *controversia* (in which a particular legal or criminal case was examined and the course of action of the accused was either defended or denounced). In the *suasoria*, any proposed course of action had to be shown to be lawful, honourable, just, and necessary, as well as clear, consistent and enforceable. Deliberative themes ranged from the political, historical and speculative to the ethical and practical everyday – for example, ‘should one marry?’, ‘should one have children?’, ‘should one take to seafaring?’, ‘should one engage in politics?’, ‘does the soldier deserve more credit than the lawyer?’, and ‘do the gods care for humanity?’ (p. 271).

Taken together, these exercises ‘accustomed boys to précis or to elaborate and expand, to tell a story vividly and convincingly, to use their imaginations, to improve their style and composition, and to argue for and against a proposition’ (p.331). In other words, they learned how to deliberate well and to arrive at a practical judgement taking into account all relevant considerations. At the same time, they developed a considerable literary culture and underwent a considerable moral training, which began with the copying and learning by heart of moral maxims at primary school.

The characteristic features of a rhetorical education

I would like now to argue that the Roman rhetorical curriculum differs in structure and content from the modern curriculum of academic subject disciplines in three crucial respects: in its subject matter, in its manner of treatment of this subject matter and in its concern with the means of expression of this subject matter. In elaborating these differences, I shall seek to justify training in the disciplines of grammar and rhetoric as the better means of developing practical reason and practical judgement.

(1) Subject matter

First, the subject matter of rhetorical education is drawn from the humanities rather than the sciences - and from the humanities treated in a particular way: not primarily as disciplines worthy of study because of the forms of knowledge they reveal, or as means of pursuing knowledge and truth for its own sake, or even as means of training the mind, but as repositories of stories and lessons of human experience. The old humanities are the subjects that, by their very nature and subject matter, have the potential to cultivate and to humanise – to ‘form a person’. They develop knowledge and understanding of the human world and of the human condition: *not* the human as biologically and socially evolved animal subject to the laws of evolution or psycho-social behaviour or economics (and therefore amenable to scientific explanation), but the human as *person* whose moral, intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual values are transmitted via a cultural inheritance. And it is history and literature above all that distil this human experience⁴, that together with our lived experience provide the bedrock of knowledge and values on which we might form a practical judgement on humane and political matters.⁵

⁴ Though I am focusing here on history and literature, primarily because they are recognised school subjects, the humanities have traditionally also incorporated law, theology, politics, ethics and metaphysics. It might be noted here that law, especially Common Law, stands as the supreme example of knowledge justified by precedent – as opposed to knowledge deduced from theoretical principles, axioms and causal laws.

⁵ The notion that education involves initiation into a moral and cultural inheritance is perhaps most closely associated in recent times with Michael Oakeshott. However, Oakeshott’s conception of

Consider how English and history differ from the other subjects of the modern academic curriculum in their subject matter and its manner of treatment. Despite their being taught as subject disciplines rather than as core elements of an integrated curriculum (as they would have been in the old liberal curriculum), the core subject matter remains stories of human experience that are potentially relevant to all pupils regardless of their capacity for literary criticism or historical research; and whether these stories are real (as in history) or imaginatively conceived (as in literature or film), they offer the possibility of deepening our knowledge and understanding of the human condition, as well as extending the range of our moral imagination and sympathy. For example, it is usual in GCSE English to study a work of American literature that deals with the issue of race prejudice - Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* are good examples. But there is no need for pupils to have a literary sensibility to be able to appreciate the human drama and moral and political message that is conveyed in these works, even though the message is the more powerful for having been conveyed in a classic work of literature - in the case of *Huckleberry Finn*, in one of the greatest of all works of American literature⁶. Likewise, there is no more powerful means of conveying the horror of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust to children than through the story and diaries of Anne Frank⁷. The humanities can humanise precisely because they are centred on such stories of human experience. The human drama is centre stage.

Martha Nussbaum draws attention to the particular role of literature in showing us that human nature is irredeemably flawed (and we are flawed), that our loves and commitments are tangled, and that our values are often in conflict – even in ‘tragic tension’. By doing so, literature has the power to make us more tolerant and

‘liberal learning’ seems to incorporate both the rhetorical and the research ideals of liberal education that I have sought to distinguish between in this thesis; and it regards liberal education as a process in which school is very much preparatory to specialised academic study at university for the minority of pupils who have the capacity to benefit from it. I have therefore not invoked Oakeshott as much as I otherwise might have done in the course of this thesis.

⁶ Personally, I never really ‘got the point’ of *Great Expectations*, *Julius Caesar* or the short stories of D. H. Lawrence at school and so studying them was a chore. I lacked the literary sensibility and the emotional maturity. But *Huckleberry Finn* left an indelible mark and there are scenes (for example, the cruel ‘tarring and feathering’ of the King and the Duke) that remain vivid and affecting.

⁷ I once devoted a Year 6 history lesson to the story of Anne Frank and read several passages at length from her diary. One girl went home that evening (I heard the next morning from her mother) and demanded a plane ticket so that she could fly to Amsterdam and see the house where Anne Frank lived; she said ‘I must go there now’. Anne Frank had spoken to her.

understanding: ‘Knowledge of difficulty breeds a tenderness to the flawed object, toward also oneself, seen as flawed’ (Nussbaum, 1990, pp. 212-3). But the adventures of virtuous heroes engaged on quests, which are often of a spiritual nature, are of equal value. As John Buchan argued in his essay ‘The Novel and the Fairy Tale’, the classic novel will endure as great literature because, like the folk tale, legend and fairy tale, it deals in enduring themes of human experience and human longing; because it shows us that despite ‘the stubborn brutality of things’, human nature can transcend itself and there is reason, after all, to be optimistic (Buchan, 1939). And Roger Marples argues that the moral value of literature lies in its enhancing ‘the ability to empathise with another’s predicament’, something it achieves through ‘our imaginative engagement with fictitious characters’ whose circumstances might be quite different from our own. In this way, art in general and literature in particular can contribute ‘to our capacity for both sensitive perception and response to the particular circumstances and predicaments with which we all have to contend’ (Marples, 2014).

The role of history in a rhetorical education is just as central. In fact, there is a striking similarity between the methods of rhetoric and those of history. The rhetorical stages of *inventio* and *dispositio* involve respectively the identification or discovery of arguments that will render one’s case plausible and persuasive, and the logical arrangement of those arguments. The historical method⁸ involves the attempt to reconstruct (necessarily *ex post facto*) why people behaved as they did in the past (assuming their actions to be rationally motivated), and to construct a plausible narrative framework to explain past events. Both involve the construction of a plausible argument through the selection of evidence judged relevant to the case; and it is in this, above all, that they stand in marked contrast to the scientific method. In order to craft a narrative, a judgement has to be made as to which facts or factors are relevant to the question in hand and how the available evidence is to be interpreted, which inevitably involves value judgements, both moral and political, together with a degree of empathy on the part of both the historian and the orator. There are, moreover, strong imaginative and stylistic elements involved in constructing a plausible narrative, and this gives both history and rhetoric a literary dimension.

⁸ I am discounting here the extreme positions that history is governed by deterministic laws and that historical narratives are merely imaginative constructions.

Since rhetorical argument is founded in large part on the interpretation and evaluation of past events⁹, on historical precedent, one could even argue that rhetoric and history are two sides of the same coin. Whereas in history, one seeks to explain why people acted as they did in the past and to interpret and evaluate their actions, in rhetoric one seeks to argue how people should act in the future by evaluating different possible courses of action. As R G Collingwood argued, history can be conceived as no less than a ‘science of human affairs’ (Collingwood, 1970, p. 115), a ‘school of moral and practical wisdom’ (p. 99). By studying how people dealt with practical real-life problems and dilemmas in the past, by re-enacting their thoughts, a person learns how to interpret similar situations in the present and is provided, in effect, with ‘a guide to action’ (pp. 99-100). However, the thoughts, words and deeds of great people from the past may not be particularly relevant to ordinary people making practical judgements in everyday life¹⁰. Social and recent documentary history is probably of more relevance here, as are literature and other art forms that deal in the experiences of ordinary human beings.

Finally, if it is stories of human experience and insights concerning human nature that are required (as opposed to literary criticism), why limit the humanities to the traditional subject matter of literature and history? There is a strong case for broadening the traditional humanities and arts curriculum to encompass the popular arts and media such as film and television. Film and television are such powerful forms of communication that it would be absurd not to draw on them for our stories of experience; indeed, they are central to our experience of the modern world. I shall consider popular culture and the problems it raises in greater detail later in this chapter.

⁹ Rhetorical arguments need not all be rooted in historical precedent: maxims, fables and parables can be drawn on, as can a range of more general enthymemes (or ‘topics’) dealing in human nature and common sense.

¹⁰ For example, in the passage quoted from above, Collingwood cites the historian attempting to understand why Nelson walked about the deck of the *Victory* ‘covered with decorations’ in full view of the enemy’s musketeers. The historian must attempt to think for himself what Nelson thought (pp. 112-3).

(2) *Form of reasoning*

Second, the forms of reasoning involved in rhetoric (as in practical deliberation on human affairs) differ markedly from those involved in academic research, where the aim is to produce explanatory theories by means of the deductive-inductive method of science or by means of the deductive method of logic, involving *a priori* rules and axioms. The distinction was originally made by Aristotle in his treatise on rhetoric: whereas in academic research, a logical proof can be formulated by the formal methods of syllogistic inference (deductive and inductive), rhetoric can achieve demonstrative proof only by the informal methods of enthymeme¹¹ and example, and its conclusions can never be more than probable or true ‘for the most part’ (Aristotle, 1991, p.77). Explanatory theories are of little use when practical judgements are required on right or expedient courses of action because practical decisions in human affairs – ‘should we go to war?’, ‘should private schools be allowed?’, ‘should I have children?’ – rest on the interpretation of the past, the prediction of the future, and the values and beliefs of the individual making the decision. The value of the humanities is that they can furnish precisely the examples and analogies needed to support a practical judgement.

Errors in rhetorical reasoning have traditionally been categorised into a set of ‘informal fallacies’ – informal in that they concern the use (and misuse) of language in rhetorical argument, whereas ‘formal fallacies’ concern errors of valid inference in deductive reasoning¹²; and a study of these fallacies might well form part of a rhetorical education - though, of course, faulty logic can be identified without recourse to traditional means of classifying particular types of fallacy. It is worth noting that a number of informal fallacies - including *argumentum ad antiquitatem* (the appeal to tradition), *argumentum ad hominem*, *argumentum ad ignorantiam* (the argument that something is true simply because it has not been proved false) and

¹¹ The enthymeme is a practical syllogism.

¹² Well-known examples include *argumentum ad hominem* (argument directed to the person), *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (after here therefore because of here), *ignoratio elenchi* (irrelevant conclusion) and *petitio principii* (begging the question – or assuming what you are trying to prove). Informal fallacies can be divided in turn into fallacies of relevance (in which the premises are logically irrelevant to the conclusion) and fallacies of ambiguity (in which there is ambiguity in the language used to formulate the argument).

post hoc ergo propter hoc – though they involve errors of reasoning in the sense that a certain assertion does not in itself constitute *conclusive* proof of the argument, may well form part of a *rhetorical* proof. In other words, the assertion may add to the weight of the argument, constitute ‘supporting evidence’ or make the conclusion more probable. For example, in seeking to answer the question ‘should we take military action in (or against) Syria?’, the experience of taking military action in Iraq in apparently very similar circumstances is of obvious relevance; and yet the analogy or precedent does not in itself constitute a valid premise or proof of any particular argument. That a majority of people, even a majority of experts, believe something does not amount to proof either (because they could all be wrong) but it may still be persuasive; indeed, our core liberal principle of democratic legitimacy involves nothing more than a majority vote. And most strikingly of all, justice in criminal law requires the verdict to be ‘beyond a reasonable doubt’ with overwhelming weight of evidence being the determining factor. In civil law, a mere preponderance of evidence is often sufficient to secure a conviction. In all these cases, we see that it is rhetorical argument rather than scientific proof that is involved in making a practical judgement.

(3) *Form of expression*

Third, the power of rhetoric as an educational tool lies in its developing the capacity to think clearly, to develop an argument and to arrive at a reasoned judgement by means of a systematic training in grammar (which is preparatory to rhetoric) and the art of prose composition (rhetoric proper). The old liberal education recognised that the capacity to reason well and the capacity to express one’s thoughts eloquently in speech or writing were intimately related, perhaps even inseparable; that it was by learning to write prose that one learned to construct an argument. The emphasis placed in classical oratory on familiarity with an extensive and exhaustive repertoire of rhetorical devices and embellishments designed to persuade and move the audience, on literary style and on delivery – Quintilian spoke of streams of eloquence flowing ‘as mighty rivers flow, filling whole valleys’ (Quintilian, 1920, pp. 365-7) - is apt to detract from the fact that great attention was also paid to the logical working out of the substance of the argument, and that the means of

developing this skill was the systematic teaching of the art of writing prose. As I noted earlier, the stages of *inventio* and *disputatio*, in which the elements of the argument were identified and arranged, were central to rhetoric and they involved, moreover, a remarkably detailed and systematic analysis of the subject matter of the argument. With the inevitable demise of classical oratory and of the embellishments of the ‘ornate style’, rhetoric might nowadays be construed simply as the art of writing plain unadorned prose.

The vital role of grammar and rhetoric in writing modern prose, together with what the modern study of rhetoric might entail, and the close relation between writing well and thinking well, are all strikingly brought out by Robert Graves and Alan Hodge in *The Reader Over Your Shoulder* (1943), one of the best guides to the writing of modern prose ever written. Graves and Hodge begin by noting that since the purpose of prose is to convey an argument of some sort to the reader, the ideas must be arranged in logical sequence and expressed with clarity and concision; the intelligent reader should not be forced to have to re-arrange the author’s ideas in his mind, or be left wondering what the author meant, or be getting ‘bogged down’ in impenetrable prose. This is perhaps, self-evident. However – and this is where the real interest lies – they go on to catalogue in exhaustive detail the principles of clear statement and graces of prose (altogether they enumerate 41 separate categories) that must be adhered to in order to achieve this end; and then proceed to apply these principles by producing ‘fair copies’ of prose extracts from leading writers, thinkers and public figures of the day. To compose good prose then, one must adhere to the following rules amongst others: (1) define clearly ‘who, which, what, where, when, how much and how many’; (2) avoid ambiguity of word or phrase, self-evident statement, material omission, undeveloped themes, circumlocution, memory strain, usage of the same word in different senses, and rhetorical devices suited only to oratory or conversation (such as over-emphasis, poeticality, elegant variation and duplication); (3) define and stabilise one’s terms; (4) use punctuation to denote the quality of connection between sentences and their parts; (5) ensure that every word or phrase is in its right place in the sentence; (6) arrange sentences and paragraphs in a sequence that is logical and intelligible; (7) order ideas ‘such that the reader need

not re-arrange them in his mind'; and (8) ensure that 'ideas should not contradict one another, or otherwise violate logic' (pp. 210-12).

Graves and Hodge's forensic examination of some 50 prose extracts¹³ to see whether they meet these criteria, their systematic analysis of the errors of clear statement and graces of prose by category, is remarkable in that they are not merely making a list of grammatical and stylistic errors (the sort of task undertaken by the typical 'good English' guide) but are engaged in a rigorous analysis of the thoughts, ideas and arguments the author is trying to convey – i.e. an analysis of their substance and coherence. In other words, they are concerned not merely with grammar but with rhetoric in its modern sense; and grammar is seen to serve a rhetorical end rather than constitute an end in itself. The principle that logic should not be violated necessarily entails awareness of the informal fallacies of relevance (even if they are not categorised and named as such); and Graves and Hodge's principles of grammar and grammatical construction entail, and are in large part driven by, an awareness of the informal fallacies of ambiguity - for example, equivocation (where ambiguity or confusion in the argument is caused by failure to define or stabilise the meaning of a word or phrase), and amphiboly (where poor grammatical construction is the cause). Grammar, rhetoric and logic, it turns out, are inextricably bound up with each other.

Graves and Hodge note that they are merely following the ancient Greeks in finding that in working out a set of principles for prose, it is impossible to confine oneself to orthology (the study of the proper formation of words), accidence (the study of the grammatical relation of words) and syntax (the study of the grammatical relation of phrases and sentences) - which, taken together, constitute grammar; one has also to include logic – 'the study of the proper relation of ideas' (p. 127). And in this they are surely right. Having to consider the manner in which the thought is expressed forces us to consider the thought itself; and having to consider the logical coherence of the thought or argument forces us in turn to consider its plausibility. Is

¹³ The extracts were chosen from the prose works of eminent people of the day (including T S Eliot, Aldous Huxley, J M Keynes, F R Leavis, Eric Partridge, Herbert Read, Bertrand Russell and A N Whitehead) and typically produced, on examination, 30 or 40 errors in the course of a 200 word passage.

it a good argument? Is it justified? Is the course of action advocated the right one in the circumstances? Have all relevant factors and considerations been taken into account?

This is the substance of rhetoric.

Before considering objections to the rhetorical ideal of liberal education, I would like to consider two other forms in which a liberal education has historically been conceived, two other curricula that have sometimes been taken to exemplify the rhetorical or *artes liberalis* ideal as outlined in Chapter 5¹⁴: the classical humanist curriculum of the 19th century and the literary curriculum (representing the ideal of literary culture) espoused by Matthew Arnold and F R Leavis.

Other conceptions of liberal education in the spirit of the rhetorical ideal

(a) *Classical humanism*

By the nineteenth-century, liberal education in England had become associated with a narrow education in the classics and was justified on grounds of ‘mental training’ and the cultivation of a literary sensibility rather than as means of producing an active citizen capable of judgement¹⁵. The shift in emphasis is apparent in the definitions offered by Henry Sidgwick in his illuminating essay ‘The Theory of Classical Education’ published in Farrar’s *Essays on a Liberal Education of 1867*¹⁶. Sidgwick defined the aim of a liberal education as being ‘to impart the

¹⁴ The *artes liberales* ideal was identified by Roger Kimball as having the following characteristics among others: ‘the goal of training the good citizen to lead society’; ‘the prescription of values and standards for character and conduct’; a recognised canon of classical texts to provide ‘both stylistic and ethical models’; and ‘a dogmatist epistemology’ as opposed to a Socratic approach to enquiry (Kimball, 1995, pp. 37-8).

¹⁵ In France and Germany, by contrast, the classics now shared the curriculum with mathematics, natural science, history, French or German – and other subjects. It was Napoleon who instituted the main reforms in France by insisting that liberal education had two factors: literary culture, represented by Latin; and exact science, represented by mathematics (Parker, 1868, pp. 67-8).

¹⁶ I shall henceforth refer to these as ‘Farrar’s essays’. First published in 1867 and edited by the Reverend F W Farrar, a master at Harrow School, the volume contained essays by a number of

highest culture' and to develop pupils' 'active, cognitive and aesthetic faculties' to the highest level (Sidgwick, 1868, p. 87); and the aim of a classical education, which formed the core of a liberal education, as being to produce someone who can 'translate elegantly and correctly from Latin and Greek into English prose' and can compose prose and verse in Latin and Greek (p. 86). The crowning stage of rhetoric no longer involved oration (and hence deliberation and judgement) in the vernacular on themes of general interest, as it would have in the Rome of Cicero, but had become merely the art of literary composition in Greek and Latin. The aim of producing the active citizen who could speak on any subject and who could form a right judgement had, in effect, been lost sight of; and for many pupils, the process of learning the classical languages had become a grind, 'dreadful and unremitting', involving hours of 'miserable drudgery' (Farrar, 1868, p. 215). However, it was still thought that this classical liberal education was the best preparation for public life.

This narrowing of the curriculum made it an easy target for critics who argued that it had little relevance to the modern world, and that mental training could just as well be effected by the study of a range of modern subjects (English, modern European history, modern languages and, above all, science) that were more relevant to the needs of pupils. Concerns that economically and industrially, Britain was in danger of falling behind other countries – most notably Germany – in its failure to recognise the need for science education and technical training only reinforced the argument. Nevertheless, there were a number of arguments adduced in favour of classical humanism by its proponents and these are worth revisiting. Sidgwick identified three main arguments': that a knowledge of Latin and Greek enables us better to understand the grammar and vocabulary of our own language; that the study of classical literature is unrivalled as a means of cultivating literary taste; and that a classical education is a superb means of 'mental training' – of developing the intellect. Let us consider these in turn.

contemporary educationalists arguing the pros and cons of the classical curriculum as it then stood in the great English public schools. They broadly supported reform and argued that the curriculum needed to incorporate modern subjects (above all, English) as well as the classics (see Curtis & Boulwood, 1965, pp. 440-442).

The first argument - ‘that we cannot understand our own language without a knowledge of Latin and Greek ... both in respect of its grammar and in respect of its vocabulary’ (Sidgwick, 1868, p. 95) – is one that Sidgwick utterly refutes. He concedes that ‘learning the rules of Latin usage would, no doubt, sharpen our perception of the rules of English usage’ but he argues that to speak English with accuracy and precision, ‘we have but one rule to follow, - to pay strict attention to usage’. Moreover, it is through a study of *English* literature, not classical literature, that English usage and style are most likely to be improved. Few would now dispute these arguments.¹⁷

The second argument commonly adduced in support of a classical education was that it acquainted pupils with Greek and Latin literature, a literature from which the highest literary enjoyment and taste could be derived. Sidgwick rejects this out of hand and marshals a range of arguments in support of his case – arguments, again, that most modern educators would probably regard as self-evident. For example, he argues that classical literature can be read in modern translation; that there is a whole range of modern literature - not least, English literature - whose study would equally well cultivate literary taste; that for most of us, the intellectual life of our own age is more important than the historical study of literature (rewarding as that may be to some); and that the familiarity with classical allusions and similes necessary to appreciate, say, Milton, can be derived without too much inconvenience by other means. But perhaps most important of all, the degree of proficiency in the classical languages needed to be able to read and appreciate classical literature was simply beyond that which the average pupil is able to attain, *even* when the curriculum was centred on the classics. In Farrar’s essays, contributor after contributor complains of the gap between the literary claims made for a classical education and what was actually achieved - with only a minority of scholars proving the exception. Sidgwick notes that many pupils had been ‘so exhausted with linguistic struggles’ that they

¹⁷ Farrar, writing in the same volume of essays, is even more scathing about the value of a classical education in this regard and argues that the study of Greek and Latin composition ‘has distinctly injured our own English language, and done mischief to some of our great writers’ (Farrar, 1868, p. 225). He goes on to cite the falsetto tones, vaporous inanities, meaningless ornamentation, artifice, tasteless variation and open plagiarism that have disfigured and spoilt the work of innumerable poets and writers from Milton and Dryden to Pope and Gray; and he compares the results to ‘rootless flowers stuck in a child’s garden’ (p. 225). The effect was to encourage little more than verbal imitations and the cramming of the memory with classic tags (p. 228).

were ‘not in a state to receive delicate literary impressions’ (Farrar, 1868, p. 116); and J. W. Hales speaks of most pupils’ ‘pretence at mastering Latin and Greek’ and asks ‘What hope could they ever have of enjoying Virgil in the original?’ (Hales, 1868, p. 310).

Part of the problem, observed Sidgwick, was the mistaken belief that linguistic understanding and literary appreciation could only fully be gained if boys learned to compose prose and poetry in Latin and Greek (i.e. to translate from English into Latin and Greek). The result of this burden was less likely to be literary appreciation than ‘mechanical ornamentation, generally clumsy and often grotesque’ (Sidgwick, 1868, p. 112) – the same point Farrar made¹⁸. Another was that inevitably only small excerpts (‘minute parts’) of the products of classical literature were studied, and hence only ‘a perverted appreciation’ was attained (p. 112). Far better that the ‘crowning stage’ of liberal education (p. 123) – rhetoric – should be taught in the vernacular so that boys should have the opportunity to elaborate an argument as a whole, to use the whole range of the English language and to draw on wider resources than merely literature. And this is, I think, the crucial point of difference between the classical humanist curriculum and the rhetorical curriculum. Classical humanism was no doubt a superb education for the classical scholar, but the old aim and ideal of producing an orator and a citizen had largely been lost sight of. The Romans declaimed in Latin precisely because it was the vernacular.

However, it is the third argument that Sidgwick finds the most persuasive – namely that the study of the classical languages can be regarded ‘a species of mental gymnastics, a method of developing the intellectual faculties’ (p. 113). Sidgwick separates the rhetorical or linguistic from the specifically mental or intellectual aspects of this mental training. Regarding the former, he argues that ‘translation from a Latin or Greek author into English prose, under the guidance of a competent teacher, is a very vigorous and efficacious training in the use of our language, and

¹⁸ Milton had made the same criticism as early as 1673 in his tractate on education. It was ‘... a preposterous exaction, forcing the empty wits of children to compose themes, verses and orations, which are the acts of ripest judgment ... These are not matters to be wrung from poor striplings, like blood out of the nose, or the plucking of untimely fruit’ (Milton, 1673, p. 237).

gives considerable insight into the nature of speech, and its relation to thought and fact' (p. 114); but then qualifies this by questioning whether learning a foreign language is 'absolutely necessary' after all. 'The normal function of a language is not to represent another language, but to express and communicate facts' (p. 124), in which case why not study language through the study of other subjects (for example, the sciences) and learn the use of words as one learns the knowledge of things. On specifically mental training, Sidgwick writes that the study of a classical language 'up to a certain point' affords

... a large amount of material that not only exercises the memory, but enforces constant attention and close comparison: rules and generalisations have to be borne in mind, as well as isolated facts; habits of accuracy and quickness in applying them are rapidly developed, and the important faculty of judgement is perpetually educated, trained and stimulated.' (pp. 126-7)

W. Johnson, the only contributor to Farrar's essays to defend the classical method of parsing and composition in Latin, argues in similar vein that the task of translating or reducing a text forces the pupil to attend to the thoughts or ideas contained in the text, forces him to discriminate and reason, forces a sort of scholarly discipline and attention (Johnson, 1868)¹⁹. However, this 'training of the cognitive faculties' is, suspects Sidgwick, 'very similar to that which would be supplied by one or more of the physical sciences, carefully selected, limited and arranged for educational purposes' (Sidgwick, 1868, p. 132).

I think Sidgwick is right and there is much to be gained from the study of both the classical languages and the sciences. However - and here I return to my argument in the last chapter - the benefits of mental training can only accrue, the intellectual virtues are only cultivated, if the pupil or student is able to gain a degree of proficiency and mastery of the subject concerned; and this requires both aptitude and specialised study. In the case of the classical languages, the sort of discrimination

19 'We need something that will bring out in shape and form something like a view of a philosophical topic. We need an exercise which cannot be written quickly, which is sure to give the censor plenty to do, which will bring two minds, the older and the younger, into stimulative contact, which forces us to distinguish between the thought to be expressed and the manner of expression' (p. 356).

envisaged by Johnson could only be attained by pupils who were able to express themselves in Latin with a degree of clarity and eloquence. The danger is that pupils would, in fact, translate word-for-word with very little attention to the finer nuances of meaning and style^{20 21}.

In summary, then, the cultivation of literary style and appreciation through a study of the classical languages (which was a principal aim of classical humanism and is often associated with rhetorical liberal education) has little to do with cultivating either the capacity to produce good modern prose or the citizen able to make a practical judgement. And though the specialised study of the classics is no doubt a fine means of ‘training the mind’, the same could be said of any specialised study, provided - as I argued in the last chapter - that its study involves the mastery of a coherent and complex body of knowledge and skill.

(b) Literary culture

I have argued that rhetoric draws for its subject matter on the stories of experience of the humanities, most notably literature and history, and therefore that the rhetorical aim of liberal education can be detached from the literary aim that has traditionally been associated with it – i.e. the aim of cultivating literary and aesthetic taste through initiation into a canon of recognised works. To argue a case forcefully and articulately does not require a sophisticated literary or aesthetic culture; the need, rather, is to express oneself with clarity in prose. And yet since the demise of classical humanism in the latter part of the nineteenth-century, debate in England surrounding the nature of liberal education has centred almost exclusively on the

²⁰ My occasional experience of reading scholars’ translations from Latin into English - and these are very able pupils who have studied Latin for four or five years - is precisely this: that their translations very often play havoc with the sense, structure and coherence of the passages concerned. These pupils are indeed too exhausted by their ‘linguistic struggles’ to pay very much attention to the meaning, let alone to the style, of the text.

²¹ A quite different argument can be made in support of the teaching of basic Latin as part of a general education on the grounds that it deepens our understanding of the English language, much of whose vocabulary is derived from Latin. But then one might simply teach Latin roots. Clive James argues (as does my mother) that the incorporation in Australia of ‘Latin roots’ as part of English language teaching was invaluable.

‘two cultures’ question: ‘what are the relative merits of literature and science in cultivating a person and educating him for modern life?’²²

The debate was not very illuminating partly because of its vitriolic nature and partly because no account was taken of the possibility that liberal education might be conceived as serving a rhetorical ideal. Nevertheless, the arguments are important ones, they are regularly rehearsed to this day, and they are worth revisiting. In Chapter 7, I argued that science should form part of a ‘general knowledge’ curriculum and be organised by topical theme rather than as a set of distinct academic disciplines on the grounds that the latter would only have value in ‘training the mind’ if subsequently specialised in. But what of the argument that it is the humanities - above all, literature – that humanise; and therefore the study of literature in the vernacular should be at the heart of a liberal education?

Matthew Arnold began a tradition of thought (the most notable twentieth-century representatives of which are perhaps T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis) which holds that the specialist critical study of canonical literature not only develops aesthetic appreciation and taste, but humanises; that with the demise of religion, ‘high culture’ can perhaps even take the place of religion as a moralising force. Now, the critical study of great works of literature, the engagement in literary criticism, might well constitute ‘a training of sensibility and intelligence’ and cultivate ‘a sensitiveness and precision of response’ as Leavis claims (Leavis, 1943, p. 34). But should liberal education centre on literary study, as Leavis argues? There are several objections to this position that we need to consider.

The first, which is the main criticism of Leavis from the perspective of cultural theory, is (1) that he regards high literary culture as the minority culture of an elite sustainable only in a hierarchical society – i.e. he is anti-democratic; and (2) that the

²² The two cultures question famously surfaced in the 1870s and 1880s, and again in the late 1950s and 1960s. The original protagonists were Matthew Arnold and Thomas Huxley, representing the claims of literary and scientific culture respectively, who carried on a long-running debate in both Britain and America. Some 80 years on, F R Leavis and C P Snow debated the same question. Snow coined the expression ‘the two cultures’ in his celebrated Rede Lecture of 1959 - ‘The Two Cultures and The Scientific Revolution’ (Snow, 1959).

notion of a rich folk culture of the past – which, according to Leavis, coexisted symbiotically with the high culture of the elite and unlike the debased popular culture of today was a truly common culture - is a romantic myth that takes no account of the oppressed and impoverished lives of the mass of people (see Storey, 2009, Chapter 2). There is some truth in both these arguments. However, Leavis's account of the cheapening and debasing effects of much popular culture²³ and of modern living in general, particularly of commercial advertising, will resonate with many people, and is shared by a host of radical critics - Theodor Adorno and Jean Baudrillard are notable examples. A more measured account that does not dismiss popular culture and mass media out of hand, but rather seeks to cultivate discrimination between the good and the bad within it, is Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel's. Hall and Whannel argue not only that there is much of value in popular culture but that for many pupils, it is only by engaging with their experience of 'mass culture' that we can begin to foster discrimination and re-shape their values and interests (Hall and Whannel, 1964); in fact, that a widening of taste and sensibility within the field of popular culture will lead also to an appreciation of traditional 'high' forms of culture. Hall and Whannel have been criticised for not escaping the 'Leavisite' position that culture is essentially hierarchical (Storey, 2009, p.55). But the position suggested by this thesis (a full exploration of cultural theory being unfortunately beyond its remit) is that it is only in practices and traditions, in the process of apprenticeship to practices and traditions, that values and criteria of judgement (both moral and aesthetic) are developed. The broad postmodern-relativist position that all works of art or creative expression have aesthetic or cultural value merely because they are acts of self-expression is not a tenable one.

The second problem relates to the argument of Chapter 7 that only a highly specialised study, a sustained apprenticeship, is likely to produce goods in the Hirstian sense – i.e. forms of knowledge, the structuring of experience, mental training, high critical standards and so forth; and Leavis, in effect, recognises this by limiting his argument to the study of literature at university, specifically to making

²³ In cultural studies and cultural theory, 'popular culture' is a notoriously problematic and ideologically loaded term. Here, I am simply referring to all those cultural forms and works that are traditionally excluded from the school curriculum because they are not judged to be of sufficient literary or aesthetic merit.

the university school of English the ‘humane focus’ of the university. The sustained disciplinary study and immersion in a tradition that would be required to cultivate the requisite sensibility and powers of discrimination are simply not possible at school, and therefore cannot form the core of a liberal school education. It might be argued that literary study at school is merely preparatory to later specialist study or that pupils might specialise early. But then we are faced with the problem that, inevitably, specialised study involves having the requisite motivation and aptitude. There is a tendency amongst educationalists [this is certainly true, in my experience, of those who attend philosophy of education seminars at the Institute of Education in London] to assume that if only teachers are sufficiently inspired, they can make works of the literary canon accessible to all their pupils; indeed, that they can make any subject accessible to quite a high level. Perhaps there is something about Shakespeare’s genius that does make him universally accessible - though I would question how many school leavers continue to read Shakespeare in their leisure time. However, I fear that Harold Bloom is closer to the mark when he writes that the appreciation of the Western literary canon – that ‘real reading’ - is only ever going to be open to a small minority of people, and hence pupils, who have both the need and the cognitive and imaginative capacity to read works of aesthetic value (Bloom, 1995, pp. 519-20)²⁴, a view with which Leavis concurs. I do not think it is necessarily a matter of ‘aptitude’ or ‘intelligence’ or even ‘imagination’. A person can be highly intelligent and articulate, even highly cultivated in many respects, and yet simply not have ‘a literary sensibility’, just as he or she might not have any particular desire or need to engage in art, music, sport or mathematics. It is a matter of psychological make-up and personality as much as some putative aptitude; which is why it is rare to find an educated person equally passionate about literature, art, music, dance, mathematics, science and philosophy - let alone about engineering, gardening, climbing, military history and sport.

The third problem with the position of Leavis is that even if we allow that the trained literary critic has judgement, sensitivity and discrimination to a high degree, the judgement is of a particular sort: it is *literary* judgement. My concern is with

²⁴ Bloom defines ‘aesthetic strength’ as an amalgam of ‘mastery of figurative language, originality, cognitive power, knowledge, exuberance of diction’ (p. 29).

practical judgement, and as I have argued in this thesis, the keys to developing this in school education are some combination of rhetorical training (encompassing grammar and prose argument), stories of experience drawn from the humanities, and specialist study. Canonical works of literature – the literary classics – might well be superb funds of stories of experience and might well depict human nature in all its complexity but the literary canon is not our only resource; and the cultivation of the skill of the literary critic who possesses a refined literary sensibility is not our primary aim²⁵. On the other hand, it is important that authentic accounts of human experience are distinguished from the inauthentic – from that which is designed merely to entertain or titillate (the melodrama, the thriller and so forth); and one of the distinguishing characteristics of a literary classic is, precisely, that it is authentic - that it illuminates vividly some truth about the human condition. Therefore literary and artistic judgements still have to be made. But it is possible to recognise a work as ‘authentic’, and therefore of literary or artistic merit, without necessarily engaging in a detailed and exhaustive analysis of how the author has achieved their effects - without some complete or perfect reading of the work in question as envisaged by advocates of literary culture as a civilizing force, such as Leavis and George Steiner. Moreover, a work can be authentic and illuminate the human condition without it necessarily being a literary classic; indeed, without it being a work of literature at all. This particularly applies to non-fiction, history, biography and television documentaries. A person does not have to be a literary critic – or, indeed, a historian - to appreciate the power of Anne Frank’s diary. Likewise, we have in film and television drama a rich resource of stories of human experience.

However, there *is* judgement involved in recognising and appreciating the difference between a melodramatic soap opera or a fantasy-thriller or a romantic comedy populated with stock characters issuing pat lines (clichés), and a well-directed well-scripted film adaptation of a novel or dramatisation of a true story. The

²⁵ It could even be argued that training in literary criticism does *not* train a person to construct an argument and write good prose. Graves and Hodge’s subjection of the prose of F R Leavis, T S Eliot and I.A. Richards (the most eminent literary critics of their day) to critical analysis is very revealing in this respect. For example, in the case of Eliot, they tabulate over thirty errors in clear statement in the course of three short prose paragraphs. They note that ‘by the standards of ordinary intelligible English, his failures to choose the appropriate word and to connect his argument lucidly are more frequent here than in any passage we have examined’ (Graves & Hodge, pp. 262-7). Leavis and Richards fare little better.

very discussion of ‘which is better’ is valuable because it encourages pupils to discriminate between the work that is authentic and the work that is melodramatic or exploitative – or merely ‘kitsch’. Of course, fantasy, escapism and the peddling of dreams have their own value, whether as entertainment or as vehicles for delivering a moral message, and this is another theme to be explored. The field of cultural studies is, of course, highly politicised; the concept of ideology is a central one. There is always the danger that the study of popular culture and mass media will degenerate into a course in political indoctrination. But the same is true of the study of literature and history. All we can hope, or expect, is that teachers consider a range of political and ideological interpretations without detracting from or politicising too much the central human drama of the situation – unless, of course, the drama is essentially political.

The fourth and last problem, however, involves a more profound concern. It is often argued that the study of science, whatever its undoubted value and importance, cannot itself humanise; that it cannot produce the capacity to make a humane or moral judgement; and conversely, that the great value of the humanities - of literature above all - is that they can perform this function; that they can humanise. But *does* a training of literary-aesthetic sensibility, of literary intelligence and discrimination, necessarily humanise in the sense of producing a moral person and a good citizen able to judge well and act on his judgement? Leavis’s argument that a high degree of critical judgement is ‘*inseparable* [my italics] from that profoundest sense of relative value which determines ... the important choices of actual life’ (Leavis, 1943, p. 35) is seriously open to question.

C P Snow alluded to the problem when he questioned the value judgements of many of the twentieth century’s most famous writers:

Yeats, Pound, Wyndham Lewis, nine out of ten of those who have dominated literary sensibility in our time - weren’t they not only politically silly, but politically wicked? Didn’t the influence of all they represent bring Auschwitz that much nearer?’ (Snow, 1959, p. 7)

George Steiner puts the problem just as starkly. We are faced, he writes, with ‘the simple yet appalling fact’ that we cannot be certain, knowing what we now do, ‘whether the study and delight a man takes in Shakespeare [makes] him any less capable of organising a concentration camp’ (Steiner, 1984, pp. 30-1). The reason for this, conjectures Steiner, might well be that by cultivating our imaginative response, our ‘actual moral response’ is deadened; that

... the cry in the poem may come to sound louder, more urgent, more real than the cry in the street outside. The death in the novel may move us more potently than the death in the next room. Thus there may be a covert, betraying link between the cultivation of aesthetic response and the potential of personal inhumanity. (p. 31)

Harold Bloom draws the same conclusion. The study of great literature cannot make the reader a better person or a better citizen, not least because it is just as likely to subvert accepted norms and values as to affirm them. He goes on

The true use of Shakespeare or of Cervantes, of Homer or of Dante ... is to augment one’s growing inner self ... All that the Western Canon can bring one is the proper use of one’s own solitude, that solitude whose final form is one’s confrontation with one’s own mortality. (Bloom, 1995, p. 30).

But perhaps the most powerful support for this line of argument comes from a consideration of the German experience of self-cultivation or ‘Bildung’. As W. H. Bruford notes in his classic study *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation* (1975), the German tradition of *Bildung* had great cultural achievements to its credit but was always deeply introspective and inward-looking in spirit. The aim, *contra* Cicero, was never to produce a citizen who could make right judgements and act in the political arena, but to cultivate the self as an end in itself. Wilhelm von Humboldt, a pivotal figure in this tradition, epitomised this in his letters, writing that the purpose of life was not to change the world (though, in fact, Humboldt did involve himself actively in politics), but through contemplation and reflection, and by holding life at a distance, to distil one’s experience into wisdom and ‘to take away ... a living picture of the world, properly unified’:

There is only one summit in life, to have taken the measure in feeling of everything human, to have emptied to the lees what fate offers, and to remain quiet and gentle, allowing new life freely to take shape as it will within the heart. (Humboldt cited in Bruford, p. 25)

Indeed, Thomas Mann, lecturing in 1923 and bemoaning the lack of interest in politics of educated people, noted that the German culture of *Bildung* implied by its very nature a certain 'introspectiveness' and involved an almost religious quest to deepen and perfect one's own personality in order to attain salvation:

... the political world is felt to be profane and is thrust aside with indifference, 'because', as Luther says, 'this external order is of no consequence' ... the ordinary middle-class man here, if he ever thought about culture, never considered politics to be part of it, and still does not do so today. (Mann cited in Bruford, p. vii)

Bruford concludes that this 'inherent defect' in the culture of the inward man is, ultimately, the explanation for the fact that, despite there being 'a considerable resistance movement towards the end which deserves all credit', 'highly cultivated men ... in whole groups, so it seems to us' raised hardly a murmur of protest against the rise of Hitler (Bruford, p. ix).

Roger Scruton, another apostle of high culture and literary art, follows Leavis in eliding our aesthetic and moral senses. Scruton argues that an artistic tradition, as well as being 'an exercise of imagination' that 'idealises human emotion' and 'rehearses the possibilities of feeling on which an ideal community ... is founded', is 'a meditation on human experience and an attempt to build a shared conception of what is worthy of our concern' (Scruton, 1998, pp. 41-2). It helps to clarify for us 'the things that are worth doing for their own sake, like [in the case of Homer] grieving and loving and honouring the gods' and to answer 'the question what to feel or do' (p. 30). But central to the notion of a common culture is that people not only know how and what to feel but are compelled to *act* on their feelings and put their right judgements into practice. And for this to happen, their moral feeling must be habituate - which is precisely Aristotle's point about moral education. The question

then is ‘why should the cultivation of a literary sensibility lead people to act morally?’ Scruton seems to elide the two: aesthetic interest, being disinterested, concerns intrinsic values; in adopting the aesthetic stance, we ask ourselves ‘is it right to take pleasure in *this*?’; and therefore our aesthetic response is the ‘expression of moral character’ (see pp. 32-3). Scruton cites Kant and argues that morality too is disinterested. But *contra* Kant, morality cannot be disinterested but must involve our desires and emotions; otherwise, as Aristotle argues (and as I have argued in this thesis), there is no motive to act.

Moreover, isn’t there a fundamental disjunction between the aesthetic and the moral²⁶? The aesthetic, even when its subject matter is moral feeling and right action (for example, on the part of the characters of a novel or an epic), concerns the contemplation of the beautiful. The moral, by contrast, concerns feeling that issues in right action. And though, because the aesthetic and the moral both concern intrinsic values, we might argue that they ultimately coincide, their sources are quite different; which is why people who do not engage in contemplation, who have little concern with ‘aesthetics’, who in philosophical and literary-aesthetic terms lead ‘the unexamined life’, can nevertheless be deeply moral; and, conversely, why aesthetes can be utterly immoral in their actions, or their inaction. As I noted in Chapter 7, the person who has not consciously examined their ethical first principles, who has not consciously tried to cultivate their inner self or examine their life, is not necessarily inferior, morally or ethically, to the person who has.

In summary, then, I think that those pupils who have the aptitude, motivation and interest might well choose to engage in the specialist critical study of literature - just as others might choose to study the classical languages. But the core curriculum of a modern liberal education should not be ‘literary’ in the sense of aiming to cultivate literary taste or sensibility.

²⁶ Here I use the term ‘moral’ rather than ‘ethical’ because the ethical in its widest sense could be taken as incorporating the aesthetic as well as the moral.

Some objections to a rhetorical education

There are, however, a number of objections that might be raised to the institution of grammar and rhetoric as core disciplinary studies. These include concerns (1) that rhetoric panders to the emotions and prejudices of the audience (Plato's charge); (2) that one can develop the capacity to think clearly and argue a case without making a formal study of the art of rhetoric, an intellectually demanding discipline that, it could be argued, is no more relevant to the needs and interests of most pupils than the specialist academic subject disciplines; and (3) that if one wanted to formally train pupils how to think clearly and argue a case, a course in 'critical thinking' would be better suited to the task in the modern age. I shall consider these objections in turn.

(1) The abuse of rhetoric

It might be well argued that an argument can be perfectly coherent and eloquently expressed, and yet at the same time plain wrong. We think, for example, of Hitler mesmerising his audience with his oratory. And yet there seems to be something contradictory about asserting that an argument is well reasoned and well constructed, and yet that its conclusions are wrong, even morally abhorrent. Our expectation is that there is a moral or ethical dimension to reasoning well, and that all the relevant facts as well as a range of different standpoints have been taken into consideration; and, in fact, this is precisely the aim of rhetoric properly conceived. Despite Plato's fierce denunciation of rhetoric and the Sophists who practised it (and whom he blamed for the death of his teacher Socrates), which still colours perceptions of rhetoric to this day, it was always the case in classical times that (a) one should only attempt to argue aspects of the case that had intrinsic merit – i.e. that the aim was to arrive at a right and proper judgement, and (b) the orator should not only speak well but be *a good person* (see Miller, 2007, pp. 5-8). It was also believed that it was perfectly legitimate to appeal to the emotions of the audience (as well as to their reason) on the grounds that, as Cicero argued, people are guided in their judgements by 'hate or affection or partiality or anger or grief or joy or hope or

fear or delusion or some other emotion’ as much as by reasoned argument (Cicero, 2001, p. 170); that, *contra* Kant, both reason and emotion are integral to human nature. I think this is essentially correct; that, as I argued in Chapter 1, the Enlightenment move to reduce human beings to disembodied reason, to detach them from obligations, commitments, interests, passions, practices and traditions (and from the values and beliefs that derive from these), in order to arrive at a perfectly rational, objective judgement, is to deprive people of the motivation to act at all²⁷. Of course, in a liberal society, people will adhere to a variety of values and political beliefs and arrive at quite different conclusions and standpoints on the same issue. There may well be no single right solution on which all can agree; but so long as the viewpoint is justified and the assumptions or first principles on which the argument rests (and with which we might well disagree) are made clear, then the conditions of clear statement and good prose can be met.²⁸

As for the danger that politicians, ‘spin doctors’ and marketing people will utilise the art of rhetoric to embellish their story, appeal to the worst instincts of their audience, or engage in straightforward deception, there is no simple answer or antidote – except to argue that if people are *properly* educated in the art of rhetoric to begin with *and* habituated in the virtues, they will be less susceptible to its misuse by themselves or by others, and to trust that in a free society with a free press, some approximation to the truth will ‘out’ in the end. It is a moot point whether we place our trust in those who appeal to the common sense, instincts and prejudices of the people; or those who come armed with rational blueprints and optimal solutions.

²⁷ Evolutionary psychologists carry the argument even further. Steven Pinker writes that the emotions are not ‘untamed forces or vestiges of our animal past’ but evolved adaptations that ‘work in harmony with the intellect and are indispensable to the functioning of the whole mind’ (Pinker, 1999, p. 370). He goes on ‘without goals, the very concept of intelligence is meaningless’ and notes that ‘the emotions ... set the brain’s highest-level goals’.

²⁸ Graves and Hodge make some effort not to allow their own literary and political opinions to colour their analysis; and they make a mental apology to those authors they had suspected of writing badly merely because they did not like their point of view (Graves & Hodge, p. 207).

(2) *Is a formal study of rhetoric necessary for all pupils?*

Another objection concerns whether the formal study of grammar, logic and rhetoric is essential at all to the development of the capacity to think clearly and develop arguments. Can't ordinary people with little formal education articulate profound thoughts and cogent arguments just as well as intellectuals, scholars and artists? Moreover, I argued in Chapter 4 that good moral judgement arises out of experience, moral sentiments and moral intuition; it does not require the formal articulation of the ethical principles involved.

The real point at issue here, I think, is the distinction between conversation and prose. Profound thoughts, acute insights and wise judgements can all be arrived at and expressed in everyday conversation. The problem is that when a *complex* argument or case needs careful consideration, and when there is a need for precision in the defining of one's terms and for clarity of expression - for the separating out of fine strands of argument and nuances of interpretation, for the careful weighing up of a range of relevant issues and factors, and for the avoidance of ambiguity (as, for example, in the framing of ethical guidelines or legislation) – prose is evidently much better suited than conversation for the purpose. And as we have seen, to write *good* prose requires, on the one hand, an understanding of grammar and syntax (i.e. of the meaning of words and of the quality of connection or logical relation between words, phrases and sentences) so that we can express ourselves clearly; and on the other hand, some mastery of rhetoric or prose composition (i.e. the capacity or skill of being able to logically organise our thoughts and ideas, and so structure an argument).

But what of those who are highly educated, who are specialists in their respective fields, but who have little or no formal training in grammar or rhetoric? This applies I think to almost anyone who has attended school in England since the late 1960s²⁹, which is when formal exercises in grammar were dropped from school

²⁹ This is certainly my experience. I attended grammar school in the 1970s and learned next to no grammar. I had to teach myself as an adult as best I could, and still resort to asking the advice of my

examination papers and when grammar came to be regarded as best taught, not by the analysis of sentences into their component parts (i.e. by parsing), but rather through use in meaningful contexts³⁰. Has their capacity to develop an argument and express themselves with clarity been impaired? The answer is ‘probably not’. The disciplined study of a subject to a high level and the acquisition of an organised, structured body of specialist academic knowledge necessarily involves cultivating the capacity to understand complex ideas and arguments, and to articulate them. This is borne out, I suspect, by our experience of conversing with people who are highly educated in scientific and technical subjects, who are highly articulate, but who have not received a literary education – indeed, who quite often have little or no interest in literature, art or aesthetics. There is, it seems, no particular requirement here for a liberal education centred on the study of grammar and rhetoric, literature and history, unless one is going to specialise in the humanities or enter politics. On the other hand, research graduates in scientific or technical subject may need to convey their thoughts to a general audience or to specialists in another field, as well as deliberate on matters of humane and political interest. And in articulating the interests of human beings, we draw primarily not on a technical or scientific vocabulary but on the resources of the ordinary everyday language in which these interests are expressed. The needs, interests, ends, goods, experiences and dilemmas of human beings are *necessarily* described in ordinary everyday language; and, therefore, the quality of connection between words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs is vital to the structuring of thoughts relating to these needs and interests - and this is the currency of the humanities. Training in rhetoric may therefore be of more general use, particularly to those going on to specialise in academic subject disciplines.

The other side of the coin is that for pupils who do not have the aptitude for or interest in specialised academic study, who do not intend to go into politics or the law, but whose interests and talents lie elsewhere, there is little purpose in foisting on them a full-blown rhetorical training on the Roman model – a training which, as

parents (neither of whom is particularly academic), who both learned how to parse sentences and who never make a grammatical error.

³⁰ Though the teaching of grammar has been recovered in recent years, particularly in primary education, there is still nothing approaching the discipline of the classical method. Grammar remains very much a surface feature of the text; and the discipline of rhetoric or prose composition has been forgotten altogether.

we have seen, is potentially highly intellectually demanding, and which, for example, would involve extended and highly analytical essays on complex political, ethical and philosophical themes. However, there is another dimension to rhetoric, and that is the subject matter on which it draws for its examples, analogies and arguments, a subject matter that comprises stories of human experience drawn from the humanities. These stories embody and encapsulate our collective experience of the nature of moral dilemmas, human tragedy, good and evil, the goods after which we strive and the virtues we display; in short, they illuminate the human condition, and as such, they have relevance to all pupils. A rhetorical treatment of these themes need not involve complex essays or a complete mastery of the art of writing prose, but could still involve discussion (both verbal and in writing) of the pros and cons of this or that course of action, or of whether the protagonist was right in behaving as he or she did. The manner of treatment required could be less formal and elaborate; the themes discussed could be more topical and relevant to everyday life – to life both as a private individual and as a citizen.

In fact, perhaps what is needed is a conception of rhetoric that is removed not only from classical, literary and academic concerns but also from a narrow concern with political deliberation. In other words, a conception that is broadened to encompass, and to put more emphasis on, the concerns and interests of ordinary people in their daily lives: not the humdrum exigencies of managing money or of managing one's diet (these 'life skills' are, I think, better learned 'on the job'), but those things that might contribute morally, spiritually, emotionally, psychologically and imaginatively to a good life – as well as contribute to our understanding of the difficulties, dilemmas and tragedies that are inherent in human life³¹. This is precisely why the stories of experience on which rhetoric draws can be derived from wider sources than literature and history - for example, from film and television, which are both highly accessible to all pupils and central to our experience of the

³¹ Martha Nussbaum argues that there need not be a sharp division between the private and the public or political spheres. She cites the Athenian *polis* as an example: 'The public sphere was suffused with the emotional and imaginative energy that we sometimes associate, instead, with the private sphere, just as the sphere of the household was itself suffused with public concern' (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 98). And she notes that in Aristotle's ethical conception 'there is no strong distinction between the public and the private' (p. 98). The problem, as I argued in Chapter 4, is that modern society bears little resemblance to the Athenian *polis*.

modern world. In fact, the themes of Roman school oratory were often of this nature: ‘should a person marry?’, ‘should we have children?’ and ‘is it better to engage in this or that profession?’

The study of rhetoric might therefore be engaged in at two levels: a general level accessible and relevant to all pupils, and a more advanced level suitable perhaps for pupils intending to specialise in the humanities or politics or law. How then would rhetoric be integrated into the curriculum? On the one hand, rhetoric would be taught as a distinct subject discipline, and the teaching of English language and ‘literacy’ would need to be reformulated to reflect this; and on the other hand, the teaching of the humanities – in particular English and history – would need to be reconceived to reflect rhetorical aims. So, for example, in English language, instead of pupils aping the externally conspicuous stylistic features of various ‘genres’ of prose writing (newspaper reports, recipes, instructions and letters etc.), pupils are taught progressively and systematically how to structure an argument. In English literature, the emphasis is not on engaging in literary criticism and aesthetic judgement, but on discussing whether the protagonists were *right* to act as they did, and going on to consider the question ‘what would you have done in that situation?’ In history, there would be an emphasis on narrative and on how particular personalities or peoples faced particular problems and dilemmas; and topics would culminate in essays requiring a rhetorical treatment of the subject matter – for example, ‘what would you have done if you were Henry VIII in those circumstances?’, or ‘are wars ever justified?’ Debates in which pupils argue their respective positions might either be preparatory to essay writing or constitute the culmination of the whole process.

Rhetoric, the art of making practical judgements in human affairs, is thereby cultivated and practised through history, literature and the various subjects and topics that together constitute the humanities; and English language or ‘literacy’ is reformulated something on the old Roman lines so that it systematically develops the capacity to structure an argument and write clear prose at a basic level - a process beginning with the formal study of grammar and simple exercises in narrative writing and *précis*.

(3) *Rhetoric or critical thinking*

On the face of it, critical thinking has much in common with rhetoric. Both share a concern to cultivate the capacity to analyse, evaluate and construct an argument, to reason well and to identify fallacious reasoning. And yet proponents of critical thinking are apt to dismiss rhetoric as the antithesis of reasoned argument. For example, Tracy Howell and Gary Kemp, who have produced a critical thinking manual for undergraduates, dismiss rhetoric as ‘sham-reasoning’, an ‘attempt to persuade ... that does not attempt to give good reasons’ but rather that appeals to ‘feeling and emotion’ (Howell & Kemp, 2002, p. 114). Since numerous courses are now available in critical thinking at GCE, AS and degree level (notice that the ‘skills’ of critical thinking are thought to exist quite independently of the ‘skills’ of literacy) it is important that we consider how rhetoric differs from critical thinking as a means of cultivating the capacity to reason well and form a practical judgement.

Critical thinking has its origins in John Dewey’s concern that thinking should be an *active* process in which received ideas and beliefs are submitted to critical scrutiny rather than a passive process of transmission and reception. Edward Glaser, one of the key figures in the Critical Thinking movement, followed Dewey’s lead in defining critical thinking as involving ‘a persistent effort to examine any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the evidence that supports it’ (Glaser cited in Fisher, 2001, p. 3); and went on to identify a corresponding set of thinking skills or abilities. These included ‘to recognise problems’, ‘to gather and marshal pertinent information’, ‘to recognise unstated assumptions and values’, ‘to comprehend and use language with accuracy, clarity and discrimination’, ‘to interpret data’, ‘to appraise evidence and evaluate statements’, ‘to recognise the existence of logical relations between propositions’, ‘to draw warranted conclusions and generalisations’ and ‘to reconstruct one’s patterns of beliefs on the basis of wider experience’ (Fisher, 2001, p. 7). Similar lists of skills have been produced by others working in the same tradition. However, though it shares some of the subject matter of rhetoric, and though its aims are laudable, critical thinking is, I think, fundamentally misconceived in a number of respects. There are three particular problem areas I would like to highlight.

First, critical thinking aims to teach a set of transferable thinking skills applicable to any subject. The problem with this is that in order to assess what information is *pertinent* or *relevant* to the argument, in order to assess and evaluate the assumptions, logical structure and conclusions of the argument according to *relevant* criteria and standards (both of which are identified as key critical thinking skills), *specialist knowledge* of the subject matter of the argument is required. Indeed, without some degree of specialist knowledge of the subject, it is quite probable that a person would not recognise that a problem existed to be addressed in the first place³². The situation is made even worse when the requirement is added that the critical thinker be creative; that one has to be ‘imaginative and creative about other possibilities’ and ‘think of relevant considerations other than those presented’ (Fisher, 2001, p. 13). True, Plato levelled the same criticism at rhetoric. In *Gorgias*, Socrates complains that instead of listening to the orator attempting to persuade on subjects in general, it would be better to listen to the relevant subject expert. Rhetoric on this account boils down to no more than ‘a knack of convincing the ignorant that he knows more than the experts’ (Plato, 1960, p. 38). But, in answer to Plato, the orator has no need to possess expertise in every subject, because his true expertise is in the art of making practical and political judgements. Unlike critical thinking, the study of rhetoric is integrated with a study of the humanities, the purpose of which is to provide the ethical and psychological insights into human behaviour and human nature on the basis of which *a particular kind of judgement* – a practical judgement concerning human and political affairs - might be formed.

Second, critical thinking associates good argument *exclusively* with deductively or inductively valid reasoning. Good argument is founded on good reasoning and good reasons have deductive validity or ‘inductive force’ – the latter meaning that a certain probability can be attached to the conclusion being true, that the generalisation is valid but there will be exceptions, and that a rational expectation can therefore be said to apply (Bowell and Kemp, pp. 82-4). Now, such reasoning certainly has its place in rhetorical argument. The difference is that in rhetorical argument, it is legitimate *also* to appeal to emotion, custom, precedent and a range of

³² Robert Glaser [not to be confused with Edward Glaser] notes that the thinking and problem solving ability of the expert is qualitatively different from that of the novice precisely on account of his specialist knowledge (Glaser, 1999).

values, interests, commitments and moral obligations that cannot be given a rational justification in the sense just described. Practical judgements must take these considerations into account, first, because - as I argued earlier - human nature is compounded of reason and emotion; and second, because people's beliefs and values, their interests and commitments, are inevitably formed in a social, cultural and linguistic inheritance. In fact, all deductive reasoning must ultimately be founded on certain original premises (or *archai*) that cannot themselves be rationally justified; and, as I argued in Chapter 2, ethical first principles fall into this category³³. To adopt a 'critical thinking' approach to evaluating and formulating arguments is to condemn us to instrumental utilitarian means-end cost-benefit analysis in pursuit of our appetitive desires and material wants. So, for example, *Bowell and Kemp* argue that charities that play on our compassion, pity and guilt by displaying pictures of pitiful starving children in their advertisements are engaging in a 'rhetorical ploy' rather than in reasoned argument; whereas a reasoned argument would incorporate the premise 'I should try to alleviate extreme suffering where it's possible for me to do so' (pp. 117-8). But why assume this premise? Why should we try to alleviate suffering or help others in need? Is there any rational justification for this altruistic behaviour? The answer, surely, is that there is no rational justification; we are speaking, rather, of ethical first principles. The only reason to help is that *it is right to do so*; and we know that it is right to do so precisely because our feelings of compassion, pity and guilt are aroused. To act out of compassion *is* to act morally. Indeed, we would think it very odd if parents thought it necessary to establish a rational justification for caring for their children or people thought it necessary to establish a rational justification for helping to feed starving children.³⁴

Third (as I argued earlier in this chapter), in rhetorical argument, weight or preponderance of evidence is usually the deciding factor, just as it is in a court of law - in which case, there can be no requirement that each strand of the argument has

³³ Even if we allow the possibility of Kantian transcendental moral imperatives (for example, in framing universal human rights), there still remains the need to address a range of broader ethical questions concerning how we should live our lives - as I argued in Chapter 1.

³⁴ *Bowell and Kemp* admit at one point in their guide to critical thinking that expected value cost-benefit calculations might be 'overridden by the existence of rights or moral rules' (p. 206), and that courses in ethics or moral philosophy might help with moral dilemmas. But they do not attempt to incorporate a moral or ethical dimension into critical thinking. I think the implications are much more profound and I do not see how they can avoid doing this.

deductive validity or inductive force³⁵. So, for example, generalisation to the present on the basis of past evidence or experience is an important part of rhetorical argument, but as reasoning it has neither deductive nor inductive validity.

In summary, then, critical thinking is useful in so far as it identifies valid and invalid inferences, but it needs to be incorporated as part of the much broader discipline of rhetorical argument.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the practical judgement necessary to lead a virtuous life and to reconcile or choose between conflicting goods might, in part, be cultivated by a liberal education in the spirit of the rhetorical ideal. This would involve, on the one hand, reconceptualising literacy as the art of developing and structuring an argument (the art of prose composition or ‘rhetoric’), and, on the other, of reconceptualising the humanities as funds of stories of human experience – a moral and cultural inheritance - whose ethical and political themes could be treated rhetorically. Rhetoric would thereby become the organising or ‘core’ discipline of a school curriculum centred on the humanities, the aim of which was to cultivate practical judgement; and it would achieve this end by considering the judgements made by real and imaginary people in the light of the core virtues whose habituation I argued for in Part 1. Though a full-blown training in rhetoric – a training in the art of political oratory - would require specialist disciplinary study of an intellectually highly demanding nature, the core of the school curriculum could be reconceived in the spirit of the rhetorical ideal, with the discipline of rhetoric taught to a basic level (i.e. as a sort of basic literacy) and applied to themes of general interest and relevance, and thereby be made accessible to all pupils. It follows that neither the cultivation of literary taste, nor a training in the classical languages, nor a training in

³⁵ It is curious that *Bowell and Kemp* allow that weight of evidence can apply in a court of law – that several items of evidence might ‘point jointly to the defendant’s guilt’ even though, taken individually, they lack inductive force in the sense of appealing to definite probabilities or rational expectations (pp. 98-101); but fail to recognise that this is precisely the nature of rhetorical argument in complex matters of practical and political judgement.

the scientific method (whatever its undoubted merits) is central to the task of liberal education conceived in the rhetorical sense – i.e. as aiming to cultivate the capacity to make practical judgements on human affairs as part of a general education accessible to all pupils.

An important question however remains to be addressed. I have argued in this chapter that a liberal rhetorical education cultivates the capacity to make practical judgements that are informed by a rich vein of moral or ethical knowledge concerning the nature of the good life, human nature, the virtues, and the conflicting ends and moral dilemmas that characterise human life. And I argued in the last chapter that a liberal education conceived in the spirit of the research ideal, and realised through specialist study, is an excellent way of cultivating the intellectual virtues necessary for engaging in the practices of adult life, and thereby realising the goods that are central to leading a fulfilled life. But going back to the argument I developed in Chapter 2, the realisation of all these liberal aims is dependent crucially on the habituation of moral virtue – i.e. the formation of character. Stories of experience are all very well but it is through *real*, not vicarious, experience that the moral virtues are habituated and a person is endowed with the will to put judgements into action.

This is the realm of character training. The question we now need to address, then, is ‘what form might this character training take?’ I shall explore this in the next chapter.

8

Character Building

In Chapter 4, I proposed that the core virtues necessary for human flourishing in a liberal democracy might be grouped into five broad categories: the intellectual virtues; the caring virtues; justice; courage and honesty (the virtues of moral integrity); and temperance. We saw in Chapter 6 how the intellectual virtues (the virtues of work) might be cultivated through specialisation and the engagement in practices at school. Here, I shall consider how the other categories of virtue - the moral virtues - might best be cultivated.

I argued in Chapter 7 that ‘stories of human experience’ drawn from literature and history, and from film and television, are invaluable in providing ethical models and exemplars on which a practical judgement might in part be founded; or alternatively, in providing examples of situations in which a different or a better judgement could have been made, or in which a moral dilemma arose. In Roman education, carefully graduated exercises in composing a rhetorical argument (the *progymnasmata*) drew on the humanities in precisely this respect – for example, the *suasoria*, in which students had to imagine themselves facing a critical situation or dilemma drawn from history and making a judgement. But models and exemplars of ethical behaviour, of virtuous action, are perhaps of less use in fostering the *will to act* on a moral judgement, in translating good intentions into action. Even more problematic in this respect are forms of moral education that attempt to provide principles of moral action and examine how a range of (apparent) moral dilemmas might be resolved through the application of these principles. As Nel Noddings and Michael Slote note, students often find it difficult to engage in moral analysis of artificial problems because these lack real characters and real settings; in fact, they are apt to find the whole exercise boring (Noddings & Slote, 2003, p. 354). Paul Standish refers to the ‘air of unreality’ that classroom discussions of ethical dilemmas can take on - discussions that are too abstract and remote from the lives of pupils to have much effect (Standish, 2001, p. 340). It is out of a recognition that

pupils need to be engaged at a deeper level of interest and motivation that ‘virtue ethics’ - a tradition of ethical thought originating with Aristotle that insists that central to moral education is the *habituation* of certain desirable ethical dispositions, or virtues - has arisen. In order to develop the will to act morally, we need to concentrate on training, forming or building ‘character’.

However, talk of character building in education (or ‘character education’) tends to conjure up images of team sports, long-distance runs, cold showers, adventurous activities, military training, and the inculcation of self-control and self-discipline – all things that are traditionally associated with the English public school. Nowadays, this sort of character training carries with it connotations of mindless conditioning and it is generally disparaged by educationalists. Yet if it is accepted that moral values in the form of certain virtues need to be habituated (the position I argued in Chapter 2) there is no alternative to *some form* of character training; and there may, I shall argue, be much to be learned from the public schools in this respect. I shall also argue in this chapter that the most radical *and* cogent critique of liberal education - liberal in the academic disciplinary sense - comes from Nel Noddings, who argues that education should be founded on an ethics of care; that its prime aim should be to produce, not rational decision-makers (important though this is), but *caring people*; and that to develop the capacity to respond caringly to others involves the habituation of certain moral virtues¹, albeit rather different ones from the stoic virtues implicated above. One way or another, moral education in the form of character training – or ‘character building’, as I shall henceforth term it² - is central to the educational endeavour.

In this chapter, I shall consider three specific approaches to character building: (1) through character training, (2) through challenging activity, and (3) through service to others; and I shall, in the process, reflect further on the nature of the virtues and on whether the Aristotelian conception of their acquisition – habituation -

¹ Noddings specifically emphasises the need for certain attitudes and ways of looking at the world to be induced, for minds to be shaped, through practice (Noddings, 1992, pp. 23-4).

² The term ‘character training’ carries connotations of militaristic discipline and mindless conditioning that I wish to avoid; I shall therefore distinguish it from ‘character building’. The ‘experience learning’ I am largely concerned with in this chapter does not involve any such training or compulsion, though it could certainly be construed as having the *effect* of ‘building character’.

is an adequate one. I conclude by considering two radical challenges to traditional notions of character building: the ‘ethics of care’ of Nel Noddings, and the ‘ethics of the Other’ associated with the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

Virtue through character training

A range of virtues has traditionally been fostered in English public schools by means of a strong ethos, generally Christian, which permeates the life of the school. This ethos is centred on various virtues (these include the selfless moral virtues of kindness, thoughtfulness and consideration of the feelings of others; respect; and a host of other virtues centred around hard work, self-discipline, perseverance and endurance) that are constantly reinforced in all the activities pupils undertake, both inside and outside the classroom - through teaching, through modelling and example, and through reward systems. State schools in England have come increasingly to recognise the value and importance of having some such ethos. Primary schools put great emphasis on fostering caring virtues and attitudes, often in very difficult circumstances, and not always parental support. Programmes of personal, social and health education (PSHE) are an important vehicle for this and complement the reinforcement of the values of the school mission statement and code of behaviour in all aspects of school life. Central to the success claimed for academy schools (independently sponsored state funded secondary schools) is a renewed emphasis on ethos. Though driven by the need to raise standards of achievement and maximise exam results (in the form of the percentage of pupils gaining five or more ‘good GCSEs’), the emphasis on ethos clearly involves the inculcation and reinforcement of a range of values and virtues. At Mossbourne Academy, for example, the core values are ‘discipline, respect, hard work and politeness’ (Adonis, 2012, p. 4). Though the academy programme is controversial (the claims made for it regarding academic performance particularly so), most commentators would agree that there have been marked improvements in behaviour and attitude in schools such as Mossbourne, whose predecessor, Hackney Downs School, was shut down after damning inspection reports (pp. 1-6).

However, ‘character education’ has had its greatest impact in American schools. A concern shared across the political spectrum to address growing violence and lack of respect in schools, has led over the past two decades to a wholesale rejection of the ‘values clarification’ approach to moral education (the notion that pupils should be given the intellectual tools to make their own value judgements) that became prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s and its replacement by a host of ‘character education’ programmes designed to instil certain core values³. And this has led, in turn, to a wealth of research literature and commentary, both supportive and critical.

Before considering the arguments for and against character education, we need to identify the various methods and strategies that are most commonly incorporated under the general rubric, not all of which strictly involve ‘character training’. I would identify five conceptually distinct dimensions to character education, five distinct components that frequently form part of programmes of character education: (1) character training through modelling and external reinforcement; (2) moral education, involving direct instruction and discussion; (3) behaviour management programmes; (4) the cultivation of democratic civic values through the institution of a democratic community (the school becomes a democracy in miniature); and (5) community service. Character training is premised on the Aristotelian belief that virtue is cultivated through repeated practice – through a sort of ‘moral calisthenics’ that develops ‘the appropriate moral muscles’ (Davis, 2003, p. 37). The pedagogic means by which the virtues are habituated include teachers ‘modelling’ the virtues; the explicit statement and reiteration of specific core virtues of character; strict rules of conduct; positive reinforcement through praise, reward and recognition; stories that exemplify the virtues; and the use of motivational posters, slogans and mantras. In these ways, a strong ‘ethos’ is created that permeates the school. Moral education involves direct instruction in the virtues, and might well include the straightforward telling of stories that exemplify the virtues; but it also extends to incorporate discussion of the nature of the virtues, of how they might be exercised in particular situations, and of moral dilemmas. The aim is to cultivate good character by cultivating the capacity to make moral judgements. Behaviour management

³ Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush were both strong supporters of ‘character education’ programmes in schools.

programmes aim to promote positive behaviour and positive attitudes by developing ‘emotional literacy’, well-being and specific social skills (e.g. ‘conflict resolution’ and ‘stress management’), rather than character dispositions or virtues as such. Civic and democratic virtues (e.g. respect for others, the willingness to subject beliefs and opinions to rational scrutiny) are fostered through the institution in schools of a democratic community. And, finally, community service fosters respect for others, an understanding of the needs of others, and the caring virtues.

It is important to recognise that criticism of character education centres largely on the first of these dimensions or elements, namely on ‘character training’. With the exception of what I term behaviour management programmes (which fall outside the ambit of this thesis, and are therapeutic rather than ‘character building’), the other elements of character education I have listed are not particularly controversial. I have already argued for moral education, in the sense of equipping pupils with the capacity to make practical judgements (through moral instruction and rhetorical training drawing on the humanities), and I will argue later in this chapter for service education. Few would dispute that the classroom should, among other things, be a forum for debate, rational discussion and the cultivation of democratic values. The real problems arise with character training; and I shall henceforth refer to criticisms of ‘character education’ as criticisms of ‘character training’, unless any of the other elements listed above are implicated.

Let us review the main criticisms that have been levelled at character training programmes in schools.

First, it is argued that there is no evidence that character training programmes work. The most thorough and extensive piece of research is probably that commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education and carried out by the Social and Character Development Research Consortium (2010) into school programmes designed to promote social and character development - or ‘SACDs’. The project investigated seven leading programmes each implemented across a range of schools

and the report (published in October 2010) concluded that there was ‘no evidence that the SADC programmes improved student outcomes’ (p. xli).⁴

Second, it is unclear how behaviourist conditioning would promote the internalisation of moral attitudes, so that moral behaviour could be sustained outside school and into adult life. Michael Davis argues that even if there were evidence of significant short-term effects on pupils’ behaviour at school, this would not constitute evidence of significant long-term effects on pupils’ character - i.e. of effects that outlast school and influence the behaviour of pupils in the adult world. In fact, there has been no such long-term research, and it is in any case unclear how long-term character effects *could* be measured or tracked once pupils leave school (Davis, 2003, pp. 39-42).

Third, for pupils and adults to exercise the virtues in the complex situations of real life requires not merely habituation but moral judgement (Davis, 2003, pp. 42-5), not merely imitation but emulation (Sanderse, 2013, pp. 36-7). Emotion, instinct and habit are not enough. Otherwise, as Aristotle warns, virtues can easily become vices, which is why Aristotle appointed practical reason (*phronesis*) the architectonic virtue⁵. Otherwise, there is nothing to distinguish good character education from totalitarian indoctrination. The point is not that there should be no reinforcement of ‘good’ behaviour in schools or that there should be no rules and rewards; rather that character education and moral education must go hand in hand if the former is to have any long-term effect.⁶

⁴ The student outcomes used to evaluate the effectiveness of SADC programmes in developing character and social skills include ‘altruistic behaviour’, ‘self-efficacy for peer interaction’, ‘positive social behaviour’, ‘positive school orientation’ and ‘feelings of safety’ along with the corresponding negative behavioural attributes. These are measured using sets of scales completed by pupils, teachers and parents (Social and Character Development Research Consortium, 2010, pp. xxx-xxxi).

⁵ ‘Virtue then is a settled disposition ... consisting essentially in the observance of the mean relative to us, this being determined by principle, that is, as the prudent man would determine it. And it is a mean state between two vices, one of excess and one of defect’ (Aristotle, 1996, p. 41).

⁶ I argued in Part 1 that practical judgement (*phronesis*) could not usefully be conceived as an architectonic virtue, rather that it is the outcome of a concurrent process of habit formation and moral instruction, which initiates a person into a moral and cultural inheritance.

Fourth, character training represents the re-assertion of traditional conservative values and, as such, is an unjustified reaction to perceived moral decline. The argument is (1) that there is no ‘moral decline’ or ‘moral crisis’ as such; and (2) that if there are social and behavioural problems in schools, the root causes lie outside in social and economic conditions, particularly in growing levels of inequality. It is these that need to be addressed.

Fifth, Michael Davis argues - convincingly I think - that the notion that teachers can ‘model’ the character virtues - is inherently flawed. The problem is that to act virtuously in the Aristotelian sense involves acting for the right reason, with the right motive, and as the situation demands - and therefore cannot be consciously staged for imitation. Either a person (i.e. the teacher) is virtuous and has no need to ‘model’ virtuous behaviour, or they are not virtuous and the attempt to model virtuous behaviour will be a charade (Davis, 2003, p. 45-7).

Sixth, the practice of ‘catching’ pupils or students doing the right thing and praising or rewarding it can backfire. On the one hand, there is the danger of focusing attention on extrinsic rewards rather than intrinsic motives (that virtue is its own reward); and on the other, there is the danger of embarrassing the pupil concerned and making them reluctant to act virtuously (at least in public) in the future (Davis, 2003, p. 48-9).

There is, I think, force to all these objections to character training programmes⁷ - though it could be argued that good behaviour is still of value because it enhances

⁷ There is a more general ‘situationist’ critique of virtue ethics as a whole from the perspective of social psychology. The argument is that people’s behaviour is usually better explained by the situation or role they find themselves in than by putative character virtues. A famous series of experiments conducted by Milgram (in which participants feel obliged to give the supposed victim electric shocks), Zimbardo (in which participants acting as prison guards engage in various barbarities under the influence of their supposed peers) and Darley and Batson (in which students who believe they are in a hurry fail to help an apparently distressed bystander) appears to confirm this thesis (see Oakley, 2013, pp. 1-3). But all these experiments assume that the ordinary person is ordinarily virtuous. Little or no attempt is made (and perhaps none could practically be made) to distinguish between people who really are virtuous (who have had had character virtues instilled deeply in them - assuming this to be possible) and those who have not. As Thomas Nadelhoffer remarks, that ‘situational forces can sometimes trump dispositional traits when it comes to moral behavior’ is merely ‘a reminder of just how genuinely hard it is to be a virtuous agent’ (Nadelhoffer, 2010).

pupils' learning, which enables a range of moral and intellectual virtues to be acquired through the engagement in practices, and that in this indirect way, the enforcement of high standards of behaviour can potentially have a significant effect on character. However, contrary to the research I cited concluding that character training programmes do not work, Wouter Sanderse has argued that character education in the form of role modelling ('understood as a kind of Aristotelian *habituation*' – Sanderse, 2013, p. 35) is potentially highly effective; and in its 'Framework for Character Education in Schools', Birmingham University's 'Jubilee Centre for Character and Values' argues that 'character is largely caught through role-modelling and emotional contagion: school culture and ethos are therefore essential' (Jubilee Centre for Character & Values, n.d.). I think that school ethos is indeed essential, and there is plenty of anecdotal evidence that the behaviour of pupils in schools, along with their academic performance, can be transformed by instilling certain core values. However, as Michael Davis warns, improved behaviour at the school level does not necessarily translate into a lasting effect on students' characters; and we have 'no widely accepted scientific study showing the effectiveness of simple character education [character education understood as habituation] in or out of schools' (Davis, 2003, p. 40).

I suspect that much of the problem lies in an over-emphasis in character education programmes on the possibility that teachers can consciously model the virtues and thereby habituate them in pupils and students. Sanderse points to the need for teachers 'to model moral actions and emotions' (Sanderse, 2013, p. 36) both through behavioural conditioning (with rewards and incentives) and through a 'more cognitive kind of modelling' in which they 'explain to children why they act the way they do', 'verbalise their goals and strategies as they deal with moral quandaries' (p. 35). Students thereby learn not merely to imitate but to emulate their role models, to apply their moral understanding intelligently and flexibly. In order to be effective role models, teachers also need to reflect individually and as a team on such questions as 'What virtues do I/we want to be a model of? Why do I/we want to model these character traits? How can I/we model these virtues best?' (p. 38). But as Davis notes, the very notion that virtues can be modelled is conceptually and morally questionable. To behave virtuously is to do the right thing for the right reason in the

circumstances; to attempt to exemplify the virtues by modelling is therefore *not* to behave virtuously. For example, to treat a person with respect ‘cannot be modelled because ... treating with respect includes an intention or motive that cannot be staged’ (Davis, 2003, p. 46). I think teachers and parents should certainly try to behave virtuously, to serve as good role models for their students and children, and to engage in moral instruction and discussion. But the sort of modelling proposed by Sanderse has a lack of authenticity about it that might well prove counterproductive.

Moreover, there is, in the absence of empirical evidence, an over-reliance on Albert Bandura’s social learning theory in justifying modelling as a means of learning. According to Sanderse, Bandura’s research affirms ‘that modelling is a powerful process that can account for diverse forms of learning’ and that ‘Children can learn new patterns of behaviour vicariously, that is without actually performing actions or receiving rewards’ (Sanderse, 2013, p. 35). Bandura’s celebrated Bobo doll experiment is the one usually cited. Young children who were shown a film of adults behaving aggressively towards a large inflated clown that sprang back upright when knocked down subsequently behaved aggressively towards it themselves. But as Michael Eysenck notes, caution is needed in interpreting the experiment. First, ‘children tend not to imitate aggressive behaviour towards another child’; and second, ‘children who had not seen such a doll before were five times more likely to imitate the aggressive behaviour of an adult model against it than were children who were familiar with it’ – in other words, ‘the novelty value of the Bobo doll is important’ (Eysenck, 1998, p. 457). This suggests that vicarious modelling *might* not be as effective as Sanderse assumes, and that habituation is most likely to be effective when virtuous acts are habitually performed in meaningful circumstances.

However, my main interest in this chapter is a form of character building that does not involve the modelling and reinforcement of certain ‘target virtues’, but rather that forces the participant to draw on their own inner resources (to find character strengths within themselves), to realise their interdependence on others, and so discover for themselves the value of selfless action. This form of character building is generally termed ‘experience’ (or ‘experiential’) learning. The traditional

emphasis in schools on character training has been complemented more recently, particularly in some public schools (Gordonstoun was the pioneer), by an emphasis on the value of experiential learning as a means of cultivating character, not only in the traditional form of team games, but in the form of adventurous and challenging activities, and service to the community. The educational and therapeutic value of learning through experience has, of course, other antecedents than the English public school. John Dewey was an influential advocate (though we should, I think, take care to distinguish the argument that all pupils should be ‘active learners’ in the classroom, which I questioned in Chapter 7, from the argument that character might be developed through challenging activity outside the classroom); and experiential education is now widely used as a form of psychotherapy in dealing particularly with troubled teenagers. Here I shall consider the value of the two main forms of experiential education: (1) learning through the engagement in adventurous and challenging activities, and (2) learning through service to the community.

Virtue through challenging activity

In Ancient Greece, physical education and athletics played an important role in education, in part because the Greeks had an ideal of physical beauty, and in part out of military necessity. However, the idea that character might be formed through physical activity, in particular through team games, has its origins in the nineteenth-century English public school. Thomas Arnold of Rugby School was the first to recognise the potential educational value of organised team games and the idea was quickly taken up by other public schools. Inspired in part by notions of medieval chivalry, it came to be believed that, if played in the right spirit, team games were a superb means of building character - of fostering courage, endurance and, above all, the willingness to sacrifice one’s own selfish interest to the common good. Cyril Norwood, then headmaster of Harrow School, encapsulated this ideal in the 1920s in his book *The English Ideal of Education* where, for example, he writes of rugby that

Selfishness, the desire at all costs to shine individually, is the cardinal sin ... It can only be played by those who are ... gentlemen. It is a test of character. (Norwood, 1929, p. 104)

A whole culture of sportsmanship and gentlemanly behaviour grew up around these team games and stock idioms like ‘it’s not cricket’ and ‘he’s a good sport’ became part of the language. Team games continue to be valued, especially in English public schools (witness the ritual of ‘three cheers for the opposition’), largely for their character building value; and the sentiment that team sports should remain the province of amateurs (or ‘gentlemen-amateurs’) - that they should not be professionalised - still finds expression today.

However, it is obvious to anyone who has taught games (I am speaking here of the traditional team ball games) that not all pupils have the aptitude or personality to gain very much from the experience; indeed, many adults look back with loathing on their experience of enforced team games at school. This often applies to pupils who have artistic or intellectual sensibilities, but also applies to those who, by virtue of their personality, are simply not ‘team-players’⁸. Moreover, it is not clear that those who are most proficient at team games are necessarily always the ones with the most admirable or virtuous characters⁹. Something *more* is needed.¹⁰

Kurt Hahn and ‘Outward Bound’

The idea that character might be formed through a range of challenging activities and experiences, not merely through team games, came a little later and formed the

⁸ The Duke of Wellington is a good example. He refused to participate in team games throughout his school career at Eton, preferring to spend his time jumping backwards and forwards over a ditch. And yet his courage and leadership qualities came to be renowned.

⁹ I speak here from personal experience of teaching rugby, football and cricket to boys some three afternoons a week over ten years.

¹⁰ I think that Anthony O’Hear and Marc Sidwell’s argument that ‘music and dance, gymnastic and sporting instruction’ will produce a ‘liberally educated character’ is even more optimistic (O’Hear & Sidwell, 2009, p. 15). One thinks of Reinhard Heydrich, the liberally educated Nazi, who was well-versed in music and sport, but who nevertheless masterminded ‘The Final Solution’.

core of Kurt Hahn's programme at Gordonstoun. Hahn's educational philosophy centred on the notion that that through being physically tested and challenged, and through serving others, pupils might discover and realise themselves. On the one hand, they learn the value of cooperation and teamwork; on the other, they learn self-reliance. Prince Philip, a famous product of Hahn's schools, writes that it was probably Hahn's experience of Nazi Germany (from which he had to flee) that 'made Hahn so aware of the need to encourage boys to develop as responsible individuals; strong enough in mind and character to reject the standards of the mob and to resist the temptation to run with the herd' (Philip, 1970, p. xi). Robert Skidelsky, on the other hand, complains that Gordonstoun boys are 'not remarkable for their independence of thought', even that 'his [Hahn's] products do not go out into the world with the object of changing it: they retreat into worlds of their own' (Skidelsky, 1969, pp. 237 & 239). There is no way of telling whether or not Skidelsky is right here, but if there is truth in what he says, two possible reasons are (1) an over-emphasis in the Gordonstoun curriculum on physical as opposed to mental challenge (the great outdoors as opposed to the life of the mind), and (2) the fact that whereas a great deal of time is devoted to physical training and games, relatively little is devoted to expeditions and service. Skidelsky criticises Hahn for his totalitarian approach to realising his vision of the active responsible citizen, an approach that would seem to militate against pupils working out their views and beliefs for themselves; but Hahn's concern (perhaps obsession) with training plans to produce physical fitness and team games to produce a spirit of cooperation and mutual interdependence (the source of much of what Skidelsky finds objectionable) can probably be detached from the 'experience therapy' itself. In fact, teamwork and physical fitness can just as well be fostered *through* the engagement in challenging expeditions and adventurous pursuits, activities that do not require formal discipline or compulsion.

The original and valuable insight of Hahn's - muddied perhaps by his authoritarian insistence on training plans, cold showers and team games - is that self-realisation is best achieved through challenging activity and through service to others. The contribution that 'experience therapy' might make to character building together with the nature of this character building is explored in a powerful piece by

Tom Price (1970), who describes his experience of Outward Bound schools - schools which were directly inspired by Hahn's educational thinking. The first thing Price insists is that the aim is not to produce a certain sort of person with a particular code of values; not even (contrary to what one might have expected) to produce 'leadership qualities' - he notes the unpleasant connotations, the suggestion of superiority; rather, to help and encourage young people to discover for themselves 'what are life's truest values' (Price, 1970, p. 87). For this reason, none of the activities are compulsory and nobody is excluded on grounds of lack of fitness, physical strength or aptitude. He even objects to the term 'character building' on these grounds, though he admits that 'character training' would be even worse. However, Price testifies to the remarkable transforming effect that a month's residential course can have on pupils usually aged 14 to 16, and chosen from a wide range of backgrounds. Among the benefits he details are the following: perseverance and commitment to seeing a task through; learning to trust and cooperate with others as part of a team; enlargement of mind and spirit; willingness to take on responsibility and lead if the situation demands; self-confidence and self-belief; optimism and hope for the future; enterprise and energy; and the courage to face fear and overcome it (pp. 81-91). This is an impressive list. If only some of what Price claims is true, the potential value of 'experience therapy' goes well beyond the 'mere' habituation of certain desirable behavioural dispositions (the selfless virtues) to include a deeper sense of well-being – psychological, emotional and spiritual.

It might be objected that some pupils – the more introverted ones, perhaps – would hate this experience. But I think the lack of compulsion and formal discipline, things that markedly distinguish Outward Bound from organised team games in schools, tell against this. It is the element of challenge and subsequent sense of achievement that is paramount.

Virtue through service

If adventurous and challenging activity is one side of the coin of experience therapy, the other is service. Service has also traditionally formed part of the English

public school curriculum; indeed, Cyril Norwood thought it important enough to make it one of five pillars of his English ideal of education (the others were religion, discipline, culture, and athletics). The public school conception of service was a mix of the Christian ideal that one should ‘love thy neighbour’, the civic ideal of public duty, and practical community service. The latter took the straightforward form of charity and was focused on helping the unfortunate poor. A more sophisticated notion of service to the community later formed the other part Hahn’s ‘experience therapy’. At Gordonstoun it originally took the form of sea and mountain rescue, and the manning of the school’s own fire brigade. The idea was that by working as part of a team and risking one’s safety in order to help others, pupils would, once again, realise themselves. The problem was that opportunities to rescue people were not all that frequent, and so a number of other types of service have subsequently been introduced, ranging from community service with the elderly or children with special needs, to conservation work and first aid. The Duke of Edinburgh’s award scheme, also inspired by Hahn, has had an impact in schools across the country. Service features strongly in it, and hundreds of thousands of young people have undertaken it, but it is of course voluntary. Service volunteers have also long been a staple of school clubs and societies, but their role has been only extra-curricular.

However, the most significant examples of service being incorporated into the curriculum in more recent years are probably in America, both in schools and in colleges – particularly liberal arts colleges.

Thomas Lickona (1992) documents a range of ways in which American schools have sought to foster a caring attitude through service to others: older pupils acting as referees and games coaches for younger pupils¹¹; the ‘buddy’ system in which older pupils ‘adopt’ younger pupils and engage in activities ranging from reading to field trips¹²; cross-age tutoring; big brother and big sister programmes in which younger children from deprived or difficult backgrounds are paired with older

¹¹ I have seen this in action in a neighbouring primary school here in England and was impressed by the sense of responsibility demonstrated by some quite young pupils – 10 and 11 year-olds - in these roles.

¹² This has also spread to schools in England but tends to be used only at the start of the new school year.

teenagers to ‘play ball, take a walk, go for an ice-cream, or just talk’ once a week; and special service projects in the community (community service programmes) - for example, caring for young children in neighbouring day-care centres, leading learning activities in elementary school classes, caring for handicapped children, and visiting elderly residents (Lickona, 1992, pp. 312-8). However, he notes that ‘educating children to care about others ultimately means educating them in social justice’ (p. 319). Service learning has the dual aim of fostering caring individuals and concerned citizens.

The ‘service-learning’ movement in American liberal arts colleges (documented by Joseph DeVitis, Robert Johns and Douglas Simpson in *To Serve and Learn* (1998)) is particularly impressive; and thought it is college rather than school based, there is, I think, much to be learned here that is relevant to school education. The programmes are integrated into the curriculum (as opposed to being extra-curricular), organised with great care and thoroughness, and have been subject to evaluation and research studies for many years. If one had to encapsulate the aim in a single phrase, it would be ‘to unify liberal learning with moral purpose’ (I am quoting from the mission statement of the Salem College service programme - Farris & Kelly, 1998, p. 43).

The interest, so far as this thesis is concerned, is whether a corresponding programme could be implemented in schools in this country. American ‘service-learning’ is generally at second-year undergraduate level, but this is, in part, because of the perceived need to underpin practical experience with relevant social and political theory. Pupils or students obviously need a certain level of maturity to be able to engage in community service and to be able to reflect on their experiences, but it may well be possible to integrate a service component into the last two years of the secondary curriculum – i.e. for all 14 to 16 year-olds.

The American service-learning programmes involve a range of domestic and international placements – for example, working with the homeless, illiterate adults, migrant workers, the mentally ill, children and communities in poverty; and range

from 30 hours (considered much too short by those involved) to 3 months, typically in the second year of study at a liberal arts college. For example, at Goshen College in Indiana, students are put on placements of several months in countries such as Costa Rica, Indonesia, and the Ivory Coast, where they live with local families and after an initial period of formal cultural and language studies, in which they are acclimatised, are relocated to a second host family in a rural area on a service assignment. On the assignment they might have to work, help, instruct or simply act as ‘a presence’ – for example, living in a refugee camp or accompanying an ambulance driver on long runs, or joining the staff of a reform school. At Goshen, ten different possible ‘models of service’ (roles they might have to play) are identified for students to think about in the course of their preparation: student (who is there to learn about the host culture), neighbour, servant (who does the chores), healer, teacher, batting coach (who shows people how to do things better), animator, good Samaritan, inquirer and diplomat (Hess, 1998, p. 132) – though, of course, these roles are not mutually exclusive (and perhaps ‘friend’ could have been added to this list). Other colleges place more explicit emphasis on developing students’ political awareness of the needs of minorities, to the extent that at Trinity College, Vermont, the Christian creed of faith, hope and love is translated into a call for social, economic and political transformation (i.e. they are taught liberation theology) and students are called on ‘to be in solidarity with those who are oppressed’ (Davis & Dodge, 1998, p. 95); and at West Virginia Wesleyan College, where there is a ‘Student Literacy Corps’, Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is the core text of the preparatory class-based course (O’ Halloran, 1998, p. 78). There is a distinct flavour of political indoctrination here, and there are obvious dangers in the automatic association of poverty or minority status with oppression, as in the assumption that the solution involves the wholesale rejection of existing ‘power’ structures and the institution of a utopian state in which all are freed from exploitation. But there is no reason that liberation theology, critical pedagogy and Freire should not be studied, discussed and argued – so long as the argument is a balanced one.

Research undertaken on the outcomes of the Goshen programme suggest that students who have undertaken the programme have been transformed in a number of

ways: their 'world view' - including their awareness of peoples and cultures other than their own, and their awareness of the experience of minorities - has changed; their interest in the welfare of others, together with their empathy for and their sense of identification with others whose situations are very different from their own, has increased; and their sense of self-belief, vocation and autonomy (their personal development or growth) has been enhanced. Students typically rank service as 'the best of their college experiences' and interestingly 'after graduation, that valuation seems to rise' (Hess, 1998, p. 138). Programmes at other liberal arts colleges seem to produce similar results. Rick Fairbanks and Tim Foss report that at St Olaf College in Minnesota, students returning from service in Indonesia 'talk in terms of self-transformation ... but we are hard-pressed to understand or explain this transformation' (Fairbanks & Foss, 1998, p. 159); students there 'typically describe the experience as life-changing' (p. 155). Barbara Tazewell reports that at St Augustine's College in North Carolina (where, interestingly, England and France rank with Jamaica and Ecuador as destinations for service), the benefits deriving from 'increase in self-esteem ... are immeasurable' (Tazewell, 1998, p. 153); and students talk movingly of experiences that will affect them and stay with them for the rest of their lives (Schultz & Brown, 1998, pp. 149-52). Steven Schultz and Stacia Brown report that at Westmont College in California, which operates an urban programme in San Francisco, students typically describe their experiences in phrases such as 'my most important semester at college' and 'the most vital learning I have ever done' (p. 64).

So what are we to make of service-learning? The testimonies of the volunteers are impressive. As in the case of Hahn's challenging activities (as implemented in the Outward Bound schools), experiences are invariably life transforming. A key difference is that in the case of service, there seems to be a greater emphasis on the fostering of a social and political conscience – as perhaps one might expect; on a willingness to engage politically with issues such as poverty and injustice as well as a desire 'merely' to serve others in need. How much this results from the experience of service and how much from the accompanying programme of seminars and discussions on wider political and social issues is difficult to say. On the other hand, though service assignments and adventurous activities are on the face of it quite

different in nature, they have an important thing in common: by facing challenge and adversity, pupils or students have to draw on their inner resources – personal, intellectual and spiritual - and in so doing ‘grow’ as people. In fact, service assignments are quite possibly the more challenging in the physical, emotional and psychological demands they make: compare, for example the challenge of climbing a mountain with the challenge of working in a refugee camp. Moreover, in the course of a service assignment, the student might be on their own for weeks on end – which, of course, makes the demands that much greater. The words of Tom Price in relation to Outward Bound therefore apply just as well to service: young people ‘discover for themselves ... what are life’s truest values’ (Price, 1970, p. 87).

Habituation or experience?

The language used in evaluating experience (or experiential) learning of any kind is inevitably fuzzy and imprecise - we talk in terms of personal growth, inner resources, self-belief, self-reliance, self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-perceptions and self-concept - because we are trying to describe what is going on when a person’s attitudes and behaviour are transformed as the result of an experience. We do not understand exactly what is going on and we are unsure in what terms to describe it. For one thing, the words and their concepts overlap quite a lot. Do we talk of the emotions, the intellect, or behavioural responses? Do we talk of attitudes, dispositions, motives, values or beliefs? Do we speak of personal qualities, attributes, capacities, virtues or personality traits? Or do we speak of some combination of all of these? To even attempt to explain human behaviour in terms of internal psychological processes and various ‘constructs’ (which research seems to demand) may be misconceived since self-categorizations – our perceptions of ourselves - are not determined by some fixed mental structure or set of personal attributes, but are social representations that depict the individual relative to social relationships and social contexts that are inherently dynamic and variable (Lyons, 1998, p. 337). This in turn would explain why experiential learning apparently has such powerful and long-lasting effects on participants.

A particular concern so far as this thesis is concerned is whether we should speak of *habituating* certain virtues – or whether it is better to speak of *discovering* values in ourselves. In this respect, it is significant that Outward Bound type courses have marked and long-lasting effects on teenagers typically aged between 14 and 16, and that the transformation can be even greater for older students in their early 20s; this seems to run against the Aristotelian notion that the virtues must be habituated from an early age. Certain virtues - courage, kindness, compassion, a concern for fairness and justice, and humility, for example - might well be better conceived as inner or latent resources that come to the fore in certain challenging circumstances and as a result of certain experiences than as dispositions that must be trained or as habits that must be formed and reinforced over a long period of time. The person who has had the experience of drawing on these inner resources, and has experienced a measure of satisfaction, fulfilment or self-belief as a result, will want to continue to test himself in the future. However, there are other virtues that probably do require practice and continual reinforcement (i.e. that must be habituated): temperance, honesty and good manners, for example – as well as the intellectual virtues. Most of the others probably fall somewhere in between.

There are also differences in personality to consider. Introverts generally prefer to work alone rather than as part of a team, and therefore team activities (as opposed to individual challenges) are likely to appeal less, and consequently be less effective as means of ‘character building’¹³. Moreover, differences in personality and temperament – differences which are often apparent from a very early age and which may be marked even between siblings – quite possibly do affect the nature of the inner resources people have to draw on. People do seem to be more or less courageous, fearful, generous or considerate to others – though these dispositions can take on different forms in different circumstances. So, for example, to be an adventurous sort of person (which is a quality of personality) is to be courageous in some circumstances, but not necessarily in others. Another consideration is that to be driven by a particular passion or commitment, even to be absorbed by an interest – particularly when it is intellectual or artistic – is necessarily to be a selfish person in

¹³ Some of the greatest heroes, the greatest models of virtue and character, have been introverts: Gandhi is a classic example (see Cain, 2013, pp. 197-200).

some respects, because unless one is single-minded, the work will never get done. And many of the virtues are essentially about being *selfless* – about considering the needs of others.

There are, then, all sorts of complications to consider in relation to the habituation of the moral virtues. We cannot *simply* educate all children (or adults) to be a certain sort of person, not because it cannot be done, but because to do so would be antithetical to Enlightenment principles of liberal democracy and individualism. We can certainly, through the ethos of a school, project and reinforce the values and virtues we regard as essential to a civilized liberal democratic society and to individual flourishing (including the virtues necessary for engagement in practices). And, as I have argued, there are some virtues that probably do require constant practice and reinforcement. But beyond this, all we can do is offer a range of experiences that will bring out the virtues latent in each child. And activities that challenge the child, young person or student – whether adventurous or service-orientated - seem to be uniquely well suited to the task.

Nel Noddings and an ethics of care

A radical challenge to traditional notions of character training and character building is represented by Nel Noddings' ethics of care. Noddings argues that education should be founded on an ethics of care, which reflects the fact that to care and be cared for (which might take the form of recognition, understanding, compassion, affection, empathy, sympathy or love) is a basic human need (Noddings, 1992, pp. xi & 17) - a need that is even more fundamental to our nature and humanity than rationality. And yet this essential truth is neglected in a school curriculum of academic subject disciplines premised on 'a narrow form of rationality and abstract reasoning as the hallmarks of human life' (p. 43). This leads Noddings to propose that the school curriculum should be radically different in two crucial respects.

First, pupils should be able to engage in activities (whether academic, practical or vocational) that reflect their interests, talents and strengths rather than some idealised and narrowly intellectual conception of what constitutes an educated person; otherwise, many pupils are condemned to failure and inequality. I agree with this argument and have argued something very similar in this thesis - though, as I argued in relation to Rawls' egalitarian liberalism, to expect equality of public valuation of people's occupations is unrealistic.

Second, moral education should be re-focused on the need to foster caring attitudes (1) by means of teachers establishing (and modelling) caring relations with their students, and (2) by providing plenty of opportunities for students to have experience and practice in caring - for example, through community service (pp. 24-5).

The problem with traditional approaches to moral education, argues Noddings, is that they either seek to equip pupils with certain virtues, armed with which they can go into the world and lead exemplary lives (often with an emphasis on the heroic male virtues of courage, perseverance and endurance - rather than on the quieter, more feminine, 'domestic' virtues); or they seek to equip pupils with the capacity to make optimal rational decisions premised on universal moral principles in situations of 'high moral conflict'. In both cases, what is ignored is who we are as individuals, the situation we are in, and, above all, the reciprocal nature of caring human relations. The aim of moral education is not to equip pupils to pursue some pre-formulated ideal of the good life but rather to foster the capacity to establish and sustain caring relations between people.

As I noted in the Introduction, this amounts to a radical critique of liberal education with implications both for its moral dimension and for the content of the curriculum. On the face of it, Noddings' proposition is (I think) an attractive one; and it chimes in many respects with what I have argued in this thesis - in particular, with my argument that we should recognise the value of ordinary people's engagement in ordinary activities reflecting ordinary concerns and interests.

Critics have highlighted a number of potential problems with care ethics: that it does not constitute a distinct moral theory but rather is an amalgam of others; that virtue ethics can easily incorporate care as one of the virtues; that care ethics focuses on personal relations rather than distant others and therefore lacks a broader sense of social justice; and finally that it provides little concrete guidance on how to act morally or ethically (a criticism that could also be levelled at virtue ethics). However, I think there are some specific problems with conceiving the moral or ethical life solely in terms of ‘an ethics of care’ – problems that relate to the themes I have been developing in this thesis.

First, ‘care’ as conceived by Noddings incorporates and conflates a multitude of overlapping dispositions, attitudes, qualities, feelings, interests, passions, commitments, values, beliefs, traits and causes. These include love, affection, sympathy, compassion, empathy, benevolence, *agape*, charity, kindness, pity, respect, humility, recognition, tolerance, a sense of fairness, courtesy – all of which are conceptually complex and arise out of some combination of self-interest (the hope of reciprocal favours), rational utilitarian calculation (for example, ‘will I be happier as a consequence?’), Kantian moral obligation (or some other set of moral first principles), innate moral sympathy, raw emotion, religious or quasi-religious calling and habituated virtue. To argue that the prime aim of education should be to ‘encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving and lovable people’ (Noddings, 1992, p. xiv) is a sentiment with which few would disagree, but it could not serve as a practical curricular aim – an aim that could be realised through a particular kind of curriculum.

Second, Nodding’s umbrella term ‘care’ conflates the attitudes and dispositions listed above with something that is categorically quite distinct: the emotional capacity to form relationships. I would question the extent to which the capacity to form relationships (which is central to Noddings’ ethics of care) can be trained or cultivated at all. Most people learn to form healthy personal and work relationships through normal social forms of interaction. It is the mark of a normal person, of a person who enjoys ‘mental health’, to have precisely this capacity. People who have difficulty forming normal relationships are generally regarded as suffering from

some form of psychiatric disorder, from mental ill-health, and possibly as benefiting from therapeutic or medical treatment. Such difficulties are often connected with a failure to develop the intrinsic self-esteem that flows from unconditional parental acceptance or from other forms of traumatic childhood experience. Differences in innate personality and temperament are also relevant here. For example, Susan Cain has documented how natural introverts are particularly susceptible to low self-esteem as a result of adverse childhood experiences, and how they differ from extraverts in their manner of expressing their feelings depending on the setting and the circumstances; so whereas in certain circumstances and social settings, extraverts will be in their element, in other settings, it will be introverts (Cain, 2013). My point is that very different sorts of caring relationships are possible depending on the personalities, backgrounds and circumstances of the people involved; and the attempt to foster particular types of caring attitude or to hold up particular types of relationship as models of care would therefore be difficult. It would be more practicable, educationally, to forget about relationships and simply foster the virtues.

Third, why should a curriculum of academic subject disciplines necessarily be antithetical to the fostering of caring relations between pupils and teachers, or to an ethos of care in a school? Equally, why should the institution of a curriculum consisting of practical and domestic subjects or topics produce more caring relations between pupils and teachers? Good schools regard pastoral care as central to their mission. The nature of the subject matter does not necessarily determine the nature of pupil-teacher relations at all.

Fourth, and finally, I have argued in this thesis that any activity, any engagement in learning (academic or non-academic), must have something of the nature of initiation into a practice if it is to be really worthwhile. And central to the notion of a practice is that the novice recognises the authority and expertise of the master – at least in the early stages of learning. Now the master or expert may well care deeply for the pupil or novice, but I doubt very much whether the nature of the relationship or the care involved will be of the kind Noddings envisages, particularly since she argues for an integrated curriculum cooperatively constructed by teachers and students in which ‘the worship of expertise must go’ and be replaced by Socratic

inquiry (Noddings, 1992, pp. 175-9). I think there is a strong case for an integrated curriculum so far as ‘general knowledge’ is concerned (as I argued in Chapter 7), but grammar and rhetoric are very much disciplines, the stories of experience contained in the humanities cannot be chosen by pupils (though there is an element of inquiry contained in any discussion of them), and specialist study *must* have the nature of engagement in a practice, and hence involve a measure of submission to authority, if it is to be worthwhile.

For all these reasons, I have doubts whether an ethics of care holds the answers. However, as I have argued, I think Noddings is right to question the value of a universal academic curriculum, right to value ordinary people’s engagement in ordinary activities, and right to emphasise the need to ‘provide all our children with practice in caring’ (p. 52).

An ethics of ‘the Other’

Another radical challenge to traditional virtue ethics, to notions of character building and habituation, comes from proponents of an ethics of ‘the Other’. This approach, closely associated with the work of Emmanuel Levinas, has attracted considerable recent interest in philosophy of education because it rejects liberal utilitarian assumptions concerning the autonomous desire-satisfying individual endowed with contractual rights *and* it rejects romantic notions of the authentic subjective inner self in search of expression (both of which have the effect of detaching people from their social attachments and relationships with others¹⁴), and instead asserts, or reasserts, ‘ethics as first philosophy’. It does not have recourse to

¹⁴ At the beginning of Chapter 1, I characterised the reaction to ‘Enlightenment rationality’ as a ‘broad humanist-communitarian-Aristotelian’ revival, and located my (starting) position as broadly Aristotelian. In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor identifies the Enlightenment and Romantic traditions as constitutive of the modern conception of self, according to which our identity is located in an authentic subjective inner self and the purpose of life is the pursuit of self-fulfilment on the part of autonomous beings; the result is that there is a deficit of ‘moral sources’ in relation to which goods worth striving for might be located, and people turn to therapy for a cure (Taylor, 1992). Paul Standish argues that the result of this ‘presumption in favour of the primacy of ontology over ethics’, this naturalising of ethics, is the ‘emptiness, indeed nihilism’ that characterises so much of contemporary moral discourse (Standish, 2001, p. 339-41).

initiation into a moral tradition (with its connotations of transmission and habituation - or 'reproduction', as critical theorists would have it), or to 'totalising' systems of morality, or to the crude calculus of the critical theorists, who would reduce all relations to power struggles and who seek justice through the abolition of inequality. Instead, it locates the ethical in a person's face-to-face encounters with 'the Other', encounters that awaken a sense of responsibility and transcendence of self that is constitutive of our very consciousness and sense of subjective being, and therefore stands prior to our rationality; in other words, it is constitutive of our ends or goods.

A full exploration of this radical yet thoughtful approach to ethical education is beyond the scope of this thesis but I would like to make some comments in the light of the broadly Aristotelian position I have argued. First, it seems to me that in regarding ethics as arising out of the primordial pre-cognitive experience of face-to-face encounters with the Other, Levinas neglects that from the very beginning human beings come into consciousness *as social beings*, as persons and as selves who exist and define themselves *in relation* to others. They are progressively socialised through upbringing, through schooling and through their engagement in a variety of practices, all of which play a part in forming them as ethical beings. Since their encounters with others are necessarily mediated through social structures and practices, the structures and practices that mediate their perceptions, I cannot see how these encounters can be regarded as giving rise to some pre-cognitive ethical experience. Second, I think that too much ethical significance is read into this putative relation with 'the Other'. Why should a mere encounter or series of encounters cause us to recognise the Other's vulnerability, evoke a sense of ethical responsibility on our part, or release us from enslavement to our selfish interest? Would *any* encounter with *any* person in *any* circumstances contain the possibility of producing or contributing to the desired effect; or must we be pre-disposed to being affected, perhaps by our personality, needs and interests, character or sensibility? I suspect that the same sorts of objections can be raised against the ethics of the Other as I detailed in Chapter 1 in relation to the Kantian notion of the autonomous actor willing the Moral Law out of rational necessity; namely, that there is no explanation supplied of why a person should behave rationally, or ethically, in the first place. We remain stuck in the world of inert ideas.

‘Relational pedagogy’ could be criticised on similar grounds. Education is seen as comprising a series of encounters in which the pupil or student is awakened to ‘new beginnings’ (Jones, 2014, p. 198), ‘journeys of transformation’ (p. 194), and ‘transcendent aspects of becoming’ (Todd, 2014, p. 231). The prosaic task of initiating into established practices within a cultural tradition, and mastering bodies of knowledge and skill, is, by contrast, merely reproductive. That education might prepare pupils to lead ‘a good life’, and that this need not involve ‘transformative’ experiences (though it will certainly be a ‘formative’ experience), has been overlooked. Overblown talk of the pedagogic encounter and its centrality to human existence neglects that the defining experiences and encounters in a person’s life may have nothing to do with teachers or with ‘education’ at all.

Christine Winter (2014) distinguishes traditional forms of curriculum knowledge (prescriptive, ‘totalising’ and instrumental) that are ‘imposed’ on the student without regard for his or her needs from the sort of knowledge that might be developed if the pedagogical relation between teacher and student were recognised as ethical (or ‘ethically just’) in the sense imagined by Levinas. A range of alternative ways of knowing that ‘respect the life-worlds and perspectives of the other’ could thereby be opened up - ways of knowing that ‘fascinate, puzzle and excite the learner’. Students would be involved in ‘making meaning for themselves’ and ‘learning to become’; teachers would acknowledge that school subjects ‘adopt a questioning role towards their own other knowledge’, ‘open knowledge up’ and ‘find a way to read “otherwise”’; and they would generate ‘inventive responses to the needs of the other’ and open up language ‘to fresh understandings of the world’ (Winter, 2014, pp. 286-9). But how do we go about identifying ‘the needs’ of the student? How for that matter do students identify their own authentic needs? Is the student assumed to be an autonomous sovereign chooser making rational choices; or are the student’s needs assumed to be defined by pre-existing ‘life-worlds and perspectives’, in which case, are all life-worlds and perspectives to be regarded as equally valid? Perhaps the intention here is to encourage a greater awareness of the needs of oppressed or marginalised minorities, ‘to see what or who may have been overlooked, marginalised and omitted in the process of curriculum-making’ (p. 280), and this is a perfectly valid concern. But again, I am not sure how the mere encounter with the

Other in the classroom, the pedagogic relationship, could realistically be the source of this greater awareness. Teachers and students alike would, I suspect, learn far more from the experience of service learning – i.e. through real life experience.

Moreover, how can one question a body of knowledge or ‘read it otherwise’ without prior acquaintance with it? And don’t existing subjects already encompass a range of alternative views and traditions? My point is that without prior initiation into subject disciplines and practices in general, a process that inevitably involves an element of ‘coercion and compliance’, talk of re-creating and reimagining them is little more than pie in the sky. Even for students who have gained a degree of mastery of their subject, the expectation that they will be fascinated and excited by their engagement in the critical and creative exploration of alternative understandings assumes (as I have argued throughout this thesis) that everyone ought to be a philosopher or a research scientist; and this is simply unrealistic.

The approach of Paul Standish in ‘Ethics before Equality: moral education after Levinas’ (2001) is, I think, more measured and thoughtful than that of some of the proponents of relational pedagogy. I agree with much of what he says concerning the primacy of ethics over atomising ontology, and I am in complete accord with his concluding words:

Education at its best ... must be suggestive of the good life and of the compelling and absolute obligation that this imposes on us. (Standish, 2001, p. 346)

But I do not see how Standish’s recognition that the background on which our deliberations rely comprises ‘our accustomed practices’ can be squared with his statement in the same paragraph that this same background ‘could never be the scene of foundational activity’ (p. 347). Standish argues that this background is ‘one of provisionality, of taking things this way or that through our accustomed practices’, but aren’t our accustomed practices *necessarily* foundational? The person who is capable of radical innovation may well regard an established practice as provisional

with a view to formulating (in Kuhnian terms) ‘a new paradigm’ - though even in this case, their education would have begun with initiation into the existing paradigm. But as I have argued in this thesis, this is the exception rather than the rule. Again, the tacit assumption is that to lead a good life, everyone must be a radical innovator, a critic or a creative thinker.¹⁵

The philosopher might well find the ethics of the Other fruitful as a form of discourse, as an approach to conceptualising ethics that seems to capture certain truths concerning the human condition without recourse to discredited ‘foundational’ belief systems; and this outlook is understandable for a person who by profession and by nature is given to engage in critical thinking, or ‘rationally critical thinking’ or ‘thinking about thinking’ (Quinton, 1995, p. 666). But to argue that people, including philosophers, can be motivated to lead ethical lives on this basis, or that children should be educated on this basis, is, I think, unrealistic and misguided. Standish’s concern is that virtue ethics is ‘foundational’, that this implies a defence of the *status quo*, ‘a resignedness to what cannot be changed’ (Standish, 2001, p. 347). My argument in this thesis is neither radical nor conservative; rather, it is, quite simply, that the ordinary life, ‘the unexamined life’, can also be the good life.

¹⁵ Noddings’ ethics of care, which I have criticised in this chapter, nevertheless has, I think, a firmer foundation than the ethics of the Other - certainly a firmer foundation than the position of those who argue for relational pedagogy: first, it recognises the value of the ordinary life, and second, it recognises that it is only through repeated practice from an early age that values and virtues (specifically the caring virtues) can be cultivated.

Conclusion

I have set out in this thesis to justify a conception of education that is liberal in the sense that it involves the formation or cultivation of a person in a moral and cultural inheritance. However, whereas liberal education has traditionally been associated with producing a governing elite and has involved a curriculum that is literary and academic in nature, my conception of a moral and cultural inheritance into which pupils might be initiated incorporates the practical engagements of ordinary life and work - engagements which have just as much value as philosophy and politics. In this respect, I differ from those philosophers of education who conceive the aim of education to be the production of autonomous citizens and critical thinkers, and who, though they might not subscribe to a liberal education in the formative sense or to a curriculum of academic subject disciplines, nevertheless conceive education in distinctly intellectualist terms - i.e. as producing critical thinkers and problem solvers. My approach opens up the possibility of a quite different sort of curriculum, a curriculum incorporating core subjects and activities other than the literary and academic, yet serving liberal ends; in other words, a curriculum that forms or cultivates pupils morally and intellectually, and that prepares them to lead a good and fulfilled life, but does not 'train' them for any specific occupation.

In Part 1, I questioned the assumption of many philosophers of education that the overriding aim of education should be to endow people with 'personal autonomy' - autonomy in the sense of possessing the capacity to articulate and justify (i.e. to reflect 'critically' on) one's underlying moral principles and values. There were several strands to my argument: (1) that the values and interests that might enable people to transcend their appetitive desires and lead a worthwhile life - a 'good life' - cannot be deduced *a priori* by appeal to pure reason but must be located in a social, cultural and linguistic tradition; (2) that these values must in large part be habituated in upbringing and schooling - otherwise people will not be sufficiently motivated to act on them; (3) that the reflective engagement in the practices of ordinary life simply does not require (and *could not* require) 'critical' reflection on the nature of

the underlying ‘paradigmatic’ principles, values and goods of these practices; (4) that since the goods of practices are heterogeneous in nature, and can only be fully appreciated by engagement in the respective practices, rational deliberation and critical reflection cannot on their own furnish optimal solutions to moral conflict - to live ethically is as much a matter of discharging the duties, obligations and commitments that one has chosen to undertake; and (5) that it is in the nature of a moral and cultural tradition (particularly when it is liberal and secular, less so when it is tribal or theocratic in nature) that it encompasses people’s experiences of pursuing heterogeneous goods and living with moral conflict, even with tragedy. Instead of personal autonomy, I concluded that the primary aim of school education should be the cultivation in pupils of certain core virtues, moral and intellectual – virtues that would enable pupils to engage in worthwhile activities (i.e. in activities from which the goods of ‘practices’ can be derived) and thereby gain the sense of justified self-worth and self-respect that is essential for human fulfilment, as well as being the essential pre-condition for active and responsible citizenship in a liberal society.

In Part 2, I supplemented this aim of cultivating the virtues with a second aim, namely that of cultivating - through a training in rhetoric, through insights drawn from the stories of human experience of the humanities, and guided by the virtues - the capacity to make practical judgements on human affairs, particularly where conflicts arise between rival goods¹. I also explored the possible nature of a curriculum that would realise these liberal aims, and concluded that it should have the following characteristics. First, it should involve the specialised study of at least one subject, a subject that need not be academic in nature but that must have the characteristics of a practice and, so far as possible, be wholeheartedly engaged in. It would thereby serve to cultivate the virtues, primarily intellectual but also moral, that are essential for adult engagement in practices. Second, literacy should be conceived primarily in rhetorical terms as the capacity to exercise practical judgement, a capacity developed in part by training in the art of prose writing and in part through a

¹ This capacity might be termed *phronesis*, not in the sense of an architectonic virtue that produces optimal judgements (I argued against this in Chapter 2), but rather in the sense of the capacity to make practical judgements - judgements that are ethical in that they issue from a person who has a virtuous character and a degree of ethical insight.

study of ‘the stories of human experience’ of the humanities - primarily history and (English) literature. Third, the moral virtues should be cultivated through a school ethos that reinforces and habituates them, through adventurous and challenging activity outside the classroom, and through service to others. The last two are particularly powerful in that they force pupils to discover for themselves the value of the virtues. Fourth, if as I have argued there is little value in a curriculum of subject disciplines as a means of training the mind or introducing ‘forms of knowledge’, then much of the curriculum might be reorganised into courses that are general, descriptive and practical in nature, with material organised by topical theme where appropriate, and with optional as well as compulsory components. Theoretical disciplinary treatment would be delayed till later.

A legitimate concern with the sort of curriculum I am advocating here would be that it closes down options for academic or literary study too early. My counter argument would be that by seeking to introduce disciplinary study too early, the current curriculum actively alienates those pupils who do not have a particular aptitude for it and who are not going on to specialise in academic subjects at university; and that it fails to provide a satisfactory general education – a *liberal* education – for anybody. Certainly, the great canon of Western literature, art and science (incorporating the academic subject disciplines) is an integral part of the moral and cultural inheritance; and a liberal curriculum should introduce these to pupils. But there is no way (I have argued) that the school curriculum can do any *more* than introduce them and perhaps whet the appetite for further study on the part of those pupils who have the aptitude and the interest. There is, however, value to all pupils in learning something of the goods worth striving for, the virtues worth exercising, and of the conflicts, dilemmas and tragedies that result when these goods and virtues come into conflict; and it is the supreme value of the humanities that they constitute a compendium of human experience in these areas. The study of novels, plays, poems and shorter stories belonging to the literary canon may well form part of this humane education, but the main purpose of the study is not to engage in literary criticism or aesthetic appreciation, rather to illuminate the human condition - and therefore popular literature, film and television would also form an integral part of this humane education.

The most significant critique of the current school curriculum in recent years is *Rethinking the School Curriculum* (2004) edited by John White. Though particular details might be disputed, the central argument – which is that the curriculum of academic subject disciplines as currently constituted does not match the stated aims of the National Curriculum, that in fact the curriculum has no reasonable or coherent rationale other than that it has existed roughly in its current form for around a hundred years² – is, I think, indisputable. One only has to consider the pronouncements of policy makers, both on the right and the left. In so far as any aims are attributed to school education (apart from the ‘basic skills’ of literacy and numeracy, ‘five good GCSEs’, and a higher position in the international league tables) they seem to revolve around ‘rigour’ – that academic subjects have the greatest rigour and that the more ‘rigorous’ the content, the greater is their educational value. However, the nature of the mental training and intellectual demands involved in the average pupil scraping a grade C in a GCSE, or the value of the knowledge and skill thereby acquired, is questionable. For example, proponents of the traditional curriculum generally assume that it should include the study of a modern foreign language on vocational grounds (one acquires a useful skill), educational grounds (intellectual rigour is involved), ethical grounds (pupils should be exposed to other cultures) and on grounds of personal fulfilment. But as Kevin Williams argues, it is questionable whether any of these aims, valuable though they are, are achieved other than for a minority of pupils - and then only to a very limited degree; in any case, there are much better ways of attaining these aims (for example, intensive summer courses and exchanges) than teaching a foreign language four times a week in a classroom. Young people might be compelled to study a foreign language for a year or two on the grounds of entitlement, but further classroom study should be optional (Williams, 2004, pp. 117-27). The same types of argument can be adduced for a range of other traditional subjects.

Where I disagree with John White, is in his proposition that the fundamental aim of school education should be to prepare pupils for lives as autonomous citizens in a liberal democracy. In one sense, no reasonable person could dispute this proposition.

² John White traces it specifically to the 1904 Secondary (grammar) curriculum framework (White, 2004, p. 180).

As I argued in the introduction, it would be odd to argue that the aim of education should be to train people for pre-allotted roles in a totalitarian state. The problem lies in what is entailed by ‘personal autonomy’. The question is how we are to prepare pupils for lives as autonomous citizens leading fulfilled and flourishing lives. The central argument of my thesis is that the best way to prepare pupils is not to seek to arm them with the capacity to make rational choices concerning their preferred ends and the means that would best attain these ends, or to choose between ‘competing ways of life, activities, belief systems, careers’ (White, 2004, p. 22)³; but to cultivate a range of moral and intellectual virtues – virtues that are mediated through a moral and cultural inheritance and can only be fostered through a process of habituation.

Perhaps the most significant attempt to reconceptualise the traditional idea of a liberal education, to frame a curriculum that prepares for life by cultivating the whole person (as opposed to merely the intellect), is D G Mulcahy’s in *The Educated Person: Toward a New Paradigm for Liberal Education* (2008a). The value of Mulcahy’s study lies, I think, in its taking us beyond the traditional battle lines (i.e. of being either for or against liberal education narrowly conceived as a curriculum of academic subject disciplines) and engaging in an analysis of the liberal ideal that is critical but also appreciative of its potential value. However, like White, Mulcahy sees people as being engaged in a sort of managerial planning of their lives for optimal results: ‘To live as a human being is to be seeking goals and to be active ... in their pursuit’ (Mulcahy, 2008a, p. 106); and ‘the rationally inspired life of a human being ... requires of us that we select means appropriate to the ends that we have in view’ (p. 167). As for these goals and ends, ‘the ultimate purpose of liberal education as conceived here is to enable the student *to define for himself or herself ... the good life* [my italics]’ (p. 188). By contrast, I am arguing that the only source of ends (unless the ends in question are material and appetitive) is a moral and cultural inheritance into which a person has been initiated; that activities are worthwhile because they initiate into practices whose goods can only fully be appreciated by practitioners; and that to become a successful practitioner, and to lead a good life, requires prior habituation into the requisite virtues. That it initiates into a moral and cultural inheritance, and that it thereby cultivates a person as a moral and rational

³ White terms this general skill or capacity ‘practical rationality’ (p. 184).

being, is, for me, the essential characteristic of the idea of a liberal education. By neglecting this central characteristic, Mulcahy has been able to incorporate in his paradigm a range of new aims and concerns: interdisciplinary areas of study, the caring virtues, building on the experiences of students as starting points for learning, knowledge creation through problem solving, and the insights of critical pedagogy - *as well as* the study of the academic disciplines and the attitudes associated with them (p. 187). But without the initiation into a moral and cultural inheritance in some shape or form, it is difficult to see how these disparate aims can be integrated into a coherent whole, or judged liberal in any meaningful sense.

The best known proponent of the argument for bridging the traditional divide between liberal education and vocational preparation – for ‘liberalising the vocational track’ and ‘vocationalising the liberal one’ – is Richard Pring in *Closing the Gap: Liberal education and vocational preparation*⁴ (Pring, 1995, p. 65). Many of Pring’s underlying assumptions and concerns are ones that I share and have sought to address in this thesis: that liberal education’s traditional conception of the educated person is narrowly intellectual and elitist; that it ignores (even disdains) the goods and dimensions of experience associated with the vocational, the practical and the useful; that it does little to prepare for citizenship or for life; and that it is only accessible to a minority, with the consequence that either we assume that ‘only a few are capable of being educated’ and the rest must be consigned for vocational training, or we assume that since academic subjects are the only ones that are worth studying at school, all will benefit from studying them ‘irrespective of the interest that young people find in them’ (pp. 120-1). Above all, I agree with Pring that any discussion of education or curriculum must begin by asking what it *means* to be an educated person – or to put it another way, by asking what it means to be a person capable of leading a life that is fulfilled and worthwhile in the broadest sense.

⁴ Pring’s ‘liberal vocationalism’ underpinned the 2009 Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training entitled ‘Education For All’ (Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training, 2009). The knowledge, capabilities and qualities deemed necessary to produce ‘an educated 19 year-old’ were those that Pring had earlier outlined in *Closing the Gap*.

However, I differ from Pring in a number of important respects. Though I have argued that all pupils will benefit from the study of the humanities conceived as stories of human experience, and from the study of a range of subjects and topics treated at a level that is general and descriptive in nature, I do not think that specialised study can or need be conceived as requiring ‘the liberal to be vocationalised’ or ‘the vocational to be liberalised’. There is no need for the student who engages in a specialised study of the classics or physics to be concerned with the practical or the useful any more than for the student who engages as an apprentice in a practical study of building crafts or digital media or fashion design to be concerned with the pursuit of the truth for its own sake. So long as the activities engaged in are conceived as practices in the fullest and broadest sense (and not merely as ‘on-the-job’ training) and involve the disciplined acquisition of a complex body of knowledge and skill, a range of virtues and capacities are cultivated; and it is the acquisition of these virtues and capacities that justifies the engagement in specialist study. Pring argues that a broadly-based general education that prepares for life and work (i.e. that is ‘prevocational’) might involve activities in school that ‘reflect the activities of the world outside the school, arise from the students’ own interests and problems, and have the same sort of ‘messiness’ that real-life problems have’ (p. 64). But though this might be argued up to a point, the danger is that such a curriculum would lack any real academic discipline and thus degenerate into ‘watered-down life-adjustment courses’ that ‘bear very little resemblance to genuine education’ (Lawton, 1973, pp. 112-5)⁵. Pring argues that the emphasis ‘is not upon the content to be covered, as in the academic tradition, nor upon specific competences as in the vocational tradition, but upon general capacities for living effectively and upon the processes of learning, of problem-solving, of cooperating and of enquiring’ (Pring, 1995, p. 79). But this misses the point that general capacities - and the intellectual virtues in particular - are best developed through specialised study that involves the mastery of specific skills and competences.

⁵ Denis Lawton was commenting on the supposedly ‘practical’ and ‘realistic’ courses ushered in by the Newsom Report of 1963 – courses designed to keep soon-to-be-school-leavers ‘quiet’ and prevent them from ‘breaking up the furniture’ (p. 115).

Finally, Pring's catalogue of the qualities needed to be 'a whole person' - an educated person - reveals the very intellectualist bias that he identifies in the traditional conception of liberal education. According to Pring, to be a whole person requires, among other things, the disposition 'of testing out and sharing beliefs, of openness to new ideas but also scepticism towards untested claims'; 'welcoming clarity and analytic sharpness and disdaining the bland and obfuscating'; 'the ability to think beyond the given, to make links between the present and the past often in a most unlikely way'; the ability 'to re-interpret experience ... through metaphor drawn from other fields of discourse'; 'the skills of inquiry'; 'the habit of self-reflection and the readiness to face one's interior thoughts'; and a 'seriousness' in 'coming to understand and to articulate' one's 'experience of living' (pp. 130-1). Of course, all these things are laudable; but, once again, we have the philosopher of education's over-intellectualised vision of the good life. The possibility that the good life need not involve the sort of critical reflection and self-examination that the academic or intellectual or literary critic is given to engaging in has been neglected. Once again, it has been overlooked that 'the unexamined life', too, might be worth living.

I have not addressed the claims of postmodern and critical theory in this thesis – claims that, if upheld, would undermine much of my argument. A full consideration is beyond the scope of this thesis, but my main concern is a straightforward one: the failure (as I see it) to specify the nature of the emancipating utopia that would replace capitalism and liberal democracy as currently conceived, and thereby abolish inequality and injustice. To answer that 'the point of Critical Theory is not that it envisages "a positive utopia" but that it is informed by a sharpened experience of the actual and intolerable injustice of the world as it currently exists' (Blake & Masschelein, 2003, p. 55) – i.e. that there is no need to specify any alternative, merely to question the *status quo* and to exercise one's transformational and consciousness raising capacities - is, I think, an evasion given what we know of the Holocaust and the horrors of twentieth-century totalitarianism. Service learning, the engagement with real people – people who, it could be argued, are the victims of injustice or oppression - is, I would argue, a more effective means of raising consciousness of the possibility of transformation (personal, social, economic and political) in ways that are likely to be fruitful and practicable. However, as I noted in

Chapter 4, the question of how to improve in practical ways the quality of people's lives and working conditions, and how to create opportunities for people to lead more fulfilled lives (both at home and around the world), is essentially a political one and demands political action; and my arguments in this thesis certainly do not preclude the possibility of more radical transformation.

I do not claim in this thesis to have constructed 'the definitive curriculum'. I am simply exploring the educational and curriculum implications of adopting a certain philosophical view of what would constitute *a good life* for any human being. Indeed, I think that even to ask the question 'what is a good life?', to recognise that the question is worth asking, leads us ineluctably to postulate that the good life is the life of a person cultivated in some sense as a moral and rational being; and therefore that education must be *liberal* if it is prepare people to lead a good life. Unfortunately, the education debate has been beset here by a lack of clarity concerning justified educational aims, the nature of liberal education, the nature of 'mental training', the value of practical subjects, the nature of moral knowledge and ethical life, the nature of worthwhile activity - and, above all, concerning what might constitute 'a good life'. My hope is that this thesis will shed at least some light on these questions and contribute ultimately to a more coherent school curriculum and to better lives.

Appendix

Some reflections on teachers as critical inquirers

These reflections arise out of informal observations of my teaching colleagues in a variety of schools over a 20-year period. I have come to the conclusion that despite education being riven to a much greater degree than most other professions and practices by competing theories and claims, often highly politicised¹, and being characterised by a succession of initiatives and models of ‘best practice’, the vast majority of teachers have minimal interest in the philosophical, theoretical and political underpinnings of their practice. My experience is that they are only interested in these underpinnings when they impinge directly on classroom practice, and even then, they are rarely motivated to engage in any sort of sustained critical consideration of them. Their concern is simply to get on with the job within the constraints imposed, to do the best job they can in the classroom by drawing on their knowledge, skill and experience of what works *in practice*. Headteachers, subject coordinators and local authority coordinators might have more of an interest in the underlying theory of their respective subjects, but even then, the concern is overwhelmingly with research findings, initiatives and projects that might contribute at a practical classroom level to improved teaching and learning.

If some philosophers of education are to be believed, teachers (so long as they are given the opportunity and the encouragement) are reflective practitioners who wish to engage in sustained critical reflection on the nature of their practice, reflection that might well take the form of action research; who wish to engage in critical reflection not merely on the theory underlying classroom practice and subject teaching (‘didactics’), but on the very nature of teaching and learning as engagements – i.e. on the nature of the goods associated with education. Teachers

¹ These claims concern, among other things, the aims of education (a particular concern of philosophy of education), how children learn (theories of learning), how children should be taught (didactics), what they should be taught (the areas of curriculum construction and selection), how teachers should be trained and how the school system should be organised. Even an issue as simple as ‘how to teach reading’ is embroiled in controversy and highly politicised – witness the expression ‘the reading wars’.

might even effect a radical re-conceptualisation of their practice from the grass roots. Chris Higgins, for example, argues that if teachers are to flourish as professionals, they need to ‘confront a fundamental existential tension: we exist for ourselves and for others’, and if they are to foster self-cultivation in students they need to be engaged in an ongoing process of self-cultivation themselves (Higgins, 2001, pp. 190-1). But my experience is (1) that the vast majority of teachers have no interest in such ‘critical’ reflection - they just want to get on with the job; and (2) that their ordinary (as opposed to ‘critical’) engagement in the practice of teaching in no way diminishes their capacity to realise its goods and lead a fulfilled life, or their moral or ethical stature. By the same token, those few practitioners who do choose to engage in research or philosophy of education, because they happen to have the interest, the motivation and the aptitude to do so (and perhaps because their personality inclines them to close analysis and theoretical abstractions) are not on that account realising greater goods or attaining a superior level of moral judgement. It is in the very nature of a practice that though its goods are continually evolving in response to needs and circumstances, and though *particular* practitioners – usually researchers or philosophers (or teachers engaged in research) - might be engaged in ‘critical’ reflection on the nature of these goods and in radical innovation, the goods themselves can only be realised through the ordinary engagement in practices.

That most teachers prefer to escape completely from teaching in their spare time to engage in other activities, pastimes or practices (rather than engage in research) is therefore not a sign that they are lesser professionals; it might even be considered a sign of mental health. One colleague (a historian) told me that he had once been on a philosophy of education course but that he could not ‘see the point’. I think this attitude, which is a perfectly healthy and normal one, and which I suspect would be shared by most practitioners, illustrates my argument.

The same lack of interest applies to the *Times Educational Supplement*. There are often multiple copies on staff room tables but teachers rarely look at it except for the jobs section (this is true of all the schools I have ever worked in, both state and

private)². I fear that a copy of the *Journal of Philosophy of Education* would evoke a mix of laughter and anger (anger at the apparently irrelevant, even indulgent, nature of the themes – themes that could only be taken seriously by those who do not have to teach in schools). True, some philosophers of education express concern that their discipline is too detached from practical educational concerns. John White attributes the problem to philosophers failing to address the practical consequences of their speculations – in particular, the consequences for the school curriculum. I agree this is one aspect of the problem; but I think there is an even more fundamental problem, the one that has formed a central theme of this thesis, namely that many philosophers of education mistakenly assume that only the life of critical inquiry and reflection (‘the examined life’) is worth living.

My argument so far is premised on the assumption that teaching is a practice with an agreed though evolving body of knowledge and skill into which practitioners must be initiated. However, it could be argued that teaching has the characteristics of a practice only to a limited degree; in particular, that it does not have the accumulated conceptually complex body of knowledge and skill that characterises such practices as medicine, accountancy, law, engineering or plumbing. Dan Lortie argues that teaching cannot be regarded as a full profession because it lacks the codified, systematic body of professional knowledge and technical language, the ‘distillation of generations of practitioner effort’, that characterises other professions (Lortie, 1969, pp. 24 & 29). And Lee Shulman notes that ‘one of the frustrations of teaching as an occupation and profession [*sic*] is its extensive individual and collective amnesia ... It is devoid of a history of practice’ (Shulman, 1999, p. 68). There is nothing comparable to the sort of sustained study or apprenticeship that doctors, nurses, lawyers and plumbers (for example) have to undergo; rather, a mix of theory, history, information, practical tips and on-the-job training which often leaves trainee teachers complaining that their training is irrelevant to their practical needs - apart, that is, from the ‘on the job’ element. So, for example, the constant complaint of fellow students on my PGCE course was that they were not being told *what* to teach or *how* to teach it – i.e. they were not given practical training; instead,

² I have quite often taken old copies home for reference, but I make sure no-one sees me doing so. I do not wish to be considered eccentric.

they were getting theoretical abstractions and idealistic visions which left them reflective but practically clueless in the classroom. Twenty years on, teacher training is much more akin to practical training and there is more emphasis on training ‘on the job’. There is a clear and detailed conception of the ingredients of a successful teacher and a successful school – i.e. of what constitutes ‘best practice’.

Unfortunately the model is also highly bureaucratic and politicised. Teachers have, in the process, become little more than functionaries who have to meet performance and competency criteria, to ‘deliver’ model lessons and model schemes of work that accord with whatever happens to pass currently for ‘best practice’³. As a result - and this is one of the most depressing features of teaching in the English state sector - the experience and judgement of the individual practitioner seem to count for nothing.

One possible solution would be to found teachers’ professionalism on teachers’ capacity to transform and reformulate their subject knowledge into a suitable form for teaching and learning (Shulman, 1999, pp. 70-75). ‘Pedagogical content knowledge’ would thereby serve as the knowledge base that teaching lacks and enhance its professional status (p. 64). Such an approach would accord well with the apprenticeship model of learning that I have argued for in this thesis. It is the root of teachers’ professionalism in the private sector, where teachers are by and large trusted to get on with the job, instead of being micromanaged. And it goes some way to answering MacIntyre’s concern that ‘teaching does not have its own goods’ (and is therefore not a practice), rather that the goods of teaching reside in the subject matter into which pupils are initiated (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002, p. 9). But it assumes a liberal ‘transmission’ conception of education, a conception that involves ‘the whole cultural formation of the student’ – the antithesis of the current conception of school ‘as an input-output machine’ (p. 4).

³ By ‘best practice’, I mean the teaching methods that are thought by researchers to be most effective. The criteria by which research studies are selected and judged, and according to which school effectiveness is measured, are of course selected by politicians, bureaucrats and their educational advisors. Best practice, so defined, is then enforced by Ofsted. Unfortunately, research evidence in the social sciences (particularly in education) is notoriously unreliable and subject to innumerable sources of error and bias. The underlying problems are, first, that it is impossible to conduct a fair test by isolating and controlling the variables; and, second, that it is questionable whether variables of any validity can be identified and measured in the first place.

It could be argued, then, that it is precisely because teaching lacks a substantive body of professional knowledge and skill (as opposed to various classroom skills that can only be learned ‘on the job’), that it is because it is not a practice (or a profession) in the full sense of the term, that it is prey to the imposition of bureaucratic managerial ‘systems’ models of best practice, and to a continual stream of initiatives all of which, it is claimed, are based on the latest ‘research evidence’. It does not help that education itself is, perhaps inevitably, highly politicised; that educationalists and politicians dispute the very aims of education, with some regarding education in traditional liberal terms (as constituting an end in itself) and others seeing education as a means of instituting egalitarian ideals of social justice. Teachers frequently complain that their ‘professionalism’ is being undermined by the employment of those without ‘proper’ teaching qualifications or who have been ‘fast tracked’ into teaching from other professions. But that this debate is even taking place is symptomatic. One would be hard put to imagine anyone suggesting that people could be ‘fast tracked’ into medicine, law, plumbing or hairdressing with minimal training and yet that their performance would be unimpaired.

However, despite all this, and despite the contested nature of education in general (which one might have thought, or hoped, would prompt practitioners to engage in critical reflection on the nature of their practice), my experience is that most teachers remain concerned almost exclusively with day-to-day practice. Their concern is with teaching not as a *critical* engagement but as an *ordinary* engagement.

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