

**New Perspectives on Young Children's Moral Education: Developing Character through a Virtue Ethics Approach**, by Tony Eaude, London, Bloomsbury, 2016, 216 pp., £24.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-4725-9646-8

I am not a philosopher but I have had a number of close encounters with philosophy over many years. The first was in the 1960s, when, as a part of my programme as a Commerce undergraduate, I was required to take a module from the Humanities. This was presumably intended to have a civilizing effect on budding economists, and I opted for Philosophy. Philosophy was also a compulsory component of an in-service degree in the sociology of education which I took in the '70s, and a strand of education theory which I taught for some years in my career in teacher-education. I like to think that it has been a thread in my academic work ever since.

From that background, I have long understood moral philosophy - or 'Ethics' if you prefer - to be concerned with how one goes about answering the question "What ought I to do?" Faced with two or more courses of action (or inaction), one must exercise some kind of judgement in choosing among them. In my studies and my teaching I encountered the 'isms' of the field - emotivism, prescriptivism, utilitarianism - and, like a generation of teachers who trained in the 'seventies, learned from the works of R. S. Peters and colleagues (Peters, 1967; 1968). From them I got some grasp of the fundamental principles which underpin moral reasoning, including those of Truth-telling, Respect for Persons, Justice and Equality. To me, that was what Ethics was. That there is another kind of moral philosophy - 'Virtue Ethics' - is something of which I have become aware only in recent years, even though it is presumed by much of what is written in my own field of pastoral care and personal-social education. Clearly, there was a significant gap in my knowledge of Ethics and moral education that needed filling, and the opportunity to review this book looked like a way to start filling it.

I was not, on the whole, disappointed. The book is generally well-written, logically structured, and has a good deal to say about virtue ethics. More importantly, perhaps, it has a great deal to say about how schools should go about promoting the moral development of children, focussing on those up to the age of about 12. It is divided into three parts: 'The context of young children's moral education'; 'The roots of moral development'; and 'Routes into moral development'.

It is Eaude's opinion (p.3) that the understanding of any 'deep experience' is not achieved by argumentation that is tightly linear. Rather, this is achieved in a roundabout way, as we revisit and refine our understanding in the light of new experiences and insights. In a way reminiscent of the 'spiral curriculum' advocated by some educators, a number of themes and issues are addressed and re-addressed in each section of the book. I believe our understanding is deepened by such a process, but the 'down side' of such an approach is an inevitable (and occasionally tiresome) element of repetition.

In the first Part, Eaude identifies (pp 3-4) three main themes which run through the book:

- that living as we do in a diverse and pluralistic society means that 'we live in a time of moral uncertainty, for children and adults' ;
- that numerous aspects of education policy, including the prioritizing of the cognitive, of factual knowledge and of outcome-measurement, militate against an holistic (whole child/whole person/whole school) approach to education;
- that the dominant discourse in ethics - that of rationalism and individualism - neglects both relationships and context, and a virtue ethics approach is the means to redress the balance.

Eaude contrasts virtue ethics with 'duty ethics' - which he says is 'primarily ... about questions of

right and wrong, with a code of rules requiring little or no interpretation to determine which course of action one should adopt' (p 29) - and utilitarianism - that one should adopt that course of action which results in the greatest good/happiness for the greatest number. Virtue ethics itself, is concerned less with the question 'What ought I to do?', and much more with the questions: 'What sort of person am I/should I become in order to live a 'good life'?' and 'what sort of society do we need to enable individuals to live a 'good life'?' The answers to these questions require that we consider not only the importance of fundamental moral *principles* (Equality; Justice etc), evidenced in the *values* we live by and enact, but also the quality of *relationships* we make, the *character attributes* (resilience; empathy; kindness; honesty etc) we develop, and our *predispositions* to shape our actions accordingly. These questions seem to be prior to the (moral) judgements which teachers, educational policy-makers and school managers (not to mention curriculum and inspection authorities such as the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED)) make when they address the questions: What ought we to teach? and How ought we to teach it?

Another fundamental question is also presumed by any prescription of curriculum or pedagogy: *How do children learn?* This is addressed in the second Part. Unsurprisingly, the 'stage' theories of Piaget and Kohlberg (and Donaldson's critique), insights from neuroscience, sociological ideas about socialization and role-models, and the limits of behaviourism - but also the inescapable need on occasions for sanctions and behaviour-management - are all discussed to greater or lesser degree. But here we find also a consideration of the importance of early attachments (Bowlby), the development of (multiple) identities and of *agency*, and the processes of imitation, feedback and habituation from which they result.

The last chapter in this Part (chapter 7) struck me as particularly penetrating. It is pivotal to the book, for it addresses a key developmental question: *How do we learn to live a good life?*, and sets the scene for the final Part which considers the strategies and methods by which schools may promote such learning. It is focused on three words: *character*, *values* and *virtue*. Noting that 'character' is less used in the UK in discussing education than it is in some other countries, Eade defines it as 'an amalgam of embedded attributes which inform and encourage intrinsic motivation, or otherwise ... [and which] ... remains fairly constant and influences, rather than determines, how one acts' (p.110). Character education is therefore not to be equated with moral education because it aims to develop a number of enduring traits (such as resilience) not all of which are necessarily 'moral'. That said, character is significant for the practice of virtue, and the enactment of values in virtuous living. Importantly, virtues are predispositions to *feel* as well as to act (p.111), so that character education must entail some attention to the emotions. Eade is at pains to stress the importance of the *social* in relation to the development of virtue and the embrace of values through practice and habituation, and this leads into a telling discussion of identity and self-image, seen as constantly negotiated and adaptive in the context of relationships.

In Part Three, using some concepts new to me - 'authentic learning space', and 'hospitable space' - as well as 'inclusive learning environments', Eade argues that schools need to be characterized by a moral order which 'enables those within [them] to experience how to live a life where how one acts and interacts matters, without imposing too definite a template of what this entails' (p. 136). Shared values, appropriate codes of (negotiated) rules, the setting and maintenance of boundaries, manners and mutually respectful relationships are all important for the experience by which morality is absorbed. Moral development and character education cannot be restricted to specific programmes, such as Education in Human Values, Social & Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) or Philosophy for Children (P4C) (pp 163-166), but must permeate the whole curriculum and the social, cultural and moral fabric (the 'hidden curriculum') of the school. The place of play, playfulness, drama and the use of language in developing a 'vocabulary of ethics' are shown to be important means for encouraging empathy and thoughtfulness. The penultimate chapter closes with a succinct summary of the book's argument for a virtue ethics approach and leads into the final

chapter's short but apposite statement of its implications for ethics, children, adults and policy.

While there was little with which I found myself in disagreement, there were places where I was puzzled or doubtful about what Eade has to say. These include the question of whether his discussion of virtue ethics, 'duty ethics', and utilitarianism is sufficient, since there are other perspectives (some listed in my second paragraph) which deserve consideration. A second concern is that, given 'emotion plays a more immediate and stronger role than cognition in our responses [to experiences such as bullying], particularly for young children and those under stress' (p 27), and that 'aspects of emotion rely on cognition and aspects of cognition rely on emotion' (p 77), clarity is needed about the relationship between the two. My understanding is that emotions have elements of affect (feeling), cognition and desire and are not to be confused with *moods* or *states of mind* (Best, 2011, p 362). The distinction Eade makes between emotions and feelings on page 77 (which he borrows from Patten) seems to have got this wrong: in the examples he gives of feelings, *guilt*, *jealousy* and *pride* look to me to be *emotions* rather than feelings, while *sadness* (which he lists as a 'basic emotion'), is almost certainly a *feeling* or, for someone who is depressed, a *state of mind*.

I also wondered about the purpose of Eade's 'potted' autobiography in chapter 3. True, many of the things he reveals are issues for others, and emerge as themes throughout the book (p 44), and I think it is always good to let the reader know where the author is 'coming from' (as indeed do I, at the beginning of this review). And it is true that some differences between today's society and that of fifty years ago are evidenced in his biography, but these personal experiences are rarely referred to later on. Given the thrust of the book, I was left wondering how he would rate his own (boys-only, private, boarding) school experience in his own moral and character development, and how this influenced his perspective on education.

Bearing in mind the title, there were times when I began to wonder just how 'new' Eade's perspective is, for the kind of schooling that he advocates throughout - and especially in Part Three - strongly resembles a Plowden-inspired schooling which is inclusive, child-centred and supportive, with subject-integration, an emphasis on the 'whole child', a suspicion of externally imposed requirements, an awareness of the dangers of labelling and the 'self-fulfilling prophecy', and a model of the teacher as a responsible adult and skilled professional in whom parents and citizens may place their trust. From a secondary-school perspective, I was reminded of the vision of the Nuffield Foundation's *Humanities Curriculum Project*, of Michael Marland's concept of the 'pastoral curriculum' (Marland, 1980), and of PSHE programmes such as *Active Tutorial Work* (Baldwin & Wells, 1979). Eade's virtue ethics approach may well constitute a 'new perspective', but it has led less to the discovery of a new approach to education than to the *re*-discovery of an approach which was popular in the 1970s and 1980s, but which, since the Thatcher years, has suffered more than its fair share of derision.

Finally, for readers looking for a *spiritual* dimension in moral education, they will find relatively little on this topic here, even though Eade has previously written a book on Spiritual, Moral, Social & Cultural development (SMSC) (Eade, 2008). The roots of (some) ethical codes in religion are rightly stressed, and the capacity for religious stories to embody moral teaching is acknowledged (p 151), but spiritual development *per se* is not explored. SMSC is noted as a curriculum requirement in English schools (p 58) and as neglected by those for whom the measurement of outcomes is all that matters (p 61), but when it comes to developing the 'whole child' in chapter 10: 'Moving beyond separate programmes', Eade writes of 'personal, social, emotional or moral' education rather than of SMSC. I find myself wondering if the author has intentionally dodged the concept of the spiritual as so unclear, complex and contentious as to present an unhelpful distraction from the case he is arguing?

Be that as it may, we should be grateful to Tony Eade for writing a clear, accessible and well-

thought out book which brings a much needed humanistic approach to education back into focus and provides a strong theoretical basis for taking it seriously.

## References

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