

Nicholas Tate

EDUCATION FOR VIRTUE

AND OTHER ESSAYS



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'As a country, we need to dwell on what we have achieved.'

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EDUCATION FOR VIRTUE
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INTRODUCTION

The essays, articles, lectures, and occasional pieces of many different kinds in this book span a period of over forty-five years. All are about education. Even if the main theme is leadership, the ideas of a philosopher, or the type of history found in the writings of a historian, the implications of the topic for education are never absent. This is because my whole career has been in education: as teacher, teacher trainer, chief examiner, headmaster, chair of school and university governing boards, government adviser, and head of national education bodies. Even some of my non-educational reading over the years has been put to educational use, especially in items I wrote for school communities where one of my objectives was also the encouragement of continuing reading and reflection among their members.

The first chapter in the book and the one with the largest number of items is on the theme of 'education for virtue', partly because I have realised in retrospect that this was often at the heart of what I was talking or writing about even if at the time I might not have labelled it as such. It was only when I belatedly read in depth what some of the great thinkers over the centuries had written about education that I realised how central education for virtue had always been to the

‘liberal education’ of which I have always been an advocate. The views on education of some of these thinkers are discussed in Chapter 3.

Two other major themes run through the book. One is the importance of history, not just as a subject in the school curriculum but also as a dimension of our lives which in the modern world seems to be increasingly pushed to the margins as if we were in Year Zero and it were possible to start all over again with a *tabula rasa*. The other is the role of the nation and the nation state, and again not just as an important part of education but as a positive element in our lives that needs defending against the globalism or universalism that brushes aside national identities, undermines liberty, democracy, and sovereignty, and boosts the power of transnational bureaucracies.

One of the philosophers I have most enjoyed discovering in recent years has been José Ortega y Gasset. Since spending a year in Spain in the mid-1960s, as a teacher of English, I had been aware of him as part of that impressive generation of Spanish writers – Unamuno, Lorca, Machado, Baroja – which had fascinated me at a time when I was beginning to be capable of reading them in Spanish. I had never, however, read anything by Ortega until a few years ago I stumbled upon his 10-volume *Obras Completas* in the London Library and found how interesting he could be, not just on education but also on history and on Spain’s great painters and writers. As a university teacher he saw his role not mainly as imparting knowledge but, in a Socratic manner, as making people re-examine their assumptions, comparing his role, as he put it, with that of someone throwing little stones into a pond to unsettle the reflection in it of the clouds floating across the skies above. It is an image that sticks in the memory and has left me hoping that this is – just possibly – what I might have been able to do with a few of the people who have read my writings or heard my speeches over the years.

I am hugely grateful to the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) for suggesting that all these works be put together in one book and for making it possible for me to bring this to fruition. This is the

third book of mine that it has supported, translating my book *The Conservative Case for Education: Against the Current* into Hungarian and promoting it at various events at MCC centres in different parts of Hungary, and liking my manuscript copy of a book on the writing and reception of canonical books sufficiently to propose its publication to Ludovika University Press under the title *Seven Books that Everyone Once Read and No One Now Does*. It has also been a privilege to see at first hand how Hungary, via the MCC in its talent development programmes at all levels, has addressed that central educational conundrum of modern democracies of how best to ensure the education of a country's likely future elite while at the same time giving equitable attention to the whole population irrespective of ability and attainment. It is a model that merits the widest attention. As someone committed to giving history a prominent place in every child's education and to supporting pupils in the development of their sense of a national identity it has also been hugely satisfying to see the priority given to these two elements within Hungary's educational programmes.

I am particularly grateful to János Setényi and Richárd Fodor of the Learning Institute, Mathias Corvinus Collegium, for their interest and encouragement at every stage of this publication, to my former colleagues Jacqui Acreman and Seta Kapoian for their invaluable support when some of the pieces in this book were being written, and to Zsolt Kilián of Ludovika University Press for all his work and advice in once again bringing one of my publications to fruition.

References for all seven chapters can be found at the end of the book. Also at the end of the book is the text that accompanies the photograph of the author shown in the frontispiece. The photograph was taken when the author was interviewed by Britain's *Country Life* magazine, at a time in 1996 when, as chief executive of England's School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, comments he had made about the role of education in developing a sense of national identity had launched a national debate on this issue.

EDUCATION FOR VIRTUE AND THE COMMON GOOD

Moral education has been at the centre of educational practice, both formal and informal, for millennia. It has also been central to the writings on education of many of the world's greatest thinkers.

For Socrates and Plato 2,400 years ago the purpose of education was to enable individuals to distinguish between good and evil, between truth and error, and to search after wisdom and goodness in their own lives and in the life of their community. For Cicero in the first century BC, it was about the virtues one needed to cultivate and the duties one had to one's republic. For Aquinas in the thirteenth century the only good life was a life based on the four cardinal virtues, the three theological virtues and the use of one's reason to determine whether one's conscience was telling one if an action was good or bad. For John Locke in the seventeenth century the four purposes of education were 'Virtue, Wisdom, Breeding, and Learning', with virtue the most important. For Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the eighteenth century, whose child-centredness sometimes leads radicals to try and capture him for the cause of progressive pedagogy, the one thing educators needed to ensure was that their pupils ended up with a clear sense of right and wrong and did not wallow in *amour-propre* (self-love). For Immanuel Kant in the

same century, it was crucial that people understood their moral duty and acted upon it, not because their feelings prompted them to do so and not out of any calculation of the consequences of their actions, but because they understood the reasons why they must act in this way. For John Ruskin in the nineteenth century, the purpose of education was turning 'base souls into noble souls'. Even Dewey, no friend of Christianity, in the early twentieth century saw schools as above all moral communities.

One could go on forever with similar quotations from many others, or one could do so until at least well into the second half of the twentieth century when something happened. The symbolic point when objective morality turned into ethical relativism was May 1968 and the appearance of signs in Paris, and then elsewhere in France, of the slogan *il est interdit d'interdire* (it is forbidden to forbid). It was the slogan that turned the 24-year-old Roger Scruton into a conservative and counter-revolutionary. Nothing encapsulates better the feeling that there is no longer any objective morality, no longer any rules, that talk of right and wrong is just 'moralising', that legitimate objections to immoral behaviours can be brushed aside as yet another outbreak of 'moral panic'. The traditional language of morality disappeared into the bottom drawer of people's minds and nothing sprung up to replace it. In schools 'respect', 'tolerance', 'being non-judgemental', 'diversity', and 'inclusion' became the watchwords, at least in England.

The difficulty caused by the reluctance to use the traditional language of morality is the starting point for two of the public lectures which I have given that follow: 'Conscience and the curriculum' and 'Education and the Common Good'. Both mention the national conference on moral and spiritual education which, as Chief Executive of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA), I convened in January 1996 and which attracted huge press attention. This was largely positive though I was accused by some of imposing

a new version of the Ten Commandments on the nation. The conference led to the establishment of SCAA's National Forum on Values in Education and the Community which was charged with seeing to what extent agreement could be reached, across a large group of people of different backgrounds, different faiths, and no faith at all, on the values shared by our current society. The outcomes of this work are discussed, from different angles, in both lectures.

All the other articles, sermons, and talks in this section of the book also raise issues relevant to moral and religious education. It remained a constant theme in my work. The audience for some of these, as with my chapel sermons in Winchester College, was pupils. Most of the other articles appeared in the school newsletters and magazines for which I wrote a piece every term for each of the three campuses of The International School of Geneva. These were addressed to staff and to parents. The two remaining items are an address and accompanying prayer, that I was asked to give to the UK's National Prayer Breakfast later in the same year that I set up the National Forum on Values, and a short article I wrote for a newsletter on the contemporary relativistic obsession with everything having to be treated with 'respect'. The latter is included immediately after 'Conscience and the curriculum'.

CONSCIENCE AND THE CURRICULUM

In May 2000, as Chief Executive of England's Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, I was invited to take part in a Symposium on the theme of 'Education for Good', held at Church House, Westminster and organised by St Gabriel's Trust, a body which promotes and supports 'religion and worldviews education'. I chose 'Conscience and the curriculum' as my title. The other speaker was Baroness Mary Warnock, Oxford philosopher, former Mistress of Girton College,

Cambridge, and chair of national enquiries into topics with a major ethical dimension. Her speech focused on the moral education of very young children.¹ She was subsequently very generous to me with her time, agreeing to speak both at one of the biennial Oxford Conferences in Education I chaired and at a Study Day I organised for boys at Winchester College.

Re-reading my speech, after a 25-year interval, has left me with two thoughts. First, the extent to which most of the characteristics of the current ‘woke’ phenomenon that afflicts the West were already present and highlighted in the points I made in this speech about ethical relativism, excessive individualism, distaste for tradition, and the simplistic division of the world into oppressors and victims, long before I first heard the word ‘woke’. Second, how some of the government initiatives about which I was supportive and with which my organisation had been associated – citizenship and personal, social, and health education – have moved on from their useful and benign beginnings and turned, in the wrong hands, into vehicles for indoctrination into whatever the left-wing causes of the moment happen to be. I also notice how much less sceptical I was then about the value of separate courses in ‘thinking skills’ than I am now.

There have been times when I regretted agreeing to give a talk with this title. I agreed to do so for one main reason. I could not recollect the word ‘conscience’ having been used in national discussions about the school curriculum and felt it would be a challenge to look at familiar issues from an unfamiliar perspective. When I thought about it further it occurred to me that we now rarely hear the word ‘conscience’ in national debates except in relation to public and social issues.

In education, concerned as it is with the development of individuals, this is unfortunate. The idea of a moral sense as a source of action

¹ Both speeches were published in *Education for Good: Symposium Proceedings* (2000). St Gabriel’s Trust, Culham College Institute.

is not just central to Christian ethical traditions, but at the heart of what the main partners in education – parents and teachers – feel they are trying to achieve. Most parents and teachers are above all concerned that children turn out to be kind, considerate, helpful, public-spirited, willing, where appropriate, to subordinate their wants and desires, and loving towards others. This is one reason for concern about school performance tables: that they can have the effect of overshadowing purposes of education felt to be more fundamental (I speak as someone whose conscience permits him to defend performance tables). Although teachers are unlikely to put it in this way, the unexpressed thought is: ‘what profiteth a man that he gain eleven A stars and yet loseth his soul’.²

But, if there is a widespread acceptance that these are some of the main purposes of education, why are we so reluctant to use the traditional language of morality – ‘conscience’, ‘virtues’, the word ‘moral’ itself – in public debates? This is what a schoolmaster wrote about the purposes of education in 1904:

The development of a moral sense goes side by side with the formation of virtuous habits. ... No education is worthy the name which is not moral and religious, which does not teach the conduct of life, the duties a man owes to himself and to his neighbours, and at the same time point to an ideal, a something beyond and above ourselves.

There would be a reluctance to say this sort of thing today – you will not find anything like it in our recent Personal, Social and Health Education guidelines – even if in practice it is what teachers still try to do. Is it just that we express similar things differently, and should cease to worry that we are less inclined to use the traditional language of morality, or is there cause for concern?

² The top grade in England’s Advanced Level examinations taken at ages 17–18.

Why it is so difficult to talk about moral issues

I think there is cause for concern about our ability to talk about moral issues, for a number of reasons. I will say something about each of these and then look more specifically at what we mean by ‘conscience’ and its implications for the curriculum.

First, there is a belief in many quarters that there are no shared values. It is widely asserted that such is the diversity of customs, creeds, and lifestyles in our society that all we can do is to agree to disagree and to respect, tolerate, and ‘celebrate’ our many differences. But this is untrue. There are many values, shared by men and women of good will of all faiths and none, that are the basis of civilised life wherever it exists. They are the stuff of the moral appeals we make all the time in our everyday lives to fairness, justice, sympathy, and self-respect. They are the stuff of constitutions, declarations of rights, inter-faith fora, and national myths. When Prime Minister Tony Blair earlier in the year tried to define Britishness, many of the qualities he identified were virtues that many other groups in the world might claim they possessed or aspired to.

We disagree about the source of these shared values, their relative priorities, and their application to specific issues and situations. There is huge disagreement about abortion, euthanasia, genetic manipulation, wealth distribution, and the many issues considering individual and collective action that face us every day. But there are shared values that enable us to talk to each other about these things, clarify the options and in some cases edge closer to agreement. These moral issues are not, as supposed, a matter simply of taste or preference. It is difficult to argue with people about their taste in clothes, cars, or interior decoration, but possible to do so – on the basis of shared values – about their views on moral issues.

The second source of my concern is the consequent assumption that individual choices are paramount, that toleration of the

different versions of right and wrong that derive from these choices is the supreme virtue, and that the purpose of education is therefore not to transmit shared values but to enable young people, *ab ovo*, to develop their own values and for the educator to be morally neutral about the outcome. The libertarian individualism and naive relativism that underlie these assumptions have taken quite a hold. They have produced a mindset and language at odds with the more conservative reality of schools. The situation is worrying: once we lose the words and concepts we need to describe the world, the world may become a different place.

The third reason for concern is linked to the previous two. It is the prevalent sub-Marxist view that values are relative to the economic and social groups that espouse them and that the world is divided into 'communities' defined by gender, ethnicity, social group, or sexual orientation, each with values appropriate to their needs. Majority communities are assumed to be oppressors and to have values that help to maintain this oppression; minority communities are assumed to be oppressed. These attitudes go hand in hand with a preoccupation with rights at the expense of any other view of moral obligation. Though useful in drawing attention to unmet needs and harmful inequalities, such attitudes can be bad news for views of ethics that emphasise universal moral imperatives, whether based on Christianity or Enlightenment principles. There is a big task ahead in combating inherited prejudices, but showing how prejudice and discrimination are wrong because they contravene universal moral principles is potentially more powerful – less wooden, less contrived, less seemingly self-righteous – than presenting them as affronts to the rights of disadvantaged groups.

My fourth reason for concern is our confusion about the relationship between what is legal and what is not. One of the consequences of the libertarian individualism and naive relativism I have mentioned is the widespread assumption that anything that is legal is beyond

criticism. This is a problem we face with the argument that we should legalise certain drugs and return to the Victorian position that some of these substances, while legally available, should be regarded as vices which men and women ought to avoid. Unlike in Victorian times, however, many people in our society are affronted by the idea that one might criticise anything that is legally permissible. It is therefore an uphill struggle to get across the view that we respect people by telling them how and why we think they are wrong. But unless we do this, we will produce a society incapable of pointing out, without ridicule, some of the moral deficiencies which afflict us.

My fifth point concerns the difficulty of talking about moral matters in a society in which religious belief is less central and less public than it was. It is not of course that we cannot do so, but that over the centuries the language of morality has become so entwined with the language of religion that the weakening of the latter leads to the weakening of the former. Words such as 'moral', 'immoral', 'good', 'evil', 'sin', 'shame', 'virtue', and 'conscience' fall far less readily from people's lips and are used far less readily to shape people's thoughts. The weakening of this traditional language of morality, and the structure for our consciousness that it provides, reinforces, and is reinforced by all the other developments I have been mentioning. If values are personal things like tastes and preferences, words such as 'good' and 'evil' carry too heavy a charge. If tolerance is the supreme quality, one cannot be seen to disapprove of actions and lifestyles even if one feels them to be wrong. If legal prohibitions are all that count, moral exhortations about matters where one has a choice come to be labelled as 'moralising' and moral criticisms seen as unacceptable interference with people's freedom.

My sixth and final point draws together the previous five. I have talked about the dominance of a libertarian-cum-egalitarian ideology. It is this ideology – secular, relativistic, contemptuous of the past

and of traditions (unless they are other people's traditions viewed sentimentally from a distance), aggressively egalitarian, assertively libertarian – that finds distasteful the idea that education is about transmitting traditional virtues and introducing young people to 'the best that has been known and thought'. Nowhere are the contemporary manifestations of this ideology better illustrated than in David Selbourne's excellent pamphlet *Moral Evasion* (Selbourne, 1998) which categorises and illustrates 11 types of moral evasion widely used by proponents of this ideology: arguments such as 'there is nothing you can do about it', 'this issue is far too complex', 'this is the price of a free society', 'we live in a rapidly changing world', 'it's no use turning the clock back', 'everyone does it', and so on. His conclusion hits the nail on the head:

We have a culture of rights on the one hand, and cynicism about the distinction between right and wrong on the other, and in which there appears to be no doubt at all about the one, and every doubt – assiduously promoted – about the other. It is a drastic combination.

Do read it!

Selbourne lays bare the authoritarian, indeed totalitarian, instincts lurking within this libertarian-cum-egalitarian ideology. There is nothing quite so illiberal or self-righteous as someone with this complex of views in full flight. I gave a speech a couple of years ago in which I happened to mention that 'lifelong learning' was not such a new idea after all in that lifelong moral improvement was at the centre of the religion which had dominated our culture for much of the past two millennia. I was making a factual point. But this did not stop someone from getting up and saying what a pity it was that I should have spoiled an otherwise good speech by such an unhelpful and irrelevant reference.

A statement of values

For these reasons it is not easy at the moment to talk about *Education for Good*. But some things have been achieved over the last few years. First, it was a major achievement of my previous body, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, to set up a National Forum on Values in Education and the Community whose work gave the lie to the idea that, because we are a diverse society, we have no shared values. The Forum's statement of values, endorsed by public opinion polls, is helping to give teachers the confidence that the values they are promoting are *our* values and not simply their own and that the work they are doing is on *our* behalf.

Second, it has been a major achievement of my current body, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, to produce and disseminate a rationale for the school curriculum which emphasises its role in transmitting shared values, developing a commitment to the common good, and promoting the traditional virtues. The revised national curriculum, which includes this rationale, also incorporates the National Forum's statement of values. Schools are being encouraged to use both rationale and values statement as the basis for their own discussions about their aims and priorities. We have also simultaneously promoted new learning goals for children of nursery age which stress the development of an understanding of what is right, what is wrong, and why. I would not wish to over-emphasise the impact of words, even in such authoritative documents, but it is a start.

The education of our conscience

Let me now isolate more specifically a number of elements involved in the exercise of conscience as a key theme in *Education for Good*, and then consider how schools might help to develop these. First, the

idea of conscience as an inner voice or innate moral sense. Second, the idea that this voice can be developed through the deepening of human reason, one's knowledge of moral principles and, if one is a Christian, one's understanding of revelation and the teachings of the Church. Third, the need to listen carefully to this voice and, using one's reason and imagination, to distinguish it from voices that are not the true voice of an informed conscience. Fourth, the will, courage, character, and habits of behaviour that enable us to do as our conscience dictates. Fifth, the guilt and shame, both prospective and retrospective, that help to deter us from acting against our conscience and enable us to learn from our wrongdoing.

Put like this, the education of our conscience is the central part of moral education; knowing what is right and wrong; wanting to do what is good and avoid what is bad; developing the right habits of thought and behaviour; learning to make difficult moral decisions in cases where moral principles conflict. What else can Parliament have meant when it laid down that the school curriculum should promote 'the moral developments of pupils at the school and of society'? Focusing specifically on the conscience, however, highlights aspects of moral development that do not always get due prominence. Described in the way I have put it, a developing conscience requires restraint, fortitude, self-denial, time for reflection and silence, the courage to be different, a serious cast of mind, and a capacity to feel shame. These are not always the qualities that leap from the page when experts on education write about the best ways of promoting the personal and social development of young people.

Take time for reflection and silence, for example. It is not always easy to get across the message that acts of collective worship, with opportunities for individual reflection, can make a powerful contribution to a child's personal development. One head teacher who always holds the last act of collective worship of the summer term in the school grounds – with a view of distant hills – told me what

an impact this had. Another told me that one of the experiences former pupils most frequently mentioned was starting the school day with a short service in a nearby church. And yet, it has been a struggle to persuade some people that the legal requirement for acts of collective worship has any place in a modern school.

Take also the capacity for shame. We still hear about shame on the front pages of newspapers: the shame of being caught lying, the shame of being sent to prison, the shame of public exposure of private vices. We rarely hear of it in discussions about moral education. We hear instead the importance of self-esteem and of 'being true to oneself'. I am not suggesting that self-esteem is not important, that many people do not lack it and that schools should not try to promote it. Far from it. But there are curious pseudo-Rousseauite assumptions floating around – about natural goodness, unfettered individual expression, and the extent of our capacity for happiness – that run counter to our experience of life. The ideas implicit in the notion of conscience – that life is a struggle to do what is good, that we frequently fail, that it is appropriate to feel ashamed when we do so, and that shame can be a useful prompt in our moral lives – do not figure in discussions about moral education in schools. Again, there may be a gulf between the words we use to describe what we do and what we actually do, but the words and conceptual framework we use can influence the reality, which is why it is so important that the curriculum provides opportunities for young people to keep on using the words and concepts of private, as well as public, morality. Many subjects can contribute to this, not just religious education or PSHE.

The other quality needed for a developed conscience is seriousness about the moral issues which confront it. The whole of education is about encouraging young people to take things seriously while making them seem exciting and relevant (in the broadest sense of that word). But this can be a difficult task in a world which

celebrates frivolity and instant gratification more aggressively than many previous societies. It is not a new problem: the novels of Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope are full of characters who gradually learn to distinguish people of true worth from the meretricious. But the inhabitants of Highbury and Barchester did not have to contend with the assaults of the mass media and global consumer capitalism.

Implications for schools

But what does *Education for Good*, seen from the perspective of conscience, actually mean for schools? First, making the values of a school explicit, and doing so through a process in which everyone in the school community has been involved, can be enormously beneficial. Schools are communities in which children learn that there are moral principles, that there are rules which derive from these principles, that they have moral choices and that they can be held responsible for the outcomes of these choices. They also have opportunities to observe the moral behaviour of responsible adults. For many children this is simply an extension of what they experience at home and in the wider community; it is not the main positive influence on their moral development. For some children it is their only opportunity.

One way in which a school's values manifest themselves is through its policy on manners. When I did my postgraduate training as a teacher in the 1960s, I wrote an essay about the purposes of education in which I referred to the encouragement of good manners as an important aim. My essay was returned with an ironical question mark in the margin. That, I suppose, was part of the challenging of inherited conventions which characterised the period. I am pleased to say that I cannot think of a school today that does not take good manners seriously, though some may be overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge facing them. I was very pleased that the Secretary

of State David Blunkett placed such emphasis on this in his recent speech to one of the teacher association conferences.

Second, the importance of collective worship and religious education. Schools which, because of their foundation, are able to offer young people the experience of what it is like to be part of a faith community provide them with opportunities for moral learning they might not readily experience elsewhere. This can play an important part in educating their conscience even where subsequently they turn their backs on the religious basis of their education.

Even where schools cannot offer the continuing experience of a faith as something lived, religious education can and increasingly does show young people that the moral traditions of faith communities are more than just objects of anthropological study. This was one of the unfortunate effects of the comparative 'role of water in world religions' approach to religious education. My own organisation's model syllabuses for religious education have had a beneficial effect in encouraging an approach to religious education which concentrates on a study of a faith as a whole, and in particular (as the law requires) of Christianity. Studying religion in this way provides the most systematic and coherent opportunity available for exploring many of the moral features I have outlined.

Despite the importance of religious education, it is crucial that it is not seen as the sole or even the main vehicle for pupils' moral development. The national curriculum is therefore explicit about how different subjects should be used to provide opportunities for moral development. My own organisation has already produced subject-specific guidance on this. This has been reinforced in the revised national curriculum by statements defining the rationale of subjects and their contribution to particular phases of schooling. Science, for example, includes the investigation of ethical issues thrown up by scientific applications; design and technology require pupils to consider the values underlying technological activity;

music aims to promote self-discipline and a sense of group identity; geography provides opportunities for thinking about one's responsibilities for other people. We have been similarly insistent that revised public examinations provide opportunities for pupils to engage with ethical issues wherever appropriate. We have done the same with ethical issues in vocational and occupational qualifications. The extent to which these opportunities will be taken up will vary from one teacher, lecturer, or trainer to another. As with other cross-curricular elements, this is an area in which teachers and others will need to be educated about the possibilities as part of continuing professional development.

*Subject areas with an important role
in 'Education for Good'*

Let me conclude by mentioning briefly three subject areas which play a particularly important role in *Education for Good*.

First, citizenship and personal, social, and health education. From this September teachers will be working with new frameworks in both these areas and, in secondary schools, preparing for the introduction of statutory citizenship education in two years' time. Citizenship education has three main elements: moral and civic responsibility; being an informed citizen; and community involvement. Although defined in the national curriculum, as statutorily required, in terms of knowledge, skills, and understanding, much of this new subject is about values. Key issues include our responsibilities to local and national communities, concepts of justice and fairness, and the nature of moral debate. This part of the new curriculum will be further enhanced by the Government's intended promotion of thinking skills in lower secondary schools – it is inconceivable that this should not include thinking in relation to moral issues – and by new syllabuses for older students in critical thinking.

In introducing statutory citizenship, schools will wish to link it particularly, though by no means exclusively, with the new statutory framework for personal, social, and health education (PSHE). Personal and social development are promoted across the whole curriculum, but separate provision is found to be helpful, especially in secondary schools, when dealing with a range of issues such as relationships, marriage, sex, and drugs. PSHE is a difficult thing to teach and, as inspection evidence suggests, widely varying in its effectiveness. Key challenges are keeping in mind the values we are trying to promote, making sure we send the strongest signals that personal and social education – indeed life – is far more than just a matter of sex and drugs, and providing plenty of opportunities for structured discussions which allow pupils to speak from their own experiences and to bring together the often-different values operating in different parts of their lives.

The second area is the arts. At a conference I attended recently for independent school head teachers one speaker said that the three most important people in a school were the head teacher, the chaplain, and the director of music, because all three dealt with ‘the big things’. We hear a great deal about the importance of the arts in promoting creativity and how crucial this is in a rapidly changing global economy. Their main purpose, however, must remain cultural, spiritual, and moral. The arts should help us to understand the nature of the Good and why we should pursue it.

This should influence the choice of books to read, paintings to look at and music to listen to. One reason why it is so important to keep on encouraging young people to read fiction is the continuing power of the novel, short story, and play to confront us with moral issues. Coincidentally with preparing this lecture I read for the first time Anthony Trollope’s *The Warden* (Trollope, 1855/2004; Trollope was a very unhappy pupil at the school I am about to take over). As with many other nineteenth-century novels, a major theme of the book is

an individual wrestling with his conscience. I learned from this book as much about 'conscience', and its dependence on a moral sense backed by a world view, as from anything else I have recently read.

One reason why I have become less hostile to the study of the new media in schools is that they provide a wealth of opportunities to discuss moral dilemmas. Given the all-pervasiveness of these media in young people's lives, it is better to exploit some of the opportunities they present and to encourage critical, including moral, reflection than to pretend they do not exist.

My final subject area is my own: history. This has been in the news recently, as ever, over what we select for study. Not this time the curriculum, but a textbook which it was claimed ignored some of the key figures in British history. Given that there is so much history, selection is not easy. One reason for choosing topics and figures to study must be the opportunities they present for moral reflection. I am far from purist about all this. One does not just study the past simply because it exists or because it helps one to understand the present. One also studies it because it confronts one with 'the big things'. Learning history will have failed if one does not come away from it with a greater appreciation of the Good and the claims of conscience. One only has to think of the opportunities presented by the study of historical characters such as Joan of Arc, Luther, Thomas More, Florence Nightingale, Bonhoeffer, and Gandhi.

*Teachers and their
moral influence*

My title was *Conscience and the Curriculum*. I have concentrated therefore on ways in which schools, directly, can make a difference in educating for Good. We sometimes underestimate, as well as overestimate their importance. A recent MORI (Market and Opinion Research Institute) poll asking what people felt had been the most

important moral influences on themselves put teachers in third place, after ‘what parents told them about right and wrong’ and ‘the way their own family behaved’. Teachers were felt to be much more important influences than friends, religion, public figures, or the way people behaved in soap operas.

As a parent and a teacher, I found this doubly daunting. I also found it very encouraging. It is one reason why what we are talking about here this evening is so important.

ELIDING RESPECT AND TOLERANCE

The following short article was written in 2015 after I had returned to England from Geneva and been shocked to find the extent to which English education was pervaded by what I still called ‘political correctness’. The shock is perhaps apparent from my tone. The article left at least one reader amazed at the idea that respecting certain things might possibly not be a good idea. It was published in the online newsletter of the National Education Foundation (NET).

Take a random glance at school mission and values statements and you will find the following words cropping up again and again: ‘respect’, ‘tolerance’, ‘non-judgementalism’. ‘Respect’ and ‘tolerance’ are the most common, especially since the Department for Education’s 2014 Spiritual, Moral, Social, and Cultural guidance identified them as ‘British values’ to be promoted. But it is far from clear what these words mean and whether the way we are currently interpreting them is in pupils’ interests or those of society.

‘Respect’ and ‘tolerance’ are often linked together as if they were the same thing. They are not. Traditionally ‘tolerance’ meant accepting the right of others to opinions and behaviours of which one did *not* approve. It has been a cornerstone of liberal democracy. But

until recently it has never meant 'respecting' or refusing to pass judgement on opinions and behaviours of which one disapproved, let alone feeling obliged to 'celebrate' them.

If one elides 'tolerance' and 'respect', and sends out the message that one should 'respect' and 'celebrate' opinions and behaviours of which one disapproves, instead of judging them, negative consequences are liable to ensue.

First, one is telling pupils what to think in areas where they should be exercising their own judgement. Faced with views and behaviours on which they have opinions, pupils are discouraged from formulating and exploring these in case another person or group might feel they are not being 'respected' or 'celebrated'. This is both illiberal and limits opportunities for developing judgement and 'discrimination' (the making of distinctions), which is a key objective of education.

Second, it sends the message that other people's opinions are not to be taken seriously. Just accepting them uncritically, in the name of 'respect' and 'non-judgementalism', is failing to engage with them.

Third, it is sentimentalism to use language which encourages blanket 'respect' and 'celebration' in relation to individuals and groups. Pupils' moral, emotional, and intellectual development occurs in situations of challenge, not when they are immersed in a syrup of universal respect. It is also dangerous to brush under the carpet the fact that people disagree fundamentally about the kind of society they would like to live in. On many issues we neither 'respect' nor wish to 'celebrate' other people's opinions, and it is better to deal with this, in age-appropriate ways, frankly and without pretence.

Fourth, excessive attention to unqualified 'respect' and the celebration of identities can become an addiction, as the sociologist Frank Furedi has pointed out. It encourages a feeble view of the self. It may help to explain the worrying developments in universities we are currently seeing, both in the UK and the USA, where students,

used to being cosseted and flattered in school, are refusing to read upsetting books, banning speakers who might ‘offend’ them, and demanding the creation of ‘safe spaces’. Where unqualified ‘respect’ extends to whole groups and cultures, it can also undermine personal autonomy. Pupils are individuals, not representatives of groups from which in some cases they may even wish to escape.

This is not to suggest that we abandon ‘respect’. Pupils need to learn to ‘respect’ other people’s rights. They need to argue their own case using ‘respectful’ language. They need to listen ‘respectfully’ to what everyone else has to say, even when they disagree. How one manages these kinds of discussions will of course vary hugely from one age group to another, and from school to school.

Above all, however, we need to get back to the idea of ‘tolerance’, with its ‘respect’ for the right to differ (even on things like ‘British values’), its connotation of open debate, and its robust and positive assumptions about human nature.

SPEECH AND PRAYER AT THE NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST

The idea of having an annual ‘National Prayer Breakfast’ seems to have come originally from the USA. It has a rather un-English feel about it. The one in the UK on 27 November 1996 took place at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre in London opposite Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament. I was invited as Chief Executive of the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority to give a speech on the text ‘Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; render unto God the things that are God’s’ (Matthew 22:21) and to offer a Prayer for the Nation, for Parliament, and for Government. The event took place at a time when I was in the news as a result of speeches and articles combating relativistic notions of morality and

urging a stronger role for moral and religious education in the school curriculum. The contemporary debates about these issues, and about national identity, are reflected in what I had to say. The address and prayer were given to a Christian audience.

*‘Render therefore unto Caesar
the things which are Caesar’s; render unto
God the things that are God’s’*

Being asked to speak to a text from the Gospels is a particular challenge to someone more used to speaking to national test results or a report of some curriculum project. In thinking about this text over the last week I realise, yet again, the relevance of the Scriptures to our lives. How much we would benefit if we spent *more* time reading and reflecting on them and *less* time on the piles of ephemeral papers among which so many of us pass our lives.

Thinking about this text brings home to me that one problem with our society is that we have lost sight of our duty *both* to God *and* to Caesar. There is an excessive emphasis on individualism in our society. It is an individualism which has many positive aspects. It is an individualism with deep roots in Christianity. But it is an individualism that has gone too far.

We have come to feel, as a society, that satisfying our wants and desires and developing ourselves for our own sakes should be our main ends. As a result, we emphasise more than we should self-expression at the expense of restraint, freedom at the expense of authority, rights at the expense of duties, and the individual at the expense of the family, the group, and the nation.

What we need is the ‘golden mean’ between these opposites. If we strive to achieve this, we still find that we are more likely to ‘render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s’, ‘render unto God the things that are God’s’, and ‘render unto self the things that are self’s’.

When we get the balance right, these things are not incompatible. Rendering unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's means recognising the state as the expression of the civil society in which we all belong and which, except where it clashes with our more fundamental duty to God, has a prior claim on our allegiance.

But taking this claim seriously – rendering unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's – also involves rendering unto God the things that are God's. I am old enough to remember the Queen's coronation in 1953, sitting round that tiny black and white television screen, and the powerful sense it conveyed, even to a child, of the sacredness of the state and the divine source of authority. We fulfil our duty to God in fulfilling our duty to Caesar: by putting others first; by accepting restraints on our freedom; by showing solidarity with others; and by being committed to a community – the nation – which, though less than the Church, mirrors the Church in bringing together past, present, and future, the dead, the living, and the yet unborn.

Similarly, Caesar, and those who work for Caesar, fulfil *their* duty to God by exercising their authority in ways that do God's will: fairly, justly, and always remembering that they are servants of civil society not its masters.

That, I think, is the key to it: the duty to serve, whether one is Caesar or one of those who obey Caesar.

It is a duty we have lost sight of. It is not that we have lost the practice of service. The country is full of people dutifully serving others and their community. It is also full of people in authority who exercise their powers in trust for the community. But, as the author David Selbourne tells us so eloquently, we have ceased to make the principle of duty explicit (Selbourne, 1994). When we begin to lose the idea of something, we run the risk in the long term of losing the reality too.

There are two views of the state in Western traditions: as a coercive power necessary to curb man's innate sinfulness; and as the means

by which, in association with others, we attain the highest of which we are capable. The latter stems from the Greek idea of the supreme value of citizenship, the former from the Christian idea that this world is second best and a preparation for a better world to come.

These two views of the state are not incompatible. Indeed, put together they represent precisely that 'golden mean' I have been talking about: a sense of the power of love and goodness, and the possibility of expressing these through our civic life, but at the same time an acceptance that evil exists, that we frequently fail, that utopias are not for here below, and that restraint is necessary for the sake of the common good.

I have suggested that rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's can or should be perfectly compatible with rendering unto God the things that are God's. But the two are not synonymous and any society that loses the distinction runs the risk of losing its proper perspective on the world. Our duty to God is more than our duty to Caesar. Sometimes they clash. Every time I go back to my old Oxford college, and see the memorial plaque outside Balliol chapel to Adam von Trott zu Solz, who was put to death for his part in the Hitler bomb plot in 1944, I am reminded what our duty must be when God and Caesar conflict.

It is not just *in extremis* that we must put God first. Rendering unto God the things that are God's also means that in the midst of life we should never forget to put the affairs of this world – whether of Caesar or self – in perspective. Individuals, families, governments, parliaments, states, countries, empires come and go. Only the City of God is never-ending. This ultimately, and eternally, is where we belong, although we only see it 'as through a glass, darkly'. A society which loses the sense that there are things deeper and truer than itself loses its sense of proportion, refuses to accept limitations on its power and freedom, and takes itself too seriously. Isn't this what is at the heart of our debate about the environment?

In a modern liberal society rendering unto God the things that are God's also means challenging society to be better than the state requires. Our belief that the state should only interfere with the freedom of the individual where the individual's actions are liable to harm others leaves us with a situation in which many of the things that it is legal to do it is also wrong to do.

I would not wish it otherwise. But, as a society, we have come to feel that we should not criticise people for exercising their rights within the law. We have come to feel that to do so is to be 'judgemental' or 'moralistic'. We must rid ourselves of this fallacy. We respect people by telling them we think they are wrong, and explaining why. We fail to render unto God the things that are God's if we give the impression, as many do, that moral opinions are merely matters of taste and preference.

But what does it mean to render unto God the things that are God's when one works in an education service provided by a liberal state within a largely secular society?

It means, first, remembering that education is about more than just enhancing this country's economic competitiveness or developing to the full an individual's potential for employability, vital though these are.

It means, second, helping children, by example and precept, to distinguish between right and wrong, and to get into the habit of thinking and behaving ethically. It means showing them that there is such a thing as moral truth. It means opening up for them, should they wish to explore it, the possibility of God as the source of that truth.

It also means, third, showing them how virtually all previous societies, and many modern ones, have been and are sustained by a belief in God. It means doing this as part of religious education, in which truths that Christians take for granted are presented, accurately, as beliefs but not as truths.

Speaking out in support of religious education in schools means risking giving offence to those who neglect it or, worse, wish to re-

move it altogether from the curriculum. It means telling them that they are being illiberal in depriving young people of the opportunity of being challenged by alternatives to the minority western view of the world currently dominant in this country.

Fourth, it means helping young people understand the seriousness and importance of life. This can be a difficult task in a world which to them must at times seem to be dominated by materialism, consumerism, and hedonism in their crudest forms.

It means encouraging young people to ‘try to discover meaning and purpose in life and how it ought to be lived’, and ‘to strive for knowledge and wisdom throughout life’. These words are from the draft statement of core values on which we are currently consulting.³ Some people, rather uncharitably, have described them as vacuous and empty of meaning. In my view they are pregnant with meaning and at the heart of what we are trying to do through education.

Finally, for those of us who work in education, rendering unto God the things that are God’s means maintaining a balance between idealism and realism, between the attempt to build the City of God in this world, and a recognition that we will not truly inhabit it this side of Paradise. There is much we can achieve. There are many ways that we can do our jobs better. But at the end of the day, in the words of that great English and Christian poet T. S. Eliot:

There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business. (Eliot,
1959, p. 31)

³ For the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority’s National Forum on Values in Education and the Community and its Statement of Values, see Talbot & Tate, 1997.

Prayer for the Nation, for Parliament, and for Government

Almighty and ever-living God, who by Your Holy Apostle has taught us to make prayers, and give thanks, for all people. We beseech you to receive these our prayers, which we offer unto Your Divine Majesty.

Let us pray for the nation.

Let us remember that all those who belong to a nation have a special duty to each other.

Let us remember what we have in common, but let us recognise all that is worthy in how we differ.

Let us remember that love and affection begin at home, but do not end with it.

Let us remember that though we are a nation, this nation is but part of Christ's Church here in earth and that Christ's Church extends beyond place and time to link together the living, the dead, and the yet to come.

Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's Church, here in this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and throughout the earth.

Let us give thanks for the many groups and institutions within our country that, quietly and discreetly and without asking for any reward, make sure that Your will is done.

Let us give thanks for the family, for all relationships based on fidelity, trust and love, for our local communities, for our schools, colleges and universities, for our hospitals, for our businesses, for our voluntary and charitable societies, and for all that brings people together to serve others and to serve You.

Let us give thanks for these fertile and beautiful islands in which we live, for the sea which surrounds and feeds us, for the changeable skies above us, for our cities, towns and villages, and for all the habits and affections, customs and routines which make this place home.

Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's Church here in this nation and in earth.

Let us pray for all those who in these islands have departed this life in your faith and fear.

Let us pray for all those heroes and heroines, sung and unsung, whose dust has mingled with the dust we breathe, and into whose dust our dust one day will go.

Let us pray for all kings and queens who, down the generations, have symbolised our unity.

Give them eternal rest, O Lord, and may light perpetual shine upon them.

Let us pray for Elizabeth, our present queen, who has taught us that through duty we define ourselves.

Let us pray for Charles, our future king. Give him strength to play his part in holding us together.

Let us give thanks for our parliamentary institutions and for all those who have struggled to give us the freedoms we enjoy.

Let us pray that all those who serve in Parliament strive to set a good example in honesty and truth, loyalty and service to others, to the glory of Your Holy Name. May they show to others that charity, in all their dealings, which trusts before it distrusts and which listens before it condemns.

Let us pray for all those who hold office.

Let us pray for all ministers and politicians that they recognise their responsibility to others, that people may be influenced for what is good, not evil, and for what is true, not false.

Let us pray for the whole state of Christ's Church here in this United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and in earth.

This, O Lord, is the time of year when, in the depths of winter, we prepare for the coming of Your Son. Let our souls we beseech You, Almighty God, achieve this their desire, to be kindled by Your

Spirit; that being filled as lamps by the divine gift, we may shine like blazing lights before the presence of Your Son Christ at his coming.

May we do this now, in these islands, as we have done for nearly 2,000 years, and may we continue to do so, into the next millennium, while time lasts and until the coming of Your Kingdom.

Grant this, O Lord, for Jesus Christ's sake, who with You and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

RIGHTS AND DUTIES: LETTERS TO TEACHERS AND PARENTS

During most of my eight years as Director-General of The International School of Geneva (known familiarly as Ecolint) the school had three campuses and each term the Director-General was expected to write a letter for the relevant campus newsletter. This was circulated to adult members of the school community: teachers, administrative and technical staff, and parents. The school had over 4,000 pupils and was spread over four sites in two cantons. As an English–French bilingual school the newsletter was sometimes in English, sometimes in French, and sometimes in a mixture of the two languages. Most ‘household’ items relevant to the daily life of the school were dealt with in contributions to the newsletters from the campus principal and from the principals of the constituent primary, middle, and secondary schools within each campus. As a result, I normally used my contributions as an opportunity to raise general issues about the ethos of the school and the aims of education. As the executive head of the Swiss Foundation that ran the school, I saw one of my main roles as helping to define and promote the school’s distinctive identity and encouraging all its members to keep constantly in mind what the education it was committed to offering was trying to achieve. In speeches to other heads in subsequent years I have urged them to see this as one of their most distinctive roles,

*without for a moment suggesting that the ways in which I had tried to do this were necessarily any kind of model for showing how this might be done (N. Tate, 2025f).*⁴

In the course of my eight years at the school I must have written well over forty of these letters. Two on the theme of moral education are included below.

*Letter for La Grande Boissière Campus Newsletter*⁵

We hear a great deal about ‘rights’ in Ecolint. The school is proud to base its values on the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; we commemorate Human Rights Day; we refer regularly in our work to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The modern world’s emphasis on human rights has been enormously beneficial in all sorts of ways. We all owe a great deal to the three countries – England, France, and the USA – which, since the seventeenth century, have pioneered and established the idea that individuals have rights which must be respected, and which transcend the needs of governments and the oppressive tendencies of majority communities.

A preoccupation with rights, however, has not been without its critics in recent years, especially on the part of liberal philosophers who are otherwise highly supportive of the idea. The concerns are twofold. First, that an over-preoccupation with rights accentuates what is felt to be the already excessive individualism of modern times, encouraging individuals to feel that the world revolves around themselves and their needs. Such egoism can be both morally undesirable and aesthetically unattractive. Second, that too much talk about rights leads us to forget that no right can exist without a corresponding duty. We can proclaim people’s rights as much as we like, but they will only be protected if there are other people who

⁴ The text of this speech is included in Chapter 6.

⁵ First published in *Ecolint – La Grande Boissière Campus Newsletter*, January 2008.

feel they have duties and who sometimes put their duties before their rights. Children therefore need to be brought up not just with a sense of their rights but also with a sense of their duties – towards families and friends, towards other members of the communities, such as schools, of which they are a part, towards the countries to which they belong, and towards humankind as a whole.

The emphasis on rights, at the expense of duties, has been accentuated in the modern world by our absorption within a market economy that sees people as above all consumers whose relationship with those who provide them with the products that they are encouraged to consume is a commercial one. The motivations in this provider-consumer relationship are also essentially egoistic ones: the provider is out to make a profit and the consumer to satisfy his or her needs and urges. We therefore hear a great deal also about consumers' rights. If I am paying, I expect an adequate return for my money and have no sense of any corresponding duties to the provider.

It is not surprising in this context that the language of rights and of the market has entered the world of education. Parents are encouraged to see themselves as consumers and as clients, and schools as providers of commercial services. In one sense, especially in the world of private for-profit education, this is not inappropriate. But public schools, and not-for-profit private schools like Ecolint, do not belong to this commercial world. Indeed, in so far as all schools are preparing students for, and modelling, the wider human community, it can be damaging to see them mainly or solely in market terms. Schools are partnerships between students, parents, and teachers. They are communities with a shared sense of identity and purpose, based on the promotion of learning, and in which everyone has duties towards each other. These duties derive from this shared sense of identity and purpose, and not from any commercial relationship.

That is why it is so counter-productive – not to mention unspeakably vulgar – to make demands of other members of a community

‘because we pay your salaries’. As teachers we often need to be reminded of the fundamental purposes of education, of the duties we have voluntarily assumed in relation to these purposes, and of how the future of individuals and of the world depends in part on our efforts. This is the language people are most likely to respond to, not the language of the marketplace.

It can be similarly counter-productive for staff to see their relationship with the school as mainly or solely that of employee and employer. The two sets of attitudes of course go together. The more staff are seen as the providers of commercial services, the more likely are they to see their own relationship with the people who pay their salaries in mainly contractual terms. This is not to suggest that parents, who pay the fees, and staff who have contracts of employment, do not have rights. It is just that the more you focus on the language of rights and of the market, the more likely you will be to end up modelling a diminished sense of human relationships and thus undermining the fundamental purposes of education.

Studies of societies that function better than others highlight the key role played by mutual trust within those societies. Trust is highest within those societies where there is a strong sense of shared values and purposes. Not surprisingly, heterogeneous societies tend to have lower levels of mutual trust than more homogeneous ones. Ecolint is of course a highly heterogeneous society, with our 136 nationalities and 86 mother tongues. Educationally, that is one of our greatest strengths. But we are also a highly homogeneous one when it comes to our mission and values as an international school. We need constantly to remind ourselves of these values and purposes and of how we need to promote them together as a community in which all the partners – students, teachers, parents – have duties first and foremost, and not just rights.

Please accept my very best wishes to you and your families for 2008.

*Letter for La Châtaigneraie
Campus Newsletter*⁶

The first weekend of term saw delegates gathering at the International Labour Office/Bureau International du Travail for the sixth Ecolint Annual Education Conference. Once again, we were delighted to welcome delegates from many other Swiss schools as well as from countries as far apart as Australia, Ghana, Chile, and Finland. It was particularly good to see a number of parents in the audience. The broad educational issues tackled in these conferences concern parents just as much as they do teachers.

This year's conference theme was 'Ethical Issues in Education', perhaps the most searching topic we have yet addressed. The purposes of education are fundamentally ethical, and schools are, or should be, some of the most ethical places in society. The aim of a school is not just to develop young people's knowledge, understanding, and skills, and to help them get good examination results, important though these are. It is also, and above all, to help them develop their values, learn how to make moral judgements, distinguish right from wrong, and acquire a disposition to do good in this world.

A UK opinion poll a few years ago asked people what the most important moral influences on them had been. First came 'what parents told me about right and wrong.' Second was 'the way my own family behaved.' Teachers came third. Both families and schools were felt to be much more important influences than friends, religion, public figures, or the way people behaved in soap operas. I doubt if these results would be very different if we were to conduct such a poll in the Ecolint school community today. They draw attention to the crucial role exercised by parents and teachers, acting together, in this area.

⁶ First published in *Ecolint – La Châtaigneraie Campus Newsletter*, February 2011.

Among the many topics raised during the conference, three stand out in particular.

First, there is agreement that, though we live increasingly in pluralist societies and in a world which brings us closer and closer to people in other societies that are very different from our own, there is a set of fundamental values that are universally shared. There is evidence to suggest that these values are innate. We differ radically in what we feel to be the source of these values; we describe and explain them in very different ways; and we apply them differently to many of the specific moral issues that face us (abortion, euthanasia, genetic manipulation, for example). We have common reference points and instincts, however, which make it possible for us to have moral discussions and to explore, and sometimes even resolve, our disagreements. This is a key message for a school community that is as diverse as ours. Our values, therefore, are not like our tastes and preferences for food, clothes, and types of music, where all we can do is agree to disagree.

Second, educators need to maintain a balance between encouraging young people's autonomy and individuality, and their sense of responsibility. We want young people to be creative and innovative, and to show spirit in ways that may involve challenging received opinions (and in particular the received opinions of the majority cultures, including the media-inspired and market-driven 'youth culture', that surround them). At the same time, we want them to have a sense of responsibility for others, to be aware that individuals only exist in communities and to have a sense of their duty at times to put the needs of the community before their individual needs, wishes, and desires. Achieving this balance is not easy, but it is crucial if we are to avoid, as most of us probably want to do, both the type of society that is suffocatingly authoritarian and conformist, and one where narrow individualism and materialism are rampant.

Reconciling these potentially conflicting forces was felt to be not just the key aim of education but of modern society in general.

Third, there was much talk of 'rights'. As a school, we draw attention constantly to the importance of human rights and to the daily struggle around the world to ensure that civil and political rights are respected, and that people have the necessary minimum of resources to enable them to have some kind of autonomous existence. The school's Charter and vision statement, and our policy on values and citizenship, place education about and for human rights at the centre of education in our school. There is, however, what I described at the conference as a 'rights imperialism' which has grown up in comfortable western societies and summed up in the feeling 'I want it therefore I have a *right* to have it'. I cited, from court cases in recent years, 'the right to human intimacy', 'the right to compensation for not having been sent to a school for gifted children', 'the right to compensation for suffering sunburn during practice for a school sports day', and 'the right to travel topless on the subway'. We do young people a disservice if we let them drift into debasing in these ways the crucially important, but limited, notion of a 'right'. They need to know about their own rights, of course, but they need to know about their duties too.

Other interesting thoughts also emerged during the conference, for example why do we never hear these days of 'meekness' and 'humility' as desirable qualities, and what has happened to the word 'conscience'? But these are for another newsletter!

THE SCHOOL AS AN INTELLECTUAL COMMUNITY

After three years at the school, I also launched a printed termly school magazine Espacecolint to which all staff were invited to contribute articles about education and culture, and reviews of books they

had been reading. It was intended as a signal that the school was an intellectual community where staff continued to think and learn and share ideas among themselves as well as with students. For the second time in my life, I took over the editorship of a magazine, overseeing 15 editions by the time I left after eight years as Director-General. For every edition I wrote an editorial on a theme that was linked in some way to the school's educational purposes and sometimes, if the supply of submissions was thinner than I would have wished, added an article of my own. Three of these are included in this publication. The one which follows involved reflections on moral education and was written in the aftermath of a visit of students and teachers to Auschwitz.

A visit to Auschwitz⁷

I am writing this editorial just after my return from a one-day visit to Auschwitz with a group of Ecolint teachers and students. I have been funding teachers to go on this visit now for eight years, as an experience that I hope will enhance their understanding of what it is we are doing when we prepare the next generation for life in an uncertain and complex world with deep roots in its recent barbarous past. For the last two years students have also been able to take part. As this is my last year at the school, I felt that it was my turn to go too. I was pleased to be going with a student group that for the first time was drawn from all three of our campuses.

I have asked the students who took part, who were clearly moved by what they had experienced, to write about their feelings and impressions for the next edition of *Espacecolint*.

In preparation for the visit, I had been reading a new book about the Holocaust by Michaël Prazan, the French producer of a documentary film based on interviews with survivors, observers, and

⁷ First published in *Espacecolint*, November 2010.

participants (Prazan, 2010). It is about not the extermination camps but the *Einsatzgruppen* (the title of the book), the killing squads which toured Nazi-occupied territories in eastern Europe disposing of millions of Jewish people with a barbarism that defies belief.

What struck me above all about this story was how the leaders and organisers of this mass murder came from Germany's educated elite. Many had doctorates. How, one keeps on asking oneself, did such people, end up as enthusiastic and diligent mass murderers? What went wrong with their education? If this happened once, how can we be so sure that the young people we are educating today will never be sucked into such an abyss? What should we be doing in our teaching to make sure that this never happens again? How can we ensure instead that the young people we are educating will take the opposite course, stand up for what is right and good, and risk their own lives for the sake of others?

Intelligence and high levels of formal education are no guarantee of goodness. Many of 'the Righteous', those who helped Jews to escape from Nazi persecution, were ordinary people with little formal education (Gilbert, 2002). What they had, however, was empathy with others, a capacity to love, and a deep-rooted sense of what was right and what was wrong. They lacked many of the qualities we prize in education. They were not particularly intelligent or well-informed, not analytical, not quick on the uptake, not even creative (our latest educational buzz word – the inventors of the gas chambers were highly creative). But they were good people.

Coming back on the plane from Auschwitz, still reflecting on my experiences and still finding it difficult to grasp that I had been to Poland and back in a day, I was left wondering what we should do at Ecolint to prepare our students to face issues that we hope will be very different from those that faced young German graduates in the late 1930s and early 1940s but which may have similar elements (the justification of torture, the possible use of nuclear weapons, etc.).

The handling of situations in which students need to explore relationships; the promotion of respect and tolerance; taking responsibility for one's own actions, rather than hiding behind superiors; developing empathy, through the study of literature and the arts; the explicit discussion of ethical issues – all these assumed a new significance.

When I write to parents every year with the summer's examination results, I always say this:

Passing examinations is not the only, or main, purpose of the education we provide in the school, important though it is. It is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for happiness and success in life or for being kind, wise, loving and responsible, or indeed for most of the many other things we would above all like our children to grow up to be.

Coming back from Auschwitz, I feel more than ever that there is no more important a message that an educator needs to get across.

In this edition of *Espacecolint* you will find articles on: Rousseau, whose deepest values were the complete opposite of everything that Nazism stood for; *la Genève internationale*, which for centuries has been a refuge for those fleeing despotism; Douglas Deane, Ecolint teacher in the 1930s who knew early on which side he, and the school he loved, stood for; and the *Roma* whose predecessors were dragged from their nomadic homes all over Europe to be gassed at Auschwitz.

FIVE SERMONS FOR ALL SAINTS AND ALL SOULS

During my time as Headmaster of Winchester College (2000–2003), a boys boarding school founded in 1382, every day began with prayers in the school's fourteenth-century chapel. As Headmaster, I was fre-

quently asked to address the assembled boys both on weekdays and for a slightly longer sermon on Sundays. Once a term the whole school also processed to a service in the nearby Winchester Cathedral where I would ascend the high seventeenth-century pulpit and address the boys far below me in the magnificent nave. These sermons were an opportunity to get across messages that ought to be a key part of any education in which morality, religion, and history have a central place. Given the need for brevity and to capture the potentially restless attention of 13–18-year-old boys, I probably gave even more thought to writing these short sermons than at other times I would have done to preparing a text with a view to publication.

Five sermons given on successive days during the week of All Saints and All Souls follow. They draw the attention of pupils to a number of people from the past worthy of admiration – heroes or heroines if you like, though I know these words are out of fashion and rightly need to be used with caution – together with central messages of the Christian religion. They encourage pupils to turn their minds to existential issues that might otherwise not be faced in the busy daily routines of school. They also look ahead to the following week when pupils will be asked also to remember those who gave their lives for their country in the two world wars. These included large numbers of former pupils commemorated in the school's own War Cloisters.

'Wykehamists' is the name given to pupils of this school, after Bishop William of Wykeham, Chancellor of England under Kings Edward III and Richard II, and the school's founder.

Monday, 30 October 2000

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

This first week back in school after Leave-out (half term holiday) is a special week in the Christian church calendar. It is the week in which falls All Saints Day (Wednesday) and All Souls Day (Thursday).

All Saints Day is the day on which we remember all those special people whose lives have shown the particular strength and force of the Christian message over the centuries. All Souls Day is the day on which we remember all those who have died, the vast army of people who came before us, and who still influence what we believe and who we are.

The following week is when we remember all those who died in the First and Second World Wars, especially all those Old Wykehamists commemorated in War Cloisters.

So, the theme of these two weeks is, in part, remembering. This is something our present world is not always very good at. A world where the pace of change is very fast is likely to be a present-centred one. But we ignore the past at our peril. We are arrogant if we think we know all the answers. We should certainly be critical about what is handed down to us from the past, but we should try to learn about it.

This week I want us to remember eight people who have a special place in the history of Christianity, and indeed of humanity: a nun; a philosopher; a farmer; and five Wykehamists. None of these were saints in the strict sense of the term, but they were all people set apart, which is one of the things that 'saint' means.

Today, briefly, the nun. She is one of the most famous Christians of the second half of the twentieth century: Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

By origin an Albanian, she worked for many years as a teacher in India before deciding that she wanted to devote her life to the poorest of the poor in that country. And this is what she did for the rest of her life, in the slums of Calcutta. She died in 1997 shortly after Princess Diana, her death somewhat overshadowed by that event. She had founded an order of nuns which today carries on her work not just in India but all over the world.

Her particular concern was with the dying. During her lifetime she cared for tens of thousands of people picked up from the streets and rubbish dumps of Calcutta: people who were starving, abandoned,

riddled with disease, gnawed at by rats, in one case living in a drain and half eaten by worms. She and her fellow nuns gave them what physical comfort they could, and love and attention until they died.

What we learn from Mother Teresa is how someone can take the Christian message of love and turn it into something very concrete and very moving. We learn from her the virtue of being humble and the virtue of being selfless. We, in all probability, are unlikely to be Mother Teresas, but the message we can take from her life is that we too can show love and we too can put others before ourselves.

Mother Teresa also believed that what she did she did through the grace of God. Hers was a clear, strong Christian faith which most of us rarely come across these days, and which few of us probably share.

It is the same clear, strong faith in the resurrection and in the grace of God that St Paul tells us about in today's reading (1 Corinthians 15). It is worth thinking about, not least because it was the faith that moved Mother Teresa to do the things she did.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Tuesday, 31 October 2000

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

I explained yesterday that I would be talking to you this week about eight special people, eight people in some way set apart, from whom we can learn something.

Our world is very sceptical about saints and heroes, about lives held up to us as examples that we should respect and follow. We seem to get more enjoyment from debunking heroes, finding fault, showing that great men and women had feet of clay.

This is very healthy in one sense, but we have over-reacted against the myths and hypocrisy of previous generations. Some people do have special qualities that we should admire and from which we can learn.

We heard yesterday about Mother Teresa. Today I want to tell you something briefly about a very different person: the French philosopher Simone Weil. In some ways she is a curious choice. She was not even a baptised Christian. She had no interest in the afterlife, the theme of many of this week's Bible readings, and could not accept many of the Church's teachings. But she is one of the twentieth-century philosophers most influenced by Christianity and she herself has been hugely influential.

She came from a prosperous Jewish family in Paris. She did brilliantly at school and then came top of her year in philosophy at the Sorbonne university. She could speak or read innumerable languages. She was the French equivalent of someone who was top of the Winchester Election Roll and went on to be top of her year – or Wrangler – at Cambridge. But she never overvalued her intelligence. She once wrote that a person who celebrates their own intelligence is like a man condemned to imprisonment who shows off the size of his cell. The truth of a life, she said, had nothing to do with intelligence.

She was a teacher during the 1930s. She was also politically active, campaigning to improve the lot of French workers and doing manual work herself so that she could share their experiences. Then came the Nazi invasion of France. Her family, being Jewish, fled to the south of France and then to New York. Simone, however, was unhappy being safe in the USA and was keen to get back to Europe to join the French Resistance. So, she came to England, hoping to be sent back to France by the French government in exile. But her health was not good and her obviously Jewish appearance would have made her involvement in a secret mission impossible. So, she stayed in England, eating only the meagre rations that French people were allowed across the Channel. She developed TB and died in Kent in 1943 aged 34.

Her works were mostly only published after her death. They are often difficult (the great French statesman, General de Gaulle, said after reading some of them that he thought she was mad). But she

asked really important questions: about whether God exists, about how a good God is compatible with a world full of pain, about what is sacred in human life, about how people's jobs can be made more satisfying. She worried away at these issues in order to give us insights that can make us understand better our own lives.

What we learn from Simone Weil – what we should remember about her in a week that is about remembering – is her incredible courage, her willpower to struggle with life's difficulties, her toughness of mind, and her sense that being alive is something very special, an adventure that we should actively do something with, not just drift through.

Today's reading from the Bible is about the resurrection of the dead. Simone Weil did not believe in this. Maybe she was wrong. But she did believe that rebirth in this life was possible, and that we achieve this by stepping outside ourselves and seeing that there is more to the world than simply our narrow wants and desires.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Wednesday, 1 November 2000

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today is All Saints Day. It is the day on which we remember all those special people – those people 'set apart' – whose lives have shown the strength and force of the Christian message over the centuries.

On Monday and Tuesday, you heard about two people who, though not saints in the strict sense of the word, were special people whose lives have lessons to teach us. They were Mother Teresa the nun and Simone Weil the philosopher.

Today we remember 'All Saints': men and women who died under persecution rather than give up their beliefs; men and women

who devoted their lives to the poor and the sick; men and women who remained cheerful despite appalling suffering; men and women with great intellects – including some of the great minds of western civilisation, like St Augustine and St Thomas Aquinas; men and women who gave up their lives for others, like the man who volunteered to go to the gas chambers so that someone else might be spared.

All these people had their faults. They were not perfect. That is not what being a ‘saint’ has meant. They did bad things; they could be irritating; they could be self-righteous; they could be intolerant of people who disagreed with them. Like the rest of us.

But they had qualities that in many ways were admirable, and that give us something to emulate in our own lives.

Today’s Gospel reading lists some of these qualities, the so-called Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3–10). It is one of the best known and most important Christian texts.

It says in particular that those who are persecuted shall receive their reward. When listening to it I want you to remember all those who have been persecuted and lost their lives over the centuries for their beliefs: those who stood up to Hitler or Stalin, for example, during the last century, both the Christian ones and the non-Christian too.

We must also remember that Christians over the centuries have persecuted each other and at times non-Christians whose views are worthy of respect even if we disagree with them. Today is a day to remember all these people, for their courage and their willingness to put principle before self.

I want to mention in particular five Wykehamists. They are not saints, but all five were put to death in the sixteenth century for what they believed in. One was a Protestant: John Philpot, burned alive – a horrendous death – during the reign of Queen Mary. Four were Roman Catholics: John Rugg, executed under Henry VIII for refusing to accept the King as head of the Church, and John Body, a schoolmaster, and John Munden and Alexander Rawlins, both

priests, who had their heads chopped off during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. All refused to deny what they believed in.

We may not agree with the beliefs these people refused to renounce or that they were worth dying for. But they showed courage. They showed a willingness to put principle before self.

They were all Wykehamists as you are. They came into this chapel every day of their lives while they were here as pupils, over 400 years ago. So, it is appropriate that on this day, All Saints Day, we remember them too, alongside all the others.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Thursday, 2 November 2000

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Today is All Souls Day. It is the day on which we remember all those who have died, the vast army of people who came before us and who still influence what we believe and who we are.

In many Roman Catholic countries, it is a very special day. People go to cemeteries to lay flowers on graves and, in parts of Latin America, to sit and talk to the dead. With the growing influence of the USA around the world, All Souls Day is in danger of being overshadowed by Halloween. This is a much more banal and highly commercialised event. Witches and goblins do not do much to help us think about who we are. Being reminded of the dead does.

It reminds us that we are only in this world for a finite period, that we have been preceded by countless generations of other human beings, and that we are as we are partly because of all that has gone before us.

It is not morbid to think of these things. It is being tough-minded and realistic to do so. Among other things it helps us to appreciate the gift of being alive.

I want us on this day to remember all those who have died in our families, in particular any who were and are near and dear to

us. But also, all those others of whom we have heard but who may have died before we were born.

I also want us to remember all those who have studied at this school since it was founded. Boys have entered and left this school in each of the last 618 years. Those who started this term are the 618th intake. They went on to be priests and bishops, monks, schoolmasters, civil servants, diplomats, politicians, scholars, novelists, explorers, business people, lawyers, military men. In terms of the number of people who have been through this school we are the tip of the iceberg. I am simply the 55th headmaster.

Next week we will remember former men of the school who died in the two world wars of the last century, and in particular on Remembrance Day, November 11th.

Today's Gospel reading is St John's account of the Resurrection of Christ: Mary Magdalene and then the apostles finding the tomb empty (John 20). It is the Christian affirmation that death is not the end.

In a sermon last week, the Archbishop of Canterbury said that we now live in a society in which few people believe that there is any kind of life after death. If this is true, we are the first civilisation in world history to do so. That in itself makes it worth pausing to think about what all those previous generations died believing.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Friday, 3 November 2000

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We have spent this week of All Saints and All Souls remembering the dead. I have chosen a few people whom I think it is particularly worth remembering. With the exception of the five Wykehamists they have all been from the twentieth century. This was a century which saw some of the greatest achievements in human history but

also the greatest barbarities, like the Nazi extermination of Europe's Jews and the extermination of countless millions by a variety of communist regimes. On Monday we heard about Mother Teresa, on Tuesday about Simone Weil, the brilliant French philosopher. Today I want to tell you about someone very different, an Austrian called Franz Jägerstätter who was beheaded by the Nazis in 1943.

Jägerstätter was a small farmer who left school at the age of 14. He was brought up in a small village not far from Hitler's own Austrian birthplace. He was a Christian, but took the teachings of his Church and their implications more seriously than many of his contemporaries. Most Austrians welcomed Hitler's takeover of their country in 1938 with great enthusiasm. Not so Jägerstätter. He was one of the very few Austrians to vote against the union of the two countries, and the only man to do so in his village. He had understood that Nazism was evil – ruthless, cruel, inhumane – and treated people as inferior just because they happened to belong to a certain race, or were disabled or mentally ill. He wanted nothing to do with it.

He had done his military service, but having understood what the regime was like refused to do any more. He would not fight or kill in support of the indefensible. It was as simple as that. His duty, to himself and to God, was to do what was good and right, not to further the cause of evil. And this is what led to his imprisonment, his trial, and execution.

For much of the time, in our own lives, it is not always easy to decide what is good or true or right or wrong. So many of the choices that face us, especially in public matters, involve shades of grey rather than black and white. But what faced Jägerstätter was a matter of black and white. There is no doubt that the Nazi regime was evil. No other word will do to describe it, and Jägerstätter chose not to do anything to help it.

People said he should give way and think of his wife and family. But he could not go against his deepest moral principles. So, he went

to his death for the sake of something bigger than himself – an idea, a principle, a sense of duty, God.

I sometimes feel that what is special or ‘sacred’ about some human beings is not what is distinctively individual about them. It is, instead, the extent to which they are able to become part of some objective notion of goodness that is independent of themselves.

And that is exactly how Franz Jägerstätter felt when he made his stand. There was something bigger than himself that he had to obey. He called this God.

Jägerstätter believed that when he died this was not the end. His strong Christian beliefs about death are summed up in today’s Bible reading. The statement he wrote in prison just before his execution shows how firmly he believed that death would be ‘swallowed up in victory’, as St Paul put it (1 Corinthians 15:54).

But even if you do not share Franz Jägerstätter’s belief in an afterlife, you can still feel that there is something noble and magnificent about someone who deliberately lost his life rather than do something he knew to be evil.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A LENTEN ADDRESS
TO 14–16-YEAR-OLDS

I was asked to address a large group of boys who had chosen to be confirmed as members of the Church of England and whose preparation was being overseen by the school’s chaplains. The request was specifically to talk about what the faith that they were about to confirm meant to me. This was a personal and difficult request, but one that it was impossible to refuse as the headmaster of an Anglican school and as someone who had himself been confirmed as an Anglican at

the age of 14. The references to the world of mass media reflect the period in which it was given. If I were to give such a talk today, I would doubtless be giving examples from contemporary social media instead. This address was given on the evening of Wednesday, 6 March 2002.

I am very interested in ideas and always have been. I hope you are too, or at least become so if you are not already. People who leave this place without sometimes getting excited about ideas have not really got out of a Winchester education what we want you to get out of it. In my case I even occasionally wondered whether I was not more interested in ideas than in people. But I have always been quick to realise that ideas are ultimately rather arid unless they can be turned into something that has meaning in our individual lives.

So, what I want to do this evening is say a few things about some ideas that I think are relevant to those of you preparing for your confirmation, a few things about what the faith that you are about to confirm means to *me* – that is something that the Senior Chaplain has asked me to talk about – and then something about how the two are linked.

I have read a number of articles recently about how the world is becoming polarised – split down the middle – into two types of people. On the one hand you have what can be variously described as a secular, western, liberal, capitalist, sceptical, individualist view of the world. That is a lot of adjectives! It is a view of the world we are most familiar with in places like Western Europe and North America. It is the view of the world shared by most members of the educated elite who wield power and possess wealth in our world – the group of people to which most of us here belong or will belong.

People who have this view of the world do not believe that the world has any kind of overall purpose or meaning. Many of us have probably had this feeling, at least some of the time. We do not feel that we are part of an overall story. We are not sure why we are here

or what we are supposed to do with this life we have been given. We have also come to feel that there are no longer any firm rules to guide us in what we do. 'Right' and 'wrong' are words that many of us rarely use. So, all that matters, we are encouraged to think, is that we are true to ourselves, assert our own identities, do our own thing, discover what turns us on, and have a good time.

Open any lifestyle magazine or newspaper colour supplement – the very sight of them, on a Saturday or Sunday, makes me physically ill – and you will see what this view of the world can lead to at its worst. A recent glance came up with the following: handbags to die for (I am not inventing it – do people really die for handbags?); 10 tips on how to host the best dinner party ever; 20 tips on how to give your girlfriend what she really wants.

Meanwhile, as forests of this sort of stuff are churned out week on week, the earth turns on its axis; stars billions of light years away flicker in the night sky; and each day millions of people are born and millions of people die (many of them for the sake of handbags). And we do not know what it all means in any sense that might satisfy us; and we have no hope that it will *ever* have any meaning because the questions we ask about the world, we feel, cannot be answered.

That is one view of the world. The other, in part a reaction against all the uncertainty and doubt I have just described, is the opposite. It is full of certainty and truth. It tells a story about how the world came into being, what it is all for, what our part in it is and how we ought to behave. It is the world view of the Muslim fundamentalist, the Mormon, the Jehovah's Witness, the evangelical Christian from the American Bible Belt, some Anglicans, some Roman Catholics, some Presbyterians, and some Zionists. People with this world view know where they stand, are reassured by this knowledge and by their participation in a community of like-minded people.

The articles which I have been reading suggest that this view of the world – which, of course is not new (it is the traditional religious

account of the world) – is gaining ground as the western secular view I described first has also gained ground. One of the things that 11 September 2001 meant was this: the clash between two seemingly irreconcilable worlds. One of the authors I have been reading has predicted more clashes of this kind to come (none of this of course is to suggest that ‘fundamentalism’ has to be aggressive – many people with a clear and simple view of the world are generous, peace-loving, and ask little more than to be left alone to live their lives).

Those, then, are two sets of big ideas: the liberal, secular, sceptical view of the world, and the view of the world of those who have found truth and banished doubt. I have been attracted to both of these views of the world in the course of my life. But I have also come to the conclusion that people who play around with ideas in their heads, as I do, have one main task: to put these conflicting ideas into a new synthesis which enables them to find some kind of truth and certainty in the world, some kind of explanation of who we are, while never hiding from the confusion and uncertainty that we keep on experiencing. It is a social and political task – a task for all of us – not just an individual one.

I was brought up as a church-going Christian. My family went to different sorts of churches at different times during my childhood, because my parents came from different Christian traditions. My father’s family were Anglicans and were farmers, and because one part of the family owned the farm adjacent to the village church the family always provided the churchwarden. It was a job that was passed from one generation to the next. One simply went to church because that was what people did and had always done.

I was therefore confirmed as a matter of course. It never occurred to me that there was any choice. And, at the age of 14, I took it very seriously. I really did feel, on my first communion, that I was joining a body of people – the body of the faithful – who, though separated

in time and space, were all part of the same spiritual community. I still feel that.

However, it did not last. The world around me, or at least the world of ideas that I was coming into contact with through my education, saw religion as something that had had its day. The scientific view of the world seemed to leave little room for religious belief. The great twentieth-century psychologists, Freud and Jung, explained it away as figments of people's imagination. Nietzsche said 'God is dead'. Marx showed how religious belief kept people in their place in the social order. It all came to seem very implausible and very irrelevant. So, I stopped going to church and never set foot inside my college chapel the whole time I was at university.

A lot of my friends, however, just happened to be Roman Catholics and after university I went to live in Spain where I met a lot more Roman Catholics – and at that time Spain was a country in which religion was still incredibly important (most of the families I knew had at least one son who was a priest and one son or daughter who was thinking of becoming a monk or a nun), and then after Spain I went to teach in a Roman Catholic school in the north of England run by a religious order. Every lesson began with a prayer and a sign of the cross; and one of my friends on the staff went to Rome to train for the priesthood, and I went there to visit him.

I became very interested therefore in Roman Catholicism, and in the strict version of Roman Catholicism that was common among the people I was mixing with. It was a kind of Christianity that had all the certainty that I no longer had. Its beliefs were clear: they were laid down in the Bible and in the teachings of the Church, and where there was any doubt on major issues, the Pope, it seemed, was there to tell you what to believe.

But I could never quite swallow all this. It was too certain, too complete a picture of the world, and I knew that the world was

not certain and that *my* picture of it was not, and would never be, complete. So I drifted away from all that. I read a great deal – mostly nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature – and this simply reinforced my view that religion had had its day. Where is Christianity in most of the great writers of the last 200 years: in Chekhov or Proust or Flaubert or Kafka or Camus? I could not find it, and if these great minds had no time for it, why should I? That is how I felt.

But what I did find in these writers was a search for meaning beyond the material, a sense of mystery, and a feeling that life was a great adventure to be taken seriously, not a place where you ought to waste time on ‘handbags to die for’.

So, I had rejected both the wholly secular, ‘have a good time’, ‘do your own thing’, and ‘don’t worry about all this having any kind of meaning’ view of the world *and* the certainties – the fundamentalism, if you like – of a traditional faith. These are the two views of the world that in the present day are increasingly in conflict with each other: al-Qaeda on the one hand and Las Vegas on the other. And in the same way that people are saying we must find a middle way in our societies between these extremes, I think that I too came to find a middle path between them.

I knew that the world would remain very puzzling and confusing, but I did know that there was something outside myself, that I was part of something very much bigger, that goodness was not just a fiction but something very real, and that Christianity encapsulated these truths in a mysterious but very important way. So, I started going to church, saying my prayers there, and rummaging around inside Christianity to see how it might make sense of my life. And it did, and still does, quite often if not always. Despite this my attachment to Christianity remains strong. I was brought up to be a Christian and one should only reject what one has been brought up to be if it is bad and it is not. I am also, like you, the inheritor of 2,000 years of Christian belief and practice. People have been taking part in the

mass or holy communion in this country for over 1,200 years, and in this school for over 600.

And when, in the communion service, we say the prayers for the dead, I think of all the countless millions who have done this before me and who are no longer in this visible world. I also think of those countless millions all over the world – for Christianity is a truly global religion – who are also taking their communion at the same time or on the same day. And that sense of all these people, alive and dead, taking part in this event is a very special one and makes me feel part of something beyond myself and gives meaning to my life. I hope that you too, when you become confirmed members of the Church, will feel something similar.

EDUCATION AND THE COMMON GOOD:
THE ROLE OF BUSINESS⁸

When a national curriculum was first introduced in England in 1989, I joined the new body, the National Curriculum Council (NCC) that had been created to oversee its implementation. My appointment was as professional officer responsible for history. The range of tasks facing NCC, however, was such that to this role were quickly added further tasks including responsibility for the 14–16 age group, guidance to schools on a range of cross-curricular themes, and liaison with bodies promoting economic awareness and understanding. The development of education–business partnerships was a major feature of this period, encouraged by the creation earlier in the 1980s by the then Prince of Wales (the future King Charles III) of Business in the Community (BITC), an organisation whose role was to encourage corporate community involvement including support for schools

⁸ First published in *The Hugh Kay Memorial Lecture*, 1996 (limited circulation booklet).

and young people. I worked closely with staff at BITC and was able to see at first hand some of the benefits of the partnerships being established between individual schools and individual businesses. This experience is reflected in the lecture which follows.

The world of business has changed dramatically since the 1990s, most particularly with regard to corporate community involvement. In some ways DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion), ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance), and the associated phenomenon of ‘woke capitalism’, have been a response to the demand that business pay more attention to its societal implications, though with some very negative as well as positive effects. The fundamental issues, however, about the common good and the need for a strong ethical dimension to business activity – the themes of the lecture – have not gone away. Were I to give a lecture again with the same title, it would be superficially different in many ways but the underlying messages would be unlikely to change.

The lecture summarises the work my organisation had been doing to promote moral education through the creation of a National Forum on Values in Education and the Community. The Forum’s draft Statement of Values, which I discuss, received widespread endorsement in the consultation to which I refer. There was strong support from some influential public figures and some major newspapers. A few journalists derided it as ‘moralising’ or as a new version of the Ten Commandments (‘Dr Tate’s tablets’ was one large headline). When the National Curriculum came up for revision a couple of years later under the new Labour government, the Statement of Values was attached to it and given official status. The main success of the initiative was to have given the lie to the crudest forms of ethical relativism then in circulation.

The following lecture took place one evening in the Church of St James Garlickhythe on the banks of the River Thames in the heart of the City of London, the capital’s financial district. There has

been a church on the site since the early Middle Ages, the medieval church having been destroyed in the 1666 Great Fire of London and a new one built by the great architect Sir Christopher Wren and opened in 1682. The contrast between the classical splendour of the church interior and the modernity of the surrounding office buildings felt like a metaphor for the relationship between contemporary business and the age-old ethical inheritance that I was discussing in the lecture.

I was delighted to be invited to give this lecture in memory of Hugh Kay, following predecessors as distinguished as Cardinal Winning and Viscount Tonypandy. My theme 'Education and the Common Good: the role of business' draws on ideas which Hugh Kay, as a great Christian broadcaster and writer, expounded with such vision and skill. A memorial lecture should begin with the recognition that, in so far as we see anything clearly, it is often because of those who have gone before us. There must be many people in this country who see things more clearly as a result of Hugh Kay. I am honoured to be asked to speak in his memory.

Rights at the expense of duties

In his splendid book, *The Principle of Duty* (1994), David Selbourne quotes Deuteronomy 27:18: 'cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way' and adds 'but cursed too, the citizen who takes no step to bring the blind back to their paths.' Selbourne is making the point that our duty to our neighbour is positive and active, not just a matter of making sure we do him (or her) no harm. This indeed is the main thesis of his book: that in our individualistic, materialistic, and hedonistic society, we have become obsessed with rights and wants at the expense of duties, that as a consequence the civic order is under threat, and that we need to be brought back to our proper

paths. It is not just that we fall short in our civic duties – all societies have done that, to varying degrees – but that we are in danger of losing, for the first time, the very idea that there is a common good which has a prior moral claim to our attention.

When I read this passage from Selbourne's book – back in August, on a Normandy beach – it had a special resonance for me. Not long before I had looked down from my high window on the forecourt below the building where I work at Notting Hill Gate and saw a blind man with a white stick who was indeed 'wander(ing) out of the way'. He was trapped against a wall that was preventing him from finding a route to the tube station. A young man sat on the wall, aware of what was happening but making no attempt, in Selbourne's words, to 'bring (him) back to (his) path'. He watched the blind man struggle until finally by trial and error he found his way out.

The young man exhibited no sense that he belonged to a community in which people have duties to each other. His behaviour illustrated, *in extremis*, what happens when we lose the idea that we have responsibilities to other people which are as strong as those to ourselves.

The common good

The theme I have chosen for this lecture is how, through education and the role of business in education, we might revive a weakened civic sense, and in particular the notion of the common good as something morally compelling in our lives. I shall not be arguing the case for the existence of a common good or for the moral claims it imposes on us. Others have done this with greater eloquence. I shall take it as axiomatic that we are social beings first and foremost and that we become significant through our membership of communities defined by history and place. As John Donne put it in his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, 'every man is a piece of the continent,

a part of the main' (Donne, 1959, p. 108). My aim is to look at what this means for education and for the role of business in education.

The pursuit of the common good, I hope to show, is necessary – and morally required – not just for the sake of the community, but also for the sake of the individual and for the sake of business. By fulfilling our duties to the community we are reaffirming ourselves as moral beings, developing some of the most important talents we have been given and placing ourselves as part of a wider story. It is hardly surprising that the period in our recent history in which the idea of working for the common good was most visibly centre stage – the Second World War – is the one to which many (though not all) people look back as a time when, in spite of hardship, they had a sense of purpose, identity, and fulfilment.

For some, our duty to others is a matter of divine command. For others, it is the consequence of absolute values which exist irrespective of whether there is a God. For C. S. Lewis, it is part of our common traditions. 'All civilised people', he wrote, 'have in common a belief in the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true and others really false to the kind of thing the universe is and the kind of beings we are' (Lewis, 1943). For Tolstoy, it arises through the renunciation which comes when we contemplate the fragility and contingency of our separate existence within an infinite universe. At its simplest, duty to others – and the primacy of this duty over the pursuit of individual wishes and desires – is a *sine qua non* of the very notion of community, of civic order, and of the state as expression of that civic order.

The fact that I have chosen the common good as my theme indicates how far, in my opinion, an emphasis on rights and wants has taken us from more traditional community-oriented societies. I doubt if I would be giving the same lecture if I occupied a similar role in Japan, with its greater emphasis on loyalty, or in Taiwan or Singapore where the role of family and clan still loom large. The

sense of community and duty to others, that are under threat in our society, are things that some other societies are able to take largely for granted. This gives them enormous advantages when it comes to the trust which needs to be placed in relations between young and old, between employees and management, between contractors and clients, and between teachers and students. But do not get me wrong. I am not saying that there are models of community out there ready for us to adopt or that other countries' sense of community does not carry disadvantages. An overwhelming emphasis on family may be the enemy of a strong civil sense; an overwhelming emphasis on conformity may stifle imagination, creativity, and business innovation; an overwhelming sense of loyalty to the state, as opposed to the community, can lead to problems with which we are all too familiar. We do not need to look outside our own traditions, with their Hellenic, Hebraic, and Christian roots, to find the basis for the recovery of a proper sense of duty and of the centrality of the common good.

'Citizens are not born, but made'

The importance of education in fostering a sense of community and of duty arises from the fact that, as Spinoza put it, 'citizens are not born, but made.' A key purpose of education thus becomes the development of knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for people to assume responsibility for themselves, for those close to them, and for the local and national communities to which they belong. The Education Reform Act of 1988, which provides the basis for teaching and learning in maintained schools, puts it very well in requiring the curriculum to prepare pupils for the 'responsibilities of adult life' and promote the 'spiritual, moral, cultural, mental, and physical development' not just of pupils but also 'of society'.

Despite this clear statement that the purposes of education are inseparable from those of society, including its less tangible moral

and spiritual purposes, we have often continued to think of education very much in individualistic terms as something solely concerned with the maximising of individual potential. Of course, maximising the potential of large numbers of individuals may well be – indeed ought to be – beneficial to society as a whole. But it cannot be thought of simply in those terms. Nor should it be seen purely in a utilitarian sense as enhancing the country's economic competitiveness and thus increasing the profits of 'UK plc' (a phrase which mistakes means for ends and which I continue to dislike). Developing the skills and qualities needed for a competent, competitive and flexible workforce is a vital aim of education and should shape what happens in schools more than it currently does. But it is not the sole purpose of education. Indeed, as I shall argue, our economic needs require that it should *not* be seen as the sole purpose nor interpreted too narrowly.

*National Forum on Values
in Education and the Community*

Education for citizenship and moral education are thus key elements of the curriculum to which, in my view, we have not paid enough attention over the last few years. Schools in general are very moral places, put a great deal of emphasis on concern for others, and are highly conscious of their responsibilities towards their local communities. They have felt, with some justification, that they have had insufficient support in pursuing these key aspects of their role, both from central bodies such as my own and from society as a whole. They also, along with the rest of society, frequently suffer from the lack of a shared language with which to talk about these things.

It was for this reason, and because of general concern about the decline of a civic sense within society, that the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority (SCAA) held a conference at the beginning of this year on the theme of 'Education for Adult Life'. The

main outcome of the conference was the establishment of SCAA's National Forum on Values in Education and the Community, a large group of people from many different backgrounds, including business, whose recommendations are to be published shortly as a basis for wide consultation. The Forum has tackled two main issues: whether there is sufficient agreement on a moral code which schools should be promoting on society's behalf; and how best schools might transmit this code, and be supported in doing so.

A statement of core values

On the first of these issues, progress has been impressive. It was clear from an early stage that we would not reach agreement on the sources of our values, for example whether these had their grounding in God or in independent moral absolutes, or in utilitarian precepts such as 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number.' Equally, it was clear that we would disagree on how our values should be applied to particular issues. There is no consensus within our society, for example, about matters such as abortion or euthanasia or the distribution of wealth, let alone how conflicting values might be reconciled within any particular situation. In between, however, there was surprising agreement – across faiths, across people of no religious faith, and across professions and social groups – on a moral code that at the end of the day the members of the Forum felt to be non-negotiable. This includes values in the context of relationships, in the context of society, in the context of the environment, and in the context of self. Typically, it consists of statements such as 'we value truth, human rights, the law, justice and collective endeavour for the common good of society', 'we value others for themselves, not for what they have or what they can do for us', or 'we accept our duty to maintain a sustainable environment for the future.'

The hope is that this basic moral code will receive support during consultation and that it will be possible to issue it in due course as a

statement of the moral basis for the work of schools, and as a basis for the ways in which society should be setting a good example to the next generation.

I am conscious that this moral code is open to three kinds of criticism:

- first, that it is too general and bland to be of any use;
- second, that, however good it is, no one will pay any attention to it;
- third, that it is an inadequate substitute for existing codes such as the Ten Commandments.

I would contest all three.

First, in a society that has lost its traditional language of morality, the reminder that there are certain fundamental ethical principles which bind us all can only do good. It is the very obviousness of these ethical principles that has led to them being forgotten. The emphasis on those things that absolutely ‘have to be’ reasserts the centrality of the moral dimension in our lives, however difficult it is to define what those things are. As Iris Murdoch wrote in her book *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*: ‘In ethics we are always making the attempt to say something that cannot be said, something that does not and never will touch the essence of the matter. But the inclination, the running up against something, indicates something’ (Murdoch, 1992). In a sense, what we are trying to do is see whether society can agree on a re-statement of those fundamental ethical principles that, as Lord Griffiths of Fforestfach pointed out in the recent House of Lords debate on morality, have been shared throughout the ages by leading thinkers, major faiths, and different civilisations.

Second, we should not underestimate the power of big but simple ideas to influence people’s lives. As the history of Christianity has shown, such ideas can have an enormous impact partly because they can be applied in so many different ways while retaining their integrity. Francis Fukuyama, in his book *Trust*, describes a recent

experiment in which ‘a large group of people at a university were given tokens that they could exchange for money that they would receive personally or for money that the group as a whole would have to share’. The decisions that participants made showed ‘that between forty and sixty per cent of those in the experiment contributed altruistically to the group’s well-being. The only exception was a group of graduate students in economics’ (Fukuyama, 1996, p. 18). The latter, he added, had been taught that ‘the first principle of Economics is that every agent is actuated only by self-interest’.

Third, we have not been so arrogant as to think that our statement of core values should or could replace existing statements, for example, those offered by the major faiths. The exercise has been of a completely different kind – a search for what we have in common. Those who already have their own more precise formulations will not find them incompatible with what is proposed. It is people without moral codes we have been targeting.

Moral and civic education

The Forum has also looked at the context of moral and civic education in schools. The last thing it is proposing is that the school timetable should contain set lessons in morality in which pupils are taught the agreed moral code in some kind of catechism. Nor is it suggesting that schools assume responsibilities best left to parents. Anyone familiar with schools and young people can be under no illusions about the ineffectiveness of moral education that consists only of precepts, or about the need to reassert the fundamental responsibility of parents. The Forum urged that:

- moral and civic education should permeate the whole of the school curriculum;
- the school should act as a model of a moral community in the way in which it organised itself;

- there should be a timetabled programme of lessons and activities to prepare pupils for citizenship, and that this programme should have a component including work with the community.

Again, the idea is to consult widely on whether this is the best way forward, whether such provision should be mandatory and how schools might best be supported in the task. There was a general view that detailed prescription in these areas was undesirable. As with most educational innovations of recent years, there is already a great deal of good practice around which might serve as models. In matters such as these there can be, and should be, no single model on which to draw.

Business and the common good

By this stage in my talk, you may have begun to think that I have got you here under false pretences. As yet, I have said very little about the role of business. Let me now turn to this in the last part of what I have to say. Business depends on the existence of a sense of the common good, and on the attempts that are made to foster such a sense through education. It is also the role of business, in its turn, to promote this sense. Business depends on notions of the common good in a variety of ways:

- through the trust it can take for granted within communities where people see the need to obey rules and subordinate their interests for the sake of others;
- through the idea that work, in part, is effort for the community;
- through the confidence and optimism generated by communal identity, self-esteem, and sense of purpose.

Without trust, business cannot rely on its employees, contractors, or customers. As Francis Fukuyama has shown, societies with low

levels of trust impose on business high levels of 'transactional costs'. By this he means those relations with partners – whether customers, employees, or contractors – that in societies with high levels of trust can be taken 'on trust'. Similarly, without a sense that work is more than simply a means to earning a living and to personal career advancement, business will have difficulty in securing commitment to its goals and mission. Business also depends, more often than we think, on the *Zeitgeist* within which it operates. Where communities have a sense of who they are, where they have come from, what they stand for and where they are going, they are more likely to generate the attitudes and dispositions that business needs.

A common culture

This argues for a common culture shared by all members of the community. Societies which lack a common culture are less likely to generate a sense of the common good. The idea of a common culture is frequently misunderstood. A common culture is quite compatible with diversity of belief, custom, and allegiance. As long as this does not preclude multiple identities, there is no reason why pluralism in these areas should not coexist alongside a shared common culture, a shared moral code, and a shared sense of national, and indeed local, identity. In our enthusiastic celebration of diversity, we have neglected to point up those things we have in common or need to have in common. This harms not just the community, but business as well. Business operates less effectively when it is not able to take for granted a common set of manners, morals, and assumptions.

This, of course, creates particular challenges to multi-national businesses which operate in a variety of cultures. But it does not undermine my point. Company cultures – including that of a supra-national company – may also be important, and may indeed be a force for good, but should not supersede the prime duty of sustain-

ing the common culture of the wider community (whether this is national or regional), as a basis for that atmosphere of trust and common purpose within which business can operate more effectively. Business therefore does not just depend on the idea of the common good. It also promotes it. As well as providing the economic and material basis for many of the key constituents of what we regard as a 'civilisation' – a role we should never ignore – business also sets an example to the rest of society of how groups of people can work together for a common end. In an age characterised by an often-excessive individualism, this is a vital role.

Business at its best

At its best, like schools at their best, business can hold up a model of what it means to be a moral community. At its best, business can illustrate the application of a range of virtues: honesty, reliability, perseverance, punctuality, foresight, restraint, self-discipline, obedience to the law and to rules, self-improvement, concern for others and for the environment. At its best, business can show that moral issues should be taken seriously, that acting morally is not easy, but that moral decisions often require careful thought. For some people, work can be one of the strongest moral influences in their lives, stronger sometimes than community, church, or even family. As a powerful influence for good, it promotes many of the same ends as the education system. The absence of work, conversely, can deprive people of this moral influence, and of a sense of worth and purpose.

Business at its worst

Business, however, sometimes falls short of the best and can actively undermine both the common good and the best efforts of schools. Sometimes this involves breaking, or bending the law. When this

happens, it sets a bad example to young people, encourages an excessive cynicism about human motives, and undermines the authority of responsible adults. More frequently, it involves acting unethically within the law. There are many things in our society which are legal, but wrong. Indeed, one of the consequences of the rather unthinking liberalism unto which we have drifted is that unless something is against the law, the assumption has come to be that it is all right to do it. These, many people seem to feel, are matters of taste or preference, rather than of right and wrong.

However, it is wrong for businesses to have a cavalier attitude towards the environment, even if it is legal to do so. It is wrong to treat employees capriciously, even if there is no infringement of employment law. It is wrong to advertise products in ways that encourage the selfishness, irresponsibility, and rampant hedonism that parents are trying to combat. It is wrong to try and turn children into premature adults, especially premature sexual adults, for the sake of a synthetic youth culture geared to adult profit. It is wrong to make economic decisions which have an impact world-wide without paying due regard to the sovereignty of the nation states within which one operates and the well-being of the peoples of these states. It adds to the difficulties of schools when their efforts to promote the moral development of young people, and to develop positive attitudes towards business, take place against this kind of background. Business also needs to deal with the perception in some quarters that, despite what it might say, the qualities it really values are aggression, ruthlessness, and deception.

This is why I welcome the move to develop codes of business ethics and the efforts such as those of the sponsors of this lecture to raise awareness of ethical issues throughout the business world. This is why I also welcome the partnership of education and business to promote the social, intellectual, and moral development of young people. The strength of the partnership lies, at least in part, in the

coming together of those who share common ethical ends. It has been one of the biggest success stories in English education in recent years. It is something we do not hear enough about.

Business-education partnerships

Activities in which people from business provide young people with role models of adult life have real value. Given the poor example set by some public figures and the lack of role models elsewhere in some young people's lives, this can be an important effect of the business-education partnership. Such activities include:

- work experience for older pupils in schools and students in further education colleges;
- workplace visits and activities that enhance economic understanding and knowledge of career options;
- mentoring by business people of individual pupils at risk of failure;
- business case studies aimed at developing economic awareness and understanding;
- business support for the development in schools of the kind of skills needed in the workplace.

The very fact of business-education partnerships is in itself a signal to young people that part of being adult is helping others, working with others, and having a sense of duty towards the community. It is also a signal, and a very important signal, given the nature of human beings, that altruism and enlightened self-interest go hand in hand.

Business-education partnership needs to extend beyond those businesses currently involved in it. While 58% of primary and 92% of secondary schools currently have links with business, the majority of firms involved have over 200 employees. There are huge difficulties in securing the involvement of small and medium-sized firms in this kind of work, but given the mutual benefits of these partner-

ships and the growing prominence of such firms in our economy, this is an area in which we need a renewed push. As the Business in the Community *Aim High* awards have shown, there are some splendid examples of good practice around.

Finally, we must not be so carried away by rhetoric and the pursuit of noble ends that we forget to evaluate rigorously the effects of business-education partnerships. The purpose of the kind of activities I have referred to is to add value to the work of schools and colleges, and to the work of businesses. If it does not do this, if it does not promote the kind of attitudes in young people we are seeking to foster, if it does not help to raise levels of attainment, especially in the basics, if it gets in the way of the core objectives of business or of schools, then we should not be spending time on it. This is why we need thorough evaluation of this work to make sure it is meeting its objectives. There is a lot of evidence that it is, but we need to keep on demonstrating that it is. At the same time, we must not forget that some of the most important effects of this work, as of education generally, are extraordinarily difficult to measure.

Re-stating the old things in new ways

In some ways that has been the main point of this lecture: to re-assert some very obvious notions about things that are not always susceptible of measurement and that are liable to be ignored when we get stuck within a narrow utilitarian or individualistic view of them. The points I have been trying to make are in no way original. One of the problems of our society is the desire to say new things, when what is really needed much of the time is to re-state the old things in ways that show their relevance to new circumstances. That is what I have been trying to do.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HISTORY

All human consciousness is within the context of a past, even where this is a largely personal one. The past even comes to us in our dreams. If, however, one has had a good historical education, the wider past of nations and civilisations is ever present in one's life and shapes how one sees the future. It is an aim of schooling to give people this sense of the past and a sign of an educated person to have achieved it.

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED ¹

History was my favourite subject at school from the age of 11. At 13 I was visiting historical sites and museums on my own and never doubted that, when the time came, I would study history at university which I eventually did at an Oxford college founded in 1263 (for which personal connection with a medieval past I have always felt grateful). After university, following a brief period of uncertainty during which I worked in Spain – where I discovered another past

¹ First published in *History Today*, 49(4) [1999], pp. 62–63.

which has also never since left me – I trained to be a history teacher. I taught the subject in schools and teacher training colleges for 22 years, at different times also editing a history teachers journal, and acting as a chief examiner for national history examinations while in my spare time studying for MA and PhD degrees (both, of course, in history). Finally, I became the public official in England responsible for overseeing the implementation of a new national curriculum in history. During all this time I read relatively little history that was not directly relevant to my theses or to my teaching, but large amounts of literature which, because virtually none of it was contemporary, deepened further the deposits from the past within my mind.

The second half of my career never involved direct responsibility for things historical, but gave me opportunities, as chief executive or head, to poke my nose into the work of officials and teachers who did have such responsibilities. It was when I was Chief Executive of England's Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, after giving a number of speeches about the importance of an education in history, that I was asked by the magazine History Today to write about how I myself had become interested in the subject. Doing so made me think about the influences that had shaped my interests and preferences. In my case the two main factors were, first, a couple of history teachers, and, second, the discovery of a museum, fortuitously close to where I lived.

My first two history teachers at successive North of England grammar schools treated their pupils in a civilised way – not all did this, my Latin master leaving me with negative memories that put me off the subject for years – and came across as genuinely interested in the topics they were teaching. A turning point in my commitment to history was when, aged 11, studying the Tudors, I was asked to write an essay about Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck, the memorably quadrisyllabic pretenders to the English throne whose names trip off the tongue, and who plagued the founder of the Tudor dynasty

Henry VII (1485–1509) in the first part of his reign. Whether it was the municipal reference library where I went to find information about them, whose very ambiance imposed high expectations of seriousness on its readers, or just the satisfaction of putting a lot of facts into a coherent chronological narrative, but I emerged from the exercise feeling both that finding out and writing about these things was worthwhile and that I wasn't bad at it. What fixed the episode in my memory, however, was being praised publicly for my work by my teacher, when the marked essays were handed back, and asked to read my essay to the whole class. Whenever I hear the names Lambert Simnel and Perkin Warbeck – which, admittedly, is not often – both the table lamps and black sky outside the windows of that library in Harrogate, and a ground floor classroom full of maroon blazers in Knaresborough, come back into my mind with Proustian precision.

The other source of my lifelong interest in history was a museum. I tell the story of this in my article in History Today published in April 1999. The title of the piece, chosen by the magazine, is from Robert Frost's poem The Road Not Taken and evokes decisions and choices, which could easily have been otherwise, that shape the rest of one's life.

It was not until the age of 12, when my family moved to a late Victorian house, that I really discovered the past. Before that we had lived in 'modern' interwar houses with little sense of history. Our new house, in a suburb of Huddersfield, had a maid's room, bell pushes, a wine cellar, and an Edwardian brass-fitted bath and shower of imperial proportions. The house exuded a sense of another world, distant yet physically close.

The town, too, was overwhelmed by its heritage. At that time Huddersfield, like other textile towns, was dominated by mill chimneys. Every day, from my trolley-bus seat, I looked out at a diorama of the Industrial Revolution extending westwards into the Pennine hills. I walked past Victorian civic buildings and Victorian millowners'

mansions to a castellated Victorian school. Mill, chapel, town hall, technical college, railway station – these were the fixed points of a decidedly Victorian compass.

But what really brought the past to life, was the local museum. Our house was a few streets away from the Tolson Memorial Museum, a civic museum in traditional style dedicated to the history of the area from prehistoric times to the present day. It was partly the musty smell, the echoing footsteps, and the sense that here was a temple to another world. But it was also the satisfaction of placing myself within an overall scheme of things. The sequence of rooms moved ineluctably from the Old Stone Age, through Romans, Angles, Danes, and the Middle Ages, to the domestic textile system and the Industrial Revolution. The world of the final rooms, that of the textile industry, was still the Huddersfield I knew in the late 1950s. In explaining this world, the Museum both gave meaning to contemporary reality and a sense of identity with what had gone before. The people whose lives were reflected in its glass cases were in some way *my* people; the Pennine moors and valleys had also been *their* home.

My first interest was prehistory. An early purchase on a visit to the Museum was *Early Man in the District of Huddersfield* (Petch & Buckley, 1924), an account of local prehistory illustrated with fuzzy photographs of flints, pots, coins, and fortifications. I still have it, in limp cloth and home printing-set typography – a bargain at one and threepence. Contemporary 13-year-olds might be amazed to learn that I read it from cover to cover. I could soon distinguish narrow from broad blade pygmies and became familiar with the work of the French palaeontologist Abbé Breuil. I remember a footnote which caught my eye, ‘The Abbé H. Breuil has recently shown that the micro-graver occurred in Mas d’Azil times; the same opinion is held by Belgian archaeologists.’ I was being introduced to two worlds – that of my Mesolithic forbears and that of scholarship. It was the latter that seemed more remote.

I was struck by the list of local sites at which Mesolithic flints had been found. I had a sense of the vast amount of human traffic which over the millennia had made its way across areas now largely uninhabited. I persuaded my parents to drive me out to some of these sites in the hope that I, too, would make some finds. And, at last, I managed to do so, on a moor-top where flint did not naturally occur. Finding a couple of microliths lying there on the grey sand, exposed by weathering, was an experience I have not forgotten. Stone Age hunters had passed this way, I felt, bringing their flint with them. They had crouched down at the same spot beneath the same sky full of clouds and skylarks.

My second interest was the Romans. The area was full of Roman forts and roads, and in the grounds of the museum was a hypocaust from a local Roman bath house. Just above our house was a Brigantian hill fort, seat (so it was suggested) of Queen Cartimandua who had played a key role in the events of the conquest. This was a huge and impressive construction, incongruously topped by a Victorian jubilee tower, legacy of another empire. My history of Huddersfield in Roman times – also limp cloth and price two shillings – identified the site as the ‘Camulodunum’ of Ptolemy’s geography. More interesting still were the remains of Hadrian’s road at Blackstone Edge, marvellously preserved on a steep hillside amid heather and cotton grass.

The Romans soon became a special interest and I got permission to travel on my own to York to look at Roman antiquities in the Yorkshire Museum. I was quite a confident child at the time – before the self-consciousness of adolescence set in – and remember a public lecture by Professor Sir Ian Richmond, author of my well-thumbed booklet, at which (to the surprise of my history master) I got up and asked a detailed question about the excavations of a Roman fort. I wondered why people in the audience were smiling. I assumed it was because of some archaeological infelicity in my question, and

not – as it clearly was – amusement at the precocity of a small person in a school blazer taking things so seriously. In a coincidence worthy of an Anthony Powell novel, I later got to know Professor Richmond's widow who was a librarian at Balliol when I was there as a student.

The Huddersfield area was also rich in traces of the Angles, Danes, and Norse, but I was much less interested in these. They lacked the bright clarity of the Roman world – the regular roads, the Latin inscriptions, the carefully documented pottery types. Fragments of stone crosses seemed very dull. What did capture my imagination were place names. These were further examples of the concrete evidence of the past that gripped me. Enshrined in a name was a story and an almost physical link with another world. Almondbury, where we lived, was the *burh* of 'all the men'; Huddersfield was Hudræd's open land (maybe); Farnley was a woodland clearing with ferns – and, yes, the ferns were still there if one looked. They may have seemed dull but, unlike the Romans, the Angles, and Danes had been sufficiently committed to the land to name every last bit of it – or so it appeared to me.

Forty years later I realise how much my interest in the past, and my view of history, have been influenced by these early experiences. But it is more than this. Those early experiences have given me a sense of belonging and identity, not now with a particular area, but with these islands and the succession of people who lived here. They gave me a chronological framework and a sense of having a place in a story. This I have retained well into a postmodernist world which eschews all meta-narratives.

As someone involved in education, my early experiences have also left me with a sense of the tremendous value of knowledge in giving us control over the world in which we live. Mastering the different designs of Roman lamps, learning the names of the parts of a medieval abbey, knowing all the Mesolithic sites – all these gave

me a huge sense of achievement. We have downplayed far too much in education the benefits of knowledge and of memorising. Some of the most useful skills I have picked up have been through pursuing knowledge for its own sake. And not just skills, but values and attitudes too: persistence, thoroughness, and a concern for accuracy. I have tried to do my bit to reassert the importance of these things in my role as the government's curriculum adviser.

Perhaps the most lasting residue of these early experiences, however, is the sense of the depth and richness of particular places seen in the context of time, and of the aesthetic satisfaction this brings. Wherever I have lived I have tried to recapture this. It never comes across with the same freshness of youth, but I have always retained something of that feeling of simultaneous ephemerality and significance. It is a legacy for which I am grateful.

TIRED OF THE OLD DESCRIPTIONS
OF THE WORLD: RICHARD COBB AND HIS
RELEVANCE TO SCHOOL HISTORY ²

They leave out the people ... that kind of history misses out the main things I want to know about. I mean, I've just been talking to an old boy who was wounded in the trenches – he even showed me his wounds. That's what I mean by history, that's when it clicks for me (pupil, speaking about a history textbook). (Goodson, 1978, p. 50)

Some have become so obsessed with individual objectives and with logical thought processes that they have lost sight of history and gutted it of its humanity. (Booth, 1978, p. 8)

² First published in *History Teaching Review*, 14(2) [1982], 16–19.

None of my Oxford tutors had the same influence on me as my teachers at school. I was fortunate, however, to be taught by three distinguished historians: Christopher Hill, the famous Marxist historian of England's seventeenth-century revolution; Maurice Keen, medieval historian; and Richard Cobb, historian of the French Revolution. Richard Cobb was an amusing and attentive tutor, despite on one occasion shaving with an electric razor while I was reading him my weekly essay. I did not read most of his writings until 15 years later when I was teaching in Scotland and when I found him an exciting change from much of the history that I was both reading and teaching. I took advantage of my editorship of History Teaching Review, the journal of The Scottish Association of Teachers of History, to publish an article about the pleasures and benefits of reading a historian whom I felt I could recommend to my fellow teachers of history. My main themes were the importance for history teachers of constantly refreshing their knowledge and understanding of their subject through reading the best of academic writing and the need to enliven school history teaching with the kind of individual, quirky, and highly revealing details characteristic of Cobb's writings. I also used the article to try to sum up much of what I had been thinking over the previous 20 years about the different kinds of history I had been studying, researching, and teaching.

In a review article in *The Times Educational Supplement*, provocatively entitled 'Quick solutions for fearful minds: G. R. Elton on intellectual retardation amongst history teachers', a well-known critic of the educational scene lamented the absence of an 'ironic view' among some of those entrusted with the historical education of the young. The term 'ironic' came from the book Professor Elton was reviewing – Kieran Egan's *Educational Development* – and had a precisely defined meaning. Egan had identified four stages through which our minds pass: the mythic, the romantic, the philosophic,

and the ironic. According to Elton, some teachers – at all levels, not just in schools – have stuck at the penultimate ‘philosophic’ stage, in which ‘abstraction takes over from the particular’, failing, despite their years, to reach the maturity of the final ‘ironic’ stage, characterised as it is ‘by a regard for particulars explored and understood in full context’. Such retardation, Elton argued, causes problems for those pupils who, unlike their teachers, are ready for the leap into intellectual maturity (Elton, 1980).

Putting aside Elton’s bulldog manner – an inseparable feature of any comments by him on school history – there is much, I think, in what he has to say. His remarks could apply equally to writers of history textbooks, to compilers of kits, worksheets and audio-visual materials, to designers of syllabuses, and setters of examination questions. In some cases, it is doubtless a question of intellectual retardation *tout court*, what I recently heard described – in the hideous management language that already pollutes the educational world – as ‘high levels of executive burn-out in people-orientated professions’. The problem, however, is more widespread and more fundamental than this. It concerns the unconscious assumptions we make about the historian’s role, assumptions that often determine what we do as teachers of history. It is my argument that some of the things that are wrong with school history are a result of following models of historical activity that fail either to reflect the best of academic practice or to satisfy the educational needs of our pupils. If this is so, it might help to account for that sense of futility about the whole exercise that from time to time comes over even the best and most dedicated history teachers, a sense of being trapped in an activity of whose rules we are only dimly aware. It is a feeling that, in my case, usually surfaces at this time of year when, after marking and revising vast numbers of examination scripts, I realise yet again how generations of children leave school filled with the most ludicrous stereotypes – about the lives of pre-Reformation priests, the

attitudes of Russians towards the revolutions of 1917, the state of the Anglican Church in the eighteenth century – and how proudly-held certificates can conceal an utter want of any sense of the reality of those distant events to which candidates have devoted so many pages of ink during a long and sultry afternoon. This may of course be just a case of late summer pessimism, a historian's end-of-summer-holidays anomie. I have a feeling, however, despite all the attacks on rote-learning and dictated notes, that in many ways we are still not far removed from the world of *1066 and All That*, that all – in short – is not well (Sellar & Yeatman, 1998).³ Of course it never will be – to assume otherwise would be to fall into Professor Elton's 'philosophic' fallacy – but it could be a lot better than it is.

To argue that we are sometimes following the wrong models of historical activity might seem surprising. After all, have we not agonised for years over this very question of what historical study is all about? There are books and articles and checklists of objectives to guide us in these matters, and all of them stress just those qualities – concern for evidence, scepticism, empathy, a sense of the uniqueness of past events – that I would claim are central to historical activity. We seem to know what our discipline is about and we all accept that one of our aims as history teachers is to introduce pupils to some of its distinctive features, in so far as we can do this given the limitations imposed on us by conflicting educational aims, by the abilities of our pupils, and by organisational constraints.

The decision to mirror the main features of the discipline in our teaching creates two obligations. The first is to survey new developments that take place within our subject – not just new facts or new interpretations (though these are often enough ignored, both by

³ This is a widely read humorous book which parodies the many misunderstandings that arise from a historical education in schools. It has gone through many editions since first publication in 1930. The phrase '1066 and all that' has entered common parlance in England.

teachers and by the writers of textbooks) – but also new approaches, whether defined by subject-matter or by technique or by a combination of the two. Our job is to keep in touch with these developments and then to decide whether, and at what stage and by what means, they can be reflected in the way in which we teach our pupils. The responsibility that we have to mirror our changing discipline is not, however, absolute. Some developments within academic history – higher levels of quantification, for example – are quite irrelevant to the needs of most pupils in schools. Others, and I am thinking especially here of some of the more mindless borrowings from sociology, are unfortunate and ought to be ignored, in the hope that sooner or later they will go away. If the present Pope is a Turk, as a conservative Sicilian remarked in Lampedusa's *The Leopard* (*Il Gattopardo*, 1958), it cannot be heretical to turn a blind eye to his teachings. Much of what has happened in academic history in recent decades has, however, found its echo in schools: in the study of local history, in the use of oral evidence, in quantification, industrial archaeology, and many other fields.

There is a second obligation, more frequently ignored, and that is to consider the implications for our teaching of the different levels – the monograph, the work of scholarly synthesis, the school textbook – at which historians write, even within the same field, and of the enormous differences that exist at each of these levels between one historian and another. History is mercifully unlike some of the social sciences in lacking any standard way of writing up the results of an investigation. To concentrate, as we often do in our discussions, on what historians have in common is to miss some of the many ways in which they strikingly diverge. It is a fruitful exercise, I think, to examine these differences, to consider what historians do, what they say about what they do, and how and what we, as readers, learn from them.

If we take the trouble to make such an examination, it will soon become clear that two models of historical writing dominate the

assumptions on which much of our educational practice is based. The first is what Elton calls the ‘chronicle’, the modern version of which is the general textbook with its attempt at overall coverage, its refusal to be side-tracked, its exclusion of people and detail, its bland pseudo-impartiality (Elton, 1967, p. 154; Edwards, 1978, p. 61; Low-Beer, 1974, pp. 396–397). The second model is what John Lombardi, in an interesting review article ‘Detail and the Grand Design in History’, has described as ‘modernist’ history, an approach which ‘presumes that what counts in the study of history are the big trends, the fundamental patterns, and the comparability of these to similar phenomena in other places and times’, an approach that ‘cultivates the cool competence of the laboratory technician’, keeping aloof from the lives and times being studied (Lombardi, 1979, pp. 223–226). Each of these models reinforces the harmful effects of the other, with the combined result that history is ‘gutted ... of its humanity’.

I am, of course, over-simplifying. Not all textbooks lack colour and not all ‘modernist’ history is as grim as Lombardi depicts it. There is enough truth, however, in this picture to account for some of the wrong emphases in school history. The situation is self-perpetuating: one textbook serves as a model for another. Some history teachers have little time to read widely. For many topics, all they ever look at are school textbooks. These then mould the ways they teach, without them even knowing that this is what is happening. The results lie all around us: the ‘typical’ eighteenth-century laird, the Russian nobility, *all* behaving with great brutality towards their peasants (read Vladimir Nabokov’s autobiography for an alternative view), the filthy slums in which *all* nineteenth-century workers eked out their miserable lives, the ‘what would you have felt about...?’ of the imaginative reconstruction, phrased in such a way as to suggest that there are only certain feelings you are permitted to have had.⁴ These

⁴ At the time of writing this article, setting exercises that encouraged pupils in history classes to imagine themselves into particular historical situations, in the

are the grand generalisations of Egan's 'philosophic' stage. Some are the unavoidable products of immaturity; most, with careful teaching, are not. In my experience, even very small children can appreciate the immense variety of the world: that not all people are nice, that some Eskimos live in igloos but others have houses with televisions and washing machines. If one can put this across to seven-year-olds, it should not be too hard to break down some of the stereotypes that adolescents seem to get from their school history.

What I am suggesting therefore is that you cast aside this article, lose for a few weeks your taxonomy of educational objectives, forget about the diagnostic test you promised your Head of Department, put to the bottom of the pile that latest CCC report,⁵ politely delay the college of education lecturer anxious to use your school for a research project into the frequency with which passive constructions are used by lower secondary pupils with IQs of 90–110, and read some first-rate historical writing, scholarly, exciting, something that brings back that sense of wonder about the complexity and unpredictability of the past that in the daily grind you had perhaps lost. You must have been expecting me to produce a name out of the hat, and I will: read Richard Cobb.

For those unfamiliar within his work, Cobb is an English historian who writes about modern France and about the French revolutionary period in particular, a scholarly and very original historian, one who gives great pleasure to his readers, an historian who also records his thoughts about the nature of history as a discipline.⁶ I do not wish to imply that all his approaches to the study of history necessarily

way that a writer of children's historical fiction might do, was a common practice, at least in some Scottish schools. I was guilty of this in my primary school textbook *Pizarro and the Incas* (1981b), in a manner which now comes across as inappropriate within a work of non-fiction.

⁵ Consultative Committee on the Curriculum.

⁶ Richard Cobb (1917–1996) was appointed Fellow of Balliol College, University of Oxford, in 1962, at which the current author studied 1961–1964. In 1973 he was appointed Professor of Modern History, University of Oxford.

have relevance to history teaching in schools or that his writings, or those of anyone else for that matter, should act as some kind of model, or that he is the only historian who treats the past in these ways or that his methods are not controversial. There is a great deal about his work, however, that is highly suggestive and from which any teacher of history could profit.

Cobb has written numerous books and articles. The most accessible books on the French revolutionary period are *The Police and the People: French Popular Protest, 1792–1802* (1970), *Reactions to the French Revolution* (1972), *Paris and its Provinces, 1792–1802* (1975), and *Death in Paris, 1795–1801* (1978). Essays, reviews, and talks on different aspects of French history and literature have also been collected into four volumes: *A Second Identity* (1969), *A Sense of Place* (1975), *Tour de France* (1976), and *Promenades* (1980). Recently he has edited a superb book of photographs on *The Streets of Paris* (1980). Dip into any of these and you will soon get the feel of the kind of historian Cobb is. One's first impression is of a writer whose prime concern is with individual human beings, with biographies rather than with social structures, with 'the infinite variety of human experience'. Here are no arid abstractions, no long-term causes, no generalisations about the bourgeoisie, or the urban working-class, or even the sans-culottes. In their places are crippled beggars on the street corners of Paris, itinerant pedlars, tattoo artists, the *flotteurs* of the River Seine, fairground workers, prostitutes, a military bigamist, deserters, gypsies, Yiddish-speaking brigands on the Franco-Belgian border, smugglers, governesses starving to death in garrets, a young girl up from the country and easy prey for the experienced seducer, a terrified farmer's wife lying awake throughout a long moonless night longing for the cock's crow and the safety of dawn. No one reading *Reactions to the French Revolution* could again generalise as rashly as we habitually do about the impact of the Revolution on French people. This is sensitive, recreative, poetic history, firmly based on

a detailed, carefully documented study of the primary sources: the records of the Basse-Geôle de la Seine between the year IV and the year IX, the *déclarations de grossesse* in the *Archives départementales du Rhône*, the papers of the *Ministère de la Justice* (Seine-Inférieure). It is not, however, anecdotal history or antiquarian history. Themes emerge from all these books: the unwritten collective orthodoxies of particular social groups, the pleasures of companionship, attitudes towards women or towards the old, the exploitation of public catastrophe for private advantage, the life of the streets, the patterns of suicide (in Paris it was mostly by drowning, reaching a peak in the summer months, with Sunday as the preferred day). These are quite different, however, from the themes of the textbook, or the exam question, or the dreary tome of some modernist historian, replete with the latest sociological jargon and written with a pick-axe.

One of Cobb's most reassuring conclusions is the way in which public events pass many people by. Despite the Revolution, most people continued to use the old calendar. For every sans-culotte who rushed on to the street to take part in a *journée* there were far more who stayed at home and bolted their doors. To one young woman, rescued by Cobb from the archives, the 9th *thermidor*, year II, was memorable not for Robespierre's fall – an event of which she was probably not aware – but for the fact that on that day she got herself pregnant. When public events do impinge on private lives, it is often in ways that refuse to fit into the neat patterns we impose upon the past. The blind beggars of Paris were chiefly conscious of the Revolution because of the way in which the use of *assignats* compelled them to employ children to tell them the value, no longer apparent from touch, of the alms they received. For Restif de la Bretonne, novelist and shoe fetishist, the nightmare of the year II was not the Terror, but the low heels that came into fashion at that time. Wolves, we learn, benefited enormously from the Revolution, roaming in hordes through the forests of Compiègne and Chantilly during the *grand*

froid of 1795–1796; the wolf traps, decorated with *fleurs de lys*, had all been destroyed.

Cobb is also superb at evoking the atmosphere of a particular place at a particular time. This is very much local history, informed by a strong sense of the way in which a locality can determine the course of people's lives. We hear 'the dull click of dominoes', 'the steadily mounting cascade of insults' from a bar, we feel 'the slight breeze coming off the river' on a summer afternoon, we seek 'the deep green of the plane-trees', we see a murderer eating a melon with a stiletto, and are brought short by 'the striking beauty of a girl emphasised by the neatness of her much-darned shoes'. When one thinks of the possibilities for our own local history that are opened up by such accounts and then when one remembers the abominations sometimes thrust on younger Scottish pupils in the name of Environmental Studies (the very title is dehumanising) the heart of a historian can only sink.

Inseparable from Cobb's sense of place is the way in which in his writings the present continually intrudes into the past. He tells us what places are like today, even when present realities – *son tennis*, *son équitation*, *sa piscine*, *son standing* – have depressingly obliterated most traces of the past. Nor does he conceal from us what he thinks about many of the characters in his books: how he dislikes Robespierre, how he feels sorry for some girl who had a bad deal. He tells us about himself, what he enjoys about the study of history, how he came to be interested in France, his childhood in Tunbridge Wells, his wartime experiences, his visits to record offices in provincial France. As in some modern novels the narrator reminds the reader that he is still there behind the characters, manipulating them, making them move in certain ways, arranging the patterns of their lives. We are always conscious of the historian inside the events, someone of flesh and blood, one contingent being writing with sympathy and

affection about the sad and glad and monotonous lives of other contingent beings. In Cobb's hands history becomes a human study: by people, about people, for people. Textbook writers, with their refusal to reveal their humanity (look at the accounts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki – the crucial test, I always feel), would be desperately out of place in such company. So too would Lombardi's 'laboratory technician.' The lack of comprehension is mutual:

Some years ago, I gave a paper to a seminar in Princeton. My subject was dearth and hunger in France, my year was 1795. My host remained unimpressed by my account of great suffering, high mortality, and massive mobility, both from town to country, and the other way round. The poor, he observed, are always dying of hunger or disease, food riots always take the same form, the weather is often variable, winters are sometimes very cold, droughts are recurrent phenomena. So what? I did not really know what to reply. I think I assumed that the death from hunger of a poor woman, two hundred years ago, was in itself important. When I first gave my talk on Perken [a criminal case in 1809 involving a double murder] at Shrewsbury School, some of the boys asked me, at the end, just what constituted the historical 'relevance' of a sordid, nasty little affair. I could only reply that it was something that had happened at a given place in a given period; and as the account of it, from start to finish, was remarkably complete, it appeared to me to be worth telling. (Cobb, 1975a, pp. 3–4)

It will come as no surprise that Cobb makes excellent use of literary evidence. Unlike the quantifiers, for whose excesses he reserves some of his most scathing asides, he has a strong sense of the links between history and literature. The works of regional novelists provide him with some of his best insights into the rhythms of French life. As

Ian Matheson writes elsewhere in this journal, 'History's affinity is with the literary arts, not with the sciences'. Cobb exemplifies this statement better than any historian I know.

All this, you might say, is perhaps of passing interest, but what has it to do with the history teacher in schools? In my opinion it has a great deal to do with the way in which our subject is taught. Above all it concerns us: as historians, as history teachers, as educated men and women. Any attempts at curriculum reform must be based upon us, upon our sense of the world and our understanding of what our subject is about. If we fail to reflect on the historiographical issues raised by writings like those of Richard Cobb, it is quite likely that our teaching will perpetuate what I have argued are false models of historical activity. Unless we make constant efforts to renew our sense of the diversity, the anarchy, the excitement of the past, it becomes all too easy to sink to the level of custodians of vast slabs of inert information: was it, we ask in our long years of penurious retirement, the 1833 or the 1844 Factory Act that reduced the hours of 12-year-olds to nine a day? Were there four factory inspectors appointed in 1833 or was it only two? The main purpose of our contingent lives can too easily become the contribution we make to the annual reissue of *1066 and All That*.

There is some evidence that our pupils are anxious for much more of Richard Cobb's kind of history, for the history of 'real men in actual situations' (D. Turner, 1977, p. 6; Barber, 1979, pp. 18–20). Inglis's analysis of the content of GCE and SCE papers shows how remote we are from this state of affairs, at least as far as public examinations are concerned (Inglis, 1979; 1981).⁷

I lack the space to pursue all the implications for school history of what I have been trying to say. They are both vast and contentious. What is perhaps less contentious is the plea that we should take

⁷ These articles refer to examinations taken at ages 16 and 18 in England, and 16 and 17 in Scotland.

pains to avoid that ‘philosophic’ generalising view of the past that Elton so roundly condemns. I can think of no better way of doing this than reading Richard Cobb. We may, at the end of it all, feel we know much less than we did at the beginning. We will certainly never think again of the French Revolution in quite the same way. This, however, is the essence of wisdom: to know, like Socrates, that we know nothing. Reading Richard Cobb, I have kept on being reminded of some lines by another great de-mythologiser, the American poet Wallace Stevens. It is a neat definition of that ‘ironic’ view Professor Elton would wish us all to cultivate:

Tired of the old descriptions of the world,
 The latest freed man rose at six and sat
 On the edge of his bed. He said,
 ‘I suppose there is
 A doctrine to this landscape. Yet having just
 Escaped from the truth, the morning is color and mist,
 Which is enough...’ (Stevens, 1955, p. 204)

IMAGES OF A HEROIC AGE ⁸

Despite my childhood interest in prehistory and the material remains of Roman civilisation, which led me to want to be an archaeologist, I became instead a historian of nineteenth-century relations between Britain and Spanish South America (the topic of both my postgraduate theses), a school history teacher, educator of history teachers, and writer of history textbooks (on Pizarro and the Incas, Scottish agriculture, British social and economic history, and the twentieth-century world).

⁸ First published in *Country Life*, 29 May 1997, pp. 72–74.

My interest in the physical legacy of the past, however, has continued. I have been particularly drawn to England's parish churches, some dating back to Saxon and Norman times, originally Catholic but taken over by the Church of England at the Reformation, and many a palimpsest – of architectural styles, wall decorations, funerary monuments, statues, stained glass, church furniture – illustrating the periods during which they have been in existence. For some years my favourite modern English poet was John Betjeman who lovingly evoked the atmosphere of these time-drenched buildings, including the ubiquitous nineteenth-century Gothic Revival ones whose spires still punctuate the skylines of many cities when not now overshadowed by tower blocks and office buildings (Betjeman, 2006).

I also did not lose my interest in Roman forts, walls and villas, and in the routes of Roman roads. Hadrian's Wall, England's most impressive Roman relic, fascinated me as a child and has drawn me back on many occasions. During a chilly early spring in 1997 I had a short camping holiday along part of the Wall with my 11-year-old son and was invited by the editor of England's glossy Country Life magazine to write a piece about the thoughts that this evoked. My themes were the Wall as an extraordinary human achievement and as a continuing part of England's identity, an identity shared not just with Wales and Scotland, which had also been partially under Roman occupation, but also, above all, with continental Europe. Working in Hungary recently and looking at the Roman exhibits in the Hungarian National Museum, I have been very conscious that, before he became Emperor and on his sole visit to Britannia ordered the building of his Wall, Hadrian had been praetorian legate in the province of Pannonia.

I had long wanted to walk the full length of the Wall and finally did so when my two daughters funded the trip as an eightieth birthday present, my elder daughter joining me for part of the walk. After six days on the 135-kilometre Hadrian's Wall Path I now have within

my bones a deep personal sense of connection with a Roman world that achieved so much and that continues to shape our thinking in so many ways.

In our highly visual age, episodes in history are likely to stick in popular memory only when attached to a powerful image. We remember the Reformation because of the visually memorable Henry VIII. But who remembers the equally significant Glorious Revolution?

It helps if there are physical remains. This is one reason why, at a time when we lament the decline in popular historical knowledge, we have not forgotten altogether Britain's Roman past. There can be few people unaware that Britain was once part of the Roman Empire. The remains of the 400-year Roman occupation are all about us. As we move closer to Europe, it is a part of our history which begins to acquire a new meaning.

The most powerful reminder of Britain's Roman history is the 80-mile-long Hadrian's Wall from the mouth of the Tyne to the Solway Firth. We do not have to be told that it is a World Heritage Site to feel the simplicity of a plan to separate one part of the island from the other with a 14-foot wall. Once seen in a photograph, or on a map, or (best of all, as I saw it earlier this year) on a sharp April morning with the curlews crying, it is never forgotten.

Not that most people in Britain are likely to visit the wall – despite the efforts of the Hadrian's Wall Tourist Partnership, an organisation spawning plans to promote the Hadrian's Wall 'visitor experience'. It is well known that we have produced a generation of young people more familiar with Florida and the Costa del Sol than other parts of their own country – a sign of the withering of a sense of national identity which must worry anyone concerned for England's survival into the next century.

But even among those who every year stare politely across the dark green English Heritage railings at Chesters Roman Fort, before

moving on to the Lucullus Larder for ice-creams or afternoon tea, how does this extraordinary memorial of a past empire relate to their sense of belonging to a particular culture and place?

At one time, the English could readily relate to Hadrian's Wall as a symbol of imperial grandeur they themselves had emulated; as the manifestation of a civilisation, they had been brought up to revere as representing the best the world has known; as an example of military prowess; even as confirmation of the superiority of those who live in the southern parts of these islands. But in our post-imperial, culturally egalitarian, and anti-militaristic world, we can no longer see it in the same light.

We are driven back, therefore, in responding to the wall, to a sheer sense of admiration that human beings could construct something so ambitious and sustain it over a period of almost 300 years. It is like the admiration we feel for a Bach partita or a complex ballet sequence: a sense of amazement that finite human beings could take so much trouble and achieve so much.

We are impressed that such an extraordinary structure could have been built in such a short time by so many people in such difficult terrain. In an age obsessed by performance targets and efficiency drives, the sheer organisation of it all takes the breath away. And any visitor to the wall soon realises that it was not just a wall. There were ditches to north and south, including the impressive vallum with its flanked mounds, as well as military roads, forts, mile-castles, turrets, and coastal defences. Anyone who has walked a long section of the wall, as I did recently with my 11-year-old son, Oliver, comes away with a strong sense of purpose and of well-oiled systems constantly refined.

But the wall is more than this. It is a symbol of a wider British identity. The Romans, after all, first brought the different parts of Britain into a province called Britannia. We often forget that the wall was not meant to mark the boundary of Roman rule. It controlled

access to the more settled parts of the province, but was also a starting point for a network of forts and roads north of what is now the Anglo-Scottish border. Roman rule is something that England, Wales, and lowland Scotland have in common.

It is also something Britain has in common with many parts of Europe. Our Roman and Classical roots bind us to our neighbours on the Continent. If the European Union is to transcend the ephemeral aspirations of Eurocrats, it will have to draw on deep cultural affinities which begin with Rome. Nothing has done more for my sense of European identity recently than looking at the writing tablet containing a line of Virgil, found beneath the turf and clay of Vindolanda, and probably a writing exercise undertaken by the son of the Batavian (Dutch) commander who presided over the Roman fort in about AD 100.

It is a sign of the times that our fascination with Hadrian's Wall is increasingly with the everyday lives of those who lived there. In a world which eschews 'metanarratives' and distrusts heroes, it is the lives of people like ourselves that attract us.

This is why the evidence from the excavations at Vindolanda is so compelling. As well as the extract from Virgil, one finds the earliest birthday invitation: Claudia Severa, wife of a fort commander, writing to her friend Sulpicia Lepidina, wife of Flavius Cerialis, prefect of the Ninth Cohort of the Batavians, begs her 'to make my day more enjoyable by your presence'. Also amazingly preserved on wooden tablets from the early second century AD are lists of stores for the commander's residence: wine, Celtic beer, vinegar, fish sauce, aniseed, beans, small nuts, bull's glue, hooks, satchels, and honey pots.

Perhaps this is the lesson of the Wall for our uncertain age: that, despite the vicissitudes about us, ordinary, civilised, pleasurable life can carry on. The message is even more powerful when we look at the evidence for the final period of the wall's history, the time when the imperial presence was finally withdrawn. Despite changes as

great in some ways as those we have seen in our own times, people continued to farm, to build, to eat, to drink, and (yes) to be merry in the midst of it all.

The fact that it is the experiences of ordinary people on the wall that speak to us today is consistent with its treatment in literature. There are few literary references to the wall – our literati tend not to live, or even travel, north of the Wash – but those that there are have everyday lives as their theme. Kipling's *On the Great Wall* (1906) ends with the image of a Roman soldier making a burnt offering of 'strewed heather-bloom' to his lost youth and lost love. Auden, in his *Roman Wall Blues* (1940), takes up the story:

Over the heather the wet wind blows,
I've lice in my tunic and a cold in my nose
The mist creeps over the hard grey stone,
My girl's in Tungria; I sleep alone.

Even Rosemary Sutcliff's historical novel *Eagle of the Ninth* (1954) – many children's (including my son's) first introduction to Hadrian's Wall – centres on the experiences of characters pursuing highly individual destinies.

Walking the wall gives one a sharp sense of the realities that faced Roman soldiers, and civilians, living there 1,800 years ago. Coming as we did from Surrey – from what in Roman times would have been the warm, vine-growing south of the province – there was no doubt as to the existence of two Britains: a South basking in the sunshine of an early summer, and a North still in the grip of frost and hail and a sap that had hardly begin to arise.

The bare moors, crags, marshlands, lochs, distant hills, and huge skies – where (as Kipling's centurion put it) 'the shadows of the clouds play like cavalry charging' – all these would have been little different 1,800 years ago. So, too, would the early celandines

and coltsfoot, the promise of summer in the trilling of the skylarks, the shrill cry of the curlew and the ubiquitous rooks.

Camping within 50 yards of the vallum, we came even closer to that ancient world during those cold early April nights. Beneath starlit skies of biblical freshness, with the Hale-Bopp comet showing up like a message from the gods, one had no difficulty in understanding the role of religion in the lives of those who lived on the wall. Shivering under canvas, with the tent flaps a sheet of ice, it became easier to imagine how the Mithraeum we had seen at Carrawburgh would have witnessed initiation rites while outside the stars blazed and the wind whistled. It also no longer seemed odd to have learned that Mithraism was still alive and well in the North-East, flowers and offerings appearing mysteriously every year both on the altars in the Museum of Antiquities in Newcastle upon Tyne and on those in Carrawburgh.

However, at the end of the day, it was other images which stuck in my mind as we drove home south from the wall to the sound of my son's Pulp CD (centurions and contemporary hits coexist easily in the young mind). The first was a tombstone I had seen in facsimile at the Museum of Antiquities at Newcastle. It was to a British freed slave called Regina, from the Catuvellauni tribe who lived round Hertfordshire, who died at South Shields aged 30. She was the wife of a Syrian merchant who supplied the Roman army on the wall. As well as being in an eastern style, the tombstone also had an inscription in ancient Syrian which I had been told read 'Regina ... alas'. I had been struck by the strangeness of the union and the pain of the loss, but also by the power of ordinary people to find happiness (however brief) despite the flux about them.

The second image was of the people who live and work in the isolated farmsteads on or near the wall. Researchers having recently linked the 9,000-year-old Cheddar Man via his DNA to one of his descendants living nearby, I wondered how many of those living in

these settlements were descended from soldiers from all over the empire who had served and subsequently settled there. Perhaps the man I had seen unloading sacks of fertiliser with his fork-lift truck was a descendant of one of the Hungarians or Spaniards known to have been stationed on the wall and his British wife.

Whether or not he was, this, I felt, was what one needed: a sense of identity with the different peoples who have lived before us in this island. Only by escaping occasionally from the tyranny of the present do we understand who we really are.

HOW A 1,500TH ANNIVERSARY SHOWS THE DEEP ROOTS OF WESTERN CIVILISATION ⁹

*The threads that link us with the past do not come just through physical remains. In writing my book *Seven Books That Everyone Once Read and No One Now Does* (2025) I was conscious, again and again, of the way a single work had been passed down through the ages from one generation to another, gathering associations and interpretations as it did so, ending up as a story of its own transmission. One of the chapters in my book is about the sixth-century Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* which has been read and/or translated by people as varied as England's King Alfred and Queen Elizabeth I, Chaucer, Erasmus, Thomas More, Casanova, Nietzsche, and Bertrand Russell, placing us, its contemporary readers, as part of a long tradition binding present with distant past. My article about this was published in the *Daily Sceptic* on 23 October 2024, the day of the 1,500th anniversary of Boethius's death.*

⁹ First published in *Daily Sceptic*, 23 October 2024.

Today, 23 October, is the 1,500th anniversary of the death of the Roman statesman and writer Boethius, put to death on the orders of the Ostrogoth ruler Theodoric in AD 524. According to one tradition, he had a cord twisted round his head so tightly it caused his eyeballs to protrude and was then beaten to death with a club, though the date and exact circumstances of his death are uncertain. October 23rd is the date used for commemoration by the Catholic Church for the man it knows as the Blessed Severinus Boethius.

Why is Boethius worth remembering in the *Daily Sceptic*?

First, because his story and that of his greatest work *The Consolation of Philosophy* (Boethius, 2010) reminds us that we share with our fellow Europeans a deep culture and long history, full of achievements of the human spirit and memories good and bad, that has nothing to do with the EU. Boethius's life and writings, and their reception are part of our common European heritage.

Second, at a time when we are constantly told that the past is full of bad things that bad people like us did to 'the Other', and our history is being removed daily from the walls of Nos 10 and 11 Downing Street,¹⁰ it is good to be reminded of someone whose writings crystallised parts of the 1,000 year old legacy of the preceding Greco-Roman civilisation and passed it on for countless numbers of people to profit from during the 1,500 years that followed.

Boethius was a Roman from a patrician family working as an official for the 'barbarian' Ostrogoths who had taken over control of Italy following the fall of the last Roman Emperor of the West in 476. Boethius was Catholic and Theodoric an Arian, though political reasons for Theodoric's decision to imprison and kill him seem more likely than religious ones. Born c. 480, Boethius spent his adult life as a scholarly Roman gentleman reading, thinking, and

¹⁰ This is a reference to the controversial removal from the offices of Prime Minister Keir Starmer and Chancellor of the Exchequer Rachel Reeves of paintings of a number of historical figures, including that of Queen Elizabeth I.

writing. He was steeped in the philosophy and literature of Greece and Rome with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Virgil his daily intellectual companions.

Among many writings he is chiefly remembered for *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which begins with the encounter in prison between Boethius and Philosophy represented by the figure of a woman. Philosophy's role in the emerging dialogue is to console and to educate Boethius who, exiled and confined, begins with a long lament about his misfortunes. Philosophy is the doctor who tries out the remedies which might help him to put these in perspective, remind himself of the ends of the Universe, the nature of true happiness, and the purpose of his life, and focus his mind on preparing his soul for death. Although Boethius was a Christian in a largely Christian society, the *Consolation* is not a Christian book. It has been heavily Christianised in many translations but has no direct Christian references. This may be one reason for the breadth of its appeal, together with the ways it mingles verse with prose and blends in stories from history and classical mythology to make philosophical points.

The dissemination of the book throughout Europe has been extraordinary. Gilbert Highet, historian of the Western classical tradition, called Boethius 'for a thousand years one of the most influential writers in Europe' and the *Consolation* 'one of the great best-sellers' (Highet, 2008). Parchment copies of the Latin text were circulating in much of Europe throughout the Middle Ages. When printing arrived in the fifteenth century it quickly became one of the most published texts. There were also many translations into the vernacular. 'No other book, except the Bible, was so much translated', says Highet.

King Alfred worked on an Old English version at the end of the ninth century in the middle of his war with the Danes. Despite his authorship being in dispute, the image of Alfred in his embattled

Wessex kingdom communing at night with the shade of Boethius in his Pavia prison, while burning the cakes, is one that persists. Other English versions followed, the most notable being Chaucer's in the late fourteenth century. The *Consolation* was translated into German, Provençal, Italian, Dutch, Greek, Hebrew, and, above all, into French in which 12 different versions were in circulation in the late Middle Ages. There was even a seventeenth-century Icelandic version of one of the *Consolation's* most moving poems by Stefán Ólafsson, Pastor of Vallanes in remotest north-eastern Iceland.

Educated people continued to be widely familiar with the *Consolation* up to the eighteenth century, but readership fell off in the nineteenth when Boethius slowly ceased to be a name one could assume others would know. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have seen an explosion of Boethian scholarship, together with the publication of David Slavitt's excellent new translation of the *Consolation*, but little evidence of continuing general readership, as with so many 'classic' texts once widely read.

The *Consolation's* readers during the preceding centuries included many women. Its most famous female reader was the now Starmer-cancelled Queen Elizabeth I, herself a former prisoner, who not only turned to it for consolation at a bad time but dictated her own English translation to her secretary during numerous sessions at Windsor in 1593 (she also translated Plutarch and Horace). Other distinguished readers who rated it highly include Samuel Johnson and Leibniz, both of whom also tried their hand at a translation, Erasmus, Robert Southey the Poet Laureate, Casanova who was made to read it when in prison, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Bertrand Russell who called it 'sublime'.

The book's literary influence has been massive. Allusions to themes in the book can be found in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, in Dante's *Divina Commedia* (where in *Paradiso* Boethius gets a VIP seat in The Circle of the Sun), in Boccaccio and Petrarch, and in both

Milton's *Lycidas* and his *Comus*. In the twentieth-century, Boethius and a copy of the *Consolation* play a central role in John Kennedy Toole's Pulitzer Prize novel, *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980).

The *Consolation* is an example of 'prison literature', a genre to which it makes a major contribution. Boethius links his own fate with the similar ones of four of his predecessors: Cicero (murdered on the orders of Mark Anthony), Seneca (forced to kill himself by his pupil the Emperor Nero), Ovid (exiled by Augustus), and Socrates (sentenced to death by drinking hemlock). The *Consolation* established key features of the genre: the need to send a message to the outside world, testify for posterity, guide others, and show the world that by the success of one's struggle one has achieved the happiness which comes from the pursuit of virtue.

There was a spate of prison stories referencing Boethius in the late Middle Ages both in England and France. Two were written in London prisons by poets who were casualties of the Wars of the Roses: Thomas Usk, author of *The Testament of Love*, in Newgate prison from where he was sentenced in 1388 to be drawn, hanged, and then beheaded, and George Ashby, who wrote *Complaint of a Prisoner in the Fleet*, from which prison he was lucky to be released in 1462.

In the following century it was the turn of Thomas More, imprisoned by King Henry VIII for refusing to accept the royal supremacy at the time of the Reformation. It was in the Tower of London while awaiting trial and execution in 1535 that he wrote his meditation *Dialogue of Comfort against Tribulation*, basing it on the *Consolation*. Four hundred years later Dietrich Bonhoeffer, theologian and anti-Nazi dissident, in Berlin's Tegel prison turned to More's *Dialogue* for consolation in the way that More had turned to Boethius. It was one of the last things he read before he was hanged on Hitler's orders in April 1945.

This whole story is an illustration of how the past is not 'dead and silent', as it has been called in our contemporary world, if we only

make an effort to let it speak. Here we have a man (Bonhoeffer) in Germany at the end of his life in touch through a book with another man (More) in England who in a similar predicament 400 years before was in his turn consoled by a third man (Boethius) in Italy a thousand years earlier who wrote a book drawing on the wisdom of a civilisation in Greece that had developed over 1,000 years before that (Socrates).

This long thread through a 2,500-year-old history is one small example of what we mean when we say we are part of a European and Western civilisation which has remarkable elements of continuity within it. We should be proud of its achievements while remembering its cruelties and, as with our linked English and British legacies, make sure we pass on its story to the next generation.

THE CASE FOR SCHOOL HISTORY: WHY IS
IT IMPORTANT THAT CHILDREN LEARN
ABOUT THE PAST AND WHY, DESPITE THIS,
IS SCHOOL HISTORY UNDER THREAT? ¹¹

I had spent a large part of my career making the case for history as a school subject. In my two books on how great thinkers in the past had written about education I frequently commented on their views on teaching history. For Montaigne, reading history, and especially Plutarch's lives of famous Greeks and Romans, was his favourite pursuit and an educational tool that stimulated the reader to reflect on his own life and to refine his moral judgement. For Locke, studying not just the ancient world but the whole of history both taught and delighted more than any other subject, history being 'the great Mistress of Prudence and Civil Knowledge' and an essential

¹¹ This is an edited version of an article first published in *Scottish Union for Education Newsletters*, 99–100, January 2025.

element in the education of 'gentlemen'. Nietzsche, I had argued, put it differently, making a case for forgetting the past as well as learning from it, but sharing Montaigne and Locke's view that history was crucial to understanding the present and inspiring one to act within it. The most ardent supporter of history as a subject discussed in my books, however, was Michael Oakshott who saw it as the theoretical means of understanding human action and an activity of reflection and enquiry that was an end in itself 'commensurate with the dignity of an immortal soul' (N. Tate, 2013, pp. 58, 75, 118–119; 2017, p. 164).

It was only recently, however, that I tried to put together my own case for school history, threatened as it seemed to be both with a growing negativity about the past within the wider society and with attempts in schools to use the curriculum as a means to socialising children into a variety of progressive causes. The following article was based on a podcast organised by the Mathias Corvinus Collegium in 2025 and subsequently published in the newsletter of the Scottish Union for Education, a body of teachers and parents fighting for the re-establishment of a traditional liberal education in an education system in which I had worked for 14 years and which had once been the envy of other countries.

The importance of the past

The French historian Marc Bloch said that 'misunderstanding of the present is the inevitable consequence of ignorance of the past'. Learning about history is important because it helps us make sense of the world we inhabit: our own lives, the events of the day, people's beliefs and attitudes, and the environment in which we live. The way we view past events and societies changes over time as we look at things from new perspectives, but history is a truth-seeking subject and, despite contemporary voices to the contrary, studying it helps

us to distinguish between true and false accounts of the past. History (as a subject) is one of the great 'languages of human understanding', alongside philosophy, the sciences, mathematics and the arts. It deserves a central place in any school curriculum committed to transmitting what Matthew Arnold called 'the best that has been thought and known'.

Learning about the past furnishes our minds with what the philosopher Michael Oakeshott called 'a storehouse of all the virtues, vices and predicaments known to mankind'. As *the* theoretical means of understanding human action, he saw it as more important than the social sciences. It helps us understand the present by making comparisons with the past, seeing how things are similar or different and thus putting the present in a new perspective and as a result opening up new possibilities for the future.

Knowledge of the past is also important for a sense of identity. We are not just isolated individuals, but members of families and of local, regional, and national communities. Knowing where we have come from, and how what we are today has been shaped by past events, can give us a feeling of our place in the social and political world and a sense of belonging, and be a source of affection and pride. Nations in particular are held together by a common story and that story comes from the past. When in the past we were ruled by autocratic monarchies and hereditary aristocracies one of the main ways the small elite in charge was educated for its leadership role was by learning about the past. Now that we have become democracies (of sorts) it is even more important that those ultimately in charge – the people – have the same understanding of what has gone before, not least so that we can keep in check the new elites who rule our lives in ways that can be as oppressive as the monarchs of old.

Learning about the past should give us the vocabulary without which thinking and talking about our current world can be very difficult. Some years ago, when training future history teachers

in Scotland I wrote history textbooks for 14–16-year-olds. One of them – a book on world history 1917–1989 – included a glossary of 175 words used in the book, terms like ‘republicanism’, ‘constitutional monarchy’, ‘feudalism’, ‘parliamentary sovereignty’, ‘boycott’, ‘nationalism’. Without a study of history many of these would be unlikely to figure in the curriculum. All are crucial for the development of the knowledge that the left-leaning US educationist E. D. Hirsch has said is essential for what he calls ‘political literacy’.

Along with what Hirsch also calls ‘cultural literacy’ – knowledge of the inherited facts and customs that distinguish a nation and its culture – ‘political literacy’, he argues, is especially important for those pupils who pick up very little of this at home. These would include children from all social classes and groups, but especially those from families only recently established in the UK, or living in ethnic or religious communities not well integrated within the wider society. Depriving such children of the political and cultural literacy that a study of the country’s mainstream past might give them is blocking those very avenues for advancement that progressive educationists and politicians claim their vision of a more ‘inclusive’ curriculum is designed to bring about.

Finally, one of the major benefits of history teaching as it has developed over the last 50 or so years is to get pupils into the habit of asking ‘how do we know that these statements about the past are true ones?’. Looking at the sources on which our knowledge of the past is based both illustrates how history gets written and establishes the habit of checking assertions against evidence which is one of the most important skills we need to develop so that we can use sensibly the mass of information with which we are bombarded daily. Sometimes this kind of school history has squeezed the time available for the even more important business of giving pupils a sense of the overall chronology of a nation’s past, but it is crucial that it remains part of any history curriculum.

Why the past is 'dead and silent'

In 2008, a group of French academics published a book about what they called the 'conditions of education', by which they meant the wider social, cultural, and ideological world within which schooling in France took place (Blais et al., 2008). Their main concern was the difficulty they had found in convincing both pupils and parents of the importance of studying French classic texts and the past more generally. They identified many reasons for this, one of which was that for most people the past, which had once been respected, even venerated, and had provided society with models of all kinds, was now 'dead and silent'. I was reminded of this recently when reading a newspaper article about civil servants in the UK voting in favour of a walkout in protest about a demand from those they called their 'Victorian bosses' that they return to working in the office for three days a week as opposed to working at home. Why 'Victorian'? Because it is now associated with things that are 'outdated' and 'stuffy'. The same negative assumptions about the past are also implicit when people denounce anything that is 'cruel', 'violent', or 'squalid' as 'medieval'. The message is that the past is over and done with, that we have moved on to a better place, and that those who support things as they used to be are 'on the wrong side of history' (as Bill Clinton and Barack Obama sanctimoniously kept on telling those who disagreed with them, Obama on 13 public occasions). Forgotten entirely are the medieval cathedrals, the holy lives of Christian saints, the poetry of Dante and Chaucer, the great nineteenth-century novelists, the coming of railways, the benefits of the Industrial Revolution, the spread of democracy, and the widening of educational opportunities.

How is it that we have come to acquire such a negative view of the past?

Much of it has to do with living in a world that has been changing so rapidly and so radically. The lives of many people living and

working in many parts of the English and European countryside as recently as the 1920s were in many ways closer to the Middle Ages than to us in the 2020s. The IT and communications revolution of recent decades has also covered our lives with a superficial veneer of technological modernity which divides us from the past and makes us underestimate the many continuing similarities between us and other human beings in past ages.

Some of the negativity about the past also still comes from a residual sense – which had its origins in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and was at its height in the nineteenth century – that history has been a story of progress and that the past therefore represents a more primitive state of being. This is in marked contrast to the previous 1,500 years during which educated people looked back to the Greeks and Romans as the greatest civilisation the world had ever known and that gave them models to be copied. We are a society today that is constantly seeking innovation. If you aren't 'innovative' it is assumed that there is something wrong with you. We are always, therefore, looking forward to the future and no longer backwards to the past.

In addition, we are a society that has been encouraged to think in solely utilitarian ways. Politicians are always telling us that what we care about are economic matters, the state of the 'pound in our pocket'. We are encouraged to see schools as just about 'getting on' in life, not about stretching our minds or making us better people. From this point of view, everything we learn needs to be 'relevant' and the past is not immediately relevant to most people. Schools used to be what Oakeshott called 'a place apart', passing on knowledge that was special, a place that was different and exciting. The idea now is that the barriers between school and community should be broken down and everything made relevant to children's everyday lives, hence the preoccupation with sexuality education, emotional learning, and contemporary issues, hence also the abuse of schools as sites of mass indoctrination into all the progressive causes of the day.

Finally, we have lost the public models of what it is like to be an educated person, someone who is well-read, interested in history, committed to a lifetime of reading good literature, and interested in the arts. The old aristocracy and upper middle class that had sometimes aspired to be such models have long lost their cultural power and have not been replaced in this role. It isn't that there aren't lots of humble people living ordinary lives who are fascinated by the history and culture of the past and keep on learning long after they have left school or university in so far as they can find the time in their busy lives to do so. It is just that they are overshadowed in the contemporary public arena by all the stars of our current world of mass entertainment, many of whom have little to teach us by way of self-improvement, by politicians who tell us only which football teams they support and which pop songs are their favourites, not what they read, and by a succession of culture ministers who are anything but 'cultured'.

The new 'war against the past'

Even more threatening to the place of history in our societies, however, is what the sociologist Frank Furedi, in a recent book, has called *The War Against the Past* (Furedi, 2024). This is a phenomenon of the Western societies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and goes way beyond just feeling that the past is 'outdated' and no longer speaks to us. It is about attacking the past and rewriting its history so that it fits into the theories of the progressive (a.k.a. woke) elites who currently dominate most western universities and cultural institutions. In their eyes the history of mankind is one long story of oppression and victimhood in which whites oppress other races, heterosexuals oppress gay and trans people, and men oppress women. This oppression, and especially the racism of white people, is structurally inbuilt within all societies, we are told,

wherever white people are to be found including in the present day. The purpose of learning about the past is to see how this has always been the nature of the world so that a new generation of activists can be formed to continue the fight against this oppression, whether as members of one of the victim groups or as ‘allies’ from within the oppressor communities.

Given that the past was already unattractive for all the other reasons I have mentioned this ‘war against the past’ is potentially the final nail in the coffin of any attempt to make the past interesting for young people. If the present is ‘Year Zero’ and everything before it was bad, history lessons become classes of indoctrination in Critical Race Theory (i.e. anti-white racism) and Gender Ideology. As parents in top US schools that have experienced a complete makeover of their curriculum along these lines pointed out to the journalist Bari Weiss in 2021 why on earth should their children want to go to school if either, when they are ‘people of colour’, they are constantly told that they are a ‘victim’, when they have never felt like one, or, when they are ‘white’, if they are labelled as an ‘oppressor’ when they have never done anything that could conceivably merit such a label (Weiss, 2021)?

Fortunately, the very worst excesses of this ‘war against the past’ have not yet reached UK schools, though the many initiatives to ‘decolonise’ not just the history curriculum within schools but all subjects – that is to rewrite the past so that it supports the new ideologies – as well as the plans for ‘decolonisation’ within the wider society among our museum, art gallery and theatre directors, are pushing further and further in this direction. ‘Decolonisation’, by the way, is not just a question of making sure that the colonial history of certain European powers is taught warts and all, which is a perfectly reasonable aim. It is about showing how whites always and everywhere have done damaging things to non-whites.

Ways forward

Despite all these threats to the study of the past all is not lost. History remains a popular examination subject in England for 14–18-year-olds and one of the top 10 undergraduate subjects in UK universities. History graduates often go on to get good jobs that have nothing to do with history. Some become good history teachers. Some, one hopes, will become historians and join a body like the UK body History Reclaimed which is committed to combating the activist rewriting of history in support of contemporary political causes.

What is particularly needed is pressure not to merge history with other ‘social subjects’, as is the case in Scotland’s ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ and in some other countries, and as happened, with similar negative consequences, in some progressive secondary schools in England before the introduction of its national curriculum in the early 1990s. Ideally history should also be mandatory up to the end of compulsory schooling. This was discussed when the national curriculum was introduced in England but rejected.

Above all history needs to be kept out of the hands of those wanting to use the teaching of history for ideological purposes. In order to ensure that this happens, initial teacher training, ongoing teacher professional development, clear curriculum guidelines, and effective systems of school inspection will all have their highly varying but crucial roles to play.

THE TREASURY OF FORGOTTEN KNOWLEDGE ¹²

As an appendix to this rationale for the importance of history in our lives and in our schools, I conclude this section of the book with a

¹² First published in *Espacecolint Newsletter*, May 2009.

short piece I wrote for staff and parents at The International School of Geneva about a book by the great classical scholar Jacqueline de Romilly who died (incidentally on my birthday), aged 97, the year after I wrote it. Sadly, it has not been translated into English. It is a paean to books and to the accumulation of knowledge which, even where 'forgotten', may nonetheless have done its work in our minds and may also, as Proust has shown us, be often retrievable. It also sums up the enthusiasm for 'high culture' – literature, history, philosophy – that I found among so many francophone colleagues during my time in Switzerland and France.

The great Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges, in middle age, and in one of his poems, describes how looking round his library he realises that it contains books that, in this short life, he will never again open. Anyone who is tempted to buy books that he or she then can never find the time to read will know the feeling. In my case there are books from forty years ago on my shelves, already yellowing, that reflect passing interests, that have never been read, and that I know, this side of Paradise, will never now be opened.

More worrying, though, to inveterate readers, are the books that carry one's name inside the front cover and of which one has little or no recollection. Even more worrying, in my case, are those old books that I finally decide it is time to read but where half way through, or indeed near the end, it suddenly comes back to me that I have read them already. This is an experience that prompts reflection: about memory, about identity (in what sense am I the same person who first read this book?), and, as a teacher, about the impact of the reading one prescribes, and the knowledge one tries to convey when helping students to develop their minds.

It was for this reason that my eye was attracted recently by the title of a book – *Le Trésor des savoirs oubliés* (*The Treasury of Forgotten Knowledge*) – by Jacqueline de Romilly, an expert on ancient

Greece and the first woman to be appointed to the Collège de France (Romilly, 1999). This, I hoped, would give me the reassurance I was looking for that ‘all is not lost’. For once I read one of my purchases straightaway. I was not disappointed.

Jacqueline Romilly’s thesis is, first, that *les savoirs oubliés* are not in fact lost but often simply waiting to be recalled, and that, second, even when recall proves impossible, past reading and past knowledge have left a deposit in one’s mind and one’s sensibility that is incalculable.

Her first point is of course best illustrated by Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–1927) where a whole lost world is brought back through the actions of both involuntary and voluntary memory. Romilly shows how the same can work with memories of what one learned at school or read a long time ago. It just requires a certain effort (and, one might add, the intellectually beneficial habit of not just relying on internet search engines).

Her second point is more subtle. Even when all the details of what we have learned or read are lost without trace there is nonetheless a residue on which we continue to draw. I may no longer remember the names of most of the Wordsworth poems I studied in my last year at school, or be able to quote any of their lines, but the sense of the value of the simple life, the artificiality of much of what goes by the name of civilisation, and the virtue of stoicism remain with me. One may have completely forgotten the narrative, and indeed the dates, of the Thirty Years War, but one’s study of it has contributed to one’s growing horror of religious hatred and one’s sense of the terrible things that men can do to each other, as well as to one’s overall sense of the evolution of European history.

For us teachers Jacqueline Romilly’s book is an important reminder that education is not just about the acquisition of transferable skills or about ‘learning how to learn’, but also about the acquisition of knowledge and the development of a mind that, however imperfect,

remains, in that unfashionable English phrase, 'well-stocked'. It is also a powerful reminder that the study of the humanities, and of language and literature, retains a central place in the development of our emotions and values despite the denial of this by some of the academic purveyors of these disciplines. 'L'enseignement a pour mission, entre autres', Jacqueline Romilly concludes, 'de constituer pour nous ce trésor (des savoirs oubliés) et de nous en apprendre le maniement'.¹³

Thus reassured, I propose to carry on reading, with diminished concern that, months later, I have often only the vaguest memory of the details of what I have read. I wish all readers of *Espacecolint* a long and enjoyable summer and many opportunities during your holidays to add to your own *trésor des savoirs oubliés*.

¹³ 'Alongside its other aims, the purpose of teaching is to help us build up this treasury of forgotten knowledge and show us how to make use of it.'

THE GREAT THINKERS
STILL HAVE
THINGS TO TELL US

I studied the history of political theory as part of the Modern History degree course I followed at the University of Oxford in the early 1960s. I was fortunate enough to have as my tutor the Master of my College (Balliol), the distinguished constitutional historian Sir David Lindsay Keir, a confidant of the then Conservative Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. Himself a former student of Balliol, Macmillan would come down to Oxford from time to time and be seen wandering round the Fellows Garden in deep conversation with the Master, no doubt (I assumed) seeking his views on political issues of the day. My tutorial partner for our weekly hour-long sessions with the Master was the agreeable scion of a leading aristocratic family who went on to be a Conservative MP and Minister and, finally, an active hereditary peer in the House of Lords. Not surprisingly, given that as a younger son he was clearly destined for a political career, he took a more personal interest in political theory than I did. I particularly remember his enthusiasm about a famous and very un-conservative passage from Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social*.

I cannot claim that a couple of terms with Sir David Lindsay Keir gave me a lifelong enthusiasm for political theory. That interest did eventually come, but much later. What I did go away with was a sense

of the kinds of issues that exercised political philosophers – functions and forms of government, freedom and its limitations, rights and duties, the notion of community – and of the existence of an intellectual community from Plato to Marx that had debated these within itself over two and a half millennia. Helped by George Sabine's excellent *A History of Political Theory* (1937) this part of my course gave me a chronology and the beginnings of a metanarrative which I was able to fill out and modify in subsequent years (Sabine, 1961). Postmodernists and progressive educationalists keen to rid education of such structures of knowledge seem not to realise how damaging their acts of demolition can be.

What brought political theory to life was having to teach about liberalism, conservatism, Marxism, and fascism as part of nineteenth- and twentieth-century history, together with my growing awareness of my own position as a citizen with views about what was happening in my own country and in the wider Cold War at that time, and of the need to put them into some kind of intellectual framework. My reading was eclectic and by no means confined to political philosophers, embracing a lot of Nietzsche and Rousseau, Montaigne, J. S. Mill, and, often for the first time, most of Plato's dialogues (as translated by Benjamin Jowett, a nineteenth-century predecessor of Lindsay Keir as Master of Balliol).¹

It was only slowly that I became aware of the extent to which the thinkers I was reading had had educational roles, in some cases not wildly different from my own, and how this had prompted them to think and write about education as well. The final incentive to

¹ It was striking, as an illustration of how Edmund Burke's 'small platoons' bear within themselves the historical memory of societies that, not long after my arrival at Balliol, I heard both the name of this former Master (died 1893) and the doggerel that had carried it forward to a new generation of undergraduates 70 years later: 'Here come I, my name is Jowett. / All there is to know I know it. / I am Master of this College, / What I don't know is not knowledge!'

look further into what they had written about education only came when I was in charge, first, of national educational bodies and then of schools, and had a role, as I saw it, of stimulating thinking and discussion of what education was for and what it ought to involve.

It was probably because I was a historian that I delved into the past for this stimulus rather than into the latest educational research. My few ventures into academic educational journals – at least from the middle of the first decade of the new century onwards – came across lists of articles with titles such as: ‘Institutional practices supporting race-evasion in Norwegian schools: counter-narratives from racially minoritised teachers’ (*England’s Educational Review*); ‘Black Associationalism and the Counterpublic Sphere: civic organizations in the history of Black American education’ (*The USA’s History of Education Quarterly*); ‘Cultural mentoring as *Acompañamiento*: Rethinking Community Wealth’ (*Harvard Educational Review*).² Half the time, as with these examples, one did not even know from the deliberately obscure titles what the article was going to be about. One could not imagine anyone wanting to read such stuff except other researchers in the same field with a vested interest in perpetuating its hieratic discourse via their own related articles.

I turned instead to Nietzsche denouncing education by ‘old maids’ (dry-as-dust academics), Locke explaining why ballroom dancing should be taught, Montaigne complaining that grammar teachers spoke less clearly than fishwives on the Perit Pont in Paris, and Kant devising an acid test of what it is to be a virtuous human being to put before 10-year-olds. They were usually stimulating, frequently amusing, rarely dull, and from their very different standpoints often made one re-think one’s own assumptions. As well as using ideas from these writers to illustrate educational points in the many pieces

² These examples are from the 2024 or 2025 editions of the relevant journals.

I had to write for school newsletters or in the talks I was asked to give I also turned my reading into a couple of books which I finally found the time to write once I ceased to be in full-time employment.

The first book *What is Education For? The Views of the Great Thinkers and Their Relevance Today* (2013)³ had an epigraph from the German Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin who, in the early twentieth century, felt that modernity had created a rupture in human consciousness between the modern world and previous ages which was forcing us to look at things in new ways. Far from cancelling the past he saw this rupture as needing a new kind of thinking:

[Which], fed by the present, works with the ‘thought fragments’ it can wrest from the past and gather about itself. Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths ... and to bring them up into the world of the living ... as something ‘rich and strange’... (Quoted in Arendt, 1970, 205–206)⁴

We would no longer revere the past but use it to help us better to understand the present. This is also what I hoped my book would do, using the issues raised by my 10 thinkers to address topics in contemporary education, above all those related to the purposes of education and what those purposes meant in practice.

³ Translated into Turkish in 2018 as *Ne İçin Eğitim* (ÇİZGİ). The 10 thinkers discussed in the book were Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Montaigne, Locke, Rousseau, Kant, Nietzsche, Dewey, and Arendt.

⁴ Hannah Arendt was a close friend of Walter Benjamin. Arendt escaped to the USA. Benjamin killed himself when, having crossed the Pyrenees on foot into Spain, he was told that he would be deported back to France where he knew he would be interned as a Jew.

My second book, *The Conservative Case for Education: Against the Current*, did something similar but looking more thoroughly at a smaller number of thinkers: T. S. Eliot, Michael Oakeshott, Hannah Arendt again, and E. D. Hirsch (N. Tate, 2017).⁵ Articles have followed on ideas about the arts from Plato to Tolstoy and their implications for arts education, and on the twentieth-century Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, and the nineteenth-century English social and art critic John Ruskin, both of whom thought deeply about education and whose voluminous and beautifully collated complete works I buried myself in over many months (N. Tate, 2024a). The articles about the arts, Ortega and Ruskin follow. One of the reflections I have taken away from all of these studies is how unhelpful it has been in most cases to slap simplistic labels on to a thinker's ideas about education. This is why at times I have labelled each of Ruskin, Ortega and Arendt as both 'radical and conservative' and Ruskin, in addition, as 'utopian and realist'.

The fourth article in this section is a short speech I gave at an MCC conference on universities at Ludovika University of Public Service in 2024 which gave me the opportunity to re-read Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University* and to read for the first time John Stuart Mill's Inaugural Lecture as Rector of the University of St Andrews, two great nineteenth-century educational works that convey a powerful sense of the purpose of the university which, in the contemporary world, we have largely lost.

The final and most recent of my articles 'Education for Virtue: what the great thinkers have told us and we have forgotten' looks again at some of the issues discussed in Chapter 1 to do with moral education in the context of 2,500 years of philosophical discussion from Plato and Aristotle to Oakeshott and Arendt.

⁵ Translated into Hungarian in 2023 as *Konzervatív iskola* (MCC Press).

THE CASE AGAINST THE ARTS FROM
PLATO TO TOLSTOY AND ITS IMPLICATIONS
FOR WHY AND HOW THE ARTS SHOULD
BE TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS ⁶

I believe in God, Mozart and Beethoven. ... I believe ... in the truth of the one, indivisible Art ... I believe that through this Art all men are saved...

– RICHARD WAGNER

O man full of arts, to one it is given to create the things of art, and to another to judge what measure of harm and profit they have for those that shall employ them.

– PLATO, *Phaedrus*, 274e

This article was prompted in part by the endless pressure that educational leaders were experiencing to increase the time allocated to the arts in schools. With some of these demands I sympathised, but was struck by how little of it had to do with any desire to strengthen the connection between current pupils and the artistic heritage of the country and civilisation into which they were supposedly being inducted. Requirements to read Shakespeare and to study canonical poets and novelists were, more frequently than not, met with opposition from the teaching profession. One rarely heard demands for more Bach and Mozart, or for the appreciation of different styles of painting, but for creativity, as if genuine creativity could take place in a vacuum free from knowledge and experience of what had gone before.

⁶ First published in *Educational Review*, 68(1) [2016], pp. 24–39.

In 2010 one of the annual educational conferences that I had introduced at The International School of Geneva was held on the theme of 'Creativity in Education'. In my opening address I pointed out that concern for creativity in education was a very recent development and that, looking back at my time both as head of England's national curriculum bodies in the 1990s and as a member of France's Haut Conseil de l'évaluation de l'école between 2000 and 2005, I could not remember a single occasion when the word 'creativity' was on an agenda or even part of any discussion. Why, I asked, was it now so constantly in the news? I was unable to provide a definitive answer, but drew the conference's attention to the thesis of the French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello that, at a time of growing social and economic inequalities, capitalism was in need of a new and more positive ideology, and one that addressed the traditional critiques of capitalism – that it was alienating, oppressive, hierarchical, inflexible – and showed how instead it could be liberating, inspiring, visionary, and, of course, creative (Boltanski & Chiapello, 1999). I made clear that I was most definitely not a Marxist, but that Marx had been right when he suggested – like Aristotle before him – that particular sets of economic circumstances throw up particular sets of ideas. I also pointed out that the creativity of the twentieth century's most original artists – people like James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and Pablo Picasso – took place against the background of a thoroughly absorbed classical tradition.

'The Case Against the Arts from Plato to Tolstoy' looks at a group of thinkers who had very strong and, at times, negative, views about the arts: Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Rousseau, and Tolstoy. In each case it looks at the extent to which each writer's 'case against the arts' is a 'case against the arts' per se or only against certain kinds of arts. Four implications for arts education are discussed: the avoidance of hyperbole with regard to the benefits of arts education; the role of cognition in responding to the arts; the ethical dimension of

art appreciation; and the balance between practice and study. The conclusion is that the 'case against the arts' provides a powerful case for arts education of a certain kind, in which creativity may be present but is not centre stage.

Introduction

As part of the commemoration of the centenary of the First World War an artist, Paul Cummins created a ceramic poppy which the set designer Tom Piper used as the basis for a piece of installation art called *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red*, in which 888,246 of these poppies, one for each British military fatality in the war, were placed in the moat of the Tower of London. The installation, created over a number of months in the autumn of 2014 by volunteers, attracted huge numbers of visitors. Few examples of new art – and by most criteria this counted as ‘art’, and was intended as such – can have aroused so much interest in Britain in recent times.

Ten days before the installation reached its climax the art critic and Turner Prize judge Jonathan Jones wrote a piece in *The Guardian* headed ‘The Tower of London poppies are fake, trite, and inward-looking – a Ukip-style memorial’ (Jones, 2014a). A longer and more closely argued article – ‘History and all its grisly facts are worth more than the illusion of memory’ – followed three days later (Jones, 2014b). Jones’s main criticism of the installation was that it ‘aestheticised’ and ‘prettified’ an event that needed to be remembered differently, without ‘dignity and grace’ and ‘fake nobility’. The barrage of adverse comment that followed Jones’s articles was predictable, with Robert Hardman of *The Daily Mail* concluding that a hundred years later it would be these poppies, beloved by the people, that would be remembered, despite being an ephemeral installation, rather than the pickled shark of Turner Prize winner Damien Hirst or the unmade bed of Turner Prize nominee Tracey Emin (Hardman, 2014).

The public debate stimulated by Jones's article – incidentally a marvellous case study for any teacher of the visual arts quick enough to take advantage of it with students while still topical – threw up a lot of questions about the value and nature of art. Is art dangerous in appealing to emotion rather than to reason? Is art an illusion that can shield us from reality rather than illuminating it? Should art aim at beauty? Is there something psychologically and ethically worrying about the pity and 'enjoyable suffering' some artworks induce? Does easily accessible art make us passive observers, distracting us from the actions needed to change ourselves and the world? Must good art have ethical purpose and impact? What should be the contribution of the 'informed few' and the 'uninformed many' in making lasting judgements about the value of artworks?

These are questions which have been debated by Western philosophers from the fifth century BC onwards. They are central to our efforts to decide what art is, what its role should be in our lives, and how we should distinguish between good and bad art. At the heart of the controversy over *Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red* were arguments that are part of a case *against the arts* that has been articulated intermittently for at least 2,400 years. In Jones's case the arguments were not against the arts *per se* but against a particular artwork. Others, over the centuries, have wondered whether the harm allegedly done by the arts generally outweighs their benefits. Few have concluded that they do and even fewer have gone so far as Plato who refused artists entry into his ideal city. Those making the case against the arts, or against certain prevalent forms of art, have, however, left an impressive legacy of writing and thought which no one trying to refine and strengthen the case *for the arts* should ignore. This legacy is also an antidote to those who, from Romanticism onwards, have been tempted to turn art into a religion, to ministries of culture inclined to drift into exaggerated claims about the benefits of the arts they subsidise, and to contemporary

societies which give certain types of artists and entertainers wealth and status to a degree perceived to be undeserved.

Arguments about the value of the arts in themselves have fundamental implications for arts education. One cannot teach the arts in school without constantly going back to the question 'what are the arts for?'. Many of those who have put the case *against the arts* have also considered it within the context of their explorations into the nature of education. Some felt driven to make this case *because* that is what they felt educational considerations demanded. In education the legacy of the case *against the arts* can also be an antidote to exaggerated claims about the place of the arts in the school curriculum and a possible corrective to current emphases in arts education.

The article surveys the case *against the arts*, focusing particularly on Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Rousseau, and Tolstoy as, arguably, its most articulate and influential proponents. It focuses on the ideas *qua* ideas rather than on their historical origins and impact. It concludes with a discussion of some of the implications of these ideas for arts education in schools today.

A definition of art and the arts

The arts in this article are taken as embracing poetry, prose literature, drama, music, and the visual arts, and their contemporary manifestations such as film and television. In so far as the discussion will involve normative boundaries to the concept of 'art' I will take as a broad definition the following statement by the philosopher of aesthetics Richard Eldridge, which he describes as 'a specification of criteria ... for calling something art':

Works of art present a subject matter as a focus for thought and emotional attitude, distinctively fused to the imaginative exploration of material ... [they] typically have representational, expressive,

and formal dimensions, all of which, both independently and in interaction, are normal foci of attention in making and responding to a work. (Eldridge, 2003, p. 259)

Plato

Plato (428–348 BC) is the main player in the case *against the arts*, both because of the extent of the attention he gave to the dangers of the arts in many of his dialogues and because of his huge subsequent influence. There are few extended discussions in later centuries about the value of the arts that do not sooner or later come back to Plato. For Aristotle, Augustine, Rousseau, and Tolstoy he was a point of sympathetic reference. For Nietzsche, a fierce anti-Platonist whose influence on modern aesthetics has been profound, he was the ‘greatest enemy of art which Europe has so far produced’ (Nietzsche, 1996, p. 129).

Plato’s most fundamental objection to the arts was that they were inferior to philosophy as a way of understanding the world. Plato’s metaphysics distinguished between the world of appearances and the underlying world of reality. What was most real was not what could be apprehended through the senses but the Ideas or Forms which were only accessible through reason and of which tangible things were merely manifestations. Beautiful artworks were as nothing beside the ‘Idea of Beauty’. As ways of learning about the world Plato ranked poetry, and art generally, last, behind philosophy, which was first, and *historia*, empirical knowledge derived from investigation and the senses, second. Plato also saw art, and especially visual art, as simply a mirror to physical objects – an appearance of an appearance – and thus at a third remove from the Ideas of Truth and Beauty that really mattered.

At its best, then, art is merely mimetic of a secondary reality. As such it may be harmless, if often irrelevant, but at its worst actively

harmful where it appeals to powerful feelings, represents and encourages immoral behaviour, promotes illusions masquerading as wisdom, and is indifferent to truth. Plato had a strong distaste for situations in which people lost control of themselves, were seduced and deceived by representations, and were moved by outside forces rather than being their own movers. This is what he feared in poetry recitations, where rhapsodes impersonated the different characters in the story, and in the tragedies and comedies, with their accompanying music, dance, and scenic effects, performed to huge audiences in Greek theatres. Poets and dramatists, Plato felt, misrepresent the gods, praise tyranny, mock named individuals, and pander to the low tastes of their audiences (Plat. *Resp.* 2.378, 2.393–394, 8.568, in Plato, 1955, pp. 116, 131–132, 342; Pl. *Ap.* 19c, in Hamilton & Cairns, 1961, p. 5). As a puritan, Plato particularly disliked the idea that the purpose of art might be pleasure. Art, where it could be redeemed and reclaimed for the city, had a higher purpose which was to develop moral character. Finally, given that performance of epic or tragic poetry was his main preoccupation, Plato also clearly felt that there was something inauthentic and distasteful about impersonation. Those preparing to be the state's future Guardians should focus on that role only, in other words on living rather than the simulacra of living – a complaint against the arts that has echoed down the ages (Pl. *Resp.* 3.395, 10.599, in Plato, 1955, pp. 134, 375).

It is for this reason that in the ideal city care should be taken to ensure that in educating its future Guardians the first stories they hear as children should produce 'the right moral effect' (Pl. *Resp.* 2.378, in Plato, 1955, p. 116). In *The Republic* Plato takes great pains to prescribe what is permissible in children's education, both in poetry and music. In his late work *Laws*, he goes one step further and envisages the setting up of a ministry of education. One of its functions would be to lay down which poems should be learned

by heart and which should be banned (Pl. *Leg.* 6.766a–b, 7.812a, in Plato, 1955, pp. 1344, 1382).

Censorship, however, does not stop with what happens in schools and children's competitions. In order to protect children, as well as to ensure the continuing moral education of adults, 'bad art' must be excluded altogether from the city. Only 'hymns to the gods and paeans in praise of good men' were to be allowed (Pl. *Resp.* 10.607, in Plato, 1955, p. 384). Even choral singing and dance, Plato's most favoured arts because of their potential benefit to the mind, were to be tightly controlled, only those modes and instruments expressing virtuous qualities being permissible. Although he was generally more relaxed about the visual arts, they too were seen as 'thoroughly unsound' because 'far removed from reality, and [appealing] to an element in us equally far removed from reason' (Pl. *Resp.* 3.399, 10.603, in Plato 1955, pp. 139, 380).

Plato's authoritarianism, indeed totalitarianism, has, over the centuries, been both widely praised and, especially in more recent times, attacked, most notably by Karl Popper, the political philosopher, who saw him as the enemy of liberal democracy and of 'the open society' (Popper, 2002).

Plato's wish to control the arts, however, arose from a desire, shared by non-authoritarians, to shape the culture in which the young grow up. A tightly controlled education would be ineffective, he felt, if the wider ethos continually pulled individuals in a different direction. It was not just access to the arts in education therefore that had to be regulated, but the arts in the state as a whole. Tragedy and comedy in Athens could be performed before crowds of 14,000. As the classicist M. F. Burnyeat has put it: Plato's 'subject is the words and music you hear at social gatherings, large and small. Think pubs and cafés, karaoke, football matches, the last night of the Proms. Think ... Elton John singing to the nation from Westminster Abbey' (Burnyeat, 2012). It was because education was so important, but only part of

a wider cultural transmission, that Plato, for the sake of the young and the future of the state, felt the need for the whole of culture to be purged. There are few today, within the West, with any sympathy for Plato's illiberal solution but in an era of global capitalism and all-pervasive mass media – the 'society of spectacle', as analysed by Guy Debord and Mario Vargas Llosa – the challenge, for educators remains (Debord, 2006; Vargas Llosa, 2012, *passim*).

Although Plato never admitted that poetry 'derives from an epistemologically legitimate part of the soul', his attitude towards art was far from being simply dismissive (Barchana-Lorand, 2012, p. 96). Plato's ideal state would have plenty of art in it, but only of a morally improving kind, censored, and representing the judgement of the discerning few.

The power of beautiful words and sounds, even if not *good*, is also admitted. Despite his criticism of Homer for immoral depictions of gods and heroes Plato knew his works intimately, was deeply attracted by them, and expressed the hope at the end of *The Republic* that he and other poets who wrote for pleasure might one day be able to make a case for their return to the city as 'we know their fascination only too well' (Pl. *Resp.* 10.607, in Plato, 1955, p. 385).

Plato was thus far from being the unqualified enemy of the arts depicted by Nietzsche. In *Phaedrus* Plato, exceptionally, accepts a use for beautiful words composed for pleasure, as well as admitting their power (Ferrari, 2012, pp. 119–120). He also uses myth to make his own points, as in the myths of the Cave and of Er in *The Republic*, creating a kind of art which, while telling a powerful story, distances the reader from it by means of interruptions and explications, rouses contrasting or ambivalent emotions, discourages the imitation of characters, and incites precisely the kind of reflective and sophisticated response envisaged by Eldridge in his criteria for art quoted above (Pl. *Resp.* 10.614–620, in Plato, 1955, pp. 393–401; Destrée 2012, p. 136).

As well as being the main mover in the case *against* the arts Plato thus also points to ways in which some of their potentially harmful effects can be avoided through education.

Aristotle

Aristotle (387–322 BC), Plato's pupil, shared his tutor's distrust of the arts, and in particular of spectacles that relied too heavily on sensation and special effects, and aroused unworthy emotions (Dadlez, 2006, p. 355). Like Plato he gave greatest importance to truths that are universal and necessary, and thus similarly placed philosophy above both poetry and *historia*. He shared Plato's sense of the overwhelming moral importance of the arts and was also convinced of the need to censor access to the arts not just for the young but for the whole community (Arist. *Pol.* 7.1336b, in Aristotle, 1948, p. 388). In other ways Aristotle, as in other aspects of his philosophy, distanced himself from his tutor. He abandoned Plato's theory of Ideas and Forms and thus, in Kenny's words, 'undercut the metaphysical objection to poetry' (Aristotle, 2013, p. xv). Aristotle saw poetry as more likely to provide access to universal truths than empirical observations, and thus ranked it second after philosophy, and thus, unlike Plato, above *historia*.

In his *Politics* Aristotle outlines the education he would provide in his ideal state. He drew a particular distinction between education designed to habituate individuals to certain attitudes, emotions and patterns of behaviour, and education to make them think. The arts were able to make a contribution to both types of education, through their ability, in the first case, to form character and shape ethical attitudes, and, in the second, to support reflection on higher things.

Education for leisure played a central role in Aristotle's plans for education. He distinguished between 'leisure' and 'occupation'. Education needs to prepare people for both these states of existence.

‘Leisure’ involves the highest form of human activity: the pursuit of intellectual excellence and of the noble and the beautiful, as ends in themselves. This idea of a ‘liberal education’, in which the disinterested and intellectually serious pursuit of the arts plays an important role, has in Aristotle one of its major sources.

Aristotle was also more relaxed than Plato about pleasure. He saw the cultivation of the mind as itself involving pleasure and that this was also a legitimate aspect of the arts. Music, as well as ‘[possessing] the power of producing an effect on the character of the soul’, was, he asserted, ‘one of the greatest of pleasures’ (Arist. *Pol.* 8.1339b, 8.1340b, in Aristotle, 1948, pp. 402, 406). He was also happy to see ‘amusement’ and ‘relaxation’ as acceptable, if subsidiary, functions of music, as relief from work and exertion, including for the young (Arist. *Pol.* 8.1339b, in Aristotle, 1948, p. 403).

One reason for these shifts in emphasis, by comparison with Plato, was that Aristotle saw emotions differently. For Plato expressions of emotion needed to be kept to a minimum whereas for Aristotle a balance was needed, neither too much nor too little (Aristotle, 2013, p. xiv). In the *Poetics* Aristotle talks of the desired outcome of the experience of listening to tragic poetry as being a ‘catharsis’, or the purging or purifying of the soul through emotions of pity and fear. The fact that he only uses this word once and never explains what he means by it has not, however, discouraged more than 2,000 years of speculative exegesis. Kenny, as one of the most recent translators of the *Poetics*, is clear that it does not mean ridding ourselves altogether of emotions, as Plato might have wished, but should be seen more as a process which enables us to reflect on and refine our own emotions, exploring them in imaginary contexts and putting them into perspective (Aristotle, 2013, pp. xviii–xxvii). Seen in this way Aristotle is far from conceding that we should be swept off our feet by the power of spectacle, and indeed is particularly critical of sensational dramas that evoke nothing but horror (Arist. *Poet.*

1453a, in Aristotle, 2013, p. 33). If Kenny's interpretation is correct what Aristotle is talking about, at least in part, is art which seeks the kind of reflective response on the part of spectator, reader or listener envisaged by Eldridge when, in laying down criteria for things to be considered as art, he talks about 'foci of attention' needed in those responding to an artwork.

Aristotle's more favourable view of democracy also helped to shape his views on art. If the coming together of different citizens' judgements could help the quality of decision-making in an assembly, as he believed, so too could 'the Many [prove] also better judges [than the few] of music and the writings of poets: some (will) appreciate one part, and all together appreciate all' (Arist. *Pol.* 3.1281b, in Aristotle, 1948, p. 143). Where Plato and Aristotle continued to agree, however, was that 'good' and 'bad' in art could be determined, and that 'bad' art could be harmful. Their disagreement concerned where the boundary between the two should be fixed and how judgements about this boundary might be reached.

Augustine

The continuing influence of Plato's 'case against the arts' long after his death can be largely explained by the way Platonism was absorbed into Christianity. Augustine (354–430), arguably the greatest Christian writer of Christianity's first millennium, was hugely influenced by Plato without necessarily having read anything he had written. Plato's 'case against art' was then transmitted by Augustine to many others during the following centuries. The ascetic view of art associated with Plato became so firmly entrenched in Western thought that its influence continued long after the Middle Ages.

As with Plato himself, however, a closer study of Augustine's views on art suggests a more nuanced picture. Augustine had begun life as a teacher of rhetoric and continued to use his rhetorical talents

in writings and sermons. He wrote a treatise on aesthetics before his conversion to Christianity, and, though in his *Confessions* he described how he turned his back on these earlier views, remained highly sensitive to the power of beautiful words and sounds (Augustine, 1997, Books IV, XIII, and XIV). He continued to be attached to some of the greatest Roman authors, and especially to Virgil's *Aeneid*, throughout his life (MacCormack, 1998, *passim*).

Despite this, Augustine shared with Plato a belief in the superiority of reason and of contemplation over the arts with their dependence on the senses. This belief deepened as he became absorbed in his new faith. The highest activity for human beings is to see and contemplate that which is timeless and immutable. Though created by God and beautiful in themselves, the things of this world are as nothing in comparison with the supreme truth, which is also the supreme beauty (Svoboda, 1933, pp. 40, 63; Augustine, 1997, Books III, X, XIV, XXXIV). In the *Confessions* Augustine describes how, when at school, his ears were 'tickled by lying fables,' how he wept at Dido's desertion by Aeneas rather than looking into his own behaviour, and how he came to value authors more for their fame and how they wrote than for what they had to say (Augustine, 1997, Books I, X, XIII, XVIII). Augustine shared Plato's belief in the inferiority of imitation when compared with the reality being imitated, his generally low opinion of the plastic arts, and his profound distaste for the theatre. He also, like Plato, saw music, on which he wrote a treatise (*De Musica*), as potentially the greatest of the arts, because of its association with number and with reason, though even here felt that it was wrong to be more influenced by the singing of psalms than by the words being sung (Augustine, 1997, Books X, XXXIII).

As with Plato and Aristotle, however, Augustine's 'case against the arts,' despite its profound negativity in his final writings, is sometimes best seen as a case against arts of a certain kind rather than against art *per se*. The ability of art to present truths figuratively and

to encourage reflection is recognised. He saw this particularly in the Scriptures. In *De Musica* he also makes the interesting distinction between reactions to the senses and judgements of reason which evaluate these reactions, the latter being seen as the most appropriate kinds of aesthetic judgement. The understanding of why one reacts with pleasure to music is more beautiful in itself, he argues, than the work of art to which one is reacting (Svoboda, 1933, p. 110). Again, as with Plato and Aristotle, these features come close to that focus on the quality of the respondent's attentiveness referred to by Eldridge in his criteria 'for calling something art'.

Augustine's 'Christian Platonism' remained dominant throughout the Middle Ages and in Faas's view was so powerful that even the Renaissance failed to dislodge it. What emerged, in Faas's interpretation, was an increasing disjunction between 'a new creative impulse, drawing inspiration from pagan, pre-Platonic models' and a 'theory of art stuck in its post-Platonic moulds' (Faas, 2002, pp. 78–81).

Rousseau

Rousseau (1712–1778) shared with Plato and Aristotle a close interest in the role of the arts in the education of the young and an even deeper ambiguity about the case both for and against the arts, an ambiguity which permeates his writings.

Rousseau's case against the arts is both more ambiguous and also more radical than that of Plato. His *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (1750–1751), in which the term 'arts' embraces the liberal as well as the creative arts, is an assault on some of the main assumptions of the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment and in particular its confidence in man's ability to improve the world. Rousseau's core argument is that, as the arts and sciences progress within a society, so virtue, vigour, sincerity, simplicity, and citizenship give way to depravity, effeminacy, insincerity, ostentation, and the search for

pleasure. Citing examples from history, he shows how, as the arts progress, *savoir bien faire* (knowing how to do things well) gives way to *savoir bien dire* (knowing how to say things well), and *talents agréables* (talents that please) replace *talents utiles* (useful talents) in public esteem. In societies in which the arts are well-developed, the fundamental purposes of life – to live virtuously and to help maintain communities – get pushed into second place. Where the arts flourish there is an incitement to ambition, pride, vanity, and flattery. The arts seduce people into feeling they have all the virtues even when they have none. They also provide instruments with which princes strengthen their tyranny, an idea greatly expanded later by Marx and his followers. In conclusion, Rousseau argues, even ignorance, innocence, and poverty look preferable to all the alleged benefits of civilisation (Rousseau, c. 1930, pp. 17–22, 30, 37, 41, 45, 47).

The power of the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* lies in its ability to get across the idea that arts, which ought to help men live good lives, can become ends in themselves and thus a substitute for those lives. Rousseau, however, was aware of the limitations of his position. He could not overlook that he himself was a prolific artist, the author of four operas, seven plays and a best-selling novel. With characteristic sleight of hand Rousseau was able to justify this contradiction by arguing that, in an ideal world – in the city state of his imagining – he would have ‘thrown [these letters] into the fire’, but that, given the degenerate state of contemporary society, abolishing the arts might make things even worse and that therefore ‘Great cities must have theatres; and corrupt peoples, Novels’ (Rousseau, 1992, pp. 196–198; 2004, p. xvii).

The main theme of this discourse and, in Rousseau’s view, of all his writings, was ‘that nature made man happy and good, but that society depraves him and makes him miserable’ (Rousseau, 1992, p. xi). Given Rousseau’s views about how the arts can turn us into passive vehicles who merely accept the artist’s judgement, the role

of the arts in this education needs to be carefully circumscribed (Dugan & Strong, 2001, pp. 341–343). In *Émile* Rousseau delays the acquisition of reading and writing, focusing instead on speech and song. Books can only be introduced when the young person has developed his own thoughts and is better able to resist the artist's seductive powers. Even in the early stages of adolescence (ages 12–15) only one book is permitted: Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, in order to learn how to be self-sufficient. When, after the age of 15, other books are finally introduced, Rousseau's preference is for authors from the ancient world who are 'rich in facts and sparing in judgements' and 'closest to nature' (Rousseau, 2010, pp. 515–516). Other writers, including poets, are not excluded, nor are visits to the theatre. The importance of the arts in education should not, however, be exaggerated. 'I care little whether he succeeds or not at the dead languages, at letters, at poetry', Rousseau concludes, in highly Platonic vein. 'He will be worth no less if he knows none of all that, and it is not with all these trifles that his education is concerned' (Rousseau, 2010, p. 517).

Despite allowing Emile to visit the theatre once he was a young man, and writing plays himself, Rousseau follows in the tradition of Plato and Augustine in expressing the gravest doubts about the theatre (Rousseau, 1995, pp. 1–125, 1195–1211; Osipovich, 2004, pp. 355–362). Many of his arguments are familiar from Plato. What Rousseau dislikes above all is that the theatre makes us feel better about ourselves through condemning others for their misdeeds or crying over their sufferings, neglecting our own lives as a result.

The case against the artists

The case against the arts up to this point had largely focused on the pretensions of the arts themselves rather than on the pretensions of the artists. Literature aside, Plato and Aristotle did not feel that

practising the arts to a high level, as opposed to *learning about* them during their education, was a suitable occupation for future leaders. Artists were mechanics and mechanical tasks were inappropriate for those destined for a life of reasoning, contemplating, and ruling. This was a view of the artist that persisted in Europe until at least the Renaissance. From the fifteenth century onwards, however, and even more so after the end of the eighteenth century, following the Romantic Movement, the notion emerged that those who practised the visual arts and music deserved the same status as those educated in the liberal arts. Artists came to be seen as people set apart and their art as an expression of their personal vision rather than that of their class, society, or Church. One consequence of this, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, was the development of art forms that became increasingly esoteric. Simultaneously a new discipline of aesthetics emerged, focusing mostly on art as the pursuit of beauty. Art came to have claims made for it that were unprecedented: that the pursuit of beauty through art could give meaning to the whole of one's life and that art could even save the world. The French poet and critic Théophile Gautier, for example, remarked that he 'would very happily renounce [his] rights as a Frenchman and citizen in return for being able to see a ... painting by Raphaël' (Gimpel, 1991, p. 81). Those pursuing a case *against the arts* since that time have not been slow to puncture such pretensions.

Tolstoy

One of the most prominent writers to do this was Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) whose witty and polemical essay *What is Art?* was published in 1898. Tolstoy rejected the idea that art was about the pursuit of beauty or pleasure. Art, to him, was the transmission of feelings from one human being to another. It was 'a means of communion among people'. He also attacked the art of his time for neglecting its

moral function: art was good when it served the good and bad when it served the bad, and much of contemporary art, in its pursuit of pleasure and beauty, was bad. He rejected most art since the Renaissance, including most of his own writings, as either 'counterfeit' or, in the sense of meeting artistic criteria but being of appeal only to limited numbers of people, 'exclusive'. He saw the inaccessibility of contemporary art – 'as incomprehensible for [ordinary] people as if ... written in Sanskrit' – as a means of asserting the superiority of artists, their patrons, and the consumers of their works, a view developed later by the Marxist Pierre Bourdieu, among others, in a twentieth-century sociological view of the arts which is itself a powerful critique of both their production and consumption (Tolstoy, 1995, pp. 26, 30, 37, 50, 53; Gimpel, 1991, pp. 133–134; Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 155–160, 207–221).

Tolstoy was particularly critical of the inversion of values by which people 'merely because they sing well, write poetry, (and) are good dancers' are praised and rewarded above those who are virtuous. Simple people, he wrote, are perplexed when 'they see that singers, writers, painters, dancers make millions, (and) that they are given greater honours than saints'. His point was about artists favoured by the elite but applies equally to the celebrities thrown up later by mass culture, and who fill our screens and newspaper pages on a daily basis.

Tolstoy was critical of schools for teaching 'people who have no wish to say anything ... the skill of writing a many-paged composition on a topic they have never thought about'. Art requires the expression and transmission of real feeling in infinitely subtle ways and it is 'absolutely impossible to teach someone in any external fashion' how to do this. All that schools can and should do, at the primary level, is to provide classes of drawing, singing, and music, and, after this, to leave those with gifts, and who have a spontaneous wish to communicate something, to perfect themselves independently. He

was particularly damning of those adults who force ‘lovely, kindly children’ from their earliest years to ‘waste their physical and mental strength’ on playing scales, singing solfeggios, walking on their toes and twisting their limbs for hours on end. Cutting back on arts education would have the effect of reducing the amount of artistic production, but that would be a highly desirable thing, Tolstoy estimating that in late nineteenth-century Europe 300,000 people were working in the visual arts alone and producing a million works of art a year. Most of this was not ‘art’ in his sense of the word and a dreadful waste of time and labour (Tolstoy, 1995, pp. 100, 113, 117, 142, 156).

Tolstoy’s case *against the arts* was not against the arts *per se* but against the particular kind of art that he saw to be dominant both in his own time and during the previous 400 years. Indeed, his view of the potential moral, religious, and social function of art was considerably more elevated than that of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Rousseau. He also did not share with any of the earlier thinkers their strong sense of the superiority of Reason. The book concludes with a hope that art might realise ‘the brotherly union of man,’ enabling people to live without courts and prisons, and encouraging them to live without violence and to sacrifice themselves for others (Tolstoy, 1995, pp. 166–167). Tolstoy was thus against the ideas of ‘art for art’s sake’ and art as a religion, but not against that of art for the sake of religion or, contrary to Plato whom he otherwise defends, against the idea that art should be mainly about the expression of emotion.

Tolstoy’s views have been highly controversial. The essay has been roundly denounced, sometimes in ways that unconsciously reinforce Tolstoy’s criticism of the self-satisfied ‘literary Establishment,’ as in Koestler’s description of the essay as ‘the shrill voice of the literary fishwife’ (Diffey, 1985, p. 3). His critique of the arts, however, is particularly relevant to a world in which some arts have become even more detached from everyday life and in which the massive

arts industry which he condemned has expanded still further and permeates many aspects of most people's lives.

*Implications for education
of the case against the arts*

The 2,400-year-old 'case against the arts' has four main implications for the place and nature of arts education in schools.

First, it asks us to keep the arts in perspective and not be carried away by the rhetoric which at times inclines to see them as both the centre of life and the centre of education. The statement, attributed to Sophocles, that 'whoever neglects the arts when he is young has lost the past and is dead for the future', permeates cyberspace: used by schools all over the world in their arts policies and publicity materials; cited in support of a demand (duly accepted) for the restoration of funding to the California Arts Council; used to promote arts education in Chicago public schools; given pride of place as the epigraph to the Department for Culture, Media and Sports and Department for Education's 2012 document *Cultural Education in England*; available as a mouse pad, on coffee mugs, and on most 'inspiring quotes' websites. Unfortunately, however, it was not Sophocles who wrote this. It was Euripides who used the phrase in a surviving fragment of one of his plays. More significantly, the version universally quoted is an inaccurate translation. Euripides did not refer to *the arts* but to what the authoritative Loeb edition translates as 'the Muses', of whom there were nine and who, in fifth-century BC Athens, were seen as presiding over history, rhetoric, and other aspects of learning, as well as the arts, thus giving the statement a very different connotation (Collard & Cropp, 2008, p. 581). Even when quoted *correctly*, as a reference to learning more generally, it is already hyperbolic, as well as unclear. Quoted *incorrectly*, it is ludicrous, if one only stops for a moment to think about it. The over-hasty acceptance of such

a statement by head teachers and secretaries of state is yet another indication, Plato might say, of the dangerous power that the arts are able to exercise over people's minds, especially, as Tolstoy might then have added, when linked to someone revered uncritically simply because he wrote plays.

I have given this particular example, unimportant in itself, as it illustrates a widespread inflation of claims about the value of the arts for young people. The Chicago report mentioned above supports its case with other quotes: 'Art lifts us off of the pavement'; 'Art makes [schools] happy place[s]'; 'Art is humanity's most essential, most universal language ... [it is] a necessary part of communication'. All these are highly contentious statements, with many implications if one wishes to use them thoughtfully as an inspiration for an arts education policy rather than just as 'hurrah' slogans. They require cool analysis, not euphoric repetition.

My first point therefore is that the doubts that Plato, Rousseau, and others have had about the arts, including their place in education, should encourage us to respond carefully to claims that the arts should be more central to the curriculum than they currently are and in particular to demands that, in phases of schooling in which they are currently optional (for example, post-14 in England, or 16–18 within International Baccalaureate programmes), they should become compulsory. Some of these demands involve students being required to choose from one of a range of arts options – music, drama, dance, 'expressive arts', 'visual arts', 'art and design' – rather than following a general course in the arts. The implication is that all these very different subjects (which can also be treated in very different ways depending on the syllabus) must have some kind of arts 'essence' in common which justifies the requirement that at least one of them be studied. But what is this 'essence', once we have moved beyond the arts 'making the school a happy place' or, ensuring, with the putative Sophocles, that young people are not 'dead for the future'? What are

the benefits for future lives that we expect each of these variants of art to have for those who study them in these ways? What evidence do we have that in practice they bring these benefits? How do we then weigh up the comparative value of using finite curriculum time in other ways, for example (in England post-14) by requiring the study of history or a modern foreign language? Answers to these questions should determine curriculum decisions, not rhetoric.

There may well be a case for strengthening national and other (e.g. International Baccalaureate) requirements in relation to the study of the arts, but it will be a stronger case, not least for the reasons mentioned by Plato, Rousseau, and others, if it takes into account the limitations, and possible disadvantages, of certain kinds of art, puts firmly aside any lingering ‘halo effect’ left behind by the notion of art as a substitute religion, and focuses above all on how the arts can refine perception and shape judgement.

Second, the ‘case against the arts’, as well as making us look more closely at the various ‘apologies’ for art that justify its place both in society and in education, also alerts us to the harm that some artworks might cause. The promotion of the arts by arts organisations and ministries of culture (and sometimes of education) is driven by two convictions: that the arts are good for the economy and that they help to make the world a better place (O’Brien, 2010). Some of the greatest minds in the history of Western thought, however, did not agree and, while in no case rejecting art altogether, pointed to the damaging effect that some forms of art can have on their audiences. The two most powerful points to emerge from this critique are, first, that, in general, artworks encourage emotion at the expense of reason and, second, that dramatic spectacles (including those using the new mass media), are to be looked at warily in case they do more harm than good.

These are difficult messages to hear in a world influenced by post-Romantic notions of the ‘autonomy of art’. They are not an

argument against the arts *per se* but against artworks that encourage or attract unthinking emotional responses and against a view of art appreciation that downplays the role of cognition. They point to an arts education that fosters a distancing from the artwork being experienced (a distancing that the best of modernism has often been keen to emphasise) and that leaves users of art unafraid to puncture the exaggerated lyricism of some of our best-loved poets or to walk out of a Wagner opera, as Tolstoy did, appalled by the excessive rapture of the audience and the absurdity of the action (and to do the same with a much-acclaimed pop band, Turner Prize exhibition or, indeed, ceramic poppy installation), while having carefully considered one's reasons for doing so.

In his book *Un cœur intelligent*, Alain Finkielkraut takes as his starting point King Solomon's request to the Lord to give him 'an intelligent heart' and uses this as the basis for a powerful case for those artworks, and that way of responding with discrimination to artworks – and, by implication, that way of educating about artworks – that give due weight both to emotion and to reason (Finkielkraut, 2009, *passim*). In doing so he provides a riposte to what he sees as the omnipresence of sentimentality – the contemporary world's version of Platonic emotional excess – and a defence of the kind of art which enables us to see through this sentimentality and guard against it. Another contemporary French writer Philippe Muray also has sentimentality as his target, though in his case locating it in the state-subsidised art world and in the arts events – nation-wide poetry jamborees, *Nuits Blanches* (all-night large-scale arts festivals) – that this spawns in the name of 'communal identity', 'social healing', and 'coming together to invent our own future' (Muray, 2010, pp. 1554–1555). Muray's analysis of these events, school participation in which is often encouraged in the name of 'cultural education', warns us, at the very least, as with the 2,400-year 'case against the theatre' that we have been examining, that, educational though these events may

sometimes be, the value of spectacles can be by no means assumed just because they go under the labels ‘culture’ and ‘art’.

Third, the ‘case against the arts’, in contrast to current assumptions about the autonomy of art, reminds us that from Antiquity onwards and until the end of the eighteenth century, no one had queried the fundamental idea that one of the main purposes, and sometimes *the* main purpose, of art was to make people more virtuous. Writers who did not share the reservations about the arts of Plato and his successors – Sir Philip Sidney, in his *An Apology for Poetry*, Samuel Johnson, in his essay on Shakespeare, David Hume in his essays on taste and the arts, and countless others – never disputed this (Aristotle, 2013, pp. 63–71; D. Greene, 1986, p. 427; Hume, 1987, Part I, Essays I, XXIII). Since Kant, however, philosophers of art have neglected or rejected as illegitimate the idea that the ethical dimension of artworks might be relevant to their evaluation. This is curious given that ordinary people continue to evaluate art ethically, most notably in recent times in relation to elements deemed to reflect racism, sexism, and homophobia, as in the past they would be more likely to have done in relation to elements deemed to be encouraging to vulgarity, frivolity, adultery, and cruelty. As Muray has pointed out, state-subsidised art, in democracies as well as in totalitarian states, is also often shot through with vague ethical purposes such as improving people’s wellbeing (O’Brien, 2010).

The emphasis that all the thinkers discussed placed on art’s ethical dimension draws attention to the importance of this as a criterion in the evaluation of certain types of art. It is not sustainable to separate art and morality completely, despite what Oscar Wilde – ‘there is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book’ – and others have been asserting for the last 100 or so years (Eldridge, 2003, p. 209). This is partly because many artists choose to give their works an ethical dimension which it is then appropriate to evaluate ethically, partly because it is legitimate to ask about the impact of an artwork and

whether this is likely to be ethically neutral, beneficial, or harmful, partly because an artwork may breach a taboo which one feels should not be breached even in art, and partly because – although Hume would not agree – it might be possible to find something aesthetically good but morally bad (e.g. Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will*), or morally good but aesthetically bad (e.g. a novel that promotes virtue but is deficient in expressive, formal, and cognitive qualities). The presence of an ethical dimension does not necessarily involve the promotion of explicit moral principles, but an attempt to show, as Eldridge has put it in the case of literature, 'that many different and divergent characters and actions are appropriately pitied, envied, despised, admired, respected, and so on, in many fine shades of meaning' (Eldridge, 2003, p. 218).

Discussions about the moral impact of art are particularly troublesome. The behavioural consequences of exposure to the arts on society at large are difficult to estimate. There is anecdotal evidence but nothing that suggests recurring patterns of behaviour that follow exposure to particular types of art (Carroll, 2000, pp. 350–387; Eldridge, 2003, p. 207). This does not invalidate the evaluation of artworks in relation to the moral experience they encourage. It is appropriate to ask, where relevant to the art form, whether our interaction with the artwork 'cultivate[s] our moral powers or ... deform[s] them' (Carroll, 2000, p. 370). This is a question, as posed over two millennia by Plato and others – including artists themselves (Cervantes in *Don Quixote* and Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* spring to mind) – which children should also sometimes be urged to consider.

Fourth, the 'case against the arts' raises the question about the appropriateness of getting children to practise the arts as opposed to appreciating them, or at least about the balance between these two elements within an arts education. Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, and Tolstoy all played down the role of providing young people

with opportunities to practise the arts, as opposed to learning about them and learning to appreciate them in a discriminating way. This is not a point of view likely to appeal to governments keen to promote 'creative' and 'cultural' industries or educationists inspired by a philosophy of 'active learning'. The very proliferation of these industries, the omnipresence of the popular arts in the contemporary world, and the fact that most people will grow up to be spectators, listeners, and readers rather than practitioners, however, highlights, as the central feature of arts education, the need for critical reflection on, and evaluation of, artworks produced by others, and for that appreciation of the factors shaping the production and consumption of the arts which helps us see how our tastes can be externally determined (or, in Bourdieu's words, to learn how when we think we 'speak' about the arts we are often in fact 'spoken for') (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 17). The focus needs to be as much on the analysis of one's responses as on the artwork itself. Artworks should invite one to reflect on how to think about 'difficult, real subject[s] in ordinary life', why one likes and dislikes things, and also, as T. S. Eliot put it, to appreciate, as Plato and others before him had done, that what we respond to 'with the least effort ... can have the ... most insidious influence upon us' and therefore 'not to assume that what we like is what we ought to like' (Eldridge, 2003, p. 71; Eliot, 1936, pp. 105, 110). As Vargas Llosa, an eloquent defender of arts education, has argued, this is particularly important in democratised capitalist societies dominated by the visual, by 'spectacle', and by the easily accessible, and in which the arts as a result risk losing their traditional role of stretching people's minds (Vargas Llosa, 2012, *passim*).

Given the seductive powers of the arts, and their ability to shape sensibilities for good or ill, as shown by the ceramic poppies in the Tower of London moat with which this article began, the crucial importance of educating people to reflect about them and about their impact on our lives cannot be in doubt. The *case against the*

arts thus provides a powerful *case for a certain kind of arts education*, in a world in which it has long ceased to be possible to exclude the arts not just from the city but from almost every part of our lives.

UNSETTLING THE REFLECTIONS
IN A POND: THE EDUCATIONAL THOUGHT
OF JOSÉ ORTEGA Y GASSET ⁷

Clichés are the trams of the intellectual transport network. Many travel on it. Whole peoples, above all, travel on it.

– ORTEGA Y GASSET, *La rebelión de las masas*

José Ortega y Gasset is probably the philosopher into whose mind I feel I have most deeply penetrated and whose views about education, with all their nuances, I feel I have most clearly understood. This does not mean that I necessarily agree with his views or that I am unaware of the deficiencies of his educational thought, above all the way he looks down on the issues from on high without attending to detail. Education was not his main interest, and it sometimes shows.

The most lasting deposit he has left in my mind is a sense of the enormity of the situation that faces each of us in both being determined by our circumstances, and especially the historical situation out of which we emerge, while at the same time having the freedom to develop one's own project or, as he puts it, to become a novelista of oneself. For a historian it is a thought to which one constantly returns, especially when reading Ortega's essays on some of those figures who clearly grabbed hold of fate and made something of themselves, through art or politics, men such as Goethe, Mirabeau, Cervantes, Velázquez, Zuloaga, El Greco, Goya, and Pío Baroja

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(the haunting paintings, prints and novels of the last three being indelibly associated in my mind with my first encounters with each of them during my year in Spain aged 20 and 21). It is Ortega's intellectual activities themselves – as an example of what a human being can do with his life – that inspires one to continue educating oneself and others (if one has that role) as much as any ideas he might have about how that education might be conducted, as interesting as those might be.

The article looks in particular at Ortega's interest in improving the education of elites, which was his main concern and what he felt was what Spain desperately needed if any national regeneration were to be forthcoming. I have also written about the education of elites elsewhere (N. Tate, [2024a](#); [2024d](#); [2025a](#); [2025g](#)).

The need for a radical pedagogy and to educate the masses

In a lecture at the Escuela Superior del Magisterio in Madrid in 1917, José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955), arguably Spain's greatest modern philosopher and one of its professors, urged future teacher educators and school inspectors to embrace *la pedagogía de la contaminación* (the pedagogy of contamination) (Ortega, [1917/2007](#)). By this he meant an approach to teaching that recognises that much of what is important in education is caught, not taught, and that the teacher's main role is not to transmit what is settled but to 'contaminate' students with the habit of searching, questioning, challenging, and unsettling established beliefs. The lecture ended on a personal note in which he insisted – too modestly, but not inappropriately given the extraordinary diversity of Ortega's intellectual interests – that he was not really a philosopher, just someone who makes people reexamine their assumptions, as if he were throwing little stones into a pond to unsettle the reflection in it of the clouds floating across the skies

above. This article explores the development of this distinctively Socratic and frequently radical educational thought and its sources within Ortega's wider philosophy.

Outside Spain and Hispanic America, Ortega y Gasset is known largely as the author of *La rebelión de las masas* (The revolt of the masses), published in 1929, a widely translated work analogous in both its themes and impact to Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835), which Ortega greatly admired and whose hopes and fears for democracy he shared (Ortega, 1929/2005; 1951). The *Revolt of the Masses* is a book that charts the emergence in Europe after the First World War of a mass society; analyses the *hombre de masa* (mass man) who typifies this society; and explores the social, cultural, and political consequences of these developments for the liberal democracy that Ortega favoured but that during the interwar years was under threat from communism and fascism. The book's themes have major consequences for the education both of the masses and of the elites that Ortega felt were needed to guide them.

Ortega's philosophy

Ortega's philosophical anthropology – a term he applied to his own writings – is frequently intertwined with his views on educational issues. His philosophical education as a young man involved spells at German universities, where as an enthusiastic neo-Kantian he came to look at the world through the prism of transcendental idealism, focusing on those parts of human culture that looked as if they might allow for universal rational judgements based on objective validity. In this phase he speculated about the possibility of an educational science applicable to all contexts, seeing the key role of educators as transmitting that which can be objectively established and embedding transcendental ideals in the minds of their students drawn from the Platonic triad of truth, goodness, and

beauty (Ortega, 1910/2004a, p. 94; 1906/2007). This neo-Kantian phase was largely over by the time Ortega was in his late twenties. Much of his later thought was a reaction against what he came to see as the dogmatism, utopianism, adherence to abstract principles and detachment from daily realities of transcendental idealism. Writers on Ortega's philosophy have categorised his post-Kantian thought into stages of many different kinds, not always helpfully given the strong elements of continuity that permeate the whole of this forty-year period (Lasaga Medina, 2012; Holmes, 2022; Haro Honrubia, 2020). Although Ortega's main educational principles are closely linked to his philosophical anthropology, the continuity in the themes running through his educational writings, at least in his post-Kantian phase, is even more striking than in his philosophy.

The shift from neo-Kantianism began even before Ortega returned from Germany in 1911. His time there had introduced him to Husserl's phenomenological approach to philosophy, which pushed Ortega away from idealism toward a greater focus on the empirical and psychological – what he called *hombres y cosas* (men and things) – and especially on the distinctive individuality of human beings. From the publication of his first major work, *Meditaciones sobre Quijote* (Meditations on Quixote), his vision of the world also became an increasingly perspectivist one, aware of the ways that so much of what we see, know, and understand reflect the angle or experience from which we perceive it. In due course this widened to what was to become the core of Ortega's philosophy, which he summed up in the phrase *Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia* (I am I and my circumstance), a way of looking at social reality and at oneself that starts with an attempt to understand one's environment and location in the historical process, and how the beliefs one absorbs and the generation to which one belongs shape one's being (Ortega, 1914/2004a; 1923/2005). Ortega's later writings *Historia como sistema* (History as a system), *Ideas y creencias* (Ideas and beliefs), and *El*

hombre y la gente (Man and people) are the fullest expression of this core idea of *Yo soy yo y mi circunstancia*, showing how the duality of the idea, while anchoring one to one's place and historical time, also points to the creative capacity of human beings to change their perspective and react in fresh ways to their circumstances (Ortega, 1940/2006b; 1941/2006b; 1949–1950/2010). This challenging but essentially positive vision of human beings facing a never-ending task of self-knowing and self-making – endlessly stepping back from the world to reflect on it and then stepping back into it to shape it – provides a pervasive philosophical grounding to Ortega's educational thought (Ortega, 1949–1950/2010, pp. 147–148).

Although a highly prolific author, Ortega never found the time among his numerous intellectual, educational, and journalistic commitments and initiatives to bring all of his philosophy together into an overall system. His works are scattered across books, essays, lectures, and magazine and newspaper articles. This article is based on an examination of the full corpus of Ortega's specifically educational writings and discourses, together with many others whose educational implications are implicit. It looks at how he conceived the purposes of education, both for whole societies and for young people, and focuses in particular on the kind of education required for the educated elites, on whom, in his opinion, an effective liberal democracy would inevitably depend. The article then examines the specific implications of these purposes for universities, in which Ortega worked. It concludes with some thoughts on the coherence and substance of his educational thought and on its contemporary relevance.

Educating a whole society

Like many Spanish intellectuals of his generation, Ortega had no confidence that current political parties would be able to rescue

Spain from its state of decadence. Urgent reform was needed – to turn people into active citizens, challenge what he saw as the deadening influence of the Catholic Church, and transform a geographical entity into a nation. Although Ortega wanted Spain to have closer links with the rest of Europe and ultimately become part of a European nation-state, the aim in the meantime was to mould a new Spanish national identity. This would require a major exercise in *pedagogía social* (social pedagogy), a term taken from the title of a book by one of Ortega's German professors, the neo-Kantian and socialist Paul Natorp, though the idea had its roots in Pestalozzi and, more distantly, in Plato's view that the fundamental purpose of education was to prepare citizens for life in the polis. In a speech on *La pedagogía social como programa político* in 1910, Ortega, himself a neo-Kantian and liberal socialist at this point, argued for the abolition of church and private schools, an education system wholly in the hands of the state, and parallel initiatives focused on educating adults in the home and public square (Ortega, 1910/2004b).

Three years later, with a view to implementing a programme of social pedagogy, Ortega launched *La Liga de Educación Política Española* (The Spanish League for Political Education), the inspiration for which seems to have come – unusually for Ortega, whose main influences were from Germany or France – from England's recently established Fabian Society (Bagur Taltavull, 2015, pp. 142, 145, 147, 156). The plan was for a civic education exercise aimed at the political education of the masses and led by the educated minority. Since 1910, Ortega had largely abandoned both socialism and neo-Kantianism; hence, the aim, consonant with his move toward a more perspectivist philosophy, was now not so much to lead people toward a future that had been decided for them but to enable them under guidance to shape it themselves (Ortega, 1914/2004c; 1914/2007).

Apart from enabling himself and a few others to clarify their views about how they hoped their country might develop, the Liga

achieved little and was wound up in 1916. Ortega's speeches and writings during this short period, which have been much studied, throw light on his political views at this stage of his career. On how a whole society might be educated, they have little to say. How is education for and through work to take place? How are *circulos de mutua educación* (circles of mutual education) to be created, and what would they do? We are not told. In contrast to other twentieth-century exponents of social pedagogy like Antonio Gramsci and Paulo Freire, Ortega's contribution to this aspect of educational thought lacks substance. Given that the Liga led to so little practical activity, Ortega also lacked the praxis these others could draw on when developing their ideas.

In the decades that followed, Ortega's view of education as a potential nation-moulding and democracy-enabling project remained strong, as did his personal commitment to promoting this project through a lifetime of teaching, intellectual production, and communication (Zamora Bonilla, 2021). What changed was his attitude toward socialisation. In 1910 it had been the name for an optimistic project to create a new Spain. By 1930 it had become a synonym for de-individualisation and a source of pessimism about the dominance of majority opinion in mass societies (Ortega, 1910/2004b, pp. 99–100; 1934/2006a, p. 830).

Educating children

Ortega's work on the Liga had encouraged him to look beyond the higher educational establishments in which he worked to think about the role of elementary school teachers, seeing them as potential apostles of a better Spain in ways reminiscent of the role envisaged by Jules Ferry in the early years of the French Third Republic (Ortega, 1913/2007, pp. 338–340). Elementary education was also the theme of one of his most thorough discussions of school-level pedagogy

when in 1920 he intervened in a national debate about a royal decree requiring the study of Spain's literary classic *Don Quijote* in all the country's elementary schools. Critics argued that this would not prepare children for life in the modern world and that instead they should learn about useful things such as railways and factories. Characteristically willing to unsettle both sides in the argument, Ortega opposed both the initiative and its critics, the latter because they were advocates of the kind of utilitarian pedagogy caricatured by Dickens in *Hard Times*, and the former because *Don Quijote* (1605) was too nuanced and modern, and would not stimulate the imagination of children in the way stories of adventures and myths were likely to do (Ortega, 1921/2004).

Ortega was influenced by the writings of the Baltic German biologist Jakob von Uexküll, a proponent of a post-Darwinian biology that emphasised the extent to which humans had freedom to shape their environment (Gracia, 2014, pp. 204, 232, 344–345). Education that focused exclusively on the absorption of techniques and on the transmission of the main features of an existing civilisation or culture, including its knowledge, ways of thinking, and morality, risked missing what was essential in moulding a population with the basic psychological qualities needed to pursue the good and to create great things. These qualities included positivity, *vitalidad* (vitality), determination, self-confidence, curiosity, intellectual agility, and courage. Without such qualities, Ortega argued, there is no worthwhile cultural, scientific, or political creativity and achievement (Ortega, 1921/2004, pp. 424–425). It was for this reason that he objected to demands that elementary education be adapted to the needs of its time and that later stages of education be heavily specialised. The aim of education instead should be to enable the young to inject as much intensity into their lives as possible. Morals, wisdom, technical skills, and citizenship were important, too, but these could come later (Ortega, 1921/2004, pp. 417–418).

*Ortega's place within the tradition
of progressive education*

Ortega used the debate over *Don Quijote* to compare where he stood in relation to previous educational thinkers. He agreed that the writings of Rousseau and Pestalozzi had helped to make elementary education less oppressive, but criticised Rousseau for wanting, he claimed, to return to a more primitive existence, whereas Ortega's concern for the early development of a primitive vitality was solely so that more advanced civilisations might be enriched. Pestalozzi had sown the seeds of something interesting but failed to develop it into a coherent theory, and he had a mechanical attitude toward teaching that was at odds with Ortega's distaste for anything that smacked of didacticism. Ortega criticised Froebel from a different angle, for seeing *lo deportivo* (playfulness) – a quality that in all its practical, physical, and intellectual aspects pervades Ortega's view of human beings – not as something that was good in itself but simply as a means to the end of developing the man in the child (Ortega, 1921/2004, pp. 408–410, 421, 425; 1910/2004b, p. 97; 1914/2004b, p. 681; 1917/2007, p. 687).

These differences, particularly with Rousseau, are less fundamental than they appear. Ortega agreed with Rousseau that the most important truths are best not taught: one needs to arrive at them on one's own instead of having them imposed by authority. How many young people leave schools, he asked, with the idea that they can become something new? How many have had their energies paralysed by being taught how they must live? (Ortega, 1917/2007, pp. 685–688). He called the approach he was recommending *la pedagogía de la alusión* (the pedagogy of allusion): finding indirect ways of getting children to take the initiative in their learning rather than giving them bodies of knowledge to learn (Ortega, 1914/2004a, pp. 768–769; Zamora Bonilla, 2024, pp. 15–16). To help teachers do

this, it was essential that teacher education included a grounding in philosophy. Without the critical faculties this would give them, teachers would be easy prey to prevailing dogmas, including educational ones (Ortega, 1914/2004b, pp. 681–682).

Ortega was also opposed to tying education down to narrow utilitarian needs that would be quickly made redundant. Educational ideas, he argued, often reflected the philosophy and circumstances of the previous generation and, because they also took decades to be implemented, children at any point were likely to end up receiving an education based on ideas current 50 years earlier (Ortega, 1923/2004, pp. 515–517).

Triumphant plebeianism

A major theme of Ortega's writings from the later years of the First World War onwards was the *plebeyanismo triunfante* (triumphant plebeianism) he saw developing in association with democracy (Ortega, 1921/2005; 1929/2005, pp. 415–420). He never questioned the superiority of democracy over the fascist and communist ideologies that were spreading throughout Europe, describing liberal democracy as the best form of public life yet seen, but he feared the way that areas of life in which everything was not equal – manners, morals, taste, matters of the intellect – were also being democratised and that freedom was under threat from a collectivist push toward uniformity and closer state regulation of people's lives (Ortega, 1929/2005, p. 403; Gracia, 2014, pp. 14–15). *The Revolt of the Masses* (1929) was his fullest analysis of this phenomenon. The origins of triumphant plebeianism, Ortega argued, were demographic – both in increased numbers and the growth of large population centres where the masses visibly dominated and set the tone. Along with this change came a greater intolerance of minority views, putting at risk freedoms that Ortega, echoing his fellow liberal de Tocqueville's fears

of the tyranny of the majority, always put first (Ortega, 1934/2006a, pp. 375–380, 402–403, 828–831).

Ortega was keen to stress that the focus of this critique was *el hombre medio* (the average man), a type of human being found across all social classes. Average men, he claimed, looked to the state to care for them and lacked a sense of duty and wider allegiance.⁸ They had many opinions – indeed were opinionated – but no ideas, reacted unreflectively to situations, and lacked any sense of belonging to a collective project. Their ability to participate in a democracy was thus limited, and they were easy prey for demagogues (Ortega, 1929/2005, pp. 408–409, 415–420).

*Why triumphant plebeianism
proved impervious to education*

Why had education failed to prevent the spread of this *barbarismo* (barbarism)? Instead of educating, Ortega argued, teachers had been merely equipping people for the technical aspects of modern life (Ortega, 1929/2005, p. 403). They had clearly failed to pass on to their students the habits of questioning and challenging, which might have saved them from succumbing to the dominant clichés of their times. They had also failed to induct them into the substructure of traditional norms, customs, and duties that – even if needing to be challenged in some areas – had in the past kept civilisation alive and were essential for coexistence within a democracy (Ortega, 1929/2005, pp. 419–420). They had been deprived of the knowledge and understanding of the historical context of their lives that would have enabled them to tackle more effectively the problems a complex

⁸ As was common at the time, Ortega often used ‘man’ (*hombre*) to refer to human-kind in general. Even when one might assume this wider meaning was Ortega’s intent, it is often, however, only ‘men’ in the strict sense of the word to whom he is referring and in whom he is interested. Ortega’s assumptions about women and their role are discussed later in the article.

new world was throwing at them (Ortega, 1929/2005, p. 403). Given the scale of the challenges arising from the alleged pathologies within plebeianism, it is striking that Ortega – the earlier champion of social pedagogy – made no specific proposals about how mass education might tackle these, putting all his energies instead into thinking about the formation of an intellectual elite that would save the masses from themselves.

The need for an elite

Ortega saw societies as inevitably run by elites, and the better the elite, the better the society (Ortega, 1929/2005, pp. 381–382). This minority of talented people existed within all classes, though it was those from the socioeconomic elite who were his prime concern (Ortega, 1929/2005, p. 378). A key element within the elite would be a small group of intellectuals more reflective, more historically aware, more critical of established pieties, more far-seeing, and more detached from personal interests than either the masses or the rest of the elite, and whose role would be that of helping to ensure the transmission, development, and, if necessary, transformation of a cultural or national heritage, not by participating in government but through developing their understanding of the world and challenging existing certainties (Ortega, 1914/2007, pp. 739–740; 1910/2004a, p. 113; 1926/2006, pp. 205–211; 1940/2006a; 1923/2005, pp. 562–563). In one essay, Ortega claimed that superior *razas* (races) – using this word, as was common at the time, also in reference to broad national groupings – were those that had within them a significant number of outstanding individuals, a category which he had no doubt included himself. The wider elite would need to be sufficiently educated in order to be able to understand and be influenced by these people.

In effect, Ortega was talking about a clerisy not dissimilar to that proposed in the early nineteenth century by Coleridge and taken

up by later English writers in that century, such as Carlyle, J. S. Mill, and Matthew Arnold, and in the twentieth century in his educational writings, by T. S. Eliot and, in France, by Julien Benda (N. Tate, 2017, p. 51). Ortega's clerisy had a special place for members of the liberal – by which he meant largely intellectual – professions. Writers, philosophers, and artists, he argued, by virtue of not being part of the state or any corporation, had the potential to act as free individuals (Ortega, 1954/2010; 1934/2006b, p. 312; 1940/2006a, p. 628).

Alongside the beneficial influence of such people, Ortega was also conscious of the existence of pseudo-intellectuals: people who, like real intellectuals, live in a world of ideas, but ideas which they do not question and have turned into dogmas (Ortega, 1940/2006a, p. 629). Weak elites, Ortega argued, led to intellectual degradation and caused the masses (rightly) to rebel against those they had ceased to respect. It was this absence of an elite backbone that had rendered Spain in need of radical regeneration, as he had argued in his 1921 work *España invertebrada* (Invertebrate Spain) (Ortega, 1921/2005, pp. 479–480, 483, 493). The problem, he thought, was a particularly twentieth-century one, pointing to the intelligentsia's turning in on itself through its reaction against Cartesian rationalism in philosophy, and its abandonment of traditional forms in the arts in favour of an avant-garde that failed to engage with ordinary people. Contemporary intellectuals, he argued, had made the big error of creating a culture for themselves and not for the rest of mankind. The great intellectuals of the past – Bacon, Galileo, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Descartes – had spoken to a wider audience (Ortega, 1953/2010, p. 390; 1940/2006a, pp. 625–626; 1924/2006a, pp. 202–203; 1932/2006a).

Many of Ortega's views about the role of elites were shared by the contemporary group of early twentieth-century political scientists and sociologists whom the political theorist James Burnham called 'the Machiavellians': Gaetano Mosca, Georges Sorel, Robert Michels,

and Vilfredo Pareto (Burnham, 1943; Hughes, 2021, pp. 20–23). Ortega's strikingly similar view of elites seems to have been developed independently of this group, with the possible exception of the German-Italian Michels, who had greatly impressed him during his stay in Germany in 1906–1907 (Gracia, 2014, p. 69).

Educating the elite

Ortega's vision for the higher-stage education needed by the kind of elite he felt was essential within a liberal democracy was fundamentally an extension of the one to which he alludes elsewhere in his educational writings when discussing the education of whole societies and of children in schools. It is a vision firmly based on his belief that human beings have the freedom to make themselves within the context of the environment in which they find themselves. Understanding one's environment in its broadest sense and the opportunities and limitations it imposes on an individual life, with a view to acting on this understanding, was a key part of education – what he called *la pedagogía del paisaje* (the pedagogy of landscape) (Ortega, 1906/2004b, pp. 99–103; 1915/2007, pp. 417–418; Zamora Bonilla, 2024, pp. 7–9). Ortega's analyses of the complexities of the emerging twentieth-century world, and in particular of self-perpetuating technological change – and its consequences in terms of enhanced leisure – gave an added sense of urgency to the need for an education that made this possible (Ortega, 1939/2006, pp. 564–547).

In order to shape their environment to the ends that they have chosen rather than simply being shaped by it, human beings, Ortega insists, will need courage, energy, imagination, vitality, and the *capacidad de mandar* (the ability to lead). It is these qualities, rather than the transmission of knowledge, techniques, or moral codes, that educators should see as their main priority. Students should

be placed in situations where they want to learn, and where they identify the problems that they feel the need to solve. Above all, they need a dose of the fifteenth-century Nicholas of Cusa's *docta ignorantia* (learned ignorance), that Socratic sense of how little one understands and the impetus this gives to trying to fill the gulf that ignorance reveals. It was for this reason that Ortega had told his education students that nothing worth learning could be taught. In another talk to students many years later he admitted that, despite this assertion, a lot of things simply had to be learned in order to keep the world going. This, he said, was the inbuilt tragedy of education as currently practiced (Ortega, 1924/2006b, p. 467; 1917/2007, pp. 685–686; 1933/2006b, pp. 270–271; 1934/2006b, pp. 304–305, 308–310, 312–314; Gracia, 2014, pp. 144, 612).

Ortega pointed to examples of the human qualities needed by elites in his often brilliant studies of key figures from both past and present: the painters El Greco, Velázquez, Goya, and Zuloaga; the writers Cervantes and Baroja; the French revolutionary leader Mirabeau; the Renaissance humanist Juan Vives; Goethe, on whom Ortega wrote extensively; and not just great names but also the hunters and *toreros* (bullfighters) whose extraordinary skills and alertness to their environments illustrated the capacity of some people to make themselves into something special.⁹

The role of the university

Ortega's most developed discussion of what the higher education of the elite should look like can be found in his *Misión de la universidad* (Mission of the University) (Ortega, 1930/2005). Although focused on Spain, this is one of the most influential European visions of a

⁹ Ortega's extensive writings on all the individuals mentioned in this paragraph, as well as those concerning hunters and bullfighters, can be found in *Obras completas*, and are listed in the index at the end of Ortega, 2004–2010, Vol. 10.

university during the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, alongside Cardinal Newman's *The Idea of a University* (1852) and Karl Jaspers's *The Idea of the University* (1959). Ortega shares with both of these – and with Michael Oakeshott, writing toward the end of Ortega's life – a sense of the centrality of a broad liberal education to any institution calling itself a university. However, unlike Newman and Oakeshott but like Jaspers, and in accordance with continental European tradition, Ortega wished to retain a key place within the university for preparing students for the main liberal professions (Newman, 1852/1996; Jaspers, 1959; Oakeshott, 1989). The weakness of the Spanish university system, he felt, was the absence of a coherent rationale. Current universities had three poorly related elements: education for the intellectual professions, a course of general culture, and academic research. The result was the production of professionals who knew little about the world outside their specialisms, were ignorant of the past, and were unable to understand and rise to the needs of their times. The *hombre medio* (average man) – doctor, lawyer, schoolteacher, economist – who emerged from this education was *inculto* (uncultured), a *nuevo bárbaro* (new barbarian), or, as a result of over-specialisation, a *sabio ignorante* (ignorant sage) incapable of providing the leadership desperately needed by a highly demanding mass population. Even the most talented specialists, he said from experience, lacked the qualities needed by well-rounded human beings and could end up coming across as infantile or stupid. Universities were thus responsible for the inadequacy of modern elites and consequently for the poor state of the country that those elites ruled and guided (Ortega, 1921/2004, pp. 420–421; 1917/2007, p. 690; 1929/2005, pp. 561–562).

Ortega's solution was therefore to turn the university's average man into a cultured man, and to do this by placing *cultura general* (general culture) at the heart of the university's teaching. Whatever professional course one was following, one would be introduced

to the great cultural disciplines necessary for one's understanding of oneself, one's past, and one's environment: the sciences, history, sociology, and philosophy. Ortega's biographer, Jordi Gracia García, has dismissed this as some kind of cultural Google Maps or Reader's Digest course, most unfairly given that, in accordance with all his educational principles, Ortega was clear *cultura general* would be structured so that key principles and methods of the disciplines would be prioritised over specific pieces of knowledge (Gracia, 2014, p. 326). This approach, he hoped, could help universities produce an elite that would be in a position to exert influence and shape debates about the future of the society. This was particularly crucial at a time of triumphant plebeianism, when there was growing hostility toward the intellect and a crisis within an intelligentsia that seemed to have temporarily turned its back on Reason (Ortega, 1930/2005, pp. 567–568; 1932/2006a, pp. 737–738; Gracia, 2014, p. 450).

Ortega's high hopes for a more cultured elite as the product of a reformed university were tempered by a sharp realism about what could be achieved given the time and human material available. He had not forgotten the lessons he learned from his early disillusionment with neo-Kantian utopianism. Courses had to be planned around what students needed to know to become a cultured person, not the interests of specialists; professors had to be selected for their talent for synthesis and gift for teaching, not their research; programmes had to focus sharply on fundamental elements and principles; student workload had to be kept within strict limits but inflexibly enforced. Ortega called these imperatives his *principio de la economía en la enseñanza* (principle of economy in education). For a writer who expressed himself with such passion about the heights and depths of the human condition, they are strikingly down-to-earth (Ortega, 1930/2005, pp. 545–549).

What Ortega did not claim for his proposals, unlike both Newman (with whom he otherwise would have agreed) and today's

university leaders, was that the broad liberal education he wished all university students to experience would be useful to them and provide them with transferable skills (Maskell & Robinson, 2001, pp. 28–32). His purposes were more profound: to produce educated human beings aware of themselves, their societies, the past world from which they came, and the era in which they lived and whose vision for the future they must help shape. A recent study of elitism in education has drawn attention to the different functions of contemporary universities as ‘ivory towers’ (conservers of an inherited culture) on the one hand, and agents of social transformation on the other. Ortega’s vision of the university combines the two, the transformation in his case to be brought about by a well-educated and responsible elite (Hughes, 2021, p. 148).

Ortega’s plans for the university included original academic research. Provision for research had been one of the characteristics of German universities that had most impressed him as a young man (Ortega, 1906/2004a). Research to him was ultimately the most important of the university’s functions, as it was the tiny minority of genuine researchers whose insights would eventually determine the direction in which society developed. But academic research, and especially scientific investigation, needed to be kept separate within the same institution, and there should be no pretence that the kind of science being taught to generalists was helping them to become scientists (Ortega, 1930/2005, pp. 565–566).

Misión de la universidad attracted and continues to attract considerable debate, though its recommendations go against the dominant trend of present-day university development in the Western world with its emphasis on specialisation and student choice. Small US liberal arts colleges come closest to providing the general culture Ortega felt was essential for elite formation, but are under pressure to dilute their course offerings and vulnerable to financial problems arising from their size. The closest parallels to his approach may

be found in broad pre-university school courses such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma.

*‘Facing the future
lacking a past tense’*

The key importance of learning about the past and, in literature and philosophy, studying ‘the classics’ (by which Ortega meant not just Greece and Rome but the whole European artistic and philosophical canon), and the desuetude of such learning during his own times, were strong motifs in Ortega’s writing. The loss of a sense of a past was one of the themes of the penultimate manuscript of his Complete Works: a lecture on *Las profesiones liberales* (The liberal professions), drafted in 1954 and due to be given in Germany but never delivered as a result of his illness and death the following year. ‘Man,’ he wrote, ‘finds himself facing the future lacking a past tense’ (Ortega, 1954/2010, p. 435).¹⁰

The past and the classics associated with it, however, do not in his view impose duties on future generations and are not to be seen as models to be followed. They constitute a cultural inheritance to be interrogated and integrated with the fresh impulses coming from each new generation, enabling us to understand who we are through learning about what has happened before us (Ortega, 1940/2006b, p. 722; 1916/2004, pp. 103–104; 1923/2005, pp. 594–600, 606–610; 1929/2005, pp. 430–431). The young are the inheritors of the lives of many people from the past, and by learning about figures such as Homer, Socrates, Alexander, Newton, Kant, Napoleon (and even Don Juan, with whom at times Ortega, critical of the sexual morality of the Catholic Church, seems to have been obsessed), they are open to the potentialities, for good or ill, of these personalities for themselves

¹⁰ ‘El hombre se encuentra hoy ante el mañana como desnudo de préterito.’

and their own times. History also tells them about clashes between prevailing norms and those who periodically challenge these norms, and through studying these conflicts, learners are better able to make judgements about matters that affect them directly. We must learn how to use the classics, he argued, by making them contemporary and injecting them with new life from our own passions and our own problems (Ortega, 1924/2006b, p. 224; 1933/2006a, p. 252).

*Trying to put a new
higher education into practice*

Late in life, Ortega was faced with an opportunity to work through in detail what some of his educational ideas would look like when put into practice. He had gone into exile during the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and only returned to Spain after 1945, frequently leaving it during the final years of his life to give lectures in democratic countries where he could speak more freely. Although reluctant to have any official connection with the Franco regime or to take up a position again in any educational institution of the Spanish state as it then was, he managed in 1948 to establish a small independent Instituto de Humanidades in Madrid that offered evening lectures and colloquiums. In keeping with his ideas about the most effective forms of education, the stress would not be on teaching but on exploring together new lines of inquiry and seeing firsthand what thinking in action looked like. The institute proved very popular but difficult to run in the atmosphere of Franco's Spain, and did not last beyond its second year of courses (Ortega, 1948/2006; Gracia, 2014, pp. 607–618; Helman, 1951, pp. 47–50).

More appealing to Ortega around the same time was an invitation to draft an outline plan for a postgraduate Institute of Humanistic Studies in Aspen, Colorado. This still exists today, with a wider focus, as the Aspen Institute (Gracia, 2014, pp. 614–616). He was much taken

with Aspen's location in the Rocky Mountains and, in the light of his 'pedagogy of landscape' – the idea that we must be attentive to learning from our environment, including the natural world – found it a suitable place for the education of people who would form the US's future ruling elite. The plan he sent to the institute's founder was self-consciously both Attic in its commitment to a rigorous study of the major academic disciplines and, following Plato's *The Republic*, Spartan in its emphasis on effort, endurance, self-discipline, and sobriety, to the point even of discomfort (Ortega, 1949/2010). Citing the example of German students who at the time were rebuilding their own bombed university in Hamburg, Ortega expected the future US elite to commit to forced labour in the form of building roads and houses. The institute would induct students into a culture and *el arte de vivir* (the art of living), not just a set of studies and activities. In accordance with Ortega's principle of economy in education, the library would have very few books, but priority would be given to how a book should be read, including principles of concentration, condensation, and synthesis. The institute would make full use of the surroundings, including the proposed social centre in which – echoing Newman's idea that the art of the university should be the art of social life – one could eat, drink, and socialise. Students would take their holidays in the winter and attend the institute throughout the summer, when courses and conferences would attract outsiders, including distinguished speakers with varying points of view with the aim of modelling for students how differences of opinion could be explored frankly and courteously. This Aspen summer season, not surprisingly for a public intellectual noted for his fondness for the company of elegant aristocratic women, would also provide students (assumed without question to be male) with the opportunity to mix with and be influenced by *mujeres distinguidas* (distinguished women). It was to be a rounded education with character, resilience, and savoir faire, as well as intellect, at its centre. Viewed from an early

twenty-first century perspective, these proposals, not surprisingly given the extent to which Ortega's thinking was *sui generis*, are both remarkably radical and deeply reactionary.

What is education for?

At the heart of Ortega's educational thought is the idea that education is about the formation of a particular kind of human being. What it is not about is giving people useful skills, or indeed pursuing any of the utilitarian objectives frequently cited in his own day and that dominate current official discourse about the purposes of education. Above all, it is not about educating useful citizens to serve the ends of a particular state. This is both because states and their needs and the demands of citizenship change over time, but more fundamentally because there is much more to human beings than their roles as citizens (Ortega, 1923/2004, pp. 515–517).

Not just in his educational writings but also in his philosophy and in his studies of outstanding individuals, Ortega sketches a vision of human beings who work hard at understanding themselves and their circumstances, digging deep behind all the beliefs and clichés into which they have been inducted through their surroundings, who accept the limitations of their situation while making best use of the freedoms it gives them, and who develop their own *punto de vista* (point of view) on the world, becoming *novelistas* (novelists) of themselves able to identify a project or vocation for their own lives (Ortega, 1949–1950/2010, pp. 144, 178, 611–616; 1932/2006b, p. 130; 1934/2006b, pp. 297–298; 1934/2006c, pp. 137–138; 1941/2006a, pp. 64–68). It is a vision with high expectations – for authenticity, tolerance, self-discipline, awareness of one's own ignorance, wisdom in one's personal relations, and an ability to show one is able to learn from others different from oneself (as Sancho Panza and Don Quixote, Ortega reminds us, did from each other) and to make

fine judgements about people and things (Rumayor, 2016; Ortega, 1924/2006b, pp. 467–471).

Ortega can be impatient with those who fail to reach his high standards, whether *nuevos bárbaros* (the new barbarians of the mass age), *sabios ignorantes* (ignorant academics who cannot see beyond their specialisms), *niños mimados* (spoiled adults in mass societies keen on their rights but recognising no duties), or those guilty of Nietzsche's *ressentiment* who, sensing their own inferiority, envy and despise the more successful while doing nothing to improve themselves (Ortega, 1917/2004, pp. 274–275; 1929/2005, pp. 408, 439, 444) and thrive in the world for which Ortega's students are being educated, a world that oscillates, he tells us, between a vale of tears and a sports stadium. The thought of death is always with us, utopias are the dreams of fools, and life, though sometimes one of enthusiasm and delight, is also full of uncertainty and danger, experienced as a state of impending *naufrago* (shipwreck). To survive there is a need to stay alert – in other words, to keep on making oneself and acquiring through self-education the resources to build something out of the flux of one's life. There can be few writers on education whose starting point is one of such existential intensity (Ortega, 1949–1950/2010, pp. 148–149, 162; 1934/2006b, pp. 297–298; 1932/2006b, pp. 122, 232; 1932/2006a, p. 738; 1934/2006c, p. 152; 1929/2005, p. 476).

Ortega: radical and conservative

Ortega has a similarly clear and forceful answer to the question, 'How should people be taught?'. This is, ideally, to encourage them into wanting to learn for its own sake, because this is what will enable them to decide what they want to be. This is why he said that he sometimes felt that nothing worth learning could be taught. It explains his stress on developing character through studies and

activities that stimulate vital impulses, his stress on active learning, his focus on the learner more than on the content to be taught, and his emphasis on *ensimismarse* (absorption in one's own thoughts), by which he meant stepping back into oneself so that in solitude and calm one can reflect radically about the world before going back into it to try and change it (Ortega, 1949–1950/2010, p. 144–147). Having rejected post-Kantian philosophical idealism and criticised the narrow vision of human beings inherent in Cartesian rationalism, dominant in Europe since the seventeenth century, Ortega could no longer agree with Plato and Aristotle that the life of the mind was the superior one. It was still crucial that education promoted the use of reason, but it had to be rational thinking as practiced by individuals in reflection and then applied in the actual world in all its messiness (1949–1950/2010, pp. 151–152, 156–157).

All this puts Ortega broadly in the same tradition as other progressive, child-centred educational theorists stretching back to Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, and Dewey and thus is consonant with the pedagogies currently dominant in much of the Anglosphere and continental Europe. Although Ortega makes no mention in any of his collected works to John Dewey, one of the few other contemporary philosophers who made a significant contribution to educational thought, there are affinities between the two men worthy of further exploration, not least a common belief that the cultural products of human history need to be actively interrogated as part of what Dewey called a 'continuous reconstruction of [current] experience' (Dewey, 1916, p. 93; N. Tate, 2013, p. 128).

Ortega differs, however, from some contemporary progressive educators keen to promote the social causes of the day, in believing, along with his fellow liberal Hannah Arendt, that the purpose of education is to help children to learn who they are so they can choose who they want to be, instead of moulding them into what we think they ought to be (Arendt, 1961a, p. 195). In this way, his otherwise

radical pedagogy was also distinctively conservative, like Hannah Arendt's, in keeping with the view of the role of the state, and by implication its educational functions, which he later came to adopt and which had shifted radically from his early embrace of the state as teleocracy (one driven by visions of the future) to his later preference, as exemplified in his *Del Imperio Romano*, for nomocracy (one based on pragmatic adaptations to existing reality) (Ortega, 1941/2006b).

Ortega also placed considerable emphasis on introducing students to the main ways in which human beings had come to understand the world: philosophical, ethical, scientific, historical, and artistic. At the university level, he saw liberal arts as central to the development of all students, alongside their professional studies, and as an essential basis for the emergence of an elite capable of governing and helping to shape a country's future. It was particularly important, he felt, for members of the elite to have the experience of getting to grips with philosophical issues, to know historically where one has come from and – a matter to which Ortega kept on returning – some understanding of modern physics, without which he felt the contemporary world would be incomprehensible to them.

Although keen that students at all levels should, as much as possible, take the lead in their own learning rather than being taught didactically, he was also realistic enough to know that a lot of things just had to be learned. While wanting young children to be as free as possible to learn from their environment, he also believed in teachers adjusting that environment to make sure that the desired learning outcomes would be achieved rather than leaving it to chance. At the university level, he supported the continuation of some traditional university teaching methods such as formal lectures, while seeing the advantages of more participative approaches (Ortega, 1906/2004a).

So that it might endure, culture, though endlessly changing, also required an element of conscious transmission – and Ortega, at least

early in his career, saw formal education as having a major duty to help such transmission take place, not just for the sake of individuals but also for that of civilisation – a quintessentially conservative view echoed a hundred years later by the English philosopher Roger Scruton, who urged teachers to ensure the transmission of what was worth valuing in a culture ‘by lodging it in brains that will last longer than their own’ (Dooley, 2011, pp. 52–53). It was perfectly possible to live a happy life without reading Plato, Ortega wrote, but it was not possible for the benefits of past civilisations to be passed on unless at least a few thousands within one’s country had done so (Ortega, 1916/2004, pp. 103–104; 1906/2007, pp. 85–86).

Ortega’s unexamined beliefs

Politically, though a democrat, liberal, and believer in free speech, Ortega had a pervasively aristocratic (in the broad sense of the word) view of the relationship between masses and elites that failed to take into account how even the most well-educated and well-meaning of the elite are quite capable of using their political power and influence to entrench themselves and act against the interests of the masses; while convincing themselves they are doing the exact opposite. The extensive literature on Western liberal and progressive elites, beginning in 1959 with Michael Young’s *The Rise of the Meritocracy* (1958) and intensifying over the last 30 years – from Lasch and Sowell in the 1990s to Goodhart, Deneen, Goodwin, and Kotkin post-2017 – has thrown up questions about how the education of such elites might be modified to limit the damage they do through their patrician disdain for the masses and intolerance of those criticising their ideologies and causes (M. Young, 1958; Lasch, 1994; Sowell, 1995; Kotkin, 2014; Goodhart, 2017; Deneen, 2018; Goodwin, 2023; N. Tate, 2022). These are questions that Ortega, himself no stranger

to patrician disdain, did not even begin to address, despite a lifetime of urging readers – in ways not wholly distant from those of Antonio Gramsci or Pierre Bourdieu – to untangle the web of structures and clichés cloaking their view of social realities.

As a writer who wrote at length about beliefs that shape us without our knowledge, it is likely that Ortega would not have been surprised if someone had told him that a later age would be immediately struck by his very male-dominated view of the world. Although he lived through a period in which there was a substantial increase in the number of women attending Spanish universities, including his own daughter Soledad Ortega Spottorno, when he came to drafting plans for a postgraduate institute in the US in the late 1940s, he could still only envisage it being filled with men whose education would be enhanced by the attendance of distinguished women at summer season events. Ortega had an elevated idea of the important role women had in bringing up future generations and setting the general tone of a society, but he did not see them as forming part of a ruling elite. Even toward the end of his life, in *El hombre y la gente* (Man and people), he argued vigorously for an essentialist – and predominantly negative – view of women as weak, confused, and having a more intense sensibility than men. Women were ‘a form of humanity inferior to that of the male’ he asserted, whose destiny was to be ‘in the gaze of men.’ Ortega’s views about women’s unsuitability for political leadership and related educational opportunities arising from these assumptions go hand in hand with similarly essentialist and negative, if less stunningly offensive, generalisations about the masses. One could argue that the inbuilt relativism of Ortega’s historicist philosophy allows for the future possibility of major shifts in the roles of the two sexes, but this does not explain away his striking failure to follow his own advice in interrogating more deeply his own historically determined beliefs in this area (Fernández Escalante, 2001; Castillo Martin, 2003, p. 54).

Ortega's legacy

Apart from his eminently sensible principle of economy – which would benefit from being drawn to the attention of politicians and social crusaders keen to use the school curriculum to solve the world's problems – Ortega mostly does not provide detailed proposals. These are notably absent in the case of programmes to tackle the educational challenges of a mass society. He asks the questions and identifies the challenges, and – perhaps rightly, given his argument that circumstances change as each new generation appears – leaves the solutions to his readers. The exceptions are in higher education where, though his ideas still have much to offer liberal arts programmes, there is little chance of their wider adoption within today's vastly expanded universities, which are full of highly specialised courses and lack a common core. It is nonetheless interesting to see that these ideas are still relevant today – for example, in a US context, in Deneen's plea for the rescue of liberal education from utility and relevance and, in a British context, in Maskell and Robinson's *The New Idea of a University*, which, drawing on Newman and F. R. Leavis, reasserts for the contemporary world the principles of a liberal education and insists that the formation of an elite must be seen as a natural and desirable end of education. It is easy to imagine that this latter polemic against contemporary universities, full of *vitalidad* in its assault on current groupthink, is one that Ortega would have enjoyed (Deneen, 2018, pp. 110–130; Maskell & Robinson, 2001, p. 184; Leavis, 1943).

Some of Ortega's insights, while penetrating, are highly general in nature, graced with grand and often memorable and stimulating phrases but that would sometimes benefit from being tested against the harsh discipline of educational circumstances. One also feels, when talking about 'Man' and his educational needs, that he is often talking about himself. His high expectations are those he has

set himself. Although aware of the need to plan for *el hombre medio* (the average man), it is those who can reach the higher intellectual levels, and the men at those levels, who usually interest Ortega most. It is unclear how he squares his desire for education to be permeated with the spirit of the philosopher's refusal to take anything for granted (calling to mind his invitation to throw little stones into ponds), belief in freedom of expression, and lifelong distaste for an education based on submission and indoctrination with his acknowledgment that societies need a body of habits and beliefs that people must accept without questioning in order to cohere. Is this critical stance just for the elite, or is it an objective also for a mass education system? (Ortega, 1910/2004a, pp. 112–115; Gracia, 2014, p. 24). Similarly, how does he integrate his early social pedagogy, with its Platonic assumption that the good life for all citizens should be active involvement in the polis, with his growing preoccupation with educating an effective elite? He does not tell us. It is not always easy or possible therefore to tease out the implications of Ortega's thought for the specific educational issues facing educational systems today, though some have tried and come up with a small number of interesting insights, alongside some highly speculative ones. It is difficult to see, for example, how Ortega's educational ideas relate to the promotion of social justice or help one in tackling educational issues in disadvantaged areas (Sanz Ponce & González Bertolin, 2016; Enkvist, 2012).

Ortega's most important educational legacy lies not in linking him closely with twenty-first-century preoccupations, which he would not have shared, but in an inspiring vision of the purposes of education and of what it is to be an educated person (accessible to many if maybe not to all); in his creative synthesis of radical and conservative educational emphases; in his sense of the necessity of an elite and the importance of how it is educated; and in his encouragement to both educators and students to continue questioning, challenging,

upsetting, and ‘contaminating’ all those things about themselves, their education, their societies that are stale, inauthentic and in need of the scrutiny of a well-formed mind.

CONSERVATIVE AND RADICAL, UTOPIAN AND
REALIST: JOHN RUSKIN (1819–1900) ON THE
PURPOSES AND PRACTICES OF EDUCATION ¹¹

Ruskin is a name known to most educated English people. There has been a Ruskin College at Oxford named after John Ruskin, social and art critic and profusive essayist, since 1899, the year before his death, and there is now an Anglia Ruskin University which emerged out of the Cambridge School of Art which Ruskin founded in 1858. His numerous books, some of which sold many copies during and just after his lifetime, still linger on the remoter shelves of second-hand bookshops, though these days are doubtless rarely bought and even more rarely read. Some people know the name but little more than that his much younger wife Effie Gray secured the annulment of their marriage on the grounds that it had not been consummated, a story made into a film.

I started reading Ruskin when I realised how interested he had been in education and how much scholarly writing there had been about his educational ideas in recent years. At this point I very belatedly also realised that part of this Ruskin revival was due to the highly regarded two-volume biography of Ruskin – nearly 1,000 pages in total – written by my Balliol College contemporary Tim Hilton. He had been an acquaintance rather than a friend and all I had known of his subsequent career was that it was an academic one involved with art. I read the first volume with great enjoyment in the spring

¹¹ First published in *Hungarian Review*, 16(2) [2025], pp. 103–115.

of 2024 and completed the second half of the second volume while on holiday in Cyprus in early September. I refer to it frequently in the article that follows. I had heard from a mutual acquaintance that he was also a member of the London Library, a private library founded in 1841 by Thomas Carlyle, which has a huge collection of the kinds of books I need to consult for most of my research. I wondered whether I would ever bump into him – or even recognise him if I did after so many years – and be able to tell him how much I had enjoyed his books. It was only later in 2024 that I learned that he had died in January of that year. He was the third of my Oxford contemporaries to do so within a 12-month period.

The article begins with a reference to a much earlier generation of Balliol College students who revered Ruskin and for whom he had some clear educational objectives.

Digging a road and making something of one's life

In 1874, John Ruskin, British art and social critic, lifelong educator, and Oxford University's first professor of Fine Art, put together a team of undergraduates from the university's Balliol College – the present author's *alma mater* – to dig a new road leading to the village of Hinksey just outside the city. The current track had become a swamp and was impassable, forcing carts to cross the village green, leaving it covered with deep ruts and making the village the most 'untidy, hopeless-looking' place in rural England (Wilde, 1909, pp. 192–193).¹² Ruskin's purposes were educational. For many years, he had been outspokenly critical of Britain's rampant laissez-faire capitalism, which he saw as damaging the well-being both of workers and of the environment, lambasting Britain's ruling class for its obsession

¹² Oscar Wilde, who saw Ruskin as a mentor, reports that he was a member of the road digging team, though the date of his arrival at the university does not coincide with the start of the team's work.

with the accumulation of wealth, idle lifestyle, and neglect of the poor. The Hinksey project was aimed at distracting members of the country's future elite from spending time on cricket, rowing, and hunting, and to instil in them instead the importance of duty, hard work, and practical action.

Like most of Ruskin's other schemes for national regeneration, the Hinksey project failed to bring any practical benefit. Although the road was never finished and quickly reverted to mud, it was nevertheless a success in one sense: Many of the young men taking part came away inspired to do something with their lives to help others. One of them, Hardwicke Rawnsley, building on Ruskin's own work, in 1895 helped found the National Trust, a body committed to preserving England's countryside from the effects of industrialisation and urban growth (Waithe, 2015, pp. 263–264). Others were involved in the establishment in 1884 of Toynbee Hall, a university settlement in the impoverished East End of London which over many decades gave young upper-middle and upper-class men (and some women) the opportunity to see at close hand the effects of poverty and take part in schemes to relieve it. From these experiences emerged many who were to play a major part both in Britain's socially reformist Labour Party and in the development of a British welfare state. Both Clement Attlee, Britain's first Labour prime minister, and William Beveridge, the author of the 1942 Beveridge Report that led to the creation of the National Health Service, were 'graduates' of Toynbee Hall and avid readers of Ruskin (Eagles, 2015, pp. 253–256).

Ruskin's British readers

It was not just members of the Oxford-educated elite whose lives were influenced by Ruskin's writings. The novelist E. M. Forster was reflecting Ruskin's impact on ordinary people when, in *Howards End* (1910), he shows the character Leonard Bast, a poor clerk, struggling

to improve himself through reading Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*¹³ (Forster, 1957, p. 52; Ruskin, 1851–1853/1903). The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were a period when Ruskin's works were being issued in cheaper editions, and pamphlets and newspaper articles summarising his views were circulating (Eagles, 2015, p. 249). It was also a period in which Ruskin Societies sprang up in northern industrial towns, in which the master's books and ideas could be discussed and activities based on them set into motion (Hilton, 2000, p. 400; Atwood, 2011, p. 164). Many of the young men sent to the Western Front in the First World War would have known Ruskin's name or come across his writings. A London magazine in 1915 reported on a soldier fatally wounded on the battlefield who had kept with him throughout the fighting a copy of Ruskin's *The Crown of Wild Olive*, and continued to read it despite knowing he did not have long to live. He asked that on his death it be buried with him. He died of his wounds the following day and the book was placed in his grave alongside him (Cook, 1918, p. 46, footnote 1; Ruskin 1866/1905a).

*Ruskin and the wider world:
Proust, Tolstoy, and Gandhi*

Ruskin's impact was not confined to the British Isles. Although deeply rooted in both England and Scotland, and fiercely patriotic, many of Ruskin's themes were universal. He was simultaneously very much a European, conscious that contemporary Britain was part of a European Christian civilisation whose artistic and architectural heritage in its medieval Gothic phase he saw as the acme of cultural achievement. He spent more than half of his life abroad, studying

¹³ Most subsequent references to Ruskin's works give the date of first publication of the work, and the volume and page numbers for its location in the Library Edition (Cook & Wedderburn, 1903–1912).

Italian and French art, and architecture and in his beloved Alps, calling Venice and Chamonix his ‘two homes of Earth’ (Ruskin, 2005, pp. 139–140, 262; Hill, 2019, p. 49).

Few writers can also have had such a major impact on people as distinguished in their own achievements as Proust, Tolstoy, and Gandhi. Proust subscribed to the 39-volume edition of Ruskin’s works, six of which he claimed to know by heart, translated into French *The Bible of Amiens*, Ruskin’s paean to the achievements of French Gothic, wrote the writer’s obituary for the French press on his death in 1900, and attested to Ruskin’s influence on his greatest work, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (Eels, 2002; Ruskin 1910; 1884/1908). Tolstoy and Gandhi, among the many things they had in common, were particularly influenced by Ruskin’s *Unto This Last*, which they translated into Russian and Gujarati respectively. This collection of essays, attacking the dominant principles of the political economy of his day – based on self-interest and the accumulation of wealth rather than on the common good – was the work that Ruskin felt to be ‘the truest, rightest-worded, and most serviceable (thing) I have ever written.’ Tolstoy and Gandhi were both impressed by Ruskin’s belief in the dignity of labour and opposition to mechanisation, which in Gandhi’s case led to campaigns in India promoting the spinning wheel and the production of homespun textiles (Ruskin, 1871–1884, Vol. 29, pp. 473, 587; Mehta, 1969, pp. 343–349; Hill, 2019, pp. 153, 192; Eagles, 2015, pp. 257–259; 2018).

Ruskin never visited North America, despite many invitations, telling readers that ‘I could not, even for a couple of months, live in a country so miserable as to possess no castles’ (Ruskin 1871–1884/1907, Vol. 27, p. 170). His works, however, were widely read on the other side of the Atlantic, prompting the creation of Ruskin Societies, such as the Ruskin Art Club of Los Angeles in 1888 – a club founded by a female reader, which is still active – and cooperative communities in Florida, Tennessee, and Georgia. As late as the 1930s, Ruskin’s

best-selling *Sesame and Lilies*, a book on how and what to read and on the roles of men and women, was still widely taught in US high schools (Hill, 2019, pp. 23, 144, 262; Aronofsky Weltman, 2016, p. 157; Marsh, 2018; Ruskin 1865–1866/1905).

‘Ultra tory’ and ‘old communist’:

Ruskin’s political allegiances

Ruskin’s thinking about society and politics, though deep and often passionate, was unsystematic. He contradicted himself and modified his views over time, arguing that ‘matters of any consequence are three-sided, or four-sided, or polygonal’. He enjoyed provoking an audience by giving himself *outré* labels like ‘Communist of the old school – reddest ... of the red’, ‘Violent Illiberal’, and ‘thoroughbred Tory and Conservative’ (Ruskin, 1858/1905, pp. 187; 1871–1884/1907, pp. 14, 116; 1867/1905, p. 402).¹⁴ The side of Ruskin that attracted widespread support and created disciples (even though he hated the idea of people seeing themselves as ‘Ruskinians’) was when he was championing the poor, denouncing the spoiling of the environment through industrialisation, attacking the misuse of riches, and offering up a vision of a happy, ethical, collaborative society in which each part depended on all the rest (Hill, 2019, p. 121).

The side of Ruskin that won less support was his defence of tradition, enthusiasm for strong monarchical rule, criticism of parliamentary democracy (he never voted), emphasis on order and obedience, and belief in a hierarchical society in which people were looked after and treated with dignity but kept in their place (Hilton, 2000, p. 116; Ruskin, 1871–1884/1907, Vol. 27, pp. 170–171).

¹⁴ Ruskin’s ‘Ultra Tory’ allegiances were on display in his habit for a long time in wearing a gilded oak-apple in his buttonhole every 29 May to commemorate the restoration of the monarchy by Charles II in 1660 (Ruskin, 1871–1884/1907, Vol. 27, pp. 170–171).

It was a type of Toryism which, in its less authoritarian versions, is not dissimilar to the ‘common-good conservatism’ characterised by Patrick Deneen in *Regime Change* as one in which a virtuous ‘few’ govern for the sake of the common good and in the interests of a traditionally-minded ‘many’ (Deneen, 2023, pp. 106–113). In the mid-nineteenth century Victorian ‘culture wars’ he was therefore, most of the time, on the side of Thomas Carlyle, the advocate of heroes and strong rulers, and firmly against John Stuart Mill, whose liberal individualism and distaste for the ‘despotism of Custom’ were the very antithesis of Ruskin’s Toryism (Mill, 2023, p. 86; Deneen, 2023, pp. 93–98).

The tension between these two sides of Ruskin’s thought – and the romantic utopianism they have in common – were particularly evident in Ruskin’s writings and activities related to education. The remainder of the article explores this further.

Ruskin the teacher

For most of his life, Ruskin was first and foremost an educator, driven in all his writings, as he claimed in his autobiography *Praeterita*, by ‘no thought but of learning more, and teaching what truth I knew’ (Ruskin 1885/1908, p. 419). He started early. Coming from a devout Evangelical Protestant family and intended for the clergy, the young John was encouraged after lunch on Sundays to imitate the sermons he had heard in church. His first, at the age of five, consisted of three words – ‘People, be good’ – which for a man who always searched for the moral purpose driving any activity was prescient of what was to follow. Anyone picking up a Ruskin essay is immediately conscious that here is someone addressing one personally, often directly as ‘you’, and with a message to convey. What is more, one is not merely addressed, but exhorted, cajoled, told what one needs to learn, and inspired to do better.

Many of Ruskin's writings were addressed to specific groups of people or, in some cases, individuals: to young people, as in *The Bible of Amiens* (the first of what was planned as a series of books on the history of Christianity); to the 12-year old girl who later became his wife, in his fairy tale *The King of the Golden River* (a moral fable Tolstoy loved and had translated into Russian); and, most famously, to 'The Labourers and Workmen of Great Britain', the audience for *Fors Clavigera*, the eccentric title Ruskin gave to the monthly letters he published on 95 occasions between 1871 and 1884. The last of these publications, the source of many of Ruskin's ideas about education, was in itself perhaps his most extraordinary pedagogical feat, providing its readers – by no means confined to working men and including both Tolstoy and Gandhi, and Ruskin's friend Prince Leopold, son of Queen Victoria – with a fascinating 'treasury' of the myths, art, literature, and history of Western civilisation (Ruskin, 1871–1884/1907, Vol. 28, pp. 444–445; Hilton, 2000, p. xxii; Atwood, 2011, p. 123).

In addition to his writings and many formal lectures, Ruskin also did a great deal of informal teaching. For some years he helped at the Working Men's College founded in London in 1854 by a group of Christian Socialists (with whom he disagreed politically), running a practical class in drawing, a skill which he promoted not so much to enable people to become artists, but rather as a way of developing their ability to look closely at things around them, an ability he saw as central to becoming a fully developed human being (Hilton, 1985, pp. 203, 205, 206). Throughout the 1860s, he was also a regular visitor at Winnington Hall, a girls' boarding school in Cheshire where he taught a range of subjects and used his teaching on mineralogy as a basis for *The Ethics of the Dust* (1866) (Hilton, 1985, p. 278; Birch, 2002, pp. 123–124; Ruskin, 1866/1905b). Ruskin was unusual for his time in advocating an education for girls and women in most respects similar to that for boys and men, and in doing so was seen

as a liberating figure by late-nineteenth-century feminists (Peterson, 2002). He was a strong supporter of the heads of girls' schools such as Dorothea Beale at Cheltenham Ladies' College, of the women's colleges recently opened at Oxford and Cambridge, and of Whitelands College, a London teacher training college for women, often helping them with gifts of artworks and objects from his own collections that might be of use in their teaching (Atwood, 2011, pp. 127–131).

His most ambitious plan to promote education was through his creation of the St George's Guild, an association into which he agreed to put a tenth of his own income and whose companions he encouraged to match with similar support, St George being chosen as England's national saint and seen by Ruskin as the slayer of the dragon of capitalism and modernity. The Guild would set up communities on land donated to it, part of which would comprise schools and libraries. No schools were ever built, though Ruskin planned the curriculum they would use and the books their pupils would read (Hilton, 2000, pp. 306–307, 320–321; Atwood, 2011, pp. 127–131).

Ruskin's aims for education

Ruskin was an extraordinarily prolific writer about education. Many of his books discuss it at length, reaching a culmination in *Fors Clavigera* in the 1870s and 1880s. As in his other writings, however, he was not a systematic thinker, sometimes contradicting himself and changing his views over time. With the striking exception of Plato, whose influence on him was massive and whose *Laws* he spent a great deal of time painstakingly translating – his Greek, despite his classical Oxford education, being far from perfect – his thinking on education was generally *sui generis*. Contemporary writers on education such as Cardinal Newman and Matthew Arnold (whom he knew) appear not to have influenced him on this subject, nor did

earlier writers such as Montaigne, Locke, and Rousseau, all of whom he was familiar with but whose works on education he appears not to have read. Pestalozzi and Froebel, whose views he would have had much in common with, he seems to have been unaware of altogether. Ruskin's opinions are more distinctive and more interesting as a result.

Ruskin's view of the purposes of education arises from both his Christian worldview and his theoretically separable, but closely linked, utopian vision of what an ideal society ought to look like. His Evangelical Protestant upbringing had involved reading a few chapters of the Bible daily with his mother, and learning portions by heart, starting with the first verse of Genesis and ending with the last verse of Revelation, and then immediately beginning the process all over again. It is therefore not surprising that, to Ruskin, the core purpose of education was the cultivation of virtue, 'leading souls to what is best and making what is best out of them' or, putting it bluntly, turning 'base souls into noble souls' (Ruskin, 1851–1853/1903, Vol. 11, p. 261; 1867/1905, p. 395). Qualities such as gentleness, compassion, mercy, honesty, and reverence therefore recur when he writes about the kind of people he wants education to produce. It is the big mistake of his contemporaries, he argues, to prioritise 'erudition' – the pursuit of knowledge – over 'education.' 'You do not educate a man by telling him that he knew not,' he wrote, 'but by making him what he was not' (Ruskin, 1872/1905, p. 232).

An important part of educating people into virtue was to prepare them for their place in society. Ruskin had a high, perhaps inflated, view of the extent to which education could bring about desired social and political outcomes, arguing that 'there is only one cure for public distress – and that is public education, to make men thoughtful, merciful, and just', and that 'the education of the heart' was the route to tackling crime and emptying the prisons (Ruskin, 1865–1866/1905, p. 107; 1860, pp. 47–48; 1867/1905, p. 393). Most importantly, for Ruskin, education needed to support the kind of

social order which he felt was most likely to bring about communal wellbeing. As a 'violent Tory of the old school' – by which he meant someone who pre-dated the 1832 Reform Act which gave the vote to the middle class and, like him and his father, regretted its passing – education needed to fit children for the stations in life that, in a hierarchical society, they were destined to fill. Ruskin thought it was profoundly unsettling, both for society and for working men, for people to be constantly striving to 'better' themselves. It was crucial, he argued, that education 'be clearly understood to be no means of getting on in the world, but a means of staying pleasantly in your place there' (Ruskin, 1867/1905, p. 397). People should be 'equally well-educated' in relation to the needs of their station, equipped to perform the tasks that would fall to them, capable of working in a mutually helpful way with those in different stations, and honoured for their contribution to society (Atwood, 2011, p. 116). This meant the imposition of duties on all groups, and especially on what he envisaged as a benevolent elite among whose members 'that man (would be deemed) the richest who, having perfected the functions of his own life to the utmost, has also the wisest helpful influence, both personal and by means of his possessions over the lives of others' (Ruskin, 1867/1905, p. 105).

Education also needed to be adapted to the distinctive talents of individuals. Ruskin was acutely conscious of the differences between individuals in terms of their aptitudes and interests, to the extent that, in his plans for the schools that were never built, he was content for children not to do things as basic as reading and writing if their inclinations did not lead them in that direction, as long as the core virtue and character objectives of education were being met. He was quite brutally clear in his opinion – unacceptable in his own time, as now – that many children, at least academically, 'could be made nothing of' and that it was necessary to take 'most pains with the best material (and) never waste pains on bad ground',

while admitting that over generations education might be able to raise the working classes to a level of 'high intelligence' (Atwood, 2011, pp. 87, 145; Ruskin, 1867/1905, p. 405).

The need for order and obedience

The kind of enlightened despotism Ruskin hoped for was obviously at variance with the increasingly powerful liberalism of nineteenth-century England, one of whose basic assumptions was that the shared morality of a society should be something to which its members had rationally committed themselves rather than a non-negotiable moral order imposed from above. As Ruskin grew older, as shown in *Fors Clavigera*, the emphasis on the need for obedience as an aim of education became more pronounced.

Judith Stoddart, in her book *Ruskin's Culture Wars*, based on an analysis of *Fors Clavigera*, sees Ruskin as purging 'the language of individual rights and rational choice from his utopia' and championing an 'authoritarian nationalism' which parallels the *völkisch* nationalist movement in Germany with which he was familiar (Stoddart, 1998, pp. 48, 67, 69–70). Stoddart's treatment of Ruskin's educational ideas is in marked contrast to most other authors writing about them in recent times, whose approach, when it departs from a neutral analysis, has tended to veer towards the laudatory; unsurprisingly, given the closeness of many of Ruskin's ideas to the anti-utilitarian and anti-knowledge tendencies within current Western educational practice.

'Authoritarian' Ruskin most certainly was, calling himself 'the Shepherd' of the imaginary schools he never got round to building, and demanding – outrageously even by the standards of his own times – that children be trained 'to obey orders with the precision of slaves', and seeing the tightly controlled canon of books that would be allowed in his schools as a corpus to be revered rather than interrogated (Ruskin, 1871–1884/1907, Vol. 27, pp. 143; Vol. 29, 136;

1865–1866/1905, p. 63; Stoddart, 1998, pp. 133–134). Whether he was a ‘nationalist’ is less clear. He loved his country, wanted children to learn to honour ‘the lovely land which the Lord your God has given you’, and felt that England could exercise a benign influence in the world if it could only put aside its worship of Mammon, but that is more appropriately called patriotism than nationalism (Ruskin, 1872/1906, p. 287; A. Tate, 2018).

Ruskin’s drift into a more authoritarian version of his ‘common-good conservatism’ should be set in the context of the declining authority of the church, the extension of the franchise to large numbers of working-class men in the towns as a result of the Second Reform Act of 1867 (which Ruskin predictably opposed), the consequent move towards universal elementary education, and the fears aroused by the establishment on the other side of the Channel, following the Franco-Prussian War, of the revolutionary Paris Commune of 1871, whose communism Ruskin was quick to denounce and distinguish from his own ‘old communist’ communitarianism (Ruskin, 1871–1884/1907, Vol. 27, pp. 115–131). All these developments potentially threatened the traditional, hierarchical society on which Ruskin’s educational ideas were based as much as they did the bourgeois capitalism that he loathed. Ruskin was far from the only Victorian intellectual to feel this threat, as shown by the interest of other writers, not least Matthew Arnold, in the stabilising and controlling power of the idea of canonical books in a time of social change (Stoddart, 1998, pp. 146–150).

*Education in practice:
learning by doing*

Ruskin firmly rejected the rote learning, memorisation of facts, emphasis on competition and examinations, and preoccupation with ‘getting on’ which he felt characterised the emerging state education

system for elementary schools. After he moved to the Lake District in 1872, he encountered aspects of this at first hand when visiting the nearby primary school in Coniston, where his efforts to introduce exciting new ways of learning eventually led to tensions with teachers required by their grant from the Education Department to run their classes in a more prosaic way (Hilton, 2000, p. 431; Ruskin, 1871–1884/1907, Vol. 29, pp. 480–481).

Ruskin's focus was on 'learning by doing' across a diverse range of activities. He was keen that his St George's Schools be equipped with gardens, cultivable land, workshops for the learning of crafts, and laboratories for the practical study of botany, zoology, and geology. (Ruskin wrote a 'grammar' on each of these subjects – *Proserpina*, *Love's Meinie*, and *Deucalion* – for potential educational use) (Ruskin, 1873–1881/1906; 1875–1886/1906; 1875–1883/1906). Music, as a key part of moral education, would be at the heart of the curriculum, as his mentor Plato would have recommended, with a particular emphasis on daily singing (Ruskin, 1871–1884/1907, Vol. 27, pp. 143; Vol. 29, pp. 479–480). So would drawing, to train children's perception so that they would look at and see things that they would otherwise not have looked at or seen, and, as a result, heighten their general awareness and improve their analytical power (Ruskin, 2005, p. 40).

Often the least important in Ruskin's mind were reading, writing and arithmetic – the core of the curriculum in state-funded primary schools – partly because character, virtue, and spirit, he felt, were unlikely to be best developed through these means, and partly because he was assuming that local 'dame schools' would have covered the necessary work before children arrived at one of his own schools. He did, however, plan for his schools to have libraries, and worked out in some detail the contents of the *Bibliotheca Pastorum* (Shepherds' Library) that he hoped he would be able to provide for all his St George's communities (Ruskin, 1871–1884/1907, Vol. 28, pp. 499–501). Transmission of the great works of the past (carefully

chosen by him as Shepherd), of England's history, of the deeds of past heroes, and of the stories and principles of the Christian faith – key elements of a traditional liberal education – remained of great importance to Ruskin, alongside his more radical focus on experiential learning. Much of this transmission, however, might be done through music, art, listening to fairy stories and fables like his own *The King of the Golden River* (Ruskin, 1851), and the memorisation by children of poems and sayings. Boys and girls would follow the same curriculum, including learning Latin where it was on offer, except that – uncontested even by his most feminist late nineteenth-century supporters – girls would learn to spin, sew, weave, and cook while the boys would learn to do carpentry, ride, and sail (Ruskin, 1871–1884/1907, p. 143).

Ruskin's image of an educated person

Anyone who has worked their way through Ruskin's highly diverse writings on education is likely to have felt developing in their mind a sense that, despite major reservations about some of his aims and assumptions, something profound and joyful is emerging in the form of his vision of an educated person. Education, Ruskin is telling us, is a deeply serious matter. It is about learning who and where we are, where we are going and what it is best for us to do, and, before we can do any of these, about learning to stop and look with patience and attention at what is around us.

If we 'stop and look' – a precursor of the philosopher Hannah Arendt's equally powerful pedagogical injunction to 'stop and think' – Ruskin tells us that we do three things (Arendt, 1978, pp. 171–173; N. Tate, 2017, pp. 186–198). First, we develop a sense of where we fit in the natural world. This is why the natural sciences and drawing were central to Ruskin's educational plans, and why he urged us 'to win the greatest possible pleasure from the smallest things' and

to begin and end as many days of our lives as we can witnessing the sunrise and sunset (Ruskin, 1872/1906, p. 188; 1879/1904, p. 362). Second, we learn where we fit within historical time, developing a sense that we have a part to perform ‘in a great scene’ which we have inherited from the past ‘and which is to endure for centuries’ (Ruskin, 1872/1906, p. 189). Third, like the halcyon bird, we build ourselves ‘nests of pleasant thoughts’ made from ‘bright fancies, satisfied memories, noble histories, fruitful sayings, treasure-houses of precious and restful thoughts’, in other words ‘houses built without hands, for our souls to live in’ for the rest of our days (Ruskin, 1872/1906, pp. 262–263). There can be few other writers on education who leave us, at the end of reading about their ideas, with a vision of an educated person of such palpable existential intensity.

THE CONSERVATIVE ‘IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY’

The following discussion of ‘conservative’ ideas of the University is from a short speech I gave at an MCC conference on universities held at Ludovika University of Public Service in Budapest on 8 November 2024 and subsequently published in Hungarian Conservative (N. Tate, 2025b). The venue was an impressive hall whose high walls were lined with large full-length portraits of past Hungarian military figures (the building had once been a military academy). I remarked to one of the other British speakers that the presence within a UK university these days of such paintings would be likely to be met with demands for their removal on the grounds either that they represented past hegemonies that needed to be challenged or that they made students ‘unsafe’. It was like a breath of fresh air to know that the sense of historical continuity that these figures conveyed was here not under threat from student mobs demanding their removal.

In some ways it was odd to be giving a talk about universities. I had studied at three of them but never worked in one. Moray House College, the teacher training college where I was a lecturer for many years, subsequently became part of Edinburgh University, but in my time, there was sharply focused on professional education and training for primary and secondary teachers, not on the kind of educational research that has since proliferated and that no one reads. I and my history colleagues wrote history textbooks for schools, scripts for school radio broadcasts, and acted as examiners for school examination boards. We had no time for the propagation of new ideologies. Many years later, back in England, I became a governor of a small private non-profit American liberal arts university in London, ending up as vice-chairman and, for two years until 2019, chairman of its Board. This gave me a chance to see in action the US liberal arts tradition – closer to the ideas of Newman and Mill than anything currently in England – in which one was able to satisfy the demand for specialisation while maintaining the idea of the university as the final stage in a broad ‘liberal’ education.

*I had included a chapter in my book *The Conservative Case for Education* on Michael Oakeshott’s ideas about the university. Oakeshott, an enemy of all ‘Theory’, was sceptical about wasting time trying to define some sort of Platonic essence or ‘Idea’ of a university rather than studying what universities actually do. He was also far from optimistic about the future of universities. In the 50–60 years since the publication of his essays on the university his worst fears have been confirmed: the subordination of university policy and funding to the alleged requirements of economic competitiveness; the elevation of social justice as one of the main purposes of the university; the downplaying of the humanities; the bureaucratisation of academic life; the application of utilitarian impact criteria to research funding; and, most gravely of all, the loss of the notion of education and research as ends in themselves.*

I saw some of these developments at first hand as all of higher education came to be more and more closely regulated, but was fortunate no longer to be in the university world during the dark days of the early 2020s when, in a gut response to Black Lives Matter, universities renamed buildings, took down paintings and statues, ‘decolonised’ their curricula, issued trigger warnings, created safe spaces and introduced new speech codes. At the time of writing there seems to be some rowing back on all this both in the UK and the USA, but there is still a long way to go. This is why it is a good idea to keep on reminding ourselves of the alternative conservative ‘Idea of a University’.

In the twenty-first century it might be thought quixotic, at least in most of the Western world, to be highlighting ideas about the purpose of universities that have anything to do with conservatism and its traditional commitment to the pursuit of education as an end in itself. It is well-attested that the dominant rationale of contemporary universities is satisfying the current needs of the economy, bringing about social change and promoting social justice, that the political culture of universities is to the Left, and that much of university teaching in the arts and social sciences relentlessly highlights the negative in Western cultural traditions.

The dominance of a progressive liberal ‘Idea of a University’ should not, however, let us forget that there is a conservative ‘Idea of a University’ waiting in the wings ready for the opportunity to reassert itself when the occasion arises. This article gives a brief summary of some of the forms that this ‘Idea’ has taken.

Most of the proponents of a conservative ‘Idea of a University’ that I shall be mentioning have not been self-proclaimed ‘conservatives’. In talking about conservatism, I am doing so in the broad sense in which the French theorist of conservatism Jean-Philippe Vincent describes it as a ‘style’ or ‘habit of thought’ rather than as the ‘system

of belief' outlined by Roger Scruton (Vincent, 2016, pp. 92, 116, and *passim*; Scruton, 1980, p. 11).

A 2,500-year-old tradition

For most of the thousand years in which European universities have existed their purpose has been to transmit a legacy of knowledge and understanding using methods which have their origins in the education developed by Plato and Aristotle 1,500 years earlier in fifth century BC Athens. The Romans called this a 'liberal' education, one for a free man and for the sake of his improvement as a being with a mind and a soul, rather than for any practical or occupational purpose. It was a classical education based in the Latin and Greek languages and in Christian theology. It changed very slowly over the centuries. If Aquinas, who taught at the university in Paris in the thirteenth century, were to have been transported to Oxford in the nineteenth century when John Henry Newman (the future Cardinal) was teaching there, he would have quickly felt at home. So great have been the changes in universities from the mid-twentieth century onwards that were Newman to be transported from nineteenth-century Oxford to a twenty-first century university he would be completely lost.

*A university education
should be mostly about 'general culture':
Newman, Arnold and Mill*

Cardinal Newman is the first and possibly greatest of those writers who over the last 200 years have thought long and deep about universities and whose ideas about university education I shall be calling 'conservative'. His *The Idea of a University* (1852) makes a powerful case for a university education as 'an end in itself'. Its prime function should be intellectual rather than moral. A university should

be a place for the transmission of a general culture, what he called ‘universal knowledge’, and, more importantly, for the development of ‘Thought or Reason exercised upon (this) knowledge’. It should *not* be a place for research or professional education. Although a university’s purpose should be the development of the individual this did not mean that Newman saw it as lacking in utility, as a society led by people with well-formed minds, he argued, was likely to be a better society than one that was not. His book defines with sophistication what it means by ‘intellectual excellence’ in ways still relevant today (Newman, 1852/2008, pp. 3, 137, 147, 153, 161).

The mid-nineteenth century in England was a fruitful place for speculation about university education as demographic, social and political change raised issues about the continuing suitability of existing models. Two other thinkers stand out: the great liberal political philosopher John Stuart Mill and the poet, essayist and school inspector Matthew Arnold. Both agreed with Newman that a university education should be ‘an end in itself’ and devoted to the transmission of a general culture.

Matthew Arnold saw education at all levels as needing to combat the prevailing ‘mechanism’ and ‘Philistinism’ within contemporary nineteenth-century English society, in ways not dissimilar to the concerns that many conservatives have about the dominance of economic considerations today. Although a self-avowed liberal who would never have called himself a ‘conservative’ his priority was to provide for the education of a cultured clerisy which would set the tone for the rest of society and ensure the transmission of ‘the best that has been thought and said’. Despite being quintessentially ‘conservative’ in his stress on an inherited culture Arnold was also radical in his wish that the effect of such an education would enable us to make ‘a stream of fresh thoughts play freely about our stock notions and habits’, highlighting that conservatives can be, and often are, reformers but not reactionaries (Arnold, 1869).

J. S. Mill, political philosopher and arch-priest of liberalism, would have abhorred any association with ‘conservatism’. As his arch-critic the Cambridge academic Maurice Cowling put it, Mill’s liberalism is ‘not an invitation to every sort of human experiment but a means to the questioning of every established habit and received orthodoxy’ (Cowling, 1990, p. 87). Despite this Mill gave an inaugural address as Rector of the University of St Andrew’s in Scotland in 1867, in which his views about universities were in many ways deeply conservative. It is an inspiring address to students telling them what they ought to get out of their university education, and a set of messages which the current author very much wished he had received when at university himself.

Mill’s plan for a university education has the Latin and Greek classics at its heart, together with a strong emphasis on poetry and the Fine Arts and on the lessons to be drawn from history, but also involves an introduction to all other major areas of study. Some specialisation would be permitted but the main aim of the university was to give ‘a comprehensive and connected view of the things that [the student] has learned separately’ (Mill, 1867, pp. 7–9, 22, 34, 38, 66, 86–87, 89). Although Cowling feels, with some reason, that Mill saw the purpose of a university education as the moulding of a clerisy committed to imposing a liberal ‘Religion of Humanity’ on the wider society, there is little sign of it in this address (Cowling, 1990, pp. 18, 38).

To what extent can ‘general culture’ survive in an age of mass culture and university expansion? Ortega y Gasset, Jaspers, Oakeshott, Maskell and Robinson, and Leavis

Social and political change, increasing specialisation, the emergence of a new ‘mass society’ and, after the Second World War, an expanded role for the state in higher education radically modified the

environment within which universities functioned in the twentieth century. This partly explains, among conservative writers on university education, the shift away from Newman's idea of a course of 'universal knowledge' that would turn boys into 'gentlemen ... [with] a cultivated intellect'. This aim had not been abandoned but would have to be achieved alongside other objectives. Philosophers José Ortega y Gasset in Spain, in *Misión de la Universidad* (1930), and Karl Jaspers in Germany, in *Die Idee der Universität* (1923, re-written in 1946), had to accept that professional education and specialisation of other kinds was a major feature of universities in their countries, while doing their best to hold on to the role of the university as a place committed to the formation of a cultured elite grounded in an appreciation of the humanities. For Ortega what was crucial was a re-vamped course of *cultura general* which would be required of *all* students and involve an introduction to the major disciplines and the relationships between them (Ortega, 1992; Jaspers, 1959).

By contrast in England the liberal conservative philosopher Michael Oakeshott, although fully committed to all academic subjects being taught as truth-seeking ends in themselves, was content for students to follow single subject traditional academic courses confident that through the methods of study inherent to those disciplines and the cultivation of the Aristotelian intellectual virtues associated with them students would leave university generally well-educated (Oakeshott, 1989; N. Tate 2017, pp. 130–131, 166–172). Similar views have been expressed more recently by Duke Maskell and Ian Robinson in their critique of the utilitarian 'New Idea of a University' and demand for a much-reduced university system focused on traditional disciplines (Maskell & Robinson, 2001).

One of the most interesting responses to a feeling that the world was losing the notion of an educated man, as a result of rapid change, levelling down and specialisation, came from the Cambridge literary critic F. R. Leavis who, in the middle of the Second World War,

came up with a proposal for new Cambridge University courses that would help to re-establish that wholeness of vision that Newman, Arnold, and Mill had been encouraging (Leavis, 1943). The university, Leavis felt, had abandoned its task of giving a sense of common function to that small group of educated men responsible for the onward transmission of civilisation. Specialisation was inevitable, he admitted, but what was also needed was the development of a kind of central intelligence that could bring specialisms into relation with each other. The way forward he explored involved degree courses that would enable people to add, alongside their specialism, an intensive study of a past century comparing it with the present day. Such courses would develop students' perception, judgement, analytical skill, reading capacity, and understanding of what is worthy and what is not in all aspects of life – in other words, provide a truly humane education. It would not be obligatory but, chosen by enough students, might do something to lighten what he saw as the depressing reality of modern times.

*Do conservative 'ideas of a
university' have a future?*

The obstacles to promoting ideas like those of Leavis are huge: massive vested interests; egalitarian pressure to open higher education to 50% or more of the population; the dominant focus on the 'new man' needed by the global economy; academics with a relativistic mindset who promote 'woke' causes; and the surrounding 'civilisation of spectacle' that makes deep study feel alien to some students.

More fundamentally, as the US philosopher Alexander Meiklejohn put it, the problem is that 'schools and colleges are not something apart from the social order to which they belong. They are that order trying to prepare its youth for participation in its own activities. And a society can only teach the hopes, the knowledge,

the values, the beliefs which it has' (Leavis 1943, p. 15). For change to happen it must therefore come both from governments which now have more control over universities than they have ever had over the last 1,000 years and – above all – from below in jurisdictions where universities have autonomy and private funding is available. If Leavis managed to brush pessimism aside in the dark days of 1943 it cannot be impossible, with initiatives stimulated from both these two directions, to do the same in the 2020s.

EDUCATION FOR VIRTUE:
WHAT THE GREAT THINKERS TOLD
US AND WE HAVE FORGOTTEN

The final article in this chapter follows on from the various approaches to looking into 'Education for Virtue' in Chapter 1, but is placed here because its focus is on the legacy of philosophers in relation to this theme from Plato and Aristotle in the fifth and fourth centuries BC to Oakeshott and Arendt in the last century, and Chantal Delsol and Alain Finkielkraut in the current one. Its final section is about exempla, the Latin word for the short case studies with which Roman writers illustrated points they were making in their writings. These were often about individuals deemed in some way to be 'exemplary' or to illustrate ethical dilemmas. In the 1990s when I had responsibilities for England's new national curriculum I often argued for the inclusion in history lessons of studies of some of the country's traditional heroes and heroines, people with substantial achievements to their names – political, military, literary, artistic, architectural, scientific, entrepreneurial – not with a view to labelling them as 'heroes' or to hiding the faults that many high-achieving individuals also demonstrate, but as positive aspects of our history that needed to be remembered. When, much later, I discovered that

a recurring theme in Ortega y Gasset's writings was his refusal to dismiss, as some of his contemporaries had also done, such people because of faults in their private lives, I felt retrospectively vindicated in my own stand against the oikophobes who mocked my wish not to lose our national 'heroes' as something absurd and unworthy of a person in my official position.

Schools are some of the most moral places in society. They have no choice but to be so as anyone who has run or worked in one knows. Without basic rules of behaviour regularly repeated and firmly enforced order can easily break down. This is what happens in a small but disturbing minority of schools in some Western countries where persistent indiscipline prevents children from receiving an effective education. In a 2024 survey in England commissioned by the BBC one in five teachers reported that they had been subjected to violence from pupils: 'hit, kicked at, and bitten' (Varle, 2026). Such behaviour reflects wider problems within local communities where indifference to societal norms on the part of a minority of the population makes life intolerable for others. These are often areas with the highest levels of persistent pupil absence, which, post-Covid, is over 20% across all secondary schools in England (UK Department of Education, 2025).

In addition to having these figures in my head as I started planning to write this reflection on education for virtue I read a newspaper report – one of many to catch my eye recently – by one of my fellow citizens on how he had challenged someone blatantly stealing a whole shelfful of goods in a supermarket only to be ignored by shop assistants under instructions not to intervene, vigorously rebuked by another customer for creating a scene and told by the police to whom he reported the culprit not to bother them with such a matter (Telegraph, 2025). Reports like this are a daily affair in societies where being 'judgemental' has become almost a word of abuse, where the

traditional vocabulary of morality – ‘good and evil’, ‘conscience’, ‘shame’, ‘duty’, ‘virtues and vices’ – has long since departed the scene, and where those in authority have gradually come to accept as normal what previously had been deemed intolerable.

Disorder, of course, is not new and was often not prevented in the past by the traditional moral vocabulary then in place, but there are contemporary factors that make it more likely. These include the collapse of organised Christianity, disrespect for authority in societies undergoing major social, and cultural change, a declining sense of community in countries expanding demographically and becoming increasingly heterogeneous, together with an emphasis on rights rather than duties.

Education by itself is unable to solve these problems, and its importance is easily exaggerated, but is one part of the complex pattern of influences on behaviour that is most subject to redirection, above all at the level of the individual school. It is for this reason that it remains worthwhile looking at what the 2,500-year-old tradition of Western thought about moral behaviour can still tell us, and what our great philosophers, often themselves educators, have had to say about the moral education of young people. This used to be part of the initial education of teachers in England but is no longer. Its current absence implies that for some people we inhabit a Year Zero in which we have to rebuild everything from scratch without the help of tradition and is a reflection of Frank Furedi’s characterisation of the contemporary world as one in which the past is seen as an irrelevant place that no longer speaks to us (Furedi, 2024).

*Attainment of virtue as the main aim
of education: for and against*

For philosopher John Locke (1632–1704), himself a tutor of teenage boys, the main purpose of education was the attainment of virtue, not

knowledge. In his *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* he claimed that the four things that most gentlemen both want, and ought to want, for their sons are ‘Virtue, Wisdom, Breeding, and Learning,’ and that ‘the first and most necessary’ of these is Virtue (Locke, 1989, pp. 194–195). Learning was the least important of the four, he thought, and would follow as a matter of course if a child’s education helped him to develop a good character and inducted him into habits of ethical behaviour.

John Ruskin (1819–1900) – not a philosopher but a social critic and a man with a lifelong interest in education – similarly put the attainment of virtue before any other educational purpose. The aim of education, he argued, was not ‘erudition’ but turning ‘base souls into noble souls’ (Ruskin, 1851–1853/1903, vol. 11, p. 261; 1867/1905, p. 395). ‘You do not educate a man by telling him that he knew not,’ he wrote, ‘but by making him what he was not’ (Ruskin, 1872/1905, p. 232).

Not all philosophers have seen virtue as the supreme good either in life or as the end of education. Plato saw contemplation as the supreme good. This was how Plato’s ‘philosopher kings’ in *The Republic* would spend their time when not exercising their public duties. Contemplation, however, involved reflecting on what was good and bad, as well as on what was true and not true. For Plato the extensive programme of education he was envisaging for the future rulers of his ideal state would ensure an inculcation of moral habits and an understanding of the moral rules on which both individuals and city states would need to base their existence.

Aristotle saw matters from a slightly different perspective. For him *eudaimonia* was the supreme end of human life. Often translated as ‘happiness’ it means more broadly the fulfilment in one’s life of what a human being is most capable of achieving. As with Plato this involved, as the highest state, the satisfaction that comes from contemplation. It was for this reason that leisure and education in preparation for its use were so important for Aristotle, as providing

the opportunities needed for exercising one's mind. Although the attainment of virtue is not the main end of either life or education Aristotle assumed that it would inevitably accompany a life dedicated to developing oneself to the height of one's capacities and that the effectiveness of education in its three aspects – physical, appetitive, and rational – would be measured by the extent to which it had produced virtuous people (Aristotle, 2004, pp. xxv–xli; Reeve, 1998, pp. 54, 61).

Although they had their different – if closely related – philosophies, Plato and Aristotle shared a dislike of the sophists whose views about education they both thought were harmful. Sophists in ancient Greece were professional paid teachers who trained young men of good family in the skills needed to be successful both in private life and public affairs. They were not imparting knowledge for its own sake but as a means to whatever ends the individual had set himself. Plato and Aristotle were critical of both their utilitarianism and their ethical relativism. It was a debate between two ways of looking at education echoed in our current world by the clash between supporters of a traditional 'liberal' or 'classical' education in which learning is for its own sake and those who see education as a means of creating what the French philosopher of education Laurent Fedi has called the flexible and rootless *nouveaux hommes* ready to be deployed to meet the needs of an ever-changing global economy (Fedi, 2011, pp. 202–203, 209).

Not all philosophers have seen the attainment of virtue as the prime or central purpose of education. The Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset (1883–1955) was keen that the early years of schooling in particular should aim at injecting as much intensity into children's lives as possible by developing basic psychological qualities such as positivity, *vitalidad* (vitality), determination, self-confidence, curiosity, intellectual agility and courage. These were the qualities needed to be fully human and without them, he argued, there would

be no worthwhile cultural, scientific, or political creativity and achievement. His concern here was with the education both of the individual and of a post-imperial Spain, suffering in the early twentieth century from a lack of sense of purpose. It was a concern that Plato and Aristotle, similarly focused on the individual as part of a *polis*, would have understood. Ortega had no wish for the mass of the population to grow up lacking in virtue but felt that moral and civic education in the early years was not the priority and much of it could be left until later (Ortega, 1921/2004, pp. 417–421, 424, 425).

Moral habits and moral precepts

Both Plato and Aristotle ideally wanted people to act morally because they knew *why* one ought to do so and not just because they had been told to do so. Both recognised, however, that for many, perhaps most, people the higher levels of reflection about the nature of morality might not be accessible and that what therefore was needed was the formation of virtuous habits. One learned what it meant to act morally by finding oneself in the world, having to act, observing how people around one are acting, seeing the consequences of their and one's own actions, and, assuming a degree of consensus within one's social environment, developing a sense of what was right and what was wrong.

An important part of forming habits is acquiring a vocabulary of moral precepts and being encouraged on a regular basis to consider the extent to which one is living up to them in one's life. For the past 2,500 years Europeans, beginning with the Greeks, have been urged to reflect upon their own behaviour in the light of the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, temperance, and courage. These were defined first by Plato in *The Republic* and then by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and centuries later were adopted by the early Christian Church. They are central to the moral philosophy of

Thomas Aquinas and to his views on education. Prudence means the ability to find the appropriate response to situations, and includes the ability to reflect on whether an action is good or bad; justice is fairness; temperance is self-control; and courage involves perseverance and endurance. These are aspects of character that are embodied in behaviour that is appropriate and praiseworthy (*ST II-II*, q. 20, a. 1, as quoted in Davies, 1992).

Alongside the four cardinal virtues – to which the Church added the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity – were also, at least in Christian eyes, their opposites the vices of hatred, envy, sloth, cowardice, and intemperance. For centuries both virtues and vices have provided teachers within the Western tradition with purposes that underlie the moral education they are providing. Even if one no longer finds them in the mission statements or mottos of most contemporary schools, including many of the ones run by the Christian churches, distant traces of them can be found in some of their replacements. Many English schools, for example, make use of the acronym RESPECT in which, following consultation and therefore with many variants, *R* may stand for relationships, *E* for equality, *S* for staying safe, *P* for a positive attitude, *E* for enthusiasm, *C* for choices and *T* for treat others as you would be treated. As a list of virtues these are but a faint reflection of their more robust predecessors. This is hardly surprising, given that, as the twentieth century's greatest moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre pointed out, the assumption within modernity is that one is preparing children not for a conception of the good that is given and unchosen but for one they are expected to create for themselves (MacIntyre, 1998, p. 107). In addition to the arrogance involved in thinking that one can so readily cast aside the moral legacy of the last 2,500 years the practical problem with schools inventing their own lists of moral qualities is that, once pupils have left the school, they are not to be found in the wider world and are quickly forgotten.

The traditional seven virtues, by contrast, are memorable and define qualities that require deep thought. They carry the patina of time and inherited wisdom. They convey a sense that one's life is immensely meaningful and that one has a purpose, which is to better oneself, and that the struggle to achieve this purpose continues until death. I would not necessarily propose a revival of the weekly self-examination based on each of the Ten Commandments that in my experience used to be recommended in advance of Holy Communion to teenagers being prepared for their confirmation as members of the Church of England in the middle of the last century, but it certainly got to the heart of the matter. Questions such as 'Have I (this week) borne no malice nor hatred in my heart, but thought kindly and charitably of all others?' (Commandment VI), do, however, act as a reminder of the basic moral imperatives that no contemporary school's code I have seen has ever done (Walsham How, 1956).¹⁵

To most philosophers, habituation to virtue was much more than checking one's behaviour against a list of precepts. Condorcet (1743–1794), most radically, urged that moral maxims and general rules of conduct *not* be learned by heart but that children should 'form (them) for themselves' through reading short moral stories from an early age (Rothschild, 1998, p. 215). The assumption behind this – in a society more homogenous than that of today – was that such stories would be conveying similar moral messages. Locke, by contrast, was keen that children learned the Ten Commandments and the Creeds off by heart so that they were for ever lodged in their brains, but did not wish them turned into more precise 'do's' and 'don'ts', seeing such lists as a crude version of habituation into virtue that needed to be treated more subtly (Locke, 1989, pp. 90, 120, 212). Rousseau, Kant, Ortega, and Michael Oakeshott, in varying ways,

¹⁵ In the same period the Roman Catholic Church in England recommended regular prayers called 'Acts of Hope, Faith, and Charity' to keep the faithful in daily remembrance of the three theological virtues (*The Key of Heaven*, c. 1933).

all agreed about the importance of a morality of habits rather than one just of principles. This led Kant (1724–1804) to commend the practice of settling moral accounts with oneself at the end of every day, a habit that would enable one at the end of one's life to know oneself sufficiently to be able to estimate one's life's overall value (N. Tate, 2015, 85, 101–102).

What all these philosophers also shared was the absence, in helping children to become moral agents, of any conception that children had rights. There were profound duties towards children incumbent on all adults and children, if moral agents, were also be deemed to have duties, but children had no rights. By contrast today many schools in Western countries, alongside all the teaching they do about human rights in general, make a point of introducing pupils to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. In England many schools indeed strive to meet the requirements of Unicef's Rights Respecting Schools Award, introducing rights across the whole curriculum in order to do so (Unicef UK, n.d.). I am not aware of any such scheme for those crucial civic *duties* that the political philosopher David Selbourne in his book *The Principle of Duty* sees as being at the heart of the ethical education of all citizens and that begin in both the home and the school (Selbourne, 1997, p. 264).

*Educating for Virtue:
the roles of Mind, Heart and Will*

Whether or not one is educating oneself into a life of virtue, or being educated by others such as one's parents or teachers, a number of elements of one's being are likely to be involved, and principally one's mind, one's heart and one's will. All three contribute to the formation of moral habits, making of moral judgements and taking of moral actions.

The Mind: the need to 'stop and think'

For Plato and Aristotle, the highest levels of moral understanding and virtuous behaviour required the exercise of the mind. Most of their successors would have agreed. Aquinas, with his Aristotelian emphasis on the importance of empirical observation and metaphysical speculation, placed reason at the heart of his philosophy. The element of 'moral science' in a young person's education required reliance both on an individual's 'experience' and on 'a mind free of passion' reflecting on this experience (Aquinas, *In VI Ethics*, lec. 7, as quoted in N. Tate, 2015, p. 44). In a contemporary world swept periodically by waves of moral hysteria which have left their wreckage behind in many schools in Western countries – because of Black Lives Matter, 'decolonisation', transgender ideology, and the alleged curse of 'whiteness' – Aquinas's message could not be more up-to-date. It is a message that has echoed down the ages. David Hume (1711–1776) looked closely at what is involved in making moral decisions – what one Humean commentator has called doing one's 'moral homework' – and which often requires 'nice distinctions made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, general facts fixed and ascertained'; in other words the application of Aquinas's 'mind free of passion' (Hume, 1975, as quoted in Baier, 1998, p. 235).

Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) wrote extensively on the way that unthinking mass opinion – 'the mob' which only 'acclaims' or 'stones' – played a big part in the rise of totalitarianism in Communist Russia, Nazi Germany, and elsewhere in the first half of the last century. The key to understanding the horrors to which this had led, she came to feel, was the relationship between 'our faculty of telling right from wrong' and our 'faculty of thought'. In the case of Eichmann, for example, whose trial in Jerusalem she attended, she wondered whether the absence of self-examination on the part of people like him

could help to explain his inability to tell right from wrong and thus his participation in acts of unimaginable cruelty. What was needed, she felt, was to ‘stop and think’, an everyday phrase into which she injected a fresh meaning. It was not abstract philosophical thinking she was talking about but the careful self-examination of one’s own thinking that she found in her hero Socrates who did not retreat into an ivory tower to think but went out into the marketplace to think alongside other people, showing them *how* to think but not telling them *what* to think. It was this, she felt, that should be at the heart of education (Benhabib, 2000, p. 75; Dolan, 2000, pp. 264–268; Bernstein, 2000, pp. 280–282).

The problems caused by a failure to ‘stop and think’ also permeate the discussion about the moral life of Western societies in the work of the contemporary French philosopher Chantal Delsol. Her interpretation of the West’s current moral state is that it has turned its back on moral reflection based on our Greco-Roman and Christian heritage. It has lost the idea of ‘a good life’ and created ‘a morality of complacency’ which refuses to accept limits on behaviour, stresses rights above duties, prides itself on its non-judgementalism and evaluates everything solely in terms of its implications for our well-being (Delsol, 2003, p. 68).

The implication of this for schools is that there is little point in basing moral education on habituation into current moral norms, as recommended by most earlier philosophers, as the former norms have been largely abandoned by new elites, as Alasdair MacIntyre has shown they have been, and replaced by norms one would not wish to endorse. What is needed instead is explicit rejection by schools of the prevalent ethical relativism, a reassertion of the traditional virtues, training in the making of moral judgements wherever this emerges spontaneously – as it does – in many parts of the curriculum, and attention to maintaining high standards of ethical behaviour in the daily lives of all members of the school community.

*The Heart: an 'intelligent' heart
or a 'sentimental' one*

Chantal Delsol's analysis of the moral state of the West suggests that the place of the heart in the 'morality of complacency' she wrote about leaves much to be desired. It is a morality driven by sentimentalism towards all the groups it has identified as victims of oppression, self-hatred towards itself as the oppressor (Roger Scruton's *oikophobia* or rejection of one's own), and virulent hostility towards anyone with the temerity to question its pieties (Delsol, 2003, pp. 74–75, 77–78, 87–90; Scruton, 1993).

The role of the heart in traditional Greco-Roman and Christian moral thought was more positive. Sympathy for the poor, the suffering and the genuinely oppressed, and a wish to support them has always been central to Christianity, though in Aquinas's words with 'a mind free of passion' and thus of the sentimentalism characteristic of those searching the world for the latest victim group to support and failing to take into account the full range of harms that their actions might cause. David Hume strongly condemned those who perform moral acts with a view to being praised for having done so – what we today might call 'virtue signalling' – while accepting that praise is likely to be the consequence of such acts even when it was not the purpose (Hume, 1975, as quoted in Baier, 1998, pp. 228–229).

Shame: the most powerful of moral feelings

One feeling seen by some philosophers as of the greatest value to someone being educated for virtue is that of a sense of shame. Locke believed that shame as part of education should be used sparingly but that the knowledge that people who mattered to a child disapproved of the unworthy things he had done could have a very beneficial effect. For Kant the internalisation of shame – when someone 'dreads

nothing more than to find himself, on self-examination, worthless and contemptible in his own eyes' – was the most powerful of all moral feelings (Kant, 1879, pp. 374–375). 'Shame' is a word almost never used in contemporary education – not surprisingly given our instinctive ethical distaste for the kind of ill-considered public 'shaming' we see a lot of the time – but still has an important role at the level of the individual conscience. We drift into relativism and into tolerating the intolerable if we do not draw clear and public lines between what is right and what is wrong in those many cases where there is no doubt about the distinction among reasonable people.

The Socratic version of shame – the refutation in a one-to-one situation of one's errors in argument – is the one version of shame that we can least afford to lose. Unfortunately, as one philosophy teacher has pointed out, most philosophy teaching, even at college level, is currently not Socratic: 'far from refuting their students, or teaching them to set a high value on being refuted, they teach them to be accepting of each other's ideas, to follow each other's intellectual leads with respect, and to impose no rule but that of an open mind' (Woodruff, 1998, pp. 20–21). This was written before our current era of trigger warnings, safe spaces and unqualified respect had pushed us even further down this road. The one bright sign in this area is the continued survival of a strong debating tradition in some education systems in which well-managed debates continue to show the benefits of enabling people to respond to refutation without feeling personally, rather than intellectually, refuted.

Moral education through the arts

The final area where the education of feelings has often been felt both to contribute to and to obstruct moral education is that of the arts. Both Plato and Aristotle were acutely aware of the potentially powerful impact of each of music, poetry, theatre and the visual

arts on people's emotions, character, and ethical attitudes. Plato's response was to propose banning or at least tightly controlling much of it as appealing to the inferior parts of the soul, and insufficiently concerned with the main aims of education which were the pursuit of truth and virtue. Only music met his criteria for having a beneficial effect on character and even then, only certain instruments and modes of music were to be permitted, and certainly nothing aimed just at giving pleasure. Aristotle shared Plato's concerns but was less authoritarian, even accepting that part of the leisure time on which he was so keen could be given over to pleasure, and that listening to tragic poetry could encourage reflection on emotions and ethical dilemmas and thus contribute to an individual's education (N. Tate, 2016a, pp. 26–29).

We may legitimately recoil from Plato and Aristotle's instinct to control and censor the use of arts in education, but choices about which books, plays, music, and types of visual art to study and practice have to be made and take into account the extent of the benefits, including any ethical ones, we hope pupils will gain from these parts of their curriculum. We may decide to concentrate, as in a traditional 'liberal' or 'classical' curriculum, on those parts of our artistic heritage that will enable us to pass on to the next generation 'the best that has been known and thought' (Matthew Arnold) or throw it aside, as some educators recommend, in favour of what has been dismissively referred to by English school inspectors as 'undemanding teenage fiction' (and its equivalent in the other arts) that only reflects the world in which pupils currently live and/or promotes the latest progressive cause *du jour*. In what Mario Vargas Llosa called our current 'civilisation of spectacle' in which cultural objects are assumed to be ephemeral (*como el popcorn*), exist only for purposes of entertainment and are evaluated in terms of their financial success, one of the major challenges for contemporary educators is to get across the idea that the purpose of education is

that the life of serious thought is one of value and that taste is very much more than just a question of what one likes (Vargas Llosa, 2012, pp. 31–36, 44, 47, 51, 59).

For Vargas Llosa, as for Aristotle, mind and heart in pursuit of both truth and virtue need to go together. This is the theme of the book *Un cœur intelligent* (2009) of the contemporary French essayist and philosopher Alain Finkielkraut who takes as his starting point King Solomon's request to the Lord to give him 'an intelligent heart' (Finkielkraut, 2009). An education and a life that blends the two is the best antidote, he claims, to the moral over-simplifications of those around us who see the world as divided between oppressors and oppressed, and who judge everyone not as individuals but as archetypes. The book examines nine novels and shows how each of them, read carefully and reflected upon, can enable one to take off one's Manichean spectacles and see the world in all its complexity, making ethical judgements about it with nuance and measure. One can do this best, however, with books that have stood the test of time – hence the need for some kind of a canon – not with the kind of fiction that reinforces the over-simplified sentimentalities – another of Finkielkraut's targets – of our current age.

*The Will: delayed gratification
and the need to combat amour propre*

For most of history the will, and in particular its exercise in restraining oneself from doing things that one ought not to do, has been felt to be an important element in education for virtue. For Locke 'He that has not Mastery over his Inclinations, he that knows not how to resist the importunity of Present Pleasure or Pain, for the sake of what Reason tells him is fit to be done, wants the true Principle of Vertue and Industry; and is in danger never to be good for anything' (Locke, 1989, pp. 111–112, 114, 136). This self-control and

restraint, willingness to concentrate on the task at hand, acceptance of delayed gratification, and determination not to give up when one feels like doing so, is something to be learned at an early age, urges Locke. Establishing these attitudes and the habits that go with them is much more important than learning Latin or Logic.

A crucial aspect of will in the pursuit of virtue is seen to be the importance of modesty. This was important to Locke (1989, p. 107) but even more so to Rousseau where it was central to his plans for the education of the imaginary Émile. Rousseau distinguished between *amour de soi* (love of self) and *amour-propre* (self-love). The former is a sense of one's worth and a determination to stand up for oneself and is wholly desirable. The latter, by contrast, involves comparison of self with others, a craving for prestige, and a sense of one's worth based on status and the opinions of others. Rousseau was all too familiar with *amour-propre*, not least within himself, as his autobiography *Les Confessions* illustrates, and as he himself recognised. People whose lives are shaped by *amour-propre* lack the will to escape from this situation and it was the core purpose of the education he designed to avoid such an outcome.

Exempla: anecdotes and heroes

It was common among Latin authors writing on moral themes to illustrate their arguments with *exempla*, moral anecdotes or stories, sometimes with heroes to emulate and sometimes because of the issues they raised. Cicero uses this technique in his *De Officiis* (On Duties), a book that was in widespread use in Europe up to the eighteenth century in the education of (mostly) boys and young men likely to take up positions of authority (Cicero, 2000). Cicero wrote the book for young Romans at a time when he saw the traditions of the Roman Republic under threat. It was also an extended discussion of moral obligations, and of the relative claims when making

ethical decisions of, on the one hand, the honourable and virtuous and, on the other hand, the useful and the expedient.

One of the examples from Roman history that Cicero uses to illustrate the different factors involved in the making of moral decisions is the case of Regulus, the consul who during the Carthaginian Wars had been captured by the enemy but sent back to the Roman Senate having sworn an oath that if Carthaginian prisoners in Rome were not released, he himself would return to Carthage. On return to Rome Regulus advised the Senate, in Rome's interests, against releasing the able-bodied Carthaginian hostages in return for allowing him – an old man less able now to fight – to stay in Rome with his wife and son. Even if the Senate were to refuse to release the hostages, he made clear that he would keep his oath, for the sake of Rome's reputation and honour, and return to Carthage to face death by torture. The Senate took his advice and Regulus returned to Carthage where he met his appalling fate.

Cicero used this particular *exemplum* to illustrate the relationship within morality between the honourable and the useful, a key theme in the history of moral philosophy and one reason why *De Officiis* continued to be of interest over a millennium and a half later to writers such as Machiavelli and Bentham interested respectively in issues of expediency and utility (Barbour & Preston, 2015; Colish, 1978).

It is also an *exemplum* of some aspects of the education for virtue I have been discussing. It shows a man so committed to a moral principle – honouring an oath – that he is willing to die for it. It shows his iron will in maintaining his stance despite (one assumes) the appeals of his family and the prospect of a hideous death. It shows the place of utilitarian considerations – in this case Rome's interest in retaining the reputation of a state that keeps its word – in moral decision-making. It leaves open the possibility of different solutions to Regulus's dilemma and, when Cicero tells us that his contemporaries 200 after the event were amazed that Regulus chose

to go back to Carthage, it shows how people's moral assumptions can change over time.

It is also an *exemplum* of how a case study might be used to get students to explore moral decision-making. Every subject in the curriculum and the daily events of a school community will offer many other such opportunities across a wide range of contexts. This is a resource which Socrates would have leapt at the opportunity to exploit in the service of an education for virtue. It remains fully available to those with the vision of such an education to make use of it.

MAINTAINING TRUST IN PUBLIC ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

In the late 1970s and 1980s, alongside a full-time teaching job, studying for a doctorate, and a role as a tutor for the UK's new Open University, I also marked a very large number of school examination papers, mainly for financial reasons. For most of the 1980s I progressed to being co-chief examiner for all the history syllabuses offered by the University of London School Examinations Board, which also included writing and marking separate papers taken by candidates in the Caribbean and West Africa. I became a regular patron of the overnight sleeper from Edinburgh to London.

This part-time work taught me a lot about both the art and the science of assessment and, as someone who had worked for years at the coal face, was to give me a certain amount of credibility with England's examination boards when a few years later I became the head of the regulatory body overseeing their activities. I knew at first hand how much a national assessment system relied on recruiting, training, and monitoring a huge army of examiners without whose cooperation the whole edifice would collapse.

After two years working for the new National Curriculum Council, based in York, I was promoted to its sister body the School Examinations and Assessment Council, based in central London,

as assistant chief executive in charge of the new examinations in English, mathematics, and science that all 14-year-olds would now be required to take following the introduction of England's first national curriculum. A teaching force already less than enthusiastic about the new curriculum was even more antithetical to the new tests, both because of a Rousseauite antipathy to testing *per se* and because of the pressures they felt they would be under as a result of the proposed publication of results. Almost universally hated were the new English tests because of the educational priorities, laid down by Conservative ministers, that they reflected: a stress on grammar and a compulsory study of at least two Shakespeare plays. I have painful memories of large halls in provincial towns full of angry English teachers who, whatever I said in favour of the government's plans, would not be persuaded that the rationale for the new emphases was educationally sound. Schools refused to enter their pupils for the tests, teacher unions took up their cause and the most amiable, if not the most successful, of the secretaries of state for education with whom I have worked, was eventually driven to a premature resignation. The tests were made more acceptable to English teachers and successfully implemented but dropped altogether in 2008 by a Labour government keen to reduce what the teacher unions had been telling them were unnecessary pressures on schools.

My years helping to run a national assessment system, which initially involved tests for pupils at each of ages 7, 11, 14, 16, and 18, have left me with two firm convictions.

The first is a belief in the importance of summative assessment at the end of a course – and this applies particularly to the candidate-focused assessments at ages 16 and 18 – as a necessary basis for selection on to higher courses of study and as a stimulus to work hard and to take one's learning seriously. It is a salutary self-discipline.

The second is an even stronger sense of the importance of on-going formative or diagnostic assessment. The national assessment

agencies that I ran placed great emphasis on this and, across all the main subjects, my subject specialist colleagues provided excellent guidance on how best it should be done. Constant and specific feedback to pupils is essential to ensure progress: on how their history essays might be better constructed, on recurring errors in English usage, on why a particular scientific concept is being misunderstood, on how to set about translating a sentence from Latin.

I have been disappointed in England in recent years by guidance to teachers to spend less time on marking the work of individual pupils and more on lesson and curriculum planning. Both are necessary in order to raise standards and the former as much as, if not more than, the latter. One of the strengths I found in my work for the Open University was the requirement – with students whom one met less frequently and, in some cases, never at all – to mark work with the utmost care, always indicating precisely why one had graded it in the way one did and what would have been needed for it to have been graded even higher. I found this kind of marking very satisfying. It was something that no one had ever done for me during my undergraduate studies.

MAINTAINING TRUST IN PUBLIC ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS: AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

The talk that follows was given in Cambridge at the first Assessment Conference organised by the new examination board Cambridge Assessment, part of the University of Cambridge. The theme of the conference was the issue of trust in national assessment systems. I took the opportunity to make some comparative comments on the various systems with which I had become familiar: those of England, Switzerland and France, and also of the International Baccalaureate with which I was now closely involved as Director-General of The

International School of Geneva, the school where the qualification had originally been developed. The preceding speaker, to whom I refer in my talk, was Baroness Onora O'Neill, philosopher and former Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge, who had given the 2002 BBC Reith Lectures on 'A Question of Trust' (Cambridge Assessment, 2005).

A few weeks ago, on a Saturday morning, I drove from Geneva, where I work, to the small Swiss town of Neuchâtel. In some communities it was the day of the *désalpe*, when the cows, with their floral headdresses, come down from the alpine pastures for the winter. In other communities it was the day of the *vendanges*, the vine harvest. I was going neither to the *désalpe* nor to the *vendanges*. The purpose of my visit was to find out more about the assessment system in place for the Swiss baccalaureate – the *maturité suisse* – taken by some of my students at the International School of Geneva. That particular Saturday was the last day of the oral examinations at the University of Neuchâtel for the final part of the *maturité*. I had got special permission on a pink form which, given Swiss bureaucracy, will doubtless be filed in triplicate in offices all over the Helvetic Federation and archived until the last trump, to sit at the back of the room during the oral examinations that play such a key role in the assessment for this particular school-leaving qualification. I attended oral examinations in French and English literature. I found it a fascinating experience. I shall begin by telling you something about this, not because I think you ought to learn about the public examination system in a small far away country about which you know little and need to know little, but because it is my intention to try to tease out of the story some general lessons about the nature of trust in public assessment systems.

There were many aspects of the arrangements for these oral examinations that I found impressive. The oral examiners in a

subject were the same people who had marked the written papers for that subject and for that particular student. One of the purposes of the oral was to help them come to an overall judgement about the candidate's abilities in the subject and thus to decide on an overall subject grade (on a scale 1 to 6). Also, each individual candidate was followed around all his or her orals – across seven subjects – by a second person, called the *expert*, a moderator whose job was to validate the whole process and to form an overall judgement about the candidate's abilities. Given the function of the *maturité* as a university entrance qualification – everyone with a *matu* is entitled to access to the first year of a Swiss university course – the *expert* plays a particularly crucial role if the overall results are marginal in deciding whether this student has or has not the *maturité* – that is the origin of the name of the qualification – to undertake higher level studies. I found it in many ways a labour intensive, highly personalised, and rather professional system.

There were some things, however, about the arrangements that I could imagine being criticised in England, were we to decide to introduce such an approach here. Some options in the *maturité* are assessed simply by means of an oral: I can imagine this being considered a far too narrow assessment approach in a subject such as history or chemistry. The length of the oral – 15 minutes – might also be felt to be a problem given the breadth of the syllabuses in some subjects. I can similarly hear voices insisting that such a form of assessment skews the validity of the assessment, turning it into an assessment of confidence and articulacy rather than of an understanding of the discipline in question. The difference between the style of the examiners – the warm empathy of one compared with the formal politeness of another – could be seen as a factor undermining reliability. On a practical level, as a candidate, I would also have found it incredibly distracting to have to prepare my unseen passage from Voltaire or Hemingway at the back of a classroom

while the previous student was having his or her oral examination at the front (when I queried this arrangement, I was told simply that this was how it had always been done for the last 110 years). I could also imagine the public outcry in England if we made students take their final examinations, on which university entry depends, a week before the university term is due to start.

Despite these possible disadvantages I have found very high levels of trust in the *maturité* assessment arrangements, both among my colleagues (my *maturité* coordinator was at Neuchâtel all day encouraging and reassuring our students as they went from one ordeal to another), among our parents, and among the wider community. The purpose of my talk this afternoon is to tease out of this situation, and out of the very different public examination systems with which I am familiar in England, in France and via the International Baccalaureate (IB), which is the main qualification taken by my students (we also take IGCSEs and the French Diplôme National du Brevet),¹ some of the reasons for trust and for the absence of trust.

There is a health warning about all of my comments. They are based on no formal research, but rather on my informal conversations with colleagues and parents of many different nationalities in Switzerland, on my work within the French education system where I have sat for four years on an advisory body to the minister of education which has only marginally been concerned with public examinations, and on my increasingly hazy memory about what we did at the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (I can't even remember exactly what happened during a recently notorious episode supposedly involving me and a former Secretary of State for Education – incipient Alzheimer's maybe, but not a pay-off as some

¹ The International GCSE (IGCSE) is an examination taken at age 16 by many international schools and by some English private schools looking for a qualification that is assumed to be more demanding than the main examination for 16-year-olds the GCSEs. The Diplôme National du Brevet is taken in France at the end of *collège* at the age of 15.

former colleagues have been suggesting!). My knowledge of the International Baccalaureate is also of recent date. There are people in the audience today who, I am sure, know much more about these matters than I do.

A few years ago, just after its publication in 1996, I read Francis Fukuyama's *Trust* and have been re-reading it for the sake of this talk (Fukuyama, 1996). Fukuyama opens *Trust* with the statement that 'a nation's well-being ... is conditioned by a single, pervasive cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in the society'. He expands, through an analysis of different societies – the USA, the post-communist societies of eastern Europe, the 'catholic' societies of southern Europe, China, Japan – the idea that the effectiveness, and in particular the economic effectiveness, of societies depend on their 'social capital', that is their ability to work together for common purposes in groups and organisations. Having just listened to Baroness O'Neill (the previous speaker), I am conscious that Fukuyama may well have encouraged the simplistic idea that trust is some kind of 'cultural glue' that either a society has or doesn't have. Trust is clearly much more complex than this. Fukuyama's central thesis, however, remains relevant: the thesis that the most effective societies are those with high levels of trust that allow the development of powerful and effective groups and organisations existing in that crucially intermediate area between governments, on the one hand, and the smallest units of society, above all the family, on the other.

I should like to use Fukuyama's conclusions about trust to try to identify those characteristics of our public assessment systems that seem to be conducive of trust and those that maybe seem to have had the effect of undermining trust. I shall be talking about the influence that the nature of our various wider societies has on issues of trust, about the role of government and that of universities, about the stability of otherwise of our assessment systems, and about their relationship with other parts of our education systems.

First, what is the relationship between public assessment systems and the kind of societies out of which they emerge? As I have said, one of the things that most strikes me about the Swiss assessment system is the extent to which it is accepted by the various partners within the system – students, parents, teachers – by comparison, for example, with the response of, say, some of my parents to the IB Diploma results and by comparison with some attitudes towards public assessment arrangements in England.

To take a simple example, there are very few appeals against the results of the *maturité suisse* and these very rarely succeed. One may, on appeal, look at the marked scripts, but only, under supervision, in the offices of the federal department of education and research. These are located in the federal capital Berne. If you are from Ticino, the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland, this would involve a road journey of over seven hours, across several alpine passes. There are few people who take a query to such a stage. They are certainly discouraged from doing so, but they also don't seem to feel the need.

The *maturité suisse* is a federal examination for private schools such as my own. It has been declared, by federal decree, the exact equivalent of what is called the *maturité cantonale* or the *maturité gymnasiale*, that is the same baccalaureate operating under similar rules but administered at cantonal level. There are 23 different responsible authorities for this qualification – the 23 cantons of the federation, each of which has full responsibility for its school system – and in many of them the responsibility for setting the papers, marking the scripts, and conducting the orals, is delegated yet further, as in the canton of Geneva, to each of the canton's secondary schools. So, we have a situation in which the life-shaping decision whether or not someone can go on to higher education is delegated to large numbers of schools each of which is expected to apply the same overall assessment standards. This is an assessment system in which, from a contemporary British perspective, one might well

expect low levels of trust, together with the corresponding imposition of elaborate systems of accountability designed to compensate for its lack. In Switzerland, however, the reverse appears to be the case. There are high levels of trust in the arrangements, on the part of students, teachers, parents, and the wider community.

Compare this with the figures for this summer's appeals against International Baccalaureate Diploma (IB) results in one of my two secondary schools: 75 appeals against individual subject results across 120 candidates, only 4 of which, incidentally, succeeded. Now the IB Diploma, in my experience, is a highly regarded qualification – highly regarded by parents and by universities – and one in which there is relatively little 'noise' about the workings of its assessment arrangements. Despite which, at least at my school, in a very international community, there is a high level of querying of results, very largely on parental initiative. This is partly of course because one is querying grades (or points) which, as in A levels, are crucial for entry to particular universities, rather than querying the simple pass-fail decision involved in the *maturité suisse*. But it also has something to do with the differing social context of the two qualifications.

The *maturité suisse* is a qualification serving a relatively stable and traditional society, what Fukuyama would call a 'high trust society'. The IB Diploma, at least at my school and at many other IB schools, is a qualification for a relatively rootless international or cosmopolitan group of people many of whom also come originally from what Fukuyama would call 'low trust societies' (he includes the USA, the countries of the former Soviet bloc and the countries of southern Europe in this category). We have many US families in our school. For some of them the IB Diploma is less important than the school's own high school diploma which is sufficient for entry to US universities. Because the high school diploma is built up from a process of continuous assessment within the school, over

a number of years, all of a student's grades count. These grades, however, are far from simply being accepted. They are quite often contested and sometimes changed. I refuse to believe, however, that this is because the processes of assessment used in my school are inferior to those used in a local Swiss school. In my opinion it has more to do with the different social attitudes prevailing in different societies. Switzerland is a less individualistic society less driven by a preoccupation with individuals' rights than the USA or the UK (though the USA and the UK are far from being the same in this respect). There is a greater acceptance of authority: when I lived, for a year, in Switzerland before moving over the border into France, I was amazed to receive little notes from the commune through my letter box, warning me that someone was going to come and inspect the plants in my garden, reminding me that I couldn't hang my washing out on Sundays, couldn't cut my lawn on public holidays, and so on. One reason for this acceptance of authority, and the high level of trust that is associated with it, is the Swiss system of direct democracy: one is choosing the people who make the rules or, as often happens, one is making the rules oneself through referenda. Attitudes towards public assessment systems are thus bound to vary widely *because of* these widely different social contexts.

My first point therefore about what is conducive to trust, or indeed to mistrust, has concerned the nature of the wider social context. Those who run public assessment systems need to make their decisions in the knowledge of this context, anticipating likely responses to new initiatives and seeing where they can play to those elements in a society that are most likely to maximise, rather than minimise, trust. My second point is a linked one about the role of governments in public assessment systems.

My first contact with a public assessment system was as a pupil at a state secondary school in the north of England in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was taken for granted that we did our O levels

and A levels with the JMB (the Joint Matriculation Board).² This was located at a strange flat brick-built place called Manchester on the wrong side of the Pennines, but one could get there fairly quickly, one knew that the JMB had links with one's local university (I remember going to Leeds University to do an A level General Studies Spoken English oral, not totally dissimilar to what I experienced the other week in Neuchâtel), and it all seemed part of a fairly cosy and well-regarded local establishment. And no one, as far as I know, ever thought to challenge the results. These were simply accepted as absolutely unchangeable, almost as if they had been brought down from the mountain and inscribed on tablets by Moses himself. It was of course a less individualistic society, less conscious of its rights, more deferential to authority, more 'high trust'. That relates back to my first general point about social context. But it was also a public assessment system that appeared to have nothing to do with government. One of the questions for this conference is to what extent the huge increase in government involvement in the English public assessment system that has taken place since that time has increased or diminished trust and what lessons from this experience can be learned for the future.

It isn't, however, a simple matter of public assessment systems that are free from government control being trusted and those that are under government control being mistrusted. It depends on wider attitudes towards government and on the exact nature of the government's role. It is certainly helpful that the IB Diploma is unconnected with any government, that it is run by an international organisation based in neutral Switzerland, and that it is teachers and academics rather than state officials who make decisions about the contents of programmes and how they are assessed. It is not irrelevant, as regards trust in the qualification, that it has been accepted in England by

² Ordinary (O) level and Advanced (A) level examinations in England were taken at ages 16 and 18, respectively.

the regulatory body, QCA³ and thus implicitly by government, but that is of minor significance by comparison with the fact that it has been accepted by English universities, that is by people who make the important decisions about the value of different qualifications and who have the added benefit of being relatively free from government interference.

But this does not mean that one cannot have a public assessment system run by the government in which there are high levels of trust. The *maturité suisse* is run under an *Ordonnance* issued by the Federal Council. The Federal Council has laid down which subjects must be studied, the form of assessment (written or oral, or both, and the marking system to be used) and the number of marks needed to pass. Some of this is even more prescriptive than the instructions of a regulatory body such as QCA. The examinations also take place outside school in university buildings under the supervision of officials of the federal department of education and research. And yet, as I have said, it is widely trusted. This is for two reasons. First, the Swiss government is more trusted by its citizens than the British government. There are many reasons for this: it is a much more consensual system lacking a dominant head (one forgets the name of the president of the Confederation); decisions when finally made have most people's and most major parties' backing; there are high levels of public involvement through elections and referenda; and in a small country government is closer to the people than it can be in a country like Britain.

The second reason why there is greater trust in Swiss government involvement in the public assessment system is that the people who

³ The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) was set up in 1997 with responsibility for England's national curriculum, national tests, and public school examinations at 16 and 18, and, in the whole of the UK, for vocational qualifications and occupational standards. The author, who had led its predecessor body The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 1994–1997, was QCA's chief executive 1997–2000.

visibly run the system are people who in themselves are generally trusted: the teachers. In the *maturité suisse* all the examiners and moderators are teachers, as they are in the school-based *maturité*. The knowledge that the final decision about your child is going to be made on the advice of a teacher moderator who has sat in on all your child's orals and looked at all their written papers is reassuring.

The system in France is in some ways similar, despite the enormous differences between France and Switzerland. The state is much less trusted than it is in Switzerland, but it is the people's state – for all its faults – in a way that it is perhaps not in Britain and there is a respect for the rituals of a uniform national education system that is one of the key symbols of a *République* of which people feel proud whatever they may think of the current government in power. This is one reason for the relatively high levels of trust in the current arrangements for assessing the French Baccalaureate despite some of its obvious problems (it is marked by conscripted teachers as part of their duties as civil servants, working to tight mark schemes under supervision in large halls, but with less training than that provided by English awarding bodies).

There was a huge controversy in France last year over the proposal by François Fillon, then minister of education, to introduce an element of coursework into the Baccalaureate. Lycée students went on strike and occupied their schools, and teachers marched in the streets. The proposal was withdrawn and Fillon, like most of his immediate predecessors, soon fell (the worst job in the world for any politician who wants to change anything is to be French minister of education). Why didn't they want some element of coursework? It wasn't because students didn't trust their teachers, as far as I could see. It was because the idea was felt to undermine the supposedly egalitarian nature of the French education system. Students from privileged backgrounds would be able to get help from home that was denied to others and would be unfairly advantaged. Travelling around,

as I do, in my car from one of my campuses to another, I listened to endless debates about this on French radio over many weeks. Only once in all that time did I hear a student voice in support of Fillon's proposal: someone tentatively saying that, yes, he thought he might perhaps be able to show rather better his real ability in mathematics if he were allowed to be assessed, at least in part, on what he knew he could do in situations where he wasn't under huge pressure from a timed written test.

The lesson from this episode in France is that it might be easier to maintain public trust in an examination system by choosing a system of assessment that has less real validity but more perceived reliability. It is not easy to persuade the public that coursework is a necessary part of a public assessment system, except in a subject such as art, and despite the strong assessment and curriculum arguments in its favour, the continued use of a (much reduced) coursework component has not helped the maintenance of trust in England's public assessment system. It is interesting that the most negative comments I have received from colleagues and parents about the IB assessment system also concern the internal assessment component and its moderation. Similarly, the main new element of the recently revised Swiss *maturité* (the main features of the qualification were retained, but there have been a number of new requirements) was the introduction of a major individual study which doesn't generate marks that but which has to be passed in order for the qualification to be awarded. It led last summer, in the first year of the new qualification, to a highly publicised case of alleged plagiarism at one of the Geneva secondary schools. This hit the headlines over a number of weeks and did not do a great deal to help to establish the credibility of what, educationally, is a valuable part of the new programme.

But I have drifted from my second main point which is about trust in relation to the government's involvement in the public assessment system. Let me return to Fukuyama. According to him

‘high trust’ societies, and thus by implication effective societies, are ones where there are strong and trusted intermediate institutions between government on the one hand, and small units like the family on the other. One of the effects of government policies and actions over the last 30 years in England has been to weaken the autonomy of some of these intermediate institutions – local government, judiciary, the notion of an independent civil service, universities, and, yes, examining bodies – and increase the power and control of central government. This has often been with the intention of increasing trust in the services being provided, via the establishment of all those accountability measures that Baroness O’Neill has been talking about. Its effect, however, has sometimes been the reverse. Either we need a British state that is more trusted – because it can set up institutions that come to be identified with the nation in the way that French people can feel proud of France’s national education system and qualifications because they can be dissociated in their minds from those currently in power – or we need the state to back off and let the intermediate institutions flourish once again. We may not be able to return to the golden age of the JMB that I have in the back of my memory – we have a different society, a different education system, and different needs – but we are a very long way off having a state that could be trusted, in the eyes of its citizens, with taking charge of a single national awarding system along the lines of the one run by the French ministry of education.

One of the problems of course is that we aren’t ‘citizens’. We are ‘subjects’, but no longer really ‘subjects’ of our wholly benign constitutional monarchy, but ‘subjects’ instead of an over-powerful government. We are moving, in Fukuyama’s words, from a ‘high trust’ to a ‘low trust’ society in which the state intervenes more and more, often with beneficent motives, but in doing so creates (and I quote) ‘distinct risks, since [state intervention] can all too easily undermine the spontaneous communities established in civil society’.

What this means, in Baroness O'Neill's words, is that we are replacing 'trust' with 'accountability'. It isn't, of course, that we don't need accountability. In the past we sometimes had lots of trust in things that weren't trustworthy and that may now be much more trustworthy than they used to be – even if, ironically, they may be less trusted – *because* of some of these accountability measures. What we need is the right kind of accountability that still leaves room for trust.

But let me move to my third point. This concerns the role of universities, a crucial issue for a conference taking place within the University of Cambridge and hosted by an awarding body that is still an integral part of it.

One of the strengths of the IB Diploma is its close links with universities. Chief examiners are almost invariably university academics and work in close partnership with their assistant chief examiners who are teachers. This has helped, I am sure, in establishing such a high level of credibility among universities for this qualification, although clearly this credibility is largely based on the intrinsic features of the qualification: the fact that it is a whole curriculum, its academic standards, together with the possibility of a fine discrimination among the very able that it offers to selectors. I have heard the criticism that university involvement in the IB exerts a conservative influence that is educationally unhelpful. There is of course a balance to be struck between what it is appropriate to provide for a particular phase of education, because of demands appropriate to that phase, and what is needed as a foundation for the following phase. Any attempt to re-involve universities more closely in the governance of public assessment in England would need to bear this in mind. The role of universities was clearer when A levels had a simpler function and were taken by a much smaller proportion of the population. The function of the *maturité suisse* is not dissimilar to that exercised by A levels at the time when I took them myself. It is a minority qualification targeted at the c. 20% of

the population who go to universities in Switzerland. The role of the general baccalaureate in France, though catering for a wider group, is not fundamentally dissimilar. It is easier to maintain trust in qualifications when they have a clear single purpose than when they serve a multitude of purposes and a wide ability range as they do in England. There may be very good reasons for having these types of qualification, but the more dispersed one's purposes and target groups are the more intrinsically difficult it can become to create trust.

My fourth point about trust is that it is most evident when there are high levels of teacher involvement in the process. The *maturité suisse* is trusted partly because it is wholly in the hands of teachers and, within a school, handled consistently: everyone does the same written exams, set by the teachers; everyone has the same type of orals, conducted by their teachers; everyone has one of their teachers as their personal moderator during the whole process; and final decisions in marginal cases are made in a meeting when all these teachers are gathered together. French secondary teachers have a high knowledge and understanding of the baccalaureate assessment arrangements because all of them at one time or another will have been instructed to take part, many of them year after year. The IB is of course a very different kind of system, using volunteer markers as with English awarding bodies. The world of the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO), however, is a relatively small one, despite being so geographically dispersed, by comparison with that of some English awarding bodies. The sense of teacher involvement in all aspects of IBO's work is very strong; my IB coordinators seem to have close direct links with people in the IBO Assessment Centre in Cardiff; people seem to feel that their voice can be heard; there is a sense of being part of a worldwide community with shared aims.

This takes me on to my fifth point. All the things that I have said about IBO could also be said in part about English awarding

bodies. They involve large numbers of teachers; they encourage feedback; they make great efforts to provide customer service. But the English national system is huge by comparison with that of the IBO or of a national qualification in a country like Switzerland with a population of only 7.5 million. The greater the size the more risks you run in terms of trust. The development of awarding bodies with wholly national roles, and the sense that a regional service that you automatically use, like the old JMB, has been replaced by a marketplace in which you shop around, has not enhanced trust even if it may have improved service. Competition and choice have been assumed to be an important part of the public assessment system in England. They play no part whatsoever in the public assessment systems of France and Switzerland. Ironically, it may be the case that, because of this element of choice in England, and also because of the regulatory mechanisms that have been put in place to ensure consistency within the marketplace, we have a better functioning assessment system than that in some other countries but at the same time less public trust in what we are doing. How we get out of that trap must be one of the key issues for this conference.

My sixth point – please keep going, there are only three more – concerns the degree of stability of an assessment system. The chief features of the Swiss *maturité* have been in place for over a hundred years. There are elements of the French baccalaureate that are also extremely old. Trust does not always cling to what is old and established hence we would not have always experienced all the revolutions, political, social, and cultural that we have experienced over the last 100 years. But where something is felt to be working and is continuing to be serving the purposes for which it was intended (for example the Swiss *maturité* as a university entrance qualification for a small minority of the population) it can acquire and retain a currency – and qualifications are currencies – which attracts trust.

This is where the instincts of this and previous English governments with regard to the retention of A levels, and even to a lesser extent GCSEs,⁴ are entirely understandable. Given the thirst for endless innovation and meddling by the state in so many areas there is a certain solace when one finds something that has been left alone.

But, of course, the system hasn't been left alone – for example we have seen the introduction of new AS levels⁵ – and it has been tinkered with because it was created to serve an educational world that no longer exists and has been looking increasingly unmanageable. And, of course, the White Paper earlier in the year promised a lot of further tinkering to tackle further identified weaknesses.⁶

Maintaining trust in a qualification is thus more difficult where key elements of the wider education system have radically changed and the qualification itself is constantly evolving. There is a strong case now in England for more radical change than what the government envisages, but given that levels of trust in our public assessment system are not what they used to be such change is always going to be extremely difficult if it is to enhance trust rather than diminish it further. There is also a great challenge facing both governments and schools in explaining to the public in simple terms what our qualifications structure is all about. As someone living abroad during the whole debate over the Tomlinson report I only dipped into the issues occasionally and found it extremely difficult a lot of the time to understand the proposals and counter-proposals. If there is ever to be a radical change to our qualification system along similar lines to those proposed by Tomlinson trust in the new arrangements is likely to depend heavily on their degree of simplicity and the clarity

⁴ The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) syllabuses replaced the old Ordinary Level syllabuses in 1986 and were first examined in 1988.

⁵ The Advanced Subsidiary (AS) levels involve courses that have half the weight and take half the time as an Advanced (A) level qualification.

⁶ A White Paper is a statement of government policy and proposals for the future, in this case on '14–19 Education and Skills'.

with which the purposes and features of the new arrangements are communicated.⁷

One feature of our public assessment system always mentioned by English parents when I ask them how much they trust the current system of qualifications is alleged 'grade inflation'. The proportions of the population in Switzerland gaining a *maturité* are remarkably consistent over time despite the fact, as I was assured the other weekend by the federal official responsible for the examinations centre I visited, assessment is entirely criterion-referenced and not normative. I know all the reasons that explain the rise in the proportions of the population gaining high grades in A levels and GCSEs and believe most of them. There have been major changes in the nature of A levels which are educationally disputable but nowhere have I seen evidence for an unequivocal 'dumbing down' or, at least, where there have been losses, there have also often been some corresponding gains. And yet, this rise in proportions gaining top grades is neither credible to a lay audience nor is it desirable in terms of the function of the A level qualification to ensure effective discrimination between candidates, especially at the top end of the attainment range. I sometimes have the perhaps unworthy thought that the main attraction of the IB diploma for many admissions tutors is not so much the quality of the overall IB programme but the way it makes a low-cost selection process a lot easier because of the extended nature of the IB diploma scale. All the suggestions for introducing finer discrimination in A levels that were discussed when I was working at QCA carried disadvantages, above all in terms of negative backwash effects on students' broader educational programme. The Advanced Extension Awards,⁸ which I was always

⁷ The Tomlinson Report on 14–19 curriculum and qualifications made radical recommendations which were mostly shelved by the Labour government that had commissioned it.

⁸ The Advanced Extension Award. This was an award aimed at the top 10% of A level candidates and of great value to a minority of pupils who needed to be

keen on, were proving educationally very valuable, but when I last heard of them were completely failing to serve any useful function in terms of providing data for university entrance simply because so few people were taking them.

My last two points are both quite short. First, I have been struck by how much easier it is for parents, students, and the public to grasp the idea of a qualification and to trust the assessment arrangements associated with it when the whole thing comes as a package. The IB diploma is a curriculum, not just a set of examinations. So are the French baccalaureate and the Swiss *maturité*. The difference between these and England's *à la carte* qualifications system – GCSEs, AS levels, A levels, and all those modules – and the IB diploma or the *maturité suisse* is a bit like the difference between the village store which is highly familiar and intimate, where the layout is easy to grasp, where you feel at home because you are known, and the large supermarket with its vastly superior but somewhat impersonal and rather confusing choice. Embarking on a programme, even though there are many choices within it, generates a greater sense of knowing where one is and where one is going than selecting qualifications from an *à la carte* list. When one is talking of trust, in a restaurant one knows well – if I may extend the metaphor – there can be advantages in the *table d'hôte*.

Second, and finally, there is one other crucial difference between the IB diploma and a public assessment system within a nation state. In the latter anything that goes wrong with the examinations is liable, and especially of course in England, to hit the headlines and undermine trust even when the problems are minor. IB diploma results, by contrast, only ever affect small minorities in the countries

stretched beyond their basic course. It was disproportionately taken by pupils at private schools and thus, for purposes of university admission, largely ignored by university admission officers keen not to be seen to be discriminating against state school applicants. It was introduced in 2002 but phased out following the introduction from 2008 of a higher A* grade at A level.

in which students take the examinations and will never be of interest to the national press. This is a blessed relief for which those working within the IBO must feel eternally grateful, although I must add that I am not aware of any major problems that would have been worth reporting even if they had been part of a national system. Incidentally, we also find that there is high trust among our parents and teachers with our International GCSE examinations (IGCSE) and results, partly because we ourselves have experienced few problems with them but maybe partly also because being abroad and not reading the British press daily we are likely not to pick up any of the scare stories that there might have been about UK-based awarding bodies.

As far as media coverage of assessment issues in England is concerned, I can think of a number of occasions when sections of the press did a disservice to the credibility of the country's public assessment system, through a sometimes careless and sometimes wilful failure to understand the issues (with a view to stimulating one of those exciting little panics that are so necessary to persuade bored readers that with each new day something fresh and interesting has happened in the world). In doing this they have on occasion made their own small contribution to pushing us out of Fukuyama's list of 'high trust' societies into his list of 'low trust' (but maybe 'high accountability') ones.

In conclusion, therefore, I have tried to identify some of the factors that are conducive to trust or mistrust with regard to public assessment systems: attitudes within the wider society, and in particular the degree of individualism and of deference to authority; the role of the state and of government in the assessment arrangements and how the effects of this can be both positive and negative, depending on attitudes towards the state and the nature of government; the relationship between universities and examinations; the degree of direct involvement by teachers and the sense of ownership of the system; the stability or otherwise of the arrangements and the

relationship between this and the stability or otherwise of the wider education system; the impact of the size of the school community being served by a public assessment system; the differences between a qualification based on a programme and an *à la carte* system; and finally, the contribution of the media.

I have started on the assumption that there have been and are problems of trust to be addressed in England's public assessment system. If that weren't so we wouldn't be having this conference. However, I have no hard evidence about the extent of this trust or mistrust. Indeed, I have a lot of qualitative evidence of a high level of trust on the part of many people. While I have focused on why there might be mistrust and what more we might do to increase trust I would not want to be adding to the problem that I have been trying to analyse. I have worked in the English and Scottish public assessment systems for many years, beginning as an O level and GCSE chief examiner for the London examinations board in the early 1980s and ending up as a senior official with national assessment responsibilities, successively, at the School Examinations and Assessment Council, the School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority. I have absolutely no doubt that the systems of paper development, marking, moderation, awarding, and customer service that were in place by the time I ceased to have these responsibilities in 2000 were vastly superior to the ones that I found when I started working in this area 20 years earlier. I would attribute this in part to the regulatory system that was put in place, and that I was so closely involved in, but even more to the spontaneous work of the awarding bodies themselves. There is much in place to suggest that we ought, in this area at least, to be one of Fukuyama's 'high trust' societies, and one in which there is a better balance between trust and accountability than the one we have at present. I very much hope that the discussions that follow on from this conference can start on this basis.

WHY, HOW, AND WHEN SHOULD WE ASSESS CHILDREN'S LEARNING?

The second article in this chapter was published on its website Corvinák by Mathias Corvinus Collegium in October 2025. It looks, in part through my own experience as pupil, teacher, examiner, headmaster, school governor, and national administrator, at different kinds of assessment and the advantages and disadvantages of their use in different circumstances. Often regarded as the most boring part of education, I point out how assessment can profoundly affect, both positively and negatively, not just students but also those responsible for assessment policy at a national level. I mention the two cases of two education ministers for whom I worked who lost their jobs when assessments went wrong or failed to meet with wide approval. The closest I got myself to paying the final penalty was the failure of a company, to which my agency had sub-contracted the work, to get the results of tests taken by every 11-year-old in the country to primary schools by the due date. Senior government officials made it clear to me and my chairman that, if the same were to happen again, it might not, in the late 1990s, involve silent removal by barge to the Tower of London followed by beheading, as in the days of Henry VIII, but at least the loss of a much-needed salary. The situation had been made worse by the fact that this was the year in which one of the Prime Minister's children was doing the tests. The following year we got it right.

Assessment is something we do in all aspects of our lives. We do annual assessments on the roadworthiness of our cars, we have medical check-ups, we examine the suitability of candidates applying for jobs, we determine guilt or innocence in courts, we assess the impact of a piece of legislation, we judge the pros and cons of

political parties before we cast our votes. For much of past history, in Europe, we even looked ahead to a ‘Final Judgement’ in which we would be assessed on how well we had lived our lives, an assessment whose result would determine our residence for all eternity in either heaven or hell.

In each case we (or God in the latter example) need to be clear why, what, and how we are assessing. In some types of assessment, the answers are straightforward. In others they can be complex and contested. Assessment in and of schools is very much in the latter category. Why and how it is done can have huge consequences for good or ill. This is above all true for the lives of those being assessed though, when a head teacher’s suicide following a negative school assessment launches a national debate about how assessments are reported and an education minister, for whom I had been an adviser, loses his job because of protests by teachers against the introduction of new tests, one sees the impact on the responsible adults as well.⁹

Three main types of assessment

The three main types of assessment in education, differentiated by their purposes, are (1) diagnostic or formative (‘formative’ meaning ‘designed to inform the way something is learned’), (2) summative, meaning assessment at the end of a phase of learning designed to show what has been learned during that phase, and (3) evaluative. Both diagnostic and summative assessments can also be used to

⁹ The English secretary of state for education, for whom the author worked, resigned in 1994 following a teacher boycott of new national tests for 14-year-olds which the Government had introduced. France’s minister of national education did so too in 2004, as discussed later in this essay. The head teacher sadly took her own life in 2023 following an inspection report – which was about to be published – which labelled her school as ‘Unsatisfactory’ as a result of administrative failings rather than the quality of the education it provided. This prompted a national outcry and debate about the suitability of such labels in inspection reports and led to changes in how reporting was conducted (Clarke & Ferrer, 2023).

evaluate the effectiveness of the educational programme on which they have been focused. I will look at each of diagnostic and summative assessment in turn, focusing on their use in schools, drawing where appropriate on my experience over the years in a range of educational roles, largely in England but also in Scotland, France, and Switzerland, and indeed on my own experience of being assessed.

I shall not be looking at evaluative assessments used to produce international league tables such as PISA. Their chief use is for political parties either to boost their reputations by showing how they have presided over an improved ranking or to attack their opponents when there has been a deterioration. Governments that need the excuse of a PISA ranking to start changing their educational arrangements have signally failed to make evaluative use of the kinds of assessments that they ought to have domestically and that will be my theme in this essay. PISA rankings have few direct implications for schools in a world in which, mercifully, education is one of the few areas where the nation state continues to reign supreme.

Diagnostic or formative assessment

In recent years secondary teachers in England have often been encouraged to give priority to curriculum and lesson planning over marking pupils' work. I find this misguided. I can understand how not having properly thought through one's teaching plan for part of the curriculum can leave one having to mark pupils' work that fails to meet the learning objectives one should have been setting. But both good lesson planning and checking on pupils' responses are needed. If one does not mark pupils' work on a regular basis one fails to see both collective misunderstandings – a widespread failure among pupils to get across the meaning of a new concept, for example – and the extent to which each individual is keeping up with the work and may need individual help.

It is, of course, in part a question of resources. The more hours that teachers have to teach, the fewer they will have for preparation and assessment. That is why allocation of scarce resources to classroom teachers – rather than to senior management, buildings, and equipment – should always have top priority. IT programmes that give feedback to users on spelling, punctuation, factual accuracy, and how to structure one's thoughts may help, but are no substitute for a word or written comment from a teacher with whom one has a human relationship and who knows the stage one is at in one's learning.

I was fortunate at school, in the subject – history – in which I went on to specialise, to have excellent teachers who not only aroused my interest in the past but pointed me towards a better understanding of the nature of the subject and how to write essays on historical issues. It was the almost complete absence of this when I went to university that was so striking. I was exposed at close hand to some of the most brilliant historians of the day, which was an education in itself, but as for guidance about my own assignments there was nothing.

It was with great satisfaction therefore, some years later, when I became a humanities tutor in Scotland for the UK's new Open University, that I came across an educational institution with a clear view of what the tutor-student relationship ought to be like and how diagnostic assessment should be done. Many of the students were able adults who, because of family background or poor schooling, had failed to receive a proper education when younger and were coming back into learning for the first time, alongside full-time jobs and family responsibilities. Not all could come to tutorials and assignments were submitted by post. The instructions to tutors were to make detailed comments on all parts of their work, including the use of English, explain the criteria by which one had given a particular grade and point out explicitly and precisely what they might have done differently to obtain the highest grade. For a tutor it was

time-consuming work, and not well-paid, but immensely satisfying to see over time the way in which it could lead to a transformation in the quality of a student's thinking and writing. It was that experience that finally made me realise that individual diagnostic or formative assessment was by far and away *the* most important kind of assessment, the one most capable of having a lasting effect on the quality of a student's learning.

When I was head of England's national curriculum and assessment agencies, our main assessment responsibility in relation to primary and lower secondary schools was to develop and administer compulsory national summative assessments at the end of the different phases of schooling, at ages 7, 11, and 14. Although we urged schools to ensure, by following the curriculum requirements, that pupils were prepared for these end of phase tests, our very clear message was that teaching with the next set of tests in mind was *not* their main function in the years leading up to them, not least because these tests were able only to sample the subject curricula on which they were based and because the results had no implications for individual pupils.

What was most important, we urged, was ongoing diagnostic assessment – informally through questioning pupils or through short tests and written exercises – across all the subjects of the national curriculum, not just the three that were subject to summative assessment. Our teams of subject experts were thus charged with providing guidance showing how diagnostic assessment might be used across all years and phases. The emphasis in this guidance, as the first and most essential step, was on clarifying the main aims and objectives within a subject which were being promoted through its programme of study. There was no point in undertaking assessments until one was clear what the outcomes of the study of this subject were intended to be at different stages in a child's schooling and within the various units into which the curriculum was being structured.

Assessment, we were emphasising, must therefore follow curriculum and not the other way round. The results of diagnostic assessment would inform any support needed either by the class as a whole or by individual pupils when facing comparable work in the future. As part of the school's ongoing evaluation of its curricular arrangements they might also help to shape how a particular unit of study would be taught on subsequent occasions.

Diagnostic tests of cognitive ability

One very distinctive form of diagnostic assessment which has been developed over the last forty years and is now widely used involves the administration of tests of cognitive ability across a whole year group within a school. Their purpose is to inform teachers of pupils' levels of cognitive development at a particular point in time with a view to identifying under-achievement and providing a baseline against which pupil achievement at a later date can be compared.

One of these tests whose use I encouraged in a school where I was a governor was PIPS (Performance Indicators in Primary Schools).¹⁰ This involves an individual assessment of each child at the beginning of the first year of schooling – at age 4 to 5 – and covering both cognitive skills and (through observation over a number of weeks) personal and social development. The results are compared at the end of the first year in order to see how much progress has been made, both individually and over the class or year group as a whole. This kind of assessment is probably what, more informally, the best teachers have always done, but like any large workforce teachers vary in their levels of effectiveness and systems

¹⁰ PIPS was developed by the University of Durham Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring (CEM) and is now available from Cambridge Assessment, as is MidYis mentioned below. There is a similar CEM adaptive computer-base assessment for 14–16-year-olds called YELLIS (Year Eleven Information System).

like this, as long as they do not become bureaucratic, can be very helpful in improving a school's performance.

Another such test is MidYis (Middle Years Information System), a test taken digitally by pupils aged 11 to 14 that assesses underlying ability and aptitude, and, in particular, the four areas of mathematics, vocabulary, non-verbal reasoning, and skills such as speed and accuracy. This is an adaptive test in which the computer automatically adjusts the level of questions based on the pupil's responses. The information provided enables teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses among their pupils, set targets for future attainment and adapt teaching to the range of needs identified.

Having baseline information of these kinds, across all of these systems, also allows the measurement of the value added by the school over a designated period of time, both to individuals and to whole cohorts of pupils. I will say more about this later.

Summative assessment

The main purpose of a summative assessment is to record some of the most important outcomes of learning at a particular point in time. The ones that people in my country England, for example, are familiar with are: at age 11, at the end of primary school, at which point when I was a child everyone was assessed to see whether they should go on to a grammar school, or to a technical or 'modern' school; at 16, the traditional school leaving age, when the first public examinations are taken across a range of subjects; and at 18, when examinations assess the smaller number of subjects in which students have chosen to specialise.

The main function of the assessments at 11 and 18 has been traditionally to select. Currently at 11 selection – by a wholly separate set of tests – only takes place in the small number of English local authorities which still have grammar schools. The statutory assess-

ment for all pupils at 11 in English, mathematics, and science is a summative one but done for evaluative and formative purposes. It has no effect on the future of the individual pupil, but shows the primary school how well it has done with the cohort of pupils leaving the school and gives the secondary schools receiving these pupils a baseline assessment to take into account in giving them the appropriate levels of support and challenge they will need in the next phase of their schooling.

At age 18, in England as in most other European countries, the public examinations determine whether students go on to university, training, or employment. As at the other ages, they also provide evaluative data on how successful a school has been, not just with individual students but also in the different subjects and across the school as a whole. This is particularly the case where, as in England, all these results are made public and can be turned into 'league tables' by the press and taken into account by parents choosing where to send their children.

*Summative assessment:
for and against*

Summative assessment, especially of the kind that I have just been describing at 16 and 18, has its supporters and its opponents, with few people wanting to abolish it altogether but with deep disagreements – which have been smouldering for many decades – on how much of it one should have and what form it should take. The main argument for the traditional summative assessment, based on timed, written examinations taken by everyone in a country at the same time on the same day and assessed according to tightly defined criteria, is that it has high reliability, that is that it ensures that each candidate is treated in exactly the same way as any other. Its critics argue that it may have high reliability but that it has low validity, in

the sense that a short-timed examination can only sample a small part of a syllabus that has been studied over a number of years and that trying to assess the outcomes of such study in an artificial and stressful environment misses out on much of what the student might have learned.

The supporters of traditional summative assessment, of whom I am one, would also argue that a certain amount of stress is not a bad thing, that its negative consequences can be exaggerated, and that it is training for an adult life in which hard work, deadlines, and concentrated effort are an essential component. Critics are more concerned about students' mental health. England's current Secretary of State for Education, for example, following a survey where many students reported that they found examinations 'stressful', has argued for reducing the time spent on them for the sake of young people's 'well-being' (Johnston & Wood, 2025).

Those who take this view, as well as reducing the length and demands of examinations, often favour greater weight being given to other forms of assessment such as coursework undertaken in school and assessed either by student's teachers or by external examiners. This, they argue, makes the assessment more valid. Their opponents, such as myself, retort that this is all well and good, but that the main purpose of the examination is selection and that this is made less reliable and more unfair the more it becomes possible for what is being assessed to become someone else's work (not least as a result of the increasing availability of AI). This is an important point as trust in the fairness of an assessment system is a crucial commodity, varies from one country and education system to another and over time, and is highly dependent on the extent to which assessments are perceived to be both reliable and valid, with a lack of reliability being what users fear most (N. Tate, 2005).

Support for summative assessment through timed examinations is not just confined to the minority of traditional – and often

older – teachers who want to cling on to existing arrangements. When France's minister for national education, François Fillon, decided in 2004 to introduce an element of assessed coursework into the French Baccalaureate, lycée students went on strike and occupied their schools, and teachers marched in the streets. The proposal was eventually withdrawn and Fillon, like most of his immediate predecessors in the role, soon fell. This was the second education minister in 10 years to whom I had been an adviser who had been forced to resign following teacher protests about tests. I hasten to assure readers that there is no visible causal connection between my advisory role and these regrettable events.

Critics of summative assessment via timed examinations are also sometimes keen to limit its role by developing assessment and reporting arrangements that embrace the whole range of students' achievements, including all the competences that students develop during their schooling, not just in their academic work but in the wider life of the school and in their extra-curricular activities. During my time as head of England's school assessment agencies in the 1990s we gave limited support to a major initiative of this kind promoting the use of what was called a National Record of Achievement. It failed to have a large take-up, partly perhaps because of the limitations of our support but mainly because employers often preferred to gather the information themselves via their own recruitment tools (Kodz et al., 1997).

More recently I have been asked for my views of an initiative being put together by a group of international schools called the 'Coalition to Honour All Learning' designed to encourage universities to take into account a much wider portfolio of achievement when offering places on university courses (Coalition to Honour All Learning, n.d.). Their target in particular is the many universities that offer places solely on the basis of examination grades. I have wished it well, as recording these experiences and competences at school level

can lead them to be encouraged and regarded highly – and they are very important aspects of education – and can discourage schools from falling into the trap of giving priority over everything else to examination results. I also feel that it may be good for the student himself or herself to have thought about and recorded all that they have achieved while at school and to have this verified. I cannot be optimistic, however, that busy university admissions officers will pay it a huge amount of attention.

Value-added assessment

The most important way in which data from summative assessment can be used for diagnostic and evaluative purposes is when it is linked to a prior assessment that, when compared with the summative assessment, is able to show how much value had been added by the school during the intervening period. When I was chief executive of England's School Curriculum and Assessment Authority, we commissioned the first major national survey – the Value Added National Project – into the potential use of value-added measures. This was partly in reaction to the hostility of head teachers to the publication of school league tables, based on the raw data from England's new national tests, which failed to recognise that schools at the bottom of the table, with a cognitively weak pupil intake, might well be doing a better job with their pupils than a school at the top of the table, with a very strong one, i.e. might be *adding more value*.

The project's report raised the profile of the concept of value-added measurement, which was widely welcomed by head teachers as an addition (or, as many would have preferred, alternative) to league tables based on raw examination results. It led to more and more schools using assessments such as the three I mentioned earlier for value-added purposes. Although England never introduced the full system of value-added across all phases that had been recom-

mended, it does currently require schools to calculate value-added measures for each individual pupil and the school as a whole based on a comparison of test results at age 11 – the baseline assessment – with performance in the public examinations at 16.

My own direct experience with these measures in the two schools in England and Switzerland where I was head and a third school in which I was a Governor has been with the A-level Information Service (ALIS) scheme which uses a computer-based adaptive test of developed abilities taken at 16 comparing it with the A-level or International Baccalaureate examination results at 18. The comparison of the two shows the extent to which value has been added, or not, at the levels of the individual, examination subject and year group. Where the baseline-predicted outcome across all students in a subject is significantly higher than the actual one this is a signal that there are issues with the teaching of that subject that need to be addressed.

In one of the three schools where I poured annually over these data a significant discrepancy kept on recurring in a particular subject. Students in that subject were doing considerably worse than in other related subjects for reasons that could not be explained by anything other than how they had been prepared for the examination. The problem repeated itself in successive years. Senior staff kept the matter under close review, the subject department concerned was required to change its teaching methods, a new head of department was appointed and results eventually began to improve. In some schools the use of value-added measures in ways like this has been a significant factor in raising overall standards of attainment right across the curriculum.

Assessment is a means to an end, not an end in itself

I have always supported the continued use of timed written examinations, as providing a stimulus to individual pupils to work hard

at their studies. I have also, as head and governor of schools, seen how important it is never to give the impression that doing well in examinations is the main end of schooling.

Having had two grandchildren take their A-level examinations at age 18 this summer and another one take her GCSE examinations at age 16 I have been aware of how all-absorbing the experience can be not just for the student but for the surrounding family. The best schools manage to keep this in perspective, ensuring that students are both helped in managing the work involved in preparing for examinations and encouraged to maintain a rich programme of extra-curricular educational activities alongside it. At one school, where I was a governor, students who, throughout their final year, had continued to throw themselves into meeting targets in other activities were also – reassuringly, but perhaps not surprisingly – those with the highest academic results. The challenge presented by examinations in this case strengthened this determination, not the reverse.

I have also in recent years been impressed by how the growing use of value-added has strengthened the determination of head teachers whose examination results may look far from outstanding but which show outstanding progress in relation to the low levels of attainment of their pupils at entry. Far from encouraging complacency this can inspire to ever higher levels of achievement. Similarly, it has been good to see previously complacent schools – those in nice middle-class areas – suddenly realise that, though their examination results may be in the top quartile, they are in the bottom quartile in terms of the value they have added.

I remain confident therefore of the power of the kinds of summative and value-added assessments I have discussed to contribute to the fundamental aims of education, and above all to support the knowledge-rich curriculum on which an education should be based. Even more important than all these, however, I would continue to prioritise the daily informal diagnostic and formative assessment

of individual pupils. This should be at the centre of a school's work. Nothing can beat the feeling that there is someone who cares about one's progress, who knows one's strengths and weaknesses, and is there to help one overcome any difficulties one might have in one's learning. Without this something significant would be missing from the very considerable benefits of all the other kinds of assessment I have been discussing.

IDENTITIES AND THEIR ROLE IN EDUCATION

I have spent much of my time, when writing on education, thinking about the way schools can and should, and in some cases should not, contribute to the development of pupils' sense of identity. My main interest, as the head of England's curriculum and assessment body in the 1990s, was with the curriculum's potential contribution to the formation of a national identity, particularly through the history curriculum but also through literature and the arts, citizenship education, and the whole life of the school.

My aim was not to produce a generation of earnest patriots – not that this would necessarily have been unwelcome – but to provide pupils with the knowledge and experiences that might give them a sense of belonging to a wider community towards which they had duties and whose future development they had some power to shape, not least through the ballot box. These assumptions proved controversial as the first essay in this section 'History and national identity' explains. I was disappointed, but not wholly surprised, when in 2008 three-quarters of teachers in a poll agreed that it was their responsibility to warn their pupils not to feel good about their country (Telegraph, 2008). It is this distaste for one's own that Roger Scruton called *oikophobia* (distaste for one's own) and which I analyse further in the second item in this section.

HISTORY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY¹*Preamble*

While preparing to write this article I have been reading the accounts of two lives that spanned the twentieth century: the French writer Simone de Beauvoir, and the English art historian and Soviet spy Anthony Blunt. Both were born during the first decade of the century and both died in the 1980s. Both their lives were shaped, at least in part, by a quest for identity. In both cases this involved a rejection of the identity prepared for them by their upbringing and the gradual development of alternative identities that, themselves, also later came under review. In *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958), *La Force de l'âge* (1960), and *La Force des choses* (1963), Simone de Beauvoir recounts a bourgeois Catholic upbringing against which, as an adolescent, she came to react; the subsequent development of an individualism which led her to feel that it was up to her, and her alone, to shape her own destiny irrespective of the constraints of custom and tradition; and then the gradual awakening, under the pressure of public events in the 1930s and early 1940s, of a sense of identity with the exploited and oppressed of the world and a feeling that her own life would only have meaning through playing an active part in this wider context. The trajectory of Anthony Blunt's life was, in some ways, not dissimilar: a reaction against the strict Protestantism of his parents; a wish to break out of what was felt to be the suffocating conformity of English middle-class life; an embracing of communism, in the face of the fascist threat of the 1930s and as a reassuring substitute for the religious certainties he had

¹ First published in M. Roberts (Ed.), (2004), *After the Wall: History Teaching in Europe since 1989*, Körber-Stiftung, pp. 28–38.

rejected; and the resulting slow disillusionment with communism in the light of subsequent events.

Both individuals had received the best education their societies could provide: Simone de Beauvoir at a Catholic girls' school in Paris and the Sorbonne; Anthony Blunt at a leading English boarding school and Cambridge. In both cases what is striking, however, is how small a role formal education played in the shaping of their identities. It gave them, in both cases, something to react against. It also gave them some of the tools with which to do this. But what most shaped their identities were family influences, friendships, reading unconnected with formal education, the pressure of events, and a *Zeitgeist* to which formal education contributed only a small part.

One begins one's discussion of education and identity therefore with a sense of humility about the limited role that schooling is likely to play in shaping the development of people's consciousness. Formal education takes place in a context over which we have little control and which develops in unpredictable ways. Humility, however, does not mean an abdication of responsibility. Formal education, at the very least, provides pupils with the skills and knowledge, including historical knowledge, with which to shape their own identities. It should also encourage habits of thought and analysis that aim to make people more rather than less rational beings. In addition, in liberal – as opposed to libertarian – societies state education is also not morally neutral about the kinds of identities that emerge. The purposes of education include both the transmission of what one generation values sufficiently to want to pass it on to the next and the promotion of attitudes necessary for the maintenance and strengthening of a liberal society within a particular state. There is no place here for moral relativism. If one's teaching leads one's pupils to become racists or fascists, or to feel that they have no duties towards their neighbours and towards their country, then one's teaching, and one's teaching of history, will have failed.

The rest of this article looks at national identity in the context of all the many different identities which we might develop, at why national identity is of such interest at the present time and why in some countries the very idea is under threat, at why the fostering of national identity, in certain ways, is important, and at how the debate over national identity has helped to shape the development of history teaching in England over the last 10 years.

Multiple identities

The reaction against the extremes of European nationalism during the first half of the twentieth century, and against some of the continuing manifestations of ethnic nationalism during its second half, has made it difficult in many countries to conduct a calm debate about the place of national identity in education. It is often assumed, wrongly, (1) that nationalism is bound to imply a sense of ethnic or national superiority, (2) that patriotism is the same as nationalism, and therefore undesirable, and (3) that having a sense of national identity is the same as being a nationalist. It is also often assumed that when one talks about the importance of fostering a sense of national identity one is implying that this is the only, or at least most important, sense of identity that one might have. This is not necessarily the case. Most of us have multiple other identities, as members of families, occupational groups, local communities, faith groups, political parties, or cultural minorities, and these are often quite compatible with a sense of belonging to our national community, to Europe and indeed the world. In the United Kingdom, for example, people can be English, Welsh, or Scottish, and also British, as well as being Europeans and citizens of a world community. It is also often assumed that national identities are or have to be monolithic. In fact, because they exist alongside other identities, they take many different forms and involve many different sets of

associations for different individuals. A Muslim living in England, with roots in Pakistan, for example, may not feel English and may be unsure which cricket team to support when England is playing Pakistan, but may have as strong a sense of British civic identity and as strong a feeling of commitment to the community in which he plans to spend the rest of his life as someone who can trace his English ancestry back to the Middle Ages. The two come together in a common civic space that is the focus for duty and loyalty. It is the responsibility of formal education, in liberal states, both to foster a sense of identity with this common civic space and to help to induct young people into the wider cultural identities within a particular country, giving due prominence to the majority culture where it exists but due recognition of minority cultures as well.

*National identity:
a controversial issue*

The place of formal education in the shaping of national identity has been a major issue in a number of education systems in recent years. It has been a particularly controversial issue for a number of reasons. Some of these are specific to certain countries, such as the issues facing the successor states of the Soviet Union or those states that have defined themselves overwhelmingly in ethnic rather than civic terms. Others are more widely shared.

First, there is the debate about 'globalisation'. Putting aside that people disagree as to what 'globalisation' means, there is a growing awareness that the world of the Internet, the world in which multinational companies shift their production from one continent to another as economic circumstances change, the world in which there is a McDonald's in every Amazonian village and every Tibetan hill-farmer watches the latest Australian soap opera (or so it seems), is a brave new world with major implications for the various subordinate

identities, including national identities, to which we feel attached. 'Globalisation' has also accentuated the cosmopolitan disdain for the particularisms of their own societies that was already common among intellectuals of a certain kind, although this may be more of a problem in England where a strain of self-loathing, very apparent in the life of Anthony Blunt, has been a feature of intellectual life since the First World War. In addition, there is now an increasingly mobile international elite which is equally at home in Stockholm, Geneva, Los Angeles, and Hong Kong, highly influential, often not very attached to any particular locality, and with interests very different from the majority of human kind who continue to be deeply rooted to a particular spot.

Second, an element in this concern is that so many of these 'global' influences are US influences. Part of the sense of threat to national identity in some parts of the world is the feeling that US cultural products and ways of thought are in danger of squeezing out the indigenous to an unacceptable degree. When some young children, as in Britain, are more familiar with the telephone numbers of US emergency services, through viewing US films, than they are with those of their own country, the role of schools in developing a sense of Britain's distinctive identity becomes an even more pressing one.

Third, in Europe, the expansion of the European Union, the limitations on national freedom that membership entails, and the debate about the various constitutional options facing the Union, have highlighted the nature of national identity. Although the initial effect of the EU, as in England, has often been to stimulate programmes of European education, on the assumption, sometimes mistakenly, that an education for national identity could either be taken for granted or was unnecessary, in time the implications of Europe for the re-definition of national identity have also emerged as an issue.

Fourth, many countries have experienced demands from their constituent regions, or in some cases nations, for greater autonomy.

The consequent devolution of powers to regional governments or parliaments has helped to revive or consolidate identities other than to those of the central nation state. In doing so it has raised the question of the nature of the latter, both for those in the areas to which powers have been devolved and for those in the rest of the country. One of the features of the history curriculum in the United Kingdom over the last 10 years has been the increased emphasis in England's national curriculum on events in the 'peripheral' parts of the British Isles, and the importance of studying these in their own right, and a similarly increased emphasis in the curricula of Scotland and Wales on the histories of their own countries.

Fifth, there has been the impact of increased migration. This has accentuated issues about the nature of national identity in particular countries, and especially the extent to which national identity is both a civic and a cultural matter. In England it has helped to lead to more open discussion about the distinction between British identity, which is essentially civic in nature, and English identity, which is more cultural although not necessarily ethnic. The tension in many countries has been between reasserting the centrality of a national identity which all must share in order for the state and the society to cohere and giving recognition to the cultural wishes of minority groups. England at times has paid more attention to the latter than to the former, in a spirit that has mixed both clear-headed liberal concerns and an irrational post-imperial self-abasement. The first version of England's history national curriculum in the early 1990s was criticised by one teacher on one of the working groups that I chaired for its 'racism' in giving a central place to a chronological study of British history. Such had been the generous, but misguided, identification with the minority that the interests of the majority, and of the country and of the state, had been ignored.

Sixth, and finally, there has been the impact of post-modernism and other related intellectual currents. If there is no objective

truth and no objective values and everything is a construct to be dismantled and reconstructed, according to the whims of the moment, into whatever one cares to make of one's life, the notion of communities rooted in time and passing on their traditions from one generation to another begins to appear anachronistic. I was involved in a major national controversy over national identity and education in England in the mid-1990s. One of the criticisms levelled against my view that one of the purposes of schools was to help people shape their sense of national identity was that cultural transmission of any kind was unacceptable, that young people should be helped only to create themselves afresh in whatever ways they saw fit, and that it was no function of schools to promote one particular kind of identity, whether national or otherwise, rather than another. This kind of ethical and cultural relativism is characteristic of societies that have moved beyond liberalism to a libertarianism that denies the state any role, beyond the most minimalist ones, in the promotion of particular ways of life. It is a viewpoint that is remote from the daily realities of schools, but its presence in certain quarters inhibits discussion about how formal education can help young people develop a sense of national identity.

*Why the fostering of national identity
through formal education is important*

Many nineteenth-century liberal thinkers, whose thinking still influences our attitudes and practices, took it as axiomatic that a sense of national identity could play a key role in promoting social solidarity and the stability of a liberal political order. I am thinking of people such as Benjamin Constant, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill. Like their twentieth-century successors, and perhaps above all the great twentieth-century liberal Isaiah Berlin, these thinkers inherited the Enlightenment's belief in the moral and rational unity

of mankind while rejecting the corollary that the end of human history was the achievement of some kind of universalist order in which particular and local affinities had been transcended.

A consensus based on their views that might be acceptable in all liberal societies would begin with a recognition that a sense of belonging to one's nation or nations – most people in the United Kingdom, for example, have more than one – was in principle a good thing. It would be seen to be a good thing because it forced us all to recognise that we are not just individuals, that we belong to a wider community or communities to which we have duties and within which we have rights, that we have a particular responsibility towards other members of this community (although our responsibilities are not confined to it), that as a community we share many moral values, and that we have a particular duty to handle differences and conflict within the community according to the democratic processes that we have collectively agreed. Such a consensus would also reject the kind of pathological nationalism that is inimical to the liberal virtues of toleration and respect for others and that has done so much to give the idea of national identity a bad name. It would, in addition, involve an inclusive view of national identity that respected diversity and difference of opinion and that, while showing a pride in the mainstream or majority traditions of the society, also actively supported the maintenance of minority cultures where that was what members of those cultures wished.

But why is this important? First, because it would be one of the most effective ways of encouraging young people to feel a sense of belonging to and responsibility for the civic society of which they are members, thus helping to tackle the creeping 'civic disengagement' which has been a recent feature of some western societies. Second, because the sense of belonging to a national community continues to be one of the few lodestars left in people's lives at a time of rapid change and flux. One advantage of the nation state is that it can

help to provide additional meaning to people's lives, above all by reflecting in the public sphere some of those values which people feel to be the defining qualities of their own being. In her posthumous work *L'Enracinement* (1949), Simone Weil, a Jew and anti-fascist, writing in exile during the Second World War, lamented the way in which the French state had both fatally weakened regional loyalties and failed to replace them with a worthwhile central focus of loyalty, thus imprisoning French people in a sterile individualism that was a major reason for the country's catastrophic collapse in the face of the German invasion in 1940. Third, it is important because attempts to weaken a sense of national identity are just as likely to lead to an extreme nationalist reaction as to the kind of 'brotherhood of humanity' sentiment that some utopians feel is all we need. It is interesting that some of the most pro-European countries in the European Union are those, unlike Britain, with the most clearly defined sense of national identity, a sense of national identity that is so confident about itself that it is quite happy to live with multiple identities.

National identity and England's national curriculum

What should all this mean in practice in schools? First, it means knowledge about one's country and its history, geography, economy, and culture. In England it means giving priority, as our national curriculum introduced after 1988 largely did, to the study of British history (in the context of Britain's relationship with continental Europe and the world), to the English literary heritage, to the English language and to the study of the Christian religion and the Judaeo-Christian roots of our shared values. This may sound obvious, but was at times controversial. I have mentioned the criticism, which was a minority one, that the history curriculum was too

Anglocentric. The concentration on the study of Christianity was also controversial, the contrary view being that all religions should have equal weight. The English literature curriculum also came in for the predictable criticism that it focused too much on dead white English males. Even insisting that the new national tests for 11- and 14-year-olds had to be taken in English by all pupils was contested at one point by some local authorities wishing to produce Urdu, Punjabi, and other translations. Giving priority to all these elements, as an essential part of the formation of citizens of the country, did not, however, imply that the culture, language, literature, history, and religions of other countries were somehow inferior. One studies England and Britain, in all their diversity, and one learns through the English language, because that is where we are and who we are.

Second, it means developing the values and attitudes necessary for the successful functioning of communities: concern for others, compassion, self-discipline, restraint, concern for the truth, enterprise. The way schools function and the way subjects are taught can all contribute to these ends. History makes a particular contribution through its subject matter, through its truth-seeking nature and through the procedures it uses to cope with disagreements about both facts and values.

It is interesting that neither the first nor the second versions of England's national curriculum, introduced in the early and mid-1990s, explicitly referred to the fostering of a sense of national identity. As a purpose behind some of the provisions of the national curriculum, in particular in relation to history, this objective had however been implicit. When the national curriculum came up for its second review, in the late 1990s, this was remedied. The first two versions of the national curriculum had been rightly criticised for telling teachers what to teach without telling them why they had to teach it. The third version therefore included rationales for every

subject of the curriculum as well as general statements of the aims of the curriculum and of the values underpinning it. For the first time it was specifically stated that 'the school curriculum should contribute to the development of pupils' sense of identity through knowledge and understanding of the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural heritages of Britain's diverse society and of the local, national, European, Commonwealth, and global dimensions of their lives'. The content of the history curriculum had not changed, though it had been slimmed down and stated in more general terms in response to criticisms that the national curriculum overall was both too large and too prescriptive. But the reasons why history was a compulsory part of this curriculum were now clearer and this gave new pointers to how the subject should be taught.

At the same time an additional subject called 'Citizenship' was added, compulsory for 11–16-year-olds and recommended for 5–11-year-olds. The purpose of this was to help young people 'become informed, thoughtful, and responsible citizens who are aware of their duties and rights' and to 'encourage respect for different national, religious, and ethnic identities'. It was assumed either that the new subject, where separately taught, would be taught, at least in part, by history teachers or that much of it would be taught through history lessons. Where the latter is happening, this is giving history teachers another nudge to consider ways in which their subject can help to develop young people's identities, including their national identity.

The more openly didactic purposes of 'Citizenship' – one of its aims is specifically to encourage young people to play an active part in their communities – differ from those of the history curriculum, with its overwhelming emphasis on the pursuit of knowledge and truth. The two, however, are not incompatible. The notion, once popular among history teachers in England, that history should be taught 'for its own sake' was never a carefully considered one. Everything we do in education is value-laden, including the choice of history,

rather than any other, as a compulsory school subject. History is taught, as it is written, within a particular context of time and space. It should both be taught and written in ways that will enable people in that context of time and space to understand themselves better and be clearer about what they wish to do with their lives. This includes, while it lasts, making sense of the nation state that still remains the focus of so many of our aspirations.

EDUCATION AND THE NATION STATE ²

The second article in this section, while covering some of the same ground, also discusses the other main issue concerning identity in education – the attempts, most pronounced over the last decade in the West, and in particular since 2020, to use school education in the service of ‘identity politics’ with a view to privileging the interests of alleged ‘victims’ – sexual minorities, women, transgender people, those deemed to belong to an imagined ‘global majority’ and ‘people of colour’ – against those of their alleged ‘oppressors’, most notably men, heterosexuals, and white people.

Readers will notice a marked difference in the tone and emphasis of this article by comparison with that of the previous one. During the 20 years between the two articles 15 million people had immigrated into the UK, changing the balance between majority and minority populations in ways that, in the author’s opinion, greatly increased the importance of prioritising in schools the national identity that all pupils need to have in common and of doing so, unapologetically, at the expense of subordinate identities.

² First published in J. Williams & R. Fodor (Eds.), *Reclaiming Classical Education*, MCC Press, 2025, pp. 111–130.

*‘Each country known or unknown
to me is as dear to me as my own’*

This is what a former student, in a response to a questionnaire sent out in 1946 by the International School of Geneva, said he had learned to feel as a result of his time at that school. It was cited over 60 years later by one of the authors of a symposium on international education, not just as moving evidence of the persistence of international-mindedness among young people following the Second World War but as the basis of the author’s wish that schools might ‘[turn] out every year ... thousands of students’ with similar feelings (McKenzie, 2011, p. 171). It is a wish made with the best of intentions, but is it one we should try to realise? In the unlikely event that we were to succeed in educating large numbers of children to feel that all the countries of the world are as dear to them as their own, would this be an unalloyed benefit? Do we really subscribe to the egalitarianism, universalism, utopianism, and – let me be frank – sentimentalism and lack of adult judgement implicit in this aspiration?

My aim in this chapter is to show why such an aspiration would *not* be an appropriate objective for a liberal education. I look first at how and why the nation state and education for national identity came to be regarded as at best something to be downplayed and at worst something to be ashamed of. I then suggest reasons that the nation and nation state should be at the centre, not the periphery, of our concerns as individuals and citizens and at the heart of our objectives as educators. I conclude with thoughts about both what education for national identity might involve and what it ought not to involve. I shall use the term ‘liberal education’ as this is how the kind of education that is now sometimes called ‘classical’ has traditionally been known and is still known in England. The adjective derives from the Latin *liberalis*, pertaining to a free man, and a ‘liberal

education', a phrase in continuous use from the sixteenth century onwards, being one worthy of such a man and 'directed to general intellectual enlargement and refinement; not narrowly restricted to the requirements of technical or professional training'.³

My interest in education for national identity is longstanding, going back to the 1990s when England was introducing a national history curriculum focused primarily, but not exclusively, on the core elements of British history. As head at that time of England's national curriculum body, I kept on hearing that some teachers were unhappy about such an emphasis, even calling it 'racist'. The idea that British history for children in English schools could be regarded in this way shocked me and I began to argue publicly not just for the centrality of British history in England's school curriculum but also for the wider responsibility of schools to provide children with the means to develop their sense of identity with the nation and the nation state in which they lived. My critics, at least within the education system, appeared to outnumber my supporters, describing my views as 'neo-racist', 'neo-conservative', 'cultural imperialist', and (the one I took as a badge of honour) 'cultural restorationist'.⁴

Oikophobia

Underneath all this, I sensed the presence of what Roger Scruton had called the 'disease' of 'oikophobia' (an abnormal fear of one's home), which he saw as common among intellectuals since the

³ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1971, entry for 'liberal'. The term 'liberal', used politically, does not have quite the same negative connotations in England, even among critics of 'liberalism', as it does with some people in the USA. 'Classical education' would normally be assumed to refer in England only to an education in Latin and Greek.

⁴ A measured and thorough analysis of the debate around these issues in one Western country, and which is critical of views expressed in this chapter, can be found in Phillips, 1997.

Enlightenment: a distrust, dislike, or rejection of things close to one and, in this case, a self-hatred with regard to England's identity and inherited culture (Scruton, 1993).

Since that time, this distaste for the nation state, Western civilisation, and traditional values has intensified to such an extent that it is now apparent that we have acquired a progressive elite, concentrated, in particular, in education, the media, public bodies, and cultural institutions but also widespread in the corporate world, imbued with these attitudes and deeply censorious of those who dare oppose it. Its view of the world is often wildly detached from that of the majority but endlessly disseminated because of the minority's control of major engines of transmission like schools, universities, and mass media. The philosopher John Gray sees parallels with the intelligentsia of late Tsarist Russia, which, through similar self-loathing, undermined the foundations of Russian society, preparing the ground for a Bolshevik regime that lost no time in turning on them as its first victims (Gray, 2023, pp. 69–70, 76–77).⁵

Oikophobia helps to explain many recent phenomena. It explains why when a national UK newspaper surveyed the attitudes of a sample of 300 teachers in 2008, it found that three-quarters agreed with the statement that it was their responsibility to warn pupils *not* to feel good about their country, a finding complemented by a 2023 survey of 1,168 15–18-year-olds in England, of which 69% stated that they had been taught at school that Britain used to be a racist country and 42% that it is currently a racist country (Staff reporter, 2008; Nadler, 2023).

It explains the removal in 2024 from the walls of a leading English private school of the name of Sir Walter Raleigh – a national hero who helped to save England from the Spanish Armada, author of

⁵ On early twenty-first century progressive elites, mostly in the USA and the UK, see among others: Lind, 2020; Goodhart, 2017; Goodwin, 2023.

one of the most memorable poems in the English language, and a man never personally involved in the slave trade – because, according to the sanctimonious statement from the head teacher, he ‘no longer represent[ed] the values and inclusive nature of the school’ (Codd, 2024).⁶

It explains the proposal in 2021 by a New Zealand government working group to give equal weight within the school *science curriculum* to Māori ‘ways of knowing’ and the decision by the Royal Society of New Zealand to place under investigation a distinguished scientist for daring to oppose this assault on the scientific principles on which modern civilisation is based (T. Young, 2021). It explains the absurd self-flagellation of the director of England’s Royal Botanical Garden in 2020 in apologising for having collected plants from around the world at a time when Britain had a global empire and for thus having turned the Botanical Garden into a ‘beacon of privilege and exploitation’ (Sumption, 2023). Finally, to show that there are collective manias at work, it explains the decision, made with lemming-like simultaneity, by many head teachers of English private schools to review their curriculum in 2020 in light of the death of a man at the hands of the police 4,000 miles away in a country with a history and culture different from that of England (Boycott-Owen, 2020).

This is the situation into which oikophobia (plus, in the last case, a lamentable failure of nerve) has led us. Why has this kind of thing happened, at least all over the Anglosphere and sometimes beyond? This question will require unravelling if we are to learn how it can be combatted and how an education that enables children to develop their sense of national identity can be constructed amidst what sometimes feels like the ruins we have inherited.

⁶ N.B. The passive-aggressive use of ‘inclusive’ to justify an act of exclusion.

*The origins of oikophobia (1):
the Enlightenment – universalism
and individualistic liberalism*

As Scruton suggested, when coining his use of oikophobia, some of the deep origins of this turning away from the nation state and from our inherited culture can be found in aspects of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. If one is developing a philosophy that defines what all men have in common, and if one believes in universally valid moral principles, one is likely to be less concerned about local customs and laws that have grown up over the centuries to respond to the needs of particular communities. If one sees everything through the prism of ‘reason’, one is likely to be less understanding and less tolerant of the way deep feelings and attachments arising from distinctive historical traditions can shape a people’s sense of identity. The Enlightenment, in some of its forms, is thus a distant source of contemporary globalism that aims to replace aspects of national governance with transnational institutions, ‘narrow-minded’ national sentiments with globalist values, and national citizenship with global citizenship. This is both an economic and a political project involving rules, powers, and institutions that reduce the authority of national governments, limit the workings of democracy, and impose progressive values on majority populations that, left to themselves, would reject them (Furedi, 2022).

The strand of individualistic liberalism that emerges from the Enlightenment is similarly a potential threat to national identity. If our social, economic, political, and cultural *Weltanschauung* is centred on the individual and his aspirations and human rights, and we believe that these rights are universally valid and enforceable supranationally, we are bound to downplay the role of traditional social units such as family, tribe, and nation. The purpose of politics in such a world becomes primarily one of supporting individuals,

giving their needs priority even when they clash with those of the communities to which they belong. The consequent increase in diversity to which this leads, a defining characteristic of the 'liberal project' according to Patrick Deneen, makes more difficult 'the civic fostering of a common weal' on which a coherent nation state depends (Deneen, 2018, p. 166).

*The origins of oikophobia (2):
moral, cultural, and
epistemological relativism*

Different currents of relativism also help to shape a *Zeitgeist* unfavourable to the nation state. Moral relativism, with its proximate origins in Nietzsche, undermines the sense that our own moral codes deserve greater attention and loyalty than those of any other group. Cultural relativism makes it impossible any longer to feel that Western civilisation is preferable to that of other peoples, even if our instincts continue to tempt us into feeling that aspects of some other cultures do not merit unlimited respect. Epistemological relativism, emerging out of what John Gray sees as hyper-liberalism's vulgarisation of some perfectly acceptable versions of postmodernism and post-structuralism, undermines the credibility of traditional narratives, queries the very possibility of truth, and, *in extremis*, leads to the notion that individuals and groups can have their own 'truths' and 'lived experience' which we are required to respect (Gray, 2023, p. 111).

One of the consequences of this is a pervasive distrust of borders, barriers, and boundaries in all aspects of modern life. In *Why Borders Matter*, the sociologist Frank Furedi sees this as the source of the growing distaste for the nation state among Western elites, linking it to what he calls the 'unbounding of cultural domains in all dimensions of social life' (human-animal, adult-child, private-public,

male-female, nation-world) (Furedi, 2021, pp. 1–2, 4, 6, 9). Without borders and barriers, nation states would cease to exist.

*The origins of oikophobia (3):
the legacy of empire*

The legacy of past empires has also had a profound effect on attitudes towards the nation state. Some aspects of colonial rule and the very idea of the rule of non-Europeans by Europeans have left many intellectuals in Europe with a sense of inherited guilt together with all the self-loathing and desire for redemption that go along with it. This is also the case in the USA as a result of its own imperial ventures and history of slavery. One cannot deny the many bad things that some Europeans did to some non-Europeans, but the maltreatment of one people by another has been a constant in human history in all parts of the world since the earliest recorded times; however, the legacy of European empires has often been made to seem even more negative than it was, and exceptionally so, despite the equally long history of non-European empires. The nuanced scrutiny of all the complex moral arguments for and against different aspects of British imperial rule, found in studies such as ethicist Nigel Biggar's *Colonialism: A Moral Reckoning*, is a long way from the simplistic and negative clichés about empire that circulate among progressive activists, and find their way into the lives and schooling of children (Biggar, 2023).

The situation has been made worse by pressure to 'decolonise' not just the curriculum but also whole institutions. Here 'decolonise' has a very specific meaning that goes way beyond merely dealing with the legacy of specific colonial empires to include an attempt to overthrow 'white privilege' wherever it is found. The thinking behind this is that the predominantly 'white' Global North has for centuries lorded it over the predominantly non-white Global South

and needs to have its hegemony removed. In essence, the struggle is not mainly about amending a traditional narrative or about rights and wrongs. As shown by recent efforts on the part of elites within Western societies to rename ethnic minorities members of a 'global majority', it is all about power and the need to dismantle the nation state to acquire it.

*The origins of oikophobia (4):
identity politics*

Distinguishing people on the basis of their skin colour in this way is but one example of the wider trend over the last 30 years or more to encourage people to identify themselves as members of groups defined by their race, skin colour, sex, gender, or sexuality rather than as members of families, regions, and nations. The hierarchy of privilege and oppression that this 'identity politics' imagines, shows influences from Marxism, though it differs radically from Marx in ignoring class as the key determinant, and from Christianity, whose concern for 'the poor, and mean, and lowly' is distorted into a deification of victimhood. Identity politics sets people against each other and is potentially fatal to the nation state, which, to function well, needs people to focus on what they have in common rather than on where they differ. It is both a consequence and cause of the decline in national feeling.

*The origins of oikophobia (5):
the reaction against fascism*

The final ideological nail in the nation state's coffin has been fascism. The horrors unleashed upon the world by Hitler have left generations fearful that aggressive nationalism might once again raise its head and turn democracies overnight into totalitarian dictatorships.

The very word ‘nationalist’ has come to be taboo and associated unfairly with xenophobia, except when applied to struggling groups in the developing world or minorities within larger states able to claim the kudos that comes from being ‘oppressed’. As a result, even the word ‘patriotism’ has become suspect in the eyes of many progressives despite one of the twentieth century’s greatest socialist writers George Orwell insisting on ‘the spiritual need for patriotism’, and its greatest moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre arguing that patriotism is no less a ‘virtue’ than any of its universalist ethical alternatives (Orwell, 1940).

The nation state and globalisation

Despite John Maynard Keynes’s dictum that ‘it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil’, there are also many non-ideological developments undermining the nation state that need to be taken into account, as well as not a few vested interests like those within supra-national bodies keen to expand their powers at the expense of national governments (Keynes, 1936, p. 384).

The main ways in which the rapid and profound structural changes of recent times have affected how nations see themselves and limited the ability of nation states to retain their autonomy can be summed up under the following headings: economic globalisation; the growth of a new global elite; the transformation in connectivity as a result of the IT revolution; cultural globalisation; mass migration; the emergence of multicultural, multi-ethnic, and plurally monocultural societies; the growing power of international organisations; and moves towards regional political and economic union (at least in Europe).

All these developments increase the impact of outside forces on nation states. They change customs, introduce new ideas, have economic effects, transform patterns of employment, and modify linguistic usage. Some developments, whether associated with global

economic actors or supra-national agencies, limit the autonomy of national governments. Others reduce the cultural differences that exist between states and shift a nation's sense of identity.

The case for the nation state

One of the curious things about those who have talked so hopefully about 'the death of the nation state' is their failure to notice how the last 100 years have seen the apogee of this form of state organisation. At the beginning of the twentieth century, huge numbers of people lived either in multi-national monarchical empires (Russia, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire) or in the vast colonial empires of European powers. Helped by the growth of national feeling, the first group was broken up at the end of the First World War, creating many new nation states. The second fell apart, at varying rates of disintegration, over the next 50 years, with the same consequences, followed, after 1990, by all those peoples recovering their freedom as a result of the collapse of the USSR. In 1945, there were 51 founding member states in the United Nations. In 2024, there were 193. The nation state is currently of greater importance to a much higher proportion of the world's massively increased population than ever in the past.

It is also striking how few of these nation states have felt driven into forming regional unions with neighbouring states rather than entering into cooperative agreements that do not impinge on their sovereignty. The European Union remains an outlier in this respect. For the vast majority of mankind, most of whom live within a few miles of where they were born and only 3.6% of whom live outside their countries of birth, many of the most important decisions directly affecting people's daily lives continue to be made by national governments (International Organization for Migration, 2020). In the absence of a sense of national identity, and of the civic

responsibility that goes with it, countries are more likely to fall into the hands of what John Gray has called ‘the new Leviathans’, states run by deeply undemocratic elites keen both to intervene in every aspect of people’s lives and to transfer powers away from the people to unelected global bodies (Gray, 2023, pp. 1–3).

A nation state has the function of representing in the public domain characteristics and values that people feel to be their own and that they share with others. It can make them feel part of something larger to which they can contribute. To do this, the nation state needs to signal that it has a distinctiveness which imposes clear limits on itself. It is right to feel an affinity with the whole of humanity, but on a daily basis, in order to feel at home in an often alien-seeming world, something other than universalism is needed. Régis Debray, former Marxist revolutionary and *ipso facto* universalist, writes about this, and about boundaries and frontiers generally, in *Éloge des frontières* (*In Praise of Frontiers*) in which he cites the Caribbean poet Aimé Césaire, himself at one time a communist, who observed that in the modern world ‘there are two ways of losing oneself: walling oneself up within the particular and dissolving oneself within ‘the universal’. Neither is desirable, says Debray, but at present (he was writing in 2010), universalism ‘pays better’ and is more tempting and is therefore the more to be avoided. Boundaries must return, he insists, so that cultures can be more confident about themselves and therefore more capable of appreciating the distinctiveness of the cultures of others (Debray, 2010, pp. 91–92; Césaire, 2005, pp. 134–135).

*Education for the two elements of the nation state:
(I) the nation and (II) the state*

So far, I have tried to show why the nation state has been under attack; how an elite has developed that likes nothing more than to diminish its powers; why, despite this, it is far from redundant; and

how there would be significant gains from its strengthening. I now look at whether and how 'liberal education' might contribute to this process.

Traditionally, 'liberal education' has focused on the *trivium* (grammar, logic, and rhetoric) and the classics of Latin (and sometimes Greek). 'Modern' subjects such as non-classical history entered the curriculum very late; the University of Oxford, which taught boys as young as 14, only appointed its first professor of modern history ('modern' being from the collapse of the Roman Empire onwards) in 1724 and did not offer undergraduate examinations in the subject until 1850. For much of its long history, 'liberal education' also saw itself as contributing to the perpetuation of Christendom rather than of nations and states that in some cases were yet to emerge. Despite this, the core purposes of a 'liberal education' – the transmission of a cultural inheritance, induction into the ways of thinking and arguing appropriate to a 'free man', and the inculcation of habits of virtue – are equally appropriate when part of the inheritance being transmitted is that of a contemporary nation state.

The two concepts 'nation' and 'state' within the term 'nation state' need to be disentangled. A sense of belonging to a 'nation' is much more than the political contract between an individual citizen and the 'state' envisaged by liberal theorists. To be part of a nation, one needs to be at ease in talking about 'we' and 'us', and have a conception, however inchoate, of what the nation distinctively stands for. At its strongest, membership of a nation means a shared attachment to its territory, language, history, and common culture. For many, it may also be a matter of kinship and ancestry, but it does not need to be. For some, when the sense of belonging is deep, as in Ukraine and Israel at the time of writing, it involves a willingness to fight and to die to ensure that the nation continues to live.

One of the effects of the deep distaste for national identity among elites has been to encourage Western governments in recent years to

reconceptualise their states in such a way as to detach them from too close an association with their underlying nations. The pinnacle of this trend was Justin Trudeau's declaration in 2015 that Canada 'had no core identity, no mainstream' and was the world's 'first post-national state'. To Scruton, the idea that such a detachment between state and nation might be possible without radically undermining the state was a chimaera. 'Our existence as political beings', he argued, 'does not derive from the state, but from spheres of social loyalty, and ... it is by means of such loyalty that the state persists' (Scruton, 1990, p. 328). The message for schools from this is twofold: first, a sense of national identity is a prerequisite of an effective state, and, second, the world outside the school's gates may not always be supportive of efforts within its gates to sustain such an identity.

EDUCATION FOR NATIONAL IDENTITY
WITHIN A PROGRAMME OF
LIBERAL OR CLASSICAL EDUCATION

The core justification for 'educating for national identity', in the context of a liberal education, is that it is an element of the transmission that is at the heart of such an education. It is therefore the duty of the school to convey to children those features of the world, both past and present, necessary for them to develop a sense of belonging to a particular nation governed through a particular state. This is the justification for the transmission of core 'communal knowledge' required for pupils to achieve what E. D. Hirsch has called 'cultural literacy' and for making this an important component of the early and middle stages of all educational programmes in schools (Hirsch, 1987). This transmission is not just necessary because of our responsibility to individual pupils but so that what is worth valuing – in this case, the continued consciousness of a national identity – is, in the

words of Roger Scruton, passed on ‘by lodging it in brains that will last longer than (one’s) own’ (Dooley, 2011, pp. 52–53).

Such transmission is both educationally and politically contentious. This does not mean that it is ‘indoctrination.’ Every educational practice is driven by the intention to have an impact on the life of the pupil and the major difference between ‘education’ and ‘indoctrination’ is whether the end the teacher has in mind is good or bad (Lewin, 2022). Education for national identity in the eyes of a believer in world government is indoctrination as is education for a strong view of global citizenship for supporters of the autonomy of nation states. What matters is not to argue fruitlessly about whether an activity is indoctrination but to be clear why a course of action is good or bad.

For all the reasons to do with the rationale for nation states discussed earlier, it is my assumption that an education that helps children feel a sense of belonging to their nation, identify with its other members, and wish the best for it is a good. I say this in deliberate contradiction of the hyper-liberal idea that ‘each human being is sovereign in deciding who or what they want to be.’ I base my assumption instead on the conviction that, within a collective and for the sake of the collective, as John Gray has put it, ‘human beings can never be wholly self-defined’ (Gray, 2023, pp. 109–110). The only occasions when education for national identity should be condemned as bad are when contested political issues within a nation state are presented to pupils in a partisan fashion, pressure is placed on them to adopt positions they do not share, and views thoughtfully expressed in discussion are censored. We cannot and should not force a sense of nationality on people, but that does not mean that we should not encourage it or be anything but concerned about its absence among both pupils and teachers.

The other potential objections to having ‘education for national identity’ in schools are that this is best done outside the school and that it is not the school’s top priority. I have sympathy for both and do

not therefore feel that it should have priority over other objectives or necessarily be the subject of yet another school policy. Much of what is needed in terms of knowledge will be met automatically within a curriculum based on the transmission of an inherited culture. Informal induction into some of the customs of a national community can happen subtly and with forethought; it does not need to intrude too heavily on all the other responsibilities required of schools. Even if there may be no policy documentation, school staff should be clear about the school's objectives. One academically successful London school noted for trying to convey a sense of British identity to a highly multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and disadvantaged group of pupils – pupils sing 'God Save the King' in assemblies – has a weekly staff discussion on the school's values to ensure they are kept fresh in everyone's minds.⁷

The occasions when a school might convey the history, customs, shared memories, and activities that make up the life of a nation will vary greatly from one country and one school to another. I have a vivid memory of all the pupils in a school in Mexico City lining up in the playground and, trumpets blaring, pledging allegiance to the national flag, something that would seem culturally out of place in a school in England. My own good fortune is to have been educated in an English state school founded in the seventeenth century, where I was able to learn in history lessons about the Stuart monarchs of that time, one of whom had given his name to my school. I have also been head of an independent school dating back to the fourteenth century, which had an impressive war memorial commemorating the huge number of former pupils killed in the First World War and subsequent wars, the daily presence of which in the lives of pupils

⁷ This is Michaela Community School, a state-funded free school that is over-subscribed and attracts both positive and negative attention. Pupils also sing in assemblies the traditional patriotic song 'Jerusalem', which contains the words 'Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand / Till we have built Jerusalem / In England's green and pleasant Land'.

was a link with past generations they were unlikely to forget. The majority of schools may not have these kinds of stimuli to memory and identity, but all schools will have opportunities offered by school assemblies, the nation's annual calendar (secular and religious), special commemorative events, local and national election days, visits by former pupils, and through the choices that have to be made about plays to be put on (does one, in England, choose a play by Shakespeare or Shaw, for example, or return yet again to the American 'High School Musical'?), music to be performed, and artwork to be displayed. I am not suggesting that all or even most of these sorts of decisions should be influenced by whether they are relevant to national identity but that this is something that should be kept under review and opportunities seized where possible.

The formal taught curriculum within a programme of liberal education ought not to require adaptation to contribute to preparing pupils for membership of a particular nation state. Its curriculum for history, literature, and the arts would, as part of its *raison d'être*, introduce pupils to the culture of the appropriate nation and the wider civilisation of which this was a part. The history curriculum would provide a strong chronological thread of the country's history from earliest times onwards (supported by time charts on classroom walls) with an appropriate balance of attention as between political, social, and economic history and as between the lives of 'great men and women' and those of ordinary people. It would see past societies through their own eyes, not judge them through the eyes of the present. It would neither disseminate negative myths about past events nor ignore happenings that cast a bad light on past societies. It would be presented as a truth-seeking subject, not as source material for contemporary political causes. Unlike in some countries, it would remain a compulsory subject through to the end of schooling.

The curriculum for literature and the arts would similarly ensure that pupils receive an introduction to some of the nation's major

achievements, based on a clear sense of the defining characteristics of the works chosen for transmission. Pupils capable of reading and enjoying more demanding literature than the majority would have every opportunity to do so. The geography curriculum would have as a major aim the transmission of core knowledge of the nation's physical and economic characteristics. A course of civics would give pupils the information they need to participate in their country's civic and political life. The curriculum would not include the kind of citizenship education that places global citizenship above national citizenship, aims to shape pupils' views on issues such as sustainability, equity, inclusion, and climate change, and encourages activism. A liberal education, as Hannah Arendt put it, should be an induction into '(this) world as it is,' not a presentation of what teachers wish it to be (Arendt, 1961a, p. 195).

What such an education would *not* do, however, is focus exclusively on the nation in question. Pupils would also learn about other countries and other parts of the world and study at least one other society from its own perspective. The same principle would be applied to literature and the arts and to scientific achievements, and indeed to citizenship. Just because it is easy to dismiss global citizenship, in the words of the head of the Toronto French School, as 'content-free hot air ... emotionally satisfying but intellectually fraudulent', does not mean that it is not important that pupils are globally (as well as nationally) conscious, have a sense of belonging to a 'common humanity', and are aware that there are contemporary issues that benefit from being addressed globally (Godfrey, 2014).

Compulsion versus choice

The suggestion that history should be a compulsory subject to age 18 is an instance of a wider principle relevant to an education aimed at sustaining a sense of national identity. The principle is that the

greater the choice that is made available within an educational programme, the less effective will be the learning of the programme's essential elements and the weaker will be its impact on community coherence. The introduction of England's national curriculum in the late 1980s illustrates both effects of the principle: replacing a host of curricular arrangements created by local authorities allowed a concentration on the core elements of literacy and numeracy, ultimately leading to significant improvements in the levels of both, and the shared experience of a prescribed curriculum gave two generations of children a set of common experiences previously unavailable across the nation. The compulsory requirement that everyone must study at least two plays by Shakespeare by the age of 14 is but one example of the effect this has had.

Schools following a programme of liberal education post-16 in countries where a wide range of subject qualifications catering for every student's taste is on offer might similarly wish to limit choice to those subjects that would contribute most to the aims of a liberal education. Given the assumptions of the surrounding consumer society, such a restriction would be deeply counter-cultural but in keeping with liberal education's preference for the tried and tested.

Education for unity rather than diversity

If one of our aims is to help pupils feel part of both a school community and a national community, we must focus on what members of those communities have in common not on how they differ. We must be aware of the diversity that exists in all school communities and seek to benefit from it, but we must not fetishise it or draw attention to it in such a way that it drives people apart. We must not talk about 'our LGBTQ+ community', as one London private school did publicly during a Pride Month in 2022, or about the black, Muslim, or Chinese so-called 'communities' within a school, referring instead

to pupils, parents, teachers, and members of staff, and emphasising that these are the roles that matter within the single ‘community’ of the school (City of London School, 2022).

We must ensure that all members of the school community – whatever their sex, skin colour, race, or sexuality – are looked after and treated equally and with kindness and respect, but we must avoid events and activities that give the impression that the school is simply a collection of these identity groups. In England, for example, history lessons in a programme of liberal education would need to cover slavery in the British Empire, the slave trade, and Britain’s world-wide effort to suppress it, as well as the US civil rights movement, but there would be no Black History Month. Pupils would learn about Elizabeth I, Marie Curie, Emmeline Pankhurst, and Rosa Parks, in the context of the relevant historical periods, but there would be no Women’s History Month. In English literature, pupils might read Mary Shelley, Virginia Woolf, and E. M. Forster, and they might learn that the first two were bisexual and the third was gay, but there would be no ‘study’ of their sexuality – as it is irrelevant to the interpretation of their novels – and no Pride Month or flag.

The heterogeneous societies we now face in many Western countries are much more difficult to manage than homogeneous ones. History, the world around us, and common sense make this blindingly obvious. The ‘diversity is our strength’ mantra of progressive elites is whistling in the dark by those who want to close their eyes to the problems their policies have created. The greatest challenge is in those societies where large groups of people of different races, cultures, or religions exist alongside each other with minimal contact either among minority groups or with the majority community. This plural monoculturalism, as the Indian philosopher and economist Amartya Sen has called it, is the current experience of many Western countries (Sen, 2006, pp. 156–160). Whatever its causes and whoever is responsible for bringing it about, it is a state of affairs that is here

to stay and to which schools need to adjust, not least for the sake of the children in those minority cultures who are excluded from the wider life of the nation states in which they live.

In education, the glorification of diversity and the appeal to ‘post-national’ universal principles have both been tried and failed.⁸ The alternative approach suggested in this chapter – a knowledge-rich curriculum with a stronger emphasis on what we have in common as members of the same nation – will not remove the basic structural problems of a plurally monocultural society, but it may reduce some of their negative effects and, as some schools are beginning to show us, would at least be worth a try.

ACADEMIES FOR ANYWHERE: INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS, THE NATION STATE, AND IDENTITY⁹

In 2003 I left England for Switzerland and quickly realised that I faced a different set of issues in relation to identity in my new role as Director-General of The International School of Geneva, a school of 4000+ pupils, c. 130-140 nationalities and c. 80 mother tongues. The school had been set up after the end of the First World War to educate the children of officials working for the newly established League of Nations and was committed to the promotion of global citizenship. The curriculum of a school with such a diverse and mobile international community – and many other international schools

⁸ A 2024 opinion poll showed that, in Britain, among 18–24-year-olds, who will have experienced a project promoting a universalist set of so-called ‘British values’ when in school, only 39% say they feel ‘patriotic’ about their country. In a separate 2024 poll, among young Muslims in the same age group, most of whom will have also been exposed in schools to the ‘British values’ project, 59% wanted showing a picture of the Prophet Mohammed to be made illegal and 32% wanted Sharia law to be implemented in Britain. See Goodwin, 2023; 2024b.

⁹ First published in M. Hayden (Ed.), *Interpreting International Education: In Honour of Professor Jeff Thompson*, Routledge, 2022, pp. 101–120.

are similar – cannot have a strong focus on one particular nation and nation state. In the early decades of the school's existence pupils were helped to prepare for the examinations offered by the countries from which their families came, while meanwhile being encouraged to develop a sense of membership of the whole of humanity and deliberately introduced to a range of different cultural influences. Pupils' distinctive nationalities were respected, and certainly not discouraged, but the main emphasis was on world citizenship.

As the number of international schools increased after the end of the Second World War the need for an agreed programme of international education became increasingly apparent, resulting in the creation of the International Baccalaureate (IB) which emerged in the 1960s out of work in which teachers at my school had been closely involved. The current mission statement of that body is 'to develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect'. Promoting 'International mindedness' and 'world citizenship' are explicit aims of many IB schools.

International schools often coexist happily alongside 'national' schools and in many countries the two have very much in common in aims, curriculum, and pedagogy. Some 'national' schools in England, for example, put 'international' and 'world citizenship' objectives first in their mission statements, not even mentioning that one of their functions is to prepare pupils for life in England, Great Britain, and the United Kingdom. Unless they have a majority of pupils from the host country – which increasing numbers do, especially in Asia – international schools cannot of course promote a particular sense of national citizenship. What they can do, but do rarely in my experience, is ensure that their pupils grow up learning what national citizenship is like in the host country in which they are being educated. I was fortunate in Geneva in that my school was a bilingual English-French school, with many local as well as international

pupils and many Swiss members of staff, and was closely associated with the Swiss state whose representatives, both cantonal and federal, sat on the governing body. Much more, however, needed to be done to teach pupils about the highly distinctive and successful country in which they were living and being educated. Much of my writing on international education, both during and after my time at the school, has touched on this theme. My most developed discussion of the issues is the article which follows and is taken from a Festschrift in honour of the great guru of international education Professor Jeff Thompson, who had been a postgraduate student at Balliol College while I was an undergraduate but whom I did not get to know until much later (see also N. Tate, 2014). The article, though addressed to an international educator audience, also makes the case for the nation and the nation state more widely and highlights the problems that arise from the promotion of sectional identities and the emergence of unstable plurally monocultural societies.

Introduction

In *The Road to Somewhere* (2017) David Goodhart, former director of the UK left-of-centre think tank Demos, came up with innovative nomenclature to characterise the cultural and political divide splintering Western societies in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. His main focus was the UK following its 2016 referendum decision to leave the European Union, but with a subsidiary focus on the rise of ‘populist’ movements in continental Europe and the implications of Donald Trump’s election as President of the USA.

Goodhart’s core thesis about ‘new value divisions in developed democracies’ is simple and clear:

A large minority group of the highly educated and mobile – the Anywheres – who tend to value autonomy and openness and comfortably

surf social change have recently come to dominate our society and politics. There is also a larger and less influential group – the Somewheres – who are more rooted and less well educated, who value security and familiarity and are more connected to group identities than Anywheres. Somewheres feel that their more socially conservative intuitions have been excluded from the public square in recent decades, which has destabilised our politics and led to the Brexit and Trump backlashes (Goodhart, 2017, p. vi).

This chapter explores Goodhart's concept of Anywheres and Somewheres, its implications for notions of identity and citizenship, and its possible lessons for schools; especially for international schools. My hypothesis – untested but intuitive – is that international schools are mostly fully paid-up members of the Anywhere camp, with students largely from Anywhere families, teachers, and administrators committed to the promotion of Anywhere ideology, and educational programmes supportive of the continuing cultural hegemony of an Anywhere elite.

It is a hypothesis that cries out for a large dose of modifying nuance. It is intended as a *ballon d'essai* through which to explore how international schools might best prepare students for membership of global and national communities in which identities, beliefs and political activities are fiercely contested. Examining how educational institutions promote ideological positions associated with particular sections of the population also highlights the need for reflectiveness about the aims of education, and about the role of educators' own attitudes and opinions in shaping the educational process. The chapter concludes with suggestions for international school practice.

Anywheres, Somewheres, and Global Villagers

Anywheres, according to Goodhart, tend to be younger, university-educated, in the upper quartile of the income and social class spec-

trum, and socially and geographically more mobile than the rest of society. They are the 'exam-passing classes'. In the UK they are concentrated in London – a.k.a. Anywhereville – and other large urban centres, as well as university towns and cities. They are socially more tolerant than Somewheres but politically more intolerant of those who do not share their views. They are individualists and internationalists, and not strongly attached to larger group identities. Though national identity is not hugely important to them, they are not mostly anti-national or in favour of a 'borderless world' while being generally pro-immigration. They are unlikely to be attracted by socialist economics but more likely to embrace the world of identity politics, supporting causes in areas such as gender, race, or sexuality. They benefit from an emphasis on autonomy and self-realisation and from an openness to radical change. As a group they have some of the characteristics of a 'hereditary meritocracy'. As such they have an influence on national life and decision-making out of all proportion to their numbers. In some areas they have successfully secured policies particularly beneficial to their sectional interests (Goodhart, 2017, pp. vi, 4–5, 23–24, 34–35, 198, 224).

Somewheres, by contrast, are on average older, poorer (if not poor), and less well-educated, with many having left school at age 16 and most not having gone to university. They are much less geographically mobile and are to be found among the three-fifths of Britons still living within 20 miles of where they lived aged 14. Somewheres are most numerous in small towns and suburbia, and in former industrial and maritime areas. They have strong group attachments, both local and national, are distrustful of change, and place a high value on security. Although some in the older generation may be nostalgic for a lost Britain, on the whole they are 'modern' people who have accepted most of the recent 'equality measures' while still valuing traditional family forms. Like three quarters of the British population, Somewheres are keen on a reduction in levels of immigration (Goodhart, 2017, pp. 5, 23–25, 37).

Around 50% of the British population are argued to be Somewheres, 20–25% Anywheres, and the rest what Goodhart calls ‘In-betweeners’. Each of the two main categories will of course include a whole spectrum of different views and attitudes. Goodhart is keen to stress that both Anywhere and Somewhere worldviews ‘are valid and legitimate’. His intent is not polemical, though his conclusion is that Anywheres have run the UK, in areas such as family policy, the prioritisation of educational expenditure, and immigration, more in their own interests than in those of Somewheres. In doing so they have provoked the reaction on the part of Somewheres shown in the results of the public votes of 2016–2019, results to which Anywheres in their turn have responded with levels of disbelief, disgust, and anger unprecedented in recent years (Goodhart, 2017, pp. 5, 24–25).

Within the category of Anywheres, Goodhart includes a 3–5% sub-category of Global Villagers, likely to be of particular interest to international schools. Global Villagers are most densely concentrated among academics in higher education, the arts, and at the top end of the professions and business. They are part of internationalised networks and in some cases have homes in more than one country. They are mostly on the left politically but include some liberal conservatives. They are just as likely to identify as European or global citizens as British. They mostly have little time for restrictive immigration policies or nation states (Goodhart, 2017, pp. 31–32, 37, 160).

The worldviews of Anywheres and Global Villagers are those with which people who know international schools will be familiar. They can be found among international school teachers, administrators, parents, students, governors, and alumni. The worldview of Somewheres is less visibly present in international schools, whether among teachers and administrators or in educational programmes. Somewheres work in large numbers in international schools, but the opportunities offered by their presence may be insufficiently exploited, as I shall suggest later. In the same way as Goodhart

concludes with recommendations for how democratic governments might do more to accommodate the legitimate claims of their majority populations, I shall use the Anywhere-Somewhere distinction as a stimulus to suggest some re-focusing of international schools and their educational programmes.

The discussion that follows, though using labels that have entered into the wider discourse from a single book, draws also on other studies of recent trends. Frank Furedi in *Why Borders Matter* examines the growing distaste for nation states among elite groups, linking it to what he calls the wider 'unbounding of cultural domains in all dimensions of social life' (human-animal, adult-child, private-public, male-female), and arguing the case for both symbolic and physical borders as the basis of identity, community, and democracy (Furedi, 2021, pp. 1–2, 4, 6, 9). Goodhart's analysis of the divisions within 'developed democracies' has been powerfully endorsed by Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin whose *National Populism* probed the sources of populism in the resentment of majority populations towards 'elitist liberal democrats who appear increasingly detached from the life experiences and outlooks of the average citizen' (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. xxxii). Michael Lind, in *The New Class War*, with a sharper focus on the USA, has argued for a new 'democratic pluralism' that tackles this resentment through a return to the kind of cross-class power-sharing which characterised the period after the Second World War, seeing this as an essential alternative to an otherwise 'grim ... future of gated communities and mobs led by demagogues at their gates' (Lind, 2020, p. 170).

International education and the nation state

The main fault line between Anywheres and Somewheres, liberal elites and majorities, is over the role of the nation state. There is nothing so eloquent of the Anywhere affiliations of the international school world

as the absence from its teacher journals and magazines of articles on how best to prepare young people for life and citizenship in a world in which the nation state is a central feature. One finds an abundance of references to world citizenship and global engagement, but little or no recognition that international schools are located in nation states, that their students are citizens of nation states, and that most students are very likely to be spending the larger part of their future lives in a state in which they are a citizen – or in another nation state in which they later choose to settle. Statements of educational purposes sometimes refer to the ‘local’, but this might easily be read to refer to the immediate locality of the school rather than to something wider.

There are three main reasons for this neglect of the nation state. First, international schools which cater for large numbers of students of different nationalities, many of whom may only be temporarily living in the country in which the school is located, quite rightly find it educationally inappropriate to teach a curriculum which in an adjacent national school might – with complete appropriateness – be more focused on the history, literature, and culture of that nation state, and on preparation for citizenship within that state.

Second, the early international schools had both pragmatic and ideological origins: the need to cater for growing expatriate populations while at the same time wishing to educate for international peace and harmony following the disastrous conflicts of the first half of the twentieth century. The ideological component of the international school movement has remained strong, and is reflected in the mission statements and educational programmes of schools with their focus on world citizenship, global engagement, Model UN assemblies, and community service involvement in activities in distant places. The ideological commitment to internationalism is further reinforced by examining bodies and accreditation agencies used by international schools. The vision of the Council of International Schools (CIS) ‘is to inspire the development of global citizens through high quality

international education.' Other types of citizens simply do not figure. The International Baccalaureate (IB), by contrast, is explicit that its promotion of 'intercultural understanding' is not 'an alternative to a sense of cultural and national identity', though putting it like this inevitably gives the impression that developing such a sense is unlikely to be a major priority for an IB school.

The third reason for the neglect of the nation state in international schools is the very public prevalence of anti-nation state sentiment. When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announces that Canada is the 'first post-national state' with 'no core identity', or opponents of Brexit in the UK denounce its supporters as 'Little Englanders' and 'English nationalists', it is hardly surprising if those who quite appropriately pride themselves on their common humanity with other people, and on their cosmopolitanism, are led to believe that support for the idea of the nation state would be incompatible with their core beliefs. Distrust of the nation state also sits easily alongside the universalism, egalitarianism, and individualism at the ideological heart of international education. For many Western liberals, especially on the political left, being an individual is more important than being a citizen, and preferring one's own culture to that of others, and sometimes putting the interests of one's own country before those of the rest of the world, as something generally to be avoided: not least because it risks accusations of ethnocentrism, xenophobia, even racism. If one adds to this the prevailing confusion about the difference between nationalism and patriotism, guilt in the West about colonialism and economic dominance, the legacy of Marxism's influence on Western intellectuals, and the pervasive distrust of frontiers, borders, traditions, and homogeneity that one finds in all aspects of modern life, it is entirely predictable that the nation state should be relegated to a very back seat.

Even though historically explicable, this is a curious situation to find ourselves in at a time when the nation state is a central feature

of our world as never before. Following a century that saw the fall, one after another, of most of the world's empires – the monarchical empires of central and eastern Europe after the First World War, Hitler's short-lived Third Reich in 1944–1945, the colonial empires of the European powers following the Second World War, and the Soviet empire after 1990, it is the nation state that has taken their place. For much of the twentieth century the nation state was seen as a key part of a 'progressive' world order. The main lesson Woodrow Wilson took from the struggle against Germany's imperial ambitions in the First World War, and Roosevelt and Churchill took from the fight to the death with Hitler in the Second World War, was that the nation state needed strengthening, not weakening. The war aims in Wilson's Fourteen Points in 1918 and in the US–UK Atlantic Charter of 1941 were not to establish a world government, or to group nations into federal units, but to give peoples the maximum freedom to establish their own nation states. It was only much later in the twentieth century and in the early years of the current century that it became common to see the nation state as 'regressive' and to be told by 'the ideology of globalisation', as Goodhart has put it, that the nation state 'is an increasingly empty vessel'. It is a negative view of the nation state which ironically coincides with an increase in the proportion of states run as democracies, and with a period in which the number of armed conflicts between states has been strikingly lower than earlier in the twentieth century (Hazony, 2018, pp. 1–2; Goodhart, 2017, p. 107; Pinker, 2018, pp. 161–166, 203).

This prevailing negativity towards the nation state is also a curious mindset at a time when the number of such states has massively increased (there were 51 in 1945 and 195 in 2015) and when most people look set to spend most of their lives in the nation states in which they were born. Despite mass migration, only 3.3% of the world's population in 2015 was estimated to live outside its country of origin (UNFPA, 2020). In many nation states the problem is

now not nationalism but a lack of identification with the national community and a disengagement from national and local politics, with falling levels of political party membership, voter participation, and confidence in politicians (Fahrmeir, 2007, pp. 216, 229; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, pp. xxi, 83–127). The decisions that most affect the lives of the world's seven billion inhabitants continue to be made within the nation states to which they belong. If a sense of civic responsibility in relation to the functioning at national level of nation states is lacking, nation states run the risk, behind a democratic façade, of turning into oligarchies run by small political elites devoted to the perpetuation of their own power. It is partly the sense of this happening that accounts for the Somewhere revolt against dominant Anywhere ideologies discussed by Goodhart and others. Even where decisions have to be taken internationally, the quality of the decisions is largely dependent on the effectiveness of the governments of the different nation states involved. Nation states can also provide public recognition of the values important to their inhabitants and help stem that 'erosion of a historically defined sense of belonging' which the Polish philosopher Leszek Kolakowski sees as a key feature of modernity and a cause of 'spiritual fragility' among the young (Kolakowski, 1990, p. 159).

While this book was in preparation the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic burst on the scene, providing a further and unexpected justification for my decision to focus this chapter on the need for international educators to remember that we still live in a world of nation states. The pandemic has shone a powerful light on the key role of the nation state in people's lives, on the value of a strong civic national ideology and sense of common national purpose, and on the need for effective national governments, in addition of course to reminding us once again of the crucial need for global consciousness and international cooperation. Not for a long time has the interconnectedness of the global and the national been so strikingly demonstrated as

in 2020. The fact that at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic the journal of the UK Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (commonly referred to as the Royal Society of the Arts, RSA), a quintessentially Anywhere institution, carried a lead article by Anatol Lieven arguing that ‘nationalism is key to tackling global crises’ made me feel that, after years of talking vainly about these matters in the wilderness, there was at last a chance one might perhaps be heard (Lieven, 2020).

The implications for international schools of the case for nation states will be discussed at the end of this chapter. As Jeff Thompson would no doubt be the first to remind me, these must depend on where a particular school fits in the typology of international schools that he and Mary Hayden have done so much to establish (Hayden & Thompson, 2016, p. 13). International schools catering for students largely from one particular nation state have a special responsibility to help their students prepare for their roles as participating citizens in this state through an introduction to the country’s history, culture, and politics. International schools that are not preparing students for life in particular states must clearly adopt a different approach, though the obligation to represent appropriately within the educational programme the role of nation states as an important aspect of contemporary and historical reality remains.

*International education,
global citizenship, and cosmopolitanism*

Support for the nation state is compatible with a profound sense of commonality with all other human beings and a feeling that one has duties towards them wherever they are. One of the greatest nationalists of the nineteenth century, Giuseppe Mazzini, a major architect of Italian unification, saw the nation state at the same time as the most effective means by which individuals could be mobilised

to discharge their duties towards humanity as a whole (Heater, 1996, p. 92). Similarly, Edmund Burke, while asserting that ‘to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle ... of public affections’, nonetheless saw such an attachment as ‘the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind’ (Burke, 2004, p. 135; Appiah, 2006, p. 152).

This ‘cosmopolitanism’, or concern for the whole world, even when the term ‘global citizenship’ is not used, is at the heart of international education. The Council of International Schools (CIS) stresses ‘world citizenship’ and provides a definition of it which all CIS-accredited schools are committed to uphold. The IB does not use the term but instead talks about ‘global engagement’ as a key element of the ‘international-mindedness’ it aims to foster in IB students (Singh & Qi, 2013, pp. vi–ix). The International School of Geneva, one of the earliest international schools and the one with the longest continuous history, offers an education, according to its Charter, ‘based on the principles of equality and solidarity among all peoples and of the equal value of all human beings’ (International School of Geneva, 2014, p. 55). The common denominator underpinning these statements is a sense of the common humanity of humankind, of fundamental equality as members of the same species, and of a duty towards those outside our own kith and kin and beyond our fellow citizens.

This is a global perspective with a very long history. Socrates, Diogenes, and Zeno in ancient Greece are all supposed to have laid claim to being citizens of the ‘universe’ or ‘world’ (*cosmos*). The idea of serving the ‘cosmos’ alongside one’s ‘polis’ became a core element in the thought of the Greek Stoics and was adopted by later Roman thinkers such as Cicero, Seneca, and Marcus Aurelius. It reappeared as an influence on Renaissance thinkers such as Montaigne and on many thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. During the eighteenth-century Enlightenment the terms ‘citizen of

the world' and 'cosmopolite' became badges of honour among the intellectual elite (Heater, 1996, pp. 6–8, 13–15, 38, 70–73). This kind of traditional cosmopolitanism is wholly compatible with strong support for the nation state. Even Kant, the Enlightenment thinker most often quoted in support of internationalism, was mainly concerned with educating children into a 'cosmopolitan disposition' rather than moving in the direction of a global association of states. He was committed to the promotion of peace and to doing what was right even if it sometimes meant not putting his country first, but was nonetheless a loyal subject of his king and had no wish to see a withering away of the Prussian state in which he spent the whole of his life (Kant, 2007, pp. 14–16, 114, 117–118, 485; N. Tate, 2015, p. 105).

One of the most impressive contemporary syntheses of a cosmopolitan outlook alongside an acceptance of the value of the nation state is to be found in the writings of the British-Ghanaian Kwame Anthony Appiah. Drawing on the long tradition of cosmopolitanism, his reflections on the contemporary world, and personal experience in moving between different cultures, Appiah makes a case for what he calls 'partial cosmopolitanism'. On the one hand this involves a strong sense of one's obligations to people outside one's immediate family and local and national communities, belief in the universality of some of our most fundamental values, an understanding that among values deeply embedded within particular cultures there may be different ones that are equally worth living by, acceptance of pluralism and diversity, and a curiosity about the world and a sense that one might have something to learn from others. Alongside all this, however, there is a need at the same time to be 'partial to those closest to us: to our families, our friends, our nations, to the many groups that call upon us through our identities, chosen and unchosen; and, of course, to ourselves' (Appiah, 2006, pp. xv, xviii, 30–31, 46–47, 80–81, 97, 165). Appiah has no time for the idea of a world state, stressing its dangers: the risk that it might acquire enormous powers which could be used

to cause great harm; its lack of responsiveness to local needs; and the way it might reduce experimentation with different institutional forms. To these one might add the democratic deficit of being largely unaccountable to the multitude of peoples over whom it would have authority (Appiah, 2006, pp. 163–164).

Appiah does not discuss how ‘partial cosmopolitans’ might react to the intermediate set of arrangements – regional blocs – that might emerge between nation states and world government. This (the US federal model excepted) has attracted little support even among cosmopolitans over the centuries, Europe with its distinctive European Union being very much an exception that other parts of the world have refrained from imitating. George Orwell did not add to the attractiveness of the idea by dividing the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) into the three powers of Eurasia, Eastasia, and Oceania, with their tyrannies and endless inter-state wars.

‘The fanaticism of the universal’

Having sketched a model of cosmopolitanism or ‘world citizenship’ which might comfortably fit with the educational aspirations of the international school movement, while at the same time preparing young people for life in a world of nation states, I am nonetheless well aware of the obstacles that the ideology of ‘internationalism’ is likely to throw in the path of any attempt to give a more central place to the idea of a nation state. There is an intolerance on the part of many Anywheres which needs to be examined before one can begin to answer the question of whether ‘international education’ is capable of negotiating a balanced and rational path between the different ideologies that impinge upon it.

Intolerance by Anywheres is of course not the only intolerance that might threaten to knock school education off balance. There is also a Somewhere intolerance (which may involve a wish to ignore the

existence of the outside world), a socialist authoritarian intolerance (which will hear nothing good said about capitalism), an identity politics intolerance (which pushes students into their gender, race, and sexuality boxes), and no doubt others. But the one most likely to impinge on international schools is Anywhere intolerance. There are two reasons for looking at this: first, because Anywhere intolerance, emanating as it does from powerful elites, is part of the influences that shape our mindset; and, second, because most of the data about the political views of teachers in Western democracies – from whom many of the personnel of international schools are drawn – suggests the likelihood that such views might end up having an impact on how things are taught.

Having commended one academic writer – Kwame Anthony Appiah – who is a self-proclaimed cosmopolitan, even if a ‘partial’ one, I shall now commend another – Yoram Hazony – the title of whose *The Virtue of Nationalism* (2018) makes clear his allegiances as a ‘nationalist’ and defender of the nation state. Ever since first writing, many years ago, about the importance of schools providing for those who wished to have a sense of national identity the materials with which to construct their own, I have myself avoided the word ‘nationalism’ like the plague. This is not because there is not a perfectly acceptable way of using the word – in the sense that Giuseppe Mazzini was an Italian nationalist, Domingo Sarmiento was an Argentine nationalist, and Nicola Sturgeon is a contemporary Scottish nationalist – but because in many people’s minds (the result perhaps of Anywhere propaganda) ‘nationalist’ is a dirty word associated only with people like Hitler and Mussolini. I have talked instead about ‘patriotism’ which, unpopular though it may also be within the Anywhere tendency, at least enables one to pray in aid one of the greatest political writers of the twentieth century, the socialist George Orwell, who stressed ‘the spiritual need for patriotism’, and one of its greatest moral philosophers Alasdair

MacIntyre, who showed how patriotism was no less a 'virtue' than any of its universalist ethical alternatives (Orwell, 1940; MacIntyre, 1984). The term 'nationalism', however, has remained more acceptable in moderate conservative circles in the USA, where Hazony was educated, and his book is designed to enable a decent name to continue to be used by decent people for decent purposes and not left to bigots and xenophobes. Although Appiah and Hazony come at the issues from different angles, I will argue that a synthesis that draws on the core beliefs of both is perfectly possible.

Hazony sees the nation state as very much in opposition to a whole variety of 'imperialist' projects and ideologies from which it has struggled to free itself. Over the centuries these 'imperialist' projects have included, in Europe, efforts to create a Holy Roman Empire, impose the authority of the Roman Catholic Church, spread the ideas of the French Revolution, establish German domination of the continent, and turn the European Union into a federal state. Outside Europe, they have included European colonialism, the Marxist promotion of revolution to bring about a world socialist order, and US-led interventionism post-1989 designed to bring to heel nation states which flout international law. The current threat to the nation state comes from what Hazony calls the 'globalist' or 'liberal imperialist' project which aims to impose its beliefs and practices on the whole world: a focus on individuals as individuals rather than as members of collectivities, a disregard for the inherited cultural identities of collectivities, a universal legal system, an agreed set of individual rights imposed on nations from above, expanded powers for international institutions such as international courts and the UN and its agencies, unconditional support for a European federal project. At the core of this project is distaste for the nation state. Referring particularly to Europe, Hazony comments that 'the independent national state is now seen by many political and intellectual figures ... as a source of incalculable evil, while the multinational

empire ... is mentioned time and again with fondness as a model for a post-national identity' (Hazony, 2018, p. 198). Globalists with this ideology, in Hazony's eyes, are massively intolerant of those who object to their vision of the future. It is a universalist ideology that 'inspires hatred' of the particular, a hatred that only grows 'as the resistance of the particular proves itself resistant and enduring' (Hazony, 2018, p. 220).

Instances of this 'fanaticism of the universal' are not hard to come by: the denunciation as 'racists' and 'xenophobes' of those in the UK keen to leave the European Union and regain their country's political and legal sovereignty; abuse towards those who query whether an 'open borders' immigration policy is in the best interests of all those concerned; the visceral distaste for the very existence of Israel, the quintessential nation state; the demonisation as 'being on the wrong side of history' of anyone whose views differ from the current socially liberal consensus. Echoing George Orwell's sentiment that 'intellectuals are more totalitarian in their outlook than the common people', Douglas Murray calls this mindset 'a dogmatism that insists questions are settled which are unsettled, that matters are known which are unknown' (Lasch, 1984, p. 108; Murray, 2019, p. 232). Anywheres imbued with this kind of dogmatic universalism are strikingly prominent within the political, cultural, media, and academic elites of the UK and the USA, and are responsible for the promotion of what the French call a *pensée unique*: a single way of thinking about things which is so all-encompassing that it is difficult to step outside it, and for which one risks excommunication should one be bold enough to do so (Hazony, 2018, pp. 11, 48, 191, 221, 233; N. Tate, 2017, 5–7).

But does this matter to international schools? It matters, first, because the issues are central to the future lives of students, as individuals, as citizens of nation states, and as cosmopolitans. Finding appropriate and non-indoctrinating ways of exposing students to

these issues is an important educational challenge for such schools. It matters, second, because of the predominantly left-wing voting patterns, and associated political views, of those who work in school and higher education. Surveys in recent years suggest that a large majority of school teachers are more likely to support left liberal political parties than conservative ones, with only 14% of UK-based teachers in a 2019 poll for *TES* indicating that they were likely to vote for the main party committed to leaving the European Union in that year's general election (Santry, 2019). A similarly high proportion of UK university academics appear to have comparable political sympathies (C. Turner, 2017). In the USA, school teachers have recently been very much more inclined to vote Democrat than Republican but 29% voted for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, suggesting a pattern less markedly different from the rest of the population than in the UK (Education Week Research Center, 2017). In US higher education the heavy lean to the left has been similar to that in the UK, with a 5:1 left-wing to right-wing ratio in 2011 (compared with a 2:1 ratio in 1996), with a particular concentration of self-proclaimed Marxists in social science departments many of whom, as Douglas Murray claims, appear to have abandoned their role as searchers after truth for a career as political activists (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018, p. 111; Murray, 2019, pp. 52, 59). I do not have such data for international schools, but will return to the implications of teacher bias for international schools later in the chapter.

International schools and education for identity

The Anywhere-Somewhere divide is about many things, but in large part it is about identity. Irrespective of the identity differences between Anywheres and Somewheres, educators need to reflect in general on how identity is shaped and how young people might be helped to understand its role in their own lives and in that of the

societies to which they belong. As a concept, identity came into its own in the twentieth century and has been the subject of extensive academic debate, above all in philosophy, psychology, and sociology. It has been at the core of many discussions around existentialism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism. A broad consensus has developed that identities are not fixed aspects of people's being but attributes that are largely constructed and thus changeable over time. Jean-Paul Sartre drew attention to what he saw as the 'inauthenticity' or 'bad faith' of those who simply accepted the identities – social, sexual, cultural, religious, national – given them by their environment, arguing the need for these to be consciously accepted, rejected, or moulded by individuals. In more recent times it has been suggested that by naming and defining new identities one may influence how people actually see themselves and how others perceive them, and that it is possible through language to 'make' new 'kinds of people' ('victim', 'survivor', 'Baby Boomer', 'obese', even – more controversially – 'autistic') (Hacking, 2007).

For Erik Erikson, the psychologist who did most to establish the twentieth-century study of identity, a sense of identity is above all essential for psychological health, with identity defined as a feeling of the sameness of oneself through time, 'a feeling of being at home in one's body, a sense of knowing 'where one is going', and an inner assuredness of anticipated recognition from those who count'. Erikson accepted that identities were fluid, and to an extent constructed, and that they changed over time, but saw the necessity of 'a sense of solid rootedness' for wellbeing. He saw the three essential constituents of a developed identity as work commitment, group affiliations, and philosophy of life (Isenberg, 2016, pp. 120, 126). Other writers on identity have stressed that the scope of possible identities is much wider even than this. Amartya Sen, the Indian economist and philosopher, postulates an imaginary person who, without any contradiction, might be:

An American citizen, of Caribbean origin, with African ancestry, a Christian, a liberal, a woman, a vegetarian, a long-distance runner, a historian, a schoolteacher, a feminist, a heterosexual, a believer in gay and lesbian rights, a theater lover, an environmental activist, a tennis fan, a jazz musician, and someone who is deeply committed to the view that there are intelligent beings in outer space with whom it is extremely important to talk (preferably in English). (Sen, 2006, pp. xii–xiii)

Sen's point is that identities are multiple and that individuals have choices about some of the identities they have, and above all about the relationship between these identities and their relative importance within their lives. His book *Identity and Violence* (2006) is a plea for multiple identities and for not seeing oneself, or being labelled, simply and deterministically, as a member of a particular race, ethnic group, gender, or religion. While accepting the inescapability of some of our identities, what we do with them is up to us. 'Life', he argues, 'is not mere destiny' (Sen, 2006, pp. 38–39).

Sen's plea for multiple identities is echoed in the writings of the Franco-Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf whose 1998 book *Identités Meurtrières* (hideously mistranslated as *In the Name of Identity*) I have frequently recommended to colleagues in international schools. Maalouf's own identities are those of an Arabic-speaking Lebanese, brought up as a Catholic in a family with multiple Christian traditions, someone with a sense of identity with the rest of the Middle East and the Arabic-speaking world, but also with France, of which he is a citizen, and with the world of *la francophonie* in which that language is spoken. While valuing these identities he also sees them, in ways similar to Appiah's 'partial cosmopolitanism', as being overlaid by an ethical sense of also belonging to a global human community, to a global *patrie éthique* (ethical homeland) alongside one's particular *patries* (homelands) (Maalouf, 1998, pp. 114–115; 2009, pp. 210, 310).

This emphasis on multiple identities is similar to the Stoic idea of an individual existing at the heart of a series of concentric circles, beginning with his or her immediate family and ending with the cosmos. It leaves one free to place a different weight on each of them at different times and in no way weakens the importance of a sense of identity with a wider group. Given the anonymity of modern social relations and the collapse of traditional metanarratives, people can benefit hugely from a sense of belonging to a community and to a communal project of which they, by right, are a part. The advantage of a sense of *national* identity, over a sense of identity to which only one part of the nation defined by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, or religion is able to belong, is that the former brings people together in a community with a common purpose while the latter potentially sets groups against each other, weakening the whole to the disadvantage of its parts.

Identity politics in its first wave, epitomised by Martin Luther King and by first wave feminism, was a demand for an end to discrimination, for full equality, and for a society in which fellow citizens sharing a common humanity could come together with a common purpose. All supporters of the cause, whatever their background, were welcome. By contrast, much of current identity politics forces its adherents to define themselves almost entirely as members of a particular group, insists on the group's separateness from other groups, disciplines its members when they offend group beliefs, 'catastrophises' the extent to which the group is oppressed by others, vilifies other groups deemed guilty by definition of this 'oppression' and of 'racism' or 'privilege', takes offence at the first opportunity, tries to shut down all opposition, and refuses to let outsiders share its culture (a.k.a. 'cultural appropriation'). Underneath all this is a search for power in relation to other identity groups and, at least among some identity politics theorists influenced by Gramsci and Marcuse, the use of identity politics activism to bring down existing

social structures (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018, pp. 64–67; Murray, 2019, pp. 56–58).

Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt in their book *The Coddling of the American Mind* (2018) examine identity politics as one example of a trend within US society and in particular within US academia. Their contention is not just that US universities (and by implication schools) are not doing enough to discourage dogmatism, groupthink, emotional reasoning, over-generalisation, dichotomous thinking and simplistic labelling, but that they are the cause of much of it. 'It is difficult', they claim, 'to imagine a culture that is more antithetical to the mission of a university' (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018, pp. 39, 59, 73; Murray, 2019, pp. 121–122, 127, 137, 151, 154).

A related dissolving agent threatening the viability of the nation state is multiculturalism, not necessarily *per se* but as conceived by some governments and by many on the political left. While identity politics has largely been stimulated from below, by activists egged on by cultural theorists, multiculturalism has been more of a state-led ideology. It has developed as a way of enabling governments to cope with the complexities of increasingly heterogeneous societies, with minority groups being supported in maintaining their separate identities and encouraged to engage with the state via so-called 'community leaders'. It is a policy stemming from cultural self-deprecation and from a wish to avoid the huge political effort required to bring about effective integration. Its public face is 'diversity is our strength', a mantra never scrutinised (the world is full of multi-ethnic states where diversity, badly handled, has been and is a major, and sometimes fatal, weakness). As Amartya Sen has argued, different cultures can coexist harmoniously within a state as long as one does not see them as singular identities and as long as there are measures to promote integration. If one fails to do this one ends up in a situation of 'plural monoculturalism' which is the opposite of multiculturalism properly conceived (Sen, 2006, pp. 156–160).

The failure of western attempts at creating a well-functioning multicultural nation state was publicly recognised in 2010 by, in rapid succession, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and UK Prime Minister David Cameron, and followed by hasty measures such as citizenship tests and educational measures to promote common citizenship, as well as, in England, by a new definition of ‘British values’ that state schools were obliged to use. Few of these seem to have done much to reduce the negative effects of previous policies (Isenberg, 2016, pp. 250–251; Murray, 2017, pp. 94–97; N. Tate, 2017, pp. 69–71, 94–96). The rise of identity politics and the debates over multiculturalism are a major fault line between Anywheres and Somewheres. Anywheres, being more socially liberal, are likely to be more sympathetic to rhetoric about diversity and multiculturalism, and to aspects of identity politics, while having reservations about its more radical features. Somewheres, because they are socially more conservative, have a stronger sense of their own group culture and a stronger identification with their country. As Sen, Appiah, and Goodhart have all suggested, however, the divide may be more bridgeable than at first sight. It remains to be seen to what extent the bridges can be built within schools.

*‘The function of the school is not to
instruct (children) in the art of living’: discuss*

The political thinker Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) had a great deal to say about education, much of which can be summed up in her often-cited statement that ‘the function of the school is to teach children what the world is like and not to instruct them in the art of living’ (Arendt, 1961b, p. 195). Although in one sense an educational conservative, in her distrust of the ‘child-centred’ Rousseauite and Deweyan educational ideas which she saw as dominant in 1950s and 1960s USA, her educational aims were far from conservative. Her interest

was not in the maintenance of existing political and social conditions, but in providing children with the kind of education that would best equip them to shape the world anew in ways that *they* saw fit. To do this they needed an induction into '(this) world as it is' and not to be taught as if the world were already other than it is.

Before making more specific suggestions about how international schools might improve this induction, making themselves rather less 'Academies for Anywheres' than they are at the moment, let me return briefly, as one always should, to the fundamental question of what education is for. If we use as a starting point Arendt's statement that the function of the school is 'to teach children what the world is like and not to instruct them in the art of living', with a view to promoting their autonomy, what does this exclude and what does it include? It certainly excludes the following: having a mission statement that implies that the only kind of 'citizenship' worth mentioning is 'global citizenship' (Council of International Schools, 2020); promoting 'planetary education' that is based on a commitment to a world 'wherein there is no other people except we – humans' (Bilewicz & Bilewicz, 2012, p. 333, cited in Singh & Qi, 2013, p. 70); teaching historical topics to support contemporary social engineering, for example massaging negative aspects of Muslim Andalusia to get across the contemporary message that different religions can all live together harmoniously; allowing educator biases to shape the content of learning programmes and school texts in ways that undermine a neutral presentation of controversial issues; demonstrating in one's casual asides as a teacher the same bad mental habits – emotional reasoning, dichotomous thinking, over-generalising – one should be warning one's students against (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018, p. 39).

I had always assumed that it was generally accepted that educators would at least *strive* not to limit student autonomy in these ways, while accepting the impossibility, and indeed undesirability, of excluding all bias. That was until in 2017 I came across a piece by

a teacher in England's main national education paper in which the writer insisted that the role of educators 'must be curating minds' (i.e. selecting which attitudes must be allowed to go into them, which is what this verb means) and called on his fellow teachers to 'step up' and through their jobs 'help to fight the Donald Trump and Brexit reactionary revolution' (Beach, 2017). This was no ordinary teacher but a young 'teacher ambassador' – with, one assumes, a clear Anywhere affiliation – recruited by a Conservative government scheme designed to encourage the most able young people to join the profession and act as a role model to others. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are many teachers who share such a view of their function, even if they do not shout it in this way from the rooftops. There are also others, in academia and especially in the humanities and social sciences, who have openly come to see the function of their professional roles as no longer merely to interpret the world but, in Marx's words, 'to change it' and to use education to train students more effectively to bring this change about (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2018, p. 254). It is a phenomenon from whose influence international schools are unlikely to be exempt.

It is easier to be clear, however, about what schools should *not* be doing than about what they should. There are many aspects of the 'art of living' which Arendt's injunction must surely allow and indeed encourage: the need to 'stop and think' and 'think what we are doing' (one of her own major themes), patience, precision, intellectual honesty, doubt, disinterested curiosity, the love of truth and justice, the willingness to be refuted by others, and, not least, all the learner attributes of the IB's excellent Learner Profile (International Baccalaureate Organization, 2013). These are all content- and perspective-free, and support – but in no way undermine – autonomy. They all contribute to the traditional liberal view of the aims of education as an induction into the pursuit of the truth and into the different kinds of reasoning involved in each form of knowledge

(Marples, 1999, *passim*). They are of course shaped by a vision of what a student ought to become – no educational effort to develop a student's humanity is value-free or without 'indoctrination' of a kind – but it is a vision of a student who is given opportunities to compare different points of view and encouraged to think critically (Kolakowski, 1990, p. 127).

As far as identity is concerned, Arendt was keen that education is about communicating *what we are* while leaving to students their decisions about *who we are*. Arendt might therefore have agreed with the philosopher of education Penny Enslin who, on grounds of autonomy, has opposed the *promotion* of national identity in schools. Schools instead, Enslin argues, should help learners to develop an understanding of the identities existing within the world and provide opportunities for them to choose or create ones themselves. She goes further, and also argues for the need to show students how the nation is an 'illusory' or 'imagined' community (Enslin, 1999). I would accept that 'nations' – like much that is important in our lives – are indeed 'imagined', and find little here that I would not wish to commend to international schools with students of many nationalities, except the implication that schools might consciously *aim* to undermine existing identities. Whether Enslin's argument applies to schools catering largely for the population of a nation state (including such schools which use the name 'international') is a very different question, the answers to which are likely to vary according to the ages of the students concerned. My first reaction is that, were Enslin's proposed approach to be put to a referendum (the kind of thing that might just happen, following a hostile petition, in Switzerland), it would be seen by many Somewheres as yet another *de haut en bas* imposition and, for good reason, soundly defeated.

Giving primacy to autonomy among educational aims raises, too, the question of whether this also rules out promoting a global sense of 'who we are'. I would argue that it does *not*. There is a permanence

and factuality about our common humanity that makes it unassailable. It further goes without saying – though I will say it to avoid misunderstanding – that there is also a need for schools of *all* types to ensure that, arising out of this sense of common humanity, students develop an understanding of their responsibility towards the other inhabitants of the planet and learn about global issues. Through this they should come to appreciate how as national citizens they can contribute to enabling their own states to rise to global challenges (Dower, 2003, p. 132). I would be very keen, however, that this sense of global identity be expressed in ways other than through the term ‘global citizenship’. A case can be made for a metaphorical and aspirational use of the term, and the intention behind its use is a noble one, but it can easily be used to mask an underlying feel-good ‘virtue signalling’ vacuity (Dower, 2003, pp. 141–149; Bawer, 2019). It diminishes the core notion of citizenship, distracts attention from the centrality of political power in world politics – power which derives from nation states even when they are acting together globally – and is not necessary as a stimulus to global engagement (Godfrey, 2014).

Somewheres and the international school

My main concerns in this chapter have been the nation state and identity. My starting point was the almost total absence of reference to the national dimension in almost all the international school fora in which I have participated, and in most of the limited range of contemporary writings on international education I have read. To what extent this neglect is replicated within international schools themselves is unknown. I am sure there is excellent practice of which I am unaware. The suggestions below for giving the world of Somewheres greater prominence within international schools are not meant to imply that in some, maybe many, this is not already happening. My thoughts in summary are as follows.

- Programmes of education in all international schools should ensure that students are introduced at appropriate ages, and cumulatively, to the concepts of nation state and national citizenship, and learn about the many different kinds of nation state, and the role of national actors, both state and non-state, in bringing about global change.
- International schools should use their host country as an exemplar of a nation state, maximising opportunities to learn its language, study its society, politics, and history, experience its culture, and get to know a wide range of its people from different backgrounds (including those from both inside and outside the school).
- Teachers and administrators in international schools should set an example by learning to speak the language of the host country, and be supported in doing this.
- International schools serving a largely national student body should have as one of their aims preparation for national citizenship. How one balances this aim with the simultaneous aim of preparing students for global awareness and engagement will require careful thought and difficult judgements (Nussbaum, 1994).
- In discussing with students controversial social, cultural, and political issues the greatest freedom of expression – in age-appropriate ways – should be encouraged in order to accustom them to expect and accept refutation, cope with being ‘offended’ by the views of others, and learn the skills of having ‘impossible conversations’ (Boghossian & Lindsay, 2019).
- Students should have opportunities to explore notions of identity, and in particular possibilities for multiple identities and the choices open to human beings. In doing this, schools will make use of the rich resources within the student body itself, the impressive possibilities for which have been illustrated by studies into the development of attitudes and intercultural understanding among students following IB courses (Wilkinson & Hayden, 2010, p. 90).

- International schools should prioritise the development of those qualities needed by a rational, reflective and empathetic human being, as discussed above, so that students may better understand the implications of their views, life choices, and actions on those, especially Somewheres, less fortunate than themselves. This applies to Somewheres wherever they are to be found, which is of course everywhere given that they are the vast majority of humankind.
- It has been variously suggested – as hypotheses open to testing – that, despite intentions pointing in an opposite direction, international schools may well in practice end up contributing to greater social and economic inequality in the countries in which they are located, strengthening the position of local elites, enabling students to launch careers away from home countries that need their skills, establishing habits of philanthropy as excuses to avoid radical change, and contributing to the global spread of the English language at the expense of other languages. They may also fail to expose students in their studies to different viewpoints about what has been called ‘neo-liberal, globalised, and essentially uncontrolled capitalism’ or ‘capitalism on steroids’, preparing them instead for membership of a global elite which benefits unfairly from these developments (Hughes, 2019, pp. 33–38). The leaders of international schools should ask themselves if any of this applies to their school, whether there is any discrepancy between its stated aspirations and the reality of what the school is and the impact it has on the wider world, and what they might do about it.
- Finally, those who teach in international schools should reflect continually on their own perspectives and opinions in relation to ethical, political, cultural, and social issues, especially controversial ones such as those dividing Anywheres and Somewheres, and ensure that where these emerge in their teaching, as they inevitably will, they compensate for any bias and impinge as little

as humanly possible on students' autonomy. At a time when it has been suggested that the main influence on a young person's world picture – perhaps for the first time in human history – is more likely to come from educational institutions than families there are few more sacred duties for educators than this one (Furedi, 2019).

LATIN AMERICA: 'TERRA INCOGNITA'
OF BRITISH SCHOOL HISTORY¹⁰

The final publication in this section dedicated to issues of identity has been included not because of its tenuous connection with national and global identities, but to show that one can be both enthusiastic about the history and culture of one's own country, and that of countries and cultures distant from one's own. I have always been clear that it is possible to have multiple identities while accepting the need to give priority, when it is needed, to one's membership of a particular nation and nation state. This embrace of diversity extends beyond multiple identities to multiple interests and the study of multiple peoples' histories and cultures. There is nothing strange, to take my own case, to have both argued for a history national curriculum centred on a chronological narrative of my country's story and at the same time promoted resources for teaching about the history of other parts of the world. Having lived in Spain for a year immediately after leaving university and while there having also become interested in the wider Hispanic world, it is not surprising that, when choosing topics to research for my MA and PhD theses, I should have looked towards Spanish South America, and then subsequently to have explored ways in which aspects of its history might be squeezed in a

¹⁰ First published in *History Teaching Review*, 14(1) [1981], pp. 2–5.

few places into the school curriculum. The following article makes an enthusiastic – and at times, looking back at it more than forty years later, over-enthusiastic – case for doing so.

When planning a history curriculum for English schools, five pressures need to be taken into account, most of which, with differing emphases, are likely to be broadly applicable to curriculum development in other countries. The first is to ensure that England remains as the central and predominant element, because that is where we are and who we are. The second is never to skip back into the ‘bad old days’ when things English often drove to the margins any study of the rest of the British Isles, thus giving due attention to the histories of Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, and their contribution to the overall ‘United Kingdom.’ The third is to place the history of England and the British Isles in its wider European context, in ways that mostly have absolutely nothing to do with the European Union. The fourth is to make sure we do not forget that for five or six centuries England has had relations with many other parts of the world outside Europe and that today, in a world in which distant events impinge on our lives daily, we need to understand something about both the present and the past of these places. The final and fifth pressure is to make sure that the other four pressures helpfully interact with each other, so that we are able to see how developments within England are often powerfully shaped by influences from a wider context, whether this is the rest of the British Isles, continental Europe or the non-European world.

We should also in any national curriculum make sure that we do not study the history of other parts of the world exclusively within the context of its relationship with our own country. It is for this reason that I have always supported including in England’s history curriculum at least one historical study, in each of the primary and secondary phases, whose starting point is looking at a culture and a history of another people from its own perspective and is not dependent solely

on what we learn of it when it is interacting with us. If we don't do this, we risk, at least in the case of England, the accusation of being 'insular', in the pejorative use of a word which ought otherwise to be our defining characteristic and a source of national pride.

Re-reading this article took me back to a world in which there was still a USSR and a Cold War, history teachers still used slide sets and filmstrips as teaching aids, my favourite Latin American writer Jorge Luis Borges was still alive, in Geneva, and still writing, and emails and internet were not yet in general use. I was also very conscious, in reading about the ignorance of Latin America on the part of Britain's elite, that almost exactly a year after the journal containing the article had been posted into letterboxes all over Scotland, the UK was at war with Argentina over the latter's invasion of the UK-owned Falklands Islands, the birthplace of the sheep farmer from whom I quote at the end of the article. If the UK government had taken South America more seriously, as my article showed that it rarely did after the First World War, this act of aggression might not have been launched and the resulting loss of military lives that we still remember every 11th November would not have been needed.

When the Anglo-Argentine writer, W. H. Hudson, first came to England in 1874 – amazed by the greenness of its landscape, the size of its trees, the magnificence of its cities – one of his first experiences after landing was a conversation with 'an important looking ... individual', whose complete ignorance of South America obviously came as a surprise. This gentleman, Hudson wrote in his diary, 'never had heard of the River Plate and asked if Argentines were not descended from the Dutch settlers and Indians. He knew a South American lady from Virginia!!!' (Hudson, 1958, pp. 32–33). Ignorance like this was not untypical of educated opinion at that time. It is still all too common today. Press coverage of Latin America, for example, is still poor, despite recent improvements. Its paucity misleads, reinforcing

stereotypes, suggesting ‘that little note ever happened except for the sporadic violence of man and nature.’ (Blakemore, 1970, p. 114). Basic misapprehensions persist. If even *The Times* refers to Bahia, an important city in Portuguese-speaking Brazil, as a ‘backwater’ where ‘Negro and Spanish traditions blend’, it is difficult to be harsh on some of the others. Even the highest levels of government are not exempt when a Secretary of State for Education and Science fails to distinguish between the terms ‘South America’ and ‘Latin America’, using the latter as if it were synonymous with the former. One may be confident that history teachers avoid these egregious blunders but many of them, at least in 1971 when Poppleton conducted a thorough survey in UK secondary schools, also ‘clearly regard Latin America as a peripheral area which comes very low on their list of interests’ (Poppleton, 1972, p. 8). This article tries to explain this neglect and suggests some remedies.

As part of the non-European world, Latin America is often not unique in receiving little attention from examination boards and history teachers. Despite the growth of interest in world history, some syllabuses continue to focus almost exclusively on Britain and Europe. When they look at the rest of the world many still fail to move beyond the twentieth century or major powers such as the USA or the USSR. Scotland’s examination board, however, is unique, at least among UK boards, in the degree to which it excludes non-European history from its syllabuses. The arguments against this have been too well-rehearsed in recent years to need repetition here. Latin American history, however, is a special case. Its neglect has often been greater than that of Asian and African history. There are reasons peculiar to the area that help to account for this. Four factors in particular seem to making Latin America a *terra incognita* in this country:

- The absence in Latin America of important British colonial or ex-colonial territories.

- The dramatic reduction in British economic influence in the area in the twentieth century, partly as a result of two world wars and the Great Depression, and the corresponding increase in US influence.
- The relative insignificance of Latin America in British foreign policy for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and
- The few international, as opposed to national, crises in its recent history.

Neglect by the press, by schools and universities, is the product of this state of affairs and helps to perpetuate it.

The picture is not as black as it was 20 years ago. There have been many critics of Britain's attitude towards Latin America and important developments in the study of the area, especially in the universities, have taken place. On the recommendations of the Parry Report in 1964, five new Latin American Centres were set up in the Universities of Cambridge, Glasgow, Liverpool, London, and Oxford, to promote both the undergraduate and postgraduate study of Latin America (University Grants Committee). Other universities and polytechnics have followed suit in a more modest way, not least in the study of Latin American history.

The recent amazing literary achievements of Latin America have also had a considerable impact in this country. Neruda, Borges, Carpentier, and García Márquez are well known outside Latin America, and translations of their works and of many other Latin American authors are now widely available. More significantly for history teaching in schools, there has been an increase in the number of teachers entering the profession with at least some acquaintance at undergraduate level of Latin American history.

All this activity has perhaps had less effect on schools than might have been expected. Poppleton's 1971 survey showed that interest in the study of Latin America was growing and that provision was

improving but found that it was the 'most neglected of the world regions' and that there was very little interest in the few options available at school level. Latin America figured far more prominently in Geography syllabuses than in History ones. Many Scottish secondary pupils are still lucky when they leave school if they possess what Tim Hastie has described as the 'basic historical information' about the area adults need if they are to make any sense of the modern world: how its inhabitants came to speak European languages, how it came to be divided up into a lot of different states (Hastie, 1979). They will, perhaps, have heard of the Aztecs or the Incas, and of Christopher Columbus. They might remember that Latin America was awkward enough to cause problems to Canning in the 1820s. They are very unlikely to have much understanding of the early nineteenth-century Emancipation and even less of any developments since then. In the absence of knowledge and understanding the traditional stereotypes take over – steaming jungles, the Rio carnival, the tango, the Mexican Western – and the diversity of Latin American reality is lost.

The case for Latin American history – within the wider case for world history which I do not propose to consider here – rests on a number of claims. In the first place, Latin America is a part of the world that has been profoundly shaped by European cultural influences. Its culture is in many ways much closer to our own than those of Asia and Africa. Although not an argument against the study of these other civilisations, the narrower cultural divide can sometimes be an advantage. The size of Latin America and its large population also invite attention. So does the poverty of many, though by no means all, of its republics. A study of the historical background to under-development in Bolivia or Paraguay, Haiti or El Salvador throws light not just on ways of life very different from our own but of the causes of one of the most important divisions, between 'developed' and 'under-developed' countries, within the modern world.

Britain's connections with Latin America are also much closer than the present low level of trade with the area would suggest. Through international agencies such as the UN, the World Bank, and the IMF, through voluntary bodies like Oxfam, Christian Aid, and Amnesty International, through investments and through government policy on human rights, Britain can, and does, exert a significant influence on Latin America, not always to its benefit. Britain has a particular interest in its continuing colonial commitments to Belize¹¹ and the Falkland Islands, and in its ex-colonies in the Caribbean and in Guyana. It is unfortunate that ignorance of these links and of the background to the present situation in Latin America should be as widespread as it is. It is particularly unfortunate that, as a result of neglect in schools, ignorance should be so complete that many adults dismiss the area as one about which they know nothing and need to know nothing.

Connections with Latin America have in the past often been much closer than they are today. British volunteers and British diplomacy played a major role in the struggle for independence from Spain and Portugal at the beginning of the nineteenth century. British merchants and investors were closely involved in the economic development of many of the new states. British investments in Latin American government bonds and public companies amounted to a quarter of total overseas investments in 1913. This was considerably more than was invested in either India and Ceylon, Australasia, or Canada. In the same year 11% of Britain's exports went to Latin America, compared with 15% to all the 'White Dominions' put together. Britain supplied, for example, 90% of Latin America's imports of coal and owned 80% of Argentina's extensive railway network (Platt, 1972, pp. 103, 249, 289, 291; Fieldhouse, 1961, p. 191). Engineers, mechanics, train drivers, doctors, shepherds, seamen,

¹¹ Belize became independent in 1981, five months after the publication of this article.

and merchants all went out to Latin America in large numbers. No big South American city, especially the ports, was without its British community. Some of them ‘went native’, marrying local women, becoming addicted to *caña*, even turning Roman Catholic. Others maintained their Victorian rectitude, forming local branches of the Church of England Temperance Society (as at the Lota coal mines in southern Chile), reading their out-of-date copies of *The British Workman* or *The Sunday at Home*, subscribing to the salary of the Evangelical clergyman sent out by the South American Missionary Society. British subjects served in the armies and navies of many Latin American republics, fighting on both sides in the Paraguayan War of 1864–1870 and again in the War of the Pacific in 1879–1883. British writers – W.H. Hudson, Conrad in *Nostromo* (1904), the neglected Scottish writer R. B. Cunningham Graham – used Latin American scenes for their novels and short stories. Manufacturers produced goods for the Latin American market, financiers floated loans in the City, Episcopalians in Edinburgh, Cupar, and Ardrrossan held sales of work so that missionaries might save the souls of ‘benighted savages’ in Tierra del Fuego.

Scotland’s connections with Latin America were particularly close. Nineteenth-century travellers’ accounts, which were published in vast numbers, invariably mention the expatriate Scots. They were found in the province of Buenos Aires as merchants, *estancieros*, or shepherds; in Tierra del Fuego, where the Sociedad Exploradora put up its daily notices in two languages – English and Gaelic; in Paraguay where the newly-qualified Edinburgh doctor, William Banks, spent a miserable six months in 1864–1865, consoling himself with daily readings of Paget’s *Lectures on Surgical Pathology* (1860); in the ports of Chile; even at the mouth of the Amazon, where a long-established Scottish resident complained to one traveller that the nearest suppliers of oatmeal were in Lisbon and New York. The

descendants of many of these emigrants are still there, their names echoing through the pages of the Buenos Aires telephone directory: Buchanan Atilio, Campbell Tomás Enrique, Grant Guillermo, MacFarlane Amelia Carmen.

The mingling of different cultures and economies had more impact on Latin America than on Britain. The economic importance of Latin America to Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is not, however, in doubt. Its legacy is still visible today in buildings like Avery Hill at Greenwich, with its marble-lined billiard room and centrally heated stables, once the home of J. T. North, the Nitrate King of Chile, or Tyntesfield in Somerset, built by the Gibbs family on the proceeds of the Peruvian *guano* trade. The fact that the memories of this recent connection have been so largely lost is an indictment of the long-standing neglect of Latin America's history in this country. It is also an incentive to remedy it for the future.

A final, and very important, justification for the study of Latin America is the intrinsic interest and excitement of many of the episodes in its history. The civilisation of the Incas, the exploratory journeys down the Amazon, the Jesuit missions, the wars of independence, the Paraguayan War, the Mexican Revolution, Papa Doc Duvalier, the fall of Allende, are all topics likely to appeal. All involve the exploration of feelings and decisions, of conflicting points of view, of the problems of evidence. It would be invidious to spell out what a study of Latin American history might comprise. This would depend on the age and ability of the pupils, on one's wider objectives and on the rest of the history syllabus. There is, however, no lack of topics either interesting and exciting in themselves or significant because of their impact on other parts of the world (such as the wars of independence or the Cuban Revolution of 1959), or thematically relevant to wider units of study like slavery, empire, industrialisation, or race relations.

Lack of resources is also no argument against the study of Latin American history. It was not so in 1971 when many of Poppleton's respondents mentioned this as an obstacle. It is even less true today when topic and text books, contemporary accounts, historical novels, kits, maps, slide sets, filmstrips, and films are available on a wide range of topics and at different levels (Hunt, 1974). The pre-Columbian civilisations, the Spanish conquest, the Mexican and Cuban Revolutions, and contemporary Latin America are particularly well served. Travellers' accounts in English exist for many periods and especially for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Naylor, 1969).

There is also much Latin American literature in translation, some of it – like Graciliano Ramos's *São Bernardo* (1934), about North-East Brazil in the late 1920s and early 1930s, or Augusto Roa Bastos's *Son of Man* (*Hijo de hombre*, 1960), set in Paraguay during the Chaco War of 1932–1935 – vividly evocative of a particular time and place (Ramos, 2020; Roa Bastos, 1988). There is, therefore, no lack of visual aids and primary sources to give the immediacy that the study of history needs. I should like to conclude with extracts from two such sources.

The first is about life on a Patagonian sheep farm in the 1890s. The writer, Duncan Kyle, was born in the Falklands in 1885, the son of Scottish emigrants, and spent his early life there and in Patagonia. The second, much earlier in date, is a letter that a Spanish trader sent home from Peru. At the time of writing, he had not seen his wife for 11 years. Both of these illustrate the point that, whatever the reasons for neglecting Latin American history – and I have tried to argue that there can be few – lack of intrinsic interest and lack of resources are not among them.

By now we are getting into the beginning of the year, 1893. Shearing the sheep was over and dipping too. The only excitement I can remember was when some Indians visited the ranch and gathered

up the mares and branded a lot of young colts. Breaking in wild horses was great fun.

In the late summer my father went away back to the Falklands about some business. Travelling was not easy, as he had to go south on horse-back for many days before arriving in Punta Arenas (Sandy Point), Chile, where he got a boat over to the Falklands. My mother and my married sister (Mrs Hope) were both expecting babies about the beginning of July, and that was mid-winter out there.

An old native midwife was supposed to be with mother at the confinement, but by bad luck she never arrived. There was no midwife and not another woman within hundreds of miles. The doctor from Rio Golliages [*sic*]¹² was sent for, but owing to bad weather and the long journey, he didn't arrive for a fortnight. By this time my mother was very ill, and there was nothing he could do to save her, but the baby survived. My mother had got an infection and blood poisoning had set in. Meantime my sister took ill and she also got the infection and died a few days after my mother. Her baby also died.

My father had been delayed on his trip and didn't arrive until after my mother had died. It was a sad home coming for him, and a very sad home for all the family. My sister, aged ten, nursed the baby, and we had all to help. There was not a woman anywhere we could turn to for help. There were six children, the eldest being ten...¹³

By your faith, lady, take special care with your children, especially my daughter Sabina ... in this way you will give me much peace of mind both there and here, because I give you my word if it weren't for the children I would have left here many years ago; and since you know, lady, how much reason there is to look after my honour, I will not be importunate, but remain begging God to hold us all in

¹² Río Gallegos, Patagonia.

¹³ Unpublished MS in the possession of Miss S. Chisholm.

his hand and allow me to see you again in health as I desire. From this side of Potosí, the day of St John – and here you can see, lady, how much I love you and my children; the others are going to see the bullfights and the tournaments, while I don't spend time or lose sleep on anything but remembering you and them, and writing you.

In the year of 1551, at your lady's command as your very own, liking and loving you more than himself, Juan Prieto.

Lady, see that the adobe walls they lay for the garden are even and very good and thick, and there should be no aperture anywhere, but all of it walled in, two rows high. And be sure that many grafts are started and trees planted, and if there aren't many rabbits in the rabbit hutch buy some and put them in, and the same with the doves. (Lockhart & Otte, 1976, p. 134)

In the next few years history teachers and examination boards will be under pressure to review existing syllabuses for upper secondary pupils and to devise new ones. In the debate stimulated by curriculum and examination reform it is important that the claims of non-European history, and in particular of Latin American history, should be carefully considered. When sifting through the vast tracts of past time for periods and area to study we should try to look at the world afresh, identifying the kind of spectacles through which we habitually view it. If we succeed in doing this, we may well decide to give Latin America more prominence in our syllabuses than it often has at present. This in its turn might help to dissipate some of that 'utter ignorance and hopeless lack of interest' which Richard Burton, the explorer and scholar, encountered over 100 years ago whenever he mentioned South America, and which is still with us today (Burton, 1870, p. vii).

PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

THOUGHTS FROM MARRAKECH ON EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

For the 17 years 1994 to 2011 I was head of big organisations, with large numbers of staff (500 in London and Belfast, over 1,000 in Geneva) and, in the case of The International School of Geneva, over 4,000 pupils spread across three campuses, eight schools and two Swiss cantons. The buck did not always stop with me, especially with the curriculum and assessment agencies I led where I was accountable to a very 'political' Board and through them to the Government, but for many matters, especially those to do with staff, it did.

I had no training for 'leadership', never had the time or the inclination to read most of the books that would have advised me about it, but slowly learned some things about it. The need to think about it was particularly compelling in schools where one could not be unaware of the expectations that others had of one as the school's leader. I also benefitted by moving on from one organisation to another and carrying with me at each transition some kind of analysis of my successes and failures. By 2008, well-established in what was proving to be the most satisfying job in my career, I felt I had something to

say about it that might possibly be useful, which I did at one of the regular International Baccalaureate conferences in Marrakech. It was following this speech that I was invited to join the Board of the IB on which I served two terms from 2009 to 2015 during most of which time I was Chair of the IB's Education Committee.

My plan is to say a few things about the literature on leadership and then to concentrate more specifically on what I think are some of the issues that particularly face, or ought to face, leaders in schools. I will conclude with some fairly personal thoughts on educational leadership that are more generally applicable. There will be a bit of time for questions and comments. My leadership style in this session will, however, be 'pacesetting' and 'visionary', in the French *cours magistral* tradition, rather than 'affiliative' and 'democratic'. These are Daniel Goleman's terms, and I will be mentioning him in a moment. I shall not therefore be asking you to turn to your neighbour to share your experiences as 'wounded leaders' (this, by the way, is a term that crops up in the literature ... I have not invented it). You may perceive this absence of audience participation either as an affront to the deepest pedagogical principles of the International Baccalaureate (IB), and as evidence of my abject failure as a leadership role model, or it may, at this stage in the conference, be a blessing. I will show you a few pictures as I go along, in case you get bored.

It was with considerable reluctance that I decided to propose this talk. On the one hand I am very clear that there is a group of roles and functions that one can define as 'leadership', and about which it is legitimate to talk, that these roles and functions are crucial to the success or otherwise of schools (and indeed of education systems more generally), that they are exercised by a variety of people, not just heads, and that there can be few topics more important for a conference directed at 'IB leadership teams'. I am also aware that this is something that I *ought to be able* to talk intelligently about,

if I try hard enough, given that I have spent the last 14 years as chief executive, head, or director-general of large, complex, and very different educational bodies. In my present job my role is also, above all, to support, coach, and appraise the heads of the three campuses and eight schools which make up The International School of Geneva. I must, I felt, have learned something from five years of trying to do this that was worth passing on. On the other hand, I am not part of the research and publications industry that has grown up around 'leadership', nor have I made a systematic study of it. Also, dipping into some of the leadership blogs I have found on the internet – yes, there are such things – has left me with a visceral distaste for the humourless people who add comments like (I quote) 'I'm one of those who have attained an appreciable level of self mastery, but I ... [have needed to] work on my social intelligence'. (I do hope it was not one of you who said this – one never knows). I would hate to drift into anything that associates me with such people or even hints at complacency and self-satisfaction. I reassured myself in the end by reminding myself that my many leadership failures were perhaps what most gave me some kind of justification to address this topic. However, the 'wounded leader' genre is already far too vast for me to wish to trouble you with any revelations as part of this talk.

First, the literature. I had never looked at any of this until preparing for this talk. I had associated it either with those unattractively printed paperbacks for aspiring executives one finds in airport bookshops or with indigestible educational research journals. The literature is certainly vast. It has also spawned a series of websites and journals, international conferences, OECD projects, and no end of courses and coaching consultancies. There are 'educational leadership toolkits', 'leadership performance matrices', 'leadership personal insight profiles', 'online mission statement builders' to help leaders create their personal mission statements, 'clearness committees' in

which your questions about the nature of your leadership can be rendered clearer and simpler, and much more besides. Taxonomies are a speciality of this area: the 21 'key areas of leadership responsibility'; the 10 'crucial components of effective leadership'; the 6 links between learning and democratic leadership; the 6 'drivers of change'; the 6 'styles of leadership'. Seven, however, is the commonest number: the 7 'key development areas for resilient schools'; the 7 core functions of leadership in schools'; the 7 'heresies of leadership'; and so on. There is clearly something about the number 7 that is deeply embedded in our mental structures: 7 Deadly Sins, 7 Liberal Arts, 7 Sisters, 7 Seas, 7-year itch. This is why, in conformity with the genre, I shall feel obliged to conclude my talk with 7 of my own thoughts about leadership. I shall also be strongly recommending a minimum 7-year tenure for the leaders of international schools, instead of the shockingly low 2.5 average that one finds at present, a statistic that is far from solely explicable by failures of leadership on the part of heads.

Dipping into all this literature left me feeling overwhelmed, slightly stressed, inadequate, faintly resentful about all the admonitions, and with a sense that I was being put under pressure to develop consumer needs which I did not really have but which the providers of services would rush to satisfy. As the controversial French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu put it, in the context of more general comments about the lifestyle counselling industry, it is a form of exploitation to 'impose impossible norms with a view to then selling the (usually ineffective) means that purport to bridge the gap between these norms and any real possibility of attaining them.'

However, some excellent reflection and research has taken place and a number of key messages come across.

First, that leadership is a key element in the process of 'school improvement', and is a thread that runs through all the other elements in the 'school improvement' process: shared vision, goals, and values,

sense of school identity, high expectations, efficiency, communications, monitoring, evaluation, professional development, finance.

Second, that leadership is exercised at all levels and should never be seen solely or mostly in terms of the head's leadership. These levels include: the Board, the other members of the senior management team, the heads of departments, the coordinators, the staff association or union leaders (a key leadership role in my limited experience and one that I have seen exercised both very positively and very negatively), teachers themselves (there is leadership exercised by teachers in staff rooms and through their roles in committees and staff meetings), even the leaders of parent teacher and alumni associations.

One level of leadership that is usually not considered in these discussions is that of educational policy makers operating in the bodies or posts at the different levels in which educational policy is made within particular states: national or regional education ministers, national education bodies, examining boards, or locally elected committees and their executive arms. The quality of this leadership can have major consequences, both positive and negative, on what happens in schools. Comparative studies of the work of education ministers, and their impact on school improvement, within and across countries would be fascinating. These may exist, but I have not come across them. There are also important leadership issues in supra-national bodies such as the IB and in education accreditation agencies. How leadership is exercised in these enormously influential bodies – the respective roles of governance and executive, the decision-making processes, the arrangements for consultation – is a matter for separate study.

The third message that I picked up from my quick survey of the literature is the importance of what is increasingly called 'sustainable leadership', in other words the need to ensure that whatever features of good practice are put in place to make schools more effective are not dependent on one person who may leave, be promoted, die, retire,

be sacked or have a breakdown, and indeed are not dependent on any particular group of individuals. The key objective must be to ensure that there is such a wide level of commitment to the vision, goals and values of the school, and of experience and expertise in its modes of working that the institution will carry on regardless even when the main leader or leaders are changed. This should indeed be part of the definition of an effective school. Sustainable leadership, however, is most likely to be achieved where there is explicit attention to risk assessment and to contingency, and succession planning, all of which, once you put aside the jargon and eschew the advice of consultants, is common sense.

The fourth message that I picked up is the obvious one that leaders must be encouraged to think, and to continue to think, about how they are exercising their leadership roles, to consider the choices that they have in terms of their leadership styles (and there are choices to be made, for example within Daniel Goleman's six leadership styles, which are not intended to be classified simply in terms of good and bad), and to plan to make changes where necessary. We probably do not need all this taxonomy paraphernalia, but we do need to be reflective, both as a matter of course in everything we do and in a more planned way in terms of our own self and external evaluation.

Indeed, what leaders need above all is to be intelligent, but as well as cognitive intelligence (never to be downplayed, and more on this later) also to be intelligent in the broader non-cognitive ways in which people like Daniel Goleman and Howard Gardner have been defining intelligence. Although Gardner and Goleman's work on multiple intelligences is not solely focused on leaders, it is above all their ideas that I have found useful and worth a second visit.

Gardner's discussions of interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence, and of moral intelligence, are all highly relevant to school leaders. So too are Goleman's four domains of emotional intelligence and the work he has done on the importance of these in leadership roles:

- *self-awareness*: emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, self-confidence;
- *self-management*: emotional self-control, transparency, adaptability, achievement orientation, initiative, optimism;
- *social awareness*: empathy, organisational awareness, service orientation;
- *relationship management*: inspirational leadership, influence, developing others, change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, teamwork, and collaboration (Goleman, 2020).

The encouraging conclusion of the research is both that emotional intelligence of these kinds can be learned and that it can have a very positive effect on one's effectiveness as a leader. Hence the mushrooming of a whole service industry to support these newly identified consumer needs. There is even, I notice from my website searches, a 'Centre for Applied Emotional Intelligence', 'the representative body [I quote] for professionally qualified Emotional Intelligence practitioners'.

The work that I have found particularly useful, however, is Gardner's most recent book *Five Minds for the Future* (2005). This is not written specifically with 'leaders' in mind, but it discusses many of the qualities that leaders need to be successful and has particularly interesting things to say about ethics and the workplace. Five is also a more manageable number than 7 or 21.

Gardner's discussion of the first of his minds – the Disciplined Mind – stresses that a discipline can both be an academic one and the set of practices associated with a particular occupation or trade. School leaders need both the passion for and mastery of one or more areas of learning (if they do not have this, they do not model the learning they are encouraging in their students) and the set of skills, attitudes, knowledge, and understanding associated with their particular trade (such as an understanding of current educational

issues and, in my case, for example, Swiss employment law, Swiss planning procedures, knowledge of my school's history, and so on).

Gardner's second mind – the Synthesising Mind – is a particularly crucial one for the school leader. Those responsible for vision and strategy need to be able to bring together a whole variety of different matters and to make connections between them. Education takes place within wider cultural, social, ethical, political, and economic contexts, and the implications of these for what happens in particular institutions need to be considered. Heads also need to have a sense of the interaction between all the different factors that make a school effective: staff recruitment, staff evaluation, arrangements for the monitoring of educational quality, professional development, consultation, communication, management structures, ICT deployment, and so on. Also, and strangely absent sometimes from the literature, connections need to be made between all this and (where appropriate, given the nature of the school) issues of market share, admissions and marketing, finance and fundraising. Of course, not all of these functions need to be exercised by one person, but the head needs to create and to communicate the overall picture. This is where Gardner's discussion of the Synthesising Mind is relevant to school leaders.

Gardner's other three minds are the Creating, Respectful, and Ethical ones. His discussion of the ethical mind is very much in the context of work situations and cites some worrying evidence about young professionals knowing that and how they should act ethically but deciding, for career advancement reasons, that they are unable to do so. My one thought about the Creating Mind is that it does not necessarily have to be the head who has this kind of mind. One needs to identify it in others and to make best use of it. In the course of a long career, I have been subjected to a variety of management development exercises, some of which have involved using one of those personality questionnaires that all the members of a team

are asked to complete. Apart from the repeated confirmation that I am obsessively rational and weak on emotion-centred aspects of personality, the one thing that these exercises always throw up is that there are some team members who stand out for being extremely creative and divergent. Usually one's response is 'yes, that confirms the sense I have of this person', but it is also often 'I don't think we have sufficiently made use of that particular talent for the sake of the institution as a whole'. The success of leaders depends above all on the use they make of others.

The fifth and final message that I have picked up from my lay-person's scrutiny of the literature is the need to think through how one is going to formalise the reflection and learning that is necessary for effective leadership. Although much or all of this can be achieved informally, and is often best left informal, it cannot over an education system as a whole be left to chance. One therefore needs arrangements for professional development, individual support and appraisal, at all levels of leadership in an institution (and, especially, in both primary and secondary schools with all those who have programme or subject coordination responsibilities).

Before moving away from the literature on leadership I also have three final comments.

First, much of what is said about the qualities you need to be a leader is hardly new and has often been said much more succinctly and elegantly over the course of human history. It is mostly all there somewhere: in the works of philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli, and Burke, in good history books, and in novels. I think I went back to school this August more reflective about my role as leader as a result of having read over the summer, on the one hand, Seneca's *On the Constancy of the Wise Man* (*De Constantia Sapientis*) (Sénèque, 1962) and, on the other, an outstanding new study of one of France's sixth- and seventh-century Merovingian rulers than from pouring over the '10 crucial components of effective school

leadership'. The contemporary world has a remarkable capacity for thinking that its ideas are wholly novel. Talking of Seneca, by the way, reminds one of the persistent gap between theory and practice. He had great ideas about the development of human character and tried them out on his student the Emperor Nero with results that you all probably know about.

My second point is to draw attention to what the French would call the 'very Anglo-Saxon' (*très anglo-saxon*) nature of most of the work on school leadership. One hears very little in France and Switzerland, for example, about school leadership as a key element in school success. Most Geneva state primary schools did not have heads until the beginning of this school year. They followed the state's curriculum and had visiting inspectors to oversee them. This is a very different concept of the school from the one that is taken for granted in most of the literature I have been referring to, but does this mean simply that Geneva was backward? Many of my school's French-trained secondary teachers also have a different view of the role of 'the school administration', not seeing it as having a great deal to do with how teachers teach. One of the challenges of school leadership in international schools, especially if they run separate language programmes as mine does, is in creating school identities in situations in which there are widely varying staff expectations.

My third point is a related one. The nature of leadership roles obviously varies with the type of school one is talking about. A private school is not the same as a state one; a boarding school is different from a day school; a proprietary private school, of which there are many in international education, is not the same as a 'not-for-profit' one; a school with a powerful elected governing board that meets frequently is not the same as one with a board that meets three or four times a year and confines itself to issues of high strategy. The various taxonomies of leadership therefore mean very different things in different situations. Education, as Kant said, is an art, based on

experience, not on theories. Kant's *Lectures on Pedagogy* are well worth reading: he actually taught for nine years and knew what he was talking about (Kant, 2007).

I should now like to say a few things about what I shall call 'intellectual leadership', something that ought to be central to a conference focused on 'Challenging the mind, Inspiring the Soul' (it is reassuring to have the IB's authoritative confirmation of the existence of the latter).

The world of education is what the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, would have called a *champ*, a field of activity with its own schema, concepts, language, rules, values, and interests. International education is a sub-set of this field. Within these fields how we think, how we behave, and what we say is very much determined for us. For much of the time, without realising it, one is 'spoken for' (*être parlé*) rather than 'speaks' (*parle*) (Bourdieu 1984, p. 17). There are important issues of free will and determinism lurking in all this that I do not wish to go into, but any glance at educational programmes and materials from a previous era highlights how what we do in schools reflects both a passing mindset that was taken as immutable at the time when it was dominant and serves some wider social, economic, or political function of which we may only be partially aware at the time.

I remember reading a study of nineteenth-century English history school textbooks and coming away feeling slightly disheartened at the thought that the key contribution of generations of my predecessors (I began as a history teacher) might well have been the buttressing of a particular kind of social, economic, and political status quo. Despite our contemporary emphasis on 'learning how to learn', which is designed, among other things, to encourage intellectual independence, to what extent are we doing just the same?

The first kind of 'intellectual leadership' is therefore to stand back from one's field of activity, one's *champ*, to ask questions about it, and

to let the education that we provide be influenced, as appropriate, by our answers. This is a kind of leadership that is not only, or necessarily mainly, exercised by heads. We all need our intellectually alert and divergent colleagues and should give them free rein in challenging the most basic assumptions underlying our activities.

As well as these very broad questions about the functions that we serve there are also lots of questions that need to be asked about the approaches to learning that we adopt. There is intellectual leadership to be exercised here too. It is easy to get locked into a single way of seeing things of which one is unaware: what the French call a *pensée unique*, a phrase for which there is no simple English equivalent.

There are some approaches to learning whose superiority is attested by research: the importance of active involvement in one's learning; the part played by learner choice; the need for variety of learning approaches; the value of praise when appropriately given; the importance of consolidation; the benefits of being explicit about objectives; the need for formative feedback. Much of this is not new: Rousseau and Kant signed up to most of this in the eighteenth century, Montaigne in the sixteenth. Some things, however, are much more contestable in terms of their short-, medium-, and long-term effects, and in terms of their relationship to the fundamental aims of education: the dominance of the enquiry-based or constructivist model of education; the preoccupation with learning as fun; the current level of some of our expectations.

How can we be sure that our current orthodoxies in these approaches to learning will serve education's fundamental purposes? Will our emphasis on 'learning how to learn' actually produce a new generation of people who have all the splendid characteristics of the IB learner profile (a document I completely endorse) or will what conservative critics such as George Steiner call the 'planned amnesia' and 'dumbing down' of modern Western education finally cut us off from our cultural roots? (Steiner, 2008). Is the inter-

nationalising of national school curricula diminishing school education's role in the transmission and maintenance of the world's highly distinctive cultures? Will this kind of education encourage the formation of largely cosmopolitan elites that have lost touch with the riches of the civilisations into which students were born? European, Islamic, Chinese, and Hindu civilisations are so old and so rich that even a lifetime's study of one of them only scrapes the surface of what they have to offer. What should be the balance in internationally-minded national schools, between the global and the culturally specific in education?

Major education initiatives, launched with the most noble of motives, have a tendency not to achieve what they set out to achieve. France's traditional emphasis on a uniform education system applicable to everyone and designed to prepare all young people for a single republican identity has not prevented the massive disaffection of young people in *les banlieues*. England's decades of a very different policy of multiculturalism, and the downplaying of British identity, seem to have produced significant numbers of young Muslims whose main wish is to destroy the society into which they were born and in which they were educated. One of this year's publishing successes in France has been the philosopher Elisabeth Badinter's *L'Infant de Parme* (2008). This describes how the greatest Age of Enlightenment educators of their day took in hand the education of the young prince Ferdinand of Parma with a view to making him their ideal of an 'enlightened ruler'. He ended up, despite being far from stupid, but with beautiful and mortifying irony, re-establishing the Inquisition, handing over his duchy to the most diehard elements of the Catholic clergy, and spending his time singing bawdy songs in taverns with his peasants. Intellectual leadership involves being sceptical about our current educational certainties, asking difficult questions about the education we are providing, and making sure that orthodoxies and complacencies are challenged.

The third kind of intellectual leadership is using our minds to help us understand the nature of the world for which our students are being prepared.

One of the duties of school leaders is to reflect on the rapidly changing nature of our world and to ensure that the education we provide enables young people to understand and to find their place within it. I am not talking about planning an education for 2050 or whatever, as that kind of futurology is pointless. I am also not talking about saving the world through education as, although we may rightly aspire in that direction, it would be quixotic to place too much reliance on it. I am talking more modestly about grappling ourselves with the issues concerning our world and then helping young people to do the same. Issues such as those to do with:

- what one means by citizenship and the relationship between national, local, and global citizenship (the last of these an area in which there are many dubious assumptions);
- human rights (an area to be debated and not just promoted);
- social justice, if one can be clear what that might mean;
- environmental issues.

These are all areas that should figure at some point in education in schools in a way that does not overshadow traditional subjects. In tackling these issues, one needs to make sure that one does not get locked into one's own current set of myths or *penseé unique* about them.

One also needs to ensure that one does not exclude from debate ways of looking at things that have become temporarily unfashionable, such as the largely complete exclusion from mainstream public discussion in most western countries of Marxist analyses of widening economic and social inequalities. Some of the things we have heard at this conference imply that all that matters is individual humanitarian action. The questioning of our world surely does not stop here.

Educational leaders thus need to set an example by showing that we are willing to engage with these controversial issues and to puncture these silences.

The key quality of school leaders that I am talking about here is the one that has been at the centre of at least Western thought since the Renaissance (and in many ways earlier), which is autonomy. We need to strive for our own autonomy and to encourage young people to strive for their own, ‘the enemies of autonomy’, as a recent philosophical work put it, being ‘indoctrination, brain-washing, domination, manipulation, conformity, conventionality, false consciousness...’

We also need to avoid that syndrome for which the French have another word that has no English equivalent: *angélisme* or naïve idealism. We must promote respect for difference and encourage ideals of peace and international understanding, but any school rhetoric that suggests that we can wave magic wands that will put the world to rights is positively unhelpful. There is some of this around. We need more of the hard-headed Israeli writer Amos Oz’s language when talking of the Israel-Palestine problem: ‘please help us to make our divorce as rational and painless as possible’ (Oz, 2004). We need deep pragmatic realism, as well as idealism.

My fourth kind of intellectual leadership concerns issues of culture. When I was at school one of the main purposes of education, without any doubt, was to provide an induction into culture viewed as what the nineteenth-century English writer Matthew Arnold called ‘the best that has been known and thought’. ‘Culture’, in the traditional ‘high culture’ sense of the term, was difficult and to enter and possess it required ‘concentration and discipline’. This was a pervasive view of education. You will find it in the marvellous letters that the Italian communist Gramsci wrote from prison to his two sons in an attempt to continue to steer their education from a distance. My question here is: to what extent do notions of this kind continue to have any place in modern education? Of course, ‘high culture’ can

be interpreted, socially and economically, as props to a particular kind of status quo, though the communist Gramsci did not see it like that. Of course, there are well-argued challenges to the notion that there is some kind of a ‘canon’ of literature, art, or music that schools have a duty to transmit. But that still leaves real issues. For example, should schools whose most recent culturally demanding school production has been *High School Musical* or the fashion show be seen as having lost sight of their core purpose? (please unpack the second of these if you will – what are we really doing when we promote things like this?) (Gramsci, 1996). Intellectual leadership consists in not just going along with the current but in reflecting on our educational purposes in the context of our views about the kind of world we want to live in.

My final point about intellectual leadership is to do with issues of ‘interculturality’. Schools with a large cultural mix, like many international and increasing numbers of state schools, require enormous sensitivity and leaders need to set an example of how issues of ‘interculturality’ should be addressed. It has certainly taken me a long time to be able to distinguish with sufficient subtlety between situations in which one needs simply to accept that people do things in different ways, and to respect this, and those in which one needs, for the sake of the smooth running of the school and because of its ethical principles, to impose limits. The issue, at its root, is determining one’s moral absolutes and where one draws the line. Some situations are straightforward. Others are more complex.

I said that I would conclude, in conformity with the leadership literature genre, with my own seven highly personal points, illustrated by a few literary and historical references (R. Greene, 2000). Here they are:

- Do not assume rationality on the part of the people you are dealing with. Remember that we are living post-Freud. Deep emotions can be at work which the people themselves do not

begin to understand. Read Julien Gracq's *Le Rivage des Syrtes* (1989) on what lies beneath the surface normality of our lives.

- Learn to live with the idea that there are multiple perceptions of every situation, but do not give up at least on *the search* for truth. Read almost any great novel. Also, never forget what it is like to feel powerless in the face of authority and be charitable to the perceptions of those who feel themselves to be in this position.
- Be patient, control your emotions, keep a sense of the unimportance of everything 'in the light of eternity'. Read Seneca and the Stoics. Find time for your own interests. Remember that Churchill came to Marrakech to relax and to paint.
- Admit mistakes and remember that, in the words of Cardinal de Retz, it is only 'weak people [who] never give way when they ought to'. Emulate Voltaire who, when faced with an angry London mob shouting 'Hang the Frenchman', turned calmly to them and addressed the mob with the following words: 'Men of England! You wish to kill me because I am a Frenchman. Am I not punished enough in not being born an Englishman?' On this they cheered his thoughtful words and escorted him back safely to his lodgings. So be cool, courageous, think quickly, and know when to give way. If deference to those who wish you ill is difficult to stomach, remember also the Ethiopian proverb (I apologise in advance for its vulgarity): 'When the great lord passes, the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts.'
- Be very explicit about the ethical principles on which you run your schools. Charters and professional codes of conduct that have been developed consultatively, and are constantly referred to and regularly reviewed, can provide communities with the common point of reference that wider contemporary societies often so notably lack.
- Focus on a limited number of objectives at a time and work hard on them. Remember the Aesop Fable (sixth century BC):

‘A boy playing in the fields got stung by a nettle. He ran home to his mother, telling her that he had but touched that nasty weed, and it had stung him. “It was just touching it, my boy”, said the mother, “that caused it to sting you, the next time you meddle with a nettle, grasp it tightly, and it will do you no hurt”’. Do not be half-hearted in tackling difficult issues, says Aesop (Aesop, 1998).

- Seventh, and finally, never forget that fate is fickle and the best laid plans may go astray. The early seventh-century Queen of the Franks, Brunehaut/Brunehilde (a splendid biography has just been published) survived as ruler for over 50 years in an incredibly ruthless world that did not much rate women (Dumézil, 2008). She was educated, tough and wily. She fought off her internal and external enemies, foiled assassination plots, gave way when she had to, used power for ends that were not wholly unworthy, and outlived the long line of rather feeble husbands, sons, and grandsons behind whom she held the reins of power. Then, in her 60s, when a quiet retirement in a nunnery beckoned (the seventh-century equivalent of a Geneva head’s retirement home in Provence), it all fell apart. The Frankish equivalent of her deputies messed things up, her deputy head intrigued against her with the other Frankish kingdoms (for which read ‘the Board’), her heads of department rebelled, parents held a protest meeting, she was betrayed and arrested, found guilty, stripped of her royal insignia, humiliated in front of her troops, tortured and finally tied by her ankles to a horse which dragged her body around until finally there was little left of her. Completely forgotten were all her achievements, the pleasures of authority, the nice office, the company car, the flattering article in ‘Swiss People of the Day’. The motto is a double one: fate is unpredictable and the Stoic must prepare himself or herself for it, but also ‘it could be much worse’.

THOUGHTS FROM BUDAPEST:
WHAT MAKES A GREAT SCHOOL? (LESSONS
IN LEADERSHIP AND LEARNING)¹

Faced with a request to address briefly the heads of Hungary's top 100 high schools about 'What makes a great school?', as an ex-head from another country, I was fearful that anything I might say would come over as patronising. I focused therefore on a small number of core leadership roles that heads needed to play which I was sure they would not disagree with but which, even if obvious, are easily taken for granted and need to be re-stated and reaffirmed. It seemed to go down quite well, especially as it was very brief and did not delay progress towards the Awards ceremony and the excellent lunch that was due to follow.

Congratulations to all of you on your schools' impressive achievements, and to all those from your schools who are not here but whom you are representing and who have also made these achievements possible: your teachers, other staff members, and of course your pupils. It is a collective effort we are celebrating.

I have been asked to say some words on the theme 'what makes an effective high school?'. You may well have thought longer about this than I have and will certainly have your own views about it. I shall simply be giving you a few personal and fairly random thoughts from my own experience. There are many factors that make for an effective school. I will only touch on a small number.

First, leadership. A few years ago, I attended an education conference for head teachers in San Francisco. One session was about

¹ First published at *Corvinák.hu*, 21 February 2025.

leadership. The speaker began by talking about how stressful a job it can be at times as a head – something about which I am sure we can all agree. He asked us therefore to start the session by turning to our neighbour and telling them ‘you’re doing a great job.’ I couldn’t possibly bring myself to do something so infantile and embarrassing but didn’t want to cause offence so turned to my neighbour and said: ‘I’m terribly sorry, but I’m British. It’s culturally impossible for me to do this.’ Fortunately, they laughed. ‘Cultural sensitivity’ was one of the themes of the conference.

I tell you this story as, unlike in San Francisco, I am more than happy to say to you today ‘You’re doing a great job’ because this time I know it is true. Telling you that ‘you’re doing a great job’ is the whole purpose of today’s event.

By the way, the rest of the talk on leadership was as appalling as the introduction suggested it was going to be.

My experience of school leadership is as head of two schools, a 13–18 school in England and a 3–18 one in Switzerland. The Swiss school had over 4,000 pupils spread across three campuses in which there were eight separate schools. I line managed all the heads, as I did in a subsequent role as executive chairman of a global group of eight schools. I have also been a Governor of five schools and so one of the people who appoint, dismiss, fix the salaries of and evaluate heads. I shall talk from this personal experience as one head to another. I was also for six years head of England’s national body for curriculum and assessment. What I am not is an academic expert on school effectiveness.

One of heads’ most important priorities, I have come to feel, is to ensure there is effective delegation and to put a lot of effort into supporting all the people immediately below them in developing their own leadership roles. I have spent much of my time doing that. Heads ‘are doing a great job’ when the school keeps running smoothly if they have to go away for a week. I am sure all your schools are

running very smoothly today in your absence and hope that you will not feel the need to either phone or text them even once.

There is a massive literature on school leadership. I have occasionally dipped into it, but found reflecting on my own experience more helpful. The only writers I failed to abandon before the end of the first chapter were Howard Gardner and Daniel Goleman whose work on non-cognitive intelligences I found very useful and which I recommend if you haven't read them. But the main thing is to self-evaluate continually however you do it. Headship can be lonely, especially when things go wrong. I myself have never had any external mentors to whom I could turn, though I have organised this for heads I was managing and seen how outside support helped them to do a better job.

Over the years I have come to feel that perhaps the head's *most* important job is to be the main custodian and promoter of his or her school's fundamental mission. A group of London schools, for example, has as its mission Immanuel Kant's *sapere aude* ('dare to know' or 'dare to use your reason') and three principles: High Standards, Hard Work, and Kindness. Mottoes like these can sometimes sound clichéd but can be a useful way of drawing attention to what a school stands for. Implementing them is a collective responsibility but it is above all the head's job to remind everyone constantly what their implications are for the school's identity and purposes. Heads are 'doing a great job' when they epitomise what education and their schools are fundamentally about.

Heads are also 'doing a great job' when they *personally* model the kind of lifelong learner we want our pupils and teachers to be. Heads will do this in different ways. I have tried to do it through articles for school newsletters in which I make an effort to go beyond the daily matters of school life and write about contemporary issues or books I have been reading, reinforcing the idea that schools should be intellectually and culturally stimulating places in which everyone

is continuing to learn. In both schools, for the same reasons, I also organised every year as a Head's initiative a 'Study Day' with lots of visiting speakers in which sessions were available on topics outside the curriculum from which pupils made up their own programme. The sessions were on a wide range of topics: medical ethics, being a Member of Parliament, Roman Britain, biotechnology, ancient Persia, a German play reading. The message I was wanting to get across was: learning is for life and not just for good exam results or 'getting on' in the world.

My next point, which is about teachers, is largely about matters beyond your control. It is a message to governments: schools are only as good as their teachers and you won't get good teachers unless in the education budget you prioritise teacher numbers and teacher pay, give them good working conditions, don't swamp them with administrative duties, and allow them to concentrate on exciting their pupils about their subject. This involves giving them the time needed for their preparation and marking, supporting them in their ongoing development, and having class sizes that enable them to get to know each child and their individual needs and talents. I know research shows that class size is *not* the main determinant of academic success, but education is not just about academic success. It involves teachers having the time to get to know each child well, not just their academic strengths and weaknesses but also their personalities, and not being so swamped by their duties that they don't have the time to notice if there is something wrong and to find a moment to have a chat with a child to see what might be done about it. It isn't courses on social and emotional learning or relationship education that children need but this kind of individual attention from people who know and care for them. Heads are 'doing a great job' when their teachers know that they support them in the challenges they face while at the same time holding them to the very highest standards in their teaching.

My final point about the curriculum is also about matters largely beyond your control. Having spent 11 years developing, evaluating, and revising England's first national curriculum, I am well aware of how a curriculum is a major determinant of a school's effectiveness, both how it can be too prescriptive, excessively limiting school's autonomy and the creativity of the best teachers, but also insufficiently prescriptive allowing bad practice to flourish. Getting the balance right is not easy.

President Ronald Reagan once said that 'the nine most terrifying words in the English language' were 'I'm from the Government and I'm here to help'. In most English-speaking countries schools at the moment are feeling the truth of this warning. They are swamped with government pressures to help solve whatever the problems of the moment happen to be, whether carbon emissions, knife crime, children's dental decay, or alleged systemic racism. The image of schools preoccupied with these sorts of issues is not going to help our main objectives, which are inspiring the best people to want to work in our schools and allowing our pupils to focus on the main purposes of education.

So, in conclusion, I have only had time to mention three out of the many influences on a high school's effectiveness: thoughtful leadership that focuses on mission and on modelling lifelong learning; a school environment that attracts teachers and lets them get on with their jobs; and a state that knows where it can help but also where it should not. You knew all this already, I am sure, but important things sometimes merit repetition.

Congratulations on all your achievements that have led to today's awards and, once again, with all sincerity, 'you're doing a great job'.

WHAT IS EDUCATION FOR?

‘What is education for’ is a title that I have used too often in the course of my career: for the King’s College, London, Annual Education Lecture in 1998, in the context of England’s national education system; for the International Baccalaureate’s Peterson Lecture in Geneva in 2004, as applied to international education; for an article ‘What are international schools for?’ in 2016 (N. Tate, 2016b); and as the title of my book *What is Education For? The Views of the Great Thinkers and Their Relevance Today* (N. Tate, 2015).

It remains, however, a question we should be constantly asking ourselves. Much of the time when we talk about education its purposes are stated or assumed with little evidence that they have been examined. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu saw education as a *champ* or field of activity with its own distinctive assumptions arising out of the ambient *Zeitgeist* which people working in the *champ* shared but might not have consciously chosen or been able to spell out explicitly (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 17). Those working in the *champ* were more likely to be ‘spoken for’ by the *champ* than to ‘speak’ in a distinctively individual way.

This is not a criticism, just a statement of how the world is. An understanding of Bourdieu’s theory gives us an incentive to do what

philosophers do, and ask ‘what does this mean?’ and ‘why am I doing this?’, interrogating the words and phrases – ‘transmission’, ‘cultural inheritance’, ‘well-being’, ‘autonomy’, ‘social cohesion’ – that pepper the discourse of those of us who are pedagogues on the rare occasions when we do talk about the purposes of education. In trying to clarify what these purposes are we need to develop a vision of the positive effects the education we are providing are designed to produce as well as of the negative effects that would result from failing to do so.

WHAT IS EDUCATION FOR? ¹

My first effort at tackling the question publicly was in 1998 as Chief Executive of England’s Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, a body set up the previous year by Parliament to take responsibility for the country’s national curriculum, national tests, academic and vocational qualifications, and national occupational standards. My King’s College Lecture, which is the first of the two items in this chapter, focuses mainly on schools, while making brief reference to non-school vocational education which for me was a new area of responsibility about which I was having to learn fast. My intention in the lecture was to avoid getting dragged into the specifics of the many educational issues of the day – the new Labour government, elected the previous year, was already hyperactive on many educational fronts – and to encourage my audience to look instead at the deep purposes of education within the context of a changing world. Re-reading it I am amazed at both how I managed to write it so quickly and found the time to read the recently published books to which I keep on referring. It can only have been made possible by some very late nights.

¹ Delivered in November 1998 and published as a booklet entitled *The King’s College Fifth Annual Education Lecture* (King’s College, University of London, 1998).

I began to get worried about this lecture just over a week ago when a colleague told me she had received an invitation and was looking forward to attending. The title, she suggested, promised something profound – a distillation of collective wisdom from Plato onwards. There was an implication that I might have been wiser to have gone for something a shade less ambitious – the future of the national curriculum, maybe, qualifications for the millennium (yet again), or even (if I wanted to draw the crowds in) level setting in the national tests. At that point, I had not written a word. Any temptation to shift course was, however, removed on checking that invitations had indeed gone out with the full title I had rashly suggested some months ago: What is education for? This is what you have chosen to come and listen to. This therefore is what you are going to get.

It struck me a few weeks ago that it really is a question we ask and answer on a daily basis, even if not conscious of doing so. I was visiting a further education college and got talking to a group of trainees studying for a level 2 qualification in motor vehicle maintenance. It was a traditional non-NVQ qualification,² one of the thousands that the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority will shortly be regulating for the first time, and the trainees were doing practice questions to help them prepare for a forthcoming timed written test. I asked one of them, who already had his own part-time business, whether he was finding such exercises and the subsequent tests useful. ‘Really useful,’ he said, ‘It is crucial I get this qualification. I need it to attract more business.’ ‘But are you learning things,’ I asked, ‘is it making you do the job differently when you get back to your workshop?’ The question obviously puzzled him: ‘Oh, no,’ he said, I never thought it would do that.’ This was someone with a

² QCA was responsible both for traditional vocational qualifications and a new system of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). NVQs are a work-based qualification based on the assessment of defined competences. They are offered at different levels across a large number of occupational areas.

clear answer to the question ‘what is education for?’. It was no doubt a different one from those who, elsewhere in the college, maybe at that very moment, were developing at QCA’s request beautiful matrices showing the impressive-sounding key skills such courses are designed to foster.

So it is a question which people do ask and answer, even if implicitly, and in many different ways. When we consulted last year on the aims and priorities of the school curriculum, we were struck by some of the differences in the responses we received from teachers, governors, and parents. This left me feeling that it would be useful to know more about what pupils, students, and trainees think education is for. But that is not the purpose of today’s talk. I shall be giving my views on what I think education ought to be for, not on what people empirically think it is for. I do so mindful of the fact that some of the most damning criticisms of our education system – I am thinking, for example, of some of Melanie Phillips’s analyses of what she sees as the cultural pathologies of our society – keep on coming back to the claim that we have lost sight of what education is for (Phillips, 1997).

This country has introduced some fundamental educational reforms over the last 10 years. It has never, in my opinion, sufficiently addressed the question ‘what is this whole system, that we are trying to reform, for?’. The omission has been particularly striking in the case of the national curriculum, something introduced for the first time into England only 10 years ago. If a national curriculum is a statement of what one generation values sufficiently to wish to pass it on to the next, I am not sure whether, as a society, we do know what we value.

It was because of the absence of a strong sense of rationale for some of the things that schools were being asked to do that the former School Curriculum and Assessment Authority organised a series of international conferences with the intention of looking at educational issues in their broader context. We never had a con-

ference that simply asked 'what is education for?', but we did look at the values that schooling is trying to promote, at the relationship between curriculum, culture, and society, at the impact of developments in information and communications technology on the nature of the disciplines taught in schools, and at the contribution of the arts to the development of individuals and of society. The intention in each case was both to get a clearer sense of why we do what we currently do and to begin thinking about any changes we might wish to make as we move towards a revision of the curriculum to take effect in 2000.

We also commissioned a survey of curriculum frameworks from a wide sample of other countries of different types. What was striking was that quite a few other countries are much more explicit about the values they are encouraging through the curriculum and how that part of education which takes place in schools fits into a broader vision for society.

New Zealand, for example, explicitly wishes the curriculum to be used to encourage young people to become 'active and informed citizens'. Sweden, concerned about the increasing complexity of the decisions facing individuals, wishes to prepare young people to 'appreciate the consequences of the various alternatives facing them'. Australia, similarly, aims to 'develop a capacity for judgement in matters of morality, ethics, and social justice'. Korea is perhaps the most explicit about its values, wishing to foster 'a quest for truth', 'working diligently', 'being honest', 'being thrifty', 'creativity', 'patriotism', 'affection for others', 'a love of freedom', and 'courage and perseverance'.

In some cases, these statements are simply pious words and have had little impact on the development of the curricula to which they relate. The Korean educationalists who came to one of our seminars were the first to admit that there is a big gulf between the country's wish to promote individualism and creativity, and the reality of an education system still heavily based on conformity and deference

to authority. In other cases, statements have been used as a basis for deciding what goes into the curriculum and how it is taught. Spain consulted widely on the values of its education system before deciding on the changes it wished to make and then made sure that these values were reflected in the changes. France is doing something similar through a recent consultation on the purposes of schooling commissioned by the French Minister of Education, Claude Allègre.

Decisions about what happens in our education system are therefore inseparable from those about our values, about the kind of society we want ourselves to be, and about our fundamental ends and purposes as human beings. T. S. Eliot made this point in his 1932 essay on 'Modern Education and the Classics', describing education as:

A subject which cannot be discussed in a void: our questions raise other questions, social, economic, financial, political. And the bearings are on more ultimate problems even than these: to know what we want in education we must know what we want in general, we must derive our theory of education from our philosophy of life. The problem turns out to be a religious problem. (Eliot, 1953)

It is because education is a 'religious problem' that we avoid talking about what it is for. As a society we avoid such questions. Unlike previous societies we lack a shared account of who we are, where we came from and where we are going. This is true of all post-Christian western societies; it is especially true of England with its peculiar difficulties in articulating its identity. This is why we fall back on narrow utilitarian explanations of what education is for – what Eliot called our preoccupation with 'getting on', which he felt was at the heart of 'modern education'. We see education above all as providing opportunities for people to better themselves economically and socially, and thus to increase the overall competitiveness and prosperity of the nation. These are legitimate and important purposes

of education, which may well necessitate an education that is far from simply narrow and utilitarian. But as a complete explanation of why education is important, they are not enough.

Plato and Aristotle tackled these issues two and a half millennia ago. Many philosophers and writers since then have done the same. In a society which rarely re-engages with the past the better to look forward, it is instructive to remember the answers they gave to the question. In addition to Plato and Aristotle, I am thinking of people like Aquinas, Milton, Matthew Arnold, Newman, and, in our own century, writers with views as diverse as Eliot and Gramsci. Their answer to the question 'what is education for?' is always an answer about the kind of society, and the kind of human beings, they would like to see. The broader picture always comes first.

The broader picture of course varies. Gramsci's is of a citizenry educated to throw off the shackles of outmoded ideologies that perpetuate an oppressive society. This is not the same as Eliot's, or Aquinas's, vision of a community that believes that true happiness is to be found in the love of God and of our fellow creatures, not in the pursuit of riches, well-being or human fame and power. But what all share, as part of a tradition stretching back through two millennia of Christianity to the Romans, Greeks, and Hebrew Scriptures, is a complete absence of hesitation in talking about what men and women are here on earth to do, and in distinguishing between lives that have been well led and those that fall short of what should be expected of human beings.

Traditional accounts of the purposes of education are therefore shaped by a sense of what it is to be an educated human being. I doubt whether we have such a sense today, or even feel it to be legitimate to have such a sense. In our preoccupation with promoting openness and tolerance we are in danger of forgetting that openness and tolerance are not ends in themselves but simply a precondition for making decisions about how best we are going to live our lives.

We are also in danger of forgetting that these decisions involve hard moral choices and the rejection of some pictures of the world and ways of life as inferior to others. Many recent debates about the purposes of education, dominated by the urgent practical need to re-establish the basics of literacy and numeracy and support the economic agenda of global capitalism, inevitably do not fully address these deeper issues.

Let me give you one example of a vision of what it is to be an educated human being, in order to contrast it with our current inability to be robust about these matters. I shall take Gramsci, both because I have recently read his *Prison Letters* (*Quaderni del carcere*, 1948–1951) but also because, having quoted T.S. Eliot, I need to balance my credentials by also quoting someone from a different part of the political spectrum. If Gramsci's vision of an educated person were widely shared within our education system and by even a substantial minority of the adult population, we would be much closer to achieving the learning society we keep talking about.

Some of Gramsci's last letters from prison before his death in 1937 were to his two sons, Delio aged 12 and Giuliano aged 10. They are the letters of a loving absent father concerned at a distance to continue to play a part in his children's education. In one letter he half-apologises for his schoolmasterish tone, and there is indeed an almost Victorian severity about one or two of his exhortations. What is most striking are not just his high expectations, but the clarity of vision about what qualities need to be demonstrated to meet these expectations and the sense of moral and cultural authority which this conveys. Delio is told how important it is to study history, but also in looking at the world as a whole not to view it too anthropomorphically. Giuliano is rebuked for commenting favourably on H.G. Wells as an author on the basis of having read half of one of Wells's stories. Delio is asked to think hard about his response to Pushkin, taking care 'to distinguish the true from the false, and the

certain from the possible or the probable'. He is encouraged to see the difference between good writers like Gorky, who had just died, and the small number of 'world writers' such as Tolstoy, whom one can count 'on the fingers of one hand'. Both children are encouraged to push themselves intellectually as far as they are able and develop habits of discipline in their work and study – Gramsci was of the view that habits of diligence, precision, and concentration can only be acquired in education through 'the mechanical repetition of disciplines and methodical acts'. They are both urged to show an interest in a whole range of human activities, especially literature, do their duty, keep their promises, face the world with calm, confidence, and courage, and never give way to grousing. Gramsci is in no doubt that everyone has a responsibility to develop themselves in these ways. People who fail to achieve these things, he is clearly saying, are not fully educated. They fall short of the ideal that human beings ought to set themselves. His answer to the question 'what is education for?' is one that would have been shared by all the other thinkers I have mentioned.

My first answer to the question therefore is that the purpose of education is to allow as many people as possible to pursue ideals as to what constitutes an educated person, for the reason that striving towards such ideals is how we define ourselves as distinctively human. These ideals are inherited from our Judaeo-Christian and Greco-Roman roots, and in their essentials have remained remarkably constant.

My answer so far relates to education in general: what we do or is done to us from our earliest moments throughout our lives until our deaths. This is what we have recently come to call 'lifelong learning'. We tend to see this as one of our bright new modern ideas. It is a good idea, but it is far from new. For two millennia our world picture has been dominated by a religion which is all about a lifelong striving for self-improvement. The fact that we have lost sight of this indicates how post-Christian we have become.

Striving to be an educated person, in Gramsci's or Eliot's or Plato's sense of the word, is of course unashamedly elitist, in the sense of trying to give as many people as possible access to the highest ideals by which people have lived and to what Matthew Arnold called 'the best that has been known and thought'. Education in this sense is a long-term aspiration of the Labour movement. Ellen Wilkinson, Labour Minister of Education in the late 1940s, expressed this aspiration most explicitly when she talked about the hoped-for emergence in post-war Britain of 'a Third Programme nation'. (For those of you in the audience below a certain age I must explain that the Third Programme was the predecessor of the current much diminished Radio 3). What she was saying – again, like Gramsci, with no hint of cultural relativism – was that education, and broadcasting, must aspire to the best and that the best must be accessible to all.

This is a crucial message to an education system under siege from all the 'dumbing down' pressures of the wider society. These pressures come from a variety of sources: a highly developed individualism, disinclined to criticise people's choices however culturally debased; a dominant egalitarianism, distrustful of what is not immediately comprehensible; a pervasive materialism which devalues what is not tangible; a postmodernist 'anything goes' intellectual climate sceptical of traditional ideas of objective reality; and the global impact of a US mass culture that US critics are the first to admit is hardly conducive to 'the best that has been known and thought'. In this situation it is crucial that the education system aspires to the best, falls over backwards to maintain standards of academic rigour and personal behaviour, sees itself as leading society rather than following, and is unafraid of being accused of elitism if by elitism is meant such things as introducing children to great artists like Shakespeare and Mozart or transmitting shared values.

This is particularly crucial for a government committed to social inclusion. We are living in a very different world from earlier in the

century when the main causes of poverty were more engrained in the structures of our society and economy. Equally important now are cultural and attitudinal factors which enable some individuals and families to seize the opportunities available and prevent others from doing so. It is in this kind of situation that education assumes particular importance. It is in this kind of situation that we need to make sure that all children have access to the opportunities that will enable them to live educated lives in the way in which people like Gramsci and Eliot would have understood such a term. Looking back over the last 30 years I am not sure to what extent we have enhanced this access; at least as far as bright working-class children are concerned. The percentages of children from different socio-economic groups obtaining the highest grades at A level or gaining admission to Oxford and Cambridge certainly suggest otherwise, as does the diminished availability for those unable to pay for their children's education of minority curriculum provision such as the classics or the three separate sciences at GCSE.

The need to tackle such inequalities in provision lies at the heart of the Government's initiatives to raise standards of literacy and numeracy and to combat social exclusion. As the Government realises, however, access by itself is not enough. One needs also a vision of what access is being given to and a determination not to fob off part of the population with some kind of second-class vision. Pursuing the cultural examples, I mentioned earlier, it means *Romeo and Juliet* for all, not *Romeo and Juliet* for some and *Sweet Valley High* – an example of what one HMI report described as 'undemanding teenage fiction' – for the rest.

This is why it is important to ensure that our national curriculum guarantees to all children access to all those things that as a society we have decided we value and which we wish to pass on to our successors.

What are the implications of this view of the purposes of education for the education specifically provided by the state?

First, it means that we need to move beyond some of the rather narrow debates about the curriculum to which we have become accustomed. It is not enough to debate the curriculum solely in terms of a return to the basics – crucial though the basics are to virtually everything else which follows and crucial though it is to support Government efforts such as the literacy hour³ to raise standards in these areas. Nor is it enough to debate the curriculum solely in terms of the skills needed to survive in a global capitalist economy, essential though this also is to our collective survival. In order to develop individuals in the way that Plato, Aristotle, or Gramsci would have them develop we also need to cultivate their aesthetic abilities, their understanding of the society in which they live, both its past and present, their appreciation of the nature of scientific enquiry, and their awareness of the spiritual and moral dimensions of human existence. In addition, they need opportunities to learn to reason and maybe even to philosophise, as they do in France where the epistemology questions in the baccalaureate are quoted on the front page of *Le Monde*. In other words, they need access, in so far as they are able to take advantage of it, to a traditional liberal education.

Much, though not all, of this is what the national curriculum was designed to provide. When the current Secretary of State announced earlier in the year that he was proposing to slim the national curriculum down in primary schools to allow schools more time to concentrate on the basics, the *Times Educational Supplement* commented that this marked the end of a brave but over-ambitious scheme to turn young children into ‘Renaissance men and women.’

³ A daily ‘Literacy Hour’ for primary school children was mandated by the Government in England in 1998 as part of a National Literacy Strategy designed to improve all aspects of literacy.

Most people probably read this as a joke, and as a joke at the expense of an overloaded curriculum. I read it as a challenge to continue to maintain the highest expectations for those children capable of rising to them while allowing a much greater concentration on the basics for those who need it. The national curriculum, in its original version, was grossly overloaded as far as primary teachers were concerned. It is arguable how overloaded it was for able children. It needs to remain an entitlement for all children to an education previously reserved for an elite. It may well benefit from being made even more flexible. Teachers certainly need the freedom to be able to adapt it to a wide variety of circumstances. But if it is dispensed with by the highest achieving schools (as has been suggested), on the grounds that their children need something special, and bypassed by the lowest achieving schools, on the grounds that their children cannot cope with it, it will end up as the preserve of the merely average. This would be unfortunate for a venture that started out, not ignobly, as an attempt to offer a broad liberal education for all.

Second, it means thinking of education in a broader sense than our current national curriculum sometimes encourages people to do. The structuring of our current curriculum in terms of subject disciplines has given a welcome clarity and rigour to what is taught in schools. I would not recommend abandoning it, even in primary schools. But it has justly been criticised in two respects: for telling teachers what they have to teach without telling them why; and for playing down the importance of some of the other things that schools feel should be taught.

As already mentioned, England is almost unique in not spelling out in public documents – except in the broadest possible terms – the overall aims, objectives, values, and priorities of the curriculum and its various parts. There is a case for considering ways in which this deficiency might be remedied as part of the current review of the national curriculum. I would like our revised curriculum documents

to look more like the Norwegian national curriculum. This has literary quotations in it, and pictures (imagine it!), and inspiring sentiments like those in last Monday's *Times* leader about the place of history in education. One reason for the sense of overload with the current national curriculum may simply be that requirements are always likely to feel oppressive in the absence of an explicit and shared rationale. The clearer we are about the ends we are trying to achieve, the less prescriptive we will need to be about the means.

The current national curriculum has also justly been criticised for giving insufficiently explicit attention to learning which does not fall readily within the different subject disciplines. The view of the purposes of education I have been talking about places great importance on people's spiritual, moral, social, civic, and cultural development. Our current curriculum has been criticised for not signalling this as clearly as it might. This was one of the reasons why the Government set up a number of groups to investigate some of these areas and QCA will be advising on what forms of more explicit provision or support, if any, might be advisable. One of the most striking differences between our statutory curriculum and that of other countries is the absence here of explicit provision for civic education. There is strong support for remedying this deficiency in ways that will be manageable and leave maximum discretion to schools. I shall say more about this and the social purposes of education in a moment.

One of the corollaries of greater attention to these wider aspects of education, which stem from its basic purposes, is a more explicit recognition that much of what one is trying to achieve is unquantifiable and unmeasurable even if not always unassessable. The value of public quantitative indices of achievement is, in my view, beyond doubt, but they do not tell us everything we need to know about achievement and we have to keep on telling ourselves this. That is one reason why QCA's current pilot on spiritual, moral, social, and

cultural development places such emphasis on reward and recognition for achievement in these areas.

Third, it means being clear once and for all about the way in which education, at least in large measure, is about making people knowledgeable. You may find it odd that I am raising yet again the old knowledge-skills issue. Doesn't everyone agree that both knowledge and skills are important and that developing them goes hand in hand? Well, yes, they do, but in practice the downplaying of the role of knowledge continues. A recent Radio 4 programme on the curriculum in which I took part saw speakers falling over each other to get across the idea that education was all about generalisable skills and not about boring old facts. It is a view I frequently come across.

It is a view hardly surprising in a culture which emphasises individualism, autonomy, and subjectivity, distrusts and debunks authority in social, moral, and cultural matters, and values assertiveness, self-expression, rebellion, and challenge rather than self-discipline, resignation, humility, and modesty (I am simply stating all this, and not at this point making any value judgements of my own). It is a view which stems also from that pervasive relativistic view of the world – what we often describe as 'postmodernism' – which sees everything as some kind of a construct: artificial, ephemeral, the result of choices and structures that come and go and in which no authority resides. It is, in addition, a consequence of the democratisation of dominant cultures and of exposure to a multitude of images and influences from other cultures and lifestyles, under the influence of mass global communication.

It is not surprising against this context that people start saying that because there is so much knowledge and because it changes so rapidly all we need to learn is how to learn and that therefore the actual content of lessons becomes a secondary matter. It is not surprising that recall and rote learning are generally felt to be undesirable. Lurking behind these views is a failure to recognise that

a key purpose of education is to give people knowledge maps and frameworks of the world. Learning how to learn and how to cope with uncertainty is much more likely if one has the mental confidence and competence which comes from having mastered a body of knowledge and from access to all the cultural information that enables one to begin to understand the society, culture, and economy in which one finds oneself.

I would not go so far as Richard Dawkins who recently pointed out that innovative theories usually occur to minds well stocked with apparently irrelevant knowledge, and suggested that Oxford should therefore stop judging entrance candidates by A levels and set a University Challenge examination, based on non-ephemeral knowledge, instead. But I saw his point. At the very least, he was saying, we should value observant minds that pick up knowledge from all over the place, store and make use of it. If we did, there would be fewer complaints from university lecturers about students who have never heard of Darwin, Freud, or Einstein, cannot identify Africa on a world map (one of Dawkins's examples), do not know what an adverb is, have no grasp of the historical background of our political parties, are unable to understand works of art that depend on classical or religious allusions, or simply cannot spell.

So far, I have argued that education – in the broadest sense, not just that provided by the state – is first and foremost a matter of individual development in search of ideals, and these ideals reflect a set of shared judgements about the ends and purposes of human beings. This was axiomatic to previous societies, at least at the level of ideology. It is only now, with the decline of Christianity, that we realise the extent to which it was a view of things inextricably tied up with a Christian legacy.

It is the state's responsibility to respect these underlying purposes of education, as part of its duty towards the aspirations of its citizens. This involves having these purposes at the heart of the compulsory

education of young people, giving them an important role within further and higher education, and supporting them where finite resources permit within continuing adult learning.

But the state has other interests in education. These relate principally to the role of education in maintaining social coherence and in supporting the economy that is the basis of society's well-being.

I shall look at both in turn.

First, education as a prop to social coherence. There are those who look askance at the state trying to shape society through the education system. The heart of the issue is people's view of the role of the state and its relationship with civil society. If we take a neo-liberal *laissez-faire* view of the state, then its role is confined to creating the conditions within which the market and civil society will operate most freely. In all other respects it is morally neutral. If, on the other hand, we see the role of the state as helping to shape a civil society that reflects the values of its citizens, it is perfectly legitimate for it to have a view about how education might be used to move us towards the kind of society in which we wish to live.

The Chief Rabbi, Jonathan Sacks, in his book *The Politics of Hope* (1997), distinguishes between liberal and libertarian views of a free society. Libertarian societies are ones where the state is morally neutral about the free choices which individuals make about their lives. Liberal societies are ones where the state is informed in its activities by a shared vision of the kind of civil society its citizens wish to promote, while respecting individual freedoms. Liberal societies attempt to preserve the gains of centuries of struggle to assert the rights of individuals, at the same time recognising that human beings are social animals who are only fully themselves through membership of a wider community. Sacks's thesis is that for much of the last 50 years, both here and in North America, we have inhabited a libertarian rather than a liberal culture. He was one of the first last year to welcome the new government as pointing in a different direction.

On the assumption that the state is trying to promote this kind of liberal society, three particular roles for education spring to mind. In effect, these are three further answers to the question *what is education for?*

First, we need to find a way of combining our highly individualist culture, which emphasises autonomy and choice, with a reassertion of the place of community in our lives. As well as a vision of an educated person we also need a vision of a harmonious society – not a utopian one, but one in which there is a better balance between rights and responsibilities, between freedom and self-discipline, and in which there is a clearer sense of limits and of shared values. John Gray summed this up in his recent book *Endgames* (1997) as an ‘individualism less possessive and more convivial’ than we have at present, one that is balanced by ‘the existence of a strong public culture, rich in options, and embodied in common institutions’ (Gray, 1997). Again, this is at the heart of what the Government is trying to achieve across a number of spheres. The kind of school communities in which children are educated, and the kind of things they learn about their wider communities, can play a part in trying to shape such a society.

Second, we need to find ways of helping ourselves come to terms with a world in which identities are being recast under the impact of globalisation. ‘Globalisation’ of course is a contested concept and the extent to which we operate within a global economic (let alone cultural) system can be greatly exaggerated. Nevertheless, the current dominance of global market capitalism, alongside an unprecedented system of mass communication, places traditional civic and communal allegiances in a new light. A recent book about French identity made the point that the traditional polarity between Paris and the provinces has been replaced by a sense that France as a whole is little more than a province of a global culture increasingly dominated by the English language and the mindset of US market

capitalism. In England, we have even more complex problems of identity to solve: our relationship with the United States in a culture that is highly distinct from that of the USA but at the same time massively influenced by it; an ambiguous attitude towards European cooperation and integration; all sorts of legacies from our imperial past; and a belated recognition that England is not the same as the United Kingdom and that new relationships need to be developed between the various parts of the British Isles.

In the task of preparing young people for this complex and changing world, I sometimes feel that our education system is dominated by those who have given way to what John Gray, in his other recent book *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism* (1998), describes as an 'empty universalism', a kind of 'citizen of the world' identity that plays down national and cultural differences on the grounds that these are rather embarrassing survivals from an unregenerate past. And yet, as Isaiah Berlin used to say, what characterises human beings is their allegiance to things that are particular to communities defined by religion, a shared past, common institutions, or a common location. The European and global dimensions of the curriculum are vitally important, but are we so sure that we have got the British dimension right? Is there even such a thing as an English dimension? Wales has its Curriculum Cymreig; Scotland is clarifying the place of Scottish culture in the curriculum. Is the distinctive characteristic of Englishness simply that it refuses to recognise that there is an issue? I merely ask the question.

One of the key tasks for postmodern societies is to develop senses of identity – and they are of course plural – that enable people to continue to feel at home in a confusing world. Of course, we must do nothing to strengthen the narrow particularism that has caused such suffering in places like Northern Ireland, Kosovo, and Bosnia. But this does not mean abandoning traditional allegiances. It means testing them out against new situations, as people are painfully trying to do

at the present time in Northern Ireland. In England it may well mean coming out from under the shell of a United Kingdom with which it has often mistakenly been assumed to be synonymous and defining in new ways its relationship with other parts of these islands. It will certainly involve a new sense of what it is to be European, and a re-examination of our cultural relationship with the United States which is so close that for most of the time we do not realise how much we have been sucked into it at the expense of other aspects of our identity.

What could be more important in education, once the basics have been firmly established, than providing the next generation with the means to come to terms with these issues of identity? This is why the purposes and content of aspects of the curriculum such as literature, the arts and the humanities (and especially history) are so important and so contested. This is why at the moment we are considering the future place in our school curriculum of some kind of citizenship education in order to tackle the disengagement from civic and political life of large parts of our society. In so far as formal education is a major influence on the development of society, these parts of the curriculum provide the basis for a common culture and common civic and communal allegiances.

Talk of a 'common culture' does not mean some kind of stultifying uniformity which fails to respect the different traditions and allegiances which exist, and have always existed, in our society. This is my third point about how education exists to shape civil society. One of the roles of the state in a liberal society is to support those institutions and ways of life – like the family – that encourage social cohesion and harmony. This has been one of the themes of the current government, most notably in its recent Green Paper on the family. Liberal states cannot be morally neutral about the culture of the societies they inhabit. Nor can schools.

This, however, gives us a problem in societies that have come to feel that values are personal, individual things, like tastes and

preferences, that we differ so fundamentally about our values that there are few if any that we have in common any more, and that the prime virtue – almost the only one we are all supposed to share – is to tolerate and respect other people's values whatever these might be. Such is the reaction against any kind of notion of moral authority that whenever one talks of education as the transmission of shared values someone invariably pops up in the audience to accuse one of indoctrination. Let's see if it happens tonight.

It was for this reason that the former School Curriculum and Assessment Authority set up its Values Forum and conducted its enquiry into the extent to which there were shared values within our society. Its powerful, empirically-based conclusion, was that indeed there were. We disagree about the source of our values and about their application to particular circumstances – moral rules frequently conflict – but there is a strong moral bedrock to our society which is shared by people of all faiths and none. It is these shared values that schools already aim to transmit. Schools are some of the most moral places in our society: they could not survive otherwise as communities. But what they need is greater support from the rest of society and the confidence that in transmitting, and in some cases strengthening, these values they are doing so on our behalf – in other words that their values are our values. I am not talking about centrally imposed moral codes, but about an explicit recognition that education has a moral purpose, that there are such things as shared values (and indeed 'virtues') which help to define our society, and that some values are non-negotiable.

In the same way that the state should not be morally neutral about the culture of the wider society so it should not be morally neutral about the need to support minority cultural and religious communities within its midst. The sign of a civilised state is that it respects the allegiances that individuals have to communities other than the overall community of the nation state, except where these conflict.

A corollary of the potential swamping of national identities by global forces is the potential swamping of minority cultures by that of the majority. Where minorities do not wish this to happen, it is reasonable for them to look for sympathy if not necessarily financial support from the state. This poses important issues for education, from the funding of religious schools to the protection of examinations in minority languages (the latter being something that QCA has consistently championed). It is at the heart of developing a curriculum which, while reflecting the majority culture of this society – the heritage of Christianity, England's artistic traditions, the history, and political traditions of these islands – as an entitlement for all young people, also recognises and encourages respect for diversity.

Finally, in talking about identity and cultural awareness, there continue to be issues about the place of modern foreign languages in our education system. It was one of the aspirations of the national curriculum that all young people would learn another language and something about the cultures associated with that language. It is an area in which we struggle against the odds, with take-up of languages post-16 increasingly worrying. We are pulled in two directions. On the one hand, the role of English as a global language diminishes our motivation to learn other people's languages. On the other hand, economic globalisation and our links with the European Union bring us into closer contact with people whose first language is not ours. A powerful reason for continuing to push hard to raise standards of attainment in languages is a need to signal our support for diversity and otherness in a world threatening to become increasingly monochrome. But we will not do it without a concerted national effort.

The final area where the state has an interest in education is in ensuring a strong basis for an economy without which many of the other goods for which we strive would be impossible. I put this last, not because it is least important but because in satisfying the other needs I have been talking about one has done most of what needs

to be done in order to prepare people to take their place effectively in economic life. We have become very familiar with utilitarian justifications for education over the last 30 years, in terms of enabling the country to compete economically. These too frequently assume that the economic life for which education is preparing people is non-negotiable rather than something we might wish to try to shape. This reservation apart, these are perfectly legitimate purposes of education. Legitimate utilitarian purposes, however, do not necessarily require – indeed categorically do *not* require – a merely utilitarian programme of instruction, or an increased emphasis on directly vocational preparation.

Cultural and attitudinal factors play a key role in economic life and it may well be through its influence on these factors that education can also support this country's economy. There is a great deal of interest at the moment in the way in which education can develop people's ability to think analytically and divergently, to be creative, to solve problems, to relate to others and to understand their emotions. This should not be at the expense of the basics or of the traditional disciplines of the curriculum, but something that is developed simultaneously. It may be that in these ways, as well as in ensuring that all young people leave school with higher levels of basic literacy and numeracy, our education system can make a more effective contribution to economic competitiveness than at present. These are certainly the skills and abilities that people will need to enable them to participate in a much more flexible economic system than the one for which education has prepared them during this century. They are at the heart of what CBI calls 'employability' and which it rightly feels ought to be a key concern of the education system. Also important, in terms of values, is getting across the idea that the creation of wealth is something to be respected, and that it has strong moral purposes, but that of course it should not be mistaken for the sole or main purpose of human existence.

State support for education to promote economic effectiveness is not, however, confined to the compulsory or immediately post-compulsory period of education. There is considerable state support for continued preparation for work on the part of adults, and in particular the unemployed, and for employee development at work. Here, the state's interest is likely to be broader than that of any individual employer and to encompass the wider development of individuals' skills in order to enable them to be better placed to play an appropriate part long term in a changing economy. This is well accepted as an element of pre-work training programmes such as modern apprenticeships and in most programmes for the unemployed. It needs a stronger focus within other forms of work-based training than it currently sometimes has.

These, then are my answers to the question 'what is education for?'. It is a question we must keep on asking. Some of the things that traditionally have been wrong with our education system stem from a failure to ask this question and to come up with a coherent answer. We need a clear and broad vision to guide us in taking forward education policy and practice. We also need a sharp sense of the context, including the ideological context, within which education develops. It is part of our traditional empiricism that we tend to shrug this off and jump straight into practical solutions. That is one of our strengths, and when I read some of the turgid jargon-ridden official policy documents from other countries I sometimes feel our greatest strength, but it is also one of our weaknesses.

What I am suggesting is simply that we try to be a bit clearer about some of these other 'big ideas' in education – as the Government has successfully done with its big ideas about standards, literacy and numeracy, and social exclusion. All these big ideas interact and need to work together.

Let me remind you in conclusion what I think these 'big ideas' are. First, education is about aspiring to high ideals of human behaviour.

It is not morally neutral about what it is to be a human person. Second, liberal states see education as helping to move us towards the kind of society in which we wish to live. This involves reasserting the place of community in our collective lives. It also involves confidence in shared values. Third, the ends of education are not purely utilitarian. It is not just about 'getting on'. Fourth, it is about employability, in the broadest sense of the word. Fifth, it is not just about things that are quantifiable and measurable. Sixth, it is about valuing knowledge. Seventh, it is about helping us develop a sense of plural identities in an increasingly confusing world.

None of these 'big ideas' are new. Indeed, it is difficult to say anything new about the purposes of education when people have been talking about them for over two millennia. But from time to time, we need to be reminded of the obvious. They also do not necessarily require major changes to provision. Being explicit about them, however, means seeing things, and thus doing things, differently.

THE CONCEPT OF A 'LIBERAL EDUCATION'
HAS A 2,500-YEAR-OLD PAST,
BUT DOES IT HAVE A FUTURE? ⁴

In my King's College lecture, I referred to England's national curriculum which I had been working to support in different roles ever since it had come into existence as an attempt 'not ignobly' to provide a broad 'liberal education' to the whole population. The qualifying phrase was a recognition of the extent of the challenge that the task had presented within an education system that had largely got rid of selection into different types of school at the age of 11. I did not, however, look into the aetiology of the concept of a 'liberal education' and was

⁴ First published in *The Hungarian Conservative*, 4(4) [2024], pp. 46–54.

not encouraged to do this in any depth until becoming involved in the classical education initiative boldly launched by the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) over the last couple of years. The second item in this chapter, an article written for Hungarian Conservative, traces the origins of the concept from the Greeks onwards. Appropriately as the final item in this book, it aims to offer a succinct summary of what a 'liberal education' is and – with the present-centred educational programmes of many progressive 'educationists' as my target – what it very decidedly is not.

Some years ago, as director general of The International School of Geneva, I invited a former pupil to talk to a group of current pupils about her experiences of 60 years earlier, as a teenage Jewish-Hungarian girl during the Second World War. She recounted the traumatic train journey that brought her from Budapest to Geneva and the few months that she had spent *en route* in the notorious Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Asked what helped to give her hope while on the train and in the camp, her unhesitating response, to the evident surprise of the pupils, was *la culture*, by which she meant memories of the great creative achievements of the human spirit that, kept alive in the camp by poetry readings and talks, had acted as a talisman against the surrounding barbarism.

In responding in this way, I realised that she had been demonstrating what the political philosopher Alan Ryan, writing about 'liberal education', had called 'a sense of cultural ownership' – that feeling of being part of a culture that is inherited, gives meaning to life and is valued – and which he had found absent in contemporary teenagers in Britain and the USA (Ryan, 1999, p. 24). She had clearly received, whether from her family or her school, or both, the kind of 'liberal education', focused on the transmission of what the nineteenth-century English poet and educator Matthew Arnold had called 'the best that has been thought and known', which Ryan was

recommending. This article deals with the origins and nature of this 'liberal education' and the need for it to continue.

A similar education, George Steiner pointed out many years earlier, had been received by some of the senior German figures organising the Nazi atrocities from which this girl had been escaping in 1944–1945. In a devastating critique of the poet T. S. Eliot's defence of this 'high culture' in his *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture* (1962), Steiner drew attention to the way in which products of a demanding humanist education, readers of Goethe and Rilke and performers of Bach and Mozart, were complicit in the administration of the Holocaust (Steiner, 1971, pp. 60–63). There were doubts, he concluded, as to whether the kind of elite education which had traditionally been lauded in Western culture could continue to be deemed to humanise those who received it.

The article explores the different ways in which the concept of a 'liberal education' has been defined and applied in practice since its beginnings in Greece and Rome. It has been given many different purposes and there have been many varieties of educational programme that have gone under its name. I discuss its connection with different political philosophies and ask whether this is an education appropriate for all or just an elite. I argue that there are principles which can help to define it, and which distinguish it from what in modern practice is its antithesis. I conclude with a tentative answer to the question: 'does liberal education have a future?' The focus of the article is principally, though not exclusively, on schools rather than universities.

The term 'liberal education' has been in use in English since the sixteenth century, as have references to 'liberal arts' and 'liberal sciences', the core distinction between what is 'liberal' and what is not being that the former is something pertaining only to free men (in Latin *liberalis*) and does not refer to an activity aimed at earning one's living (Oxford English Dictionary). The term 'liberal arts', in

its Latin form *artes liberales*, goes back to Roman times. There is no inevitable association between a ‘liberal education’ and ‘liberalism’, as I hope to show, despite Ryan’s book having this potential connection as one of its core concerns, and certainly no association with the contemporary US meaning of ‘liberal’ as ‘left wing’, even though there are some who might wish to recruit it to that cause. ‘Liberal education’ has in recent years, especially in the USA, at times also been referred to as ‘classical education’. This article reserves the latter for an education in the Greek and Latin classics, which may or may not be part of a wider ‘liberal education’.

Plato and Aristotle

As in matters of political theory, discussion about the nature of liberal education often begins with Plato. His prime concern was for the education of the small elite of ‘Guardians’ needed to rule the ideal city state that he had envisaged. The main focus of a Platonic education would be on identifying the most talented and turning them into an elite dedicated to the pursuit of truth, virtue, and beauty. This would involve a process of continuous ethical and intellectual self-examination and self-improvement, which would last throughout their lives. Those Guardians reaching the ultimate stages of this process would, at least for some of their time, devote themselves to a state of advanced philosophical contemplation, alongside serving the state (N. Tate, 2015, pp. 15–28).

Plato’s disciple Aristotle shared his mentor’s view that the core purpose of education was to produce individuals capable of the highest levels of thought, but extended this to a wider group of citizens, while recognising, as Plato had also done, that there would be some who would need to be habituated to virtue rather than coming to understand its necessity through reflection and choice. Aristotle placed great emphasis on the importance of leisure in

giving his elite the time required to think and read. Recognising the substantial differences between types of state, he stressed the need for education to be adapted to their differing circumstances (N. Tate, 2015, pp. 29–41).

The seven liberal arts

Plato and Aristotle continued to be read, and had a major influence on the development of Rome's thinking and practice in educational matters, not least in the teaching of dialectic and rhetoric. It was under their influence that the main features of the 'classical education' that was to persist in many parts of Europe up to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were gradually formalised during the Roman Empire and the period immediately following its collapse.

This was a programme of seven liberal arts divided between the *trivium* (grammar, logic or dialectic, and rhetoric – how to use language, think, and argue), and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy – areas of knowledge to which these three arts need to be applied). Key figures helping to establish this as the core curriculum for medieval Christendom were the great sixth-century Christian statesmen and scholars Boethius and Cassiodorus. Christian attitudes towards what was in origin a pagan educational programme were sometimes ambivalent, though the use of these pagan tools could be justified in the European universities which emerged from the eleventh century onwards not as ends in themselves but as laying the groundwork for advanced studies in theology and philosophy (Wagner, 1983, pp. 17–18; Morrison, 1983).

Classical learning: for and against

Over the 1,300–1,400 years during which this classical curriculum was in use in much of Europe it took many different forms. It was always a

curriculum with mastery of the Latin language – the language of the Christian Church up to the Reformation, and of law, medicine, and scholarship – at its heart, though at times and in places it would also include Greek. Sometimes, and especially in the last few centuries of its use, it included some learning of vernacular languages and also of more modern history. Like most curricula, it was sometimes well taught and sometimes badly taught, with the infliction of corporal punishment on the unsuccessful and unwilling a perennial feature.

It had some distinguished critics. Montaigne calling the methods of teaching generally used as ones designed to produce ‘donkeys laden with books’ rather than people who thought (Montaigne, 1991, p. 199), while Milton denounced the ‘barbarous’ methods that led people into a ‘hatred and contempt for learning’ (Milton, 1644), and Locke objected to the ‘very unpleasant Business’ of learning long lists of words (Locke, 1989, pp. 215–218, 227, 234–235). In the nineteenth century, one of England’s greatest novelists, Anthony Trollope, reminiscing about his 12 years of classical teaching at Winchester and Harrow, two leading schools, could not remember coming away from a lesson in which he had learned a single thing (Trollope, 1928, p. 17). Winston Churchill had comparable things to say about his own education at the second of these schools, despite ending up as a great master of English prose (Churchill, 1930, pp. 30–38).

I cite these examples to show that the ‘classical’ form that ‘liberal education’ mostly took during the 1,500 years following the fall of Rome was not an unmixed blessing. Where it was successful, as with Montaigne, Milton, and Locke, it helped to produce immensely learned people able to use their knowledge of Greek and Roman literature and philosophy to great creative advantage. One of the best examples of a programme of classical education, influenced in this case by currents of Renaissance humanism, is to be found in the Jesuit *Ratio Studiorum*, a set of school regulations issued in 1599 for the provision of ‘a good liberal education’ both for

future members of the Society of Jesus and for laymen being taught in Jesuit schools (Farrell, 1970). It was in use wherever Jesuits were to be found, not just in Europe but also in Spain's overseas empire and in India. The focus was predominantly on the classics, but the mother tongue and natural science were also taught, a diversity of teaching methods used, punishment kept separate from academic matters, and students given opportunities to perform in plays. It was the curriculum that educated in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries some of Europe's most impressive intellects: Descartes, Corneille, Molière, Calderón de la Barca, Torquato Tasso, Goldoni, Voltaire, and Montesquieu.

What is a liberal education for?

Studies of how people referred to 'liberal education' in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries show how, as in other periods, the term meant different things to different people at different times and how, as its meaning changed, echoes of former meanings continued to linger within new contexts (Rothblatt, 1976). For much of the eighteenth century the emphasis was on the impact a liberal education would have on character, and an individual's ability to conduct himself in polite society. It was seen very much as a 'gentleman's education', the main purpose of which was to develop judgement and form practices of sociability. This was a long way from the aim of the *Ratio Studiorum* 'to lead men to the knowledge and love of our Creator and Redeemer' or the Platonic and Aristotelian idea that the best life was a contemplative one.

Other conceptions of a liberal education which emerged in the nineteenth century put the training of the mind before aspects of character and culture, and argued for the need to measure the success of this training through the controversial introduction of examinations (Rothblatt, 1976, pp. 119–124, 197). T. H. Huxley, scientist

and pioneer of scientific education, saw it almost entirely in terms of mind *and* character, with the transmission of culture not even receiving a passing mention (Huxley, 1909, pp. 38–39). Others in the nineteenth century, most notably Matthew Arnold, placed greater emphasis on the cultivation of the ‘sweetness and light’ brought by culture and the arts and, through these means, the development of an individual’s ‘high best self’ (Arnold, 1869, pp. 23, 89).

Contemporary writers on liberal education show a similarly wide range of emphases. Alan Ryan, writing about Britain and the USA, distinguishes between a ‘liberal education’, by which he means one designed to produce ‘an aristocracy of everyone’ as a way of sustaining the ‘liberal society’ that is his ideal, and – somewhat confusingly – a ‘liberal-education’, by which he means the modern equivalent of a gentleman’s education, one that incorporates ‘high culture’, enlarges the mind, refines the taste, and is worth it for its own sake (Ryan, 1999, pp. 22, 36–37). While aspiring towards the latter for some people, he is convinced, as a liberal and democrat, that some version of the former is also needed for the rest of society.

Another strong contemporary defender of liberal education is Martha Nussbaum, writing in a US context, who in *Not for Profit* (2010) makes a forceful case for a humanities education for all, and for education not to be dominated by economic needs. While stressing the value of the Socratic approach and the need for critical thinking, her underlying aims are not open-ended. To her, a successful liberal education appears to be one designed to produce the types of young adult, suspicious of traditional authority, freed from local loyalties, and seeing themselves as citizens of the world, whom we have witnessed dominating US campuses ever since 2020 (Nussbaum, 2010, pp. 7, 45, 55, 125, 141). ‘Critical thinking’ in this context seems to be little more than challenging the forces hostile to the kind of left-liberal democracy that Nussbaum obviously supports. Despite her rejection of economic motives, her version of ‘liberal

education' does not come across as one designed to produce men and women who are truly free.

The recent writer with perhaps the most essentialist view of liberal education is Anthony O'Hear, whose *In Defence of Liberal Education* describes it, without qualification, as the transmission of an inheritance from one generation to another which is worthwhile 'in and of itself' for the individuals who receive it. Defining it in such terms leads him to believe that liberal education, while it might thrive under some governments, is unable to do so under the ones we currently have in the West where states feel that they 'own' children and can do with them as they wish. Such governments, he argues, cannot be trusted not to tinker with their educational programmes by inserting into them purposes arising from whatever their concerns of the moment happen to be (O'Hear, 2023, pp. 14, 21).

Over the centuries, liberal education has therefore been seen both as a process that is wholly for the inner development of the individual and also, very frequently, one that puts wider purposes first. The aim has been to make the individual into a better man, but also to ensure that society is better governed, that there are enough educated clergy to perform their functions, that there is sufficient suitable manpower to uphold the country's imperial burden, or in our own times, as the French philosopher of education Laurent Fedi has put it, that there are enough highly skilled and flexible *nouveaux hommes* needed to take their place in a nomadic global marketplace (Fedi, 2011, pp. 133, 191–209). Purists like O'Hear may accept that some of these purposes are important and likely to be incidentally fulfilled through a liberal education, but argue that to put them foremost will undermine the effectiveness of any education focused solely on its benefits to the individual.

There is one purpose of a liberal education concerned with society's wellbeing that looks beyond the individual to something wider, without distorting its main emphasis. Roger Scruton put it

very succinctly when urging teachers to ensure the transmission of what was worth valuing in a culture ‘by lodging it in brains that will last longer than their own’ (Dooley, 2011, pp. 52–53).

Is a liberal education for all people?

One of the biggest obstacles to the continuance of the liberal education once offered to small elites is having to make a decision as to the extent to which it, or some version of it, can or should be made accessible to the majority of the school population. The possibility of providing a liberal education for the working classes was not considered seriously in England before the Second World War (Ryan, 1999, p. 83). In Spain in the 1930s, Ortega y Gasset saw liberal education for those outside the elite as a theoretical possibility – there were able men among the working classes who might benefit, he observed – but, despite having thoughts about almost everything else, he clearly did not see this as a priority (Ortega, 2004, pp. 40–41).

When, in the twentieth century, mass education was extended beyond the primary level, governments developed provisions for the majority of pupils who were deemed unable to meet the demands of the academic programme available for the minority. As societies became more egalitarian, these selective systems were challenged, most assertively in English-speaking countries where public education increasingly began to cater for almost the whole of the age group within the same school. Even where elements of selection have remained within these community schools, there has been a watering down of some of the demands made on all pupils, a move to an increasingly child-centred rather than knowledge-centred approach, and the development of a school culture less receptive to the Arnoldian ‘best that has been known and thought’.

Even more fundamentally damaging to liberal education, including in those selective schools still able to provide some version of it,

are the factors that the great Peruvian novelist Mario Vargas Llosa identified in his book *La civilización del espectáculo*, published in 2012 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of T. S. Eliot's defence of 'high culture' in *Notes Towards the Definition of Culture*. The three main ones are as follows: the harmful effect of the pervasive cultural relativism of the modern world; the decline in standards arising from the disappearance of the 'cultured' class that had previously ensured the transmission of 'high culture'; and the absence of the 'glue' by which religion in the past helped to hold societies together (Vargas Llosa, 2012; Eliot, 1962). Although Ryan does not cite the same negative factors, he too talks about how the 'dis-educating society' of the world in which schools find themselves is not a favourable environment in which to operate. While accepting that John Stuart Mill's aspiration of a 'liberal education for all' was unlikely to be achievable, he nonetheless still feels that at least 'a decent foundation course in liberal education' should be provided for everyone 'whether or not they like it' (Ryan, 1999, pp. 34–35, 55, 86).

*What liberal education is
and what it is not*

The content of a liberal education will and should vary according to time and place, not least to adapt to the widely differing cultures of the countries in which it is taking place and to the age group being educated. Essential features are the following: a focus on the Platonic triad of 'the true, the beautiful, and the good' without resort to ethical or aesthetic relativism; an introduction to the major languages of human understanding – historical, scientific, artistic, mathematical, ethical, and philosophical – and to the Aristotelian intellectual virtues involved in their study; academic rather than social and emotional learning at the centre of the educational process; a focus on cultural transmission based on Europe and the West's Judeo-Christian and

Greco-Roman roots; a positive induction into the relevant nation state; at least one foreign language started early and taken to a high level; Latin where a classicist is available to teach it well; and pragmatism in teaching methods.

In some ways, it is easier to identify the things that liberal education is *not*. It is not an education focused on issues of contemporary concern, as Nussbaum would favour. It is not a political project designed to inculcate children with the ideas and attitudes currently in favour with the elites that control education systems. It does not involve pupils in activism to promote political causes, nor does it restrict their freedom of expression in relation to these causes. It does not waste time 'discovering' knowledge that is best explicitly taught. It gives priority to the transmission of knowledge, skills, and habits of study intrinsic to the traditional disciplines, and not, at least in the early stages of education, to interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary studies. It does not see the core purpose of schooling as the emotional and social wellbeing of the child, important though this is, and does not take over education and welfare responsibilities properly those of parents. It sees parents and families as the main players in the formation of the next generation and the state and teachers as those aiding this, not the other way round.

*Is liberal education a liberal
or conservative project?*

Given that 'liberal education' and 'liberalism' have a common root in the Latin word for 'free man', and thus in the concept of liberty, the connection between the two, at least in terms of aspirations, ought to be close. John Stuart Mill, England's greatest philosopher of liberalism, saw liberal education playing a big part in the move to the increasingly liberal society he hoped would be his country's future. In an address in 1867 to students at the University of St Andrew's in

Scotland, he described the aim of a liberal education as ‘the improvement of the individual mind and the benefit of the race.’ His vision for a liberal future was a self-educating society in which everyone would endeavour to make the best of themselves and in which access to a liberal education would open up for all (Mill, 1867, p. 11, and *passim*). It was a vision shared in the USA by Horace Mann and Ralph Waldo Emerson, and in England by Matthew Arnold, though the conservative Arnold’s view of a liberal education placed more emphasis on the transmission of an inherited culture than Mill did.

From Ryan’s perspective in 1999, it was a vision – which he himself shared – that had been largely unrealised despite the previous half century having been one in which, at least in English-speaking countries, some version or other of liberalism had been all-pervasive, even among self-styled ‘conservatives.’ Looking around him in Britain and the USA just before the beginning of a new millennium, Ryan saw not the ‘broadly cultivated,’ lively, and self-improving society he and his nineteenth-century predecessors had imagined, but one ‘narrowly self-centred’ and dominated by ‘domestic, private, and familial concerns.’ He was similarly disappointed by the state of liberal education both at school and university, with even the best schools in Britain and the USA being less ambitious than they might be, and US university students having shifted in huge numbers from academic disciplines to career-related ones. It would be a bold person to claim that a quarter of a century later the situation had much improved (Ryan, 1999, pp. 56, 125, 126, 129, 137).

According to two of liberalism’s most outspoken critics, this failure to embed liberal education is best attributed to liberalism itself. The political theorist Patrick Deneen sees liberalism as not just a political project but a movement seeking to transform human life and the world by maximising freedom for individuals, liberating them from restraints, and enabling them to choose whatever identities they

wish. This does not generate greater happiness. By freeing people from customs and traditions, and breaking up families and communities, it creates situations that require increasing intervention by the state. A movement committed to freedom ends up creating some of the most intrusive state mechanisms of all time (or as John Gray put it, ‘the logic of limitless freedom is unlimited despotism’).⁵ It is not surprising in these circumstances that education in liberal democracies ceases to be focused on the transmission of a common culture. ‘Liberal education,’ concludes Deneen, ‘needs rescuing from liberalism’ (Deneen, 2018, pp. 110–130, and *passim*).

The conservative political historian Maurice Cowling’s target is ‘higher liberalism and ... liberal rhetoric’ of all kinds, but particularly as it emerges from the pen of John Stuart Mill. Despite its rigorous content and core of classical learning, the objective of the liberal education proposed by Mill in his St Andrew’s address is not, he argues, the development of free men able to make up their own minds, but to nudge them into questioning ‘every sort of received orthodoxy ... every established habit, religion, and institution.’ The role of the clerisy Mill hopes to educate will be to absorb a body of received opinions which it will then transmit to the rest of society. Mill’s educational purpose therefore is one of ‘moral indoctrination’ and as such cannot constitute ‘liberal education’ (Cowling, 1990, pp. xlviii, xxv, 87, 107, 113, 143). Some of the emphases in the kind of liberal education proposed in Nussbaum’s *Not for Profit*, mentioned earlier, may not merit such a strong label, but are moving in a similar direction (Nussbaum, 2010, pp. 7, 45).

These two objections help to clarify how ‘liberal education’ both is and is not linked to liberalism. They do not rule out a link with some aspects of liberalism, on the lines sketched by Ryan, but draw

⁵ Gray is putting in his own words a passage from Dostoyevsky’s *Demons* (Gray, 2023).

attention to the way liberal education is much more closely aligned with conservative concerns such as cultural transmission, moral absolutism, habituation to virtue, membership of communities, self-restraint, and respect for tradition.

Does liberal education have a future?

Instead of just lamenting the decline in France of an education based on transmission, a group of French academics set out in 2008 to identify what they called the ‘civilisational’ conditions which were causing it. They analysed the obstacles to such an education arising from the prevailing *Zeitgeist*: the general lack of interest in the past in a future-oriented society; the demand that knowledge is related directly to the learner and is immediately useful; the cult of the spontaneous; the dominance of the visual; and, most fundamentally, the sense, for the first time in history, that the past is ‘dead and silent’ (Blais et al., 2008, pp. 8, 60, 73, 75, 109, 110, 160). It is an excellent analysis, but not a cheerful book. A warning that the past for the first time is ‘dead and silent’ was also one of the last messages Ortega y Gasset was planning to pass on just before he died in 1955: ‘Man finds himself facing the future lacking a past tense’ (Ortega, 2010, p. 435). It was found in the text of a lecture which he had prepared but which, poignantly, he did not live to give.

In *Forgetfulness: Making the Modern Culture of Amnesia* Francis O’Gorman gives two other reasons for our neglect of the past: first, the assumption ‘that what is important in history is only that which prefigures modern liberal values’; and second, the endless focus on the sufferings of ‘the Other’ which has ‘helped persuade too many people to regard the past only as something to be glad to get rid of’ (O’Gorman, 2017, pp. 134–135). Deneen in *Why Liberalism Failed* attributes all of this to liberalism’s ‘presentism’ and its deep antipathy to inherited culture, pointing out that Tocqueville had

already warned about this liberal characteristic nearly 200 years earlier (Deneen, 2018, pp. 72, 74).

In the light of such ‘civilisational conditions’ the future for liberal education is not therefore a rosy one. The bloated Western states that Deneen and Gray see as the result of pushing liberalism to its limits are far too tempted, as O’Hear has indicated, to use their powers over the schools they control to tackle whatever the political causes of the moment happen to be – in England at the time of writing this is knife crime, tackling misogyny, countering ‘misinformation’ on the internet, and teaching children how to brush their teeth – than to find time to strengthen the academic curriculum (Spicksley, 2024).

Politically, however, it is not impossible for a state to decide that it would be better, both for children and for the country, to give schools freedom to develop educational approaches that follow liberal education principles, whether within the state system or outside it, especially if evidence can be gathered to show the beneficial effects it is having. Excellent practice in liberal education exists in some schools, both state (for example some UK ‘Free Schools’) and private, and in elements of state curricula in some countries, and there are still some excellent liberal arts universities. These could be more systematically studied and communicated.⁶ A tradition 2,500 years in the making, and which is one of the most persistent threads running through our common European and Western civilisation, still has plenty of possibilities ahead of it.

⁶ O’Hear discusses the schools of the American Association of Christian Classical Schools (ACSS) (O’Hear, 2023, pp. 58–62), and finds it difficult to categorise them as offering the kind of liberal education he is advocating.

APPENDIX

A STUDY IN CONTRASTS, THE MAN
IN CHARGE OF THE NATIONAL
CURRICULUM SHINES A BRIGHT
LIGHT ON NATIONAL IDENTITY¹

Nicholas Tate is a kind of miracle. At a time when Britain is increasingly confused about its values, about its very identity even, this man has appeared, taken charge of the National Curriculum and lit a path through the darkness. Through education it should be possible to form people who know what it is to be English and want to be active citizens. The French achieve this, he says. So could we. Much of what Dr Tate says is common sense, but it takes someone to say it. And the history of British education since the Second World War has been notably short on common sense.

So, Dr Tate is to be celebrated. But what a paradox the man is. Here is a staunch defender of the English tradition, which he would be the first to acknowledge as being empirical. Yet he is the closest thing to an intellectual that this country is capable of producing. For once, a government not overflowing with affection for ideas has picked a person with no fear of them. With his dark suit, dark hair, dark beard, and dark eyes, he is – well, very dark; almost, his enemies in the teaching profession might say, Mephistophelean. He is demonised as a Little Englander, a jingoist, a monster of the

¹ First published in *Country Life*, 190(41) [10 October 1996], p. 56.

Right. Nevertheless (paradox again), a word that he uses continually is ‘community’, which now has pride of place in the lexicon of the Labour Party. For example, it is education’s task to ‘get young people to believe that there is a community, an entity to which they belong, which is important: viz Britain, or England. Or both.’

Then there is the paradox of trying to inspire the English education system with Dr Tate’s big ideas. Viewed from abroad, our system must seem hopelessly eccentric. With its many examination boards offering competing syllabuses, schools have always had a wide degree of freedom over what they taught. This freedom has been limited by the National Curriculum and national testing, but remains greater than that in, say, France. Even with the National Curriculum, there are no universal textbooks. When the National Curriculum was introduced in 1988 ‘Kenneth Baker did have the thought for half an hour of kite-marking text books and then said: “perish the thought, it is contrary to the English tradition.”’ It might be said that Dr Tate’s centre-outwards effort to promote national identity is, oddly, inimical to it.



Indeed, his inspiration comes partly from overseas. ‘A defect of the English educational system has been its unwillingness to look beyond these shores,’ he opines. Now, educationalists regularly beat a path to Taiwan and South Korea, to study how they produce such good results. Dr Tate is just as concerned about what is taught. ‘If you look at textbooks in French schools, you will find that they have a more thorough grounding in French history, French geography, and French literature – and the arts generally – than our children do.’ Personal experience may have sharpened Dr Tate’s perceptions, since his first job after Balliol College, Oxford, and teacher training was to teach English literature in Spain. ‘That gave me a strong sense

of what it is to be English.' Living in Edinburgh for 14 years may have had a similar effect.

The insights that Dr Tate gathered from his time as a teacher, part of it in Sheffield, often run counter to received opinion. He does not believe that children should be patronised by being taught only about contemporary literature. There is a 'mistaken assumption that children will respond to things that relate to their own experience, which is nonsense. On the whole, children respond better to things that are totally remote from their own experience.' Their imaginations are fired by Arthurian legends, Norse sagas, Greek myths. 'The last thing someone brought up on a grim council estate on the outskirts of Birmingham wants to read about at school is life on grim council estates on the outskirts of Birmingham.' Being an intellectual does not prelude romanticism. It was discovering prehistoric flints on the hills round his childhood home in Yorkshire that first kindled his love of history.

If Dr Tate ever spoke Yorkshire, it is now hard to spot. Most people probably find their ears busy enough keeping pace with the verbal flow. He talks seamlessly, with a donnish fondness for double negatives. His thoughts send him down ever more labyrinthine corridors of syntax. Only once do the verbal defence mechanisms fail – when he is talking about Edinburgh. It is 30 years behind the rest of the country which, he lets slip, is 'a jolly good thing.' Opponents who fear it is Dr Tate's intention to turn the clock back would rejoice at this hostage to fortune. The rest of the world might well agree with him.



Something he regrets is the decline of classics. 'Traditionally we have drawn on the riches of the Ancient World', he says. We are now in danger of cutting 'ourselves off from the classical roots of our high culture'. That term 'high culture', in the modern context, is brave.

In some quarters it will be as unwelcome as Dr Tate's defence of the virtues of spelling. 'What I don't like about sloppy spelling and punctuation is the attitude of mind it sometimes reveals, which is carelessness, a feeling that anything goes, a lack of sense that perfection is important.'

Dr Tate is aware that his views, antithetical to much of the teaching establishment, could cause him to become 'a media construct': a blimpish Aunt Sally at which the Left of the profession would simply shy coconuts. But there are limits to his affection for old-fashioned values. He does not believe in the Top Nation concept of English history, which 'does not and cannot' permeate teaching any more. 'We had a particular sense of identity in the Imperial period, which is a relatively brief period. Britain as a state is not much older than the United States.' Consequently, people are not apt to feel British. But the English, as leading nation in the union, have lost sight of their identity more than the Welsh, Scots, or Irish.

One aspect of identity is participation. 'I am keen that people should learn about the electoral system, local government, central government. The trouble is that it is often terribly boring.' Another aspect is national self-esteem. In Dr Tate's view, 'we are not a country ... with a high sense of national self-esteem'. Lack of national self-esteem causes the extreme jingoism and xenophobia sometimes displayed unattractively on the football terraces and in the tabloid press. As a country, he says, we 'need to dwell on what we have achieved': words that should be printed on a piece of card and sent to every newspaper editor, television producer, and radio interviewer, as well as teacher, in the land.

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EDUCATION FOR VIRTUE AND OTHER ESSAYS

In this book the author, historian and educator, in a selection of his writings over many years, raises fundamental questions about education in schools and universities: What is education for? What role do schools play in transmitting a more than 2,000-year-old civilisation from one generation to the next? Why have we ceased to talk about education for virtue? Is it legitimate for schools to promote a sense of national identity? What is the best way to ensure that the elites emerging from our educational institutions govern for the common good rather than for themselves? Why is learning about the past so important?

These and other issues are addressed through essays, short pieces of journalism, speeches, and articles for scholarly journals. A common thread is the contribution that great thinkers – from Plato and Aristotle to José Ortega y Gasset and Hannah Arendt, many of whom were also teachers themselves – are able to make to educational issues that were as relevant 2,500 years ago as they are today. Nicholas Tate also draws on his own experience to highlight the challenges and opportunities facing educational leaders in trying to maintain a focus on education as a process of self-improvement that may begin in schools but continues throughout life.

NICHOLAS TATE is a historian who, over a career in education spanning more than 50 years, has been a teacher, headmaster, teacher educator, school and university governor, chief executive of England's school curriculum and assessment authorities, and adviser to ministers of education in England and France. He has lived and worked in England, Scotland, Spain, France, and Switzerland. He has written widely on educational topics, especially on the history of educational thought in *What is Education For?* and *The Conservative Case for Education*, on international education, and, in his latest book, *Seven Books that Everyone Once Read and No One Now Does*, on the role of great books in people's lives. His most recent position was as Adviser to the Learning Institute of the Mathias Corvinus Collegium (MCC) in Hungary.



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