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Hirst on rational moral education

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ABSTRACT

In *Moral Education in a Secular Society*, Paul Hirst offers accounts of the content and justification of morality and the aims and methods of moral education. My own recent book, *A Theory of Moral Education*, does the same. Here I explore the similarities and differences between our theories. In the first part of the paper, I outline what Hirst calls the 'sophisticated view of education', which I wholeheartedly endorse, and highlight his attention to the noncognitive as well as the cognitive aspects of morality. In the second part, I explain how Hirst's transcendental justification of morality differs from my contractarian justification and trace the implications of this difference for our respective accounts of moral education.

KEYWORDS: morality, moral education, Paul Hirst, transcendental deduction, contractarian justification, practical deliberation

INTRODUCTION

Paul Hirst's only sole-authored monograph, written almost 50 years ago, was *Moral Education in a Secular Society* (Hirst 1974). His project in the book is to work out secular accounts of the content and justification of morality and the aims and methods of moral education. Accounts are secular, on his view, when they make no reference to religious concepts or beliefs. He is at pains to emphasize that secular morality is not incompatible with religion: secular moral theorists need not suppose that religious beliefs are false or unintelligible, only that morality does not depend on them. For the 'secular Christian', he says:

> religious beliefs, rightly understood, are not a proper basis for scientific, moral, aesthetic, or other beliefs; rather they complement these other forms of belief in some way and are even perhaps in significant measure dependent on them. In this complex situation it is perhaps wise to think of the intellectual areas of secularisation as, in the first instance, the development of the sciences, morals, art, social and political thought as autonomous areas. (Hirst 1974: 3)

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On the assumption that morality must be developed as an 'autonomous area', Hirst proceeds to outline a theory of what moral principles are, how they can be justified, and what is involved in equipping pupils to live by them. He recognizes that 'on many crucial relevant matters there is great diversity of opinion' (p. 6), that 'the history of ethics is strewn with unsuccessful theories' (p. 28), and that 'there are very severe limits to the positive suggestions for the practical conduct of moral education that can be confidently expressed on the basis of well-founded research' (p. 100). Nevertheless, he thinks, 'moral education is going on for good and ill' (p. 6) and educational theorists have a duty to help if they can. This practical imperative emboldens him to advance a theory that 'takes a particular stand on certain matters of very real controversy' (p. 6).

My own recent book on this topic, *A Theory of Moral Education* (Hand 2018), stands in a direct line of descent from *Moral Education in a Secular Society*. Broadly speaking, I share Hirst's understanding of the nature and scope of philosophy of education and of the requirements that must be met by an adequate account of moral education. Patricia White, in her generous introduction to a symposium on my book, draws attention to the 'striking parallels' between my project and Hirst's: we both seek 'to put moral education on a solidly rational foundation' and 'to establish this independently of theological support'; we are both troubled by the 'bugbear' of indoctrination; and we both have 'confidence in the persuasiveness of painstakingly careful argumentation in establishing a basis for moral education' (White 2019: 633).

For all the similarities between our projects, however, there are some deep-going differences. We have different views about the content and justification of morality, and these give rise to different accounts of the aims and methods of moral education. In brief, Hirst defends a *transcendental* justification of moral standards, which yields a rather abstract set of moral principles. Working out what abstract principles require in specific situations is often cognitively demanding, so for Hirst the principal focus of moral education is practical deliberation. By contrast, I defend a *contractarian* justification of moral standards, which yields a more concrete set of moral rules. Working out what concrete rules require in specific situations is usually quite straightforward, so practical deliberation is, on my view, fairly peripheral to the core business of moral education.

In the first part of this article, I explore the common ground between Hirst's theory and mine. I outline what Hirst calls the 'sophisticated view of education', which I wholeheartedly endorse, and highlight his attention to the noncognitive as well as the cognitive aspects of morality. In the second part, I examine the points of divergence between our theories. I explain how Hirst's transcendental justification of morality differs from my contractarian justification and trace the implications of this difference for our respective accounts of moral education.

Before turning to these tasks, however, I should like to say something on a personal note. The essays collected in this special issue celebrate the life and work of Paul Hirst, who passed away in late 2020. Although Paul had been retired for some years when I began my academic career, he was still active in the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain and a regular at the weekly philosophy of

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education seminars at the London Institute of Education (IOE), so I had the good fortune to meet him on many occasions. I encountered him first, of course, in his field-defining writings: my doctoral thesis tackled the conundrum for religious education posed by his twin claims that there is a religious form of knowledge and that nothing is known in the religious domain (Hirst 1965a,b, 1973; Hand 2006). By the time we met in person, I was acutely aware of his prominent place in the philosophy of education pantheon. When I gave my first paper in the IOE seminar series, some time in 2001, Paul was in attendance—I can see him now, sitting unobtrusively at the back of the room, next to the door in the left-hand corner—and it is hard to overstate how much his opinion mattered to me. I learned a few days after the seminar that he had commented favourably on my paper and my elation was palpable. He must have been aware of the esteem in which I and my contemporaries held him, but he wore it lightly: in conversation he was convivial, engaged, disarmingly unguarded and infectiously good-humoured. I soon relaxed in his presence and I have fond memories of him regaling us with stories of the halcyon days of philosophy of education and of his unconventional upbringing in the Plymouth Brethren. Some years later, when I was grappling with R. S. Peters' transcendental justification of theoretical activities for another special issue of this journal (Peters 1966; Hand 2009), Paul was a willing and gracious correspondent and helped me to a clearer understanding of Peters' arguments. His death has deprived our field of a titan, and our community of a dear friend and colleague.

THE SOPHISTICATED VIEW OF EDUCATION

In Chapter 5 of *Moral Education in a Secular Society*, Hirst sets out his well-known distinction between the 'primitive' and 'sophisticated' views of education. According to the primitive view, education is simply a matter of one generation passing on to the next its rituals, customs, practices, and beliefs. As Hirst puts it: 'Whatever is held by the group to be true or valuable, simply because it is held to be true or valuable, is what is passed on so that it comes to be held as true or valuable by others in their turn' (Hirst 1974: 80). According to the sophisticated view, however, holding something to be true or valuable is not a sufficiently good reason for passing it on to children. Of the things we hold to be true or valuable, only those that are 'rationally defensible on objective grounds' are suitable for transmission through education. Many of our beliefs and values, especially, perhaps, in the domains of morality, religion, and politics, do not pass this test: though we may hold them 'tenaciously', they are in fact 'highly debatable', so we have no business imposing them on the young (p. 80).

Hirst sums up the sophisticated view as follows:

> Once it is fully recognised that the belief that something is true, even if that belief is universal, does not of itself make it true, a new principle emerges for carefully assessing what we pass on to others and how we wish them to regard it. That we hold something to be true or valuable is of itself no reason why anyone else should so regard it. That something can, on appropriate objective grounds,

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> be shown to be true or reasonable is a very good reason for passing it on to others. But even then what we must surely seek is that they will hold it, not because we hold it, but because there are objective grounds. Only then will they be prepared to reconsider, and where necessary revise, their beliefs and practices when new evidence and better arguments arise. (Hirst 1974: 80)

This passage makes clear why Hirst thinks we should prefer the sophisticated to the primitive view. It matters that children come to hold the beliefs and values imparted to them on objective grounds, because only then will they be in a position to revise their beliefs and values when 'new evidence and better arguments' come to light. Beliefs and values imparted on some other basis than objective grounds—imparted, that is, by means of psychological pressure or manipulation—are not held evidentially, so are not sensitive to changes in the evidence base. Here the bugbear of indoctrination is in plain view: primitive education must be rejected because it saddles the young with beliefs and values that are resistant to rational correction.

The implication of the sophisticated view for education in the domain of religion is clear: 'no particular substantive religious claims can be either assumed to be, or simply taught as, objectively acceptable' (p. 86). It must be recognized that all religious claims are 'radically controversial' and therefore that confessional forms of religious education are impermissible. The interesting question is whether the sophisticated view has the same implication for education in the domain of morality. Does a commitment to imparting beliefs and values on objective grounds rule out the possibility of teaching moral standards? That, for Hirst, is the fundamental challenge that a theory of moral education must meet.

All of this seems to me exactly right. I agree with Hirst that educators should pass on to pupils only those beliefs and values that enjoy the support of decisive evidence or argument, and that persuading pupils to accept debatable or controversial claims is tantamount to indoctrination. I also agree that this constraint represents a formidable challenge to the enterprise of moral education, given the existence of deep and reasonable disagreement about the content and justification of morality. Here is how I put the point in the opening chapter of *A Theory of Moral Education*:

> Teachers, parents and others involved in the education of children ought to be both implacably opposed to indoctrination and acutely aware of how easy it is to slip, consciously or unconsciously, from rational to non-rational means of persuasion in the transmission of beliefs. But anyone so opposed and aware cannot fail to be troubled by the aim of bringing it about, in the face of reasonable disagreement about morality, that children subscribe to moral standards and believe them to be justified. (Hand 2018: 7)

On the sophisticated view of education, then, and on the problem for moral education to which it gives rise, Hirst and I are fully in accord.

THE NONCOGNITIVE ASPECTS OF MORALITY

Matters of belief and judgment are, for Hirst, central to morality and moral education. But he regularly pauses to remind his readers that they are not the whole story. As well as holding the right moral beliefs and being able to deliberate well, moral

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agents must have certain *dispositions*—to engage in deliberation, to act on their moral judgments and to abide by moral rules:

> The moral life necessitates also a host of personal dispositions… In this domain of dispositions the moral person must indeed be disposed intellectually to think the issue through, so that he actually makes the moral judgments for which he is equipped… What is more, if the morally right action is to occur the person must be disposed to act on his moral judgments… In addition to dispositions to make rational judgments and to act on them, there must also be dispositions to act in accordance with rationally defensible rules and principles on those many occasions when deliberation is either impossible or unnecessary. (Hirst 1974: 66–7)

It follows that the scope of moral education cannot be restricted to moral cognition. There must be attention also to cultivating moral dispositions, to ensuring that pupils are not only *able* but also *inclined* to form and act on considered moral judgments. If these dispositions are to be acquired, Hirst thinks, it will not be enough to invite reflection on abstract or hypothetical moral questions detached from pupils' everyday lives. There will need to be opportunities for pupils to put their moral thinking into practice in relation to problems and projects they care about. He writes:

> …if dispositions to act rationally matter as much as dispositions to think rationally, the process of encouraging responsible moral judgments without related action is of itself inadequate and might well encourage an undesirable divorce of moral thought and action. It seems then that at the centre of explicit moral education there should be the study of, and involvement of the pupils in, particular moral activities that they are able to see as important. (Hirst 1974: 113)

Like Hirst, I seek to give due weight to the noncognitive aspects of morality and moral education. I argue that full commitment to a moral standard involves both *subscribing* to it and *believing subscription to be justified*, where the former is noncognitive and the latter cognitive. Correspondingly, an adequate programme of moral education will include both *moral formation* and *moral inquiry*. By moral formation I mean the cultivation in pupils of the intentions, feelings, and habits that constitute moral subscription; by moral inquiry I mean inquiry with pupils into the nature of moral standards and the justification for subscribing to them. Fostering conative, affective, and behavioural dispositions is therefore integral to the work of the moral educator:

> a person who subscribes to a standard characteristically intends to comply with it, feels good about complying with it and bad about failing to comply with it, and habitually does comply with it. If her subscription to the standard is moral, she additionally wants and expects others to comply with it and endorses penalties for non-compliance. This syndrome of attitudes and dispositions can be deliberately cultivated in children, but not, or not primarily, by the expository and discursive methods ordinarily used to develop their knowledge and understanding. (Hand 2018: 30)

Among the methods of moral formation available to moral educators, I suggest, are issuing prescriptions, rewarding compliance, punishing non-compliance, modelling compliance, and modelling reactions to the compliance and non-compliance of others.

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Here too there is a large measure of agreement between Hirst and me. The moral educational task is to cultivate not just moral understanding, but also moral intentions, feelings, and habits.

THE JUSTIFICATION OF MORAL STANDARDS

I turn now to the points at which our theories diverge. First, and most obviously, we disagree on the justification of moral standards: Hirst favours a transcendental justification and I a contractarian one. In this section I explain the difference between our justificatory strategies; in the next, I consider the effect of this difference on our accounts of moral education.

Hirst begins by distinguishing moral standards from standards of custom, law, politics, prudence, and religion. The defining feature of moral standards, he proposes, is their justificatory ultimacy. Whereas standards of other kinds 'do not rest on an ultimately adequate base and thus need further justification', moral standards are the principles we take to be 'ultimately defensible'. They are 'the ultimate values of life in terms of which all other things are judged' (Hirst 1974: 12). And this, of course, makes them peculiarly difficult to justify.

Nevertheless, Hirst thinks there is one justificatory strategy that is up to the job. Relying heavily on arguments advanced by R. S. Peters in *Ethics and Education* (Peters 1966), he contends that certain moral principles are necessarily presupposed by the practice of seeking and giving reasons for action. Insofar as we are actively engaged in this practice, we are already committed to its necessary presuppositions. This is the justificatory strategy of transcendental deduction:

> In this way, if morality is about having reasons for actions, the very notion of 'reasons for actions' itself lays down a number of fundamental principles without which the whole search for reasons is unintelligible. These principles are therefore not optional, or matters of choice or decision for the person who demands reasons; they are principles to which he is unavoidably committed by making the demand for reasons. What these do is map out certain fundamental features of rational morality, laying bare what objectivity in this area necessitates. (Hirst 1974: 46)

The principles that can be justified in this way, Hirst says, are 'fairness, truth-telling, freedom, consideration of interests, and respect for persons' (p. 46). He does not provide the deductions for these five principles, but simply refers his readers to Peters' arguments for them. He takes it as read that Peters has made his case satisfactorily and thereby furnished us with a robust foundation for rational moral education. It is a foundation that meets the requirement of being thoroughly secular, despite that fact that 'rational morality as Peters outlines it is in all major respects identical with the central tenets of Christian morality' (p. 53).

Peters' transcendental deductions have been extensively discussed in the philosophy of education literature and subjected to numerous critiques (see, for example, White 1973; Kleinig 1973, 1982; Downie et al., 1974; Wilson 1979; Hand 2009; Cuypers 2012). This is not the place for a detailed examination of them; but let me say a few words about their general form and some of the objections to which they are vulnerable.

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Peters' starting point is the assumption that 'a differentiated form of discourse has emerged which has the practical function of guiding people's behaviour by the giving of reasons' (Peters 1966: 114). The question characteristically posed by participants in this form of discourse is 'why do this rather than that?'. The next step is to ask 'what any individual must presuppose in so far as he uses a public form of discourse in seriously discussing with others or with himself what he ought to do' (p. 115). If it turns out that 'certain principles are necessary for a form of discourse to have meaning, to be applied or to have point', Peters thinks, we shall have 'a very strong argument for the justification of the principles in question' (p. 115).

The five principles of fairness, truth, consideration of interests, freedom, and respect for persons are then derived as follows. Seriously asking 'why do this rather than that?' implies a commitment to 'choosing rather than plumping', which in turn requires a commitment to 'the very formal principle of no distinctions without differences', and this turns out to be none other than the principle of *fairness* or *justice* (p. 121). Choosing rather than plumping also implies a concern with properly understanding the options available, and thus a commitment to *truth*. Because practical discourse is public and involves deliberating with others about what is worthwhile, participants cannot be selective about whose interests they take into account: they must be committed to the general principle of *consideration of interests*. The fact that participants are seeking reasons for doing this rather than that implies that they are wedded to their *freedom* to choose between this and that. And finally, participants in practical discourse are committed to seeing and valuing themselves and their fellow deliberators as persons—'as centres of valuation, decision and choice' (p. 211)—and so to the principle of *respect for persons*.

Unfortunately, the difficulties here are legion. First, even if we allow that there is a 'differentiated form of discourse' that presupposes these five moral principles, it seems obvious that people are at liberty not to participate in it. They can settle for plumping rather than choosing, or they can engage in a less demanding form of practical reasoning that does not commit them to caring about fairness or worrying about the interests of others. In this sense the transcendental deductions 'move within too small a circle' (Wilson 1979: 137): they show only that people whose preferred form of practical reasoning presupposes moral standards should be committed to those standards.

Second, it is not clear that the transcendental deductions are valid even within their own small circle. It is true, perhaps, that seriously asking the practical question 'why do this rather than that?' presupposes that one is, in fact, free to do this or that. Without such freedom, the question is idle and therefore not 'serious' in Peters' sense. But it is hard to see why someone asking this question is obliged to *value* their freedom, or to uphold it as a moral principle. The burden of having to choose between this and that might be one the inquirer would sooner not have to carry. Or again, while our inquirer may be committed to finding out truths relevant to the choice before her—truths about the choiceworthiness of this and that—she need not be committed to truth per se. She need not care about the pursuit of truth for its own sake, or endorse a general principle of truth-telling. As John White puts it, 'this is commitment to truth in a far weaker sense than that required by the argument' (White 1973: 11).

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And third, while Peters' deduction of the principle of no distinctions without differences may be valid, his attempt to cast it as a principle of fairness or justice is highly suspect. A commitment to not being arbitrary falls some way short of a commitment to being fair, and the fact that a distinction marks a genuine difference does not make it just. The thinness of Peters' principle of justice is vividly illustrated by his observation that 'a torturer could exercise his art on his victims with fine discrimination and impartiality. He would be just, though a torturer' (Peters 1966: 124). In the end it is difficult to disagree with John Kleinig's verdict on the matter:

> Is the principle of no distinctions without differences sufficient to establish the formal principle of justice, viz. that 'no one shall be presumed, in advance of particular cases being considered, to have a claim to better treatment than another'? It would seem not. (Kleinig 1973: 159)

In light of the serious objections to Peters' transcendental arguments, I do not think we can accept Hirst's claim that they furnish us with an adequate foundation for rational moral education. On the sophisticated view of education, teachers should refrain from passing on to their pupils beliefs that are 'on objective grounds … highly debatable' (Hirst 1974: 80). The belief that moral standards are transcendentally justified plainly belongs in this category.

In *A Theory of Moral Education*, I develop a rather different account of the nature and justification of morality. Like Hirst, I think there are important differences between moral standards and standards of other kinds (of law, etiquette, prudence, etc.). On my view, however, what distinguishes moral standards is not justificatory ultimacy, but rather the particular way in which people subscribe to them. A standard is moral when a person's subscription to it is universally-enlisting and penalty-endorsing; that is, when she wants and expects everyone to comply with it and supports some kind of punishment for non-compliance. In David Copp's terms, this is an *attitudinal* as distinct from a *material* conception of morality (Copp 1995: 82).

Because, on my attitudinal conception, moral standards are not defined by their justificatory ultimacy, the task of justifying them is a little less daunting than it is for Hirst. What must be shown is that there are certain standards of conduct such that we each have good reason to comply with them, to expect others to comply with them, and to endorse penalties for non-compliance.

Happily, a justificatory argument that meets these requirements is readily available. It rests on two claims. The first is that all human beings, or at least all human beings living alongside others in social groups, are unavoidably confronted with a serious practical problem. Following Copp, I call this the *problem of sociality* (Copp 2009: 22). The second is that human beings can effectively ameliorate this problem by means of universally-enlisting and penalty-endorsing subscription to some basic standards of conduct. These two claims together give all of us a decisively good reason to subscribe to a core moral code.

The problem of sociality arises from three contingent but permanent features of the human condition, discussions of which are to be found in the writings of many philosophers, including Thomas Hobbes (1929 [1651]), David Hume (1896 [1739]), H. L. A. Hart (1994 [1961]), G. J. Warnock (1971), John Rawls

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(1971), and J. L. Mackie (1977). These features, sometimes described as the 'circumstances of justice', are (1) rough equality, (2) limited sympathy, and (3) moderate scarcity of resources. The problem to which they collectively give rise is that there is, in human social groups, a standing propensity to outbreaks of conflict and breakdowns in cooperation.

Under the circumstances of justice, we cannot rely on self-interest and sympathy to keep the peace. We need a supplementary kind of motivation for keeping to cooperative agreements and treating each other in non-harmful ways. We need the conative, affective, and behavioural dispositions that constitute subscription to standards. But note that this is only an effective response to the problem of sociality if everyone is on board:

> … the problem of sociality will not be solved or ameliorated by subscription to conflict-averting and cooperation-sustaining standards unless *everyone*, or almost everyone, subscribes to them. Indeed, if only some people subscribe, the problem may actually be exacerbated. If some members of a social group commit themselves to prohibitions on theft and violence and other members do not, the former succeed only in making themselves more attractive targets to the latter… What the problem calls for, then, is not just subscription to the relevant standards of conduct, but universally-enlisting and penalty-endorsing subscription to them. We must each take responsibility not only for complying with the standards ourselves, but for actively encouraging others to comply and for standing ready to punish them when they do not. (Hand 2018: 67)

Here we have a justification for subscription to moral standards that is robust enough to serve as a basis for rational moral education. It is a contractarian justification because it has a reciprocal or quid pro quo aspect that assumes tacit agreement among the members of a social group. In Hume's words: 'this may properly enough be called a convention or agreement betwixt us, though without the interposition of a promise; since the actions of each of us have a reference to those of the other, and are performed upon the supposition that something is to be performed on the other part' (Hume 1896 [1739]: 490). The basic moral standards justified by this argument include prohibitions on killing and causing harm, stealing and extorting, lying and cheating, and requirements to treat others fairly, keep one's promises, and help those in need.

Interestingly, Peters explicitly endorses this justification for the 'basic rules of social life' (Peters, 1966: 173–5). For him, though, the basic rules do not qualify as 'fundamental principles' because 'they are not presuppositions of practical discourse' and because 'they are contingent upon certain very general empirical facts about men and their situation upon earth' (p. 174). On my view, fundamental or not, the basic rules are the core of rational morality.

THE FOCUS OF MORAL EDUCATION

What follows for the practice of moral education from the different justifications of morality Hirst and I favour? It might be thought that the pedagogical implications of our differences are fairly minor. We both wish to see pupils equipped with a set of rationally justified moral standards and the dispositions to comply with them;

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although we disagree on which standards are justified and why, perhaps this is a disagreement only about the content of moral education, not about its aims and methods.

I do not think that is the case. The burden of my argument in this final section will be to show that our different justifications of morality lead us to make quite different pedagogical proposals. The key to understanding why is to look again at the sets of moral standards we each take to be rationally justified.

For Hirst, the justified moral standards are principles of fairness, truth, consideration of interests, freedom, and respect for persons. What is immediately striking about these principles is their high level of abstraction or generality. Moral agency, as Hirst understands it, involves being guided by these five principles, these five ultimate values, in all one's practical thinking and judging. Because the principles are so general, and because contexts of decision and action are so numerous and diverse, it is frequently difficult to work out what morality requires. Applying abstract moral principles to the messy business of life is cognitively demanding:

> But if the fundamental principles provide the ultimate reasons for what is to be done, they have to be applied in all the many and varied situations in which we act… Nor must it be assumed that there is in the end necessarily only one rationally defensible thing to do in any given situation. Often alternative actions are equally justifiable. The clash of principles when applied in specific contexts may not be resolvable in any one way… Some complex situations are unique and must be looked at in that way. How the principles apply can perhaps only be judged by someone having detailed personal knowledge as a participant in that situation. Often even the participants do not know all the relevant facts. Morality on rational principles is not an easy matter. (Hirst 1974: 51–2)

Hirst does not suppose that it is *always* difficult to work out what morality requires. Not all situations are complex and sometimes only one course of action is justifiable. As noted above, Hirst takes the dispositions required for moral agency to include not only a readiness 'intellectually to think the issue through', but also a willingness 'to act in accordance with rationally defensible rules and principles on those many occasions when deliberation is either impossible or unnecessary' (pp. 66–7). Nevertheless, it is quite clear, on his view, that 'the making of autonomous rational judgments about action is the central feature of the moral life' (p. 64), and that judgment-making of this kind places a heavy deliberative burden on moral agents.

As a consequence, Hirst thinks moral educators will need to devote much of their time and energy to equipping pupils to meet these cognitive demands. Schools must ensure that pupils acquire 'the very considerable amount of knowledge that is necessary for morally responsible living in our complex democratic society, and the intellectual skills and dispositions the making of moral judgments demands' (p. 109). In particular, 'there must be attention to moral problems themselves', with a view to showing pupils how 'relevant matters of fact and principle can be harnessed to the making of judgment' (p. 113). Hirst is broadly sympathetic to Kohlberg's theory of moral development and to the idea that the moral thinking of pupils can be improved by inviting them 'to participate in activities and thought

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relevant to their present experience and context, that will induce conflicts resolved by a cognitive shift into a new mode of judgment' (p. 96).

Hirst recognizes that not all moral education is explicit: there is implicit moral education in the way schools manage relationships, resolve conflicts, exercise authority, and make and enforce rules. But he gives a central role to the explicit teaching of morality, and the primary focus of such teaching is the improvement of pupils' practical deliberation and moral judgment.

A little surprisingly, Hirst seems doubtful about teaching the rational justification for moral principles. In his discussion of explicit moral education, he makes no mention of acquainting pupils with the transcendental deductions. And earlier in the book he sounds a sceptical note about the capacity of most pupils to understand them:

> Maybe many are capable of rational judgments over a wide area in terms of questions of fairness, freedom, equality and more localised rules that reflect these principles. Whether or not many could hope to follow the controversial debates of philosophers on the justification of these principles, even if they were presented to them in a suitable form, is another matter. (Hirst 1974: 64)

The reason Hirst's doubts on this score are surprising is that his own defence of the sophisticated view of education requires that pupils accept what they are taught 'because there are objective grounds' (p. 80). It is not enough for the sophisticated view that teachers restrict themselves to passing on beliefs and values that are rationally justified: they must pass on those beliefs and values in such a way that pupils hold them *on the basis of* their rational justification. Insofar as Hirstian moral education involves persuading pupils to accept moral principles without also teaching the transcendental arguments that are supposed to justify them, it remains education of the primitive form.

Now consider the set of moral standards yielded, on my account, by the problem-of-sociality justification: prohibitions on killing and causing harm, stealing and extorting, lying and cheating, and requirements to treat others fairly, keep one's promises, and help those in need. These are not abstract principles but concrete rules specifying types of conduct that are prohibited or required. Complying with them is sometimes *motivationally* demanding, in the sense that moral agents may be sorely tempted to violate them, but only rarely is it *cognitively* demanding. In the vast majority of cases to which these rules apply, what they require is obvious:

> There is usually no mystery at all about whether a specified course of action is a case of stealing, bullying, lying or cheating, and no room for uncertainty about whether or not morality permits it. Given the universally-enlisting and penalty-endorsing character of moral standards, it would be odd if they were generally difficult to apply. In many of the everyday contexts in which people are expected, on pain of punishment, to comply with moral standards, it would be hopelessly impractical to take time out to deliberate about what they require; if such deliberation were routinely necessary, punishing non-compliance would be most unfair. Something has gone badly awry with a moral code if those who subscribe to it struggle to see what it requires of them. (Hand 2018: 36)

I do not deny that there are *some* situations in which the requirements of morality are unclear. In the book I discuss two familiar kinds of problem encountered in the

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course of applying basic moral standards to the circumstances of action: *moral dilemmas* arise when a course of action appears to be required by one moral rule and prohibited by another (what if telling a lie is the only way to avoid causing harm?); and *borderline cases* arise when a course of action has some but not all of the distinguishing features of a required or prohibited form of conduct (does borrowing-and-forgetting-to-return qualify as theft?). No doubt there are other kinds of problem too, and I readily allow that moral education should equip pupils to contend with these problems. Pupils must be 'given opportunities to think and talk about the application of their moral standards', with a view to helping them acquire 'the ability to work through moral uncertainty and to cope with morally ambiguous situations' (p. 36).

But, crucially, problems of this kind are very much the exception. Most of the time applying basic moral standards to the circumstances of action is quite straightforward. In a well-functioning society, members comply with moral standards habitually and unreflectively: it is obvious to them what morality forbids and demands, and they do not think twice about regulating their actions accordingly. Where there is an impediment to habitual compliance, it is much more likely to be motivational than cognitive: it can be hard to resist the temptation to peek at someone else's answers in a test, to skip a promised visit to an elderly relative when the football is on, to lie about additional income on a tax return. Helping pupils to contend with temptation, self-interest, and weakness of will is far more central to the moral educational task than helping them to contend with moral dilemmas and borderline cases.

There is, moreover, a danger attendant on overemphasizing the cognitive demands of moral compliance:

> Disproportionate attention to moral dilemmas and borderline cases can give children the quite misleading impression that moral standards are peculiarly difficult to apply. It can blur the line between knowing that people sometimes reasonably disagree about what their moral code requires and supposing that such disagreements are the norm. If, for example, a school were to address the topic of morality exclusively through discussion of intractable moral dilemmas, it would not be surprising if pupils came to think of moral standards as rules that characteristically conflict with each other, or are dauntingly difficult to follow. For obvious reasons, such misconceptions tend to undermine, rather than support, the attempt to bring it about that children subscribe to moral standards. (Hand 2018: 36–7)

For these reasons I think it is a mistake to make practical reasoning and moral judgment the primary focus of explicit moral education. What *should* be the primary focus is disciplined inquiry into the nature and justification of moral standards. Because, like Hirst, I am persuaded that the practice of education should be governed by the sophisticated view, it seems to me imperative that moral educators furnish pupils with a sound understanding of what moral standards are and what justification there is for subscribing to them. Moral inquiry should range widely over different moral theories and perspectives, over the plethora of moral standards to which people do in fact subscribe, and over the various arguments by which they have sought to justify their subscription. Much of this inquiry will be *nondirective*:

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where moral standards and justificatory arguments are matters of reasonable disagreement among reasonable people, schools have no business taking sides in the dispute. But some of it will be *directive*: pupils should be gently dissuaded from endorsing moral standards for which no credible justification is available, and actively encouraged to endorse the basic moral standards vindicated by the problem-of-sociality justification.

There is, then, a fundamental disagreement between Hirst and me on what should go on under the heading of explicit moral education in schools. On Hirst's view, moral education lessons should attend principally to pupils' thinking about the application of moral principles to the circumstances of action; on mine, their central concern is with pupils' thinking about what morality is and why we need it.

CONCLUSION

I have tried to bring out the most significant similarities and differences between Hirst's theory of moral education and mine. There is, I have suggested, a substantial overlap in our understandings of what such a theory must accomplish, of what differentiates education from indoctrination, and of the need for educational attention to the noncognitive as well as the cognitive aspects of morality. But we have irreconcilably different views about the nature and justification of morality, and these differences have far-reaching implications for our educational prescriptions.

Along the way, I have explained why I think my theory has more going for it than Hirst's. Those who have found my explanation persuasive may nevertheless by troubled by a nagging doubt, to the effect that I have sidestepped a challenge from which Hirst does not shrink. The business of life really is messy, and navigating the rocky terrain of practical decision and judgment really is cognitively demanding. Even if I am right that working out what morality requires in a given situation is usually straightforward, it remains the case that children and young people must be equipped by their education to make choices and solve practical problems that are very far from straightforward. Hirst's deliberation-focused account of explicit moral education, it might be thought, promises to contribute to that endeavour in a way that my account does not. Let me conclude by offering a brief response to this doubt.

Insofar as the basic thought here is that room must be found in the curriculum for pupils to deliberate together about important and difficult practical decisions—decisions about how to vote, what to do for a living, what kinds of relationship to pursue, etc.—I am entirely sympathetic to it. I have argued elsewhere that schools should pay far more attention than they currently do to initiating pupils into forms of practical inquiry (Hand 2015). It will be helpful here to divide practical inquiries into two broad categories: those that are *self-attentive*, where the inquirer's personal preferences and aptitudes figure properly and centrally in the deliberative process; and those that are *self-inattentive*, where the inquirer's preferences and aptitudes are largely incidental. Deliberation about what to do for a living, for example, is

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appropriately self-attentive, while deliberation about how to vote is arguably not. Other distinctions will be needed too, and careful thought will have to be given to which forms of practical inquiry are taught and what scope there is for directive and nondirective teaching in each.

But it serves no useful purpose to try to address the whole range of practical decisions and judgments under the heading of moral education. For one thing, it unhelpfully obscures the significant differences between forms of practical inquiry. For another, it stretches the meaning of 'moral' too thin: if all practical deliberation is moral, 'moral' is just a synonym for 'practical' and a new term will be needed to distinguish considerations of duty from considerations of other kinds. It is, I suggest, more analytically useful, and more consistent with ordinary usage, to construe morality in the narrower sense, as 'a system of particular constraints on conduct—ones whose central task is to protect the interests of persons other than the agent and which present themselves to an agent as checks on his natural inclinations and spontaneous tendencies to act' (Mackie 1977: 106). And because constraints of this kind are quite specific about the forms of conduct they prohibit and require, explicit moral education should focus less on questions of application and more on questions of content and justification.

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