# General Introduction

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Ethical education is very important. Without it, people can be unconcerned about the suffering and plight of others, thereby contributing to a culture of apathy and uncaring; and some can be profoundly ignorant of how different the viewpoints and experiences of others can be from one's own. Arguably, educational institutions across the globe have played a major role in this uncaring, due to their increasing emphasis on knowledge and information transfer (facts over interpretation), instrumentalisation (learning for the sake of financial gain) and individualism (competitive grades). In many parts of the world, these tendencies are exacerbated by the false dichotomy between traditional moral views based on religion, which tend to be insular and dogmatic, and secular conceptions, which tend towards relativism. Internationally, educational practices have not resolved this tension.

This book is directed towards the need for a new approach to ethical education in schools, one that is focused primarily on human relationships. Ethical education can help us appreciate better the lived realities of others, and be more sensitive to their perception of a situation or encounter. Traditionally, the field of ethical education is seen to be dominated by three approaches. Some schools have moral education components in their curriculum, but with a focus on imparting information about social issues and the duties of citizenship. Others emphasise teaching moral reasoning. The alternative to these approaches usually consists in interpretations of Aristotle that embody a non-relational conception of virtues. In short, ethical education tends to be conceived either as the teaching of moral values as a subject matter, or as the fostering of cognitive moral reasoning, or as the cultivation of virtues or character traits.

All three approaches need to be challenged. The first is that they are not sustainable because ethics cannot be taught only as a subject matter for it does not consist solely in informational propositional knowledge. It also requires the cultivation of the sensitivities that constitute caring in a relationship. The second is that they are limited because ethics is rooted more deeply in the social and emotional aspects of human relationships than in the cognitive grasp of moral principles and in reasoning from these principles. Such reasoning will neither awaken the need nor enliven the ability to appreciate that others may see a dispute quite differently from oneself. The third is that they are reductive as they reduce the richness of the ethical to a list of virtues required for the good life of an individual. In this view, as we shall see, relationship is always a secondary consideration, derivative on the value of the character traits of the person required for their well-being and flourishing.

These three approaches are limited in their capacity to enable young people to overcome challenges in their relationships and their feeling for others. Furthermore, these approaches are even more constraining when they are embedded within an instrumentalised conception of education according to which processes of teaching and learning are primarily means to a set of results. This limitation applies even when these results are defined in terms of knowledge, emotions or virtues. Such instrumentalised views of education ignore the importance of living relationships within a school community as non-instrumentally valuable, and instead merely consider relationships to only partially characterise ethical education, hence missing out a core ingredient.

Moreover, one might argue that the three approaches fail to adequately distinguish between ethics and morality. A moral theory specifies what one ought to do in terms of what is right. It concerns doing the right thing when this is understood either in terms of promoting the general good or in terms of complying with a set of duties. In this regard, it is juxtaposed with self-interest. For this reason, morality as a social institution involves the enforcement of morally right actions and the prohibition of wrong actions. Because of this, it is concerned with public and private enforcement through praise, blame and guilt. In contrast, ethics is concerned with the quality of a life for the person living it, that is with her flourishing or well-being. In this sense, a person ought to care more for her friends or relate better to her colleagues. But this 'ought' doesn't imply that she should be condemned or feel guilty for not doing so. It only implies that her life would be better if she were to do so. As such, an ethical 'ought' does not involve any enforcement, including

praise, blame and guilt. Morality commands; ethics recommends. (For more on this difference, see Chapters 1 and 3 of this book.)

This difference is relevant to our project because ethical considerations are not felt as an external imposition. They are a part of a person's development as a person, and as such, they are a core part of educational processes.

## RELATIONAL ETHICS

To overcome the limitations of the three approaches, we need to understand better the nature of ethics. The chapters in the first part of the book argue that ethics should be understood primarily in terms of relating to others within relationships. Among other things, such relating might consist in understanding and caring. This relational approach takes seriously the claim that all ethical concerns arise in the contexts of human relationships. We shall contrast it with traditional approaches that take the individual as the starting point for characterising ethics, such as virtue theory, and care ethics, even though these are the closest relatives to a relational approach.

### Virtue Ethics

We assume a virtue theory to be one that attempts to define the rightness of an action in terms of the virtues. According to Hursthouse (1999), the right act is the action in the circumstances that the virtuous person would perform. Virtues are character traits that are necessary for flourishing, claims Hursthouse. To this we might add an important rider: for virtue ethics to be a genuine alternative to exotic forms of consequentialism and deontology, it must be the case that the value of a virtue is not entirely instrumental, that it isn't reducible to the value of a right action. Otherwise, virtue ethics would be a form of character-trait consequentialism or a form of Kantianism. In fact, Aristotle does explain how a virtue can have non-instrumental value: the exercise of the virtue *constitutes* flourishing (inter alia); it isn't just or only a means to it. This implies that the virtues can be good non-instrumentally (Thomson, 2015). It also allows for the possibility that actions have a moral value that is derivative on that of a virtue: actions can be wrong insofar as they express a vice and right insofar as they express a virtue.

In terms of ethical education, a strength of virtue theory is that it acknowledges that in addition to being useful, the virtues have non-instrumental

value. This indicates that the theory won't reduce the value and content of educational processes to a set of external purposes. In other words, it is less prone to instrumentalise education, especially in contrast to thinkers such as Richard Peters and Paul Hirst who tend to think of education as a provider of intellectual capacities and vocationally relevant skills (Steutel and Carr, 1999).

Another educational strength of virtue theory is that it avoids the false dichotomy between reason and passion, or rather cognition and emotion, which tends to plague writers in traditional moral theory. For example, a virtue theorist would claim that to understand a situation might involve feeling in a certain way. This aspect of virtue theory has huge importance for understanding practices that deepen sensibility or sensitivity (McDowell, 1979).

Nevertheless, arguably, there are three features of a relational approach that make it interestingly distinct from virtue theory, despite the affinities. First, virtue theory is implicitly individualistic because the virtues are character traits of a person, pertaining to *her* flourishing. Indeed, some writers read Aristotle's concept of flourishing or *eudaimonia* as a process of development of the self (see May, 2010). So, although Aristotle emphasises that we are social animals, he doesn't stress the relational nature of being virtuous: the fact that the virtues only count as such in relation to relationships. As Sharon Todd argues in Chapter 4 of this book, being virtuous shouldn't be conceived of as having a set of ready-made traits that one carries around; rather they exist and emerge only in relationships and through encounters.

Second, a relational approach looks upon a relationship as a co-construction by two or more people together. However, having two virtuous people in proximity to one another doesn't constitute a relationship! The relationship is a factor that cannot be reduced to non-relational claims about the people involved. Consequently, the same will apply to an ethical relationship. Therefore, the idea of an ethical relationship needs a characterisation that transcends the ethical behaviour of distinct individuals, even towards each other.

Third, a relational approach takes seriously the claim that meaning arises out of social practices and is itself relational. It takes seriously Marx's claim that a human being is a social animal who can individuate herself only in the midst of society (Marx, 1973). It is the wrong way around to think that society is constructed out of individuals. Rather, a person can think of herself as an individual only given a social context. In other words, the practices underlying meaning and individuating presuppose a collective transpersonal 'we' as opposed to an interpersonal 'me' and 'you'. It is a mistake to think that we

build the collective from the individual, as writers such as John Searle (1995) do. The reality is the opposite: we separate our individuality from the transpersonal. As Kenneth Gergen indicates in Chapter 1 of this book, the social nature of meaning itself has ethical implications.

## Care Theory

Care theory is perhaps an even closer relative to the approach advocated and explored in this book. Insofar as it is a theory at all, it claims that caring is a fundamental moral notion (see Held, 1995). Caring is understood as a complex relationship between persons, or between the one who is caring and the one who is cared for (see Noddings, 2013). Noddings defines care as a relation of engrossment such that the person who is caring receives the one who is cared for on the latter's terms. Tronto and Fischer (1990) construe care as 'a species of activity that includes everything we do to maintain, contain, and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible' (p. 40). Tronto (1994) identifies four sub-elements of caring: attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness (pp. 126–36).

We may interpret care theory in four ways. Insofar as care is understood as a virtue, care theory is a kind of virtue theory, and it is subject to the critiques we presented earlier. Insofar as care theory consists in activism for a set of practices, it is not an ethical theory. Instead, it advocates the promotion of the well-being of and support for care-givers. For example, Eva Kittay (1999) calls for the public provision of care doulas, who care for care-givers (p. 113). Third, when care theorists define caring as a social relation rather than as a virtue, their theory is distinct from virtue theory, and may be thought to be very close to the approach argued for in this work. (We will consider the fourth interpretation later.) This third type of care theory claims that the caring relation is the basis for ethics. Noddings (2013) explicates ethical relations in terms of caring, and caring in terms of the relations between the carer and the cared-for, between giver and recipient. The theory takes caring-for as the paradigm ethical human relationship, and tends to model such relationships on caring roles within society such as mother, doctor, nurse and social worker. In the context of a school, this means that the focus is on the teacher–student relationship.

A relational approach would differ from care theory in three ways. First, it would view ethical education as concerned with *all* relationships within the school, including importantly those among the students. More generally, a relational ethical theory would reject the assumption that caring-for is

a primordial type of relation. For example, companionship needn't be conceived as a caring-for. When two friends play together or when two colleagues discuss their analysis of a problem, when two acquaintances catch up on each other's news: these ways of relating aren't caring-for. Arguably, the resolving of disputes in a relationship would not constitute a form of caring. Such forms of relating can be more or less ethical.

Second, a relational approach concerns the capacities for human relationships that transcend roles, such as care provider and care recipient, teacher–student, and even pupil–pupil. How we relate to each other as people can't be captured with whether we have performed our respective roles well. Relating well to others requires a set of sensitivities that connect to the other person *as a person* and not merely in terms of their role. This is an important point because, since roles are functions and functions pertain to purposes, thinking of human relationships in terms of caring roles will tend to carry an instrumentalising element.

Third, there is a tendency in care theory to understand caring as an activity rather than as a relation. This is the fourth interpretation mentioned earlier. As we shall see in Part I, the fourth interpretation is individualistic. It doesn't constitute a relational approach. It is one thing to ask from an individualistic standpoint 'How can *I* care more for *my* companions?' It is quite another to inquire whether our relationship is a caring one. Part I of the book will explicate the importance of this difference.

## Towards a Relational Approach

This book is *not* dedicated to developing a full-blown relational ethical theory. This is because we are more concerned with ethical education as such. Nevertheless, we will develop an approach to ethics that is relational, which might serve as a prolegomenon to a more complete theory. We develop the approach in three ways. First, we examine hermeneutical challenges in relationships: *How can I understand others better, both those who are close to me and those who are more distant?* Such challenges include centrally the capacity to be sensitive to others, and more aware of others *within* relationships. Second, relational ethics transforms individualistic questions about oneself and the other person into ones about relationships per se, or from the 'I' to the 'we', such as *How can we enrich our relationships?* Seen in this way, there are a host of ethical issues that do not reduce to statements about the individuals. Third, these irreducible relational questions will transmute into an inquiry concerning communities and their cultures.

## ETHICAL EDUCATION

Concerning education, we are looking for ideas that neither rehearse well-trodden ground (such as critiques of performance-driven education) nor define overly idealistic solutions (such as those found in alternative models or in whole school transformation). We intend to move the conversation forward by making some explicit assumptions about the aims of education (e.g. the students' holistic human development) and the nature of learning (e.g. beyond the acquisition of knowledge). Furthermore, we direct our questions towards how to foster ethical education from within the state school system. Although in the literature, progress has been made in defining radical alternatives to the traditional public system, state schooling itself tends not to explore these questions from socio-emotional and relational perspectives.

For this reason, the book is divided into three parts which cumulatively construct a vision of ethical education. The first part is directed towards the underlying theory of ethical concepts. The second part focuses on the pedagogical principles related to ethical education. The third is dedicated to innovative practices in ethical education. In addition to the general introduction and conclusion, there will be an introduction and a conclusion for each of the three parts, to enable the reader to see how the diverse perspectives make sense as a unified approach.

We believe this approach would benefit a greater number of young people, and it offers an opportunity to engage existing innovative ideas from within the confines of state systems. Nevertheless, we will devote the final chapter (Chapter 10) to characterising how the ideas elaborated in the book would transform the educational system (rather than practices within it).

Given the parameters established by the approaches outlined above regarding relational ethics and ethical education, the main question addressed in this work is: 'Within the context of public education, what educational practices might help young people to become more ethically aware and motivated?' The answers provided emphasise the daily practices or micro-ethical interactions that build ethical relationships in schools. They seek to understand and transform the implicit ethical spaces in schools, such as the nature of learning activities, student–teacher interactions, opportunities for young people to share, the *ethos* of the school as a community, the participation of parents, and the overall dialogic and collaborative culture in education.

In summary, although this book focuses on supporting teachers' professional learning with regard to ethical education, it is not about teaching ethics to young people as lessons with plans to improve their moral reasoning or character. Instead, it seeks ways for young people to develop ethical capacities in their relationships within the life of a school community, which are equally applicable to their lives beyond the school. It is more about establishing educational processes with a direction than planning for defined results.

## BACKGROUND AND FEATURES

The book is a collection of essays written by scholars and researchers who have made these questions their life's passion and who came together to share their understandings in an international symposium organised by the Guerrand-Hermès Foundation for Peace in 2017. The book contains diverse international perspectives and multidisciplinary voices, but they are all directed to well-defined questions within the theoretical parameters already outlined.

The book features a strong international orientation: the theories and pedagogies we discuss are inspired by thinkers from diverse cultures, and the practices we examine are drawn from state schools in countries in divergent contexts, including Europe, North and South America, Africa and Asia. The work is also interdisciplinary: the contributors come from a range of fields, including philosophy, sociology, psychology, education, organisational studies, religious studies and spirituality, and cover many aspects of ethical education, from theory, to curriculum and pedagogy to classroom practices.