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in Literary and Arts Education

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INTRODUCTION: An Intellectual Journey

From literature and the arts to philosophy
My academic background was in humanities and the arts and, prior to an interest and career in philosophy, I trained as a teacher of art and English (language and literature) and worked for several years in various northern English primary and secondary schools. However, during my years of employment as a teacher, I discovered – in the course of reading much English as well as translated classical and European literature – that my interests were rather more, as it were, philosophical than literary. Indeed, much drawn to the drama and fiction of such writers as Ibsen, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Thomas Mann and Herman Hesse, it was but a short further step to the more philosophical literary productions of Sartre and Camus – and, from there, to the explicit ‘existentialist’ works of Sartre, Kierkegaard, Marcel, Buber, Jaspers, Maritain and Berdyaev (many of whom were also religious philosophers or theologians). Something of the same interest in ideas probably also coloured and guided my tastes in painting, sculpture (in which I was also academically interested and practically involved)) and music: again, I was (and remain) much more drawn to the narrative, expressive and thematic painting of pre-Raphaelites, surrealists or expressionists – or to the sculpture of Rodin and Henry Moore – than to the more abstract, aesthetic or formalist art of Mondrian, Nicholson or Hepworth. This was or is by no means an exclusive preference, since I have continued to appreciate and enjoy all types of literature, art and music: but I was from early on persuaded that literature and arts could be important vehicles for the expression of ideas – as well as emotions – that may be difficult, if not impossible, to communicate in other ways.

After several years of school teaching, however, I applied as a mature student for a course of full-time university undergraduate studies in philosophy and was fortunate to be accepted by the philosophy department of the University of Leeds. There can be no doubt that Leeds was one of the leading British provincial departments of philosophy of the day, including several philosophers of international reputation on its staff. Roger White, Peter Long and Timothy Potts had established reputations in the field of philosophical logic, Hugo Meynell had published widely appreciated work in the philosophy of religion, and U.T. Place’s papers on brain-mind identity were almost obligatory reprints in contemporary collections of work in the philosophy of mind. Of the two full professors in the department, Roy Holland was a pupil of Wittgenstein’s own distinguished disciple Rush Rhees and Peter Geach was himself a leading pupil of
Wittgenstein as well as the distinguished spouse of the no less formidable Elizabeth Anscombe – another key student of Wittgenstein and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Cambridge. William and Martha Kneale, formerly of Oxford (where William Kneale was White’s Professor of Moral Philosophy) and the authors of a pioneering history of logical enquiry – *The Development of Logic* – had recently retired to the Yorkshire Dales just to the north of Leeds and were frequent visitors to the department.

Still, for anyone seeking exposure to existentialism, phenomenology, structuralism or other mainland continental approaches to philosophy, Leeds was the last place to look. The name of the philosophical game in Leeds was linguistic analysis with a particular emphasis on more formal analytical techniques and approaches. Under the leadership of Geach and Holland, the influence of Wittgenstein was pervasive, but there was much stress on the continuity of the *Philosophical Investigations* with the *Tractatus* – and, in turn, on the debt of the *Tractatus* to the logical investigations of Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell. As Roman Catholics, Geach and Anscombe also acknowledged a line of philosophical descent from Aquinas, and through him Aristotle – whose role as a pioneer of formal methods was much emphasised. In short, while the Leeds department provided a wide ranging programme of philosophical enquiry, no less hospitable to metaphysics, aesthetics and theology than to the staples of epistemology, ethics and philosophy of mind, proper grounding in the techniques of modern formal analysis was regarded as a *sine qua non* of progress in any and all fields of philosophical enquiry. The flourishing undergraduate led philosophy society (of which I was for a time secretary and conference organiser) held regular well-attended meetings which featured such first class analytical philosophers as Bernard Williams, Richard Hare, Gilbert Ryle, A.J. Ayer, Peter Strawson, J.J.C. Smart D. Z. Phillips and Isaiah Berlin. One of the most memorable Leeds conferences – on the logic of Intentionality (1974) – featured a stellar line-up of Peter Geach, W. V. O. Quine, Donald Davidson, Jaako Hintikka and Dagfinn Føllesdahl.

Looking back, there can be no doubt that my Leeds years were nothing less than a personal ‘Damascus’ experience: that, in short, they completely changed me as a person and utterly transformed my view of what was from now on worth doing. The philosophy that had now become a defining feature of my new identity was a very different beast from the ill-defined intellectual passion that had drawn me to the Leeds course only three years previously. In the space of a few years, I had moved from a
conception of philosophy as a search for grand but vague answers to large but often ill-formed questions to the recognition that there were rigorous and systematic methods by which philosophical claims and arguments could be clarified, analysed and/or tested for their sense, coherence or cogency.

The turn to philosophy of education
Despite offers of PhD funding from two different sources, I aspired to put my recently acquired philosophical training to some practical professional use and to this end applied for a one-year Masters degree in Philosophy of Education at the London Institute of Education – a key programme for the wider dissemination of the new British brand of analytical philosophy of education recently pioneered by R.S. Peters. In the event, my year of MA studies in Philosophy of Education was valuable and exhilarating – no less for the wider intellectual and cultural opportunities on offer in London than for the courses provided by Peters and his colleagues at the London Institute. On the Institute programme itself I followed courses in epistemology and metaphysics with Joan Cooper, philosophy of language with David Cooper (later Professor of Philosophy at Durham) and, not least, by R.S. Peters himself on philosophy of education – though access to the teaching of such other luminaries as R.F. Dearden, R.K. Elliott and John and Pat White was always available through their PGCE lectures. But London also afforded – not least through the superb intercollegiate programmes of philosophical and other lectures – direct access to the teaching of Peter Winch, David Hamlyn, David Wiggins, Richard Wollheim, Hide Ishiguro (among others) as well as to the lectures of such visiting academics as Elizabeth Anscombe, Saul Kripke and Bernard Williams.

Following completion of my London masters course, I sought employment in the teacher education sector of British higher education. Indeed, following the pioneering work of such educational philosophers and theorists as Richard Peters and Paul Hirst, British university departments and colleges of education were seeking to develop a more thoroughly professional approach to teacher education and training grounded in an enhanced appreciation of the significance of educational theory for effective teaching. A key aim of this new view of teacher professionalism was to raise teaching to the status of an all-graduate profession through the development of rigorous discipline-based programmes of professional education in British teacher training colleges. The basic idea was that teachers could hardly be fit for purpose without some formal understanding of such professionally relevant disciplines as history, psychology
and sociology of education. Moreover, educational philosophers such as Richard Peters and Paul Hirst gave philosophy a central role in the professional training of teachers: first on the grounds that a grasp of ethics and epistemology was needed to appreciate the purposes of education, the school curriculum and the wider moral and social development of young people; secondly, because skills of philosophical analysis should help teachers to detect logical errors and fallacies in much official educational policy and other documentation. In large agreement with this general view of the value of philosophy for professional education – and having substantial experience as a former primary and secondary school teacher, I accepted a post as education lecturer in an Edinburgh teachers’ college in the throes of developing its first undergraduate Bachelor of Education programme.

In order to trace my rediscovery of the educational importance of the arts that is the main concern of the present work, it is important to appreciate that my new professional context encouraged exploration of issues concerning the teaching and learning of practical pursuits and skills that connected fairly directly with the kinds of philosophical questions about mind and action in which I had been interested at Leeds. There, I had been precisely drawn to the attempts of such philosophers and logicians as Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, G.H. von Wright, Anthony Kenny and A.I. Melden to explain human agency in terms of a distinctive teleological (basically Aristotelian) conception of practical reason or deliberation. In particular, Von Wright had argued that the idea of practical reason rather than causal law might assume the key explanatory role in the social sciences. While much of this work was clearly of a daunting philosophical complexity, it nevertheless seemed to promise some systematic understanding of the learning and teaching of the practical knowledge, capacities and skills with which my teaching students were primarily concerned (in a field of pedagogical theory, moreover, in which crude causal analyses of skill by and large predominated). In short, my first published academic work of relevance to the questions on which the present collection of essays is focused, sought to apply what was at the time state of the art philosophical action theory to understanding certain educational issues and questions about knowledge in practice and practical learning.

Research and publications
(i) Practical knowledge and knowledge in practice
I approached these questions from different (albeit related) directions. First, I aimed to criticize a dominant academic tradition of curriculum theorising for its failure to
appreciate (probably, as Ryle and others had argued, on Cartesian grounds) the distinctive character and complexity of practical reason. Secondly, however, I sought to develop an account of practical knowledge in which the pedagogical role of such reflective and inferential capacities would be more apparent. While my first ever published paper (1978a) made a start on the second of these tasks, drawing on contemporary work on practical inference to provide an analysis of knowing how in terms of practical reason, my second published paper of the same year (1978b) addressed the first concern by re-examining and re-affirming the educational value and status of practical activities and skills in the contemporary school curriculum. However, it soon became clear that the task of understanding and explaining practical knowledge raised many technical philosophical problems that could not be confined to journals of education and teaching. Thus, a third publication (1979), addressing some of these more technical questions about the logic and epistemology of practical knowledge and ability, appeared in the following year. This was the first of a series of publications in the broad field of action theory with particular regard to notions of practical knowledge, ability and skill: these included a further paper on practical knowledge (1981a), two essays on practical inference (1980a, 1981c), two pieces on the intentionality of agency (1980b, 1984b), a paper on the logic and epistemology of skill acquisition (1981b) and an essay on logical analogies and disanalogies between theoretical and practical discourses and argumentation (1982).

At the more professional educational end of things, however, I published further papers in journals of philosophy and theory of education devoted to the educational or pedagogical application of the more formal philosophical work. Indeed, this stage of my academic and professional career clearly marks the start of a return to my earlier philosophical interest in the arts. For, having acquired some interest in the educational significance and value of dance, I also published (fairly pioneering) articles on the meaning and teaching of dance (1984a, 1987b, 1997). In general, however, these and other attempts to understand the educational character and value of practical knowledge in terms of action theory could be regarded as (roughly) the initial phase of my academic work in philosophy and philosophy of education and as the first of three or four presently relevant themes or phases of my work.

(ii) Ethics and moral education
The second of these phases of my academic work in philosophy and education began in the early eighties and has continued more or less to the present day. One of the core
teacher education courses that I early on developed was an elective on ethics and moral education in which I had devoted much space to neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. This was hardly surprising given that the action theorists on whose work I had also drawn – such as Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, and G.H. von Wright – were also key figures in the development of modern virtue ethics. At the more philosophical end of things, my published work on ethics – mostly but not entirely focused on virtue ethics – began with a paper distinguishing between two kinds of virtue (1984/5) that I delivered to a 1984 London meeting of the Aristotelian Society. I published further ethical papers in the eighties on the virtue of chastity (1986; see also 2007b), Freud’s sexual ethics (1987a) and the cardinal virtues (1988) and have continued to publish on topics of moral philosophy and the nature of virtues down to the present, with fairly recent publications on problems of so-called emotional intelligence (2002) virtuous character and choice (2003b) virtue and moral ambivalence (2009) and moral dysfunction (2010c). However, the first of many publications on the theme of moral education as such (1983) identified three broad approaches to moral education -- focused respectively on pro-social conditioning, cognitive development and character - - and was basically concerned to demonstrate the benefits of a virtue ethical approach to moral education over its deontological and other rivals. This virtue ethical approach to moral education has continued to be the core concern of my work – not least in the more recent papers on the moral educational significance of the arts, which are of main present interest. It was also the main focus of my first book (1991), and of a critically well-received collection of distinguished invited essays on virtue ethics and moral education that I co-edited with Jan Steutel (1999).

(iii) Professionalism and teaching
However, a third major area of my work – which also connects with the essays in this volume – has turned on questions of the character of teaching, its occupational and professional status and the grounds of professional ethics in teaching and other occupations. My interest in the professional nature and status of teaching was prompted by concerns over the emergence of some rather reductive (behaviourist) models of professional teaching and other expertise – focused on teaching styles and competencies – that seemed to gain political and professional ascendancy in the late eighties and early nineties. In this connection, I published several critiques of such models, several articles resisting ‘applied science’ interpretations of the relationship of educational theory to practice in favour of a non-technicist conception of this relationship, and several papers on the grounds of professional ethics in teaching and
other occupations. I also attempted to draw all these ideas together into a coherent whole in my second book on professionalism and the ethics of teaching (2000). Much of this work was specifically directed towards developing a distinctive virtue ethical conception of professional teacher expertise. A recent paper on the role of character in teaching (2007a), relates well to the essays in this collection, since it argues that the kind of character that teachers need in order to be effective professionals requires a broad liberal education (in something like R.S. Peters’ sense) – including substantial cultural acquaintance with literature and arts.

(iv) Education, moral virtue and the arts

It should now be clear that the fourth and most presently relevant phase of my philosophical and educational work – precisely devoted to the ethical and moral educational significance of the arts – cannot be disconnected from my earlier work on action theory and practical reason, on ethics and moral education and on educational professionalism. In short, putting the different pieces of the jigsaw together, I have already indicated key respects in which my early efforts on action theory, practical knowledge and skill (including work specifically on understanding dance skills) were closely connected to – went more or less hand in hand with – my work on ethics and moral education. The same philosophers (Elizabeth Anscombe, Peter Geach, G. H. von Wright, Anthony Kenny and A.I. Melden) interested in Aristotelian practical reason as crucial to explaining the teleological character of human agency were also concerned with its ethical role as the guiding light of moral virtue and virtuous formation. However, in the course of claiming the advantages of a virtue ethical conception of moral wisdom over its various deontological rivals, I emphasised that far from representing an autonomous mode of reflection, such wisdom is (as Aristotle evidently thought in his *Poetics*) often effectively nurtured by epistemically significant artistic and other narratives as well as other kinds of knowledge. But, by the same token, I argued in my work on the moral character of professional teacher reflection that if something akin to Aristotle’s moral wisdom lies at the heart of such reflection, then the acquisition of such wisdom cannot just be a matter of the development of context-free technical skills or competencies and may be much assisted by the broader cultural and literary initiation of teachers. In short, the professional wisdom of teachers may stand to benefit as much (if not more) from reading Charles Dickens and D.H. Lawrence as from books on educational psychology. Taking the cultivation of virtuous character to be central to any and all true moral development, then, there would appear to be a good case for the educational rehabilitation of the arts, which certainly seem to
have suffered some educational neglect and/or curricular marginalization in recent days.

The chapters of this work and their sources
At all events, it would appear that the wheel of my intellectual interests has now come – in the course of four decades – full circle. Having been led into the mazes of philosophy through my early interests in literature and other arts, my schooling in analytical philosophy has eventually led me back to exploration of the potential of various arts for cultivation of the wisdom of Aristotelian moral virtue. Indeed, since I would now consider this latest direction of my work to have stimulated some of my all-time best and most personally satisfying achievements, I have had no hesitation selecting essays from this body of work for the present collection. In the event, the six articles I have finally selected are not only pieces that I regard as some of my most satisfying personal achievements, but also essays that I believe hang together in a very coherent way – though the order in which they appear here is not the order in which they were originally published.

The first substantial essay or chapter of this work, which I was originally invited to read at an educational conference in Madrid in 2004, was subsequently published in the *Journal of Moral Education* (2005). It is basically concerned to explore a complex web of conceptual relations between education, personal and emotional development and the place of the arts in such development. If education, as conceived in the liberal educational tradition, is regarded as more than just a matter of vocational (or other) training, then it might precisely be held to involve affective and emotional aspects of personal formation: in short, it may be conceived as helping us to become certain kinds of persons rather than socially useful units of production. If that is so, then we might well ask what parts or dimensions of the school curriculum are most conducive to such development and note a fairly time-honoured association of literature and the arts with the education of emotions and feelings. In fact, Aristotle in the *Poetics* explicitly regards exposure to the arts as conducive to the cultivation or refinement of emotions, and also sees this as crucial to the development of the practical wisdom (*phronesis*) of moral virtue that he takes in turn to be the fundamental aim or goal of a liberal education. In order to make this case for the education of emotion, however, a certain modern view of the non-cognitive nature of emotion needs to be resisted and to this end the present essay defends a particular Aristotelian virtue ethical conception of the ‘intentionality’ of emotion. However, in upholding the view that literature and arts
play a key role in educating the emotions, the essay also defends (against more cultural relativist views) a ‘universalist’ Aristotelian conception of the emotional value of poetry. This defence of the value of poetry also draws on the insights of such ‘romantic’ poets as Wordsworth as well as upon philosopher James Young’s more recent idea of the arts as forms of ‘illustrative representation’ (see Young 2001).

The next essay or chapter of this work was first read at an annual Oxford conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain and subsequently published in the Journal of Aesthetic Education (2010b). The paper is continuous with and builds on the first essay by re-affirming and reinforcing the cognitive status and epistemic value of many (if not all) artworks and of emotions as ‘intentionally’ conceived. In this regard, the essay takes the side of Aristotle against Plato in rejecting the latter’s dismissal of artistic production as epistemically worthless rhetoric. This chapter again supports Aristotle’s view that in so far as arts may help to educate emotion, they are conducive to development of the practical wisdom of moral virtue that constitutes the main aim of liberal educational initiation into knowledge. In support of this idea, the chapter also rejects a mistaken interpretation of ‘romanticism’ that sees arts as concerned with feeling rather than reason, as well as a formalist account of art as concerned only with ‘aesthetic’ effects. While arts are often concerned with feeling and aesthetic effects, they are not exclusively so. That said, this chapter is also concerned to take seriously Plato’s reservations about much narrative art as potentially corruptive of moral sensibility. Plato thought that some kinds of music, for example, were inimical to the formation of good (virtuous) character, but it has often been more widely feared that much literature exploring socially or otherwise disapproved themes (one need only think here of the works of D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce or Henry Miller) may corrupt the morals of those exposed to it. Rejecting Platonic censorship, the chapter takes the view that since it is part of the role of art to explore the limits of human experience – even if this means challenging conventional moral convictions – this is something with which education has to come to terms as judiciously as possible.

The third chapter included here on Aristotelian virtue and character in the Arthurian and Grail narratives of Malory, Tennyson and others was originally written as a presentation to a US Air-Force Academy conference in Colorado Springs to which I was invited to contribute a paper on virtuous character in military training: it was subsequently published in the Journal of Beliefs and Values (2003a). Family legend has it that the inspiration for this paper came from my (then) young daughter to whom
I was at the time reading a simplified version of Sir Arthur Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur* – in the course of which she asked me why Lancelot, depicted as the greatest, most heroic and chivalrous of the knights of Arthur’s round table, fell short of achieving vision of the holy grail. On the face of it, the third chapter of the present work can be read as an attempt to answer this question drawing on Aristotle’s insightful virtue ethical taxonomy of types of moral, immoral and amoral character in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. More generally, however, the chapter may be taken as a case study of the potential of works of literary narrative – in this case the perennially popular (especially among the young) Arthurian and Grail narratives – to provide deep insight into the psychology of moral character. With the help of moral philosophy – in this case the (Aristotelian) virtue ethical distinctions between virtue, continence, incontinence and wantonness (as well as various other distinctions between these) – the chapter seeks to support the time-honoured view that myths, legends and other stories are not just forms of juvenile entertainment, but may provide and have ever provided rich sources of moral wisdom about human character and agency for the edification of young and old alike.

Of course, access to significant moral narratives has been afforded from past to present by other than literary sources: painting and sculpture have often dealt with narrative themes – and, in more recent times, the modern technologies of photography, cinema and television have been increasingly common and popular vehicles for the depiction of every conceivable aspect of human life, character and agency. Indeed, it may well be that the young of recent (especially post-WWII) generations – at least in more liberal and affluent western countries – have been more given to the consumption of television, cinema and (now) computer imagery than to the written word. Cinema is also by now a fairly well established and culturally celebrated art form with a significant corpus of works of recognised artistic merit if not of genius, and some acquaintance with the best of past and contemporary cinema might nowadays be expected of anyone claiming a significant level of education or culture. In this light, the fourth substantial chapter of this work – first published in the *Journal of Moral Education* (2006b) – sets out to explore the moral educational potential and prospects of cinema, again from the perspective of virtue ethics. The chapter argues that while there is of course (as in the case of literature) much morally shallow and worthless cinema, and while the exploration of the finer nuances and complexities of human character, motivation and agency has too often lately been sacrificed on the sensationalist altar of special effects technology, cinema is clearly capable of quite
distinctive artistic expression of significant moral themes. In the course of making this point, moreover, the chapter gives special attention to two fairly recent cinematic works: The Fisher King and O Brother. That said, the paper argues that much of the artistic and moral power of these two movies depends on their development of older literary themes and narratives and that – given that this is the case of so much great cinema – film can hardly be considered an artistic substitute or replacement for wider cultural reading and literature.

The fifth substantial chapter of this work on the relationship of ethical/moral to aesthetic considerations in environmental appreciation and education was first presented as a talk to a group of outdoor and environmental educators in the University of Edinburgh prior to subsequent publication in the Journal of Philosophy of Education (2004b). It would appear, in light of growing threats to the natural environment – such as pollution, global warming, depletion of resources and so on – that systematic promotion of greater public appreciation and awareness of such problems is a matter of pressing educational concern. There has certainly been much recent attention to environmental ethics from moral philosophers. However, one evident difficulty with much contemporary environmental ethics is that it has been mostly a matter of attempts to apply modern ethical theories – such as (Kantian and other) deontology and utilitarianism – to environmental concerns and that such theories tend to be rather anthropocentric. It is difficult on deontological perspectives to make sense of duties to natural environment, since duties are correlative to rights and it is hard to make sense of environmental rights; and utilitarian views are inherently focused on human (instrumental) interests. Virtue ethics may seem more promising in this respect, to the extent that it focuses on the intrinsic value of character development. But although outdoor education has often focused on such development, it is not obvious that such emphasis significantly departs from anthropocentric and instrumental concerns to appreciation of the intrinsic value of natural environment. Despite this, this chapter suggests that the cultivation of certain aesthetic sensibilities to the intrinsic value of natural beauty is significant for virtuous character, and that arts education – the focus here is on poetry and sculpture – may greatly assist such cultivation.

However, one humanly significant art form that might seem difficult to square with the education of virtue is that of music. While it may be easier to see how novels, dramas or graphic arts (especially those that focus on the depiction or study of character) may
inform the practical wisdom of moral virtue, it may be less easy to see how music – especially music that is not thematic or ‘about’ anything in particular – might assist such reflection. Certainly music has commonly been held to be emotionally ‘moving’, but this is of little significance to much modern ethics for which morality is a matter of reason rather than emotion. Once again, this is less problematic for virtue ethics that has invariably regarded emotional development as crucial to the development of virtues and emotions themselves as having an educable ‘cognitive’ or ‘rational’ component. But this still leaves rather unclear the role that ‘music alone’ – without explicit thematic or ‘intentional’ content – might play in such development of virtuous emotion. Interestingly, however, both Plato and Aristotle were agreed that music is of the highest significance for the proper education of virtue – though they were, no less interestingly, divided on the question of the precise nature of such virtue-promoting music. At all events, the last substantial chapter of this work, first published in the *Philosophy of Music Education Review* (2006a) is one of several papers that I have recently published on music, virtue and emotion (2004a, 2008, 2010a), all concerned to uphold the significance of music for development of morally virtuous character.

**Conclusion**
The six papers included in this work were carefully selected on the grounds that although they are all reasonably free-standing and self-contained pieces – each of which may be read independently of the others – they can yet, taken together, be seen to tell a much larger story about relations between virtue, the arts and education towards which the present author has been working for at least a decade, if not (as this introduction has tried to show) for much of his working life. While there is little if anything in the way of significant overlap or repetition between these essays, they also aspire to what the author would regard as a generally consistent and coherent view – that may also be considered to present, as far as it goes, the author’s largely settled perspective on these issues. To be sure, that is not at all to say – as the concluding section of this work will affirm – that there is nothing more to be said on these philosophically vexed issues: far from it, there is clearly much to say on many of these questions. It is only to say that, as far as I am concerned, any such useful work would have to proceed by way of further elaboration of the issues on the broadly virtue-ethical lines explored in these chapters. For the present author, contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics (bearing in mind that not all contemporary virtue ethics is Aristotelian) offers a far better prospect of addressing these educationally important questions about the development of virtuous character and the place of the arts in such
development than any of its contemporary ethical rivals. It is upon this case that the present essays rest and on which any further work would in the present view have to build.