Teaching Good

An Educational Argument for Moral Knowledge

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For my grandparents,

Bob and Jenny Schram,

whose compassion and charity have taught me most about the good life

Introduction

Three weeks after Israel was attacked by Hamas on October 7th, 2023, the British Columbia Premier David Eby announced that a new requirement would be implemented in BC schools: mandatory Holocaust education. In a statement made at the Jewish Community Centre of Greater Vancouver, Eby noted that there had already been "a rise in antisemitism in BC following the terrorist attacks in Israel, which evokes the history of persecution of Jews."[1] The requirements are expected to roll out in 2025, marking the first revision to the BC Curriculum since its redesign in 2016.

In response, the executive director of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre, Nina Krieger, cited a 2018 study conducted by the Azrieli Foundation and the Claims Conference which found that 62% of young adults (ages 18–34) in Canada did not know that six million Jews were killed in the Holocaust.[2] Kriger celebrated the BC government's decision to promote Holocaust education, as it "provides powerful entry-points for fostering critical thinking, social responsibility and moral decision-making. Ultimately, teaching and learning about the Holocaust contributes to a more cohesive and inclusive society, where the dignity and rights of all people are valued."[3] Though some may interpret the government's decision as motivated by traditional educational reasons – such as advancing historical knowledge or critical thinking skills – it's Kriger's emphasis on ethical language like "responsibility" and "moral decision-making" that should not be missed. She is right to observe that the push for Holocaust education, in the context of the ongoing War in Gaza, is also one for moral education.

Notice how Eby frames the move: "Combatting this kind of hate begins with learning from the darkest parts of our history, so the same horrors are never repeated." For the premier, this education requirement is to combat hate. He said as much when he revealed the decision

was, in effect, a reaction to the vandalism of a Surrey synagogue and hateful comments directed at a West End Israeli restaurant.[4] What Eby is describing is a kind of teaching that focuses on moral learning, otherwise known as moral education.

It remains to be seen if the BC Ministry of Education will, in fact, adopt a modicum of moral education. After all, moral education is controversial, its absence in the present BC Curriculum a telling sign of the Ministry's willingness, or lack thereof, to commit to teaching anti-hate. This assumption was seemingly reinforced on June 14th, 2024, when the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) issued an apologetic email to all its members; the letter, from BCTF president Clint Johnston, recounted how the provincial labour union had rejected the application of a group of teachers seeking approval to form a new provincial specialist association (PSA) called "the Holocaust and Antisemitism Educators Association" (HAEA). Existing PSAs create educational resources and host professional development workshops for teachers. Following premier Eby's announcement, HAEA sought recognition and funding from the PSA council to supply schools with tools for teaching Holocaust and antisemitism education. Former BC cabinet minister Selina Robinson expressed confusion over the council's rejection of HAEA, as it was the first time a PSA application has ever been turned down.[5] The denial initially came without explanation from the chair of the council, and this information became public online to intense social media backlash, especially given that the union supports more than 30 other PSAs, one of which promotes pro-Palestinian resources. Johnston did not address the alleged double-standard,[6] only clarifying that he had since met with representatives of the HAEA to "hear their concerns and seek advice on a path forward," who had expressed they were "deeply unsatisfied and wanted to see the BCTF take action to improve Holocaust education and address rising antisemitism."[7]

Still, in another statement, BCTF asserts that "Education is key to combatting antisemitism and other forms of hate."[8] As speculation and debate continues over the priorities of these organizations in BC, we should take time to inspect the common presupposition behind all these pronouncements and platitudes: education has moral implications. Current events abroad and at home illuminate the many moral dimensions of educational institutions. If a majority of graduating students fail to learn about the Holocaust, and we care to reduce that percentage, it is not *historical knowledge*, fundamentally, that matters; we care about the *moral consequences* of such a statistic, and the historical knowledge is but a means of achieving some moral end.

By morality, I am referring to the nature of right and wrong, where "rightness" constitutes what moral agents ought to do, and where "wrongness" constitutes what they ought to not do. For example, I could contend that Holocaust education is morally right, because we ought to condone it, and that hate is morally wrong, because we ought to condemn it. Another way of saying this is that Holocaust education is praiseworthy, and hate is blameworthy. This definition provides the foundation on which I build my entire argument, though on its own it is not enough to dispel all confusion; for instance, we will need to unpack "oughtness" and "moral agents." Therefore, to communicate clearly on this topic, I will here expand on a number of relevant terms and how I intend to use them.

Terminology

In the philosophy of education, there is no real difference between "morality" and "ethics." Though there are schools of thought that would specify ethics as relating to moral rules in public, as opposed to morality relating to individual values, here I don't believe a distinction is helpful. Even moral philosopher Peter Singer unpretentiously defines "ethics" as "the discipline

concerned with what is morally good and bad and morally right and wrong."[9] Henceforth, I will generally use "morality" and "ethics" synonymously.

A moral right, as far as I'm concerned, is the same as a moral good, each denoting a standard that should be met (e.g. I may wish to speak about Holocaust education as morally right or morally good, interchangeably, without contradicting myself). Importantly, "good" can be used as a noun and an adjective, the latter to describe ideas or behaviour as morally right. Both cases of moral "goodness" are quite different from other instances of the word, such as "non-moral goods." A "good" could imply any benefit or advantage, whether or not it is moral, like "epistemic goods" (e.g. an increase in students who are Holocaust literate), to be discussed in greater detail in the first chapter. Something may be "good" for you, or for your family, or for your company, but may not be morally good. Likewise, conditional goods are not necessarily the same as moral goods; if a school implements a dress code, and the students abide by the rules and wear proper attire, then a standard has been met, making the students' behaviour "good" in one sense. But wearing school uniforms is not good *intrinsically*, and failing to do so outside of school is also not bad. Thus, just because some desires and goals can be met in certain scenarios is not to say they are *morally* good. To distinguish the two, then, I posit that when most people talk about morality, they generally mean that some things should always be done, regardless of the context or consequences, and some things should equally never be done, as best as we can.

By *we*, I mean moral agents, or those who are capable of and expected to act commensurate with moral goods. This is to say that if someone is incapable of meeting these standards, they are not morally responsible for their actions, like infants. I will spend more time demonstrating how one can come to learn moral goods, but for now, I will define a moral agent as a rational human being, thereby excluding non-human animals and underdeveloped humans

(this is not to say that non-moral agents are exempt from moral thought; i.e. moral agents can, and do, have obligations towards non-moral agents).

We recognize the attitudes and actions of moral agents as morally good and bad because of the normative function of rightness and wrongness. On this view, morality is, essentially, prescriptive, in other words, it is incorrect to say, on my account, that "lying is bad, but that doesn't mean you ought to not lie." Instead, by saying "lying is bad," you are simultaneously saying "you ought to not lie." Some may think this is a circular argument, that you can only understand one in light of the other. But here we are simply hitting the linguistic bedrock that all definitions are subject to.[10] Therefore, any utterance of a moral statement is to necessarily invoke a normative claim.

Suppose a teacher is in the middle of a lesson, but notices out his window a student crying by herself, possibly in physical pain. The teacher arguably has an educational interest in ignoring the student for the sake of his own class, to keep the activity on track. The teacher could also believe that this particular student is not his responsibility, technically. And the teacher may even have a personal preference not to interact with someone emotionally vulnerable. However, despite all of these considerations, the teacher *ought* to check in on the student in need. Some of the choices available to the teacher can be defended on account of conditions (e.g. *if* the teacher prioritizes his lesson, *then* he should remain in his classroom), but one of them is not dependent on any external reason (e.g. fulfilling a professional obligation); we know what the *moral* choice is by virtue of its bearing on the moral agent, other desires notwithstanding.

The moral proposition implied could be stated simply as "It is wrong to neglect a child in distress," or in a conditional form as "If an action is an instance of neglecting a child in distress, then it is wrong." Some may insist that the claim can only be accepted by prefacing it with "If

anything is wrong, then . . . ” If this initial antecedent is added, the claim itself is only trivially true. However, I believe viewing morality in this way is a mistake. In their book *The Moral Universe*, John Bengson, Terence Cuneo, and Russ Shafer-Landau help illuminate the error with the example of gold having the autonomic number 79. They ask us to consider two renderings of this statement:

> ‘If something is gold, then it has atomic number 79.’
>
> ‘If anything has atomic number 79, then if something is gold, then it has atomic number 79.’
>
> While the first rendering in terms of a simple conditional seems to us a natural and correct construal of the original claim, the second, complex rendering strikes us as a patently implausible way of interpreting that claim.[11]

Some may object to my defining moral goods as obligations for *all* states of affairs. For instance, it could be argued that there are hypothetical cases when tending to a hurt child is bad, or when lying is good. Famously, the assumption that some moral rules must be followed no matter what was challenged by the “right to lie”[12] thought experiment: imagine you are hosting your neighbour at your home, and a stranger appears at the door. The stranger reveals his intention to kill your friend, and asks if she is in the house. You could tell the truth, if you believe it is always wrong to lie, but then you would be giving the stranger an opportunity to murder your neighbour, which is also wrong. So, for the sake of protecting someone’s life, you think you ought to lie. Perhaps, then, moral goods are not invariable after all.

However, rather than exposing a flaw in my conception of morality, this thought experiment actually clarifies it. Consider the reason that is appealed to when lying: the lie is essential to the security of human life. *This* moral good, which determines what we ought to do in all circumstances, is otherwise known as a value. By “value,” I mean a prototypical moral quality or virtue, such as compassion, kindness, tolerance, love, and so forth. Some values are

boundless, pertaining to all experiences, whether there is a murderer at your door or not. Even if you, individually, don't care to recognize the value of human life, and permit the stranger to murder your neighbour, the moral imperative to do otherwise would still exist. My definition of morality does not imply, then, that some actions (i.e. telling the truth) are always moral; instead, it states that there will always be some actions that, in accordance with contextless values, ought to be taken, which makes them moral by nature.

Nothing I have claimed about morality thus far should be controversial, for it is compatible with the definitional consensus of most moral philosophers. Of course, many reject that values exist or that morality is universal, but those criticisms are separable from the shared understanding of the terms. It would be like proffering a clear definition of God, one that most people – both philosophers or religion and laypeople – can agree is meant by the word "God." Establishing that God is, by definition, an omnipotent, omniscient, and omni-benevolent being is not the same as defending the existence of such a being. An atheist can accept the former and deny the latter. Likewise, I hope to demonstrate why and how my use of the term "morality" is consistent with the philosophical literature and common parlance. After all, people use moral vocabulary all the time, and even if they haven't thought deeply about the denotation behind these expressions, they should be able to appreciate the accuracy of my definition as close to what they mean when they say "right" and "wrong."

In fact, the "right to lie" thought experiment has already illuminated the foremost moral traditions and views, which, yes, approach morality in different ways, but importantly all agree they are, indeed, approaching morality. The most significant ethical theories are listed as follows, with how they would broadly respond to the aforementioned illustration:

- Consequentialist ethics (or "consequentialism"): the belief that an action is right if its consequences are good, and wrong if its consequences are bad. Two strands of consequentialism are:
    - Social Contract ethics: the belief that an action is good if it is agreed to be allowed by yourself and everyone else involved, and therefore is mutually beneficial.
    - Utilitarianist ethics (or "utilitarianism"): the belief that an action is good if is useful for everyone, whether or not it is useful for you.
        - Preference utilitarianism: the belief that we should treat others how we want to be treated, which means respecting their preferences.
        - Hedonistic utilitarianism: the belief that we should try to produce the greatest amount of happiness and/or decrease the greatest amount of suffering.

  Lying to the stranger at your door to prevent murder is categorically consequentialist, for it has you reflect on what will happen as a result of your action, rather than thinking about the action possessing any moral weight in itself.
- Deontological ethics (or "deontology"): the belief that an action is good if it is in principle good, and if the actor intends to do good by it, regardless of the consequences. If a deontologist believes lying is wrong, and she has a duty not to lie, then she would be committed to being honest with the murderer.
- Virtue ethics: the belief that an action is good only if it is acted by a virtuous person, who embodies and acts in accordance with moral values. A virtue ethicist could respond to the dilemma either way, so long as she appeals to something like courage or honour.

- Rights-based ethics (otherwise known as natural law theory): the belief that an action is good only if it honours the innate rights of a person, such as right to life. A right-based ethicist may need to organize particular rights into a hierarchy, but it would be easy to imagine her friend's right to life as being more important than someone else's right to truth.
- Care ethics: the belief that an action is good only if it intends and succeeds to care for those with whom we are in close relationship. A care ethicist would likely opt to lie to the stranger out of care for her friend.
- Egoism: the belief that an action is good only if it ultimately serves oneself. An egoist could justifying giving up the whereabouts of her friend if it meant guaranteeing her own safety.

All of these theories belong to one branch of morality in analytic philosophy called "normative ethics," which attempts to explain what one should and should not do in principle. Though they all differ in how to qualify moral goods and moral wrongs, they all agree in that moral goods ought to be pursued, and that moral wrongs ought to be avoided (which supports my definition, a la Derek Parfit's central argument that all ethical theories inevitably climb the same mountain from different sides, so to speak). Normative ethics is the main topic of Chapter 3, so understanding this definition of ethics is foundational. The other two branches are "meta-ethics," what grounds the truth of normative ethics, and "applied ethics," or the practical application of normative ethics in the real world.

Meta-ethics is the subject of Chapter 2, and requires several technical terms. It is a kind of "epistemology," which is the philosophical inquiry into how knowledge is known. Epistemologists try to explain how knowledge can be justified. The question "how do we know

the sky is blue?" is epistemological because it asks under what conditions a person can recognize and understand a fact. Epistemology should be distinguished from the related "ontology," the study of being. Ontology is concerned with existence and reality. The questions "*why* is the sky blue?" and "is the sky *actually* blue?" are ontological, as they shift the focus from the knowledge of blueness to the grounding of blueness. Therefore, something can be true (ontologically) even without our knowing (epistemologically). One is a theory of knowledge, the other a theory of being.

As the meta-physical basis for all normative ethics, meta-ethics attends to both moral epistemology – how we know right from wrong – and moral ontology – what makes right and wrong. I tackle moral ontology in Chapter 2, and moral epistemology in Chapter 3. There is a clear division in ontological views of morality: moral realism and moral anti-realism. Though there are many different kinds of moral realism and anti-realism, one way of thinking about the dissimilarity is that moral realism says morality is discovered by moral agents, whereas moral anti-realism says morality is created by moral agents.

Moral realism is the meta-ethical view that moral truth exists, meaning that a moral statement can be true or false. As described by the philosopher David O. Brink, moral realism is a metaphysical "realistic view about ethics [that] asserts the existence of moral facts and true moral propositions" and that it is "committed to moral facts and truths that are objective in some way."[13] One form of moral realism is moral naturalism, which, like scientific naturalism, contends that these facts are always explained naturally. Its competition is moral non-naturalism, which instead insists that moral truth cannot be wholly explained by, or reduced to, natural facts.

Moral anti-realism is the meta-ethical view that all moral ideas are ultimately invented by human minds. The position is, by definition, the denial of moral realism. According to the

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, moral anti-realism denies that moral properties exist at all, and that their existence is non-objective.[14] On moral anti-realism, "an action is morally right or wrong ultimately because it is in some way licensed or forbidden by some of our fundamental judgments. If, therefore, our judgments were radically different, moral truths would also be radically different; if we didn't make any moral judgments, there wouldn't be any moral truths either – that's the view."[15]

For moral philosopher Thomas Nagel, the difference between the two camps can be illustrated accordingly: "If my having a [moral] reason depended on my believing, or being disposed to believe, that I had it, or being disposed to act in accordance with it, that would be antirealism. It would amount to reducing a normative truth to some kind of psychological truth, rather than giving it an independent and irreducible status."

Moral realism is usually categorized as a type of "ethical cognitivism," which is any view that asserts moral language is truth-apt. Ethical cognitivism encompasses all views that allow for moral statements to reflect truth in the way that other kinds of beliefs do. For example, the sentence "stealing is wrong" could express a truth about stealing like the sentence "apples are red" does. Opposite ethical cognitivism is ethical non-cognitivism, which holds that moral statements are not truth-apt, or have no truth conditions. On non-cognitivism, an utterance like "stealing is wrong" is simply not a candidate for truth or falsity like "roses are red" is.

I bring up this dichotomy because, while moral realism is typically positioned within cognitivism, moral anti-realism represents several views on both sides. For instance, moral constructivism maintains that moral beliefs are cognitive but constructed. On the other hand, anti-realist views like emotivism and error theory fall under non-cognitivism. It is not enough,

then, for me to defend ethical cognitivism alone; my argument for moral knowledge only makes sense on moral realism.[16]

I spend more time articulating "moral knowledge" as a concept in Chapter 2, though it is fair to say that the term simply refers to "any knowable facts about morality" or "knowledge that is moral in character." The same goes for "moral truth": if we grant that something can be true, but not known, I will use the words consistently to mean that something can be morally true, which is not identical to (though is a prerequisite for) moral knowledge.

Moral data refers to the foundational elements and experiences that shape our common understanding of morality. One helpful way of illustrating how moral data works is through John Bengson, Terrence Cuneo, and Russ Shafer-Landau's vignette called "Collegiality":

> A colleague of yours has been in a bad car accident, sustaining major injuries. To ease the burden on her and her family, you pledged several weeks ago to provide a meal for them on a particular date. But you've forgotten all about this, and instead hatched a plan to spend the day hiking. You know that reneging on your promise won't be disastrous; the family won't go hungry tonight if you don't provide a meal. But after running through a number of such scenarios, it seems clear you should cancel your plan and prepare the promised meal. You realize that given your previous commitment, doing so is not merely good or appropriate, but is what the situation favors or demands. So you judge that keeping your pledge is what you ought to do, and you set out to prepare the meal. The decision is in fact fairly typical of you, since you tend to be compassionate, conscientious, helpful, and resolute.
>
> Later, a friend acknowledges that your behavior merits praise, but plays devil's advocate, querying why you should bother preparing food for your colleague: Why not lie and wash your hands of the situation? Or send a slanderous letter in which you vent your frustration at cancelling your plan? Or, more drastically still, why not prepare to torture your colleague because of the inconvenience she's caused you? In response, you defend your decision by appealing to truisms such as:
> It is wrong to lie simply because one doesn't feel like telling the truth.
> It is wrong to slander someone simply because it makes you feel better.
> It is wrong to torture others simply because they've inconvenienced you.

The authors argue there is a range of apparent moral facets that can be extrapolated from this illustration, which can be understand as moral data points:

- Moral features, such as values (e.g. compassion)
- Correlation between moral (e.g. values) and non-moral (the difficulty of your friend's situation) things
- Independence of moral demands (the reason to provide the meal is not dependent on your desires)
- Inescapability of moral demands (there is nothing you can do to make yourself unaffected by moral reasons)
- Priority of moral demands over non-moral ones (it is more important for you to prepare the meal than to go hiking)
- Centrality of morality (the moral reason to make the meal has normative force)
- Non-arbitrariness of morality (the moral reason to make the meal is not fixed randomly, by mere fiat, or in a manner analogous to mere picking)
- Non-contingency of morality (you have reason to think that the moral truism of defending your judgement holds in a wide variety of possible scenarios)

Argument Overview

Now that I have laid out my definitions, let me state my thesis plainly: *public schools should teach moral education using a moral realist curriculum*. By moral education, I mean age-appropriate components of moral philosophy, including the alethic (truth-related) and aretaic (virtue-related) skills that are ineliminable to coherent moral knowledge and wisdom. Though I am supportive of meeting the needs of moral education in younger grades, too, specifically I am interested in the dearth and deficits of moral learning in secondary school curricula. The shorthand for this overall posture, henceforth, will be "moral education," unless otherwise stated. I arrive at the first half of this argument – public schools should teach moral education – by

examining the aims of education. In Chapter 1, I make the case that all traditional aims of compulsory education imply moral learning, and that compulsory education typically neglects moral earning. Given these two premises, it is clear that compulsory education should reprioritize its incorporation of moral learning.

The second half of my thesis – moral education should use a moral realist curriculum – is the only sensible conclusion we should draw as moral educators, and the only path to ratifying moral education. This is a bold claim, as many in the field[17] grant that moral learning is an educational good, but deny that it should be taught like other school subjects. However, I find it inconsistent, illogical, and unhelpful to be in favour of teaching morality if one does not ground their meta-ethics in realism. I defend this move by using a justified true belief (JTB) approach to knowledge, which I divide into five criteria that I show are capable of being satisfied with moral language. Articulating what moral knowledge is, on this account, and how it can be ascertained, learned, and taught, is covered between Chapters 2 and 3. Finally, in Chapter 4, I address the question of how ethics can be taught, practically, exploring implications for policy and further research, and responding to possible objections.

I opened with a look at antisemitism as a kind of moral education, though the intent of this book is not to justify or conceptualize antisemitism education, per se. Rather, I hope to offer a defense of moral education, theoretically, one that should be taken seriously by the province if and when they amend the curriculum and adjust for ethical concerns. Considerations in the philosophy and policy of education should not fixate only on teaching *well*, but also on teaching *good* – that is, the knowledge and wisdom of moral goodness.

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Introduction Endnotes

[1] *B.C.*, 2023.

[2] Wallace, 2020.

[3] Visca, 2023.

[4] *Holocaust education*, 2023.

[5] Xu, 2024.

[6] In the words of Nico Slobinsky, vice-president of the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs.

[7] Johnston, 2024.

[8] *Statement*, 2024.

[9] Singer, 2024.

[10] No word in the Dictionary can be defined without using others words in the Dictionary.

[11] Bengson, J., et al, 2024.

[12] Usually credited to Benjamin Constant in *Des réactions politiques* (1796), though my framing of it is slightly simplified and adapted.

[13] Brink, 1989.

[14] Joyce, 2022.

[15] Erdur, 2016.

[16] This is a point that has been made before. For instance, Douglas Rasmussen (2007) comes to the same conclusion, but I will unpack and defend my version of this argument in Chapters 1 and 2.

[17] For example, John Dewey (1909) was a proponent of moral education, but rejected that it was a kind of knowledge that should be, and even could be, transferred. The Dewian tradition tends to echo the same idea.

Chapter 1

Imagine you are a science teacher. At the beginning of the school year, you meet with your department to discuss the goals for the semester. You'll need to start preparing lessons and labs. You'll have to purchase materials for projects. You'll need to make decisions about exams. As you begin writing your course outline, you're faced with the question: What do you want your students to learn by the end of the term?

You could answer this question by referring to an array of knowledge: that students develop a greater understanding of DNA, or chemical compositions, or atomic theory. There are many concepts that you believe a young person would be better off knowing, and you see it as your job to ensure they attain this knowledge. Becoming scientifically literate, then, would be the aim of your course.

Then again, being exposed to scientific facts may not be enough, for you also care about your students knowing *how* to interpret their learning: that students develop the skills to conduct scientific processes, like make hypotheses or evaluate data. Indeed, you hope to elevate prowess and proficiency in students when it comes to doing science, so that they can apply these abilities outside of the classroom, too. Therefore, an alternative aim of the course could be to foster scientific skills.

However, a upon further reflection, you wonder if merely acquiring scientific comprehension or capabilities is missing the point of students ultimately becoming *scientists*, in a way. It is one thing to assemble a toolkit of know-hows, but another to embody the spirit of science. Eventually, a student must move beyond using the scientific method in isolated incidents, and instead approach all aspects of life with acute observation, skepticism, and experimentation. Thus, the real aim of the course could be to adopt science as a lifestyle.

A final thought strikes you: what if science is simply instrumental to what really matters? The only reason these students are privileged enough to learn about science in the first place is because they live in a liberal democracy. So long as this course is conducive to participating and promulgating democratic society, and as such promoting equity and minimizing inequality, then it will be effective. On this view, teaching science must always be in service of righting wrongs and preparing young people for social change.

Considerations like "what should students learn?" are what inform curricula, and have been debated in the educational literature for some time. Should you replace "science" with another school subject, like "art," you will find that there are similar problems to sort through (an art teacher may worry she is overemphasizing artistic techniques over theory, for example). An educational aim, as far as I'm using it here, refers to the ideal purpose that an educator hopes her students will be able to ultimately fulfill. In this sense, I use the term "aim" interchangeably with "goal" and "end." Though educational theorists don't always acquiesce on which aim should be foremost, it is typically accepted that "education," generally, is an attempt to achieve at least one of four goals:

- The transmission of knowledge
- The cultivation of skills
- The rearing of character
- The development of democracy[1]

Some philosophers argue in favour of one or more of these features as incumbent on education, while others maintain that a combination of several is necessary. Though the analogy reveals how these considerations are individually contemplated by teachers, they are not just theoretical, but inform policy and curriculum. In British Columbia, the provincial curriculum was redesigned

in 2016 to reflect several facets of learning, which makes room for curricular content (or knowledge), curricular competencies (or skills), and core competencies (or character). For the sake of my readership, I will focus on the implications of BC Curriculum, though much of what I write is relevant to any system of public education organized by these kinds of aims.

There are some remarks to be made about the aims of education. To return to the opening illustration, it is obvious that any conception of science education is meaningless without a commitment to metaphysical realism. In philosophy, realism is the view that some phenomena exist outside of the mind. For instance, a realist would be able to say that the Earth was round even before anybody believed it was round. This position is opposite anti-realism, which would hold that the roundness of the Earth is only "true" in the sense that we've all agreed it is. A course like science is spurious on anti-realism. If you are teaching for knowledge, you've already conceded that there are things that are *knowable*. If you are teaching for skills, then you must reckon with the reliability of science (e.g. how is its repeatability explained?) and what good reality-detecting aptitude is without reality. And if you are teaching for character, meaning the formation of habits of scientists (or artists, readers, etc. in any other field), then your pedagogy grants the need for some knowledge, which I have already argued have a foundation in realism. The same applies to teaching for politics: if science actually works, and can be used to advance an agenda, it will be because the knowledge on which it's based is sound.

One could rightly contend that not all school subjects necessitate the view of realism. For instance, though there are knowledge, skills, character, and even activism to boost in an art class, art itself need not be objective.[2] We should be careful in how we use the word "knowledge" henceforth. An art teacher may casually reference 'the rule of thirds' as compositional 'knowledge' in her photography course. But, more accurately, what is being described by the

teacher is a technique; it is *not* true, in a realist sense of the word, that the rule of thirds always makes a good photo, though it *is* true, in a realist sense of the word, that the rule of thirds is used by photographers to divide their frame for balance of subjects. On this account, art is not a knowledge-based subject, and as a result, the other educational aims – skills and character – are not informed by knowledge either. Instead, only knowledge-based subjects are definitionally committed to realism.

Notice, now, the implications of education; a wide array of topics can be relevant by virtue of their knowledge-base or lack thereof. Consider that astronomy and cooking have not always been taught in schools, but were added to the BC Curriculum because they conform to its educational aims. Imagine, then, what it would take for morality to join their ranks. If moral education constitutes a kind of skill akin to cooking, whether or not it is grounded in realism, then it may be of some educational relevance. But if moral education is akin to astronomy, grounded in philosophical realism, then it's importance cannot be understated.

If science education seeks to enlighten students scientifically, and arts education seeks to enlighten students artistically, then moral education seeks to enlighten students morally. This is to say that most forms of compulsory education address a need in adolescent development, otherwise they wouldn't be compulsory. Educational philosopher John Wilson makes this connection as he elucidates moral education as a means to initiating learners into moral insight:

> moral education is logically similar to other subjects and forms (science, history, etc.), including those that deal with controversial areas (religion, politics, etc., see Loukes, 1983). When we educate, we initiate pupils into various forms. The forms are not the personal property of any particular culture or social group but represent the procedures, methodology, types of reason and skills demanded by pure reason in order to answer certain logical types of question. Thus in science we initiate pupils into 'scientific method', and show them how to think and behave when trying to answer questions about the physical world. We do not (a) simply hand them "right answers" on a plate, nor (b) suggest that there arc no such things as right answers--that it is all "relative" or "a matter of taste". What we do is to show them how to get the right answers by their own use of

> reason via the appropriate procedures (observation, experiment, hypothesis, etc., not consulting the Bible or accepting Aristotle's authority or looking into crystal balls). So with morality.[3]

Just as students must be taught to read, write, question, and interpret – for we don't assume they will master, let alone acquire, these skills on their own – they likewise need to be taught to think and act morally.

Undoubtedly, this understanding of moral education is compatible with the aim(s) of education, from the transmission of knowledge to the rearing of character. As one of the pioneers of modern moral education, Nel Noddings has long maintained this point: "Everything we do, then, as teachers, has moral overtones. Through dialogue, modeling, the provision of practice, and the attribution of best motive, the one-caring as teacher nurtures the ethical idea. She cannot nurture the student intellectually without regard for the ethical ideal unless she is willing to risk producing a monster."[4]

Could Noddings say the same of home economics? Not likely. It is apparent that many life skills are valuable, and have their place in education, but nonetheless are not paramount to the very edifice of education. Moral judgements like "teachers ought to remain impartial" or "schools must tend to all students' wellbeing" or "educational institutions shouldn't indoctrinate" are already imbedded in the enterprise. Of all topics to study in school, ethics is one closest to home.

Moral Education in BC

In 1890, on the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, the largest Canadian Indian residential school was erected. For nearly 90 years of operation, the Kamloops Indian Resident School (KIRS) attempted to assimilate and subordinate Indigenous children. Students suffered years of abuse and negligence, resulting in 51 recorded deaths, while the number of unmarked

graves is estimated to be in the hundreds. Survivors endured an education that has been described as moral indoctrination and cultural genocide. In her thesis on the school's history, Jenna Foster notes that "The KIRS curriculum was based on the modernization theory that Indigenous students would eventually transform into happy healthy Canadian citizens if they only assimilated to Euro-Canadian values."[5] For example, female students were segregated from their male classmates and delivered character education aimed at inculcating values like modesty, cleanliness, and gentleness. By subjecting students to rigid religious and racist training, the KIRS aimed to brainwash tens of thousands of Indigenous youth. This infamous legacy of the re-education machine that was the Indian Residential School System is, perhaps, what many in British Columbia first think of when they hear the term "moral education."[6]

Of a type like KIRS, moral education is indefensible for several reasons: 1) by incorporating religious orthodoxy alongside knowledge-based courses, it presents contentious opinions – such as the necessity to adhere to rigid gender roles – as comparable to non-controversial ones – such as the necessity to recognize patterns in order to make generalizations (or other principles fundamental to traditional school subjects); 2) it co-opts the term "knowledge" altogether in its moral instruction; 3) it provides no robust justification for the such instructed values, in spite of the amount of reasonable disagreement that exists surrounding moral truths; and 4) it imparts these ideas in such a way that students accept them non-rationally. To sum up, moral education is unwarranted if it's irrational and indoctrinatory. BC has condemned these qualities in its public education ever since it abolished Residential Schools. When the BC government revisited its compulsory education system in 2016, it launched a new program that champions critical and reflective thinking so that students will "examine their own thinking and that of others," make "judgements based on reasoning," become "analytical and

investigative, willing to question and challenge their own thoughts, ideas, and assumptions," "reflect on the information they receive through observation, experience," and to "refine their thinking."[7] Just as most other contemporary democratic societies have produced educational institutions that seek to cultivate reason, BC schools have rightfully retreated from the features of moral education,[8] casting doubt on its future as a worthwhile pursuit.

As discussed briefly in the Introduction, moral education can broadly refer to any teaching process aimed at "moral learning." Moral and educational philosopher Michael Hand delineates two kinds of moral education: what he calls 1) moral formation and 2) moral inquiry.[9] The former includes the issuing of prescriptions (e.g. directly conveying moral rules like "don't take things that belong to others"), the rewarding of compliance (e.g. commending a student for being inclusive), the curtailing of bad behaviour (e.g. punishing a student for disobeying an authority), and the modelling of good behaviour (e.g. acting in accordance with the prescriptions and embodying the values shared to students so that they can witness moral conduct). Residential Schools like KIRS were guilty of this first type. But so, too, are elementary schools; primary teachers regularly engage in moral formation, without facing any backlash. The only times to the contrary are when the values informing moral formation are controversial, such as the recall petition against Minister of Education Rachna Singh over the usage of SOGI 123[10] materials in 2023.[11]

It would seem, then, that schools never did away with "values education," for they still value reason, critical thinking, and reflection, as well as diversity, equity, and inclusion. Indeed, the fact that the curriculum is so flexible to change, and so subject to criticism, is indicative of the nature of educational aims: it is the *values* of the educational institution, rather than its *characteristics*, that matter. In order to adjudicate *which* values are taught is to permit into the

conversation Hand's second classification: moral inquiry. As a kind of moral education distinct from moral formation, moral inquiry is cognitive, in that it attends to developing, testing, and revising beliefs: "It is a matter of investigating the nature of moral standards, asking how subscription to such standards might be justified, and examining the strength of suggested justifications."[12] Hand gives examples of non-directive and directive teaching tactics that lead students to explore moral precepts. On a non-directive style, a teacher is not committed to ensuring students arrive at any one conclusion, but instead creates an opportunity to learn about competing moral ideas objectively. To illustrate, think of an 'education on religion,' wherein students survey a wide array of worldviews, rather than receiving a 'religious education,' where they are taught that one worldview is correct. This style of inquiry is contrasted by the directive tactic, which instead intentionally steers pupils towards one belief, among many, as the best or most defensible. To illustrate, think of a scientific inquiry into the explanation for biodiversity, which sees a teacher help guide her students in the direction of one theory over others that best explains the data.

Non-directive moral inquiry is not particularly fashionable outside of upper-level Social Studies electives like Philosophy 12, which themselves are becoming rarely offered. Even if it were more popular, it is difficult to see how non-directive inquiry can fully respond to the need for moral education, raised above, and resolve the problem. Hand puts it this way:

> Teaching about moral codes, in the sense of explaining what they require and how they differ, without any thought of persuading children that one or other of them is authoritative, is a perfectly intelligible undertaking, and one for which 'moral education' is not an inappropriate label. But moral education understood merely as the anthropological study of moral codes would hardly answer to the pressing social need most of us take to be the raison d'etre of the enterprise. Moral education matters because each new generation must be taught the difference between right and wrong; children must come to understand and be disposed to comply with the requirements of morality. The crucial educational task is the formation of responsible moral agents, and this *does*

> involve the cultivation of subscription to moral standards and belief in their justification.[13]

Again, neither Hand nor I are dismissing the non-directive approach wholesale. However, I will argue that the moral education needed in BC must be more than non-direct. Former president of Harvard University, Derek C. Bok, sketches a similar point on the topic of college courses that have "rarely attempted to make more than a limited contribution to moral education . . . they do not develop the power of moral reasoning. To the extent that these courses are simple surveys of ethical theory, they likewise do little to help the student cope with the practical moral dilemmas that he may encounter in his own life."[14] It is not enough to present students with antisemitism and non-discrimination as two viable views. Moral education must be prepared to condemn one and promote the other.

Directive moral inquiry is a dying breed, and perhaps for good reason. In her famous essay "The Crisis in Education," Hannah Arendt discourages teachers from using their authority to tell students what to think, especially when it comes to political matters.[15] She argues that politicizing education leads to indoctrination, which threatens viewpoint diversity, freedom of speech, and open-mindedness. It is exactly this danger that, Hand establishes, moral education must be protected against: "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."[16] What I hope to prove in this chapter is not only why directive moral inquiry must return, but how it can do so rationally and in conjunction with BC's current aims of education.

For Hand, the charges of indoctrination should not scare us into avoiding moral education altogether. There is a problem for all learners that goes unaddressed in a morally-neutral

education system: moral knowledge requires a teacher. If it didn't, it would either be innate, or passively absorbed. And yet we know, firstly, that moral knowledge is not innate, for though "we are biologically equipped with a *capacity* for morality [like a capacity for language], we are no more born subscribing to a moral code than we are born fluent in a mother tongue."[17] And we know, secondly, that moral knowledge is not absorbed: "Moral instruction and guidance is so integral to our understanding of parenting and teaching that it is hard to imagine what these activities would look like without it . . . Morality is always, in practice, taught as well as caught . . . "[18] So, if it is futile to jettison moral education, then how can we ensure it does not become indoctrinative?

David Copp tackles this problem by testing the concept of moral education against his definition of indoctrination:[19]

> So the issues are whether propositional moral teaching is special in that, perhaps (1) epistemic reasons *cannot* be provided for believing moral propositions or (1a) *pedagogically* appropriate reasons cannot be provided or (1b and 1c) *fairly balanced epistemically cogent* reasons cannot be provided or (2) *local controversy* cannot be adequately addressed. Is propositional moral teaching different in any of these ways from teaching, say, evolutionary theory?[20]

Copp contends that the only issue is "whether it is possible to provide *epistemically* appropriate reason for believing moral propositions."[21] Indeed, if there is such a thing as moral knowledge, it must philosophically earn its title of "knowledge" the same way other curricular knowledge has.

Epistemology in Education

Science, alongside other knowledge-based courses like mathematics and history, belongs to the aim of learning and understanding "epistemic goods." Jonathan E. Adler contends that the pursuit and transmission of knowledge in education is an "aim of truth" – and, as we will see, "it is capable of justifying various basic educational practices."[22] Knowledge is a philosophical claim about the contents of reality. To "know" is a factive verb, in that it states a true belief (the

truth of *p* is necessary for *S* to "know" *p*). Philosophers still debate how to qualify true belief as "knowledge" (as opposed to coincidence[23]), but typically they agree that a justification must be made by appealing to good reasons: evidence, intuition, sense experience, etc. Theories of knowledge can differ in their respective disciplines, but each must adhere to criteria for truth. Empirical evidence is a requisite for a scientific or historical proof, and logical consistency is essential for a mathematical proof. Either way, knowledge about the way things really are – propositional knowledge – is always predicated on truth, and as Emily Robertson maintains, it is "reasonable to assume that acquiring propositional knowledge is a major aim of education."[24] Decidedly, then, an educational institution that seeks to transmit knowledge is declaring itself as an epistemic authority: a trustworthy source of public knowledge.[25]

Of course, we can be wrong about what we think we know (misunderstanding data, miscalculating measurements, overlooking fallacies, misplacing trust in anecdotal evidence, etc.). As Adler puts it, "Doubts about the concept of truth cast doubt upon the truth-aim. If truth is correspondence with facts or states of affairs, to take the most well known explication, we can easily make sense of teaching that, say, 'DNA is a double-helix.' "[26] Consider that phrenology, the study of the human mind's capacity based on the shape and size of the skull, was once taught as medical science alongside anatomy, before being debunked by modern neuroscience. Likewise, erroneous claims about biological determinants of intelligence permitted IQ school testing that "authoritatively justified separate curricula for allegedly backward groups."[27] It is worth noting that practitioners of phrenology in the 19th century or race IQ testing in the 20th century presumably believed its validity on the basis of scientific principles, at least in part. If a school is to be viewed as an epistemic authority, then it must be prepared to defend its epistemic goods, or else it is no better a source of knowledge than a Canadian residential school.

The difference between preposterous fictions and sound facts will always come down to the rigor of the justification.[28] Educational philosopher Robin Barrow opines that "while there are many plausible arguments to suggest . . . that we can seldom, if ever, know that we know something, it is not at all plausible to suggest that there is nothing to be known or that the very idea of knowledge is confused and incoherent."[29] Take a historical example of an overturned truth claim, acknowledged widely in the pre-16th century world: the Sun and other celestial objects revolve around the Earth. There were several reasons to take this idea seriously: based on what the human eye can perceive, it appears as though the Sun and Moon move through the sky, just as it feels as though the Earth is stationary. Most populations around the globe were religious, and were reinforced by their holy texts[30] that the Earth "should never be moved"[31] or that "The sun rises, and the sun goes down."[32] The brightest minds – who we could call epistemic authorities of their time – since ancient Greece endorsed geocentrism, drawing detailed diagrams of the trajectory of planets as they circled the Earth. Claims to the contrary were counterintuitive, and the odds were against convincing anyone otherwise. And yet, thanks to astronomical science and technology, the evidence for heliocentrism is now much more compelling: telescopes prove other planets have their own satellites that do not circle the Earth; the theory of gravity explains how the Sun, with much greater mass, exerts a constant pull on the Earth into an elliptical orbit; we can test the hypothesis by tracing the speeds and movements of celestial bodies on their epicycles, and will find that our orbit predictions are accurate compared to what we would expect to see on a geocentric model. Especially considering we have sent probes and astronauts off-planet to observe these phenomena firsthand, it is evident that the Earth revolves around the Sun, and that any alternative suggestion is far less reasonable. As such, the BC Curriculum teaches heliocentrism.[33]

Can we be certain that heliocentrism is a fact? No. Perhaps scientists today are wrong, just as the Catholic Church was wrong when they denounced Galileo Galilei. We can only measure our confidence on a scale of probability, and given the reasons we have for the truth of heliocentrism, we must rely on trust: trust for the precision of our tools to record data accurately, trust for the ability of our minds to interpret data properly, trust for the reliability of scientific consensus to be a credible marker of dependability, etc. But even with the limitations of flawed mental hardware, it is extremely likely that heliocentrism approximates the reality of the cosmos. Herein we must concede that knowledge is not synonymous with truth, but instead the closest thing we could ever mean by something counting as good as true. Bertrand Russell puts it best in *Education and the Good Life*, articulating that we must not

> be content with a lazy scepticism, which regards objective truth as unattainable and all evidence as inconclusive. We should admit that even our best-founded beliefs probably stand in need of some correction; but truth, so far as it is humanly attainable, is a matter of degree. Our beliefs in physics are certainly less false now than they were before the time of Galileo . . . It is necessary, therefore, to teach this, and also to teach the skill required for marshalling evidence. In a world where rival propagandists are perpetually blazing falsehoods at us, to induce us to poison ourselves with pills or each other with poison gases, this critical habit of mind is enormously important. Ready credulity in the face of repeated assertions is one of the curses of the modern world, and schools should do what they can to guard against it.[34]

Some have taken this concession to imply that there is no truth. In order to falsify some views, we seemingly need objective standards that apply to all belief-formation. And if there are no such standards, then no judgement about what is *really* real can supersede the rest. This anti-realist position can be demonstrated by analogy: Western archaeologists posit that Indigenous Peoples of the Americas emigrated from Asia approximately 12,000 to 14,000 years ago, across the Bering land bridge.[35] However, the long-standing stories of most Indigenous groups disagree; the oral tradition of the Navajo People, for instance, tells of their original creation in the now-American Southwest, where Turtle and Coyote created the Earth.[36] The relativist would take this

discrepancy to mean that each perspective is equally valid; there is no ultimate truth to the origin of the Navajo People, as knowing it will entirely hinge on one's subjective perspective and tests for knowledge. Again, we could have cause for caution when conceptualizing schools as epistemic authorities if they wield no such authority.

For the relativist, there cannot be a scheme-independent way of deciding between competing paradigms, and therefore no truth that transcends all schemes. One problem with this kind of metaphysical denial is that it is paradoxical. The statement "there is no truth" can only be true if there is some truth. In other words, one cannot know "there is no truth" unless by admitting the maxim to be true, which of course permits the existence of truth. Not only is the argument self-defeating, it also overlooks the degrees of confidence that separate a bogus claim from a serious one.[37] Everyone holds beliefs about the world, the relativist included, which are largely out of our control; we arrive at conclusions on account of what is most convincing to us. If we maintain a certain belief – say, that water freezes at zero degrees Celsius, or that two plus two equals four – it is impossible to force ourselves to believe the opposite. The conviction is external to our choice. So, even on an antirealist view, there at least seems to be some beliefs more plausible than others, because there are some reasons more persuasive than others.[38] As Robin Barrow puts it, "[relativist] considerations do not in themselves establish that all claims are necessarily no more than relative to contingent conditions in some way. And no amount of such evidence and epistemological theorising is sufficient to show that there is no truth to be ascertained."[39] This insight may not be enough to dispel all metaphysical denial of objectivity, but it should be enough to defend the practice of educating for knowledge.

Should we grant that truth exists, we still need to establish on what grounds it can be knowable. Heliocentrism is still contested, now by the flat-earth movement which denies

contemporary astronomical science. Both sides in this debate claim to be doing science in an effort to describe the world the way it really is, and so an educational institution must decide how much viewpoint diversity it is willing to entertain. When the creation science movement challenged public education in Arkansas in the 1980s, a legal case forced an ostensive ruling to be made on the nature of science: that the theory of intelligent design fails to satisfy the essential characteristics of science[40] that evolutionary biology meets.[41] The Arkansas curriculum still includes evolution by natural selection, and makes no mention of creationism.[42] In this case, educational knowledge is whatever can best hold up under careful scrutiny.

Curricular knowledge is never immune to criticism: some reject the Holocaust as a historical event, or that imaginary numbers exist, or that the Earth is 4.5 billion years old. Nonetheless, schools continue to teach these facts because they have an obligation to disseminate knowledge. It is not in the interest of educational institutions to platform fringe opinions. Teachers can exercise professional discretion by reminding their students they are each entitled to developing their own religious or political perspectives. However, teachers are also expected to hold learners accountable to standards of knowledge. It would be inappropriate for a teacher to facilitate an inquiry into genocide denial, just was it would be wrong to accept multiple correct answers on a test question regarding what variable x is in the equation $2x + 5 = 21$. To relay knowledge is not to possess special access to objective reality, but to trust and transmit the most robust ideas.

A willingness to accept that truth exists, and that it can be knowable, is crucial for the premise that an education system ought to promote knowledge. “Justified true belief” theory (JTB) is still the prevailing definition of knowledge in academia.[43] For example, to know that Justin Trudeau is the Prime Minister of Canada, it must be the case that:

1) You believe Justin Trudeau is the Prime Minister of Canada.
2) Justin Trudeau is the Prime Minister of Canada.
3) You are justified in believing Justin Trudeau is the Prime Minister of Canada.

These conditions of knowledge are important to flag if we are to understand what makes certain information worthy to be taught, and later, what counts as moral knowledge. Let's unravel these, in turn, and pull out any further threads tangled into these three terms.

If a proposition is sincerely believed (justification notwithstanding), it means a high degree of epistemic confidence is placed in it. This means that someone need not have *certitude* about the proposition, and likewise that the amount of confidence someone has is considerably higher than indifference or indecision. Suppose Sarah believes that the human body is composed of 206 bones. There is very little doubt in Sarah's mind that the number is anything other than 206. However, if she is honest with herself, Sarah understands that she could be wrong, for she has never counted all of the bones herself. If she were to express her confidence probabilistically, she would estimate the odds of the proposition being correct around 95-98%. On different matters, like the existence of God, Sarah would admit she lacks the same degree of confidence. If she had to guess, she would say she is only 55-60% sure that there is a God. When it comes to bones in the body, Sarah holds a belief, but when it comes to God's existence, she does not.[44]

Belief denotes epistemic confidence, regardless of the kind of proposition in question. If Sarah also believes that the Anglo-Zanzibar War lasted 38 minutes, we can take it to mean that she is very confident in it. Although a belief about human anatomy is a scientific one, and belief about a military event is a historical one, they are both propositional "beliefs" in that they share probabilistic cachet. In other words, to call something a "scientific" belief is to admit that it has two traits: 1) likelihood, and 2) explanatory power (the ability to describe something which, in

this case, is scientific in nature). Bear in mind that we can easily substitute examples for beliefs that are not true, such as a mathematical belief in Terryology,[45] which one can [falsely] have a high amount of confidence in. My point here is only that all beliefs pass a threshold on everyone's personal gauge of likelihood.

It is almost circular to demonstrate how something can be "true" without reference to the other two conditions of knowledge. However, in order for something to be true, in principle, it also must have two traits: 1) it is universal, and 2) it is stance-independent. If a proposition is true, like "the Earth's atmosphere is composed of 78% nitrogen," we want to be able to say that this is *always* true, no matter where you are in the world (and, indeed, no matter where you are in the universe, for the atmosphere of the *Earth* will still be the same, even if you are elsewhere). Similarly, the truth of the atmospheric composition must be so even if you fail to believe in it, or even if everyone fails to believe in it. Rather than depending on any one person's stance, a truth exists outside of human minds.

Finally, justification must be brought into the equation. It is the most nebulous of the three terms, for it has allowed many philosophers to become confused about JTB theory. Named after 20th-century American philosopher Edmund Gettier, a Gettier problem is a counter-example to JTB which attempts to show that there are cases where all three conditions (justification, truth, belief) can be met whilst the fact of the matter is still not known.

For example, suppose you look outside your window, and see a man in a green jacket shoveling snow. You know your father owns this jacket, so you induce that your father is shoveling snow. What you can't see from your vantage point is that the man shoveling is actually your neighbour, who happens to own the same green jacket. Unbeknownst to you, still, is the fact

that your father is shoveling snow in the backyard. Therefore, you have justification for believing your father is shoveling snow, and it is true that he is, but you do not know he is.[46]

As far as I'm concerned, Gettier problems like these fail to disprove JTB theory. Though, in this case, you have some justification for believing your father is shoveling, I would argue the justification isn't strong enough to count for knowing. You possess a reason for believing he is shoveling, but your justification would be stronger if you went outside to see his face (you are also wrong about where he is shoveling snow, so the original proposition is already undermined). Ergo, "justification" is a loose term and can mean many things by different people. We should hold the term "justification" to a higher standard, which is what scientists, historians, mathematicians, and other expects do in their respective disciplines (recall heliocentrism).

Imagine that, before discovering the identities of the shovelers, the man in the green jacket you see out your window takes his shovel and uses it to assault a pedestrian. If you were taken to court as an eyewitness, no judge would accept that you "know" the suspect is your father, because you couldn't even identify his face. Although your observation can, and should, be taken into account as a kind of evidence, a judge's verdict must meet a much higher standard of justification.

"Beyond reasonable doubt" is a helpful judicial phrase that typifies an argument for or against a proposition using a set of evidence: fingerprints, blood samples, testimonials, documents, alibies, and so forth. It is the sum of all this data, and the methods of interpreting them, that instantiates the kind of justification that supports belief in the age of the Earth or the authenticity of the Holocaust. It is helpful to thus qualify the term "justification" so as not use it like Gettier. One way of doing this comes from philosopher Gerhard Schurz, who introduces the

prefix “optimal” to differentiate this kind of justification. Schurz’s “optimality justification” refers to any method that is optimal for any epistemic goal:

> This means that the optimal method is never worse but possibly better than all alternative methods that are cognitively accessible. Thus, using the optimal method is the best that one can do to achieve the epistemic goal. Importantly, an optimality justification does not need to exclude the possibility of sceptical scenarios featuring ‘Cartesian’ or ‘Humean’ demons. In these sceptical scenarios, no method can be successful, and an optimal method will be ‘the best of a bad lot’. This refutes the reliability of the optimal method, but is compatible with its optimality.[47]

Not only does Schurz’s framing avoid mistakenly setting the bar too low, he calls optimality justification a “more modest” epistemic move because it cannot, and should not, produce perfect results.

From each of these conclusions, it is evident that a claim which satisfies the three independent conditions of JTB theory thus implies the following five characteristics:

- Epistemic confidence
- Universality
- Stance-independence
- Optimal justification
- Explanatory power

The standard epistemological assumptions are reviewed in this chapter in order to identify the above sub-qualifications, which I hope make the explanation and evaluation of epistemic goods and moral knowledge as organized and clear as possible. Whether they realize it or not, educational institutions under a curriculum like BC’s are teaching knowledge that bears these traits.

Epistemic Goods

Historically, knowledge acquisition has been the objective of both Western and Eastern educational institutions. Though the content of the learning varies, curricula are curated according to criteria of epistemic value, meaning that the knowledge taught is purportedly relevant or useful to the context of the pupil. In BC, educationally worthwhile knowledge pertains to traditional subjects like history, mathematics, or natural sciences; students are expected to learn historical facts (e.g., King Louis XVI was executed in 1789, Social Studies 9), mathematical facts ($a^2 + b^2 = c^2$, Math 8), and scientific facts (vaccination prevents disease, Science 9). The BC Curriculum (2016) calls this content the "essential topics and knowledge [of] each grade level" that subsumes "information from a broad knowledge base" that "directly support students in their growth as educated citizens."[48]

The philosophy of education has long pondered the role of truth in teaching, but nearly all theorists maintain it has a place, in some respect. In *Ethics and Education*, R. S. Peters includes "knowledge and understanding" as foundational to education:

> We do not call a person 'educated' who has simply mastered a skill even though the skill may be very highly prized such as pottery. For a man to be educated it is insufficient that he should possess a mere knowhow or knack. He must have also some body of knowledge and some kind of a conceptual scheme to raise this above the level of a collection of disjointed facts. This implies some understanding of principles for the organization of facts. We would not call a man who was merely well informed an educated man. He must also have some understanding of the 'reason why' of things.[49]

An epistemic good, by Peters' definition, is involved in a broad set of knowledge that ought to be both learned and understood. It is not enough to memorize facts of history if they cannot inform the student of how to interact with institutions and ideas of today: "We might describe such a man as 'knowledgeable' but we would not describe him as 'educated.' "[50] For instance, a student could be taught the straightforward fact that a tree is a living organism. On its own, though, this fact is not very useful if the student lacks the concepts, procedures, and language to distinguish

living things from non-living things. Ergo, in order to have educational value, knowledge must be applicable to the real world, and it must be supported by the related processes that make it applicable.

The BC Ministry of Education utilized the concept of "structures of knowledge," popularized by curricular designer H. Lynn Erickson, in which she states that fact-based disciplines like science and math can be structured for deeper learning: in Social Studies, for instance, a unit on the history of the American Revolution begins with a foundation of knowledge (e.g., what the Boston Tea Party was, who the Loyalists were, etc.). The more a student studies the topic, the more she is exposed to emerging patterns, and can learn to understand reoccurring concepts (e.g., conflict, revolution, oppression, etc.). From there, the relationship between concepts can be expressed as a generalization that ties the ideas together (e.g., "people can revolt against government"). Acquiring this knowledge is meant to allow students to make connections and transfer ideas to their lives.

Peters' point about knowledge and understanding informs this know-do-understand model of BC's Curriculum to "foster deeper, more transferable learning" and "engage students in authentic tasks that connect learning to the real world."[51] Rather than aiming at knowledge acquisition, per se, knowledge-based courses in the province's public education system strive to develop *conceptual understanding* of the knowledge in question. For instance, a student who is expected to learn about the theory of evolution in her science class may worry her personal religious beliefs in creationism are being challenged. How does her science teacher resolve the conflict between maintaining the epistemic standards of the curriculum and respecting the intellectual autonomy of the student? The answer, for Peters and for BC, is to cultivate within the student her understanding of the knowledge, which means teaching for the ideas, dispositions,

and skills to understand a concept instead of simply teaching the concept to be accepted at face value.

As a conception of education, teaching for understanding separates itself quite distinctly indoctrination. Because the importance of the learning is located in the process of arriving at reasoned conclusions, rather than in the conclusions themselves, this pedagogy evades many of the problems that can arise in epistemology, as discussed earlier regarding getting the facts wrong even in good faith. Furthermore, teaching for understanding does not mean that anything counts as educationally worthwhile knowledge, for as I have said, a curriculum grounded in metaphysical realism does not necessarily permit students to develop a conceptual understanding of, say, Holocaust denial as a valid theory of knowledge; whether or not a student really comes to believe in the historicity of the Kristallnacht or the factitude of the Battle of Crete is beside the point, so long as she can understand these events, how historians have verified them, and why they matter. When students learn how to discover, explain, analyze, and defend some set of knowledge, without being forced to claim the knowledge outright, then there is little room for accusations of indoctrination.

The next question, then, is *what* epistemic goods students should be learning about. Here we will assess the fact-based courses of the BC curriculum to determine the motivations for their selection of epistemic goods.

In outlining goals for teaching Science, the documents use phrases like “developing habits of mind” with respect to “a consideration of social, ethical, and environmental implications” and “social, moral, and ethical decisions and actions in [students’] own lives, culture, and the environment.”[52] It stresses that “scientific literacy play a key role in educating citizens of today for the world of tomorrow. Critical to succeeding in this endeavour are the core

competencies that provide students with the ability to think critically, solve problems, and make ethical decisions."[53] Thus, the knowledge of the subject is conducive to worthwhile skills – in this case, critical thinking, problem-solving, and ethical decision-making. In short, all scientific learning in BC's education system is meant to be 1) factual, 2) useful, and in some cases, 3) ethical.

In Math, a similar commitment is made: "Mathematics is integral to every aspect of daily life. Mathematical skills are essential for solving problems in most areas of life and are part of human history. All peoples have used and continue to use mathematical knowledge and competencies to make sense of the world around them."[54] Again, the curriculum emphasizes that its content is factual, and that problem-solving is relevant to one's everyday life. Furthermore, it asserts that by studying math, students "learn how to make accurate, informed, and ethical choices" and "develop a capacity for abstract thinking, which includes the critical thinking skills necessary for understanding global issues in society."[55] These claims continue to suggest the relevance of morality to these epistemic goods, and they highlight the rationale of education for knowledge: to provide students with a helpful understanding of their world.

Finally, the Social Studies curriculum declares that students are expected to "develop the competencies needed for participation in a democratic society: considering multiple perspectives, respecting different values and points of view, gathering and critically analyzing information, making informed decisions, and effectively communicating their views."[56] This process is made possible by engaging with the knowledge areas of "history, geography, political science, and economics."[57] By taking into consideration the political environment of the students, and the need for empathy, viewpoint diversity, effective communication, and critical decision-making, the Socials curriculum is similarly aligned with the values underpinning its fact-based cousins.

To summarize, the BC Curriculum champions relevant knowledge for the good of the students' extra-curricular and post-secondary life. As we will see, there are major implications of what else should count as educationally worthwhile knowledge on this philosophy that the province has adopted.

Epistemic Needs

Though compulsory education has long concerned itself with the dissemination of facts, morality is one form of knowledge that has often been neglected, especially in Canada's contemporary education system. Compared to its counterparts - historical accounts, mathematical proofs, scientific theories - moral knowledge is not simply underemphasized, but altogether avoided, in BC schools. And yet, given BC's commitment to an essential broad knowledge base for the educated citizen, we should expect the opposite: a predominant attention to moral learning such that children may grow to "recognize the factors that affect their holistic wellness and take increasing responsibility for caring for themselves."[58]

Michael Hand presses the importance of moral education as closely connected to public education, for "school neutrality serves only to ensure that non-rational parental moral influence is largely unchecked."[59] Because educational ends all seem to be characterized in moral terms, perhaps most famously and succinctly by the phrase "the good life,"[60] it is curious that teaching about *goodness*, explicitly, remains to be seen. Presumably, a person learns a great deal about morality throughout her life; having children, voting, consuming products, etc. all have moral implications, and are no stranger to the everyperson. The older one grows, the more morally-consequential decisions she makes. Lived experiences can make a person morally wise, but not all moral insight is passively perceived. Some of this knowledge will be imparted by mentors, instructed in Sunday School, or instilled by family. Maxims like "do unto others as you would

have others do unto you" or "you reap what you sow" are often *taught*. But this kind of moral education is not endorsed by public schools, and instead popular sentiment says it's best to reserve such moral learning to the privacy of home or extra-curricular activities. Crucially, though, this delineation is made *not* because of a belief that moral learning is trivial or superfluous. To the contrary, many believe morality to be the *most* important kind of learning. Unlike other epistemic goods, including those just surveyed in the natural sciences, morality is dismissed not as a *good*, but as an *epistemic* one.

If it could be demonstrated, though, that there are moral facts worth learning about, free from the bias of meddling stakeholders (who we equally keep involved in the dissemination of other facts, like evolution, even when such facts are disputed by parents who disbelieve evolution), then I assert this exclusion is unwarranted.[61] Why assume such a link could be made? For starters, moral judgements appear to reflect *propositional* beliefs, by which I mean that morality tends to be in the business of making statements about the rightness and wrongness of various states of affairs. For example, take the moral claim that "discrimination is wrong." If one accepts this proposition, they take it to be *true*, and wish that others accept it as well. Recall the analogies made to astronomy and cooking at the outset of the chapter; if one tried to the same with a culinary sentence, like "stewing with chili powder is wrong," they would really be saying one of two things: 1) an opinion, or 2) a moral judgement. An opinion is unlike a truth proposition because one would only be expressing a preference which they would not be committed to wishing everyone else to adopt. On the other hand, if one actually was convicted that stewing with chili powder is *morally* wrong, instead of contextually wrong, then they are no longer speaking in culinary terms, but moral ones. By this reasoning, morality seems to occupy a space closer to astronomy than it does cooking.[62]

We began by reflecting on the Indian Residential School System to discern the most significant challenges to the project of teaching moral knowledge, such as:

- Moral knowledge being unsettled, unlike other kinds of knowledge
- Moral knowledge failing to constitute a kind of knowledge in the first place
- Moral knowledge being unjustified on account of moral disagreement

To continue to respond to these objections adequately, I will flesh out my conception of moral knowledge, and posit that it can survive all of the above critiques.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the aims of education – knowledge, skills, character, and/or politics – and an argument for why morality is related to these aims: each aim either explicitly assumes moral learning (character and politics), or implicitly makes room for it (knowledge and skills). In particular, I focused on the knowledge aim, and how it is a precondition for the other three. I then ran a simple overview through epistemological considerations for education, such as commitments to meta-physical realism and JTB theory. I contended that there are five characteristics that must feature in propositional knowledge that is disseminated in education. Finally, I explored non-moral and moral reasons for incorporating knowledge into curricula as epistemic goods, before briefly touching on the noticeable absent of "moral knowledge."

In the next chapter, I will apply notions of moral beliefs to three of the five characteristics that must feature in propositional knowledge that is disseminated in education, as a test to see if there are propositional moral beliefs, and if these beliefs could be true.

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Chapter 1 Endnotes

[1] Or, of course, the advancement of any other political agenda, though in our context this will be the most agreeable of politically-motivated educational aims.

[2] Aesthetics, as a philosophical discipline, questions this assumption. But for the sake of this example, I'm willing to bracket this idea in order to make a larger point about areas wherein objectivity is far less controversial.

[3] Wilson, 1996.

[4] Noddings, 1984.

[5] Foster, 2010.

[6] Aptly summed up by Gerald Grace (2002), that moral education is now unseemly due to its "historical associations with various forms of religious and moral indoctrination of the young."

[7] Ministry of Education, n.d., *Critical thinking.*

[8] That is, how they existed most clearly in the province's past.

[9] David Copp makes a related, though slightly different, distinction between "moral socialization" (building moral character) and "propositional moral education" (teaching children what to believe morally, or, in less directive cases, getting children to consider what to believe morally).

[10] A resource for teaching Sexual Health and Gender Identity in schools.

[11] Larsen, 2023.

[12] Hand, 2017.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Bok, 1976.

[15] Arendt, 1961.

[16] Hand, 2017.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] "To induce people to believe something *uncritically* – or to *indoctrinate* them in this thing – is to induce people to believe it, where, given its nature, there are or could be epistemic reasons for believing it, but to do so (1) without

providing epistemic reasons for believing it, [a] to the extent that presenting such reasons would be pedagogically appropriate, reasons that are [b] epistemically fairly balanced and [c] epistemically cogent, or (2) without addressing any local controversy about it by acknowledging and, to the extent that is appropriate, evaluating the different sides of the controversy."

[20] Copp, 2016.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Adler, 2003.

[23] One could hold a true belief *p* (e.g. it is raining in London) on unsatisfactory grounds (e.g. by using mysticism to magically predict the weather), and therefore fail to actually "know" *p*.

[24] Robertson, 2020.

[25] For further reading on epistemic authority in the educational literature, see Zagzebski, L. T. (2012). *Epistemic authority*: A theory of trust, authority, and autonomy in belief. Oxford University Press.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Giancarlo, 2022.

[28] For a full foray into epistemology, beyond the purview of this book, see: Scheffler, I. (1965). *Conditions of knowledge; An introduction to epistemology and education.* Chicago: Scott, Foresman.

[29] Barrow, 2000.

[30] Though the Christian Bible is more explicitly geocentric, some readings of the Qur'an suggest similar conclusions (see Surah 31 Luqman, Ayat 29-29 or 36:37-39).

[31] Psalm 104:5.

[32] Ecclesiastes 1:5.

[33] Science 10.

[34] Russell, 1926.

[35] Fagan & Durrani, 2017.

[36] Cooper, 1987.

[37] Relativists may espouse anti-realism, but seldom do they behave as though it has any bearing on their life. When we get sick, we take medicine, believing it can actually alleviate symptoms. When a crime is committed, we

presume that there actually is a perpetrator, and that we can be wrong about who we accuse. When we pick up an apple, we don't think it's simply a figment of our imagination, but instead eat it on the belief that it will provide nutrients to the body. If it has legs, relativism never gets very far. Whereas if there is anything that can be considered knowledge, it is that the Earth is moving beneath our feet.

[38] Another related distinction is one Barrow (2000) makes: "There is, for example, a very important difference between maintaining that there is no reality (no world out there, no facts, nothing given), and maintaining only that we can never truly know that reality or be certain that we understand it correctly."

[39] Barrow, 2000.

[40] 1) It is guided by natural law; 2) it is explained by reference to natural law; 3) it is testable against the empirical world; 4) its conclusions are tentative; 5) it is falsifiable.

[41] McLean v. Arkansas Board of Education, (1982). 529 F. Supp. 1255. http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/mclean-v-arkansas.html.

[42] *Biology – Integrated*, n.d.

[43] Gettier problems notwithstanding, though, as I hope to show, they shouldn't decrease the credence of JTB as the best model we have for knowledge.

[44] Note that lacking a belief in God is not the same has having a belief in the nonexistence of God. If Sarah thought she were 85% sure that God does *not* exist (or 15% sure that he does), then she could say that she does have a [dis]belief, just like her belief in the number of human bones.

[45] Actor Terrence Howard's theory of logic and mathematics, which attempts to prove that $1 \times 1 = 2$.

[46] This is only one of several versions, but I have yet to encounter a Gettier case that, in my mind, comes close to disproving JTB theory. For more, see Gettier, E. L. (1 June 1963). Is justified true belief knowledge? *Analysis*, 23(6), 121–123. 10.1093/analys/23.6.121.

[47] Schurz, 2024.

[48] Ministry of Education, n.d., *A framework*.

[49] Peters, 1966.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ministry of Education, n.d., *Rethinking curriculum*.

[52] Ministry of Education, n.d., *Science - Goals*.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ministry of Education, n.d., *Mathematics*.

[55] Ministry of Education, n.d., *Mathematics – Goals*.

[56] Ministry of Education, n.d., *Social studies – Goals*.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Ministry of Education, n.d., *Personal*.

[59] Hand, 2017.

[60] The phrase "the good life" can take on different connotations, depending on its usage in politics or economics. Here I am continuing the tradition of "Eudaimonia," the Greek term for "happy," "ethical," or "meaningful" life.

[61] Of course, some may dismiss moral education on other grounds, such as the opinion that morality is meaningless or unimportant, but I am not willing to entertain such attitudes here. If I did, I would be disposing the inherent goal of educating for the good life, too. Therefore, my focus here will be on the philosophical merits of moral knowledge as an epistemic good.

[62] I am not yet putting to rest this argument, for there are objections to this inference that morality is cognitive in the first place. I will wait to deal with these objections, though, in the next chapter, for now I only want to show that a the commonsense view doesn't hold moral propositions to be non-cognitive.

Chapter 2

Consider the following statements:

A. The universe is 13.7 billion years old.

B. Marie Antoinette was beheaded in 1793.

C. It is snowing in Haida Gwaii, BC.

D. Genocide is wrong.

E. Chocolate is the best flavour of ice cream.

F. Homeostasis maintains blood glucose levels in organisms.

G. Lying is good.

H. The human species originated in Africa before migrating globally.

First, see if you can rank your confidence in each claim by ordering every statement according to "strongly believe" at the top and "strongly disbelieve" at the bottom." For example, you could create a list like this:

1. D
2. F
3. B
4. H
5. A
6. E
7. C
8. G

Then, think about the process used to determine the likelihood of each claim. As discussed in the last chapter, there could be different methods appealed to when justifying a belief. You may be

inclined to place statement C fairly low if your weather app indicates there is no precipitation right now in the archipelago, or you may be inclined to place statement F fairly high if you value the consensus of medical experts to accord an accurate account of human biology. It is not mandatory for you to make these choices, of course, and though I am certainly not eager to commit an *argumentum ad populum*,[1] I do hope to show why patterns of intuition should be taken seriously.

The age of the cosmos and the historicity of the French Revolution, among F and H on this list, are just examples of the content included in the BC Curriculum.[2] This Ministry of Education therefore treats these facts as objective, knowable, and worth knowing. As discussed in the last chapter, an epistemic good, with respect to educational institutions, is a provable, and useful, set of information. And despite the many ways our tools for detecting reality are unreliable (our historical records could be subject to human error, our microbiological data could be miscalculated, etc.), schools can still be trusted. Though they are not omniscient arbiters of truth, educational institutions nonetheless disseminate epistemic goods, so long as the information in question is justified enough to count as "knowledge." This means that teachers can assert, with an immodest amount of confidence, that some facts are true and objective.

If we return to your personal ranking of the eight statements in the opening exercise, I presume that upon inspection you can find good reasons for your belief in certain claims and your disbelief in others. Though it's not necessary that your order is identical to mine, I suspect that you have similar intuitions, such as denouncing genocide and lying. There's even a good chance that you placed one of these moral beliefs as the strongest on your list. What similarities can you draw between these beliefs and the other claims about science or history? Notice that the character of these beliefs is dramatically different from something like a preference for

chocolate. Likewise, recognize that the same trust in rational intuition used to affirm knowledge is directing our moral sensibilities.

In the last chapter, I called attention to the double-edged nature of knowledge: it is both fragile and convincing. If you are willing to grant that you cannot *know* our universe's exact, or even estimate, age, for any number of legitimate reasons (be it that science isn't 100% reliable, or its methods could be mistaken, or its enterprise it produces is subjects because it's filtered through Eurocentric bias, etc.), and simultaneously are willing to still *say* that you know our universe's age, then you agree that to "know" something is to justifiably hold a belief that is very likely to be true; in the words of Thomas Nagel, "a lot [of moral realism's plausibility] depends on whether the possibility of realism is admitted in the first place."[3] The gulf between knowing this scientific fact and knowing a moral one, like the wrongness of genocide, is surprisingly small.

Moral Knowledge

Teaching ethics coherently necessarily involves affirming moral knowledge. Just like scientific knowledge, the premise of moral knowledge is bound to metaphysical realism. As such, moral anti-realism cannot justify moral education – only moral realism can.[4]

Consider by analogy the teaching of history. If a Social Studies class is to study the War of 1812, with emphasis on any educational aim, all of the learning is contingent on historical knowledge. For example, a lesson on the causes of the war only makes sense if the teacher and students agree that impressment actually occurred. There are those who are agnostic towards the realism of history, and suggest that events are always subjective to perspective, interpretation, and bias. Some of them may even insist so much skepticism about historical knowledge that they would deny any truth of the matter as knowable. Ask yourself: could a historical anti-realist be in

favour of history education? Maybe, but even less likely is the idea that she could teach it effectively and consistently. The whole paradigm would be flawed and nonsensical. I take it that moral education would be equally doomed on anti-realist pre-suppositions. Michael Hand avows that

> merely educating about morality, then, not only extends the period of childhood amorality to the point at which children are capable of autonomous moral choice, but also predictably results in some children autonomously choosing to be morally agnostic. It is, therefore, a form of moral education inadequate to the task of reliably bringing it about that children subscribe to moral standards and believe them to be justified.[5]

If moral propositions are just as artificial as historical ones, then teaching morality is baseless. It is futile to justify moral education without grounds for moral truth. Imagine desiring that a class of students come to obtain a particular moral insight, whilst disbelieving that this insight is true. John M. Mizzoni dismantles this mistake by writing "If every value is simply created and totally subjective then I have to ask why I should care to bother about sympathies or selfishness if I don't wish to?"[6] Furthermore, if in this lesson the students are taught that moral propositions are ultimately just the invention of human minds, then what reason will the students have to take moral precepts seriously? We wouldn't endorse such a paradoxical pursuit with respect to any other knowledge-based subject. Now, if you think this is because you deny that morality is knowledge-based, then I will strive to make you think otherwise in this chapter.

To illustrate what I mean by a moral fact, consider this claim: torturing animals is wrong. By torture, I mean the infliction of extreme pain in such a way that it is not to the benefit of the one being harmed.[7] By wrong, I mean we ought to not do it. This statement expresses a moral fact, on my view, so long as it possesses the five characteristics identified in Chapter 1:

- Epistemic confidence
- Universality

- Stance-independence
- Optimal justification
- Explanatory power

Though together they are "requisites for knowledge," recall that they are the constituent parts of JTB theory, where requisite 1 represents *belief*, requisites 2 and 3 represent *truth*, and requisites 4 and 5 represents *justification*. The statement "torturing animals is wrong" satisfies conditions because:

1. It is expressed with epistemic confidence.

   To begin, one must sincerely hold a moral belief not as an opinion, but in such a way comparable to other kinds of epistemic beliefs. By epistemic, one grants that such a belief corresponds to a feature of reality.

2. It is true for all people.

   This second criterion establishes the universality of the claim.[8] Torture has taken many forms, all of which were morally wrong.[9] It hypothetically could take many more forms, but we don't need to test these first in order to know they are wrong.[10]

3. Its truth is stance-independent.

   Thirdly, we must admit that our belief in the wrongness of torturing animals does not make it so. After all, not everyone will agree that torturing animals is wrong, especially those conducting it. As such, for something to be a fact, it must be true orthogonal to what we think of it. This third criterion therefore indicates that we are not creating knowledge, but discovering it.[11]

4. It is optimally justified.

This fourth criterion involves demonstration how a moral agent can apprehend and adjudicate true moral beliefs.

5. It describes a moral idea.

   Finally, we must clarifies the kind of knowledge in question, for indeed there are different types. We are not describing a mathematical or historical proposition, though I will later argue we are describing something *like* those things.

Before I begin to defend these convictions, I would like to preface this chapter by reminding the reader that the intention of this book is to make an *educational* argument. If someone in my shoes were to advocate for another knowledge-based domain to be represented in curricula, like how astronomy was fought for, she would similarly be disposed to draw from the relevant fields – astronomical science, astrophysics, astrochemistry, or cosmogony, among others – to build her case. However, she would not be expected to make an entirely *scientific* argument, for those have already been wagered (and won) in the scientific literature. Clearing that bar, again, would be unnecessary, and also not in the interest of educators. Instead, her readership calls for a simplified and concise, yet persuasive and rigorous, argument. What follows is the same approach for moral knowledge.[12]

Epistemic Confidence

One of the most influential moral thinkers, 20th century philosopher G. E. Moore, penned in his magnus opus *Principia Ethica* that "it is the business of Ethics, I must insist, not only to obtain true results, but also to find valid reasons for them."[13] Moore, before me, championed moral realism, for he was convinced that the best explanation of the moral data was that objective moral knowledge existed.

Moral knowledge was first denied by ethical non-cognitivists, who forwarded the idea that morality has been misunderstood. On non-cognitivism, moral language is not truth apt. Instead, a moral attestation such as "killing is wrong" fails to signify a belief about reality in the way a sentence like "killing is the taking of human life" does. Thus, moral utterances like "don't kill" (an instruction) or "boo to killing" (an emotion) are not candidates for truth or falsity. English philosopher Simon Blackburn contends that "the function of normative sentences is not to represent either peculiar Moorean facts about the world or more mundane empirical facts about the world. It is to avow attitudes, to persuade others, to insist on conformities and prescribe behavior."[14]

The first problem with ethical emotivism, as it's sometimes called, is that it assumes symmetry between human desires and supposed moral goods. But consider that often what is deemed morally important is opposite what one prefers. For example, a student may know she ought to be listening to her teacher, but possess no preference to do so, and indeed, will act in ways contrary to what she recognizes as morally dutiful. On emotivism, we would not expect to see these two diverge so often and so dramatically. Michael Smith criticizes this non-cognitivist view, accusing the anti-realist of being incapable of explaining the appearance of debate over moral beliefs bearing good enough reasons: "The problem here isn't just that we *say* that moral judgements can be true or false, though we certainly do do that. The problem is rather that the whole business of moral argument and moral reflection only makes sense on the assumption that moral judgements *are* truth-assessable."[15] Emotivism is not fitted to account for one's agreement that "chocolate is the best flavour of ice cream" is a emotive stance, and that "genocide is wrong" is not one.[16]

The other shape that ethical non-cognitivism takes is prescriptivism, made famous by R. M. Hare who thought that moral language is always action-guiding, that moral statements must have the logical form of imperatives. Though an element of prescriptivism is compatible with moral realism, and how I've defined morality generally in the introduction, some non-cognitivists would take prescriptivism to mean that *descriptive* moral statements are not cognitive. If ordinary language philosophy's[17] emphasis on the social use of language is correct, then moral judgements issue commands, but do not assess truth and declare propositions.

This objection commits the "speech act fallacy" as coined and defined by John Searle as breaching the following rule: "Any analysis of the meaning of a word must be consistent with the fact that the same word (or morpheme) can mean the same thing in all the different kinds of sentences in which it can occur."[18] The mistake is that non-cognitivism infers that moral judgements *are* made in performing certain speech acts, but are *not* made in stating facts, which is false if the same moral claim can be used to perform any number of speech acts simultaneously. Again, Smith iterates the quality of moral language as it's most commonly spoken: "we seem to think moral questions have correct answers, that the correct answers are made correct by objective moral facts" as well as that "when we make a moral judgement we thereby express our *beliefs* about the way these moral facts are. In forming moral opinions we acquire beliefs, representations of the way the world is morally."[19]

Conflating moral judgements with emotive or instructional attitudes and desires may explain some of our cognitive dissonance, but it neglects to offer the most plausible account of many other instances of moral thinking. Take the claim that the Holocaust is a moral wrong. The wrongness of the Holocaust will either be an opinion you happen to have, no truer than your belief that *Inception* is the greatest movie of all time, or it will be true in the way that the

mitochondria really is an energy-producing organelle. Non-cognitivism is contingent on moral language lacking propositional content, which seems unlikely when we look closely at what is meant by moral statements. A 2008 study found that at a neurological level, beliefs about the physical nature of the world, such as "a water molecule is composed of hydrogen and oxygen atoms," appear identical to moral beliefs, such as "it is good to be kind to children."[20] Neuroimaging has likewise shown the striking similarity between mathematical beliefs, like "2 + 6 + 8 = 16," and moral ones, like "it is good to let your children know that you love them."[21] We are willing to treat moral judgements about the Holocaust as fact because we think of them in those terms. Perhaps we lack the same conviction when it comes to inconclusive moral debates (e.g., the wrongness of abortion), but it seems unlikely that *no* moral beliefs bear truth content when they are used precisely for that purpose. The philosopher Jürgen Habermas posits that "[a]s long as the cognitive content of morality could be expressed in assertoric statements, moral judgments could be viewed as true of false,"[22] meaning that moral assertions can be phrased propositionally, and when done so, can be cognitive.

Note that cognitivism and its counterpart merely seek to denote whether human *beliefs* about morality can be true. This is to say that even on cognitivism – accepting the proposition that moral statements can be true or false – most moral beliefs could still be wrong, even ones as strong as the Holocaust being evil. As such, error theory grants that sincere moral judgements try to describe reality, but that they fail, because there are no moral features in the world. To put into perspective, consider the "impossible creatures" analogy: the same way you reject the existence of unicorns is how the error theorist rejects moral truth; to be skeptical of unicorns doesn't mean all statements about unicorns are incoherent, for it would be correct to say that "my dog is not a

unicorn." Therefore, the serious meta-ethical challenge to moral knowledge is not non-cognitivism, but anti-realism.

As a moral realist, I intend to use ethical language in such a way that is truth-apt. At the very least, then, I can speak for myself and how I would like my views to be understood. As such, moving forward I will put aside ethical non-cognitivism and maintain that moral language can represent beliefs about truth. Instead of non-cognitivism, error theory generally holds that moral judgements *are* truth-evaluable, but always false. This view is generally defended by two lines of argumentation, both made famous by Australian philosopher J. L. Mackie: 1) the argument from queerness, and 2) the argument from relativity.

Mackie's first argument, from queerness, attacks moral properties as too strange to be taken seriously. The existence of moral truth necessitates the world bearing "qualities or relations of a very strange sort, utterly different from anything else in the universe."[23] What is more, we would need "some special faculty of moral perception or intuition, utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else," all of which demands belief in unusual "objective prescriptions" and weird epistemological equipment.[24] Essentially, there is valid suspicion surrounding how an ethical imperative like "you ought not torture kittens" can be a knowable feature of reality.

Though some versions of moral realism are guilty of appealing to indefensible presuppositions, like Divine Command Theory[25] (which affirms supernatural elements of morality), Mackie is mistaken in his sweeping generalizations. Contemporary moral realism is not the same as a metaphysical Platonism, for example.[26] To the contrary, moral realism is best summarized by Thomas Nagel as the view that "there are reasons for action, that we have to discover them instead of deriving them from our preexisting motives – and that in this way we

can acquire new motives superior to the old."[27] To help make his point, Nagel has us think of the badness of pain:

> [Pain] is not some mysterious further property that all pains have, but just the fact that there is a reason for anyone capable of viewing the world objectively to want it to stop. The view that values are real is not the view that they are real occult entities or properties, but that they are real values: that our claims about value and about what people have reason to do may be true or false independently of our beliefs and inclinations.[28]

Some skeptics may grant the distinction, but will still accuse the very notion of moral knowledge as a misnomer, and therefore asymmetrical to scientific or mathematical truth. Supposedly, we cannot treat claims like "it is true that the sky is blue" and "it is true that murder is wrong" as identical uses of "truth," for we would be guilty of a category error, Instead, there is a difference between descriptive assertions, like "lying is harmful," from prescriptive ones, like "one should not lie." This delineation could easily explain why domains like math and science are believed to be different from morality, for they make claims about the way the world actually is, not the way the world should be. Enlightenment philosopher David Hume called it an is/ought problem to distinguish positive facts from normative statements, given "it's necessary that [an ought] should be observed and explained; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it."[29] In the spirit of Hume's differentiation, there can be no moral facts - certainly not any like the facts taught in schools.

Consider, though, how normative values inform myriad projects that, instead of facing the same philosophical demands from cynics, are taken for granted as self-explanatory. Scientific knowledge is not free from value judgement; in fact, it only exists insofar as experts can infer conclusions by appealing to respect for, and trust in, reason. For example, the law of noncontradiction states that contradictory propositions cannot both be true in the same sense at

the same time: the two propositions "*p* is the case" and "*p* is not the case" are mutually exclusive. It is by virtue of this law that you cannot conceive of a round square, or a cup that is blue all over and red all over. You cannot hope to explain why the law of noncontradiction exists without using it in your own explanation, always getting caught in a circular argument. Indeed, a scientist cannot explain why the laws of logic or causality exist, nor derive from nature why she ought to study nature, nor account for why there is something rather than nothing. And yet, a scientist's silence on all these questions says nothing of the fact that reason, logic, and causality do exist. Certainly, a non-cognitivist mustn't denounce moral obligations for being too queer, when the reality has never been a stranger to queerness.

Instead, I must contend Hume has it backwards: it is not the case that we cannot derive an ought from an is. To the contrary, we cannot derive an is without an ought. To illustrate, we need only refer to one of our early examples of a scientific or historical fact, such as the locus of the Earth in the universe; if the Sun is at the centre of the solar system, we know this by virtue of our obligations to reason coherently. After all, such conclusions ought to behave the fundamentality of logic, like the law of the excluded middle: the Earth either is in the centre of the galaxy, or it isn't. It cannot be neither, and it cannot be both.

Indeed, non-moral normative statements seem to be widely accepted without facing the same sort of philosophical interrogation; epistemic laws are plausible, as evidenced by a statement like "you should believe the Holocaust was a real event." The claim is normative, as it states what one ought to accept, epistemically. A Humean perspective might likewise reject normative epistemology, since one should not believe in the existence of something – the truth of an ought - if it cannot be observed objectively – like matter and energy. But to reject normative epistemology by appealing to this principle would be committing a self-defeating fallacy: how

can it be so that one should not believe in these kinds of things? Terence Cuneo argues that denying the existence of epistemic facts like these undermines itself, guilty of saying something like "Epistemic nihilism is true, but we have no reason to believe it."[30] Rather than commit such a blunder, Cuneo uses a parity argument to show that we can already identify punitive facts that seem: 1) reason-giving; 2) objective; 3) supervening on non-normative reality. If a skeptic is foolish to deny these qualities in epistemic facts, like "you should believe the Holocaust was a real event," then it is not only coherent that epistemic facts exist, but very likely. This is why Habermas attests that "[w]hen we know what is morally right to do, we know that there is no good (epistemic) reason to act otherwise."[31]

Any charge that moral realism is too weird to be true is simply mistaken. There are, indeed, many non-scientific truths: take complex mathematical facts, which need not be physically real, nor empirically discernable, to be true or knowable, respectively. Our willingness to buy into the queerness of these things may just afford us more intellectual credit to spend on a moral theory.

Universality

A stronger objection comes in Mackie's second argument, from relativity, one shared by other meta-ethical positions that brush shoulders with error theory, including constructivism and contractarianism. The common footing they find is in explaining moral disagreement the same way the aforementioned relativists explain metaphysical disputes. Because there is vast moral disagreement between societies and eras, Mackie contends that moral judgements "reflect adherence to and participation in different ways of life."[32] Here, Mackie uses the example of differing views on monogamy, and suggests that one culture isn't likely to have more grounds for prohibiting it as the other is for permitting it. Thus, there cannot be a moral "truth" to the

practice of monogamy, at least universally, as it will only be relatively true to each group who socially constructs moral norms.

However, recall that there is just as much inconsistency in beliefs about reality across people groups and points in time: magic and superstition do not receive the same esteem in the 21st century as they did in the 14th, just as the regard for science is not as high in central Africa as it is in northern Europe.[33] Imagine a dystopian future where, thanks to propaganda and indoctrination, everyone came to believe that the Moon landing was a hoax. The fact that the Apollo 11 mission *did* occur in 1969 would not depend on people's recognition of it. The lack of unanimity in belief of *x* says very little of the existence of *x*. If anything, Mackie is under-appreciating the extent of moral *agreement* that exists within and between cultures.

Slavery was abundant in the 14th century, compared to its maligned status of today. We could postulate that the conflicting attitudes between then and now reveal there is no objective truth regarding the moral permissibility of slavery. Or, as David Enoch argues, we could say that "slavery is and always has been objectively morally impermissible and the [practitioners of the past] were simply morally mistaken on this matter."[34]

A better explanation for moral disagreement coexisting with universal moral truth is a multitude of psychological factors. Moral mistakes are easy to make when the stakes are high. No matter how sharp the reasoning is for ethical veganism, convincing people that their everyday dietary habits engender gratuitous suffering, rendering them moral monsters, will be both extremely difficult to accept (cognitively) and to change (practically). Enoch writes that "very much is at stake, and so false moral beliefs can rather easily be explained in terms of their psychological payoffs."[35] Note that Enoch is not accusing moral agents of *desiring* to accept

something epistemically, but rather than such desires can subconsciously influence what people accept epistemically.

In establishing the cognitivism of morality, I argued earlier that moral propositions are unlike emotional attitudes and personal taste. As such, real moral facts are not relative to place or time. As Steven Pinker notes, "One can easily say, 'I don't like brussels sprouts, but I don't care if you eat them,' but no one would say, 'I don't like killing, but I don't care if you murder someone.' "[36] It is definitionally true, then, that morality transcend national, cultural, or religious contexts, otherwise, as far as I'm concerned, we are not actually talking about morality.

For a fact to apply to everyone, it need not even be knowable in the first place. The roundness of the globe has always been true, regardless of one's point of view or paradigm. For much of human history, this fact was not known, and still today, it is not universally accepted. Likewise, it is ineliminable to remember that the truth of a fact is not contingent on any person or group's belief in it. To the contrary, it is possible that moral facts could be true in spite of no rational being recognizing it.

The universality of a historical fact doesn't mean that it must have occurred in every country's past, or must apply to every country's culture. For example, the historicity of the Haitian slave revolt against French colonial rule in 18th-century Saint-Domingue is universal, in the following senses: 1) the methods used to qualify its truth are the same for any other historical fact, whether or not they occurred in Haiti; 2) the events are not true only for Haitians, but for all people, equally capable of recognizing the truth of the events. Likewise, I am positing that a moral fact must be universal insofar that it's based on transcultural and timeless principles, and that it can be knowable by anyone.

Moral realism does not predict that all rational minds will agree on moral truth. But it does entail, using my established reasons for cognitivism and epistemic reasons – that our moral beliefs hold to the principle of universality. Any sincere belief in the wrongness of genocide tacitly condemns it in all possible worlds. As such, the phenomenon of moral disagreement is neither a serious challenge to moral knowledge nor its instruction; as Dominik Balg sharply articulates, "the observation that many if not most moral questions are controversial fails to pose a critical epistemic challenge to knowledge transmission accounts of moral education."[37]

The Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant made a similar point about universality in his development of the categorical imperative,[38] though called it *universalizability*. Kant's principle states that only a person should only behave in ways that they would reasonably expect others to do in similar situations: "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law."[39] Notice, however, that a universalizable action does not imply *truth*. Though my condition has its origin in Kant, and points to the same conclusion (to be discussed further in Chapter 3), I prefer the term *universal* with respect to moral ontology to demonstrate that a correct moral *proposition* is true no matter where its observer happens to be geographically. Many modern moral realists, myself included, maintain that 1) some moral principles are universalizable, and 2) some moral truths are universal.

To illustrate the precision of my term, then, consider that you know that apples are red. Of course, we can stipulate that not *all* apples are green, and even all *parts* of apples are red. Still, the correctness of the original claim is true of some apples, and is *universally* true. If you believe that torturing animals is wrong, you mean that it is universally wrong, while also clarifying that not *all* forms of inducing harm are wrong.

Especially in education, resistance to universal ethics sometimes comes way of a demand for cultural tolerance. In an aversion to presumed Eurocentric arrogance, someone may insist that we ought to respect moral disagreements and forgo any assumptions of superiority. However, this objection is not a serious argument; David Enoch points out how foolish it would be to "hide the truth of metaethical realism from the masses, because the average realist is much less tolerant than the average antirealist, or because realism leads (causally) to fanaticism."[40] Even if these were the cases, nothing follows about the truth of metaethical universalism, and whether moral disagreement says anything of realism being false.

Stance-Independence

Consider the operations you run in your mind when trying to decide on an ethical course of action. If you are, say, trying to facilitate a quarrel between two people you care about, you will want to think carefully on what to do. Jonathan Dancy argues that engaging in this process already signifies the ontological status of morality:

> First you try to decide which features [of the moral data here] make a difference to how you should behave. It is true that we call this 'deciding,' but it is no different from deciding that it will probably not rain tomorrow; in both cases we think of what we are doing as the attempt to get things right. We don't suppose that it is up to us what matters, so that any sincere 'decision' is right, any more than that it is up to us what the weather will be.[41]

Stance-independency, simply, is the view that moral beliefs correspond to facts external of our minds.

Mackie's overarching issue is with what he sees as the stance-dependency of moral claims: "to say that [objective prescriptions] are intrinsically action-guiding is to say that the reasons that they give for doing or for not doing something are independent of that agent's desires or purposes."[42] After all, since morality often seems to ask us to act in ways we prefer not

to, there must exist reasons to act external to our minds. This argument is sometimes identified as part of a larger "naturalistic" challenge.

Basically, a moral realist could argue that if there are objective statements to be made about real and observable properties of the world, such as happiness or wellbeing, and if these are moral goods, then it follows that objective statements can be about moral goods. This tradition has its roots in John Stuart Mill, whose seminal work on utilitarianism, in which he opines that "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure."[43] But, if moral knowledge simply describes the way the world is, then we could mistakenly sanctify natural behaviours as good ones. Suppose we observe that humans tend to eat three meals a day. Knowing this routine, should we necessarily contend that humans *ought* to eat three meals a day? Moore would call this a naturalistic fallacy.

However, not every fact is a moral one, and it is the moral facts that pertain to moral aims. After all, it would be a mistake to call meal habits "scientific" knowledge. The fact that humans eat three meals daily is true like scientific facts, but it is more sociological than scientific. In the same way, we can only induce moral prescriptions from moral knowledge, and moral knowledge must describe, in some sense, moral goods or lack thereof.

Still, even moral behaviour is a natural phenomenon that is influenced by evolutionary mechanisms both random and undesigned. As such, we need to carefully disentangle moral obligation from moral tendencies. For example, humans behave in many ways that we might call "moral," such as parents nurturing their kin, even though these behaviours can be explained in

non-moral ways, and could be driven by non-moral incentives. If we have evolved, like our evolutionary cousins, to survive and cohabitate with others, then our strategies will be arbitrary, not absolute.

Take non-reciprocal altruism. Naturalists have observed this "I'll scratch your back, you scratch mine" behaviour occurring among animals, such as in cleaning symbiosis, which is the mutually beneficial relationship between two creatures of different species where the "cleaner" removes (usually by consuming) the unwanted materials attached to the surface of the "client." The behaviour has been described by biologists Alexandra Grutter and Robert Poulin as "[cooperative] in nature as opposed to the tooth-and-claw struggle for existence."[44] Are we to believe, though, that each animal *ought* to serve one another? We could, but we wouldn't want to believe it simply by pointing to each creatures' programming, for then we would be condemning ourselves to believing that they ought to do everything else they find natural, impulsive, or self-serving. Instead, we would want to say that one ought to behave morally *in spite of* their evolutionary instincts.

Opposite ethical naturalism, which stipulates that moral facts are made true by objective features of the world, is non-naturalism, which ascends to a belief in moral truth as autonomous from the natural world. Within the genus of moral realism, non-naturalism categorically denies that moral knowledge can be reduced to non-moral features, like naturalism does (whom Mackie's critique). For instance, a hedonistic utilitarian could claim that the maximization of pleasure is morally good. This assertion in effect equates "good" with "the maximization of pleasure." An understanding of moral realism as the sum of maximal goods alone is not sufficient for moral knowledge, and cannot withstand the naturalistic fallacy, for a few reasons. Moore criticizes ethical naturalism using the open-question argument, summarized here:

1. If *x* is good by definition, then it is meaningless to ask "Is it true that *x* is good?"
2. The question "Is it true that *x* is good?" is not meaningless.
3. Therefore, *x* is not good by definition.

Premise 2 is an open-question; we can muse, in good faith, whether a statement like "altruism is good" is true. On ethical naturalism, such a consideration wouldn't be possible, but must be a closed question (e.g. if John is a bachelor, it is incoherent to ask "but is John married?"). Moore permits the relevance of natural properties to moral truth whilst avowing that the latter is not held hostage to the former in any definitional way:

> It may be true that all things which are good are also something else, just as it is true that all things which are yellow produce a certain kind of vibration in the light. And it is a fact, that Ethics aims at discovering what are those other properties belonging to all things which are good. But far too many philosophers have thought that when they named those other properties they were actually defining good; that these properties, in fact, were simply not "other," but absolutely and entirely the same with goodness.[45]

On the other hand, non-naturalism is not forced to divorcing normative and non-normative facts entirely. Consider the difference between the following claims:

A. Driving under the influence of drugs increases the chance of fatality.

   Y. Therefore, people should not drive while drunk.

B. Ford manufactures over 8,000 motor vehicles per day.

   Z. Therefore, General Motors should make 8,000 cars a day.

Fact A reveals information about a moral value: human life. Fact B does not include any obvious information about any values. Both are true, but only one fits my definition of moral knowledge, and therefore only one can help us decide how we ought to live. The normative induction of Z is unjustified. 18th century moral philosopher Richard Price avers this idea that some assertions and actions reflect a moral essence:

> [A]ll actions . . . have a nature . . . This may be, that some of them are right, others wrong. But if this is not allowed; if no actions are . . . of a moral obligatory nature . . . it follows that, in themselves, they *are* all indifferent. This is what is essentially true of them, and this is what understandings, that perceive right must perceive them to be . . . [I]t seems sufficient to overthrow any scheme that such consequences . . . should arise from it . . . all beings enjoy, from the reasons of things and the nature of actions, liberty to act as they will.[46]

In short, Price pushes against the assumption that all actions are morally indifferent. Some are morally loaded. We will discus how the relationship between normative and non-normative facts is obtained later – for Mackie poses another argument on this seeming incongruity – but for now I hope to show that moral realism can escape the naturalistic fallacy.

The relativist may agree that moral knowledge is tenable, but only insofar as it applies to relative notions of moral goods and values. After all, prohibiting drunk driving is only sensible for those who care about human life. What about those who do not? Most variations of moral constructivism hold that a moral claim is inevitably dictated and bound by personal preference or cultural norms. In other words, what may be morally "true" for one person will not necessarily be the same for another.[47] The realist needs to exhibit how a moral goal, like the minimization of human suffering, can be truer than another goal, like the maximization of suffering.

To illuminate the plausibility of existent reasons external to stances, Parfit provides is the "Future Tuesday Indifference" thought experiment, which demonstrates the intuitive nature of reason-giving, stance-independent, non-natural facts:

> A certain hedonist cares greatly about the quality of his future experiences. With one exception, he cares equally about all the parts of his future. The exception is that he has Future-Tuesday-Indifference. Throughout every Tuesday he cares in the normal way about what is happening to him. But he never cares about possible pains or pleasures on a future Tuesday. Thus he would choose a painful operation on the following Tuesday rather than a much less painful operation on the following Wednesday.... This indifference is a bare fact. When he is planning his future, it is simply true that he always prefers the prospect of great suffering on a Tuesday to the mildest pain on any other day.[48]

It should be clear that the hedonist in this scenario is irrational. But the only way he can be irrational is if he has reasons to act contrary to his desires, which runs counter to the stance-dependence hypothesis.

Recall that stance-dependency is unique to moral anti-realism. Meta-ethicist Melis Erdur recapitulates anti-realism as "amount[ing] to the view that the ultimate reason why anything is right or wrong (including things like slavery, genocide, torturing babies) is the fact that we actually make a judgment to that effect. And that is simply a moral misjudgment – what counts most, from a moral point of view, against such things is not that we disapprove of them."[49] And yet we know that, like any stance-independent truth, the wrongness of genocide isn't won by majority vote. If the genocide is wrong, its wrongness isn't contingent on our thinking so. After all, molecular composition isn't true *because* of our knowledge of it, but *despite* it.

This is why moral realists agree that moral truths are not contingent, but necessary. Logical argumentation can prove that some conceptual truths, like "a bachelor is an unmarried man" or "2 + 2 = 4" are not dependent on subjective stances, but are necessarily true. We converge on these truths by virtue of "disciplined reflection." That we come to affirm universal moral concepts by the same process is evident of their stance-independence. John Bengson et al. maintain that such moral concepts possess "disciplined necessity" in their Disciplined Necessity Argument from here, summarized as follows:

1. If a range of moral facts weren't stance-independent, then their disciplined necessity would be inexplicable.
2. Their disciplined necessity is explicable.
3. Therefore, a range of moral facts are stance-independent.

Premise 1 is the natural implication of moral anti-realism, for the view stipulates that moral facts do not have disciplined necessity. And yet Premise 2 is demonstrable in virtue of both several of the arguments already discussed, but in particular, the arguments remaining in our coming section on optimality justifications.

In the same way that someone like L. E. J. Brouwer posits that mathematical truth is not contingent on a metaphysical Platonic realm, so too do ethical non-naturalists in their argument for moral truth. Consider the objectivity of the following mathematical equation: $C = \pi d$. This expression is mathematical fact, according to my five requisites for knowledge:

1. It is believed that it corresponds to reality.
2. It is universally true (a person's identity, geography, or culture are not relevant to its truth).
3. It is stance-independent (it is not made true by a person's belief in it).
4. It is optimally justified (like other mathematical proofs, we can test and falsify it).
5. It explains a geometric concept (as opposed to, say, a historical one).

We have good reasons to be confident in believing it as a proposition about the world (the student can trust her math teacher as an epistemic authority, or can trust her own faculties of making sense of the circumference formula).

The objectivity of this equation, just like any mathematical fact, is not contingent on observation in the external world. We should not be humble about mathematical facts; we can actually *know* what circumference is and how it applies to the real world, and we really *should* instruct it in schools. Anything less would be intellectually dishonest and educationally unjust.

Crucially, mathematics is non-natural. Rather than verifying a mathematical proof by looking into a microscope or dissecting some phenomena, we reason, intuit, deduct, and infer. In

fact, the same is true for other kinds of knowledge. Parfit elucidates how such non-natural facts can exist with the following examples:

> Someone might argue:
>
> (M) It could not have been true that nothing ever existed. If that had been true, there would have been the truth that nothing existed. So your alleged possibility is self-contradictory.
>
> This objection, I believe, fails. We can claim that, like numbers,
>
> (N) truths are not a kind of entity about which it is a good question whether, in some ontological sense, they exist, or are real.
>
> The relevant question is only whether something is, or would have been, *true*. Most truths are true only because things of some other kind exist, in an ontological sense. But truth do not have to exist, in some part of reality. Truths need only be true. We should admit that, in one sense, truths exist. We should not claim that
>
> (O) if it had been true that nothing ever existed, there would not even have been the truth that nothing existed.
>
> We should admit that, if this had been true, there would have been this truth. But this claim would use the phrase 'would have been' in a non-ontological sense.[50]

In this defence of non-naturalism, Parfit reveals the resemblance moral knowledge bears to its mathematical counterpart. Therefore, by analogy to true arithmetical beliefs, he surmises that "evolution can explain how, without being causally affected by irreducibly normative properties, we can form true beliefs about epistemic and practical reasons, and about what we ought to believe, and want, and do."[51]

The are ways to bridge the gap between intuition and stance-independent truths. Hossein Dabbagh aptly observes that "[j]ust as perceptual experiences are typically non-voluntary, intuition is a non-voluntary state and can oppose what we believe or are inclined to believe. Hence, insofar as intuitions are akin to perceptions in being presentations, they are belief-

independent."[52] It is the job of epistemology to do this work, while what we have covered thus far is an ontological account of moral belief and truth.

If we return to the original proposition, that torturing animals is wrong, I think we are well on our way to classifying it as a moral fact. Thus far, I have provided an argument for how the statement could satisfy the first three requisites for knowledge, which are:

1. Epistemic confidence
2. Universality
3. Stance-independence

I say "could" because it's possible that torturing animals could also be good, and that the goodness of torture satisfies the requisites, too. We still need to look at means of *knowing* either to be true. After all, the mathematical examples only work because of the processes used to vindicate them. And these justifications for believing in non-natural knowledge do differ from those used for natural knowledge, like observational science.

For instance, take the existence of francium, a chemical element discovered in 1939. The truth of francium's existence is universal and stance-independent; the truth of it is not made real by our recognition of it, for francium predates 1939, but the knowledge of it is dependent on the discovery. Thanks to Marguerite Perey's purification process, we now have an optimal justification that instantiates an epistemic belief. If there are facts about Alkali metals that await our uncovering, perhaps there are also moral facts that could be verified using a justification method.

Summary

In this chapter, I applied notions of morality to three of the five characteristics that must feature in knowledge underpinning education, as a test to see if there are propositional moral

beliefs, and if these beliefs could be true. Possible objections might concern the tenability of my meta-ethical position, the adequateness of my criteria for knowledge, and the epistemic symmetry of diverse forms of knowledge, among others. My conception of moral knowledge may not be capable of dismantling all criticisms, though I maintain that I have said enough such that the burden of proof is on the skeptic to demonstrate why my conception is incoherent. In any case, I hope that the argument presented here will be effective in provoking thoughts around epistemic goods, and useful in the wider context of knowledge considerations in philosophy of education. The next section will tackle some of these questions that remain, such as how to ascertain correct moral belief, how to adjudicate between conflicting moral intuitions, and how to effectively teach ethics.

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Chapter 2 Endnotes

[1] A logical fallacy based on claiming something is correct simply because so many people happen to agree with it.

[2] A. The Earth is 4.5 billion years old (Science 10).

B. Marie Antoinette was beheaded in 1793 (Social Studies 9).

F. Homeostasis maintains blood glucose levels in organisms (Anatomy and Physiology 12).

H. The human species originated in Africa before migrating globally (Social Studies 7).

[3] Nagel, 1986. For the full quote:

I think the burden of proof has been often misplaced in this debate, and that a defeasible presumption that values need not be illusory is entirely reasonable until it is shown not to be. Like the presumption that things exist in an external world, the presumption that there are real values and reasons can be defeated in individual cases, if a purely subjective account of the appearances is more plausible. And like the presumption of an external world, its complete falsity is not self-contradictory. The reality of values, impersonal or otherwise, is not entailed by the totality of appearances any more than the reality of a physical universe is. But if either of them is recognized as a possibility, then its reality in detail can be confirmed by appearances, at least to the extent of being rendered more plausible than the alternatives. So a lot depends on whether the possibility of realism is admitted in the first place.

[4] In the field of moral education, this perspective tends to, regretfully, only be held on religious premises. Take development psychologist Thomas Lickona, who poses the problem in a way I do in this chapter: “Character education reasserts the idea of objective morality . . . [A] truth . . . . independent of the knower . . . Thus, objective moral truths have a claim on our conscience and behaviour.” Lickona goes on to ground these assumptions in the context of Christian evangelicalism, whereas I hope to convince readers that an objectivist moral education can be entirely secular.

[5] Hand, 2017.

[6] Mizzoni, 1995.

[7] We can, of course, imagine morally permissible acts of hurting animals, such as performing life-saving surgical operations. But torture is uniquely not helpful to the tortured.

[8] The truth of something can be established by its universality. If water freezes at zero degrees in Canada, water must also freeze at the same temperature in Morocco. Some may resist, suggesting that a moral truth could be conditional, with one example being that killing is not always wrong. However, if we grant that in some situations, like self-defence, killing is not wrong, then what we really have is a semantic problem. The moral realist can therefore agree

that killing is not always wrong, but still say that *murder* is always wrong, wherein murder is qualified as killing *not* in self-defence (or any other exemption that makes killing morally permissible).

[9] If you think you have in mind an example of morally acceptable torture, then 1) you have incorrectly misunderstood my definition of torture, and you are actually thinking of something else, or 2) we can apply my forthcoming argument (particularly the method outlined in Chapter 3) to check if it holds up under scrutiny.

[10] There will inevitably be hypothetical challenges, such as "greater good" arguments that pose if something is always wrong, in principle, or if it can be justified if the goods outweigh the costs. I will address this issue in Chapter 3, but for now I will simply note that it is *because* of moral evils like pain and suffering that make torture wrong, and any appeal to justify it would have to be to prevent the same sorts of moral evils in others.

[11] If something is stance-dependent, it cannot be an objective fact. There have been many events in history that were observed and recorded by a number of different people who report the story differently. Point of views will differ, and memories will recall information inaccurately. Whatever *did* occur is what is true, and it can be knowable if we have good justification. However, something may have objectively happened even without our recognizing it.

[12] For further reading on advanced moral philosophy that inspires my argument though is too technical to fit within the scope of this book, please see:

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Zimmerman, A. (2010, July 8). *Moral epistemology*. Routledge.

[13] Moore, 1903.

[14] Blackburn, 2006.

[15] Smith, 1991.

[16] Emotivists should also ponder to what extent their theory extends to other views. Alex O'Connor has suggested that even all scientific beliefs can be reduced to reductive feelings of intuitive pleasure – what he's casually called "global emotivism."

[17] For more on ordinary language philosophy (OLP), see Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.

[18] Searle, 1969.

[19] Smith, 1991.

[20] Harris et al., 2008.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Habermas, 1996.

[23] Mackie, 1977.

[24] Ibid.

[25] There are a few philosophical problems with DCT. Peter Railton (2017) gives one:

> We can imagine a God-like being arranging all the features of all the stones in the world, then wondering whether to add to this world any consciousness . . . But we cannot imagine such a being fixing all the features of an act of inflicting prolonged agony upon another person for one's own amusement, then having a choice to make about whether to make this a good or bad thing, or something there is a reason to stop. Here, I think, we do encounter inconceivability.

[26] Relating to Plato's theory of the Forms.

[27] Nagel, 1986.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Hume, 1739.

[30] Cuneo, 2007.

[31] Habermas, 1996.

[32] Mackie, 1977.

[33] Rabesandratana, 2019.

[34] Enoch, 2009.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Pinker, 2008.

[37] Balg, 2023.

[38] The categorical imperative is, briefly, the deontological maxim to only act whereby one can, at the same time, will that the act become a universal law.

[39] Kant, 1785.

[40] Enoch, 2009.

[41] Dancy, 1991.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Mill, 1863.

[44] Grutter, A. S., & Poulin, R, 1996.

[45] Moore, 1903.

[46] Price, 1787.

[47] This basic idea may be correct without moral knowledge being false. If our moral aim is to eliminate human suffering, then the fact that Sarah ought to donate 10% of her annual income to a human rights charity can exist simultaneously with the fact that Jonah ought to donate 1%. The only aspect of moral knowledge that needs defending is that it can be objective in a case-specific way. Similarly, a physical injury for one person can require different (but equally objective) medical treatment than someone else.

[48] Parfit, 1987.

[49] Erdur, 2016.

[50] Parfit, 2017.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Dabbagh, 2022.

Chapter 3

In 1928, American poet Robinson Jeffers wrote "Hurt Hawks," supposedly based on the experience of his family caring for an injured harrier that his son rescued:[1]

> The broken pillar of the wing jags from the clotted shoulder,
> The wing trails like a banner in defeat,
> No more to use the sky forever but live with famine
> And pain a few days: cat nor coyote
> Will shorten the week of waiting for death, there is game without talons.
> He stands under the oak-bush and waits
> The lame feet of salvation; at night he remembers freedom
> And flies in a dream, the dawns ruin it.
> He is strong and pain is worse to the strong, incapacity is worse.
> The curs of the day come and torment him
> At distance, no one but death the redeemer will humble that head,
> The intrepid readiness, the terrible eyes.
> The wild God of the world is sometimes merciful to those
> That ask mercy, not often to the arrogant.
> You do not know him, you communal people, or have you forgotten him;
> Intemperate and savage, the hawk remembers him;
> Beautiful and wild, the haws, and men that are dying, remember him.
>
> I'd sooner, except the penalties, kill a man than a hawk; but the great redtail
> Had nothing left but unable misery
> From the bones too shattered for mending, the wind that trailed under his talons when he moved.
> We had fed him for six weeks, I gave him freedom,
> He wandered over the foreland hill and returned in the evening, asking for death,
> Not like a beggar, still eyed with the old
> Implacable arrogance. I gave him the lead gift in the twilight. What fell was relaxed,
> Owl-downy, soft feminine feathers; but what
> Soared: the fierce rush: the night-herons by the flooded river cried fear at its rising
> Before it was quite unsheathed from reality.[2]

What can we learn from this poem, whose speaker laments that after six weeks of tending to the animal, resolved to mercy-kill him? An English teacher may suggest figurative language techniques, such as the simile "like a banner in defeat." A biology teacher could say the

importance of wing functionality in birds of prey, and at what point bones are "too shattered for mending." A psychology teacher might focus on the behavioural tendencies of the hawk, like its "intrepid readiness." But only a moral teacher can tell us what normative wisdom we should accept, or reject, when it comes to treating animals ourselves.

It is fair to be skeptical that "Hurt Hawks" could be *morally* educational. After all, there appears to be several complications to guaranteeing a singular and unifying moral truth in just one poem. A careful reader may naturally wonder:

- Do animals have the same moral worth as humans?
- Do animals experience pain in the same way as humans?
- Is an animal's suffering the only, or most, relevant factor in how one should treat it?
- Can we be sure the injury is beyond repair?
- What mechanism is being used to determine the moral course of action?
- Is that mechanism reliable?
- What makes the poet a moral authority worth listening to in the first place?

These questions are entirely legitimate, and if left unanswered, leave little reason left to take seriously the notion of moral learning, at least with respect to a poem like Jeffers.' However, if you agree that there are moral insights for us to discover – be them in poetry, literature, science, history, and so forth – then you are committed to accepting the possibility of moral knowledge. For instance, as argued in Chapter 2, there are compelling reasons to think that moral realism is true. The relevant question for this chapter will be to what extent such knowledge is knowable. If you disagree that there are moral insights, it may be because you are a metaphysical anti-realist or an ethical non-cognitivist. As I have already tried to demonstrate why the former is incompatible with the aims of education (in Chapter 1), and why the latter is implausible (in

Chapter 2), I will not be responding to these objections here. Instead, my focus will be on dismantling criticisms of the justificatory nature of moral beliefs and theories.

So far, I have argued for the plausibility of an utterance like "torturing animals is wrong" possessing moral truth. In the last chapter, I evaluated this statement according to the first three of five criteria necessary for all propositional knowledge, wherein knowledge is understood as justified true belief. Recall that, on my view, a sentence is epistemically eligible (that is, knowable, learnable, and teachable), if:

1. We are epistemically confident in it, as we are with other facts
2. It can be shown to be universally true
3. Its truth is stance independent
4. We can justify it optimally
5. It explains a moral concept

In this chapter, I endeavour to complete the second half of my argument that the existence and knowability of moral knowledge is demonstrable. So long as an acceptance of JTB theory admits that a belief can count as a fact when satisfactorily justified, I maintain the same rationale applies to beliefs of a moral sort.[3] I begin with a discussion of *optimality justification*, Gerhard Schurze's account of foundation-theoretic epistemology introduced in Chapter 1. In this section, I attempt to elucidate the means by which one ascertains correct moral belief, and how one adjudicates between conflicting moral intuitions, which I argue can be done by appealing to morally-coded data like conscious wellbeing. After that, I expand on the *explanatory power* of beliefs that are moral in nature, which thus concludes our summary of five requisites for moral knowledge. I end by endorsing a *posture* towards moral knowledge that is educationally worthwhile – that is, an

attitude about propositional and procedural moral knowledge that should inform compulsory curricula.

Optimal Justification

One of the first hurdles a knowledge claim must clear is logical positivism. A movement born out of 20th century analytic philosophy, logical positivism asserts that only statements verifiable through direct observation or logical proof are capable of conveying truth content. Philosophers use the verification principle to check if something satisfies these standards, such as a scientific theory that must stand up under the scrutiny of empirical substantiation. Logical positivist and ethical emotivist A. J. Ayer was skeptical of moral truth because moral judgements cannot be translated into empirical terms, rendering them worthless:

> The presence of an ethical symbol in a proposition adds nothing to its factual content. Thus if I say to someone, "You acted wrongly in stealing that money," I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, "You stole that money." In adding that this action is wrong I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, "You stole that money," in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks. . . . If now I generalise my previous statement and say, "Stealing money is wrong," I produce a sentence that has no factual meaning — that is, expresses no proposition that can be either true or false. . . . I am merely expressing certain moral sentiments.[4]

If individual moral judgements are cognitively meaningless, it follows that general moral statements and principles are just as jeopardized. The verification challenge is thus distinct from the related open-question argument, and must be addressed at once if any optimal justification of morality is to be discussed.

One flaw of the verification challenge is that even verified facts fail to have verification conditions on their own. Logician W. V. Quine exposes this problem by showing that individual sentences face "the tribunal of experience" as a collective whole, where the minimal meaning of an idea is not contained in the statement itself, but among a complete constellation of them.[5] For

example, the sentence "electrons have negative charges" seems compatible with logical positivism, but Quine's point demonstrates how any verification of this sentence requires a network of interconnected beliefs and procedures, rather than one singular experiment. In the same way, "one oughtn't to privilege her own pet's welfare over the needs of other animals" is not the kind of fact that is verified on its own, but only in tandem with a web of processes.

Another flaw with verificationism is that it is possible to conjure claims that are taken to be true without admitting Ayer's constraints. Take the statement that "J. Robert Oppenheimer was not thinking about Taylor Swift during the Trinity test." Sentences like this one are verified indirectly, on explanatory grounds. As William G. Lycan notes, "we believe [sentences like these] as the result of explanatory arguments which make them reasonable to accept *and to act on* as theoretically informed judgements even though the arguments do not deductively 'prove' the judgments to be true."[6] Thus, moral knowledge is not knocked down by logical positivism, and indirect verifications of this sort show that moral theories can be statements of fact.[7]

The topic of logical positivism tends to bring to mind further discordances between science and morality. After all, I have already argued that moral truths cannot be reducible to natural facts; if they were, then it would at least be coherent to imagine a "science of morality" framework, which could identify and measure moral goods in the real world. However, on non-naturalism, it seems to follow that there can be no way of evaluating moral properties that are, by definition, nonevaluative. We can refer to this challenge, broadly, as a critique from scientific naturalism.

It is worth noting that there *can* be reasons to believe the non-naturality of something, as written about in the philosophy of mind. The famous mind-body problem asks how the physical matter of the brain interacts with the ineffable activity of consciousness; while scientific

naturalism doesn't leave much room for the existence of minds, we nonetheless maintain that minds exist. Moral realism is similarly defended, by Lycan, by employing other moral data: "Rather than starting . . . with an empirically established correlation between actually detected instances of our reduced and reducing properties, we allow thought experiments as well and appeal to modal intuitions . . . "[8] Indeed, Lycan calls these "empirically tutored modal intuitions" to mean intuitions that obtain only after one has acquired empirical knowledge.

After all, normative and non-normative facts are not entirely independent – a point I made in Chapter 2; this is what we can call the "moral essence" of the data.[9] The way one is informed by the other is through supervenience. In philosophy, supervenience is the relationship between two phenomena, where "supervenient properties are determined by "subvenient" properties. A brown table has the subvenient properties of its physical proportions, surface texture, chemical composition, and wavelength of light it reflects. The table has the supervenient property of the colour brown.

David O. Brink calls this relationship between normative and non-normative facts the "notion of constitution," wherein non-natural moral truths are not identical with, but made up of, natural ones: "moral facts and properties are constituted by, and so supervene upon, natural (i.e. natural and social scientific) facts and properties."[10] Thus, moral facts do not exist *in addition to* non-moral facts; moral facts exist *in virtue of* non-moral facts.

There are two useful ways of conceptualizing this dynamic. One comes from P. F. Strawson, who takes time to disentangle moral intuitions from superficial feelings, like one's fondness for strawberries being dependent on the fruit's sweetness:

> the connection between wrongness and giving pain to others is not an accident of our constitution; nor does its perception require any special faculty-but simply that which we use in all our reasoning. From the fact that an action involves inflicting needless pain upon others, it follows necessarily that the action is wrong, just as, from the fact that a

> triangle is equilateral, it follows necessarily that its angles are equal. This is the kind of dependence that we intuit; not an analytic dependence, but a synthetic entailment; and this is why the "because" clause of my ethical sentence does, after all, constitute evidence for the ascription of the moral characteristic.[11]

This reading of moral and non-moral coaction emphasizes how ethical intuitions are not accidental. We can discern moral attributes in the data because of the notion of constitution.

A second way of conceptualizing the relation between moral and non-moral facts comes from Jonathan Dancy, who brings to mind the dangerousness of a cliff, which is connected to other aspects of a cliff, "such as the crumbly nature of steepness. . . . Similarly, what makes an action good will be its generosity, considerateness etc.; it is good because of its generosity of whatever it may be, and generous because it was a substantial personal sacrifice, perhaps."[12] Ergo, the remaining meta-ethical problem is not an ontological one, but an epistemological one: how is it that one discovers these moral facts?

Intuition, as meant by Lycan and Strawson, and Moore and Sidgwick before them, is more than just a gut feeling; it is a *seeming*.[13] In philosophy, the seeming sense is a profound one, and crucial to epistemology. As moral philosopher Bruce Russell puts it, "[w]e have intuitions that there is a fact of the matter about these things, intuitions about what those facts are, and an intuition that those intuitions are evidence about what those facts are. Barring sound arguments to the contrary, we should accept what those intuitions say."[14] On this account, moral intuitions are capable of detecting truth, too.

I ended the last chapter with the comparison between moral facts and mathematical facts. The domain of mathematics also has realists who claim that "numbers are abstract objects whose existence and nature we can become aware, not by entering into natural causal relations with them (which is impossible) but by the operation of reason and judgment."[15] Steven Pinker articulates how a moral intuition is analogous to a mathematical intuition:

> [Moral truths] are there for us to discover, perhaps in the same way that mathematical truths (according to most mathematicians) are there for us to discover. On this analogy, we are born with a rudimentary concept of number, but as soon as we build on it with formal mathematical reasoning, the nature of mathematical reality forces us to discover some truths and not others. (No one who understands the concept of two, the concept of four and the concept of addition can come to any conclusion but that 2 + 2 = 4.) Perhaps we are born with a rudimentary moral sense, and as soon as we build on it with moral reasoning, the nature of moral reality forces us to some conclusions but not others.[16]

The role of intuition, in math, is to animate a number of methodologies, which occasionally are entirely different from one another, but no less objective.[17]

For instance, intuition can be relied upon in set theory: if we imagine a set of natural numbers N = {1, 2, 3, . . . }, we can intuit that even if infinite, the set is countable. On the other hand, if we imagine an endless set of real numbers between 0 and 1, we can also intuit that there is no way the set can be listed in a sequence, as there will always be some real numbers missing. As Georg Cantor famously proved using rational intuition, there is a difference between countable and uncountable infinities.

Importantly, an example like Cantor's diagonal argument illuminates several inferences about intuition. For starters, intuition is not an external sense like our auditory or olfactory organs; we obviously do not apprehend everything by seeing or touching physical objects, and so if some mathematical truths can be known *a priori*, it's possible for moral truths to be of the same category. Granting this factor should assuage anxieties about "special faculties" needed for moral realism that are "utterly different from our ordinary ways of knowing everything else," in the words of J. L. Mackie.[18]

On that note, the illustration also reveals how intuition is but the beginning, rather than end, of mathematical learning. Intuition alone does not close the book on mathematical facts, for the diagonal argument is verified and reinforced by formalized theory, namely cardinality. Most mathematicians (and math teachers) would concur that mathematical knowledge is composed of

a combination of elements, intuition being one alongside logic and physical reality. Likewise, Peter Singer argues that "The only approach to our ordinary ethical intuition is a critical one which does not accept an intuition unless it can be defended on the basis of a more fundamental ethical theory."[19]

Of course, not everyone in the field of philosophy will agree, which brings me to my third point: the ontological and epistemic status of mathematical truths is still debated in the literature. Some see Cantor's diagonal argument as best explained by internal rationality (logicism), while others think it is merely a mind-dependent construction (intuitionism). Anyone worried about the lack of consensus surrounding morality – be it regarding moral realism and anti-realism, or cognitivism and non-cognitivism – should remember that there is just as much disagreement in the philosophy of mathematics, none of which should cast uncertainty about mathematical intuition or, indeed, education.[20]

Fourthly, and finally, the intuition to some infinities being larger than others is not unlike Lycan's "empirically tutored modal intuitions." Optimally justifying a moral fact begins with inspecting the moral data, which we know includes *natural* facts. As the sciences can tell us, natural facts can be calculated objectively. Therefore, subvenient moral qualities can procure similar rigour. If we look to any of the previous examples, like antisemitism, indoctrination, or animal torture, it is easy to determine a common denominator: wellbeing.[21]

According to Sam Harris, wellbeing denotes the degrees with which conscious creatures can experience pain and pleasure - all of which "potentially fall within the purview of science."[22] Though at first this observation may seem imprecise, we should be apt to note that a term like "human health" is also vague, subject to interpretation and change, and yet health science is certainly not subjective. "Health" can mean many different things, and can be attended to in

many different ways, but the pliancy of the term is not a reason to denigrate hospitals, pharmacy, veterinary medicine, or P.E. The suffering or flourishing of the mind, otherwise known as wellbeing, is fundamental to ethics. Though not every moral theory places it at the centre, it is impossible for any perspective – deontology, consequentialism, virtue ethics, care ethics, right-based ethics – to do without wellbeing. Another way of saying this is that, generally, any credible moral theory of normative ethics invokes wellbeing at one step or another, regardless if the theorist is aware.

Suppose we asked several different moral philosophers what to make of the Hurt Hawk dilemma. Recall that the poem deliberates tending or ending a suffering animal. We can imagine each moraliser's response would resemble something like the following (permitting some variation in any individual's given emphases and nuances):

- Social contract ethicist: we have obligations based on both explicit and implicit agreements with one another. However, because non-human animals are not part of the social contract, we have no duties towards them, so it is neither wrong to kill the hawk yourself or to let it die on its own.
- Preference utilitarian: because we have good reason to believe that animals like hawks have preferences, such as the preference not to die, it is morally important to preserve the life of the hawk as best as we can.
- Hedonistic utilitarian: because we have good reason to believe that animals like hawks experience pleasure and pain, such as the pain of suffering, it is morally important to prevent the hawk's pain. And because we know the pain will endure to an inevitable death, it is morally better to put it out of its misery.

- Deontologist: it is wrong to justify killing an animal if the outcome of its death is desirable. Instead, we always have a moral responsibility to help animals in distress, just as it is a morally important rule to never kill an animal.
- Virtue ethicist: because the morally right thing to do is to channel traits like compassion and courage, it is actually admirable to kill the hawk, since making that choice takes courage, and is the ultimate sign of compassion.
- Rights-based ethicist: all human life is innately sacred, and therefore it is never permissible to euthanize a human being. However, because a hawk is a non-human animal, it is exempt from the same rights that humans deserve, and therefore it is okay to kill the hawk.
- Care ethicist: the morally right thing to do must always be in light of the act of care. Even if caring for the hawk is useless in the long run, given its finite amount of days left, it is still better morally than treating it without care.
- Egoist: the morally right thing to do is whatever is in our best interest. Leaving the hawk to die of its own causes is the least-demanding burden for us, and so nothing further ought to be done about it.

On the surface, it may seem as though each response to the problem is irreconcilable with the next. Not only are there many different reasons on either side of the argument, but there are even competing reasons for the *same* course of action. Although I grant all of these distinctions, and do not endorse any one over another, I believe that *all* invoke "wellbeing" in *some* capacity.

For example, the utilitarians agree that the hawk's wellbeing is the constant in the equation; a creature's preferences and life are certainly accordant with the definition of wellbeing. Likewise, contract ethicists, egoists, and care ethicists are chiefly concerned about

states of wellbeing, too, though in humans (either one's own, or mutual parties) instead of animals. And so the while the quality and target of the wellbeing differ across these positions, they are all, at bottom, aiming at increasing wellbeing.

What about the other theories? Deontologists, virtue ethicists, and rights-based ethicists, for example, would reject that their primary motivation is to increase wellbeing. But if pressed with questions like "why should we follow moral rules?" or "why should we be virtuous?" or "why should we honour people's rights?" one of two options remain for these theories: 1) because doing so is ultimately good for us, or 2) because doing so is intrinsically good. Notice that any appeal to purposes[23] for rules, virtues, or rights is itself consequentialist, and that these reasons would almost certainly be with respect to wellbeing.[24] If, on the other hand, the ethicist maintains rules, virtues, or rights as intrinsic goods, there must be some means of differentiating said goods from conditional goods or moral wrongs. Recall that we can analyze each scenario for its moral data, its relationship between subvenient and supervenient properties. For example, the rights-based ethicist appreciates the natural fact of the hawk's life in determining the moral belief in the hawk's right to life. Notice, again, that the relevant evidence is characterized by some facet of a creature's wellbeing, fueled by an intuitive conviction.

Indeed, all normative ethicists must be prepared to defend their view, just like every other philosopher, and they do this by falling back to the dependability of intuition. Take Kant, a deontologist, who must, when all is said and done, resort to the trustworthiness of human intuition to infer his theory:

> In whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may related to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition. This, however, takes place only insofar as the object is given to us; but this in turn, is possible only if it affects the mind in a certain way. This capacity . . . to acquire representations . . . is called sensibility. Objects are therefore given to us by means of sensibility, and it alone affords us intuitions.[25]

Even though Kant's sensibilities lead him to different conclusions than the virtue ethicist's, for instance, it is plain to see that each are operating on the same principle of trusting thoughtful, reflective intuition. On this note, utilitarian Katarzyna de Lazari-Radek has actually argued there *is* a time and place for deontology or virtue ethics, because all normative ethical theories are just different language games for the same task: figuring out what we ought to do. In one circumstance, like law- or policy-making, deontological thinking is what we need, while in other circumstances, like teaching children, care ethics is more intuitive.[26] The variables change, and the priorities shift, but the underlying mechanism is consistent.

The mechanism I am referring to is not a gut feeling, but something much more like Lycan's idea of empirically tutored modal intuitions. We can test the candidacy of a moral seeming with Lycan's basic methodology, summarized here:

1. Start with the *principle of conservatism*: do not discard a strongly held intuitive belief unless there is some positive reason to reject it.
2. Make *consistency tests for tenability*: ensure that this belief is not a hallucination, false memory, superstition, *déjà vu*, etc. and that it fits into an explanatory body of beliefs.
3. Finally, *bootstrap* the belief: if an overarching theory can make sense of the belief, how it is produced, and how it is true, then bring it into a coherent global explanatory structure.

This third step, otherwise known as reflective equilibrium, is achieved when a moral belief in state of balance with a moral principle, thanks to deliberative adjustments to either if they are otherwise unaligned.[27] Coined by moral and political philosopher John Rawls, reflective equilibrium establishes the objectivity of morality, like Brink, who contends that "Coherence with, among other things, considered moral beliefs provides evidence of objective moral truth."[28]

How can this sort of belief be objective? Remember, I have already disregarded the conflation of knowledge with truth. I have only proposed that "objectivity" is an imperfect but unbeaten approximation of truth. And so whatever we can hope to mean by objective is a sufficient summation of what moral knowledge offers. Consider the positive claims of human health, such as that there are bodily states that are healthier than others. There are facts of medicine that not only describe the health of a person, but even ways of increasing the wellbeing of the body. Regardless of dissenting opinions - say homeopathy or naturopathy - health science is the most trustworthy resource to understand the reality of human biology, and to promote its life and longevity in effective ways. Likewise, we need not grant that a moral framework be consensual or popular to reliably meet the ends of moral claims.[29]

A skeptic will be hard-pressed to think of moral actions that do not, in some capacity, avert suffering or promote flourishing. Harris posits that the concept of morality has always been understood, at least in part, by the indispensable flux of human wellbeing:

> Defining goodness in this way does not resolve all questions of value; it merely directs our attention to what values actually are - the set of attitudes, choices, and behaviors that potentially affect our well-being, as well as that of other conscious minds. While this leaves the question of what constitutes well-being genuinely open, there is every reason to think that this question has a finite range of answers. Given that change in the well-being of conscious creatures is bound to be a product of natural laws, we must expect that this space of possibilities - the moral landscape – will increasingly be illuminated by science.[30]

Between the extremes of maximal misery and wellness is a spectrum of moral goods. Some moral questions may have multiple, equally scaled answers that show an increase in flourishing, and they might not even be knowable yet.

The nexus of morality and wellbeing is an intuition. Brute facts, unearthed by intuition, are otherwise known as axioms. Recall that many rules of logic are axiomatic, such as "nothing can both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect." If there are moral axioms, one

seems obvious: inflicting the worst possible suffering on everyone would be wrong. Notice that this proposition doesn't ask you to grant that the worst possible suffering for everyone is the worst possible reality;[31] the sentence is a basic concession that the *subjective* suffering of all conscious creatures is *objectively* bad.[32] You could doubt it, but you would be denying your deepest intuitions, and should at least be consistently skeptical of other axiomatic beliefs.

If we apply a spontaneous moral hunch, like "inflicting the worst possible suffering on everyone is wrong," we can see that:

1. It is a strong epistemic belief, which we have no reason to dismiss out of hand.
2. It is coherent with other moral beliefs (we tend to believe that our own pain, and others' pain, should be alleviated) and integrated with other non-moral beliefs (our understanding of psychology, neuroscience, etc.).
3. It can lead to greater understanding of the original idea by being inserted into thought experiments (e.g. is it wrong for some to suffer in order for others to flourish?), and by using reflective equilibrium.

Far from only reinforcing spontaneous instincts through confirmation bias, this process can alternatively challenge them. For instance, insofar as a creature has the capacity to suffer, it would seem that is worthy of moral consideration. Harris' titular moral landscape envisions peaks and valleys of both human and non- wellness, on a scale starting at the hypothetical worst possible suffering for all. Thus, one ought to decrease maximal suffering, even for a hurt hawk,

because built into this premise is an impossibility to conceive of anything one ought to do besides alleviate maximal suffering.

This method is not the only one available, but it is worth pointing out that all moral theories depend upon the intuition of some moral beliefs. David Ross articulated it best as the common denominator of ethics:

> It has, of course, often been pointed out that every ethical system admits intuition at some point. Utilitarianism in the general form represented by Professor Moore's ethical writings admits the supposed intuition that only what is productive of the greatest good is right. Hedonistic Utilitarianism adds to this the supposed intuition that only pleasure is intrinsically good. Sidgwick's form of hedonistic Utilitarianism adds to these intuitions two that contradict the essential principle of Utilitarianism, the 'axiom of rational self-love' and the 'axiom of justice'. The objection that many people feel to Intuitionism can hardly be an objection to the admission of intuition; for without that no theory can get going.[33]

Ross is right that appeals to intuition are both necessary and intellectually-undemanding;[34] it is anything but a defeater to make room for it in one's approach to moral epistemology. We already trust our senses to inform us about the facts of physical reality, and we can extend the same level of trust to our moral intuitions to inform us about moral truths.

Explanatory Power

We must lastly shift our attention to the mechanisms of reflective equilibrium. We will want to know what makes moral beliefs coherent and compatible with one another and with non-moral beliefs. Let's look, once more, at the most salient piece of moral evidence in "Hurt Hawks": the animal's wellbeing. Behold, this is the same value at the core of the wrongness of torture, and every other case explored in the book. It is no fools-errand to imagine a moral normative end being settled, such as "inflicting the worst possible suffering on everyone is wrong." In history, moral progress has seen slavery overturned and women's rights vindicated. In education, moral progress has seen racial segregation abolished and sexual orientation

inclusion policies implemented. A universal characteristic of these moral initiatives is the prioritization of wellbeing.[35]

There is no shortage of knowledge about wellbeing. A wide range of academic disciplines carry out research on the non-natural facts of wellbeing: neuroscience can tell us how hormones govern parental care, social attachment, and stress regulation;[36] neuroendocrinology can tell us how thyroid hormone can augment the treatment of mood disorders;[37] positive psychology can tell us how marriages that encourage forgiveness and kindness improve mental wellbeing;[38] social psychology can tell us how isolation is correlated to major depressive disorder.[39] The list goes on.

Moral knowledge attempts to extrapolate *ought* claims from these *is* statements. The process of reflective equilibrium is one way of approaching this feat. John Bengson, Russ Shafer-Landau, and Terence Cuneo attribute the general practice of sorting "essences" from accidental facts as "Pricean reflection," named after philosopher of science Huw Price. If you reflect on the nature of a triangle, you will discover that they are *essentially* three-sided; and if you reflect on the nature of desire, you will discover that it is *essentially* directed at something. Reflective equilibrium, they argue, involves critically examining our moral intuitions not just for coherence, but reliability. To illustrate, we can employ this kind of reflection on the question of whether it would be good to torture a hawk for fun. It would be counterintuitive to accept that such an act inflicts suffering on the animal, but that such suffering is not relevant to the truth of any claim that "one ought not to torture animals." On the other hand, it is intuitive that an act's being an instance of 'inflicts suffering on animals' is relevant to its being wrong. This is because, Bengon et al. maintain, that "[w]hen you attend to the property [of suffering, let's say] and focus

just on what it is to [cause pain], it becomes clear that there is a moral strike against such conduct."[40]

Finally, it is worth observing that though there are differences in what facts describe – that is, normative and non-normative facts – there are no major differences in what *makes* them facts. This is why I have approached ethics using justified true belief (JTB) theory. Christopher Tollefsen encourages this approach, too, as he argues that the separation of the epistemic from the moral is untenable: "[moral] agents can go wrong in their assessment of the evidence if they do not have a sufficient moral grasp of the nature and importance of the good of truth, and if they have not developed the appropriate norms and virtues of inquiry and judgment by which truth is assessed."[41] This process, Tollefsen describes, is the exact same one needed for obtaining other kinds of knowledge. "Where the agent judges rightly," Tollefsen writes, "it is solely on the basis of the evidence and the judgement that the evidence is truth conducive."[42]

As is true for other knowledge-collecting methodologies, this entire system of meta- and normative ethics does not guarantee unanimity. What it does provide, though, is a teachable system, grounded in realism, that equips a learner with the skill to justify moral beliefs in ways not unlike their other justified beliefs.

Justified True Moral Beliefs

In summary, a refinement of intuition and attention to moral essence allows us to make not just non-normative propositions, but normative ones, too. On the JTB framework, it is conceivable that there is an array of basic moral facts. Though moral epistemology can be further complicated, the simplified argument recounted here satisfies the fourth and fifth requisites for knowledge that I have been arguing for since Chapter 1. This final step of justifying what I have established are moral beliefs completes a JTB approach to moral knowledge.

If we see we have strong epistemic beliefs (1) that are universal (2) and stance-independent (3), and we can justify them optimally (4) to describe something morally (5), then we have, what we can call, moral knowledge. Rather than approach the topic of moral knowledge from a particular tradition in normative ethics, like deontology or utilitarianism, I hope this set of criteria may make known the truth of different moral theories in different moral circumstances. Take the classical trolley problem, as outlined by moral philosopher Philippa Foot: "[A conductor is] the driver of a runaway tram, which he can only steer from one narrow track on to another; five men are working on one track and one man on the other; anyone on the track he enters is bound to be killed."[43] Just like the psychic numbing example, we may feel compelled to save several people at the expense of one, though here this consequentialist inclination is less obvious. Variations of the trolley problem can trouble both deontologists and utilitarians, depending on minor tweaks to the set-up; for instance, if instead of pulling a lever the conductor was forced to push a fat man off a ledge onto the tracks, effectively stopping the runaway cart from killing five up ahead, many would-be utilitarians change their tune.

We are not wrong to want to spare the fat man; after all, the similarly-coded "sixth patient" dilemma was, in effect, settled by medical ethicists: suppose a doctor is guaranteed to save five people from certain death so long as she can harvest someone else's organs to perform extreme transplants on each of the five patients. Meanwhile, a sixth patient is dying of a deadly disease, and his body contains the necessary organs for the other near-death patients. The cure for this illness is readily available, but there is a shortage of organ donations. Though the calculus of utilitarianism seemingly demands that the doctor sacrifice the sixth patient, practitioners in the real world are forbidden to do so, thanks to the principle of nonmaleficence: a physician has a duty to "do no harm" to a patient. Does this response to the moral dilemma cast

doubt on utilitarianism? On the contrary, we can see that the principle of nonmaleficence is motivated by the same values that a utilitarian like Singer (hedonistic, concerning pleasures and pains) privileges, such as the reduction of harm: in order to minimize harm (a utilitarian value), we ought to follow this rule (a deontological value).

Therefore, the boundaries between views in normative ethics are perhaps thinner than they once appeared. After all, what is care ethics if not consequentialism, where the intended outcome is care? Every ethical theory is coupled with values. The best way to determine which value to uphold is to employ reflective equilibrium. To be clear, I am not defaming normative ethics; as a matter of fact, the study of deontology, consequentialism, and the rest is an important part of moral education, and certainly compatible with what I have defended as the optimal justification of moral knowledge. I only wish to clarify the intellectual price tag of my argument: an educational institution need not be burdened with buying into a particular normative ethical theory in order to accept moral realism and to endorse moral knowledge.

Directly disseminating moral facts like “torturing animals is wrong” is not quite what I have in mind for moral education, though at times there is surely room for such teaching. Like other knowledge-based courses, moral education should lean into the cultivation of certain skills that equip learners with the means to uncover knowledge for themselves. Science education must occasionally transmit propositional knowledge, but in a curriculum like BC’s, it generally teaches ideas and methods that are informed by knowledge. Naturally, moral education should follow suit. Consider the relevance of non-normative facts to normative ones; when students learn about the reality of factory farm conditions, they will be better disposed to make reasoned moral judgements on the ethics of veganism.

A common complaint of a method like the one I've recounted in this chapter is that it all hinges on intuition, and if intuitions can be wrong, then the moral theory would also be flawed. After all, how can we know that our intuitions are properly aligned with reality? Given that our instincts are evolved traits, and evolution by natural selection favours survivability, rather than truth-apprehension, then there is seemingly no reason to trust our moral sensibilities, which is needed for reflective equilibrium. However, we must pause to remember that *no* truth claims, whatsoever, can withstand such scrutiny. Our knowledge of physics may very well be incongruous with reality if our brains are not predisposed to detect reality. Morality truth is not uniquely threatened by this challenge. And the challenge itself is not particularly strong, for it is self-defeating: if we cannot depend on our own minds, then why believe the inference in the first place?[44]

Summary

In this chapter, I applied notions of morality to the remaining two of the five characteristics that must feature in propositional knowledge underpinning moral education. The goal of this section was to demonstrate how moral beliefs can be optimally justified and describe the moral truths. I argued that intuitive reflective equilibrium is a feasible moral epistemology. Possible objections might concern the plausibility of the method, as discussed with respect to Singer and the trolley problem, and criticisms of discourse ethics, such as its impracticality and narrowness, which reopens the problem of reasonable disagreement. The next chapter will discuss the viability of moral education informed by my conception of moral knowledge in the context of the existing BC curriculum.

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Chapter 3 Endnotes

[1] Jeffers & Ridgeway, 1968.

[2] Jeffers, 2006.

[3] Though my focus in this chapter is on requisites 4 and 5, I hope it becomes apparent that each of these characteristics work synergistically, all necessary and jointly sufficient for the overall conception, and any conclusion about moral knowledge demands appeals to all of them. I won't shelve the first three requisites as if they are now irrelevant, but instead return to them when needed to test the success of my argument.

[4] Ayer, 1936.

[5] Quine, 1951.

[6] Lycan, 1986.

[7] Lycan provides a helpful example: "if I know the theory behind the Wilson cloud chamber, I can say that I have *observed that* an electron is crossing the chamber when the bulb has been squeezed. The moral case seems parallel: If I have internalized a justified moral theory that entails that murder is wrong, then upon witnessing what is unmistakably a brutal murder I can claim to have *observed that* a vicious, immoral act has taken place."

[8] Ibid.

[9] A la Richard Price.

[10] Brink, 1989.

[11] Strawson, 1949.

[12] Dancy, 1991.

[13] For further reading, see: Bealer, G. (1998). Intuition and the autonomy of philosophy. In M. DePaul and W. Ramsey (Eds.), *Rethinking Intuition: The Psychology of Intuition and Its Role in Philosophical Inquiry*. Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.

[14] Russell, 2017.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Parfit, 2008.

[17] To be clear, the term "intuitionism" takes on a rather different meaning in mathematics than it does in ethics, for the former is actually much closer to meta-physical anti-realism, unlike its counterpart in ethics. I am, therefore, trying to be careful not to conflate the basic idea of "intuition" in math with the particular view of "intuitionism."

[18] Mackie, 1977.

[19] Singer, 1982.

[20] Anyone still unimpressed with this assertion on the basis of morality and mathematics being too dissimilar for comparison (i.e. that incorrect moral beliefs don't obviously announce themselves as wrong the same way incorrect mathematical beliefs do when you, simply check the math) should bear in mind that, thus far, I am only attempting to establish the importance of accepting *intuition* for both theories to work. This argument is altogether different from one that posits *how* to learn moral truth as one does for mathematical truth.

[21] I don't presume "wellbeing" is the *only* relevant commonality. Perhaps there are several. But to ignore it as an indispensable part of the moral data would be guilty, as I continue to argue, of dispensing one of the strongest intuitions we can apprehend – a burden that falls on the skeptic to overcome.

[22] Harris, 2010.

[23] By "purpose," I mean striving for a goal (in order to differentiate from the term *reason*, which I grant can be used, in the philosophical literature, to denote something purpose*less*, as far as I'm defining "purpose").

[24] What purpose is there to do something if not for someone or something's benefit? I can't think of any.

[25] Kant, 1998.

[26] Lazari-Radek, 2024.

[27] See: Rawls, J. (1971). *A theory of justice*. Harvard University Press.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Human health is, rightly, conventional in schools. Physical Education involves providing opportunities for students to learn how to take care of their bodies. Students may be trained to run a short distance, because running is a well-attested exercise for strengthening muscles and improving fitness. Students are not assessed on their willingness to accept that they ought to run, although perhaps it would be warranted to do so. But it isn't contentious for schools to impart psychomotor knowledge about how one can live a healthy life. So too, I would maintain, can an educational institution impart moral knowledge about how one can live a good life.

[30] Ibid.

[31] It also does not grant that anyone actually possesses the power to inflict the worst possible misery on everyone. But, if someone did have such a power, then doing so would be morally wrong.

[32] To ensure any confusion has been avoided on the topic of objectivity, Harris emphasizes the following:

> many people seem to think that because moral facts relate to our experience . . . all talk of morality must be "subjective" in the epistemological sense (i.e. biased, merely personal, etc.). This is simply untrue . . . given that there are facts – *real* facts – to be known about how conscious creatures can experience the worst possible misery and the greatest possible well-being, it is objectively true to say that there are right and wrong answers to moral questions, whether or not we can always answer these questions in practice.

[33] Ross, 1951.

[34] By intellectually-undemanding, I mean not coming at too high a cost to accept.

[35] In fact, the very notion of "moral progress" only makes sense on moral realism.

[36] Fries et al., 2005.

[37] Geracioti, 2006.

[38] McNulty & Fincham, 2011.

[39] Buunk & Dijkstra, 2008.

[40] Bengson et al, 2024.

[41] Tollefsen, 2003.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Foot, 1967.

[44] As discussed in Chapter 1, with regards to metaphysical antirealism, as well as in Chapter 2, with regards to the naturalistic fallacy.

Chapter 4

In March 2002, an engine fire broke out on an oil tanker, the *Insiko 1907*, 800 miles south of Hawaii. Without enough time to radio for help, the surviving 11 crew members retreated to the ship's front quarters with limited supplies of food and water. The *Insiko* drifted for over two weeks before the crew found rescue by a passing cruise ship. However, not all of *Insiko*'s passengers made it safely to the cruise ship; only after abandoning the tanker did they realize the captain's dog, a terrier named Hokget, had been left behind. Within days of the media's coverage of the story, donations came flooding in from 39 states and four foreign countries to fund a rescue mission for Hokget. One check was for $5,000. The Hawaiian Humane Society paid private company American Marine $48,000 to attempt to locate the lost ship. Even the US Coastguard quietly redirected tax money in an effort to recover the tanker. By April, a Japanese fishing boat reported a sighting of the *Insiko*, and two fishing vessels eventually reached the ship, saving Hokget.[1]

The same story of collective action and altruism cannot be said for the millions of dogs doomed to Asia's meat trade every year, where an estimated 30 million are annually stolen or taken from the streets and brutally slaughtered. In South Korea, dogs are bred in crammed cages, without proper food, water, or protection from the elements, and eventually beaten to death or hanged.[2] The nonprofit organization Humane Society International runs several campaigns to save animal lives from cruelty and captivity, which rarely sees the uptick in donations or media attention that Hokget received. Though many are compelled to respond to the predicament of a singular, named victim, in an unusual state of peril, few are motivated to afford the same concern to the masses suffering from a similar situation. Psychologist Paul Slovic calls this phenomenon "psychic numbing," the propensity to become more apathetic, rather than less, in the face of

widespread suffering than they would to isolated incidents. Slovic finds that "[m]ost people are caring and will exert great effort to rescue 'the one' whose needy plight comes to their attention. These same good people, however, often become numbly indifferent to the plight of 'the one' who is 'one of many' in a much greater problem."[3]

Caring for one dog, like Hogket, while simultaneously turning a deaf ear to all the rest, is a moral mistake. I believe understanding moral mistakes like this are possible on the view advanced in the last two chapters, during which I argued that a JTB framework allows us to justify our moral beliefs in ways akin to their counterparts, such as scientific or historical beliefs. I also believe that understanding moral mistakes like this is educationally worthwhile. In this chapter, my goal is to demonstrate why and how moral education can be informed by moral realism. Some of the examples I proffer here involve expanding moral sympathies to those outside of our familial or social circle, for such ethical dilemmas are powerful in demonstrating the effectiveness of reflective equilibrium, both for confirming some moral beliefs and correcting others (all part of the justificatory method detailed in the last chapter).

John Stuart Mill once wrote that "[E]ducation . . . should . . . establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole."[4] Though I am abstaining from declaring myself a consequent, as he does, it's plain that Mill is right about the central content of moral education: it is crucial that students come to recognize "the good life" with respect to themselves and others, and to the extent that the two are tied. This insight, I believe, is the most obvious answer to the question of *why* we need moral education. Skeptics who interrogate the notion of moral education want to know what a public moral education would consist of, for it seems redundant to remind adolescents of the virtues they learn at home.[5] But it is apparent that moral wisdom is informed by moral knowledge, and

moral knowledge is cultivated by the educative process of moral inquiry. Just as blatant is the need for moral wisdom to make young people sensitive to issues they are unprepared for without: antisemitism, medical emergencies, economic crises, veganism, open borders, mass misinformation, political corruption, and artificial intelligence, to name a few.[6] In other words, we cannot assume that people will come to appreciate moral considerations, like the good of the whole, on their own, and that public education can therefore make salient these insights that are, sometimes, counterintuitive.

Take Peter Singer's contention that "We are morally obliged to do *much* more than we are doing at present to distribute resources from the affluent nations to people existing in poverty, and our obligations to members of our family and our community do not necessarily take precedence over our obligations to the poor of other countries."[7] Neither conventional nor tame, this assertion is discovered only by careful moral discipline. And there is a need for such a discipline. For Singer's readership, this has included the "moral majority" of the 1980s: "When millions of American voters see homosexuality and pornography as more important moral issues than human rights and aid for developing nations, something has gone badly wrong with the prevailing understanding of morality." For my readership, we can bring to mind many cases of hyper-fixation on relatively small issues, such as outcries against Apple product changes to its headphone jacks, at the expense of attention given to major ones, like the mining of conflict minerals for the production of cell phones.[8]

The existence of moral knowledge bears weight on a number of social institutions, chief among them education. Now that I have made the case for justified true moral beliefs, and for their merit in compulsory education, I will give an idea of the practical application of moral teaching.

Can Ethics Be Taught?

If, as I have argued, there is moral knowledge, and that such moral knowledge is educationally worthwhile, then it seems to follow that moral knowledge should be taught. But a possible rebuttal says that even educationally worthwhile moral knowledge may not be *teachable*. The question "can ethics be taught?" was posed by Derek C. Bok in the 1970s, partly in response to a perceived moral degradation of American government and culture. He writes that "[i]f other sources of ethical values have declined in influence, educators have a responsibility to contribute in any way they can to the moral development of their students."[9] Though Bok speaks specifically on post-secondary institutions, his general attitude towards ethics and education is admissible in this discussion of compulsory education, for the reasons he gives are transferrable. In this section, I revisit Bok's influential essay and its implications for moral education, so as to better defend teaching ethics in schools as a feasible and worthwhile goal.

To begin, I will remind you that in Chapter 1 I referenced Bok when reviewing the deficits of moral education courses that only *survey* ethical theories. In its place, Bok advocates for problem-oriented courses in ethics, built around a series of contemporary moral dilemmas. Some examples include medical students grappling with abortion and euthanasia, or business students deliberating corporate bribery and deceptive advertising. He commends the ability of these classes to help students "become more alert in discovering the moral issues that arise in their own lives."[10] He argues that this kind of education, if not compelling enough to improve the character of a "scoundrel," can legitimately enlighten individuals to more truths that they would have been blind to otherwise. "By repeatedly asking students to identify moral problems and

define the issues at stake," Bok maintains, "courses in applied ethics can sharpen and refine the moral perception of students so that they can avoid these pitfalls."[11]

Furthermore, moral education can reorient the view that moral problems are merely matters of opinion, and that it is pointless to debate them if they are not real. Bok argues that "[a] well-taught course can demonstrate that this is simply not true, and that moral issues can be discussed as rigorously as many other problems considered in the classroom."[12] The development of students' capacities to reason morally is made possible by a school's commitment to moral realism, and to making moral facts presently known. And with these skills, students will be well-prepared to make significant decisions about professional and personal aspirations.

Bok then shifts to reply to skeptics of moral education. One critique levied at these programs is that they are ineffective at leaving students with satisfactory moral conclusions. Bok denies this claim by examining several illustrations of moral education, one being a Harvard class that were asked the question, 'Is it okay for a government official to lie to a congressman in order to forestall a regressive piece of legislation?' Apparently, the students only saw the issue through cost-benefit terms, like "What are the chances of getting caught?" and "If [the official] gets caught, how much will it hurt [her]?" For Bok, "[s]urely these students might revise their position if they were asked to consider seriously what would happen in a society that invited everyone to lie whenever they believed that it would help to avoid a result which they believed to be wrong."[13] We should not be ignorant to the possibility of progress in moral cognition when it is self-evident that paying attention to certain factors can and will affect people's judgments. "Even if courses in applied ethics turned out to have no effect whatsoever on the moral development of our students," muses Bok, "they would still make a contribution." This

contribution is the value that is gained from being forced to think carefully and rigorously about complex problems.

Another critique of moral education is that, though important, it is best left to extracurricular sources, and that schools should not interject on moral learning if it occurs elsewhere. On this point, Bok writes that "[t]o be sure, no one would deny that ethical values and moral character are profoundly dependent on many forces beyond the [educational institution] – on family influences, religious experience, and the personal example of friends and public figures. But this is true of all education." We shouldn't confuse morality as an outlier unlike other school subjects; if we agree that students must learn about science both in and outside of school, it is no less rational to say the same of morality.

In short, it is reasonable to say not only that ethics should be taught, but that it can be taught. As Bok puts it, "students in [moral] courses will become more alert in perceiving ethical issues, more aware of the reasons underlying moral principles, and more equipped to reason carefully in applying these principles to concrete cases."[14] If the question of "can" is therefore put aside, the question of "how" must then be considered. One major worry, especially on account of my approach to moral education, being informed by moral realism, is this: if we care about students acquiring moral knowledge, how can inquiry, an open-ended process, direct students towards the right conclusions and away from the wrong ones? What follows is a defense of how my theory of moral knowledge in compulsory education survives these challenges.

Philosophical Discussion

Bok congratulates the emphasis on discussion in moral education, as opposed to lecturing: "[i]nstructors may present their own views, if only to demonstrate that it is possible to make carefully reasoned choices about ethical dilemmas."[15] This dialogue-driven kind of

learning is already one of darlings of the BC Curriculum, wherein multiple courses are encouraged to foster oral communication and collaboration. The document proclaims that, through verbal interactions, "students acquire, develop and transform ideas and information, and make connections with others to share their ideas, express their individuality, further their learning, and get things done," all of which is "fundamental to finding satisfaction, purpose and joy."[16]

Teachers can engage their students in discursive practices in order to promote their moral competency. Tim Sprod calls this approach the vitality of "effective moral education: discussion of ethical issues in a community of ethical inquiry."[17] There are many ways verbal communication exercises can compliment moral learning, one being deliberative knowledge. Deliberation is used in many areas of learning, like Science and Social Studies, to engage students in productive discussions around complex issues. We've known about the merits of deliberative knowledge in moral education since Dewey,[18] and a great deal of research has demonstrated how facilitated dialogue enhances reflective judgment and deeper understanding.[19]

This framing of moral education should quell the anxieties of skeptics who have occasionally argued that a codification of values might only teach young people to simply fear chastisement or discipline, adopting an attitude known as "rule-fetishism." Others have contested character education on the related grounds that students will learn to hone values for selfish purposes, animating hubris rather than humility, or conformity rather than independence. As expressed by philosopher Roger Marples, "[i]t is all very well to insist that 'One should not tell lies', but the circumstances in which a refusal to tell the truth is morally unacceptable are not self-evident. One has only to recall the all-too-familiar occasions when one finds oneself torn between the requirement to tell the truth and that of not causing unnecessary distress."[20] If a

student's learned moral behaviour is determined by rule-adherence, then that behaviour is not in fact virtuous; we do not want students to act morally because those are the rules. Therefore, the problem as Marples puts it, is not that it obstructs other aims of education, but that it fails as moral education in the first place. In other words, true moral education must be prepared to calibrate students to the nuances of moral considerations. Marples calls this process "moral sensitivity," and posits that its cultivation is "not only the key to a proper understanding of the moral reality, which we are unavoidably forced to confront, but is the central task of moral education."[21]

To summarize this section, I have tried to give an account of how my conception of moral education is not defeated by objections regarding its practicality. Specifically, I looked at the role of philosophical discussion and moral sensitivity as practices that are compatible with (and indeed, grounded in) an education in moral knowledge. In the next section, I deal with the challenges in qualifying teachers to take on this kind of teaching.

Ethics Education in the BC Curriculum

There are two forms that moral education can take of which I am a proponent, both of which attune students to moral sensitivity: 1) administering an ethics program, wherein the pre-existing school subjects are updated to incorporate components of relevant moral learning, and 2) implementing an ethics class, alongside pre-existing school subjects, wherein the focus of study is on moral learning. Henceforth, I will refer to these as integrated and freestanding moral education.

Firstly, integrated moral education could incite a reinvigoration of the current curriculum. Recall the many ways its traditional subjects like Science, Math, and Social Studies are already imbued with implicit and explicit ethical language. Not only that, but BC prides itself on

electives such as Genocide Studies, which seeks to address questions including "[w]hy should we consider the historical, political, and social context when making ethical judgments?" and "[s]hould people of today have any responsibility for actions taken in the past?"[22] It's clear that the Ministry of Education is invested in moral education of *some* kind, but the misstep so far has been that not nearly enough attention has been directed to figuring out *how* teachers can instruct, facilitate, or assess moral thinking. However, there are some straightforward ways of bringing ethics into present pedagogies and praxes, for as Gary Fenstermacher, Richard Osguthorpe, and Matthew Sanger note,

> the teacher is not simply attending to history, or science, or language arts, but to moral rules stories, or ideals . . . by adopting a curriculum or program designed to teach morality (e.g., character education and life skills programs), by exploring the moral issues within the academic curriculum itself (e.g., war policy, literary characters, species extinction, welfare), or by building capacities necessary for morally good conduct (e.g. empathy, moral reasoning, and perspective taking).[23]

Though it has implications for teacher education, integrated public moral education is probably less demanding than freestanding, so I will start here.

As acknowledged in Chapter 1, there are three core competencies that inform everything taught in the BC curriculum, "interconnected and are foundational to all learning"[24] – communication, thinking, and personal and social responsibility. I propose that either the last core competency be capitalized on for all its potentially, or a fourth be introduced. "Personal and social responsibility" is a loaded phrase, after all. A sincere interpretation of those words necessarily says that there are duties that bear on each of us, and that students ought to recognize these imperatives. On the other hand, a new core competency, like "ethics," could go a long way in bringing to the surface the moral dimensions of a plethora of school subjects.

Take the Social Studies curriculum, which champions the historical thinking concept to "[m]ake reasoned ethical judgments about actions in the past and present, and assess appropriate

ways to remember and respond."[25] If teachers are meant to help students develop moral judgments and responses, the inference is that there are "reasoned" ways to both think and act morally. Its "key questions" section raises several moral considerations, such as "Should the Canadian Senate be abolished, reformed, replaced, or maintained?" Suppose a student engaged with these questions, surveying the available evidence, reflecting on his acquired knowledge, and devising original solutions; presumably, the teacher must assess the quality of her student's ethical judgements. And so we must ask, how should the teacher evaluate her students' moral thinking? She could simply focus on the student's research skills or understanding of content rather than his use of moral knowledge, but given the outlined competency, she would be missing the learning objective. To appraise reasoned ethical judgments is to do moral philosophy, which up until now has seldom been actualized in the classroom.

Instead, if the student approaches the question of reforming the Canadian Senate with respect to values, like the aversion of harm, or the promulgation of justice, then there is opportunity for him to make an ethical judgment. Suppose the teacher receives three submissions that look something like this:

A) The Canadian Senate is unethical because it erodes two moral goods: democratic principles and fair representation. Since senators are appointed rather than elected, there is a lack of accountability for political decisions. It is unjust if state actors can wield that much power without being directly answerable to those they serve.

B) The Canadian Senate should be protected because it does more good than harm for Canadian citizens. Everyone in the country benefits from the legislation passed by senators. For instance, in 2023, a study found that 88% of BC residents thought that the Senate is still useful as a political function, and therefore it should be preserved.

C) The Canadian Senate should be abolished because it allows non-white and non-male individuals to have power. It would be better to replace this system with an absolute monarchy, one that guarantees no women or people of colour have a say in politics, as they are inferior in leadership roles.

A teacher could then evaluate the moral reasoning in each students' work based on the rigour of their methods and justifications. For instance, student A must be correct in his use of non-normative facts – in this case, that the senate is undemocratic, unrepresentative, or unchecked. These statements must be accurate, and they must be morally relevant. Likewise, if student B makes politically and morally false statements, then he will need to revise his work. Even if his statistic were correct, it would not reasonably follow that if the majority of people think something is good that therefore it is good (and even if *that* were true, the student would need to rectify his hypocrisy around democratic principles). Furthermore, it is within a teacher's capacity – and I would argue also her educational responsibility – to correct student C where he has erred in his moral thinking. Student C has made moral mistakes in his argument.

The same is true for many other aspects of Social Studies. When I ask my secondary students why we should even bother study history, I am always surprised to hear them intonate the same adage that they no doubt learned from a previous teacher: 'those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,'[26] or more simply, 'we have to learn what happened so we don't make the same mistakes.' Alas, there is no data to show that a greater literacy in history causes less moral error. As Singer says, "history cannot dictate what we ought to do."[27] Only moral education can.

I am optimistic that there is space for these kinds of moral reflections in subjects beyond Social Studies, too. In Language Arts, students read novels that uniquely mold their character by challenging empathy, tolerance, and feeling; as Roger Marples puts it, "[n]arrative art of all kinds opens our eyes to the need for sensitivity to the vastly different kinds of moral phenomena, and the equally vast range in which they are manifested."[28] Literary studies should be an opportunity to sharpen one's moral judgements by taking on diverse perspectives, humbling

one's egotistical presuppositions, and appreciating the weight of conceptual vocabulary that can be harmful. These literacy exercises foster moral discernment, not subordination.

Take into consideration how germane moral philosophy is to the typical novel study. Students are taught the process of hermeneutics to carefully unravel a book's theme, otherwise known as the "moral of the story." In a work of literature like *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, it is easy to see how such moral messages are represented in ought statements: we ought horde less and give more. This story follows the materialistic Ebenezer Scrooge, a cruel and greedy businessman who mistreats his staff and shelters himself from the rest of Victorian London. When he is visited by undead spirits, and transported across time to witness the suffering of the poor, destitute, and crippled, Scrooge experiences a crisis of conscience; he tells the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, "hear me, I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?"[29] Moral learning in a unit like this should draw attention to the realities of Dickens' social context and readership: that during the Industrial Revolution, Great Britain saw a rise in factories and manufacturing, and a culture of obsession with success and production; that Dickens was sent to work at a boot factory at age 12 when his father was arrested; that Dickens originally planned to write a political pamphlet to raise awareness to the dangers of supporting industries that exploited the working class and children, called "An Appeal to the People of England, on behalf of the Poor Man's Child," which instead became *A Christmas Carol*.

It may be clear to most students that Scrooge's priorities and lifestyles are in need of repair, and that his transformation by the end is morally consequential, it may be less clear to these same students that Dickens' themes ask the same self-sacrifice of them, too. For instance, upon completing the novella, students could be asked to engage in Peter Singer's thought

experiment of the drowning child and the expanding circle: *imagine, on your commute to school near Okanagan Lake, you notice a child is struggling in the water. To wade in and pull the child out would be easy, but it will mean ruining your new $200 pair of shoes, and by the time you'd make it back home to change, you will have missed your first class. Do you save the child from drowning?* The invariable "yes" is followed up with the second scenario: *Now think of the day you first bought these $200 shoes. Before you made your purchase, what if you learned of a charity which could save the live of a child in Eritrea by donating $200, who will otherwise soon die. Would you then be just as obliged to save the child from death?* This dilemma is one many young people in the affluent west are ignorant to; just like the adult subjects in Paul Slovic's research, they make a serious moral blunder when they tout self-righteousness in promising to save a nearby stranger, and cynicism in refusing to give to a distant "other."

How does Singer's dilemma expand our moral thinking? It is not an illusion that you believe you would save the drowning child; we can grant that given the right circumstances, you really would act on your beliefs. The insight here is that you may simultaneously walk past the proverbial "drowning" chid thousands of kilometers away. This hypocrisy should produce in you either a tangible change in your behaviour – for instance, making that $200 donation – or a reasoned defense of why you do not have the same obligations towards the child in Eritrea as you do the one in front of you.

Compulsory education has long resolved to rectify the inaccuracies of our assumptions. Math students "use *reasoning* and *logic* to explore, analyze, and apply mathematical ideas [emphasis added]," such as predicting "the theoretical probability of an event" ("Mathematics 7"). A popular probability puzzle is the "Monty Hall problem," which challenges our intuitions of chance: suppose you're a contestant on a game show given the choice of three closed doors,

one concealing a new car, and the other two, goats. You select door one, and the host, who knows what's behind all the doors, opens door three, revealing a goat. He offers you a chance to switch your choice to door two. Though instinctively, for many, it seems the odds of winning the car are 50/50, making switching moot, there is in fact a correct answer - that is, a more *reasonable* and *logical* choice to make: the switching strategy has a 2/3 probability of winning the car, as opposed to a 1/3 alternative. To briefly elucidate, because the clause of the illustration is the host knowing where the car is hidden, a probabilistic advantage can be determined based on how he has curated the remaining options. For many students, the solution becomes more intuitive with a reframing of the scenario using 100 initial doors instead of three, which takes the contestant from a 1/100 guess to (after 98 doors eliminated) either a 1/3 or 1/2 decision. This exercise illustrates how our minds can betray us, failing to produce reliable beliefs. Math teachers regularly rectify these errors, and they are equipped to do so thanks to a vast archive of instructional samples offered by BC's curriculum website. But when it comes to developing "a sense of how mathematics helps us understand ourselves and the world around us," the curriculum is quiet.

In reflecting on the Asian dog meat trade or the problem of psychic numbing, we could come to varying and incompatible conclusions, but one will be better than others. For instance, Paul Slovic's studies reveal that otherwise well-meaning donors are less likely to spend the exact same humanitarian effort divided to two children instead of one. As a consequence of psychic numbing, speculated to be an evolutionary byproduct, we tend to become more phased when we hear stories of relatable suffering, and less phased when we hear of wars and genocides raging. In Slovic's words, "The value of a person's life declines precipitously with number."[30] Not only would someone be guilty of intellectual hypocrisy (that is, a failure to be consistent about her

beliefs), but she will have made a moral mistake: an objective error in her critical thinking about ethics. We know, instead, that it is better for a donor to maximize her humanitarian efforts so as to help save two lives instead of just one. To put another way, a donor ought to maximize her humanitarian efforts so as to help save two lives instead of just one.

The Math curriculum also involves strategic thinking in puzzles and games, reasonable estimation skills, and modelling in situational thought.[31] One challenge, the prisoner's dilemma, can produce both mathematical and moral insights: Imagine that you live under a totalitarian regime. You and your neighbour have been harbouring fugitives in your homes, protecting them from the intolerant government who would have them sent off to a concentration camp. One day, you are both arrested by the secret police on account of your alleged crimes. The prosecutors cannot convict you on principle charge, but they have enough evidence to convict you on a lesser charge. Therefore, they offer each of you a bargain:

A) Cooperate (stay silent, and serve a short sentence)

B) Defect (betray your friend, allowing you to walk free, forcing your friend to serve a long sentence)

The trouble is, your neighbour is being held in a different cell, being presented with the same two options. Therefore, if you both opt for choice *B*, then you will each being adding more to your sentence than originally. We can weigh these options in light of several variables; one that tends to come to mind first are the competing values of self-interest versus loyalty. If we override our egocentric instincts with our ethical intuitions, we can see why choice *A* is what we ought to do. But there is more to learn from this thought experiment than just that; when formulated in a decision matrix, we can demonstrate why favouring cooperation over competition, as a general heuristic, is not only good for others, but also optimal for oneself;[32] supposing the short sentence

2 years, the longer is 5, and the longest is 10, then the variables in this dilemma can be represented in this table:

Table 1	They cooperate		They defect	
You cooperate	You: 2	Them: 2	You: 10	Them: 0
You defect	You: 0	Them: 10	You: 5	Them: 5

If you and your neighbour cooperate with one another, then the total combined sentence is 4 years. Compare that with the total combined sentences of one person defecting while the other cooperates (10) or both defecting (also 10). Logically, the best choice, both for yourself and for your friend, is to minimize the amount of suffering hypothetically served. It yields the lowest combined penalty for each person involved.[33]

Table 2	They cooperate	They defect
You cooperate	4	10
You defect	10	10

A satisfactory moral education can would have students learn how to arrive at correct answer to this question, just as a basic mathematical education can do the same with the Nash equilibrium in game theory. And it is important to recognize these facts not only because self-serving temptations are abundant in competitions of all stripes, which everybody confronts throughout life, but because more people than not tend to defect rather than cooperate, when faced with this prisoner's dilemma.[34] This tendency is one that can be corrected for with appeals to logic and ethics, which opens one up to an appreciation for counterintuitive wisdom.

Consider a different spin on a decision matrix that emphasizes potential gains rather than costs: would you rather receive one million dollars, or give away 10 million dollars? There are

ways to incentivize the chooser towards charity, which exemplifies why giving, instead of taking, can be superior for the receiver and the giver. For instance, a 2010 study found that the relationship between material wealth and self-reported happiness flattens out at around 75, 000 dollars for annual income.[35] Excess income and spending, like the doubled 150, 000 dollars, makes negligible impacts on oneself. In the long-term, one million dollars wouldn't make much of a different to any person's life after a temporary high, whereas it *would* make more than a marginal different if put to the right causes, such as The Life You Can Save.[36] Organizations like these can reliably apply donations to actionable efforts that prevent deaths, transform infrastructure, and end suffering.

As many skills-based pedagogies triumph, learning Shakespeare's soliloquies, or Newton's second law, or Pythagoras' theorem are not necessarily significant in and of themselves, but as instruments of foundational abilities and deeper insights. They support the growth of individuals who are becoming "personally and socially competent in all areas of their lives."[37] Moral education need not echo religious or political indoctrination, because indoctrination is uncritical instruction. Instead, moral education can be measured by the same epistemic qualities underpinning all of the content and competencies of our curriculum. Philosopher Philip Cam argues that values education is engaged in "thoughtful deliberation and decision making" and "the kinds of regard and reciprocity that grow under its influence."[38] By these accounts, curricula would not be betrayed, but elevated by a closer commitment to moral education.

What about freestanding moral education? It may seem like a harder sell in the BC Curriculum, but recall the occasion of our forthcoming curricular modification: mandatory Holocaust education. Here we already have a morally-motivated addition to compulsory

education in public schools. This change will likely resemble the last update, from 2023, stipulating that all students working toward a BC Certificate of Graduation must successfully complete at least four credits in Indigenous-focused coursework. For example, between Grades 10 and 12, students can enroll in an eligible course like English First Peoples 12, which provides them with an important education in Indigenous literary topics, in order to satisfy this demand. Four credits in antisemitism ethics, which count towards the overall 80-credit minimum, could echo this most recent revision to the key conditions of the Dogwood Diploma.

If a new ethics requirement were to be introduced, the existing Philosophy 12 could be a candidate, for it covers "methods of reasoning and argument in philosophy" (such as rational decision making), "metaphysical theories about the nature of reality" (such as realism, nihilism, and positivism) and "theories of morality, ethics, and aesthetics" (such as the good life, deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue ethics).[39] A robust exploration of these topics will steer students towards ethical insights. In particular, one of the Big Ideas of Philosophy 12 is that "[w]hile philosophical questions often examine issues with no definitive answers, logic and reasoned arguments can show which answers have more or less value."[40] Though not grounded in moral realism, this statement signals at least a soft objectivism where learners are expected to be held to high epistemic "value" standards, and where they can be more and less correct in their analyses of ethical issues.

The details of an "introduction to ethics" course must be shaped by a joint effort between working educators, school districts, administrators, policy makers, and community stakeholders in the province. It should be restated that my argument seeks to show why and how moral education is a worthwhile project in the first place, rather than dictate what its instruction must look like. However, some suggestions for consideration when drafting such an outline include:

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of the stages of moral development;[41] Elliot Turiel's work in moral reasoning;[42] and Nel Nodding's development of care ethics.[43]

Teacher Education

One objection to moral education is directed at the competency of the *teacher* to adequately teach ethics. Bok observes that "if a professional school divides the responsibility for moral education among a large number of faculty members, most instructors will not have a knowledge of ethics that is equal to the task. Many of them will give short shrift to the moral problems and concentrate on other aspects of the course materials that they feel more equipped to teach."[44] In these higher education ethics programs, the instructors have too much ground to cover such that they won't properly take the time to accustom their students to the relevant ethical literature. And even if they did, there are "deeper reservations as to whether those who teach [moral] courses are really qualified to do so."[45]

This worry is substantial, and should be addressed on two fronts: teacher training and teacher qualification. Teacher training refers to the provincial process of certifying a teacher to work – in BC, this is the Bachelor of Education (BEd). This program is post-degree, compared to a teacher's qualification for particular subjects, which are primarily recognized by focus areas of undergraduate degrees. As far as I can tell, proper teacher training in ethics is needed for integrated moral education, whereas proper teacher qualification in ethics is needed for freestanding moral education. The BC Ministry of Education does mention philosophy when it stipulates that "an acceptable teacher education program must include studies in . . . educational foundations."[46] There are plenty of opportunities for these programs to incorporate moral philosophy, too. After all, education schools like the University of British Columbia's (UBC) already have Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) modules; the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, &

Decolonization (EDI-D) Cohort was added to the BEd at UBC to "support and inspire teacher candidates, and the students and mentors they work with, to explore, develop, and deepen curricular and pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning within the particular lenses of [these values.]"[47] The university facilitates this segment of the program in collaboration with School District No. 38, whose Strategic Plan 2020-2025 has an entire Equity and Inclusion priority in which DEI is identified as "critical to success, wellbeing, and fulfillment."[48] Any institutional backing of DEI is, simultaneously, an endorsement of moral training. Only minor tweaks would be needed to adjust for the foundations of an integrated moral education.

On the other hand, freestanding moral education puts greater pressure on the qualifications of a teacher. The Ministry requires secondary school teachers to have "a minimum of 24 credits of academic coursework in one teachable subject area."[49] The organization does not yet recognize ethics as one of the 30 teachable subject areas. However, neither does it recognize law, specifically, and yet Law Studies 12 is a course in the curriculum. As part of the Social Studies department, a teacher with a history background (history being a teachable subject) may be hired to teach Law, but that doesn't guarantee the teacher will have qualifications in law, let alone 24 credits worth. Instead, a teacher would appeal to other kinds of credentials, such as certificates, professional development, or experience, to be entitled and prepared to teach such a course. Therefore, it is plausible that an ethics course could be taught by a teacher who has studied moral philosophy, to a degree adequate to the institution. As I said, if Philosophy 12 were to serve as a blueprint for this hypothetical course, it is worth noting that philosophy is also not recognized as one of the 30 teachable subject areas, so whatever challenges there are to philosophy teachers in public education would be no less serious than those faced by potential ethics teachers.

In South Korea, where the public education system has been reformed considerably to focus on ethics, critical thinking, and philosophy for children, higher education institutions now have academic departments that train both elementary and secondary school instructors to teach moral education.[50] The faculty in these post-secondary programs have academic backgrounds in moral philosophy, moral psychology, and civic education, and for universities in particular, teacher candidates are requires to complete a certain number of credits in moral education.[51] There is nothing implicit in Korea's direct approach to moral education that makes it less feasible in Canada, and certainly nothing that commits moral education to a specific ethical viewpoint.[52] To the contrary, BC's Bachelor of Education already incorporates philosophy in its foundations of education requirements, to say nothing of the strong emphasis on professional development for working teachers, wherein similar training can be disseminated. All of this is to say that supporting integrated or freestanding forms of moral education is not, at minimum, impossible.

Objections

Even if you grant that there are good reasons for moral education, and that it is possible to teach moral knowledge, you may still be unconvinced that it be mandatory. After all, there are good reasons for an education in, say, human psychology: just as I have argued the relevance of ethics to the overall life of the student, so too could one show that psychology is too important to leave out of a holistic education; just as I have argued that there are insinuations to ethics in each of the traditional aims of education, so too could one show that psychology is compatible with teaching for knowledge, skills, character, and politics; and just as I have argued that moral truth is tenable in JTB theory, so too could one show that there are facts of psychology rooted in metaphysical realism. When all is said and done, it is curious that psychology is not recognized

as a teachable subject, and that the field is not mentioned whatsoever in the BC curriculum.[53] A version of my entire argument could seemingly work for psychology education, then, which is a problem if there is rational resistance to psychology education in schools.

Though I concede that some of the comparisons are valid, I believe we can sever the analogy at a few points. For instance, it is much harder to establish the significance of psychology to *all* learners than it is to do the same for morality. If moral truths exist, then they necessarily have ramifications for everyone, whether or not everyone pays attention to them. On the other hand, if truths in psychology exist, they may or may not have application to some individuals, but it cannot be guaranteed that they will make sizeable differences to these individuals' lives. One could argue that mental health is a psychological concept that affects everyone, but it is an entire category related to, but independent from, psychology – which is why it features on the Physical and Health Education part of the curriculum. Another reason I am in favour of moral education and not psychology education is that, as I have argued, morality is intertwined in most of the current subject areas. While there are myriad moral insights to glean in contemporary Science and English, there are only occasional psychological insights, at best, in any given class.

If you still take issue with the *compulsion* of moral education, I would just clarify that I am on the side of moral learning *in* compulsory education. This is to say that even electives, like Philosophy 12 or Genocide Studies 12, are educationally valuable courses that should continue to be offered, even though their respective areas are not enforced on the entire student population of a secondary school. I wish to see ethics represented in the public education system, because moral learning belongs in educational institutions that develop the minds of young people. However that goal is accomplished will be open to interpretation, but I hope that the points

presented in this book will warrant the consideration of moral knowledge seeing its way into school curriculum.

Summary

In this chapter, I attempted to put to rest anxieties about the feasibility of moral education, especially when taking into consideration the analogous aspects of other kinds of education. I addressed the question, 'can ethics be taught?' in the affirmative, drawing from Derek Bok and others who have developed similar arguments. I then proposed two forms of moral education that could be effective in the contemporary BC curriculum. In the Conclusion, I will address some final objections surrounding my conception of moral education and raise implications for further research.

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Chapter 4 Endnotes

[1] Dickman, 2011.

[2] https://www.hsi.org/issues/dog-meat-trade/.

[3] Slovic, 2007.

[4] Mill, 1863.

[5] Alternatively, they may wonder why moral inquiry in secondary school should be compulsory, drawing a distinguishing it from moral formation, in elementary school, as outlined in Chapter 1.

[6] There are also, of course, the inevitable moral considerations of everyday life: whether it's right to tell the teacher the answers to the test are visible, whether one should lie to protect their friends from trouble, and so forth. But my point here is to stress the importance of morality and why it should be taken seriously as a consequential part of education.

[7] Singer, 1982.

[8] Robinson, 2019.

[9] Bok, 1976.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] BC Ministry of Education, n.d., *Communication*.

[17] Sprod, 2001.

[18] Dewey, 1908.

[19] For example, see: Yan et al, 2018.

[20] Marples, 2022.

[21] Ibid.

[22] BC Ministry of Education, 2019, *Social studies*.

[23] Fenstermacher et al., 2009.

[24] BC Ministry of Education, 2019, *Core competencies*.

[25] BC Ministry of Education, 2019, *Social studies*.

[26] Santayana, 1922.

[27] Singer, 1982.

[28] Marples, 2022.

[29] Dickens, 1843.

[30] Slovic, 2007.

[31] BC Ministry of Education, 2019, *Foundation of mathematics.*

[32] This fact is morally relevant, for looking out for one's own benefits can be a moral good. The same way we know that suffering is bad for others is because we know it most acutely as bad for ourselves. Singer (2019) even counts "the idea of giving yourself a purpose in life and feeling fulfillment through helping a lot of other people" as a mentionable incentive for doing the right thing.

[33] This exercise is one variation of the classic prisoner's dilemma in game theory, originally framed by Merrill Flood and Melvin Dresher.

[34] Fudenberg and Karreskog, 2021.

[35] Kahneman and Deaton, 2010.

[36] For more information, visit https://www.thelifeyoucansave.org/.

[37] BC Ministry of Education, n.d., *Curriculum redesign*.

[38] Cam, 2014.

[39] BC Ministry of Education, n.d., *Philosophy 12*.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Kohlberg, 1974.

[42] Turiel, 2009.

[43] Noddings, 2013.

[44] Bok, 1976.

[45] Ibid.

[46] BC Ministry of Education, 2022.

[47] *Equity, Diversity*, 2023.

[48] *Equity and Inclusion*, n.d.

[49] BC Ministry of Education, 2022.

[50] Han, 2024.

[51] Seoul National University of Education, 2024.

[52] Though much of South Korea's moral philosophy education revolves around the learning of Confucianism, it could just as easily operate according to a commitment to an altogether different ethical system, which is to say that nothing about Confucianism itself bears on the practicality of teacher training.

[53] Psychology 12, a former elective, was removed in the 2016 redesign of the curriculum.

Conclusion

In this book, I endeavored to contribute a philosophical defense of moral education. I believe we should be sanguine about the prospect of galvanizing moral learning in public schools. To conclude, I will review the arguments made in the book, address some remaining questions and potential objections, and finish with some suggestions for further research.

In the Introduction, I laid out some reasons why educators, especially those in BC, are considering the merits of moral education. I unpacked some basic terms in the philosophy of ethics and education, and established that my focus in this field is on propositional knowledge, moral philosophy, and moral inquiry in secondary grades in compulsory curricula.

In Chapter 1, I argued that all traditional aims of compulsory education are committed to affirming knowledge, and that conceptual understandings of knowledge are epistemic goods. By appraising the current BC Curriculum and its implied moral modicums, I averred that moral knowledge is of educational interest.

In Chapters 2 and 3, I dissected the constituents of "knowledge" using JTB theory, in an attempt to show that a justified true moral belief is plausible. In particular, I ascribed five criteria to propositional morality, and tried to operationalize the discovery of it through an epistemic process. The ever-expanding corpus of moral knowledge, conferred by ethical philosophers, should serve as a promising start.

In Chapter 4, I reified this theory into conceptual practice with examples of how moral education can curtail aberrations in moral thinking. Moral mistakes can be inoculated, I insisted, by stewarding students towards legitimate moral insights. If we eschew this educational responsibility, I worry that moral maturity and intelligence stagnates.

In each of these four sections, I confronted many counterarguments to my claims, and attempted to demonstrate why my conception of moral education is nonetheless sound. I hope that having already addressed several objections, little more needs to be said to clarify the thinking behind my argument. However, some remaining questions that haven't yet been dealt with should be discussed now before I conclude. I express these in the form of hypothetical questions, and respond in turn.

Remaining Questions

What makes moral education different from religious education?

Unlike the private school system, the commonsense attitude is that public education should be nonreligious. By agreeing with this, I would seemingly calling into question my own advocation of moral education if 1) morality and religion are inextricably connected, or 2) the reasons I've presented for a defense moral education are compatible with a defense of religious education.

To start with the first objection, I grant that many faith traditions teach their own moral laws (e.g. the Ten Commandments), meta-ethics (e.g. Divine Command Theory), and normative theories (e.g. the Golden Rule). However, I do not hold that moral knowledge is *intrinsically* tied to religion. If it were, it would require a belief in a deity. But nowhere in my case for moral realism did I reference theism or scripture. Indeed, if my JTB approach to morality works, it does so without relying on any supernatural suppositions.

Even though the moral ideas shared in this book are secular, they are still, I think, harmonious with a host of religious worldviews. It is not an affront to the Christian or the Jew to suggest that we should calibrate our moral intuitions to be better aligned with a reflective

equilibrium of justified true beliefs. If anything, most major religions support the same conclusions I've arrived at regarding moral realism.

Thus comes the second question: what makes moral education different from religious education? If I'm right that the former does not offend the latter, because they tend to overlap more than they differ, I will need to show why there are meaningful differences so as to only promote the one and not the other. After all, one could charge me with making an argument that sounds awfully similar to religious apologetics for the existence of God, smuggling in pseudoscientific rhetoric about "methodologies" in morality.

Though I acknowledge that my views about moral realism and knowledge could be seen as controversial, we should remember that many other credible ideas have been, and still are, controversial. Disagreement about a domain does not make it spurious. Rather, we neglect to make religious education compulsory not because it's controversial, but because it's irrational, at least with respect to the epistemic standards to which we hold traditional school subjects. And I don't think many religious thinkers would even disagree with this, for then there would be no need for faith. Moral knowledge is not learned by faith, but by reason, and therefore should be considered separable from religious knowledge.

One other impetus for lumping together religious and moral education is because they both sound indoctrinative. Indeed, I have provided examples of both simultaneously: the Indian Residential School System. And while there are many more ways moral education has been, and can be, guilty of indoctrination, I maintain that the kind of moral inquiry articulated in this book is no more indoctrinative than anything else in the BC curriculum. Recall that epistemic education, as discussed in Chapter 1, involves not the mere acquisition of knowledge, but the

skills of *understanding* of it. Just as students can be taught *how* to understand trigonometry or cellular mitosis, they can also be taught *how* to understand axiology or virtue.

Doesn't moral education lead to intolerance of diverse perspectives?

The BC Curriculum, unlike some other curricula across Canada, is known for its progressive qualities, such as commitments to Indigenous ways of knowing and anti-racism. One may worry that moral education would be a step backwards, making schools more close-minded to viewpoint diversity.

If moral education only constitutes the dissemination of propositional moral knowledge, then this worry would be warranted. If, on the other hand, we imagine moral education like our other school subjects, we can see that there is, in fact, room for reasoned debate and disagreement in a Science or Social Studies classroom. We can also see that there are good reasons for Science and Social Studies classes to disprove bad ideas; after all, we need not be modest about our denouncement of phrenology or the flat Earth.

Likewise, intellectual humility is not always a virtue in moral matters; we can, with certainty, condemn racism, and we should, with fervor, celebrate moral progress. In the cases when moral education clashes with people's cultures, we should remember why it is a value to respect others' worldviews in the first place: it is self-contradictory to profess that we ought to be open to divergent views whilst denying that oughts are justified true beliefs.

If moral knowledge is real, where are the moral experts?

My analogies to other fields, like science or history, in order to sketch out what I mean by moral "knowledge," seem to have a fatal flaw: the apparent lack of moral expertise. If follows that if science and history are real areas of discovery, then some people can learn enough about

the topics to become authorities. But the absence of moral specialists would suggest there is no moral knowledge after all.

It is not obvious to me, however, that everyone is equal in their moral cognition. It's certainly the case, for example, that not everyone is equal in their moral *behaviour*; I'll take it you agree this is self-evidently true, otherwise you would be committed to saying there's no moral difference between Jesus and Mao Zedong. But we can even go further in saying that, as an *epistemic* discipline, there are also significant degrees of differences across individuals and groups. Teachers can recognize this, for they are moral authorities over their students, in the same way that parents can possess greater moral wisdom than their children.

It is this very idea of competence in any domain that admits educators to teach what they know, and the reason I listed moral philosophy as an important consideration for teacher training programs. If we're looking for moral experts, surely we could say that Marcus Aurelius, Mary Astell, or Martin Luther King, Jr. have better moral ideas than Nero, Stalin, or Genghis Khan. And even if we can't claim that Kant is to morality as Einstein is to physics, my argument has been that moral knowledge is plausible, not that all moral questions have already been solved. There was a time when no single scientific expert existed on the planet, and even then, there was such a thing as scientific truth. Perhaps, like the age before the Enlightenment, moral knowledge is still in its infancy.

If moral knowledge is knowable through intuition, how can we have counter-intuitive moral thoughts?

The kind of moral education I endorse is one that helps rectify instincts that, upon reflection, fail to hold up. This process is largely dependent on the power of rationale intuition.

But if there are *counterintuitive* truths, such as the ones illustrated in the psychic numbing problems, then have I not contradicted the reliability of intuition?

It's possible this paradox is really a red herring, and we've simply been misdirected by limitations in language. As I've pointed out, the term "intuition" can take on different meanings in different contexts, so we should be on guard for miscommunication and misunderstanding when a word is so flexible. When it comes to meta-ethics, I am situating intuition in a philosophical tradition, as opposed to common parlance, wherein intuitions are closely connected to *seemings* and *sensibilities* that are used in inductive reasoning. This concept has much less to do with "gut feelings" than it sounds.

If we return to some of the examples explored in this book, the distinction becomes clearer. The Monty Hall thought experiment is essentially intuition at odds with itself: the initial impression that one has a one-in-two chance of winning the game rubs up against the reality that one's chances are lower than expected. The process by which we know the odds can go from one-in-three to two-in-three is discoverable by using intuition, the same kind that we use for a wide array of understanding, morality included.

Where do we go from here?

Though much ink has been spilled in epistemology, ethics, and education, there is a lacuna, it seems, in their convergence. If moral knowledge is taken seriously as an epistemic good, then, moving forward, philosophers of education could explore ancillary questions on moral consensus versus moral facts, the imperfections of JTB theory, competing frameworks of moral epistemology and normative ethics, sequencing of moral concepts for developmental appropriateness, sensitivity to controversial topics, and open-mindedness of diverse moral opinions.

Further research in this area of moral education would benefit from empirical studies into the efficacy of moral inquiry in schools. I have purposefully refrained from relying on qualitative research in building my thesis, for the success of the argument in principle should not be restricted to what has been the case in practice. That being said, recognizing the effectiveness as well as the limitations of moral education programs will be invaluable to future conversations around curricular reform.

I do not discredit or disparage the work that precedes me, and certainly hope my contribution will be useful, but ultimately I am compelled to respond to what I see as a lack of a *sustained* conversation about moral knowledge. We should not shy away from difficulties that the topic entails, but embrace the challenge.

It has been said that "[t]o educate a man in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society."[1] Until we take seriously the notion of an education in morals, alongside in mind, we are doing our province an educational and ethical disservice.

Conclusion Endnotes

[1] The aphorism is usually attributed to Theordore Roosevelt, but the exact words cannot be traced to a primary source.