

Against directive teaching in the moral Community of Inquiry:

A response to Michael Hand

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Abstract

While we consider directive teaching to be detrimental to the Community of Inquiry (CoI), we nonetheless find ourselves in qualified agreement with Hand as he challenges certain norms of practice that support the common presumption in favour of nondirective teaching in the moral CoI. We agree with Hand that it is possible for teachers to impart their own moral beliefs without indoctrinating students, yet we argue that the risk of indoctrination remains present in the many realistic scenarios in which teachers misjudge controversial standards as uncontroversial or in which teachers' arguments bypass students' reason. We agree with Hand that substantively closed questions can generate satisfying inquiries, with the caveat that in the absence of open inquiry there is a chronic risk of eroding the ethos of trust in a CoI. Similarly, we find qualified agreement with Hand regarding teachers' philosophical self-effacement. We accept that teachers may judiciously suspend neutrality in order to ensure that sound arguments and objections are aired and understood, yet we caution teachers against endorsing any particular justification or rebuttal.

We further raise three distinct concerns about Hand's theory. Firstly, we argue that Hand's theory is insensitive to the varieties of moral controversy that emerge within the CoI. We maintain that a nondirective approach is required for a proper exploration

of (a) controversy over conflicting justifications for shared moral standards grounded in diverse normative ethical theories, where the conative power of particular justifications may differ among individuals; (b) controversy over the meaning, scope and significance of moral concepts; and (c) controversy over the application of moral standards and concepts to actual cases. Secondly, we argue that in light of teachers' susceptibility to motivated reasoning and myside bias, Hand's theory places undue demands on teachers to exercise objective judgement. Where teachers unwittingly transmit biases to students, we are not assured that Hand's proposal can safeguard against indoctrination. Thirdly, we do not share Hand's conception of moral inquiry as concerned exclusively with argument over the content and justification of moral standards. The narrowness of this conception, together with available evidence that moral argument alone has little effect on moral behaviour, leads us to question Hand's claim that a fundamental reason for engaging students in moral inquiry is to reinforce their moral formation. We suggest that the scope of the moral CoI should not be limited to argument over the content and justification of moral standards, but should also include the cultivation of virtues and dispositions that prepare students for complex moral decision-making, as well as the investigation of Aristotelian questions concerning what is worthwhile in human life. Given our broader conception of the CoI as both moral and ethical, and our emphasis on students having both the freedom and the responsibility to judge reasonableness for themselves, we conclude that nondirective teaching remains a beneficial regulatory principle for CoI practice.

Key words

community of inquiry, directive teaching, ethical inquiry, intellectual virtues, moral controversy, moral education

Introduction

In 'Moral education in the Community of Inquiry' Michael Hand, in this issue, claims that directive teaching is compatible with the Community of Inquiry (CoI) and, further, that directive moral teaching within the CoI is educationally appropriate in the context of teaching certain moral standards whose justifications he describes as uncontroversial. These claims, which have striking implications for classroom practice, are provocative because directive teaching is widely considered to be

anathema to the CoI.

As philosophers in education who regard the CoI as conducive to moral education, we have strong reservations about Hand's overall thesis. Yet there are many points in his argument that we find both persuasive and edifying for practitioners. While Hand seeks to push back against three sources of resistance to directive teaching in moral inquiry within the CoI literature, he doesn't have to push *too* hard. We agree—with important caveats—that a teacher may impart her own moral beliefs without indoctrinating students; that substantively closed questions can generate satisfying inquiries; and that the teacher's neutrality may be judiciously suspended. However, successfully challenging the norms of neutrality and openness does not clinch the argument that students participating in a CoI should be guided towards particular answers. We will respond to each of Hand's substantive arguments before outlining further reservations about some of the assumptions that underlie his position.

Responding to Hand's arguments

On indoctrination

Hand distinguishes moral beliefs that are uncontroversial ('justified' or 'unjustified') from those that are controversial. The risk of indoctrination in directive teaching is limited, he claims, to inquiries concerning the *controversial* standards, as it is only these standards that cannot be imparted without some degree of manipulation. In making this claim Hand assumes that teachers are adequately equipped to distinguish uncontroversial from controversial standards in a consistent and impartial manner. We note however that if a teacher were to misjudge a controversial standard as uncontroversial and go on to teach it directly, she would indeed risk indoctrinating her students. We consider it highly likely that teachers will in fact make such errors of judgement on a frequent basis, due both to their susceptibility to biases (about which we say more in a later section), and to the insufficiency of their theoretical knowledge in most instances. Hand (2018) expects teachers to have 'a secure understanding of [the] subject matter [of moral inquiry] – of the range of moral standards to which people subscribe and the justificatory arguments advanced in their support, and of the status and soundness of those standards and arguments' (p. 88). Our experience in schools suggests that this expectation is unrealistic and would be regarded as excessively demanding by most teachers.

Hand argues that rationally persuading students of the justificatory status of ‘justified’ and ‘unjustified’ moral standards is *not* indoctrination, since it is not a method that bypasses reason. This is eminently plausible, but only insofar as rational persuasion is what is actually occurring in a classroom. We believe that even if teachers were to succeed in reliably discriminating between controversial and uncontroversial moral standards and duly limit their directive approach to teaching the latter, the risk of indoctrination would persist for two reasons. Firstly, just because a teacher’s view is rationally defended and the student comes to accept it as true, it doesn’t follow that reason actually did the persuading. The teacher’s status, power or privilege might be turning the gears; a classroom culture of naivety, deference or laziness might be at play; the student might be especially unconfident, reverential or teacher-pleasing. Secondly, we suspect that given licence to teach directly in a CoI, teachers are in practice likely to use *all* the tools of influence available to them—rhetorical as well as logical—especially in defence of any moral standards they believe to be uncontroversial. Since teachers’ arguments may well bypass students’ reason, the risk of indoctrination is ever-present.

On open questions

Hand challenges the widely-held assumption that inquiry in a classroom CoI must be substantively open in the sense of dealing with unsettled questions that have indeterminate answers, or whose candidate answers stand in tension or conflict. Hand contends that the mere semblance of such openness is enough to stimulate philosophical inquiry. We agree, having witnessed vigorous classroom exchanges on questions whose answers are at least provisionally settled among experts in the relevant fields. Questions like ‘What distinguishes science from pseudo-science?’ and ‘Do only sentient beings have rights?’ have sparked heated controversy in our classrooms, however satisfactorily they may have been resolved by leading philosophers of science or legal theorists.

Yet while we agree that inquiry *can* succeed in the investigation of settled matters, we regard these cases as the exception rather than the rule when it comes to moral education. There is much to be said for a consistent focus on genuinely open questions. It ensures that students are alive to the disagreements and different ways of seeing that are integral to moral life. Further, in the absence of open inquiry, there is a chronic risk of eroding the ethos of trust in a CoI. Once students come to expect the teacher to have an agenda for an inquiry—perhaps even *the* answer—the semblance of openness

starts to look more like a charade. Students may begin to doubt that *any* inquiry is genuinely open to diverse views.

Hand (2019) cautions educators against placing too much emphasis on openness and indeterminacy for fear of giving students the misleading impression that moral questions are normally intractable (p. 37). While we recognise that there are aspects of moral life that are firmly settled (at least within the context of a school), we believe this need not compromise the beneficial openness of the CoI. The diverse avenues for directive teaching beyond the CoI (e.g. assemblies, seminars and pastoral conversations) afford ample opportunity for teachers to illuminate whatever aspects of moral life are taken to be non-negotiable.

On neutrality

Hand resists the notion that the facilitator of a CoI should be philosophically self-effacing: that she should adopt a position of substantive neutrality on all philosophical questions for the sake of the inquiry. He argues that those who advocate for such philosophical self-effacement unreasonably assume that a teacher cannot be substantively committed without supplying students with answers and thereby undercutting the inquiry. He distinguishes between *giving* (or supplying) answers, and *guiding* (or directing) students towards answers, the latter being compatible with the CoI, in his view.

Hand's claim that directive teaching is compatible with inquiry has ample support in the literature (e.g. Chen & Klahr 1999; Garlikov n.d.; Rowlands & Carson 2019), at least with regard to maths and science, disciplines in which most problems posed at the school-level have more or less cut-and-dried answers. But if we look to the humanities and social sciences, the landscape changes. Here we find issues that are frequently far more controversial. The Australian Curriculum, for example, expressly states that in these learning areas students are expected to explore ambiguities and diverse perspectives, develop considered points of view on complex and contentious issues, reflect on their civic responsibilities, explore how ethical values and principles influence human affairs, and investigate changes in societal attitudes over time (ACARA n.d.). These are all activities through which students are likely to confront dilemmas, conflict and uncertainty. Moral inquiry is the paradigmatic classroom activity in which controversies abound, even where teachers may believe that matters are settled. As we will argue shortly, the many kinds of controversy in which moral discourse is mired should caution teachers against too hastily crediting their own substantive moral commitments or using them to vindicate directive teaching in a CoI.

We agree with Hand that, in the interest of expanding students' moral horizons, the teacher should strive to give due prominence to a range of the strongest arguments and to 'see to it that the sound arguments for basic morality, and the sound objections to arguments against it, are thoroughly aired and understood, either by giving the floor to pupils able to articulate them or by feeding them into the discussion herself' (Hand 2020, p. 15). If these actions are interpreted by some as compromising the teacher's substantive neutrality, so be it. We regard substantive neutrality not as a goal to be pursued or rejected *tout court*, but simply as an often-useful tactic to help students improve their thinking. Further, we emphasise that *airing* ideas is not tantamount to *endorsing* them. A teacher who supports her students' inquiry into a range of justifications, and who foregrounds reasons and arguments that she finds most plausible, need not—and, we argue, *should* not—have the directive aim of 'guid[ing] the course of the discussion' (Hand 2020, p. 15) towards a given conclusion. Yet Hand advocates 'steering discussion in the right direction' (Hand 2020, p. 18), which implies a commitment not merely to persuading students that certain moral standards are justified or unjustified, but further, persuading students of the decisiveness of *a particular* justification or rebuttal. We will say more about this when we come to discuss controversy over competing justifications for shared standards.

Exploring some assumptions implicit in Hand's theory

So far, we have met Hand on his own terms, conceding that indoctrination may in principle be avoided when the teacher presents her own rationally-defended views, that inquiry can succeed even where the topics explored are substantively closed, and that the teacher's substantive neutrality is not a goal to be pursued at all costs. These concessions come with caveats that concern the epistemological and ethical readiness of any particular community to break with the conventions of the CoI, and the risks and rewards associated with doing so. While we welcome Hand's critique of the seminal literature and his nuanced treatment of unhelpful caricatures, our caveats restrict the scope of his thesis and lend support to our counter-claim that nondirective teaching remains a reasonable *prima facie* principle regulating practice in the moral CoI.

In what follows, we lend support to this conclusion by identifying some problematic assumptions that we believe are implicit in Hand's theory of moral education: assumptions about the loci of moral controversy, the capacity of teachers to avoid bias, and the role of inquiry in moral education.

On the loci of moral controversy

In our view, Hand's theory is insensitive to the varieties of moral controversy that emerge within the CoI. Hand (2018) regards moral controversy as a matter of reasonable disagreement over the content and justification of moral standards where the 'evidence and arguments bearing on a matter [are] subject to more than one plausible interpretation' (p. 2). Moral controversy cannot be contained in this way, however. In addition to disagreement over the array of possible justifications for shared standards, the CoI allows for reasonable disputes about the meaning of moral concepts as well as about how standards and concepts ought to be applied to particular cases. Each of these kinds of controversy ought to give pause to teachers who might otherwise embrace directive teaching in the CoI.

Controversy over competing justifications for shared standards

We appreciate Hand's close attention to moral justification, which is indeed an important locus of controversy in the CoI. Yet, unlike Hand, we believe it would be a mistake to inquire into any moral standards within a CoI with the aim of persuading students to accept a given justification as *the decisive one*.

One of the benefits of using the CoI model for moral inquiry lies in participants coming to see issues from more than one perspective, thereby experiencing the 'penumbra of uncertainty' (Russell 1950/1992, p. 11) caused by the tension between competing moral intuitions. In the face of this tension, arriving at a final judgement is a matter of either 'going with the strongest intuition or ... allowing reason to choose among the alternatives on the basis of the conscious application of a rule or principle' (Haidt 2001, p. 819). Given the prevalence of cognitive biases, choosing to go with one's strongest intuition is a risky strategy for anyone who cares about their moral beliefs being epistemically warranted. The more reliable approach, as Haidt suggests, is to intentionally apply a principle such as *an action is only ethical if it demonstrates a disposition to act virtuously and with good judgement; an action is only ethical if one can affirm that others in a like situation should act in that same way; or an action is only ethical to the extent that it promotes collective wellbeing*. Such principles are of course the stock-in-trade of normative ethical theories. The decision to apply one principle rather than another may be arbitrary or capricious, but at least where this decision is transparent it can be challenged; and where criteria for moral judgement are admitted by the community, different justifications for moral subscription can be assessed on common terms.

The very existence of competing normative ethical theories all but guarantees controversy over the strength of alternative justifications for subscribing to a given moral standard. It is well understood that people's normative judgements are shaped in part by the ethical theories to which they consciously or unconsciously subscribe: theories such as virtue ethics, deontological ethics, utilitarian ethics, rights-based ethics, and ethics of care. Depending on which theoretical frameworks inform their respective judgements at a particular time, different individuals may have diverse but nonetheless equally defensible reasons to believe that a behaviour is morally wrong (or right). For instance, here are just some of the reasons why lying may be considered wrong:

it diminishes trust between human beings [and weakens social cohesion]

it treats those who are lied to as a means to achieve the liar's purpose, rather than as a valuable end in themselves

it makes it difficult for the person being lied to make a free and informed decision about the matter concerned

it cannot sensibly be made into a universal principle

it's a basic moral wrong

it's something that Good People don't do

it corrupts the liar

[it breaks an implicit contract among language users] not to use language deceitfully

[it puts the liar's] long-term credibility ... at risk.

(from BBC n.d., paras. 20–28)¹

To properly assess the relative persuasiveness of each reason, a community of inquirers would need to determine which ethical theory each reasoner is invoking, and further, which ethical theories *ought* to be applied to the decision at hand. Ongoing controversy about the relative merits of conflicting theories in normative

¹ We note that Hand (2018, p. 4) enumerates an alternative set of candidate reasons for lying being wrong.

ethics suggests that there may be no conclusive way to determine which theory ought to guide decision-making under any particular circumstances.

In some instances, people will come to the very same moral judgement whether they are looking at a morally-significant action through the prism of virtue ethics, utilitarianism or any other ethical theory. For instance, a community may universally condemn actions that wantonly harm innocents, perpetuate systemic injustices, or destroy the earth's life support systems. With respect to such cases, we agree with Hand that it is deceptive to present 'either robustly justified or demonstrably unjustified moral standards as if their justificatory status were matters of reasonable disagreement' (Hand 2020, p. 8). Still, consensus on the wrongness (or rightness) of an action does not imply consensus about the particular justification for it being wrong (or right). Even where diverse ethical theories point to identical moral judgements, the underlying arguments are likely to differ substantially. This is precisely why it is meaningful for students to 'work out the justifications for themselves', as Hand urges, 'through a dialogical process of proposing, testing, critiquing and refining arguments' (Hand 2020, p. 12).

Hand elsewhere acknowledges that disagreements about the justification of standards are matters of reasonable disagreement and that 'different justifications for the same standard can sit quite happily alongside one another: acceptance of one does not necessitate rejection of all others.' (Hand 2018, p. 69). Yet he claims there is at least one justification which is *not* a matter of reasonable disagreement and which thereby provides a universally acceptable defence of basic moral standards. This he calls 'the problem-of-sociality justification': a basis for holding people to moral standards that are conflict-averting and cooperation-sustaining (Hand 2018, p. 68-69, building on work by Copp 2009). We assume it is this justification that Hand has in mind where he uses the definite article recurrently in phrases such as 'helping [students] grasp *the* justification for subscribing' (Hand 2020, p. 8, emphasis added) and 'steering discussion in *the* right direction' (Hand 2020, p. 18, emphasis added).

Hand's argument for the problem-of-sociality justification is provocative, but it only takes us so far. While the importance of avoiding conflict and sustaining cooperation may meet with widespread assent, it should not be assumed that these are *the* effective spurs to moral commitment. Other justifications may be doing the work of securing an individual's subscription to a particular standard. We worry that directive teaching in a CoI would seriously short-change students by limiting their opportunity to tease out the robust reasons (ethical, religious, political, aesthetic or otherwise) that

genuinely motivate them. It is these reasons that will supply the needed 'strength of will to resist temptation' in times of 'flagging resolve' (Hand 2018, p. 42).

We are not suggesting that the conative power of a justification amounts to its rational persuasiveness. Any given impulse—virtue-signalling, for instance—which motivates an individual student's commitment to, say, helping those in need, might be regarded by others in a CoI as clearly *not* the best justification for doing so. Nonetheless, we believe that students should be given every opportunity to think through moral problems independently and to determine for themselves which reasons for moral action are most compelling to them. Although directive teaching might efficiently lead students to a more widely-accepted justification (while perhaps also securing their commitment to the basic moral standards with which Hand is concerned), these benefits would come at the expense of a more full-bodied kind of ethical inquiry which we take to be fundamental to the (nondirective) moral CoI. We are referring to a kind of inquiry concerned not merely with moral justification, moral subscription and code compliance, but concerned more broadly with the cultivation of moral and intellectual virtues and dispositions that will serve young people in the face of novel and complex predicaments. Developing virtues such as courage, humility, compassion, charitableness, curiosity and judiciousness contributes just as much to a meaningful moral education as does either moral reasoning or moral formation. While the CoI is not the only context in which students can develop such virtues, it is an important one, due in part to the climate of intellectual freedom and responsibility that is most fully realised in the absence of directive teaching. We therefore perceive a serious opportunity cost associated with directive teaching in the CoI.

Controversy over moral concepts

When discussing moral controversy in the CoI, Hand focuses heavily on controversy over the justification for moral standards, as we have seen. This preoccupation eclipses reasonable disagreement over the meaning, scope and significance of moral *concepts*. Conceptual exploration is central to the CoI, and if it were to be displaced in the course of reconstituting the CoI to accommodate directive teaching, the loss would again be costly.

While Hand is right to remind us that moral disagreement over the content and justification of moral standards 'does not go all the way down' (Hand 2018, p. 76), disagreement about the meaning of concepts sometimes runs very deep indeed. By way of illustration, one of us has found that participants in a CoI often struggle to

agree on paradigmatic examples of the application of a given concept, although they readily nominate boundary cases (Lockrobin 2020, p. 124).

To better appreciate what is at stake here, consider this example of an inquiry from an American high school history class, a video of which is published on Teaching Channel (n.d.). In the context of a unit of study on the American Civil War, students were invited to discuss an array of primary source documents, including an impromptu speech given by a former slave urging his kin to leave the plantation. Class discussion centred on the related questions of (a) at what point the emancipated slaves became free, and (b) what freedom means. In our view it is not merely the second question that is philosophically controversial and ripe for the kind of open inquiry that is incompatible with directive teaching. The first question is too, because determining when the former slaves became free hinges upon settling the philosophically contested meaning of the concept of freedom.

During the class, further questions arose over the impacts of various factors—unemployment, sharecropping, subjection to Black Laws, and lack of civil rights—on the former slaves' freedom. Despite their empirical dimensions, these questions likewise can't be resolved without an agreed definition of the moral concept of freedom. But arriving at such a definition via directive teaching would ride roughshod over a legitimate diversity of perspectives and would likely curb the expression of reasonable arguments. In the present example, as long as 'freedom' remains open to interpretation, liberal education requires that the teacher take a nondirective approach to inquiry. The same is true of all moral standards by virtue of the fact that they contain moral concepts, the meaning of which is never fully determined.

In our view, Hand understates the role of conceptual controversy in the CoI. He asserts that 'in the main ... it is perfectly obvious when a given act of appropriation is a case of stealing' (2018, p. 3), and that moral dilemmas and borderline cases are 'the exception, not the rule' (2018, p. 36) in moral life. The CoI is not a microcosm of life, however. In the somewhat rarefied space of the CoI, conceptual ambiguity arises very frequently, and is beneficial in prompting nuanced thinking. We have space here to explore just one example featuring an educator (Avram Barlowe) and his students:

Saloul: I don't think was wrong what [the former slave] did, that he stole his master's horse. In his eyes, that was his exit to freedom. And when it comes to freedom, sometimes you have to do what you have to do. There was another passage where someone stole a bed, a mattress; and you can't ride a mattress. It's not a magical mattress that will take you

to freedom ... But at least a horse, it will take you to where you need to go. And I feel like it's different. It's justified ...

Avram Barlowe: I think what Saloul is saying is, the man who took his master's horse to escape, that that's an act of freedom and that's a legitimate taking of the master's property; but ... taking the bed of the master on the plantation is not an act of freedom and they should not have taken that property. Is that correct? Do people agree?

Jabarii: I agree ... but I mean even when he took the horse, that's still stealing ... Obviously he needed to take that horse to get to freedom, but it's still stealing to me.

Saloul: But it's justified stealing.

Jabarii: Yeah. It's justified.

Avram Barlowe: Let's go to the actual document—the fourth document. I don't think he thinks it's stealing. And why does he say 'I don't think it's stealing'?

James: He thinks that the horse is sort of his pay for all the work that he did for the guy for thirty years.

Avram Barlowe: I guess that's my question. He says, 'I worked for this guy for thirty years. I feel like I didn't steal anything. I feel like I deserve the horse. The horse is mine.' So I think he's disagreeing with both Saloul and Jabarii in saying, 'I didn't steal. That horse is my property because I worked on that plantation and never got any payment.' Is he right, or are Jabarii and Saloul right? ...

Ezra: I think that he's right because, yes, he worked for thirty years which is a long time, which warrants a lot of pay for somebody who had been free; so now that he is a free person and he took the horse and the thousand dollars which is so little compared to the work he actually gave to the family, it doesn't even really make up for it, but it justifies what he did.

Jabarii: I think his definition of freedom was payback, kind of. Not actually payback like revenge, but payback like you're gonna give me what you owe me. So, you owe me a horse, I'm gonna take it ...

Rio: It's definitely stealing because it's a civilized country and there's laws, and since the [former slaves] are free, they should obey those laws. I'm not saying that they shouldn't get reparation, but they shouldn't take it upon themselves to just take what they think they deserve.

(Teaching Channel n.d.)

In the course of this inquiry, we see the emergence of students' differing ideas about what constitutes stealing. According to Jabarii (who maintained that taking the horse amounted to stealing despite it being a morally justifiable act), stealing is taking something belonging to another without permission or authorisation. Yet according to James (who described the horse as payment for the slave's decades of unpaid work), stealing is taking something that hasn't been earned.

Let's imagine a different scenario in which the teacher had taken a directive approach to this inquiry. The underlying message to students, implicit or explicit, would have been that the moral standard 'do not steal' is a justified one. The teacher, in line with Hand's proposal, might have encouraged students to examine the strength of suggested justifications for upholding this standard: a worthy intellectual exercise. The teacher may even have guided the class to accept the problem-of-sociality justification. Yet the students would have been forced into a false dilemma: either *taking the horse was wrong* (because it contravened a justified moral prohibition against stealing); or *taking the horse was not stealing* (because it was morally justified, whereas stealing is morally prohibited). There would have been no scope, within this imagined scenario, to acknowledge the legitimacy of Jabarii's position that taking the horse was both an act of stealing *and* a morally justifiable act in this particular case.

Controversy over application to cases

We have arrived at a third locus of controversy in the CoI: controversy over the application of moral standards and concepts to particular cases. The transcript above, which we offered as an example of the centrality of conceptual controversy, is again useful here. It illuminates the value of exploring, within a nondirective CoI, disagreement about the application of a moral standard ('do not steal') to a specific case.

There is no doubt that received moral standards such as 'do not steal' exert a powerful force. After all, people are not blank slates. We become morally socialised in early childhood, and most of us who have the opportunity to influence a new generation of children seek to foster prosocial behaviours, empathic concern for others, self-regulation, and the anticipation of moral emotions. The near-universal experience of moral socialisation leads most to accept a set of moral standards and prohibitions that we share in common at least with others of a similar cultural background, if not with a much broader cross-section of people. Caution is needed, however. Paul (1988) rightly advises educators to

distinguish clearly between espousing the universal, general principles of morality shared by people of good will everywhere and the very different matter of defending any particular application of these principles to actual life situations as conceived from a particular moral standpoint ... It is precisely because we often differ ... as to the proper perspective on the facts that we come to differing moral judgements. (p. 12)

We recognise that controversy abounds when applying moral principles to actual situations. This is why we take the view that as part of a properly philosophical moral education, teachers should encourage nondirective inquiry into specific cases or scenarios which become touchstones for students' moral intuitions and commitments. Exploring cases additionally provides useful opportunities for students to evaluate moral standards and explore the meaning of moral concepts. If such case study is lacking in the CoI, or if directive teaching restricts the investigation of competing views about how moral standards and concepts should be applied, then important questions are left unexplored.

Students may well subscribe to the general standard 'do not lie', for instance, but under what particular circumstances, if any, might they condone lying? Would they make an exception to the rule for the sake of a starving family whose survival in a time of famine depends on lying to marauders about a cache of food? Cases like this throw into sharp relief the complexity of applying moral standards to real-world situations while simultaneously exercising students' capacities to navigate them independently in the future. In a similar vein, students are likely to endorse the general standard 'do not kill', but does eradicating a deadly virus count as killing? And does a meat-eater's complicity in the killing of animals violate the standard? (Here Hand's classification strikes us as especially curious, given that he classes 'do

not kill' as a justified and thereby uncontroversial moral standard, whereas he classes 'do not eat meat' as a controversial moral standard.) In sum, a student's knowledge of the arguments against stealing might be watertight, but if he fails to perceive how he might enact that principle in moral life, his moral education has failed him.

Hand (2018) acknowledges that disagreement over the application of standards is an 'important feature of moral life and a proper focus of attention for moral educators' (p. 3). He assigns the term 'moral deliberation' to the discursive practice of considering circumstances in which 'it is not immediately clear what morality requires' (Hand 2018, p. 35). Oddly, however, he classes deliberation as an activity of moral *formation* (which is concerned with developing intentions, feelings and habits that secure subscription to moral standards). He thereby fails to recognise the rightful place of such deliberation in moral *inquiry* (which is concerned with, among other things, investigating the nature of those standards). We maintain that being fully committed to the moral standard 'do not lie' as a matter of pro tanto principle is insufficient for moral education: it is not enough to subscribe to the standard, expect the same of others, and know why the standard generally holds. What is further needed is a fine-grained understanding of the nuances and boundaries of the concept of lying as well as the contextual considerations that would make lying wrong, permissible or even supererogatory in particular circumstances. That understanding can only be acquired by thoughtfully testing the standard's applicability to numerous and diverse cases, an undertaking ideally suited to inquiry in the CoI.

On teachers' capacity to avoid bias

Hand assumes that teachers in a directive CoI are capable of impartiality as they guide students towards answers. This assumption is problematic. Since individual teachers in their respective classrooms usually work alone, without the checks and balances of a self-correcting community of peers, they are particularly vulnerable to unconscious biases such as motivated reasoning and myside bias (Kahan 2013; Kunda 1990; Nickerson 1998). This poses a considerable impediment to distinguishing matters of genuine controversy from those of merely apparent controversy, a distinction that Hand's proposal requires teachers to make.

It is well known that people tend to interpret evidence in a way that confirms their prior beliefs or reinforces the dominant beliefs within their community, their judgement being clouded by goals extrinsic to accuracy of belief (Kahan 2013). Being attuned to group norms, people typically align their moral judgements with those of their friends and acquaintances, even in the absence of rational persuasion (Haidt

2001). More concerning still, people routinely engage in post hoc reasoning: the biased search for arguments that will provide retrospective support for their existing moral intuitions (Haidt 2001).

Teachers are not immune to such biases, regardless of how highly intelligent and educated they may be. If anything, cognitive sophistication increases the 'bias blind spot': the failure to detect biases in one's own judgement (West, Meserve & Stanovich 2012). It may therefore be unwise to position any teacher as the ultimate arbiter of moral justification, or even to take for granted that her sense of being morally persuaded has its roots in reasoning at all. Indeed, a teacher's sense of a moral argument's cogency may signify little more than its compatibility with her biases. This should be of utmost concern.

Where teachers' own epistemological understanding falls short of the evaluative benchmark—as it does with regrettable frequency (Hofer & Pintrich 1997)—it is unreasonable to expect teachers to escape the mire of partisanship themselves, much less afford this opportunity to their students when moral issues emerge in classroom inquiry. Directive teaching within the moral CoI would therefore present significant threats. As Paul (1988) cautions, '[w]ithout scrupulous care, we do no more than pass on to students our own moral incapacities, moral distortions, and closed-mindedness' (p. 11).

On the influence of inquiry on moral formation

While there are many good reasons to engage students in moral inquiry, we question Hand's claim that a fundamental reason 'is to reinforce [students'] moral formation' (Hand 2020, p. 8). Indeed, we doubt that a student's grasp of a given justification for subscribing to moral standards reliably has the impact Hand anticipates on the 'intentions, feelings and habits that constitute [moral] subscription' (Hand 2020, p. 8). As Haidt (2001) observes, 'moral discussions and arguments are notorious for the rarity with which persuasion takes place' (p. 819). While the nature of the influence of moral philosophical reflection on behaviour remains virtually unexplored (Schwitzgebel & Rust 2016), the limited evidence available suggests that moral reasoning has little influence on children's prosocial behaviour compared to affective factors like warm parenting, low use of power-based discipline, positive interactions with teachers and friends, emotional support, and reinforcement of positive behaviour (Malti, Dys & Zuffianò 2015; Wentzel 2015). Additionally, research into the conduct of professional ethicists across a spectrum of areas suggests that ethicists

behave no more scrupulously than non-ethicists of similar social background (Schwitzgebel 2014; Schwitzgebel & Rust 2016).

Implications for moral education more broadly

A risk of exaggerating the influence of moral inquiry on moral formation is that it may incline teachers to view moral inquiry largely as a means to leading students to certain predetermined conclusions. This would effectively stymie moral education by normalising what one of us has called ‘philosophically superficial ethical instruction’ (Robinson [now Lockrobin] 2016, p. 46) in the CoI, a result of teachers ‘striving to fulfil the requirements of [their] role as ethical instructor to the neglect of [their] role as philosophical facilitator’ (p. 46). This disequilibrium arises, we observe, because teachers are often torn between conflicting demands. On the one hand, in their role as ethical instructors they are bound to ensure that students commit (or at least conform) to certain standards. On the other hand, in their role as philosophical facilitators they must help students develop the intellectual virtues required to analyse, apply and perhaps even overturn those standards. We have observed many cases in which teachers’ struggle with this tension leads them to conduct pseudo-inquiries in which anything goes, so long as the teacher’s chosen conclusion is eventually endorsed. These pseudo-inquiries have all of the procedural pageantry of a nondirective CoI, but little of the pedagogical substance. There has been a mere *pretence* of the intellectual freedom and responsibility characteristic of genuine inquiry. We may say in such cases that moral education in the fullest sense has been obstructed. Students have been denied the opportunity to develop the dispositions they need to inquire effectively in the future.

Rarely have these moral and intellectual resources been more critically needed than in today’s world. The vast array of moral questions raised by the climate crisis exemplifies how moral conundrums will come thick and fast for the current generation of students. These conundrums, many of which we have explored with our students, include ‘Does nature have any value besides its worth to humans?’, ‘What’s wrong with extinction?’, ‘Should today’s children have children of their own?’ and ‘What do those alive now owe future generations?’ (Lockrobin 2019). Hand’s preferred grounds for defending certain moral standards as conflict-averting and cooperation-sustaining may stretch to breaking point in an imminent world in which resources will certainly be more scarce, humans will likely be more unequal, and sympathy may be more limited as a result. Students growing up in such a world have less to gain and more to lose from being guided towards answers.

Conclusion

Hand successfully calls into question certain norms of CoI practice, norms that support the common presumption in favour of nondirective teaching in the moral CoI. Although we share Hand's view that these norms are not absolute, we remain unconvinced that the CoI is hospitable to directive teaching.

We have elaborated Hand's picture of controversy in the moral CoI by digging deeper into some varieties of moral disagreement. These, we have argued, can be properly explored in a CoI only where the teacher takes a nondirective approach and treats all moral standards at least prospectively as matters of reasonable disagreement.

Tensions among different normative ethical theories can give rise to conflicting but nonetheless plausible justifications for shared moral standards, and a diverse community of thinkers can be expected to disagree about the best justification for subscribing to seemingly uncontroversial moral standards. Directing students to accept the problem-of-sociality justification fails to recognise the various alternative and compatible justifications for shared moral standards that may have conative power for students. If students were to assent to particular beliefs at the cost of developing the ability to make wise judgements about novel and complex moral problems in the future, we would have reason to doubt that those students were being adequately morally educated.

Indeterminate moral concepts are another locus of controversy in the CoI, as we have illustrated, with disagreements over the meaning, scope and significance of concepts all being grist for the mill. Similarly, we have suggested that reasonable disagreement runs somewhat deeper than Hand acknowledges when it comes to students' applying moral standards and concepts to actual cases. Here again it is our view that a nondirective approach is best suited to fostering a community in which the expression of dissent can flourish and in which students have the freedom and responsibility to judge reasonableness for themselves. After all, a primary attraction of the CoI is that students learn to hold themselves and one another to account for their beliefs by reasoning publicly about their disagreements.

We have further argued that a mandate of nondirective teaching within the CoI is key to ensuring that undue demands for objective judgement are not placed upon teachers. As we have seen, teachers' susceptibility to myside bias and motivated

reasoning may foster the unwitting transmission of biases to students. We are not assured that Hand's proposal can safeguard against indoctrination in these cases.

Hands offers what he regards as a more expansive understanding of the CoI (expanded to make way for directive teaching) with a view to more effectively achieving the aims of moral education as he sees them, namely to secure full commitment to shared and robustly justified moral standards that serve to avert conflict and sustain cooperation. However, his vision of the expanded CoI is one that we in fact regard as diminished, as it reduces moral inquiry in the CoI to argument over the content and justification of moral standards.

It is in view of this narrow interpretation of moral inquiry that we take exception to Hand's claim that a fundamental reason for engaging students in moral inquiry is to reinforce their moral formation (and thereby to secure their commitment to and compliance with certain moral standards). Accordingly, we have pointed to evidence that suggests moral argument alone has little effect on moral behaviour. We do, however, recognise the scope for moral argument about standards and their justifications to be intertwined, *within a CoI more broadly conceived*, with other elements of a meaningful moral education. These elements include the cultivation of virtues and dispositions that prepare students for complex moral decision-making, and the investigation of Aristotelian questions concerning what is worthwhile in human life, what we should desire, strive for and value, what qualities we should cultivate in ourselves and celebrate in others, what we should regard as the constituents of human flourishing and the ultimate meaning or end of our existence. This broader moral *and ethical* description encapsulates our own vision of what the CoI can and should be.

As we have seen, too concentrated a focus within the CoI on garnering students' acceptance of a decisive justification for subscribing to moral standards can undermine the entire project of moral and ethical education. While we agree with Hand that educators should make space to justify the rules that stabilise school and community life, we do not think that this should occur within the CoI. We conclude that in order to preserve the intellectual freedom and responsibility of the CoI—features that are vital both epistemically and ethically—all moral questions should be treated as though they were unsettled, all conclusions as provisional, and all arguments as subject to reasonable dissent.

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