Re-Thinking School Discipline: Towards an Ethical Approach

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ABSTRACT

Authoritarian approaches to school discipline are driven by the belief that children need to be tightly controlled in order to create and maintain a calm environment where learning can successfully take place. However, when the authority of adults is absolute, as is the case with such discipline, children's natural capacities to question and challenge, which are integral to their growth to moral maturity, are undermined. This thesis adopts a broadly philosophical approach to explore the key justifications for such rigid approaches to school discipline and argues that they are inconsistent with the shared values that schools in England are required to promote, and consequently are neither educational nor ethical.

Through analysis of the approaches to school discipline presented by two dominant and influential voices in this field in England, I identify the problems with practices that focus on adult authority at the expense of children's freedom, and investigate the inadequacy of the underlying assumptions on which they are established. I argue, first, that strict disciplinary practices, complemented by character education, seek to control children and deny them the opportunity to learn to think for themselves. Second, that the result is an impoverished version of moral education whereby children are learning to prioritise the neo-liberal and economically advantageous value of self-interest. Third, that implicit within strict discipline is a lack of respect for children which hampers their developing moral autonomy.

Building on this critique, I establish an ethical basis for school discipline which is grounded in respect for children. I apply the principle of equal worth and argue that their essential humanity necessitates their being treated as equal to adults in terms of respect. Grounding approaches to discipline in respect for the child negates authoritarian practices and allows children to develop into autonomous, critically aware individuals. I conclude by demonstrating how a principle-based approach to discipline and school rules can help children develop an understanding of the law which highlights the importance of school rules being established on a firm foundation of modern liberal values.

LIST OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AV	Authorised Version, Bible
CBBC	Children's British Broadcasting Corporation
DfE	Department for Education
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights (1950)
EE	Eudemian Ethics (Aristotle)
NE	Nichomachean Ethics (Aristotle)
NIV	New International Version, Bible
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PA	Parts of Animals (Aristotle)
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate of Education
Pol	Politics (Aristotle)
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
TES	Times Educational Supplement
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

DECLARATION

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

STATEMENT OF COPYRIGHT

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Genesis of the Project

This thesis was conceived some fifteen years ago in a university lecture theatre. I had been enrolled on my PGCE course for five weeks and had been looking forward to the lecture on discipline, or, more accurately, behaviour management as I discovered it was generally termed. This was not because I shared the sense of trepidation about entering a classroom which many of my fellow students had expressed and was hoping for practical tips for teachers. Rather, I felt sure that within the ivory tower of academia I would learn about the justifications for discipline in schools, the basis from which teachers derive the right to punish students, how discipline can help children learn about the right reasons for behaving and how I might respectfully guide them on the path to moral autonomy. I can certainly say that the ensuing lecture had a profound impact on my development as a teacher, but not in the way I had anticipated. The lecture was given by a local headteacher who told us how he had successfully turned around a failing school due to his 'innovative' disciplinary regime. He extolled the virtues of 'positive discipline' as the means by which he had brought even the most recalcitrant students to heel. Yet the disciplinary regime he described was far from positive in my eyes. His description of the 'yobs' he was forced to deal with, of the 'skin-headed, tattooed' parents he regularly subdued, and of the irrational rules he deployed to do so, left me reeling at the extent of his disrespect for the people he was employed to serve, and at the implications of a lecture hall full of trainee teachers being given this approach as a model for future practice. The wording of his final power point slide has remained with me as the apotheosis of what I felt was the negative discipline he was promoting: 'children are like wolves; they hunt in packs'. I am not certain if this was intended as a joke or a sobering warning of the horror we would be confronted with when we began our teaching practice. I am sure, however, that it was a hugely disrespectful statement about children that propagated a rhetoric of negativity and fear about their behaviour.

When I did go into schools, my experience of the students I met and taught was not of a pack of wolves but of lively, interesting and intelligent young people. I was, however, forced into a

situation where, in order to progress and be viewed as a 'successful' teacher, I had to deploy the techniques of 'positive discipline'. This meant imposing arbitrary rules about school uniform, giving detentions for minor issues, and not allowing students to challenge me due to the requirement that students must 'follow all adult instructions, first time, every time'. I was subjected to as strict a regime of discipline as that imposed on the students. I felt conflicted by the requirement to adhere to a policy which forced me to behave in a way which was counter to everything I believed about treating children with respect and encouraging them to develop their capacity to think and challenge the *status quo*. Ultimately, I found the situation morally untenable and left the teaching profession. In due course, this thesis was born.

1.2 The Debate around Discipline

The liberal principles of justice and equality demand that the right to be educated extends to all children and young people, and it is the primary obligation of schools to provide this education. Schools have rules backed up by the threat of punishment or sanctions to ensure that the education provided is not disrupted by unruly behaviour or other distracting activities, so that it can proceed as efficiently and effectively as possible. That much is uncontroversial, but questions arise regarding whether the control and restraint that lie at the heart of school discipline sit easily with (let alone support) the core aspiration of education (or at least liberal education) – developing rationally and morally autonomous, self-motivated individuals. Too much discipline might result in either the alienation of children from school or their development into passive, unthinkingly obedient young people who accept the teachers' authority without question. Too little discipline, on the other hand, might reduce the amount of genuine learning that goes on because there are too many distractions in the classroom.

The debate surrounding discipline in schools is therefore primarily concerned with getting the balance right with regard to the amount of control which should be exerted over children. This is conventionally, if over-simplistically, framed as being a debate between traditionalists, who argue that adults should have the authority to take full control of children's behaviour and that the establishment of a disciplined environment must occur before any serious learning can take place, and progressives, who believe that if children are respected and their needs and interests are taken into account, there will be much less need for discipline and control in the classroom (see Watson 2021). The distinction is underpinned

by quite different views of the nature of childhood and the concept of the child. Traditionalists are likely to view children as animal-like, irrational, uncivilised, immoral, unreliable, impolite, ungrateful, too often swayed by their emotions, more interested in the immediate than the long-term, and in need of 'tough love'. Progressives are more likely to consider that children have a natural innocence and goodness that needs respecting and protecting, but that this is all too often corrupted through contact with the broader society. Traditionalists, at least in their extreme form, are most likely to support no-excuses or zero-tolerance discipline at school and to see such uncompromising approaches as the only way forward (these approaches are discussed fully in Chapters Two and Three); progressives, on the other hand, are more likely to support less punitive approaches to school discipline (see Oxley, 2021), such as restorative practices, which focus on the use of mediation and conciliation to resolve issues rather than imposing punishments.

However, it seems to be the supporters of ever-stricter discipline policies who currently have the upper hand (see Wood, 2024). The growing insistence on harsh and authoritarian disciplinary practices by many behaviour experts, senior educational practitioners and members of the former Conservative government has been highlighted by increased expressions of concern from a wide range of other stakeholders in education. Teachers have been driven to take strike action over the uncompromising position of senior leaders on disciplinary practices (Bakshi and Carter, 2024); parents have felt forced to complain about the rigid enforcement of 'barbaric' rules (Endley, 2023); students have felt the need to make 'themselves ill' to avoid the 'cult-like rules' operating in their school (Thorp, 2024) or to protest about the strict rules on uniforms and the use of toilets (Weale, 2023); and academics have been prompted to query the use of isolation rooms (Sealy *et al*, 2023), exclusions (Pufall Jones *et al*, 2018), and the use of punishment for every rule violation regardless of the reasons for non-compliance (see Goodman 2023, 2013, 2006; Thompson and Tillson, 2023; Warnick and Scribner, 2020; MacAllister, 2017).

Although Dix has claimed that 'the tide is turning on the behaviour debate. The "punishment brigade" are losing the argument' (2017, p. 1), there is little evidence to support this assertion. From 2010-2024, the determination of the former Conservative government to 'unequivocally restore adult authority to the classroom' (DfE and Gove, 2011, n.p), along with the influential voices of Tom Bennett and Katharine Birbalsingh, who promote the use of authority-driven models as the means of improving student achievement, has had a

profound impact on the trajectory of discipline policies in schools. There may have been a move towards more euphemistic language, with ‘isolation rooms’ now being called ‘reflection rooms’ (see Hazell, 2019), and ‘behaviour management’ now being described as ‘creating a culture’ (Bennett, 2017). However, there remains a strict adherence to rigid disciplinary practices, which, far from respecting students, seek to create compliance and conformity by prioritising control rather than more ethical and educational approaches to discipline.

It is easy to blame the escalation of strict discipline policies on the students. Ofsted does this when it highlights students’ ‘disruptive behaviour’ which ‘affects pupils and teachers’ experience of school and their ability to learn or teach’ (Ofsted, 2023, p. 52). But the conclusion reached in this thesis is that the answer to any perceived growth in problematic student behaviour is not the development of ever stricter disciplinary policies and ever tighter control of students. What is needed (and what this thesis attempts to provide) is to rethink school discipline from first principles. This involves tracing the problems with current approaches to school discipline (such as no-excuses, zero-tolerance and ‘positive’ discipline) back to their underlying values and assumptions; assessing how justifiable and appropriate those values are for the education of children in the 21st century; and suggesting an alternative framework of values where necessary that will be more educationally and ethically effective in contributing to children’s development. By values I mean those commitments and convictions which inform and constitute the guiding principles for our decisions and actions.

1.3 Discipline and Values

Current practices in school discipline seem to be drifting further and further from the ‘fundamental British values’ that every school in England is required by law to promote (‘democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs’, DfE, 2014a, p. 5). For example, in secondary schools like Michaela Community School, students’ basic freedoms such as going to the toilet are dependent on getting the teacher’s permission, and conversation in the corridors is a punishable offence. And the decision by this school to ban Muslim children from performing their obligatory Islamic prayers during the school’s lunch break (see Chapters Three and Eight for a fuller discussion of this) seems to come perilously close to undermining three of

the four core British values. First, the ban seems to be in direct conflict with the value of 'mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs' (and to claim, as the Michaela School does, that all children whatever their faith are being treated the same – i.e. they are being treated with equal intolerance – does not make it better). Second, the freedom to pray seems to be a perfect example of the 'individual liberty' that all schools are required to promote. Third, a child's right to freedom of religion is recognised in Article 14 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989), which was ratified in England in 1991, and for the school to deny this freedom contributes little to children's developing commitment to 'the rule of law'.

If discipline in schools continues to challenge core British values and the whole framework of modern liberal values on which these are based,[1] then a large number of normative and conceptual questions come into play. These questions form the basis of my research and require the broadly philosophical approach I adopt to address them. Although some of the questions are not addressed directly in the thesis, together they form the backdrop for the critical analysis that forms the heart of this thesis. These questions include:

- What do we mean by discipline? What is its purpose in schools?
- Where does the right to exert punitive discipline derive from?
- Is discipline functional or educational? If educational, what are its educational aims?
- Is character education an aspect of discipline?
- Can discipline exist without the threat of punishment?
- How far, if at all, should discipline contribute to moral education or moral training?
- Are rules an inevitable aspect of social life? How do rules link to authority? What should be the limits of a teacher's authority?

[1] I use the terms 'liberalism' and 'modern liberalism' more or less interchangeably throughout the thesis to refer to the version of liberalism that is grounded in Enlightenment values, that emphasises positive freedom, equality, reason, social justice, democracy, toleration, secularism, personal autonomy, social welfare, human rights, the rule of law and respect for persons, and that can be traced through the thinking of Locke, Kant, Rousseau, Mill, Popper, Berlin, Dewey, Rawls, Dworkin, Hart, Sen and Raz, among others. The term 'modern liberalism' is used to distinguish this form of liberalism both from 'classical liberalism' (which emphasises the self-regulating market economy, the pursuit of self-interest, the role of the state in maintaining domestic order and non-interference in individual freedom, and which has been revived in recent years through the development of 'neo-liberalism') and from 'postmodernism' (which emphasises pluralism, relativism, subjectivism, uncertainty and scepticism and rejects notions of objective truth, rationality and the 'grand narrative'). A liberal framework of values underpins most social and political institutions in the West, as well as legal, moral and educational systems, and is recognisable, if not fully shared, by most citizens (see Halstead, 2005; Pring, 1996). It is not a closed or dogmatic framework but is welcoming of diversity and remains open to challenge and change over time.

- Should schools encourage children to act out of self-interest, or out of a sense of duty, or in accordance with a pre-packaged list of virtues?
- Can habituation, conditioning, training or indoctrination, if they fail to engage children's capacity to think, ever contribute to moral growth? If autonomy, as reasoned self-determination, is an integral aspect of moral behaviour, can schools ever engage in moral education without having moral autonomy as an ultimate goal?
- Does neo-liberalism provide a better justification for requiring children to behave in certain ways than modern liberalism does?
- How should we conceptualise the personhood of children, and to what extent do children share the same rights as adults? Are children of equal worth to adults, and does this entitle them to be treated with the same respect?
- What positive lessons can children learn from discipline, or does such learning come about through any explanations provided alongside the discipline, rather than from the discipline itself?
- Can discipline ever contribute to the development of critical thinking and self-determination in children?

These are all philosophical questions that cannot be answered through empirical research, only through philosophical discussion and reflection. As Richard Smith points out, the business of philosophy is 'sorting out muddled thinking' (1985, p. 5). My approach throughout the thesis will therefore be broadly philosophical, and I intend to examine, from the standpoint of applied social philosophy, 'what might be at stake' in the construction of current models of school discipline in terms of their educational and moral implications, before moving on towards establishing an understanding of discipline which is more warranted (Bridges and Smith, 2006, p. 134).

Through textual, critical, and conceptual analysis I explore the arguments presented in support of authoritarian approaches to school discipline operating in England and the 'common-sense' assumptions that lie behind the arguments. I examine whether such assumptions are educationally valuable, rationally justifiable, and ethically consistent and how appropriate they are in the context of a modern liberal democracy. It is hoped that this clarification of the underlying issues will point to ways forward in establishing an approach

to the practice of school discipline which is justifiable, appropriate and consistent with the goals of liberal education.[2]

The aim of this research is to establish an educationally and ethically justified approach to school discipline from first principles. This involves a four-stage process:

1. To analyse and critique the justifications for, and implications of, approaches to discipline which prioritise strict obedience to adult authority, as put forward by two contemporary proponents;
2. To examine and reach a clearer understanding of the concept of discipline and the nature of its links to authority, rules, punishment, character education and moral education;
3. To explore some of the problems with neo-liberalism and its key assumptions (about the basis of educational values and the nature of childhood) which underpin the current use of discipline in schools;
4. To establish a framework for an approach to school discipline which is educationally and ethically justifiable.

Typically, current research on school discipline is concerned with 'what works',[3] or describes it as a problem in terms of the correlation between classroom discipline and educational achievement (Haydn, 2014), or reports student responses to disciplinary practices (Payne, 2015). However, the value of such empirical approaches to the question of school discipline is clearly limited, and there is an increasing awareness of the need to re-think school discipline as an ethical and educational practice. Goodman (2006) and Warnick and Scribner (2020) recognise the importance of the moral element in discipline; MacAllister (2014) appreciates the educational aspect of discipline; and Thompson and Tillson (2023) bring together a range of contributors focusing on the ethics of the use of punishment in schools,

[2] *Prima facie*, some of the statements made in the thesis have the appearance of empirical claims, or at least, of claims that appear to combine the philosophical or conceptual with the empirical. On this view, statements such as '[Children] cannot learn to think critically if they are not allowed to challenge rules' (p. 45 below) or 'Children's dependence on adults does not disqualify them from respect' (p. 212 below) should be considered empirical claims, albeit ones that are very difficult to test. My own approach, however, involves treating them as propositions whose validity can be tested only through careful conceptual analysis, not through empirical investigation. The concept of thinking critically, for example, is not one that is easily measurable and so does not lend itself easily to empirical investigation, but a careful analysis of the concept can establish the relationship between critical thinking and the challenging of rules. Similarly, only conceptual clarification of 'dependency' and 'respect' can establish whether the two concepts are actually compatible; since they are both abstract, immeasurable concepts, their compatibility cannot be established through empirical research.

[3] See Johnson King (2023, pp. 220-221) for an extensive list of such research.

which is also explored by Warnick (2024). Concern about the nature of punishment in schools has led, *inter alia*, to the promotion of restorative practice as an alternative means of resolving behavioural issues, for example, at Carr Manor School in Leeds (see Lightfoot, 2020) and School 21 in Newham (Wilby, 2016) (see also Finnis, 2021; Oxley and Holden, 2021; Acosta *et al*, 2019; Dix, 2017; Stowe, 2016). However, it is doubtful that any such approach will provide an adequate panacea for what is deemed inappropriate behaviour in school. For example, in the case of restorative practice, it is difficult to envisage how restoration could be achieved in relation to the violation of many school rules which are arbitrary and unjustified. Other issues that have been identified with restorative practice are that it can serve to reinforce and reproduce inequality (Lustick, 2021; cf. McCluskey *et al*, 2008); that practical factors such as time and academic pressures can be a barrier to its successful implementation (Joseph-McMcCatty and Hnilica, 2023); and that there can be discordance between research and practice (Zakszeski and Rutherford, 2021). I argue that useful discussion about how to resolve the problems which arise when rules are broken can only begin when the foundational values which make school discipline educationally and ethically grounded have been clearly set out. My research seeks to establish this groundwork.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into four parts. In Part One (Chapters Two and Three), I establish and critique a model of discipline which has had a significant impact on the direction of government policy and wider practice in schools in England in recent years. Part One thus provides the context for the research, and introduces the key features of, the problems with, and the case against, rigid methods of school discipline. These are generally referred to as no-excuses or zero-tolerance approaches and require children to obey rules issued by adults without question. I subject the methods and ideological position of two powerfully influential proponents of these approaches – Tom Bennett and Katharine Birbalsingh – to close analytical scrutiny to establish the key claims and justifications of these approaches and to test their validity. I use their thinking as a springboard to raise some of the key issues that

relate to authoritarian school discipline, including authority, consistency, conformity and compliance.[4]

Chapter Two engages in a discussion of Bennett's approach which serves to bring to the surface some of the key issues which are central to the thesis. I identify the four key justifications he puts forward in support of requiring children's strict obedience to adult authority; these are subjected to close analysis and critique in order to assess the validity of his claims. The chapter then explores how Bennett has developed his approach in his more recent writing through the terminology of 'culture'. This is followed by an analysis of the case for consistency, which he presents as an essential aspect of his disciplinary approach, and the implications of discipline for conceptions of flourishing. The chapter concludes by locating Bennett's ideological standpoint within a neo-liberal framework of values and introduces some of the moral implications of this position in relation to discipline in schools.

Chapter Three provides further context for the research. It engages with what Taylor describes as 'the empirical realities' of discipline in schools in order to ensure that the more philosophical analysis that follows operates to 'recognize and speak directly to these realities' (2024, p. 301). The chapter takes the form of a philosophical case study of discipline at Michaela Community School in Wembley. I examine a range of evidence including two texts edited by Katharine Birbalsingh, headteacher of the school, which describe the school's uncompromising disciplinary practices and their rationale. I highlight the fundamentalist aspect of discipline at the school by drawing parallels with the regimes operating in Christian fundamentalist schools, cults, and in Margaret Atwood's literary depiction of Gilead, the fundamentalist state in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1996) [1985]. The chapter grounds the philosophical issues which emerge from this approach to discipline and form the subject of this thesis in the reality of school practice, to ensure the relevance of the following chapters.

The insights gained in Part One pave the way for a closer critical examination of the concept of discipline itself in Part Two. The context provided in Part One is thus important in

[4] Both Bennett and Birbalsingh are polemical in arguing in favour of their controversial views and, at times, require a response which addresses the challenge of their emotive language and contentious opinions. However, by stating my rejection of their position in a way that is measured, proportionate, reasoned and justified within the broader framework of the thesis, I have sought to avoid mirroring the language of these two polemicists. I wish to emphasise that even in places where my own language may sound polemical, this is not my intention. When I talk of Bennett's belief that teachers should have 'absolute authority' over students (p. 25 below) or of the 'literal repression' which is integral to the successful operation of Michaela's disciplinary practices (p. 75 below), these emotive and apparently extreme terms are not used for rhetorical or polemical effect, but simply as an accurate description of the current practices and views under consideration in Chapters Two and Three.

situating the next, more analytical chapters, within what Goodman describes as 'ground-level practice', albeit viewed from an 'academic perch' (2006, p 225). Discipline is widely viewed as integral to the process of education, even by philosophers of education who may not share the neo-conservative views of Bennett and Birbalsingh discussed in Part One. For example, Wilson identifies it as one of 'certain necessary concepts and principles connected with the nature of education itself' (1977, p. 33). Similarly, Mayworm and Sharkey consider it as 'necessary to maintain classroom order, promote student learning, and ensure the safety of students and teachers' (2014, p. 693). Goodman, perhaps less emphatic as to its value due to its *modus operandi* in many schools, sees discipline as pragmatically inevitable, because 'to maintain stability, teachers must therefore develop management systems enforced by discipline' (2023, p. 13). The central issue with which this thesis is concerned, however, is not whether the extent of problematic behaviour in schools makes discipline inevitable, but whether the means employed to deal with such issues are ethically and educationally appropriate. If we acknowledge the necessity of discipline in schools, it is essential that we understand what discipline is, why discipline is an integral feature of school practice, what discipline actually achieves, whether discipline is merely an organisational tool or if it has deeper educational benefits, and if discipline can be justified as a means to create children that conform to a particular model of the good. This part of the thesis seeks to address these issues, all of which are fundamental to thinking about disciplinary practice in schools.

Chapter Four moves beyond a narrow understanding of discipline as punishment for rule violations to a more nuanced interpretation which can accommodate the educational and ethical requirements that I argue are integral to its use in schools. Drawing on the work of John Wilson, Richard Peters and Joan Goodman, I attempt to identify the key features of discipline in schools and examine how the language of punishment might affect students' moral engagement. I consider how discipline is often conceived solely as a means of control, and how Ofsted's approach to the use of discipline in schools falls foul of what I refer to as the dilemma of discipline in Chapter Two. In the final section, I propose a new understanding of discipline which is aimed to resolve this dilemma. It distinguishes outer (i.e. externally imposed) discipline from inner (i.e. personally thought-out) discipline and prioritises thinking rather than obedience as its ultimate goal. Kant is acknowledged as a major influence in the development of this approach.

Chapter Five expands conventional understandings of discipline in schools beyond the use of punishment for the violation of rules. I argue that the increasing popularity of character education in schools has developed into a further means of controlling students' behaviour. Approaches to character education are examined, as are the links between character education and moral education. The chapter adopts a Kantian perspective to explore the limitations of some conceptions of character education. By comparing the behaviours specified by Ofsted as demonstrating outstanding practice in their 'behaviour and attitudes' categories, and the 'desirable character traits' identified by the DfE for cultivation through character education (DfE, 2018, p. 3), I demonstrate that the aims of character education are indistinguishable from those of discipline. The value of self-discipline as an enabling character trait is queried and the chapter concludes with some of the main problems with character education as currently conceived.

Part Three of the thesis drills deeper into the foundations of school discipline in order to get to the roots of the tensions and issues identified in current practice. In particular, it focuses on the growth of two highly significant but disparate sets of values and assumptions which have influenced the development of approaches to discipline in schools in recent years. The first of these is the rise of economic liberalism or neo-liberalism, which provides fertile ground for authoritarian approaches to school discipline to thrive. The second is the gradual emergence of a view of the child which has more in common with Aristotle's thinking than it does with more progressive initiatives developed in the last fifty years such as the UNCRC (1989). The common factor in both of these tendencies is a gradual undermining of (or at least a hesitation to commit wholeheartedly to) the values of modern liberalism, including rights, equality, social justice, personal autonomy and respect for persons.

In Chapter Six, I chart the rise of neo-liberal ideology in education (first mentioned in Chapter Two) and explore the impact of this on the values at the heart of education. I then examine the use of consequences in schools to illustrate how the practice of discipline has been deployed to promote the neo-liberal value of self-interest as the dominant motive for behaviour. Finally, versions of character education which derive from an Aristotelian view of virtue, and which I argue in Chapter Five are actually a form of discipline, are shown to be complicit in fostering an individualistic, self-serving version of the good.

A further problem to emerge from a close examination of current authoritarian disciplinary practices is the derogatory view of children and childhood that they take for granted. This

view is justified by both Bennett and Birbalsingh by reference to the perspective of Aristotle, and so Chapter Seven begins with a critical discussion of his assumptions about the child and childhood. Though Aristotle's opinions remained dominant for many hundreds of years, they were eventually challenged in the Enlightenment period by both Locke and Rousseau, who demonstrate a greater sensitivity to the nature of the child. In the late 20th century, children were seen for the first time as rights holders, and the kind of rights they might legitimately claim are discussed here. The chapter concludes with the claim that children should be considered as of equal worth to adults and argues that their essential personhood means they cannot be denied any rights (such as a right to respect) that belong to all people by virtue of their status as fully human.

The purpose of Part Four is to present a way forward for school discipline which is ethically and educationally justifiable by virtue of treating children as persons of equal worth to adults. By focusing on the importance of modern liberal values as the basis for education and the development of ethical understanding, I present and defend an approach to school discipline which is opposed to that promoted by the influential voices in Part One of the thesis. My case highlights the importance of valuing children as fully human persons and the importance of recognising this when making decisions which affect them and how they are treated. My argument is built on the values of freedom and equality as understood within an established tradition of modern liberal thinkers. As becomes clear in Chapter Seven, children are frequently overlooked within liberal theory because of what is considered to be their lack of moral status and rational capacity (see Turner and Matthews, 1998; O'Neill, 1994). Part Four of the thesis seeks to rectify this anomaly by establishing a case that shows children should be treated with equal respect – a central value of modern liberalism. I argue that adults need to find a better way of respecting children, and children need to find a better way of valuing themselves, than according to the price of their labour in the marketplace or according to their ability to comply with the requirements of an oppressive regime.

Chapter Eight builds on the claim at the end of Chapter Seven to argue that treating children with respect is a fundamental obligation deriving from modern liberal values, and that this has significant implications for the establishment of ethical disciplinary practices in schools. I examine the concept of respect, including its various meanings, its central position within a framework of modern liberal values, and the problems that arise from incomplete or inadequate definitions of respect. I then turn my attention more specifically to the matter of

respecting children, including whether children have the same right to respect as adults and whether children's dependency on adults reduces their right to equal respect. I consider what respecting children involves, why respect is important for children, and what behaviour adults need to adopt if they are to demonstrate respect towards children. Finally, I directly address the relationship between respect and school discipline. By focusing on the centrality of respect as a fundamental value when considering how we interact with children, we acknowledge children's humanity in their moral being and their human dignity.

Having established the means of ensuring the ethical validity of school discipline, I expand this theoretical argument in Chapter Nine by presenting an approach which not only encourages children's moral autonomy but is also educationally justified in line with the fundamental values of liberal education. I argue that as rules are a key component of discipline, school rules can be seen as a model of the law and as such offer the potential to educate children about the law and its related concepts – justice, democracy, citizenship, freedom and equality. By linking children's experience of rules in schools with teaching them an understanding of the law, I argue that discipline provides the means to teach young people that rules are based on key principles that serve to define a democratic society. I compare Hart's positivist approach to rules with Dworkin's principle-based approach and conclude that if schools adopt a Dworkinian approach to teaching children about the nature of rules in school and law in society, school discipline can be both educationally and ethically justified.

The questions which this research addresses remain at the forefront of the educational agenda following the arrival of the Labour administration in 2024. It will be interesting to monitor how discipline in schools evolves as, at the time of writing, the new government are reportedly planning to 'phase out "cruel" behaviour rules' by terminating the use of isolation rooms (Fazakerley, 2024). But what is clear is that the influential voices which form the subject of the first two chapters of this thesis are unlikely to be quietened. Bennett has already responded by insisting that 'removal rooms are essential in a school with any level of challenge' (quoted in Fazackerley, 2024a). Similarly, Birbalsingh has claimed that 'if Labour do what they say they will do to schools, disadvantaged kids will pay the price' (2024a). It is to be hoped that, however the future of discipline in schools develops, it meets the criteria I establish in this thesis – that it should respect children as of equal worth and be educationally and ethically justified.

PART ONE

Two Dominant Voices in Current Thinking about Discipline

CHAPTER 2

THE 'EXPERT' ADVICE OF TOM BENNETT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter traces the development of Tom Bennett's model for discipline in schools which is adult-focused and seeks to give the teacher complete authority and control in the classroom. He is widely hailed as a 'behaviour expert' (TeacherBooker, 2024; The University of Notre Dame, 2024; Bennett, 2012), with his 'expertise' rooted in his practical experience of teaching rather than philosophical analysis. His work merits close study because of the impact it has had, directly and indirectly, on teachers and at the DfE, rather than because of his claim to be 'a moral philosopher' (Bennett, 2010, p. 210). From 2008 to 2016 he had a highly influential column in the *TES* (formerly the *Times Educational Supplement*) which led to his appointment as behaviour advisor to the DfE in 2015. In this role, he authored *Creating a Culture: How School Leaders Can Optimise Behaviour*, an 'independent review of behaviour in schools' (Bennett, 2017), and produced a report on the training of new teachers in behaviour management which gave guidance on future practice (Bennett, 2016a). Both documents have directly influenced the development of policy on discipline in schools in England. He was subsequently appointed as lead adviser to the Behaviour Hubs initiative launched in 2021 (based on the 2017 review), to offer support to schools 'to improve their behaviour culture by working with exemplary schools' (DfE, 2020, n.p.; see also DfE, 2021).

The present chapter falls into four sections. The first looks at Bennett's publication *The Behaviour Guru: Behaviour Management Solutions for Teachers* (2010).[5] I set out the key features of the approach he promotes here and identify four justifications that he presents as the foundational beliefs which underpin it. Each is examined in the light of philosophical thinking in the field of education and critically evaluated to establish its validity.

The following section engages with Bennett's more recent version of discipline, which he advocates in terms of creating a culture of behaviour. I argue that the culture he promotes is

[5] This first publication grew out of his advice column for the *TES* and has been profoundly influential, having been routinely given to all new members of the National Union of Teachers (Osiris Educational, n.d.). It is important to establish that Bennett's *The Behaviour Guru* is aimed primarily at teachers and the key ideas are presented in a conversational or 'pseudo-comical' style rather than an academic one.

in fact an authoritarian disciplinary regime which requires unthinking obedience to rules. In the next section I focus on the role of consistency in disciplining children. Bennett insists that it is a foundational value in establishing good behaviour in schools. I argue that consistency, although it is not without educational value, potentially narrows children's experience and fails to prepare them for life outside the classroom. The chapter concludes with a final section that explores how Bennett seeks to reconcile what is essentially an anti-educational approach to discipline in schools with modern liberal values. However, I locate the values underpinning it within economic liberalism and examine the implications of this for students' moral development.

2.2 Taking Control of the Classroom

In *The Behaviour Guru* Bennett sets out his approach to discipline in schools and his justifications for its use. His aim in this text is 'to present the practice of teaching as springing from a set of simple and clear axioms' (2010, p. 123), one of which is 'that behaviour management is fundamental to good teaching. If you can't control them you can't teach them' (p. xvii). Through this language of 'management' and 'control', Bennett aligns 'good teaching' with his approach to discipline which is concerned to impose a model of good behaviour on students rather than develop their capacity to understand the reasons for it. Teachers and students have very specific roles with the former in the position of absolute authority over the latter. Teachers are required to unilaterally create the rules within a school and consistently impose punishments for every breach, regardless of the individual circumstances of the case. Correspondingly, students are expected to unquestioningly obey all teachers' instructions without exception, regardless of their educational value or of the circumstances of individual students which may compromise their ability to obey. This approach exemplifies no-excuses or zero-tolerance discipline. I now identify the four justifications Bennett puts forward in support of the methods of discipline he promotes and test their validity in the context of a framework of modern liberal values.

2.2.1 Justification One: Teacher authority is the prerequisite of an orderly classroom

Teacher authority is foundational to Bennett's approach. However, there is a lack of clarity about the nature of the authority he espouses. His 'common sense' (p. 10) techniques for

teachers to assert their authority, which include 'act[ing] tough' (p. 11), blur authority with dominance as the concepts are presented interchangeably. The problem with 'common sense' is that it can take for granted certain assumptions such as, in this case, that teachers have authority as of right. This belief permeates the advice offered – 'Speak as if what you say has authority. It does. You're the teacher, for God's sake' (p. 12). Bennett advises, 'Let some air creep into the way you speak. It lends presence to what you say, and frames your words with an aura of authority: "Look at my splendid words!" it seems to say. "Kneel, worms!" Practise this at home. Alone' (p. 12). Inherent in this construction of authority is an expectation of automatic compliance. There has been much philosophical debate about the nature and limits of the authority which teachers might appropriately exercise in schools (see Macleod *et al*, 2012; Steutel and Spieker, 2000; Peters, 1973, 1967; Wilson, 1977). However, Bennett's narrow version of the concept, as an uncontroversial and necessary means of establishing control, confirms Pace and Hemmings' claim that 'having a good conceptual and realistic grasp of classroom authority continues to elude most educational policy makers and researchers' (2007, p. 22). I argue that Bennett's inadequate conceptual grasp of the key issues in the debate about school discipline is a major hurdle for him in establishing an approach which can be ethically and educationally justified.

I now look at Bennett's approach in the light of philosophical discourse relating to the concept of authority and begin by examining two types of authority. An individual may acquire authority in two ways. First, by virtue of their position which places them *in* authority over other people, for example a judge, a police officer or a teacher; and second, by virtue of their knowledge and experience which makes them *an* authority in a particular academic subject, for example. Steutel and Spieker, following Raz (1986, pp. 29, 52), refer to these two types of authority as practical and theoretical respectively (2000, p. 325; cf. Peters 1966, p. 239). They explain that 'a person who is said to be a practical authority is supposed to have authority over *conduct*, whereas a person who is considered a theoretical authority is expected to have authority over *beliefs*' (2000, p. 35). They argue that being *in* authority gives the person holding that authority a claim-right, which in the case of the teacher would be to demand the obedience of their pupils. Similarly, they suggest that being *an* authority entails the right to 'the acceptance or endorsement of one's views or beliefs by others' (p. 326).

Because teachers generally have subject knowledge alongside their practical authority, there is a tendency to blur the two forms of authority. Bennett in his subsequent publication *Running the Room*, claims that 'teachers are expert behavers' (2020a, p. 61). The implicit assertion here is that behaviour is a field of knowledge, which would make a teacher *an* authority on behaviour as well as being *in* authority in relation to behaviour. Regardless of the truth of the claim that teachers are behaviour experts, for this to have any validity as a justification for the authority to adopt a no-excuses or zero-tolerance type discipline, we must assume Steutel and Spieker are correct in relation to theoretical authority creating the right to have one's views or beliefs accepted or endorsed. I argue rather that this right extends only to having one's views respected and taken seriously. To have them accepted and endorsed as of right precludes the possibility of challenge and refinement which are essential for progress. As Peters acknowledges, 'such authorities must always be treated as provisional' (1966, p. 240). The implication of this for the teacher as *an* authority on behaviour is that, rather than imposing a normative duty on students to believe teachers have a reason for a required action to obtain obedience, it places an onus on the teacher to be open to challenge. As *an* authority it must be assumed they will be able to rise to such challenge. This version of theoretical authority gives it the credentials appropriate for an educational setting which are lacking in Bennett's model, so far as it can be interpreted in line with this version of authority.

John Wilson acknowledges the claim-right conferred by practical authority in that 'unquestioning obedience' is often a rational response to 'the very notion of authority' (1977, p. 54) – a right that Bennet accords to all teachers. However, unlike Bennett, he allows some room for questioning; indeed, he sees this as inevitable (p. 55). In the context of the school, this may involve 'educating students to raise questions and be critical about particular manifestations of authority' (p, 56).[6] Bennett's version of authority does not accommodate such student participation:

> I have yet to find an opinion from a Year seven pupil about how I should run my classroom that was an improvement on what I do. Teachers teach, and students learn. Until that changes, I'll be setting the rules in my room, for the benefit of their futures. With or without their agreement. Make agreements with them by all means – as long as what they agree to agrees with the things you agree with. (2010, p. 140)

[6] See Chapter Four for further discussion on Wilson's views on authority.

Wilson argues that a teacher's authority derives its legitimacy from assuming a quasi-contract whereby 'we can construe the pupil as voluntarily or contractually putting himself in the hands of the educator' (1977, p. 59). Although this is not a literal analogy, the very essence of a contract is that it is a freely entered agreement between equal parties, characteristics which are essential to the validity of the comparison. The extreme inequality Bennett presents between the teacher and pupil along with his disregard for the benefit of agreement in the relationship undermines any notional contract as a justification for the teacher's authority.

Similarly, Peters' analysis of authority demonstrates the inadequacy of Bennett's version of teacher authority. Peters notes that authority in the context of social control presupposes (a) that there are 'correct or incorrect ways of doing things', (b) that these are coded into 'an impersonal normative order or value system' which 'regulates behaviour' and thus creates 'a rule-governed form of life', (c) that certain individuals or groups are authorised to apply and enforce the rules, and (d) that the system operates 'because of acceptance of it on the part of those who comply' (1966, p. 238-9). On Peters' model, Bennett is not promoting the authority of the teacher but the power to dominate. For Bennett, the 'correct or incorrect way of doing things' is not derived from an 'impersonal normative order' but from the teacher's subjective understanding of right conduct: 'insist that they [students] obey your rules, because they are the basis of a good education' (2010, p. 17). He claims that students should not be involved with the creation of rules until they 'earn the right' (18) which seems to be when they 'become adults' (p. 19) since he describes teenagers as 'self-obsessed' (p. 18) and 'a bit selfish' (p. 19). By denying students the opportunity to engage in the creation of the structure of authority in the school, this approach discourages them from making a reflective judgment on the nature of the rules that are being enforced and accepting the teachers as legitimate authorities. Rules will not be seen as derived from sound principles but from the subjective judgement of the teacher. What Bennett promotes is more akin to power or indeed dominance which implies that one party imposes rules or patterns of behaviour on another through physical or psychological coercion or the manipulation of rewards and punishments.

One of Pace and Hemmings' 'essential claims' about authority in the classroom is that it 'depends on teachers' legitimacy, students' consent, and a moral order consisting of shared purposes, values, and norms' (2005, p. 1). At the heart of this claim is a reciprocity that is lacking in Bennett's view of the classroom. Kurland similarly identifies mutuality as integral to a teacher's authority in the classroom and believes that 'teachers … communicate their

respect for their students by encouraging them to express their ideas [and] taking their ideas seriously' (2014, p. 90). However, as I have established, for Bennett, even the essence of a social contract, which underpins a rational understanding of authority, is nonsensical in a school setting as it presupposes equality as a fundamental value. His model of authority lacks accountability and gives the teacher inalienable supremacy. It might be more accurately referred to as authoritarianism which is directed to ensure the enforcement of strict obedience at the expense of personal freedom. The deep lack of respect for young people, which I discuss in detail within Bennett's next justification, underlies this viewpoint and indicates how little value is given to them as members of the classroom or school community. To follow through this perspective, if adults always know best and young people are not worthy of respect, there is no reason to listen to what students have to say. This can operate to validate disciplinary techniques which are, for example, irrational, immoral, arbitrary, and result in the unjustified curtailment of children's freedom, if an adult considers them to be appropriate. Such a mindset of infallibility in a teacher must inevitably limit a student's potential to pose and develop new ideas, to think independently and to challenge the teacher's thinking which, in a dynamic academic environment, ought always to be open to discussion.

2.2.2 Justification Two: Children are like animals

I now turn to Bennett's foundational claim, that 'we are profoundly like' animals (2010, p. 3), which is the basis for a construction of children within an 'animal paradigm' (p. 17). This, he insists, means they can be more easily 'trained … into a certain pattern of behaviour and response' (p. 17). Accordingly, students are variously referred to as wolves (p. 16), monkeys (p. 13), worms (p. 12) and raptors (p. 16). Whilst each carries its own connotations, Bennett's extended raptor metaphor confirms the basic assumptions on which his approach depends – that children are out of control and incapable of reason.[7]

His presentation of young people in animalistic terms acts as a justification for three claims. First, that they are in need of control, second, that disciplinary methods which involve training, habituation and indoctrination are appropriate and necessary, and third, that a confrontational approach is required to deal with children's innate unruliness. This latter claim is brutally articulated in the language of a battle where traps are set, lines established,

[7] Strauss describes raptors as dinosaurs which 'were about the size of small children, almost certainly covered in feathers, and not quite as intelligent as the average hummingbird' (2019, para. 1).

fences raised, and forbidden zones created. Both teacher and students are dehumanised as the former is advised 'to bite' (p. 16) and the latter presented as wild creatures, 'sniffing around the fences' (*ibid*) and determined to break through the metaphorical barricade of rules. This sustained animal trope deprives students (and teachers) of any moral or critical awareness and operates to other young people, constructing them as a threat in order to justify the operation of power. Nietzsche's perspective on language helps to unravel Bennett's claim that 'we are profoundly like' animals. Nietzsche explains that 'everything which distinguishes man from the animals depends upon his ability to volatilize perceptual metaphors in a schema, and thus to dissolve an image into a concept' (Nietzsche, 2015, p. 18). This suggests that the device of the metaphor which Bennett deploys to establish his claim paradoxically disproves it. Nietzsche sees the constructions of truth through the language of metaphor as a means of ordering power structures:

> For something is possible in the realm of these schemata which could never be achieved with the vivid first impressions: the construction of a pyramidal order according to castes and degrees, the creation of a new world of laws, privileges, subordinations, and clearly marked boundaries—a new world, one which now confronts that other vivid world of first impressions as more solid, more universal, better known, and more human than the immediately perceived world, and thus as the regulative and imperative world. (2015, pp. 18-19)

This seems particularly apposite in the context of Bennett's construction of young people as a means of justifying their subjection to his mode of authority. On this view, the use of metaphor allows Bennett to normalise punishment and authoritarian practices by aligning the classroom environment with that of the animal. Zoologists have observed that in the animal kingdom punishment is a natural process of establishing hierarchical structures: 'by punishing actions that infringe their interests, dominant animals teach subordinates to behave in a fashion that increases (or avoids reducing) the dominant's fitness' (Clutton-Brock and Parker, 1995, p. 214). Here, dominance is enacted in the interests of the powerful which in a classroom situation translates into the teacher.

This animal analogy serves to further support the view of teachers as possessing inalienable authority in the classroom which gives them the right to exercise discipline as control over their students. However, this is merely a metaphorical fiction which Bennett seeks to establish as truth. Inherent in this discourse is a profound disrespect of young people. This serves to reinforce the consistently negative attitude towards them which is displayed

throughout *The Behaviour Guru*. Such negativity manifests itself first, in his choice of vocabulary to describe students: 'goblin' (p. 21), 'midget' (p. 22), 'cheeky blighters' (p. 31). Second, in the assumptions expressed: 'they are innately selfish' (p. 104), 'spotty, charmless and lacking in hygiene' (p. 163), not quite people or human ('they're learning to be people', p. 18 or 'learning to be human beings', p. 98) and 'a pupil's voice certainly shouldn't count as much as a teacher's' (p. 168). Third, in the belief that they need to be 'crushed' (p. 31), punished (p. 49), clobbered and broken (p. 46). It is difficult to justify any approach to school discipline in the context of a modern liberal democracy which fails to acknowledge children as fully human people worthy of respect. I go on, in Chapter Eight, to argue that respect for children is integral to making discipline in schools an ethical endeavour, but now I turn to Bennett's third justification for his approach which sits rather uncomfortably with his view of the child.

2.2.3 Justification Three: We discipline them because we care about them

It is difficult to reconcile Bennett's scant respect for young people with his third justification for an authoritarian approach which he grounds in an ethic of care. Alongside his depiction of students as a variety of wild beasts snapping at the heels of authority, he presents an image of himself as an empathetic teacher who cares deeply about his students (p. 100), wants them to feel valued (p. 121) and is concerned about their wellbeing (p. 177). Bennett's notion of care seems to be rooted in an Old Testament version of parental love which dictates that 'he that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes' (Proverbs 13. 24, *AV*). He asserts that children 'need discipline first then they need love' (2010, p. 72), and therefore that 'you need to get tough to show you care about their education' (p. 117).

According to Noddings' ethics of care, an integral aspect of caring is that the carer 'is motivated in the direction of the cared-for' (2013, p. 92) suggesting care is focused on the interests of the subject of care. Bennett's claim that 'I care deeply about them…and that means that I'm going to make them succeed even if they don't want to' (2010, p. 100) might suggest that his conception of care meets this expectation, as success seems to be in an individual's best interests. However, Noddings also emphasises the importance of respect for freedom which necessitates the treatment of the individual being cared for 'as subject – not as an object to be manipulated' (2013, p. 92). The subject-object dichotomy problematises Bennett's conception of care. His execution of care positions students as subject to, rather

than the subjects of, care – 'You care about them so much that you want them to do well. Because you want them to do well, you insist that they obey your rules, because they are the basis of a good educational environment' (2010, p. 17). The character of this optimal educational environment, the creation of which is presented as a key aspect of caring, is perhaps best described in Bennett's 'Classroom Charter':

> 1. Anything they do which disrupts their education (as defined by me) is forbidden.
> 2. You know fine well what that means.
> 3. Anyone who objects to this charter has the right to put their objections to me in writing, whereupon it will be recycled as toilet paper.
> 4. I reserve the right to make up new rules as I progress: pay attention. (p. 143)

Thus, the terms of education are dictated by the teacher who wields absolute authority, has no regard for the opinions of students and arbitrarily creates and applies rules. To 'succeed' in this regime, students must presumably learn unquestioning obedience. This suggests that caring, for Bennett, comprises training students into unthinking compliance. It is difficult to acknowledge this as care even if it is rooted in an archaic religious ideology. As Noddings has aptly noted, 'cruelty and harsh judgment are not strangers to religion. Further, the frequent insistence on obedience to rules … contributes to the erosion of genuine caring' (2013, p. 117). So, if Bennett's exercise of care is not of a genuine type, what is it rooted in?

Bennett's model of care is consistent with his view of children as animals. This allows him to interpret behaviour as innate reactions developed through a series of learnt responses to external stimuli. Through a process of operant conditioning, these responses can be strengthened or weakened in accordance with a pre-determined model of behaviour (see Skinner, 1953). This view of behaviour as lacking any internal motivation, effectively dismisses a range of ethical considerations in establishing an approach to students' behaviour, which on a modern liberal view would necessitate the exercise of respect and a model of care which grows out of it. For Bennett, care is a form of obedience training which predominantly relies on punishment to ensure compliance with rules: 'Basically you should punish them when they do something you don't like, and reward them when they do something you do. But you should be doing a lot more of the former and less of the latter, at least initially' (2010, p. 15). On this model the teacher is the sole arbiter of right conduct. Responsibility for

behaviour is totally within the teacher's domain as he or she decides what he or she 'likes' in this context and this constitutes the 'right' mode of conduct.

There is an uncomfortable consistency here. If children are like animals, animal training techniques will necessarily be the most appropriate and effective means of training them into appropriate behaviour, and practices adopted to care for animals will be deemed suitable for children. However, animal carers, consistent with Noddings' view above, take into account the intrinsic nature of the creature they are dealing with. It is now deemed cruel to keep animals in circuses as it undermines their natural characteristics, yet Bennett promotes an approach to educating young people that may ultimately deprive them of what it is to be human, and hold back their development as morally autonomous individuals. Indeed, if they are conditioned to behave without thinking about the reasons for their actions and according to externally determined modes of right conduct, there is a danger that Bennett's premise will be self-fulfilling, and they will start behaving like animals.

2.2.4 Justification Four: It works

Bennett's overriding justification for the methods he employs (repeated three times on the first page of *The Behaviour Guru*) is that they 'work' (2010, p. 1). But what does 'working' mean? In order to address this question, I introduce the two main aims of discipline in school to highlight what I describe as the dilemma of discipline. This demonstrates a major flaw in the 'it works' justification.

Discipline in schools has two key objectives. The first is practical in seeking to maintain an orderly environment so that learning can take place. It requires children to follow rules. This aim features widely in government documents and seems to provide the overriding objective for Bennett's approach. The second is educational in that if young people are taught the basic principles of right behaviour this creates an opportunity for them to develop into thoughtful, morally aware individuals who understand the impact of their behaviour on others. This requires children to ask questions, learn through experience and make mistakes. Whilst the successful operation of the former can be easily observed, the latter is a more subtle and nuanced process which eludes formal assessment and if actively pursued may even be seen as a hurdle to the operation of the former. The only basis on which Bennett can claim that his approach to discipline 'works' is the observable behaviour of the students, which satisfies the

first aim of discipline. However, the fact that students are behaving as a teacher requires does not mean they are morally aware. This is the dilemma of discipline when used in schools.[8]

The dilemma of discipline is accentuated within Bennett's model where the students are not allowed any say in the development of disciplinary rules and the justification for this is that the rules emanate from an authority source, which in itself is open to question. When a teacher operates an authoritarian regime and adopts an uncompromising approach to rule-breaking, fear of punishment becomes the overriding motive for behaviour. Behaviour simply becomes a conditioned response to the external stimuli of punishment or praise rather than an action which is performed by a morally aware individual who has thought through their reasons for behaving in a particular way. The problem with Bennett's approach is that by adopting a technique which relies on conditioning behaviour to achieve the first aim of discipline, an orderly environment, he precludes the possibility of the second, because a conditioned response depends on the elimination of the need to think. His approach may 'work' to make students compliant, but in terms of contributing to students' educational and moral development it is indefensible.

If tangible, assessable outcomes become the sole justification for the development of educational policy, this raises serious questions about the nature and purpose of educational provision. Noddings raises exactly this point in a strikingly apposite way:

> Because the infliction of pain in nonhuman groups acts to keep subordinates in line, it might be supposed that the same tactics will work among humans. And they might! But the fact that they work does not necessarily make them ethically justified. We have to know what they are working toward, what undesirable side effects often appear, and whether there are better ways to accomplish the ends we deem desirable. It is not enough to say, out of context, 'they work'. (2002, p. 204)

Bennett's 'ends' are inextricably linked to his conception of education. This resonates through his construction of what it is to be a teacher and his perception of students. For him, a teacher is an adult professional doing a job which is to 'provide them [students] with the best

[8] The dilemma of discipline is distinct from what Peters describes as the 'paradox of moral education'. The former is a matter of a conflict inherent in discipline itself such that being disciplined is in effect an obstacle for the educator in being able to ascertain a child's actual motive for behaviour, especially when that behaviour is ensured by the threat of punishment. The latter is a matter of child development which means for Peters that because 'a rational code of behaviour and the "language" of a variety of activities is beyond the grasp of young children, they can and must enter the palace of Reason through the courtyard of Habit and Tradition' (2015, p. 52).

education we can to prepare them to succeed in life' (2010, p. 60). As we have seen, rule following is viewed as foundational to a good education (p. 17) and an integral aspect of being successful. However, underpinning this approach is a confusion between (a) training which is to do with teaching externally verifiable skills and techniques and (b) education which has less tangible goals including the development of personal and moral autonomy. Rule following is an important part of being trained. Skills and behaviour can be learnt if certain procedures are followed, and Bennett's model of discipline could provide the first step in making students more amenable to skills training. But to be educated encompasses much more than being trained. It involves *inter alia* having independence of thought so that one can function in a context where there are no rules or predetermined expectations, the ability to think critically so as to formulate judgements which will enable one to challenge rules and authority in a reasonable and justified manner, and the capacity to determine one's own path whilst being sensitive to the needs of others. Indeed, education is about developing the very attributes which distinguish us from animals. In aligning young people with animals, Bennett justifies a model of discipline which may 'work' within a model of training but which, because of its reliance on compliance, is opposed to the essence of education. It is the distinction between the nature of training and that of education which has traditionally caused us to refer to animal training as opposed to the education of animals, and this, if overlooked, could have negative long-term effects on how young people develop in schools.

This section has examined four justifications for the strict enforcement of obedience to adult authority which Bennett presents in *The Behaviour Guru* as 'the theory behind the advice' (2010, p. 1). I have established that these justifications are flawed both in terms of their lack of theoretical foundations and in their incompatibility with the purpose of discipline in schools as an educational and ethical venture. His narrative technique and the content of his advice express an uncompromising and irrational stance which accurately mirrors the techniques he seeks to promote. Like the young people Bennett is determined to control, the struggling teachers who feel in need of guidance on discipline and turn to his advice, will be vulnerable and susceptible to the 'authority' of his behaviour management. If teachers accept his advice which lacks justifiable moral or theoretical foundations, it will be difficult to justify their actions other than on pragmatic grounds not only to themselves but more importantly to their students. This has profound implications for students' moral development. This concern is increased by the fact, noted at the beginning of this chapter, that Bennett has been increasingly influential in the development of school behaviour policy

since the publication of *The Behaviour Guru*. The views expressed in it, when read in conjunction with the documents which Bennett has produced in his advisory role, are integral to an understanding of the context and rationale of much current policy on discipline in schools.

2.3 Creating a Culture of Discipline

In this section I explore the development of Bennett's approach to discipline as expressed in *Creating a Culture: How School Leaders Can Optimise Behaviour in Schools* (2017). This independent review of behaviour was commissioned under the former Conservative administration, and the recommendations it makes are developed in Bennett's subsequent publication, *Running the Room* (2020a). The review document heralds a welcome change of tone and its key recommendation, that schools need to establish a behaviour culture, has been accepted by the DfE. Its guidance on school discipline now adopts the language of discipline as culture (2024a, n.p.), and schools are encouraged to 'assess their behaviour culture' using a toolkit to 'recognise good practice and identify areas that need attention' (DfE, 2024b, n.p.). However, as I shall establish in this section, the underlying values and expectations of the relationship between teachers and pupils, and Bennett's basic assumptions about young people, and their need to be subject to a high level of control in order to succeed, remain unchanged. I argue that the behaviour culture Bennett recommends is a culture of unthinking obedience to authoritarian discipline, which has implications for children's educational and moral development. By unpicking Bennett's conception of culture, I establish the form of discipline he and the DfE are encouraging schools to implement.

2.3.1 A Culture of Control

Bennett explains that culture 'means the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people, society or community' (2017, p. 12). In *Running the Room*, he describes it at the classroom level as 'the beliefs and values of the classroom' (2020a, p. 97). Whilst these appear uncontroversial descriptions of culture, a closer exploration of how Bennett recommends it should operate in schools reveals the extent to which it is being marshalled as a means of control. Implicit in his definition is the idea of consensus. This, however, is the problematising factor in his approach, due to the means by which he seeks to achieve it.

In order to refer to a group as ‘a people, society or community’, there needs to be a core of shared values and aspirations which have been reached through a process of explicit or implicit agreement. It is through the processes of give-and-take, consensual and informed participation, and debate and compromise, that a culture evolves within a group (see Wenger, 1998, p. 13). Yet for Bennett, culture does not evolve, rather, it is imposed. He explains that ‘a key role of leadership is to design a detailed vision of what the culture should look like for that school, focussing on social and academic conduct’ (2017, p. 6). For Bennett, the focus of establishing a culture is to dictate the ‘correct direction’ of conduct which he considers to be ‘an issue of the highest strategic importance’ (p. 12). The appropriateness of this military language becomes increasingly apparent as the extent of the behaviour to be directed is described:

> ‘Behaviour’ in this report means any actions performed by any members of the student and staff communities. It includes conduct in classrooms and all public areas: how members work, communicate, relax and interact; how they study; how they greet staff; how they arrive at school, transition from one activity to another; how they use social media, and many other areas of their conduct. It does not merely refer to how students do or do not act antisocially. (*ibid*)

Thus, under Bennett’s approach to ‘creating a culture’, every aspect of the students’ and staff’s behaviour will be subject to the ‘culture’ of the school leader. This approach has the potential to turn schools into institutions akin to autocratic regimes rather than communities which value and develop the individuality and flair of their members. Indeed, according to Bennett, routines are key to building a successful school culture and ‘any behaviour that should be performed identically, most or all of the time, should be made into a routine’ (p. 8). Such a mechanistic approach to behaviour may be appropriate for a factory production line, an army barracks or a prison, but it is difficult to justify such rigidity in an educational setting. I now explore Bennett’s justification for this tight control of behaviour in schools.

2.3.2 The Justification and Exercise of a Culture of Control

Bennett seeks to promote the cultivation of an automated response on the basis that it helps students to behave better. He claims that ‘it can help students if we make routines as specific as possible, set timelines on when they are achieved, and make it easier for them to behave by taking some of the thinking out of it’ (2020a, p. 177). Indeed, Bennett believes that a

major reason why students don't like school is that 'we ask them to think', and he references Willingham (2010) in support of this view. However, Willingham's response is to develop thinking by finding the 'sweet spot' which can facilitate it (p. 22), rather than to curtail such opportunities as Bennett suggests. One method Bennett recommends which closes down both the teachers' and students' potential to think is 'scripting' (2020a, p. 226). He explains that by introducing scripts for teachers, a school can 'create as much consistency and clarity of culture as possible' (p. 228).

Bennett provides an example script from Dixons Music Primary Academy to illustrate good practice. Such scripts create highly structured routines by providing detailed requirements for how staff and students must move and position themselves during specific activities as well as the precise phrases for the teacher to use when speaking to students, depending on which Key Stage the students are at. The language which is specified for use by staff monitoring corridors at lunch and breaktime illustrates how students are being acculturated in the way Bennett suggests:

> **Transition Routine 4**
> **Corridors lunchtimes and breaktime**
> Teacher to complete Transition Routines 1-3.
> Teacher to remind children of expectation of silence in the corridors and link to earning autonomy.
> EYFS/KS1: 'The rule is silence, in order to earn your next autonomy badge you must show that you can be trusted in the corridors.'
> KS2: 'Remember that we are moving around school in our natural state.'
> (quoted in Bennett, 2020a, p. 229)

This 'script' is striking in two ways – first, in relation to what it is teaching children about autonomy and trust, and second, in providing clarity about the nature of the culture Bennett is urging schools to establish. In Key Stage 1 the children are told that they will receive an 'autonomy badge' if they demonstrate that they 'can be trusted in the corridors', but the reality is that they do not 'earn' it because they are trusted to behave well, but because they can be trusted to follow the rules. The very existence of a rule prohibiting any noise in the corridors demonstrates a complete lack of trust in the students' ability to moderate and make judgments about the noise they make. Not only are they taught a very narrow understanding of trust, but they are also introduced to a false understanding of autonomy. It is one that suggests autonomy is 'earned' through conformity in contrast to the established meaning of the word which describes independent self-determination, free from external influence. The

success of this acculturation is indicated by the fact that by Key Stage 2 the expectation is that conformity to rules will be so entrenched that silence has become students' 'natural state'. This suggests a culture which prioritises conformity and rule following at the expense of trust and autonomy, a culture that appropriates the vocabulary of modern liberal education and shifts its meaning to fit within an agenda of control, a culture which fails to respect children and allow them to grow and express themselves as children. In fact, like Dixon's Academy, Bennett shifts the meaning of words to suit his agenda of behaviour modification, such that 'creating a culture' comes to mean imposing a regime of rules to govern every aspect of life in schools.

In this section I have established that Bennett's behaviour culture is a means of exerting control over students which is justified on the grounds that it eliminates the need to think. The high level of control which this approach operates aligns it with no-excuses and zero-tolerance approaches and means it falls foul of the arguments I raised in the first section of this chapter in relation to issues of teacher authority, respect for children, the teacher's relationship with them, and the ethical implications of the means adopted to establish discipline. I suggest that establishing a behaviour culture, on Bennett's terms, is to create a linguistically palatable version of authoritarian discipline. Due to Bennett's time in the role of government adviser on behaviour in schools, this approach has permeated into educational policy as an acceptable means of controlling young people's behaviour.

2.4 The Value of Consistency in School Discipline

This section focuses on a central tenet of Bennett's approach to discipline – consistency. I argue that consistency is overrated in relation to school discipline and that it can ultimately result in stifling children's moral and educational development.

2.4.1 Consistency as a Virtue

The first and arguably the most fundamental principle that Bennett puts forward as supporting his culture of behaviour is consistency. Indeed, the value of consistency permeates his entire understanding of discipline on the basis that 'consistency is the foundation of all good habits' (2020a, p. 15), 'consistency is key to culture' (198), 'consistency is key' to effective sanctions (p. 251) and 'trust is built… on routine and consistency' (p. 292). Bennett is not alone in his

faith in consistency. The value of consistency was promoted nearly fifty years ago by Lee and Marlene Canter with the introduction of their model of 'assertive discipline'. This emphasises the need for a teacher to 'maintain a consistent influence with regard to children's behaviour' (1976, p. 132) which is achieved through 'consistent communication' (p.12) and the setting of 'firm, consistent limits' (p. 10). Both the Elton Report on discipline in schools (1989) and the Steer Report on behaviour and discipline (2009) highlight the importance of consistency. This was subsequently affirmed in Ofsted's 2014 report on low level disruption in the classroom which also emphasises the role of consistency in dealing with behaviour in schools and concludes that 'underpinning … outstanding behaviour are systems that are applied fairly and consistently by all staff. Students know what is expected of them and the consequences that follow should they fall out of line' (p. 25).

This preoccupation with consistency is replicated in the *School Inspection Handbook* which emphasises its importance fifty-nine times (Ofsted, 2024). Consistency is a crucial criterion in the judgement of an outstanding school where teachers consistently build and develop their own knowledge (para. 475). Leaders 'create coherence and consistency across the school so that pupils benefit from effective teaching and consistent expectations' (para. 360). Pupils 'behave consistently well', demonstrate 'consistently high levels of respect for others' and 'consistently have highly positive attitudes and commitment to their education' (para. 471). It is hardly surprising that consistency has come to be known as 'the holy grail' of school discipline (see Worth, 2020; Nedev, 2019).

Despite this enthusiasm for consistency, it is difficult to identify a justifiable basis for this preoccupation amongst its proponents. For example, Starkey (2016) in the same vein as Bennett, claims that 'consistency is one of the driving forces of an effective classroom', that it 'instils a sense of trust' (para. 2) and that 'consistency breeds confidence, confidence breeds effort and effort breeds results' (para. 3). However, he offers no evidence for these beliefs and empirical research by Irby and Clough has found that 'there are limits and unintended consequences to relying uncritically on consistency as a guiding principle for improving school discipline' (2015, p. 170). The fervour for consistency clearly prompts the question as to whether it is in fact a panacea for, *inter alia*, issues relating to behaviour – a question I now seek to address.

2.4.2 The Case for Consistency

Consistency is certainly valuable in some contexts, for example, it is considered integral to a coherent academic argument ensuring that it is logical, justified and doesn't involve contradictory points. Similarly, it features as an intrinsic aspect of the successful implementation and administration of law, as it provides the means of guaranteeing the principle of equality before the law and so garnering respect for the rule of law. As rules provide the basis for the exercise of discipline in schools, this latter example of the value of consistency seems to offer a useful analogy, and to provide evidence for the importance of consistency, when dealing with issues of behaviour.[9] However, there are important distinctions to be made between the consistent functioning of the law and the consistent application of rules and routines in school as proposed by Bennett.

I present five features of the law which relate to consistency and then examine their relevance for consistency in the context of the school. First, the law is developed through consensus and democratic process and is subject to a series of checks by the elected representatives of those who are subject to it. Second, the law is concerned with establishing the minimum standard of acceptable conduct necessary for citizens to live in harmony. Third, the law is not concerned to instil a specific set of values or 'culture' on those within its jurisdiction but seeks to strike a balance between the competing values of freedom and equality to achieve justice amongst those who hold a wide and diverse range of beliefs. Fourth, the law has mechanisms to allow for its inconsistent application in cases where an individual can raise a recognised defence. Fifth, the law operates on the assumption that a person is innocent of an offence until proved guilty and allows them a fair trial before a jury of their peers.

When these features of the legal system are compared with a behaviour system like that promoted by Bennett, it becomes apparent that his case for consistency is difficult to maintain. Bennett makes clear that on his view a fundamental principle for any teacher should be 'my room, my rules' (2020a, p. 15), which runs counter to the democratic principles inherent in the rule of law. His system of discipline rests on a very pessimistic view of human nature as he claims, 'children do not behave well by default, and nor do we' (p. 50). Whilst this belief appears to position adults and children on an equal moral footing, he still believes that teachers have, by virtue of 'necessity', the 'authority and right to establish the culture of the room' (p. 102). This is because 'it is impossible to expect that a room of 30 individuals

[9] I return to the relationship of the law, rules and school discipline in Chapter Nine.

will be so mature or charitable to spontaneously agree upon a charter of rules and behaviour aimed at maximising everyone's well-being and education' (*ibid*). Yet, if adults are equally prone to misbehave it is difficult to identify the source of the teacher's authority beyond that of power, which Bennett denies (*ibid*). Thus, his approach is inconsistent with the principles underpinning the rule of law which include justice, transparency, equality, accountability, impartiality, and access to legal remedy, all of which are, to some extent, accommodated by consistency. In a classroom setting where the teachers set rules that apply to the students but not themselves, administer the rules and punishments and operate a zero tolerance or no-excuses approach to discipline which interprets challenging a rule as defiance, the analogy of the law no longer holds to support consistency.

Unlike the law, the rules and routines promoted by Bennett which require consistency are concerned to dictate the minutiae of students' conduct or 'micro-behaviours' (p. 183). When students are subjected to the extreme conditioning which results from Bennett's advice to teachers to 'reinforce the behaviour you want constantly, over and over' (p. 200), the consistency they are subjected to seems more akin to oppression. Such conditioning, rather than striking the balance between freedom and equality which the law seeks to achieve, inevitably results in a flawed version of equality which depends on treating everyone the same regardless of their individual differences and simultaneously stifles the freedom to develop independent thinking and thus diversity.

In view of his exacting approach, it is surprising that Bennett draws on the law to describe a model of discipline which might be too rigid – 'a strictly legalistic approach to good behaviour can be useful, but is only ever part of what it takes to get great behaviour from people' (p. 214). This suggests a weakening in his adherence to consistency, and indeed he goes on to acknowledge that 'never permitting any exception might be cruel and could be stretched to absurdity' (p. 253). In fact, he demonstrates some sensitivity to the 'less visible difficulties' faced by many young people in his discussion of the use of exceptions (p. 252) and in his response to 'dealing with crises' (p. 321). However, it is unclear how extreme the difficulties or crises will need to be to justify an exception. Those he offers as examples to challenge zero tolerance, such as allowing students to leave the room if a fire breaks out or not expecting homework if a child is hit by a bus perhaps indicate what is meant by the 'very, very, very low levels of tolerance of routine breaking' (p. 255) he considers to be appropriate. Indeed, the case he describes of three children who are all late for a lesson, two because they

were messing about and one because he was delayed by having to wait for the toilet, is offered to show the appropriate use of an exception in that the first two are scolded but the third told to manage his time better. However, all are given a detention. This seems to be what Bennett calls a 'nuanced and tailored approach' (p. 141), but it raises the question of just deserts and whether a child should be punished by a detention for being delayed in the lavatory, for the sake of consistency.[10] This highlights a tension between fairness and consistency. *Prima facie*, fairness requires that rules are applied consistently, in other words that all children should receive the same punishment for the same offence on a strict liability basis. However, fairness also demands that individual circumstances should be taken into account, with the result that justice requires differentiated punishment or even no punishment.[11] Blanket consistency can often result in unfairness. Children are very perceptive with regard to justice and fairness, and injustice has been shown to impact negatively on their future behaviour (see Ehrhardt-Madapathi *et al*, 2018, p. 363). Resh and Sabbagh found that procedural injustice particularly affects pupils' attitudes and that 'students are more liberal and trustful in what they evaluate as procedurally fair schools' (2014, p. 68). Whilst they, like Bennett, consider consistency to be an essential component of procedural justice, unlike him they emphasise the importance of 'having a "voice", i.e. the legitimacy to appeal when "fair" procedure seems to be violated' (p. 54). Thus, Bennett's approach is in fact more rigid than 'the strictly legalistic approach' he claims to moderate with exceptions, for the procedural justice of the law always allows an accused the opportunity to prove their innocence.[12]

Bennett's prioritisation of consistency seems to assume that it is an essential good, yet if someone is consistently cruel, the cruelty is not ameliorated by its consistency. The value of consistency derives solely from the practice that it describes. No student would be happy if the teachers were always unfair even if they were being consistently unfair. It is not consistency which is of value but fairness. This is borne out by the law. The consistent

[10] The tightening of rules surrounding the use of toilets by students in schools has elicited much concern from parents, pupils and charities (see Clarke, 2023, James and Goss, 2023). The BBC *Newsround* program has reported a charity stating, in relation to toilets in schools, that 'strict rules around their use are affecting the health and wellbeing of some children' (CBBC, 2023). A survey conducted by *Newsround* found that 73% of respondents felt that going to the toilet was a problem in their school (*ibid*).

[11] An example of how uncompromising consistency can result in unfairness is illustrated by complaints raised by parents against Mossbourne Victoria Park academy in Hackney. Fazackerley reports that strict adherence to rules at the school, regarding students' use of toilet facilities, has resulted in 'accounts of secondary-age pupils with no prior incontinence issues soiling themselves, or menstruating through their uniforms, because they were not allowed to go to the toilet or were too scared to ask' (2024b, n.p.).

[12] For Bennett, allowing students to express themselves as a means of helping to improve their behaviour is 'obviously nonsense' (2020a, p. 47).

application of the principles that ensure the rule of law is valuable because the principles it secures are those considered valuable in a liberal, open, democratic state. It is at the level of principle that Bennett's approach diverges from the law and at the level of principle and values that the flaws in the promotion of consistency in schools are laid bare.

2.4.3 Consistency and Punishment

From the previous discussion it follows that Bennett's claim as to the value of consistent punishment or, to use his preferred terminology, sanctioning of students is only justified if the principle underlying the sanction has value. He seeks to rationalise his methods of discipline on the grounds that 'helping children to behave well is one of the greatest acts of liberation there is … Unless we prescribe what they can and cannot do, we condemn them not to freedom, but to slavery – the slavery to one's own wants' (2010, p. 76). This view depends on two conflicting principles, one relating to the value of conformity, the other to that of freedom. The justification of sanctions seems to derive from the contribution they make to ensuring compliance with prescribed behaviours which Bennett claims ultimately creates free individuals. This is an unconventional view depending as it does on versions of freedom and slavery which are directly opposed to the meanings normally associated with these terms. If the purpose of sanctions in schools is, as Bennett suggests, to *liberate* children from their 'own wants', the intention behind them must involve depriving students of autonomy by conditioning them into conforming with a culture which values specified modes of behaviour. Similarly, when the goal of consistency *per se* is to ensure that students 'expect the same routines, and have it imprinted again and again by repetition, until it becomes easy and natural' (p. 180 *sic*), this too acts to condition young people to uncritically assume prescribed behaviours. Therefore, whilst the sanction and the consistent implementation of it provide an appropriately consistent means to an end, that end is wholly inconsistent with the aims of education in a modern liberal democratic society and the fundamental values of such a society. I conclude this section by exploring the aims of education which Bennett seeks to secure though the use of consistency. This involves an exploration of flourishing, conformity and compliance, which from Bennett's perspective are the positive outcomes of consistency.

2.4.4 Flourishing and Conformity as the Aims of Consistency

Bennett does not specifically define what he considers to be the aim of education as he does not 'believe education has one intrinsic aim' rather 'people have aims for education' (p. 29). Amongst such aims he lists 'good grades', 'creating informed citizens', 'creativity' 'democratic participation' and 'building character' (*ibid*). It is worth noting that critical thinking, growth, freedom, and autonomy are absent from this list, perhaps because such aspirations cannot be maintained within his assertion that 'every conceivable aim of education is supported by better behaviour' (p. 29). Yet, if 'better behaviour' means consistently and uncritically following rules and routines, Bennett's notion of education remains the narrowly reductive, training-focused model articulated in *The Behaviour Guru* which sees compliance as a 'vital' component of education (2010, p. 96). His consistency-orientated approach deprives young people of the edifying experiences they need to grow and learn. They cannot learn to think critically if they are not allowed to challenge rules or what they perceive to be unjust, they will not come to understand the limits of freedom unless they are allowed to test the boundaries, and they will not develop autonomy if they are never allowed to make genuine choices about their own behaviour. An essential aspect of education is allowing students the freedom to think, to argue, to challenge, to play and, importantly, to be wrong. Halstead and Xiao's research with primary school children (2023) found that pupils' own values largely coalesce with these liberal aspirations for education. The interviews they conducted with children 'highlight a number of core values, including friendship, fun, fairness and freedom' (p. 371). This suggests that students are very capable of understanding how to behave on the basis of certain shared values. However, Bennett fails to take account of, or trust, students' own developing values, preferring to impose a culture which 'involves directing the students' appreciation of what is valuable and important towards those things the teacher knows to be useful or good or valuable' (2020a, p. 100). This seems to be integral to what he considers to be a teacher's 'moral purpose', which is 'to enrich their [students'] lives, minds and abilities in ways that will enable them to flourish independently of our direction, long after we cease to be part of their lives' (p. 82). However, I argue that the possibility of independent flourishing is curtailed by consistency which limits opportunities to explore different ways of being.

I have established that from Bennett's perspective, autonomy or the ability to act independently is seen in terms of consistently conforming with a prescribed mode of conduct without constant reinforcement. Indeed, he states that 'some level of conformity is

essential, for some things, in order for societies to flourish … Conformity, while obviously connected to many things we might rightly abhor – obedience to tyrants, etc. – can also be seen as a positive force, a necessary one, and a cement that binds us to one another' (pp. 124-125). If it can be shown that learning to conform is essential for individuals to flourish in the broader society then there may be some merit in Bennett's approach and in the prioritisation of consistency. Yet, the key issue is the extent to which consistent conformity can be considered beneficial for flourishing.

In *The Behaviour Guru* Bennett presents a view of flourishing which is inextricably linked with consistent conformity and obedience. It is in this earlier work that he establishes himself as being 'into Aristotle' (2010, p. xviii), an interest which continues in *Running the Room* and underpins his belief in the moral importance of flourishing as an 'aim of teaching' (2020a, p. 80-81). He is not alone in this prioritisation of flourishing by those who are 'into Aristotle'. For example, Kristjánsson is eager to 'move the flourishing discourse forward in order to make it enrich educational policy and practice' (2020, p. 192). There is also a more general wave of interest amongst philosophers of education. Brighouse believes that 'schools have an obligation to prepare children to be able to flourish in the society they will inhabit' (2006, p. 28), de Ruyter considers that 'parents and teachers can and should do what they can to make it as likely as possible that their children will flourish' (2004, p. 388) and Reiss and White make the 'very minimal assumption that education – at home and at school – should help people to live flourishing lives' (2013, p. 2).

Bennett adopts a narrow interpretation of Aristotle's view of flourishing basing it solely on the idea of role fulfilment. He explains that everyone will 'flourish when they try their hardest to be the best in their roles. That's what flourishing means' (2020a, p. 80). This reductive interpretation of the concept means that 'flourishing' becomes compatible with his approach to discipline and consistency due to his definition of the role of the student:

> they have to work on the qualities of focus, kindness, patience, perseverance, fortitude and many others. In a lesson, this might mean that they are expected to do the reading for the lesson or to have brought in a show-and-tell, take a seat quickly, get to work quietly, ask questions when they don't understand, wait their turn to be called upon, do their best to complete the work and help their table partner when they don't understand. (p. 81)

It is possible to trace in this some sense of what Reiss and White identify as the two aims of flourishing: the first being 'to do with the student's own flourishing' and the second, 'to do with others' [flourishing]' (2013, p. 8). There is clearly an attempt to construct a model of flourishing which seeks to promote a conscientious approach to learning which is intended to help students attain future goals and to develop an attitude of kindness to others. However, within the broader context of Bennett's proposed culture of behaviour management the limitations of his version of flourishing become apparent. As Brighouse points out, 'being more knowledgeable than, and having legitimate power over, a child, does not, however, give us a right to impose our particular view of how they will flourish on them' (2006, p. 43).

Yet this is exactly what Bennett's creation of a consistent school culture seeks to do. There is no place within the students' role, as he constructs it, for them to develop other than as determined by the culture of the school. This is very much at odds with academic approaches to flourishing which prioritise the development of autonomy. De Ruyter suggests that 'educators should not prevent their children from having "an open future", because educators do not know which life will be meaningful to children' (2004, p. 88). White's warning that 'on the road to intellectual autonomy, children need protection against those who try to impose on them a vision of how to live' (2011, p. 93) seems most apposite here. The remedy he advises to such imposition – which recalls Wilson above – is 'intellectual. Young people can learn to ask the right critical questions. 'Is A right in wanting me to do X?' 'What gives him or her the authority to lay down how one should live?'' (p. 94). Such questioning does not appear to have any place within Bennett's imposition of a consistent school culture where teachers consistently hold all the power in order to maintain authority. He explains, 'power is a zero-sum game. It cannot be created or destroyed, only passed around. You need to be the authority in the room, or the students will be. Good luck with that' (2020a, p. 41). If, from within this approach, a student was permitted to pose such questions as White suggests, it would clearly be very difficult to justify the maintenance of teacher authority to students when its sole basis is power.

Whilst Bennett is correct in his belief that consistent conformity may indeed be of value in some circumstances, in a democratic society this will only be to the extent that it is useful in creating the minimum standards necessary for harmonious living. The equality created by enforced compliance with rules will always be tempered by the value of cultivating

individual freedom – a tempering which is missing in Bennett's approach. When students' conformity is promoted on the basis that it creates a consistent environment conducive to learning it is important to consider the lessons that are being learned alongside the stated objectives. Dewey observes that where

> conformity is the aim, what is distinctively individual in a young person is brushed aside or regarded as a source of mischief or anarchy. Conformity is made equivalent to uniformity. Consequently, there are induced lack of interest in the novel, aversion to progress, and dread of the uncertain and the unknown. Since the end of growth is outside of and beyond the process of growing, external agents have to be resorted to to induce movement towards it. (2007 [1916], p. 42)

He equates conformity with a lack of respect for diversity, a closing down of options and the impossibility of autonomous development.

If a goal of education is to prepare students to be citizens in a modern liberal democracy,[13] they need the experience of sharing in decision making, having their voices heard and the feeling that they have something to contribute to the culture of the school and the broader society. However, Bennett is quite explicit about the aims of consistency which sacrifices democratic values at the altar of conformity:

> Telling students '*Just do it because I say so*' isn't entirely without merit (after all, there might be plenty of circumstances when you want exactly that, and *it is the eventual goal of all this routine building*) but as a sole strategy it has limited effectiveness. Try to persuade as you instruct, as long as you remember that you're doing so as a tool, *not because the classroom is a democracy. It is not.* Your room, your rules. (2020a, p. 187, my emphasis)

This consistency-based approach, intended to ensure conformity, is more suited to preparing students for life in a repressive, totalitarian regime than a democratic one. Kelly likens such a method to 'a form of training in obedience, "a gentling of the masses"' (1995, p. 171) which is most effective when young people can be conditioned at school into accepting without question that compliance is the norm. It could be argued that there is some value in this type of mindset as it clearly facilitates the smooth running of a school, but it has wider ramifications in easing the functioning of other social organisations as well as the state itself.

[13] Bennett seems to acknowledge this when he posits 'democratic participation' (2020a, p. 29) as a potential aim of education. However, he seems careful not to directly align himself with such an aim by presenting it as one which his reader might wish to promote.

As Ezra observes, 'people who are educated in this fashion usually accept the social order, its values and its norms not only as obvious and evident but also as correct and justified' (2004, p. 221). Such a state of mind resonates with Bennett's agenda for discipline.

This internalisation of externally imposed expectations through the uncompromising and consistent requirement of conformity is intrinsically opposed to the educational aim of encouraging students to think for themselves. By making them dependent on an external authority to determine how to behave, young people are not given the opportunity to develop capacities such as thinking critically, choosing autonomously, acting independently, which are necessary to operate successfully in a modern liberal democratic society. As such, Bennett's approach is anti-educational.[14] I suggest that non-conformity is an educationally more valuable approach. If students are non-compliant, this means they may actually be thinking about the rules rather than being passively obedient. Halstead and Xiao argue that 'engagement is a positive learning outcome, even if the particular response involves resistance or subversion' (2023, p. 375). Having compliant students might be considered conducive to creating an effective learning environment but this relies on a narrow view of how young people develop and places limits on genuine educational opportunities which develop independent thinking and action.

This section has argued that from an educational perspective there is little to commend Bennett's adherence to consistency. Whilst there is educational benefit for students to learn to argue consistently, the consistent influence of his culture teaches the opposite. By consistently conditioning students into unthinking conformity, he seeks to close down avenues of discussion which would provide an area for developing their capacity to think and flourish as individuals. If students are immersed in a culture of compliance which bears no relation to the reality of life outside school, I argue this will leave students ill-prepared for the future. They will be ill-equipped to make the many decisions they will be faced with in their everyday lives and to cope with the diversity of attitudes, behaviours, and responses they will encounter from the people they will meet. The creation of an artificially consistent environment in schools has the potential to dehumanise students, to entrench cultural insensitivity and stifle the development of personal autonomy. By eliminating inconsistency of approach between teachers, by reducing the possibility of surprising students and by

[14] A recent Ofsted inspection at The Abbey School in Faversham where the leaders have 'strict expectations of behaviour' found that 'for the majority of pupils, these approaches are applied in a manner that is overly restrictive. Many pupils find this oppressive' (Ofsted, 2022, p. 3).

treating everyone the same every time, opportunities for young people to learn about the unexpected, the bizarre and the interesting nature of life in the 'real' world are lost.

2.5 The Ethics of Bennett's Approach to Discipline

In this concluding section of the chapter, I explore how Bennett attempts to give ethical credibility to the disciplinary techniques he promotes, which I argue sit uncomfortably with the moral values which inform the purpose of education within a modern liberal democracy. I first explore his emphasis on the importance of dignity in relation to children and argue that his confusion about the nature of dignity results in a failure to demonstrate respect to children. Second, I identify the ideological foundations of his approach within economic liberalism and explore the implications of this for children's moral development.

2.5.1 Discipline and the Dignity of the Child

If Bennett's vision for discipline in schools is lacking in educational benefits, why does he promote such an approach and why has it been adopted as a basis for government policy and as such, is being implemented in schools? It became clear from *The Behaviour Guru* that he has little respect for young people whom he repeatedly likens to animals. In his more recent work Bennett gives the impression of a shift in attitude. In *Running the Room,* he emphasises the need to 'treat them with dignity' (2020a, p. 87, see also pp. 149, 150, 182, 193, 210, 322). Bennett is not explicit about what he means by 'dignity' but he does identify that, as an underlying principle of education, 'we should view every member of the classroom as an individual deserving as much dignity, liberty, esteem and consideration as possible' (p. 38). Such a liberal principle is difficult to reconcile with the nature of his approach which appears to stifle individual liberty and thus demonstrates little esteem or consideration for the dignity of individual pupils.

Dignity is a concept at the heart of thinking about human rights and is noted as foundational in the preamble to the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) (1948). It is a way of expressing an inalienable quality inherent in all people simply by virtue of being human. It carries with it the idea of basic equality and is generally considered to have its origins in Kant's *Groundworks of the Metaphysics of Morals* (2012 [1785], p. 41; cf. Debes, 2023) As Baroness Hale, in a legal judgment in the House of Lords, explains, 'treating some as

automatically having less value than others not only causes pain and distress to that person but also violates his or her dignity as a human being' (2004). The recognition of the dignity of persons thus requires that they be treated with a basic level of respect which becomes due to them by virtue of their being human.[15] Perelman provides a useful explanation of how this dignity is widely conceived as integral to rights:

> The notion of human rights implies that there exist rights that may be attributed to every member of the species, and that these rights are related to the very quality of being human, without distinction between members of the species and not extending beyond them. Whether the religious origin for the special place reserved for human beings in the doctrine is recognized or not, that doctrine proclaims that every person possesses a dignity proper to itself and merits respect insofar as that person is a free moral agent who is simultaneously autonomous and responsible. (1982, p. 119)

However, the problem with this definition is that on the one hand it claims there is an essential dignity in being human that establishes all humans as equally valuable, but on the other hand it qualifies this claim on the basis that additional attributes are required to warrant respect. Significantly for young people, these attributes are those generally deemed to be lacking in children and so this justifies their not being treated as equally worthy of the respect due to those possessing these characteristics.

Bennett does seem to recognise this essential dignity as existing in all people when he states that, 'it is entirely possible to reprimand a student unambiguously, and to do so in a way that conveys they are still human beings with dignity' (2020a, p. 267). Yet, the fact that more generally he talks in terms of 'treating' students *with* dignity problematises his claim. A person *possesses* dignity which necessitates that they be 'treated' *with* respect. Logically, if X treats Y *with* dignity, it is X who possesses the dignity, not Y. X is simply behaving in a dignified manner in his treatment of Y. Therefore, when Bennett stresses the need to 'treat them [students] with dignity' (p. 87), it is the teacher who has dignity not the child. Although it could be argued that Bennett is confusing dignity with respect this is difficult to maintain as Bennett never in fact recommends treating students with respect as might be expected from someone who is concerned with the dignity of the child. In fact, the definition of respect he offers – 'deferring to agreed hierarchies, accepting authority sources' (p. 123) – precludes children from being respected due to the position he affords them within the

[15] I return to issue of respect in detail in Chapter Eight.

hierarchical school structure he promotes. Thus, although *Running the Room* offers a linguistic gloss to his approach through which it purports to give students dignity, to allow them to flourish and become free agents, the reality of this semantic shifting is that students actually remain the objects of disrespect, have their wings clipped and become bound by a rigid regime of imposed routines.

A detailed analysis of Bennett's writing and ideological basis reveals that his attitudes and values remain unchanged from those expressed in *The Behaviour Guru*. Despite the semblance of a more measured approach, animal imagery slips through his restraint as disinterested students are compared to 'a dog who has correctly discerned a worming tablet crushed into its feed' (2020a, p. 20) and the ideal is for students to be 'like fish, unable to conceive of anything beyond the water in which they float' (p. 56). There is little regard for the dignity of students in the use of such imagery. This scant respect for young people is further exemplified in his response to a speech by Izzy Garbutt, youth MP for Wigan and Leigh, in the UK Youth Parliament, where she spoke eloquently about her experience of education. She pleaded, 'the education system is supposedly created for young people so please listen when we say it is failing us … nurturing the development of young people as individuals should be the aim of education' (2022, 31:13). Rather than listening or taking seriously what she has to say by respecting the fact that she is clearly speaking from a position of knowledge and experience and would have a thoughtful and positive contribution to make to any debate about the future of the education system, Bennett responded publicly on *X* by seeking to humiliate her. He stated, 'Oh God this is terrible. I applaud the speaker's moxie, but this is the Biff & Chip guide to progressive instrumentalism' (2022).[16] Inherent in this response is a rigid ideological position which dictates his attitude to young people and consequently justifies his approach to dealing with their behaviour. I argue that it is this ideology which helps to explain why he is so insistent on promoting such an anti-educational and unethical approach to discipline in schools and why it is has been given such support by government.

[16] Biff and Chip are characters in the Oxford Reading Tree, a reading scheme widely used in primary schools.

2.5.2 A Failure of Moral Coherence?

Bennett does not address his theoretical position explicitly, but it becomes clear in *The Behaviour Guru* that he is influenced by Aristotle and sees libertarianism as providing the guiding moral system for society (2010, p. 144). Similarly, in *Running the Room* he does not claim to adhere to a particular ideological position but the values which underpin his approach help to establish his political philosophy which has been described as 'neo-conservative traditionalism' (Buckingham, 2020), and 'characterized by an authoritarian ideology' (Gillborn *et al*, 2022, p. 1). Whilst omitting to offer any coherent philosophical justification for his beliefs about adapting student behaviour, he does claim that he has found 'political philosophy far more important than I had ever imagined' (Bennett, 2020a, p. 22).

One question he goes on to pose but not address – 'how do people coexist in ways that maximise their aims – justice, liberty, equality, income, resources, or some combination of all of these?' (*ibid*) – reveals a great deal about his values. His equal alignment of the fundamental, abstract liberal values of justice, liberty and equality alongside the materialistic aspirations of income and resources demonstrates an economic focus which positions him within the prevailing framework of values informing current educational policy, that of economic liberalism. This provides the backbone of beliefs of the various ideological frameworks with which Bennett is aligned – libertarianism, neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism. This trio happily co-exist in a mutually supportive ideological bubble of right leaning beliefs which support a hierarchical social structure and share a guiding 'moral' system which prioritises the individual such that self-interest becomes the overriding consideration in human interactions.[17]

Bennett's rhetoric regarding the responsibilities of the teacher might seem to challenge my positioning of him within this theoretical system. He claims that

> Conformity can be one of our greatest vices when married to unscrupulous authority. The takeaway for the classroom teacher? To be fair, kind and as just as possible. To never abuse one's authority for selfish purposes, or in order to make us feel important, to make someone else feel small, or to amuse ourselves. This is yet another reason why the teacher's moral compass is a vital component of what we do and who we are. (2020a, p. 121)

[17] I explore the moral underpinning of this ideological position, its effect on discipline in schools and the implications for students' moral development in Chapter Six.

This seems to counter my arguments that his approach to behaviour in schools is in fact founded on an unscrupulous form of adult authority, promotes student conformity as an ideal, relies on distorted notions of justice, freedom, and autonomy, and fails to acknowledge young people as worthy of respect. So, what principles dictate 'the teacher's moral compass' on Bennett's terms? In his assertion of the absolute authority of the teacher on the basis that teachers are 'expert behavers' (p. 61) and have an uncontroversial grasp of what is 'useful or good or valuable' (p. 100) there is an implicit assumption that the moral compass of the teacher can be left to rotate freely. However, if teachers have a duty to impose a specific school culture, students who do not conform to expected modes of behaviour will be subject to forms of punishment which may be ethically flawed; and because teachers have a duty to follow the school's policies, regardless of whether they agree with them, they are deprived of their own moral compass (see Bennett 2020a, p. 111). Under Bennett's regime of culture, teachers become as subject to the rules of a school's discipline regime as the students and their moral responsibility is shifted to the school system rather than the individual interests of the students. When conformity is viewed as a good in itself, the reason for following rules ceases to be vested in the moral value of the behaviour the rule seeks to achieve but in rule following *per se*. Obedience becomes the primary moral virtue. If the fundamental reason justifying a rule's existence ceases to be the value of the required behaviour, the motivation for complying with the rule will not require thinking about moral issues. Rather, on the basis that Bennett describes, the motivation for behaviour dissolves into questions: 'Do they see value in it? Does it give them something they want?' In this context, the 'something' can mean 'meaning, status, peer esteem, self-esteem', and many other similar goods' (p. 66). The 'goods' he refers to are all based on inward looking considerations such that reason for action becomes vested in considerations of self-interest rather than in questions of right and wrong.

Bennett's moral framework has shifted little from that demonstrated in *The Behaviour Guru* where he describes libertarianism as the 'moral system upon which our entire social structure is based' (2010, p. 144). He bases this assertion on his beliefs regarding personal responsibility. In order to justify his approach to discipline, it is necessary to establish that students are fully in control of their own actions, a belief he maintains in *Running the Room*: 'treating students as having responsibility over their actions is vital if we are to teach them how to accept responsibility for themselves, to manage their own lives, and grow in maturity' (2020a, p. 36). Whilst he does caution that some vulnerable children are perhaps

not always able to control their reactions, this does not in fact mitigate their being punished: 'We permit too much misbehaviour while we explore its reasons and lose more time than we possess. More importantly, whatever the reason for the behaviour, usually the initial response is the same' (p. 37). As he established in the earlier volume, he takes 'free will as a given' because, he claims, this means he can believe in personal responsibility (2010, p. 146). It is this faith in the inter-relatedness of 'free-will' and personal responsibility that offers the key to understanding Bennett's ideological foundations. At the heart of economic-based liberal theories is the belief in the need to prioritise the freedom of individuals in order to facilitate their unfettered access to the marketplace with minimum state intervention. This limited involvement of the state necessitates that citizens be trusted to behave in a responsible manner. The adoption of economic values in the development of educational policy, which I address in Chapter Six, was instigated by the Thatcher government, and has meant that schools provide perfect arenas for the inculcation of values in the preparation of students as appropriately active economic participants in society. Davies and Bansel identify the significance of the reconfiguration of schools within an economic or neo-liberal agenda so that they become the creators of 'highly individualized, responsibilized subjects' (2007, p. 248). Their presentation of neo-liberalism as functioning 'at the level of the subject, producing docile subjects who are tightly governed and who, at the same time, define themselves as free' (p. 249) is difficult to distinguish from the operation of Bennett's approach to behaviour in school. Both depend on the prioritisation of compliance whilst promoting a distorted discourse of freedom bound by responsibility. Whilst students are encouraged to accept 'their behaviour is their responsibility' (Bennett 2010, p. 211) and 'to take responsibility for their actions' (2020a, p. 141), this merely offers an illusion of choice as the exercise of free will is limited to obedience or punishment. If the responsible student *chooses* to obey the rules it might seem that teachers adopting Bennett's approach are guiding students into make the *right choice* which is redolent of *good* moral education. But if there is any motivation for action beyond unthinking compliance, this primarily derives from the wish to avoid punishment which is founded in self-interest – the very principle which is seen to drive neo-liberal ideology (see Todd Peters, 2004, p. 59; Wiegratz, 2013, p. 63). Thus, the strict discipline practices promoted by Bennett operate seamlessly within the broader framework of neo-liberalism informing education policy, to prepare students to act on the basis of self-interest regardless of whether a decision requires moral or economic

considerations to be taken into account.[18] Deprived of the capacity of autonomy through an unmitigated culture of conformity, young people are likely to leave school as ideal, responsible, neo-liberal citizens, highly skilled in following rules as they 'freely' pursue their own interests in the economic market place.

This chapter has sought to highlight some of the major problems with Bennett's approach to discipline in schools and its potential implications for the educational and moral development of young people. It raises three key issues regarding the ways schools seek to restrain the behaviour of their students and which this thesis seeks to address. The first relates to how discipline is used as a means of controlling children, which I argue results in a curtailment of their development towards moral autonomy. The second involves the extent to which neo-liberal values inform disciplinary practice in schools and the implications of this for students' moral development. The third concerns how society's conception of childhood influences and justifies the modes of discipline operating in schools. The following chapter considers the implications of these issues for the development of students' moral autonomy more fully. I do this through an analysis of Katharine Birbalsingh's approach to school discipline which she has implemented at the Michaela Community School.

[18] I develop this point more fully in Chapter Six, where I argue that the use of consequences in schools acts to promote self-interest and furnishes young people with a morality which fuels a neo-liberal market economy.

CHAPTER 3

DISCIPLINE AT THE MICHAELA COMMUNITY SCHOOL

3.1 The Michaela Community School

The second of the two major British voices under consideration in this thesis that speak out in support of a no-excuses discipline policy requiring unquestioning obedience to adult authority, is that of Katharine Birbalsingh, headteacher at the Michaela Community School at Wembley Park in London (subsequently referred to as Michaela). This school is widely referred to as 'the strictest school in Britain' (Davis, 2024; Carroll, 2022; Carr, 2018; Adams, 2016), and Birbalsingh is often described as 'Britain's strictest headteacher' (Edwardes, 2022; Knowles, 2021). Though Bennett and Birbalsingh are generally singing from the same hymn sheet – so much so that Bennett describes Michaela as 'the best [school] that there's ever been. It is extraordinary' (quoted in Economist, 2023) – they have different primary emphases in their work. Bennett is concerned with sharing his expertise and giving advice to the teaching profession, particularly to new and inexperienced teachers, and this role was recognised through his appointment as behaviour 'tsar' to the DfE in 2015. Birbalsingh's primary concern, on the other hand, is to run a successful school in line with her distinctive and well publicised vision of education. She was appointed social mobility 'tsar' by Liz Truss in 2021 while retaining her position at Michaela, but resigned after 15 months because (perhaps ironically) she did not like the discipline involved in being a spokesperson for government policy and preferred the freedom to express her own views as she thought fit (Butler, 2023).

Michaela was established in 2014 under the Conservative-Liberal coalition government's initiative to set up free schools independent of local authority control. Birbalsingh was headteacher, and Suella Braverman chair of governors.[19] It is a co-educational, 11-18 secondary school with a reported higher-than-average proportion of students entitled to free

[19] Suella Braverman is a Conservative member of Parliament and held the office of Home Secretary from 2022-2023, under both Liz Truss and Rishi Sunak. Her right-wing political views have been criticised by Johnathon Ashworth, former Labour shadow paymaster general, as 'legitimising fringe far-right elements that threaten our cohesion and democracy' (quoted in Savage and O'Carroll, 2024).

school meals.[20] The school aims to bring 'the values and advantages of a private education to young people of all backgrounds by providing a highly academic curriculum and strong discipline' (Michaela, 2018). Indeed, Michaela's approach to education is tightly structured and controlled, with discipline permeating every aspect of the students' experience in school. Through its carefully managed approach to public relations, the school has become internationally renowned for its adherence to strict disciplinary practices (see Carroll, 2022; Fenton, 2022; Carr, 2018). Praise from Conservative politicians and supporters of traditionalist education has resulted in visits to the school by the rich and famous, and this has in turn provided many opportunities for further successful public relations. The school's dedicated YouTube channel and the headmistress's multiple television appearances, promoted on the school's website (Michaela, 2024a), focus on presenting the school as a bastion of good practice where 'pupils make huge progress' (Birbalsingh, 2017, 0:44-0:47, see also Birbalsingh, 2020a, p. 22). The evangelical zeal of the staff to communicate their enthusiasm for and belief in the rightness of their methods is crystallised in two recent publications, *The Power of Culture* and *Battle Hymn of the Tiger Teachers: The Michaela Way*, both edited by Birbalsingh (2020b, 2016a). These volumes emphasise the school's commitment to promoting the well-being of its students through strict disciplinary measures, a 'traditional curriculum' (Ashford, 2020a, p. 61), 'traditional teaching methods' (Birbalsingh, 2020a, p. 18) and the centrality of relationships 'built on a foundation of adult authority' (Burkitt, 2020a, p. 8). The school has been described as 'outstanding' in all areas by Ofsted inspectors and has achieved examination results which the school website describes as 'extraordinary' and 'remarkable' (Michaela, 2024b). In addition, Birbalsingh herself testifies to the fact that visitors to the school are 'always struck by how polite and motivated our children are, how dedicated and enthusiastic the teachers are' (2020a, p. 22).

It is rare for a school to offer such a rich set of resources for a study of its own values and discipline policies. In this chapter, I seek to use these resources in order to achieve two goals: to identify and analyse the vision, values, beliefs and principles which underpin the school's approach to, and justification for, its distinctive approach to education in general (section two), and to school discipline in particular (section three); and to engage in a critical analysis

[20] The percentage of students on free school meals at Michaela is stated as being 25.7%. on the government's website *Get Information about Schools*. However, it also states that the number of students at the school is 708 and of those 158 are eligible for free school meals, which means the percentage is 22.3% (DfE 2023a). This places the school below the national average of 23.8% (DfE, 2023b) and well below the London average of 25.8% (*ibid*).

of these beliefs and values and the highly regimented, authority-led practices to which they give rise (section four). In particular, whilst acknowledging the recorded progress made by students in terms of exams results and their ostensible conduct, I am concerned to explore the extent to which the school's disciplinary practices are educationally and ethically justifiable and the potential impact they may have on young people's long-term educational, social and moral development (sections five and six). Is the 'Michaela way' likely to hinder its students' long-term development into free-thinking, self-motivated adults? This preliminary critical investigation of the school's values, beliefs and underlying principles will open up further questions about the purpose of discipline, the possibility of character education, the pursuit of self-interest, the nature of childhood, the importance of respecting children and the contribution that school rules can make to learning about citizenship and the law – which together will make up the remainder of the thesis.

3.2. 'The Michaela Way': the School's Educational Vision, Beliefs and Values

The topic of discipline at Michaela cannot be explored without reference first to the broader vision of education that the school upholds and second to the more detailed values that provide the justification for, and an understanding of, the school's approach to discipline. The values provide the backdrop against which the disciplinary procedures are acted out. In this section, the values will be analysed and discussed, as far as possible, in the terms the school itself uses, and a more critical examination will be held back till the later sections of the chapter.

3.2.1 Small–c Conservative Values

This much-repeated phrase (Birbalsingh, 2020a, pp. 21, 24, 25; see also Birbalsingh, 2023; Martin, 2023) is a key to understanding both the beliefs and the values of the school. For Birbalsingh, it is a description of 'those values that I hold most dear' (2020a, p. 21), that together form the 'beating heart within' (p. 24), as opposed to the daily practicalities of running a school. In essence, it refers to a respect for tradition and a preference for 'old-school' values (p. 17), rather than innovative and progressive ones. But there is more to the phrase than that. I take the term to be indicative of all of the following:

- Acceptance of distinctively British values (or at least, middle-class values), like keeping a stiff upper lip (i.e. emotional restraint, stoicism or resilience), upholding fair play (anything else is 'not cricket'), patriotism, good manners, queuing, punctuality, respect for tradition, common sense, deference to authority, community spirit, personal responsibility, British reserve, modesty about success, respect for one's elders, and even the principle that one-should-eat-everything-on-one's-plate-because-there-are-people-starving-in-Africa. These are very different from the 'fundamental British values' which all British schools are required to promote, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs (DfE, 2014a). In fact, the list of 'shared British values' is entirely made up of liberal values which are not distinctively British at all; they will be discussed below.
- The belief that somehow private schooling is better than public schooling and that it is appropriate for state schools to emulate private schools wherever possible, particularly in their emphasis on order, high standards, the authority of the teacher and the values of self-responsibility, duty and rigorous, challenging work. At Michaela, this emulation extends even to learning table manners, so that their pupils will be able to feel comfortable eating in a formal context such as a middle-class dinner party or an Oxbridge college (Taylor, 2020, pp. 341-2).
- The use of traditional teaching methods and rituals like rote learning of times-tables, the group recitation of rousing, patriotic poetry, a preference for whole-class teaching as opposed to group-work, requiring students to stand up when the headteacher comes into the room, encouraging competitiveness among students and the strict control of student behaviour through shaming, detention and particularly through the initiation into school rituals and traditions by means of the boot camp which takes place at the start of Year Seven. Birbalsingh speaks of her belief that she understands human nature 'and that means children are able to grow up properly' at Michaela (2023, n.p.).
- Trust in the staff to support and promote the shared traditional values of the school, so that they speak with one voice to both children and parents. As Birbalsingh notes, 'The thing I am most proud of is filling a school with small 'c' conservative staff, from the caretakers to the office staff to the kitchen staff, to the teachers (2020a, p. 21), and she takes care to maintain the unity through very regular staff meetings.

- Assumptions about what is seen as the natural order of authority, hierarchy and respect within the school. The school's ethos is inspired by the eponymous Michaela,[21] whose mantra – 'they are the children, we are the adults' (*ibid*) – establishes what is taken to be the natural order of authority. Children are the ones who should show respect; teachers are the ones who should receive it. Learning is teacher-led, and adult authority is not questioned. It is claimed that this hierarchy of authority enables teachers to establish positive relationships with the students and maintain the ordered environment which facilitates learning (see Raichura, 2020, p. 141). If the children ever make a complaint against a teacher (for example, for being racist), the school must always back the teacher. For those at the bottom of the hierarchy (the children, of course), gratitude (even for small mercies) should precede entitlement. There is not much talk of children's rights at Michaela.
- In spite of Birbalsingh's claim that her small–c conservatism has nothing to do with support for the Conservative Party (Birbalsingh, 2020a, p. 21), there is an easy slide from small–c to large–c Conservatism, and it is true that Birbalsingh's involvement with the Conservative Party dates back to her decision to speak at the Conservative Party Conference in 2010. The most vocal support for the school comes from right-wing politicians like Michael Gove, Boris Johnson, Liz Truss and Suella Braverman, right-wing academics like Roger Scruton and right-wing educationists like Tom Bennett.

3.2.2 Fundamental Convictions

Simon Virgo closes his chapter in *Michaela: The Power of Culture* with a list of Michaela's core beliefs and assumptions which he thinks everyone at the school must share. They include an interesting, and perhaps rather odd, mix of ideas: epistemological ('we believe that beliefs are important … that truth exists … that knowledge matters'); sociological ('we believe in the family … we believe education profoundly affects society' … 'we believe it is good for children to love their country'); spiritual ('we believe in hope'); metaphysical ('we believe in the possibility of change'); moral ('we believe authority isn't a dirty word' and 'we believe in personal responsibility'); and educational ('we believe being a teacher takes

[21] The school is named after Birbalsingh's former colleague, Michaela Emanus, whose 'old-school' teaching style she admired (Birbalsingh, 2020a, p. 17).

courage'). But the concept of the child and how children should be treated are the things that come across most strongly in this list of core beliefs. Children are expected to 'respect their teachers' – though there is no suggestion that respect is a two-way practice. It is the role of teachers to teach and pupils to learn – though there is no suggestion that teachers and pupils can learn together, or that pupils can learn from each other, or from their environment, or in many other ways. Pupils are required to accept their lower status ('we believe in gratitude rather than entitlement'). Children must accept the authority of teachers and the value of discipline. In return, 'teachers should love their pupils', though 'loving pupils involves holding them to high standards' – in other words 'tough love' (Virgo, 2020, pp. 35-6).

3.2.3 Tough Love

The oxymoron, tough love, is at first difficult to understand, and people may be forgiven for suspecting that it is simply a euphemism for strict discipline. This impression is reinforced by the advertisement for a 'Detention Director' at Michaela that appeared in the *TES* in 2017:

> Do you like order and discipline?
> Do you believe in children being obedient every time?
> Do you believe that allowing children to make excuses is unkind?
>
> If you do, then the role of Detention Director at Michaela Community School, could be for you.
>
> This role isn't suited to a would-be counsellor or to someone who wants to be every child's best friend. This role is for someone who believes children need clear, firm discipline. This role is for someone who believes tough love is what children need to become better people and grow into responsible young adults. (TES, 2017)

But there is more to the concept of 'tough love' than this advertisement implies. Butterfield, a teacher at Michaela, says that a teacher 'can be light-hearted one moment and instantly authoritative the next', which he calls the 'warm/strict approach' (2020b, pp. 315, 319). The teacher may be issuing a reprimand or punishment at one moment but building up a strong relationship with the children through friendly conversations and 'relaxed and jovial teaching' shortly afterwards. The children see both sides of the teacher, and come to 'genuinely love and respect me, as I love and respect them' (p.319). Other teachers at the school draw attention to the centrality of relationships in creating the 'school's warmth' (Staw, 2020, p. 97) and see relationships as 'a key ingredient in achieving the pupil buy-in that allows a school like Michaela to function so well' (Burkitt, 2020b, p. 103). The desire of teachers to be loved by their pupils is also seen in the title of Birbalsingh's blog ('To Miss,

with Love'), which points to what she wants to receive from the children rather than to what she can offer them. For Birbalsingh, strict discipline and consistent punishment are a form of love, not only because they are seen as in the children's long-term interests, but also because the teacher is showing their care by holding them to high standards. 'Tough love' occurs when the child understands that the teacher cares for them enough to accept nothing but the best from them.

3.2.4 Shared British Values

I have already drawn attention to the difference between the 'shared British values' which all British schools are required to promote (democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs) and the small–c conservative values which Birbalsingh prefers. She does little to encourage children to learn about democracy through the adoption of democratic procedures in the classroom like the participation of pupils in decision-making and the discussion of rights such as the right to protest; these are seen as 'leftie' and 'progressive' ideas (Birbalsingh, 2023). The parallel between school rules and the rule of law is not ignored at Michaela, though justice at Michaela is speeded up by the school's refusal to listen to the defence of anyone deemed to have broken a rule or to take account of extenuating circumstances. Individual liberty is understood primarily as 'freedom from'; freedom from bullying, for example, is achieved by the school's surveillance and control, which ensures that bullying does not take place. 'Freedom to' presents a greater challenge to the school, however, as it seems to be in direct conflict with the school's commitment to the tight control of student behaviour. Porter describes it as a 'paradox, that pupils cannot truly be free unless they have been shaped towards certain ends' (2020, p. 57). He argues that 'some constraint and some direction' are needed before young people are free, though he does not suggest how long the period of constraint and direction should last (p. 46). Possibly until the end of compulsory schooling. 'Mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (DfE, 2014a) also seem to present a challenge to Michaela school, which is not met by a carefully thought-out programme of multicultural education, but by an expectation that pupils will leave their different faiths at the doorstep as they enter the school and focus instead exclusively on their shared cultural inheritance as British citizens. The story of Birbalsingh's refusal to allow Muslim children to pray at school during the lunch hour is told in a later chapter. She claimed

that allowing prayers would risk 'undermining inclusion and social cohesion between pupils' (Kenber and Ames, 2024), but it remains an open question what messages the children at the school will pick up from her refusal. Beyond the minimal framework of liberal values contained in the government's definition of 'shared British values', scant attention is paid in the Michaela literature to other values of liberal education such as equality, personal autonomy, critical thinking, fairness, open-mindedness, the celebration of diversity, the avoidance of coercion and manipulation and the avoidance of dogma. Overall, the attention the school pays to 'shared British values' seems to be fairly minimal, though this does not seem to have been noted by Ofsted inspectors.

3.2.5 Neo-Liberal Values

Neo-liberal values, on the other hand, though rarely mentioned directly in any of Michaela's publications, are easily recognisable by anyone reading between the lines. Children are being trained to meet the economic needs of the country and to become active economic participants in the marketplace, with all aspects of educational provision being structured towards this end, in accordance with neo-liberal principles.[22] The relationship between effort and reward is stressed; success is defined narrowly as good exam results, and the benefit of good exam results is measured in terms of their impact on future material wealth or the attainment of 'high social status' (Gerrard, 2020, n.p.). Michaela encourages its students to aspire to the higher strata of the social hierarchy and wants them to feel comfortable 'at an Oxford college dinner or at a drinks party for wealthy bankers' (Ashford, 2020a, p. 64) and to know how to behave during 'an internship in the Civil Service' (Sibley, 2020, p. 115).

Discipline is justified in terms of future income lost by children educated in disrupted classrooms (Porter, 2016a, p.68). Its function at Michaela is twofold: to make learning more efficient, and to teach habits of compliance and the acceptance of instructions without question. At the same time, children are encouraged to define themselves as free and to take responsibility for their own actions. The practice of discipline at Michaela, like that promoted by Bennett, serves to reinforce self-interest as a motive for action – the very principle which is seen to drive neo-liberal ideology – by avoiding punishment and working hard for personal success in examinations.

[22] For a more detailed exploration of neo-liberalism see Chapter Six.

3.3 The Centrality of Discipline

Student conduct is highly regimented both academically and socially at Michaela. It would not overstate the case to describe the school as fanatical about discipline. The belief in 'the value of discipline' not only establishes the context of the education it provides (Virgo, 2020, p. 36), but it is also integral to the very process of learning which the school operates. This is centred on 'drill and didactic teaching' (Dyer, 2016, p. 28; see also Butterfield, 2020a, p. 105 and James, 2020, p. 198), the promotion of adult authority and the eschewal of child-centred approaches: 'we believe that if more schools were to reinstate teachers to their rightful positions of authority that the longstanding damage to education by progressivism would be stifled' (Smith, 2020, p. 148). Dyer's definition of their approach as 'the pedagogy of imparting immutable facts' (2016, p. 28) posits the school directly in a hard Dickensian milieu which Jonathon Porter, former deputy head at the school, playfully acknowledges in a parodic alignment of himself with the execution of 'a cruel and heartless system administered by Gradgrindian monsters such as myself' (2016b, para.1). Porter goes on to describe the reality of the Michaela approach as 'a warm but unapologetically strict school-wide system, which sanctions pupils for poor behaviour' (para.2). Pedagogy and disciplinary practice are inextricably linked at Michaela as drill and didactic teaching rest on the same beliefs as the no-excuses discipline which the school extols – successful students can be trained through repetitive practice to think and behave in predetermined ways.

At Michaela, practice is underpinned by a belief in the value and virtue of equal treatment. All students are subject to exactly the same academic and disciplinary rules and regime regardless of ability, special educational needs, social background, religious affiliation or any other distinguishing characteristic. Students are required to comply exactly with the rules. In terms of conduct this means they move around the school in complete silence, along marked routes (see Brierly, 2020; Adams, 2016), and remain silent in lessons unless given permission to speak (Michaela, 2023). School lunch is subject to tight control, with one teacher or other adult at each table and a topic of conversation prescribed for the duration of the meal (Taylor, 2020, p. 339). There is a strict uniform code, and pupils are forbidden to gather in groups of more than four. In the classroom SLANTing is obligatory as a means of demonstrating

mental engagement through physical demeanour.[23] Outside school, students are similarly required to demonstrate measured, disciplined conduct. Barry Smith, former deputy head, describes student behaviour on a trip out of school: 'they walked in single file and in silence, eyes front, from school to the tube. They stood tall and proud. Ties tight, shirts white, shoes shining bright' (Smith, 2016a, para.2). Such lyrical conduct is achieved only through very strict enforcement of rules. As Facer explains, 'our zero-tolerance behaviour system means perfect behaviour' (2016, para.5). The school prides itself on just how strictly it applies its discipline policy (see Birbalsingh, 2024b, 1:12-1:37; Griffiths, 2016). There is no compromise at Michaela, punishments are invoked for all infractions of the rules (although see Kirby's (2016a) distinction between excuses and reasons). Kirby explains,

> We set detentions for lots of reasons: for arriving one minute late to school or more; for not bringing in the daily homework … for not having the right equipment … for reacting badly to a teacher's instruction or demerit, such as sulking, tutting or rolling eyes … for persistently turning round in class after a teacher has reminded the pupil not to do so. (para.3)

This does not sound dissimilar to other schools such as, for example, those in the Dixons Academies Trust referenced in Chapter Two, but Michaela seeks to distinguish itself from other schools. As Amadi, chair of governors, states, 'We are different. We are unique. We are Michaela!' (2020, p. 15). This distinct identity is something that the school works very hard to achieve. Sibley explains that 'the wonderful behaviour on display at Michaela does not happen by accident. It arises from our commitment to instilling our ethos in each of our pupils' (2020, p. 109). Michaela's success in creating a very specific ethos or culture illustrates the full implications and effects of Tom Bennett's emphasis on 'creating a culture' to control behaviour which was discussed in Chapter Two. However, whilst the school's 'excellent GCSE results' (Virgo, 2020, p. 33) and 'wonderful behaviour' (Sibley, 2020, p. 109) pay testament to Bennett's approach, serious questions remain about the deeper impact it has on students' developing identities. Poems like Kipling's 'If' and Henley's 'Invictus' are regularly recited to instil a shared community identity, and this is further reinforced by teachers narrating

[23] This acronym denotes the need to sit up straight, listen, answer questions, never interrupt and track the teacher (Kirby, 2016b, p. 81) and is a technique promoted by the American educationist Doug Lemov (2021, p. 400). The Michaela version differs slightly from Lemov's in its use of the letter 'N'. The former does not allow students to interrupt the teacher whereas the latter requires nodding to demonstrate interest.

> what makes us ‘Michaela’ all the time. In every assembly, every break time, every lunch time, in every meeting, and in every interaction. It is on the walls of the corridors and in the poetry we learn. It has to be everywhere, because we want our pupils to feel that it is part of our shared community identity. (Sibley, 2020, p. 112)

‘Being Michaela’ involves the assumption not only of specified behaviours but also of a particular mindset. What distinguishes it from other schools is the all-consuming nature of its discipline. Once pupils become subject to its ‘culture’ they ‘stay silent even when a teacher is not around, because they are bought in to the system and culture’ (Brierly, 2020, p. 314). They are subject to the school’s value system both in and out of school. The role of the parents in instilling values in their children is marginalised in favour of the school as they too become subject to its disciplinary regime (Birbalsingh, 2016b). Smith explains,

> Kids and parents are told that every Michaela pupil must be in bed and asleep by 9pm. They’re told they should be up at 6am. They’re told that they need a fresh, clean white shirt every day, clean pants, clean socks, they’ve got to wash their ‘bits and pits’ and brush their teeth. A healthy, filling breakfast too, before they leave the house. No calling in to Subway – that’s where the rough kids hang out. We remind our pupils: ‘You’re not like them. You’re Michaela. And remember, every Sunday night at 7pm I should be able to open my window and hear 360 Michaela pupils polishing 720 shoes...’. (Smith, 2016b, p. 202)

Thus ‘being Michaela’ is to fully embrace and conform to a highly regimented way of life, buy into a strong sense of group identity and champion the exclusivity of that group.

So how is this accomplished? How does ‘a tough intake…[with] some very bad habits’ (Kirby, 2016b, p. 81) transform into appreciative models of conformity? New pupils are initiated into the system at the beginning of year 7 with a week-long ‘boot camp’ which teaches the students ‘the mindset and habits to succeed at school’ (Kirby, 2016c). The idea of military discipline, implicit in the boot camp, has been promoted by the DfE (with questionable success, see Walker, 2022; Camden, 2019; Richardson, 2016) as a means of tackling behaviour and attainment issues in schools (see DfE, 2013a), and it seems to have reached its apex at Michaela. Indeed, Kirby, deputy head at Michaela, explains, ‘we have found bootcamp to be life-changing for our children: it changes their life chances and propels them well on their way to achieving their highest aspirations’. He suggests that its adoption ‘might have a profound impact on other schools’ (2016b, p. 93). Certainly, the potential for Michaela to act as a beacon for good practice has not been lost on Conservative figures in the

worlds of politics, philosophy and education. Nick Gibb, speaking as former Minister of State for School Standards, urges, 'what we need is a Michaela … in every city and town serving those communities that have been let down for generations' (2021). Roger Scruton claims that 'visiting Michaela was for me a life-changing experience … Michaela is the model free school that all our schools should imitate' (quoted in Birbalsingh, 2016a) and Tom Bennett believes that 'Michaela is a trailblazer for schools that walk every word they talk' (*ibid*).

As part of the discipline policy, the pupils at Michaela are taught prescribed traits of character, notably politeness, gratitude and obedience (first time every time); they have little voice in the school, and even when they are allowed to speak, what they say is subject to tight control. The pupils are trained to be unerringly grateful to be there and subject to its regime (Birbalsingh, 2016c; see also Sibley, 2020, p. 122). An intrinsic aspect of the school's approach to discipline is to 'teach gratitude, because we know it is our duty to help our pupils become happy, and being grateful is essential to being happy' (Raichura, 2020, p. 140). Being grateful is in fact compulsory as students are expected to 'offer "appreciations"' (i.e. public expressions of gratitude to specific individuals, usually teachers) for five minutes each day after lunch, followed by two claps from the rest of the school (Taylor, 2016, p. 119; see also Sibley, 2020, p. 121). Some students are so grateful they even thank teachers for punishing them: 'I'd like to give an appreciation to my teacher for giving me a detention for failing to annotate my work' (Michaela student, quoted in Griffiths, 2016, p. 15). Some of the problems with the notion of being grateful for a punishment are discussed below, and the concept of discipline is examined more fully in Chapter Four.

3.4 An Educational Critique of Discipline at Michaela: Prioritising Authority over Autonomy

3.4.1 The Need for Children to be Subject to Adult Authority

As we have seen, amongst the key convictions underpinning the 'Michaela way' are the importance of authority, discipline and students' respect for their teachers (Virgo, 2020, p. 36). Porter, who has been one of the chief spokespeople for discipline at Michaela, blames his claim that 'discipline, authority and punishment have become dirty words in the contemporary educational debate' on 'Rousseau and his 20th Century followers', who 'have consistently sought to emphasise children's innate goodness' (2016a, p. 77, see also Porter,

2020, pp. 42-45; Virgo 2020, p. 35). Birbalsingh has been highly vocal in her condemnation of such views and has publicly declared her belief in the doctrine of original sin (2021).[24] In fact, it is this assumption about the nature of the child that forms the basis of Michaela's approach to discipline.[25]

Michaela's account of children, reminiscent of that in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1997 [1954]), is presented by Butterfield as the justification for its uncompromising approach to discipline:

> Why are we so adamant about the need for a firm behaviour policy? Aside from personal experiences, we stand by the idea that all humans are inherently flawed, children even more so. Unguided and left to their own devices, children will inevitably rebel, rejecting generally agreed standards of how civilised people should behave. (2020b, p. 316)

If we accept that children are predisposed to behave inappropriately, a legitimate argument can be made that those who are qualified to direct young people's behaviour towards a model of the good have a duty to do so. Indeed, this is the approach taken by Andrews who claims that teachers have a duty 'to wisely choose and steadfastly enforce the right restraints and boundaries for their pupils' (Andrews, 2020, p. 303). Yet if the Michaela model rests on the belief that 'all humans are inherently flawed', where do teachers derive the authority to make such judgments?

Raichura asserts that it is teachers' 'expertise and training' that give them authority (2020, p. 140) and that young people will respect them because they hold the key to guiding them to future success. However, he confuses knowledge with authority, which is perhaps understandable in view of the Michaela logo 'knowledge is power'. He claims that if teachers 'shed all of this knowledge for fear that we exercise 'authority' and think that is a bad thing, then we fail to give our pupils what they crave: boundaries to develop good habits, and knowledge needed to succeed' (p. 141). The correlation he assumes between knowledge and the exercise of authority is at best tenuous. Like Bennett, he blurs the two uses of the term 'authority' which I examined in Chapter Two. Whilst Raichura describes teacher authority at Michaela in terms of theoretical authority, his failure to adequately distinguish it from practical authority creates a false impression of the true nature of authority operating at the

[24] Birbalsingh reportedly regretted making this declaration. However, her remorse is not based on a change of viewpoint but rather because she found the criticism it caused was a distraction from 'the need to teach children to behave well' as she had to 'spend ages defending myself' (quoted in Hazell, 2022).
[25] I explore different conceptions of the child in Chapter Seven.

school. He claims that it is 'the sense of authority that creates a culture of behaving well in school … It is behaving out of a legitimate respect for authority, which rests upon knowledge' (2020, p. 141). The basic premise of this assertion is that children behave out of respect for the theoretical authority of their teachers, and it is this respect that operates to enforce good behaviour. However, in the light of my discussion of authority in the previous chapter, it can be argued that respect for authority arises in two ways. The first derives from admiration for the qualities which qualify a person or body as *an* authority. The second is a more tenuous form of respect but one which is widely adopted in schools and is obtained through the threat of punishment by those *in* authority. This latter form of respect is more akin to obedience and merely creates a semblance of genuine respect. Theoretical authority elicits the first form of respect and practical authority establishes the latter. In view of the emphasis which Michaela places on relationships, it is surprising that Raichura states 'that pupils do not behave because they have a relationship with the teacher, but because the teacher has authority; authority precedes relationships' (p. 141). This is difficult to reconcile with his claim that the authority of the teachers is in fact founded on knowledge. For this to be the case, a relationship will first need to be established where students' respect for the knowledge and expertise of the teacher can develop and they gradually come to see the teacher as *an* authority. Knowledge-based authority can only precede a relationship if knowledge is assumed by virtue of a teacher's position. In this case, it is their status as a teacher that gives them authority not their knowledge, meaning they are actually exercising practical authority, respect for which relies on fear of punishment and a belief in the necessity of respect for authority *per se*. The teacher as the power-wielding party will inevitably structure the parameter of the 'relationship' which ensues. Whilst Raichura's rhetoric of knowledge-based authority paints a picture of an ideal in an educational context, the fact that authority precedes relationships at Michaela reveals the true nature of authority and the relationships established at the school.

Essentially Michaela promotes a power-based authority justified on the grounds that children are inherently flawed, which imposes the 'testing task' on teachers of 'inculcating good habits in our pupils' (Raichura, 2020, p. 136). The accomplishment of this task necessitates treating all children 'equally',[26] because the belief that young people are inevitably flawed dictates that, in essence, they are constructed the same regardless of their actual individual

[26] Equal treatment is interpreted by Michaela as treating all children the same, however different their needs might be.

differences. This equalising feature, their assumed predisposition to misbehave, becomes the motivating factor in deciding how adults should respond to them. Essentially, such a view necessitates a belief that children cannot be trusted to be in control of their own behaviour and must be subject to strict control in order to ensure they comply with adult expectations of good behaviour. Indeed, Severs has argued that Michaela operates on the basis of 'a comprehensive system of distrust' and quotes Birbalsingh articulating her uncompromising adherence to this view of the child, on which the school is founded: 'I don't trust them, they are kids' (Severs, 2018, n.p.). Whilst this belief is used as a justification for restrictive disciplinary practices in schools, I argue its adoption has negative educational and moral implications.

3.4.2 The Effect of Authority on Children's Self-Esteem and Autonomy

Joan Goodman's study of charter schools in Philadelphia, which operate highly ordered and rigid regimes like Michaela, demonstrates how primary-age students have internalised the idea that they need tight control. She describes one child's response: 'A primary grade student, asked what she would do if there were no rules, responded, "I would break the computers … climb up the wall … knock over tables and chairs … rip books"' (Goodman, 2013, p. 94). Goodman quite rightly describes such a response as 'self-disparagement' (*ibid*). Student testimonies from Michaela suggest they are equally ready to view themselves as flawed and incapable of redemption without the guiding hand of Michaela:

> If Michaela Community School never existed, we wouldn't be kind to other people (quoted in Williams-Yale, 2016, p. 116).
>
> Thank you so much for helping throughout the year with my anger and my self-control … I believe you have made me a better person than I was a year ago (*ibid,* p. 115).
>
> Since attending Michaela, I have reformed into a polite young lady (quoted in Birbalsingh, 2016a, p. 301).
>
> Michaela has made me improve my behaviour and work ethic (quoted in Cheng, 2020, p. 271).
>
> If it wasn't for Michaela, I wouldn't make eye contact with teachers. (*ibid*)

It is striking how these students have taken on board the idea that their improvement is due to the influence of the school and its teachers. Their own role in their development is marginalised, suggesting a lack of faith in their own agency. It seems that only Michaela can be trusted to ensure the students are 'good'. Students left to their own devices will inevitably revert to type, like students from other schools: 'We are NOT normal. You know what normal kids do? They shout in the street. They push and shove …' (Smith, 2016b, p. 203). These 'unruly' children have not been repeatedly subject to 'narrations [which] aim to imbue pupils with a sense that they are incredibly lucky to be at Michaela' (Thompson, 2020, p. 127).

Goodman describes how such self-disparagement, brought about by 'the internalisation of the negative views of others', is manipulated to encourage students to fear the freedom of the world outside what is constructed to be the safe environment of the school (2013, p. 94). She explains how the students she interviewed associated freedom with an 'untamed spirit' which they had come to view as dangerous in the hands of the young who, they had been trained to believe, could not be trusted to behave appropriately (*ibid*). Similarly, at Michaela, staff rely on students' self-disparagement as a means of embedding their own role as uniquely qualified to guide pupils along the *right* path: 'We tell our pupils that they are lucky to have such incredibly knowledgeable teachers' (Raichura, 2020, p. 141). This means that the students are more disposed 'to buy in to our school ethos and to appreciate how lucky they are' (Cheng, 2020, p. 271). Once children have fully bought in to the discourse Goodman identifies, where freedom is associated with danger, Michaela is able to establish a misleading rhetoric of authority as care, which diverts attention away from the reality of the restrictions imposed on students at Michaela:

> Far from being the authoritarian nightmare we might imagine, teacher authority gives children clear rules on acceptable behaviour, both in terms of how they should behave in the classroom and how they should behave towards each other. Children need these boundaries so that they feel safe and have a sense of belonging. (Staw, 2020, pp. 88-89)

Porter goes so far as to interpret the restrictions Michaela imposes on its students as a means of giving children freedom, explicitly describing Michaela as a 'school of freedom' (2020, p. 39). He claims that 'we help them to become truly free' (p. 52). However, to make such an assertion about a school, whose whole structure of discipline relies on the very tight control

of its students and an insistence on obedience, involves an inversion of our understandings of freedom. To be free is 'being able to act without hindrance or restraint; liberty of action' (*OED*, 2024). As the experience of Michaela students clearly does not fall within this definition, in order to justify the oppressive regime of the school Porter engages in a form of semantic trickery to present restriction as an *a priori* condition of freedom. On this basis he claims that an educational approach which prioritises freedom in the conventional sense of the term – promoting self-determination through the valuing of choice, rights and autonomy – is actually opposed to genuine freedom: 'the more subtle problem with the removal of constraints in education is that it radically misunderstands what it means to be free' (2020, p. 44). He argues that if children's natural responses to situations are restricted, they are being given negative freedom, and this paves their way to positive freedom in the future 'to be the best form of themselves' (p. 52). His attempt to rationalise the high level of control that Michaela wields over its students is characteristic of the flawed justificatory rhetoric on which the school's approach to discipline is founded. The school culture essentially deprives students of their freedom to develop as individuals with a free-thinking independent spirit, able to challenge the *status quo*. The students do not behave as the school demands because they are free and choose to do so, but because they are subject to a strict regime of externally imposed discipline and punishment. Sarah, a former pupil of the school, explains in an interview with the BBC that students' motivation to behave well derives from 'fear rather than the children actually wanting to learn' (quoted in Jackson *et al*, 2024, n.p.).

3.4.3 Overt and Hidden Values at Michaela

Porter further promotes Michaela's approach by presenting it within his construction of Aristotle's argument in *Nichomachean Ethics*: 'Our actions become our habits, our habits become our character, our character is who we are' (Porter, 2020, p. 49). The basis of his argument is that instilling the habit of obedience through the constant threat of punishment forces students to adopt specific forms of behaviour. These repeated behaviours become so routine that students begin to accept them as the norm, and they develop into habits. These habits then become an intrinsic part of the students' being and so play an essential part in their character development, affecting the kind of people they become.[27] This presents

[27] See Chapter Five for a detailed study of character education and the problems with this view of character development.

Aristotle as an academic and philosophical justification of what is essentially a form of behaviour conditioning combined with indoctrination.

It is difficult to reconcile the restrictive practices and the resultant effects on students' self-worth and personal development with any notion of freedom. If a school is 'explicitly concerned with the moulding or shaping of a pupil towards a human ideal' (Porter, 2020, p. 46), as Michaela is, this should be a matter of deep concern within a modern liberal democratic society which values individual freedom, diversity, tolerance and respect. In Margaret Atwood's dystopian world of *The Handmaid's Tale* (1996 [1985]), Aunt Lydia, the authoritarian keeper of the handmaids, assures them that 'there is more than one kind of freedom … Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from. Don't underrate it' (Atwood, 1996 [1985], p. 34). Like the handmaids, students are given freedom from the responsibility of making decisions, but to free an individual from exercising their own will is more akin to slavery than freedom.

One of the major problems at Michaela is that the path it sets out is a very narrow one. In treating all students the same, it does not promote diversity and difference. Its model of discipline means that 'pupils complete every action in an exact way, following precise instructions from teachers in a set amount of time, which is counted out loud as the process is being cheerfully completed' (Cullen, 2016, p. 140). The result is that sameness pervades every aspect of school life from the way students walk down the corridors (in single file and in silence), how they sit in the classroom (SLANTing to demonstrate their shared engagement in the lesson), how they show their appreciation (two claps only after the count of two), how they dress (in very specific uniform) and even how they behave outside school. Although this may create a superficially pleasing sense of order (enough to please Ofsted), there is a failure to address the subtler lessons that students are learning through the hidden curriculum, which Hamilton and Powell describe as 'the unofficial rules, routines and structures of schools through which students learn behaviours, values, beliefs and attitudes' (2007, p. 2116). There is little space at Michaela for 'unofficial rules, routines' or 'structures' to emerge, as every aspect of students' life is strictly determined and monitored. However, students still learn from the values which underpin the organisation. The link between the hidden curriculum and values is complex and important (see Halstead and Xiao, 2023, p. 364; Clement, 2023, p. 60), especially at Michaela where there is a problematic tension between the values the school claims to promote and those which it actually instils. The school claims to develop students'

self-discipline but what the students are more likely to learn is that self-expression and spontaneity must be sacrificed.[28] The school claims to develop students' respect for the wisdom and experience of adults but what the students are more likely to learn is the value of obedience and conformity and the need to compromise their own judgement.

The lessons of the hidden curriculum draw attention to the incompatibility between the theoretical rhetoric of freedom that Michaela promulgates and purports to achieve for its students and the literal repression which is integral to the successful operation of its disciplinary practices. Students are taught the importance of respecting adults and listening to what they say, but they are not shown respect themselves or given the freedom to air their own views, unless of course these are in accord with those of Michaela. Ting explains that 'at Michaela, we stamp out disrespect not from a purely authoritarian basis – 'respect me because I am an adult!' – but instead out of a desire for our pupils to become respectful citizens' (2016, p. 103). However, he inadvertently exposes the inconsistency of respect at Michaela. It is difficult to justify the teaching of respect by *stamping out* disrespect and although he claims their approach is not 'purely' authoritarian, it is essentially so. Newman makes it clear that 'a cornerstone of our beliefs at Michaela is our conviction that adult authority must insist that all pupils follow all teachers' instructions, first time, every time' (2016, p. 94). And Ting adds that 'pupils who don't fully obey their teachers are disrespecting them' (2016, p. 104), firmly establishing the Michaela definition of respect as obedience, with respect 'established automatically' (Burkitt, 2020b, p. 101). This problematises the notion of the 'respectful citizen' and raises the question as to whether an obedient citizen is fitting for a democratic society.

Indeed, there is a broader question at issue here about how well students at Michaela are being prepared for adult life in general. Cullen describes the simulacrum which awaits the students: 'They have the bigger picture painted for them in bright technicolour – a future filled with choice and autonomy because they have learned traits like kindness and integrity' (2016, p. 140). But how are students going to be masters of their own fate in a future that has been created 'for them'? This is likely to leave them ill-prepared to make choices; as we have seen, 'every decision … for pupils has been made' (*ibid*). Despite the fact that 'thousands of times a day Michaela pupils choose', they always make the same choice '… to do the right thing' (p. 142), which at Michaela is to obey the rules without question or be punished. In a

[28] On the problem with self-discipline as an educational goal, see Chapter Five.

complex adult world rooted in dilemma, students will inevitably face situations which demand that choices be made without the security of rules to direct their course of action. The inflexible responses to rules that have been drilled into them are unlikely to equip them to deal with the new and unpredictable situations which they will face in adult life and consequently they may struggle to make choices and exercise the autonomy.

Whilst technicolour heralds an advance from black and white, Michaela is entrenched in a backward-looking ideology of compliant students and controlling adults which demonstrates a clear misunderstanding of the purpose of education. This criticism can be levelled at both its academic and social curricula – the emphasis on drill and didactic learning depends on the unthinking accumulation of facts and the disciplinary regime rests on an uncritical acceptance of adult rules. Thus, minds are closed and thinking discouraged. Education should be about opening minds to new ideas but, as I argue below, Michaela trains its students to see the world in the simple black and white terms associated with a fundamentalist belief system. There is the Michaela way, which is the right way, and the way the rest of society operates, which is the wrong way. In a society which increasingly fears extremism, it is worth pointing out the potential of such polarisation (see Department for Levelling Up, 2024). At the British Council conference, *Going Global 2015*, Louise Richardson, former Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, noted, 'Any terrorist I have ever met through my academic work had a highly over simplified view of the world, which they saw in black and white terms. Education robs you of that simplification and certitude. Education is the best possible antidote to radicalisation' (Richardson, 2015, 18:29-18:55). The point which is at stake here is that the role of education is to open the mind to different ways of seeing the world, which is poetically and factually 'crazier…than we think,/Incorrigibly plural' (MacNeice, 1979, p. 30). Yet Michaela, exemplified in its rote learning of the poetry of both Kipling and W. E. Henley, colonises its students' minds within a single worldview and imposes a burden of compliance with a set of values which implicitly negate personal growth and independence of spirit and will.

3.5 An Educational Critique of Discipline at Michaela: Covert Fundamentalism

Whilst the school identifies itself as 'non-denominational' (Michaela, 2018) and does 'not allow pupils of any faith to pray on the school site' (Michaela, 2017), much of its practice creates the semblance of a religious community. Indeed, the students are greeted each

morning with the 'daily "Sermon from the Bench"' (Smith, 2016b, p. 202), which is an opportunity for Barry Smith to preach to his disciples. He uses this declaratory opportunity to reiterate what seems to be the gospel according to Michaela: the unchanging nature of the rules (p. 202), the exclusivity and superiority of the brethren ('there aren't many of us. We're special', p. 203), the unholy character of those outside the circle ('we respect other members of the public. Kids from other schools don't do that', *ibid*) and the power of Michaela's panoptic eye ('Every week I go to McDonald's and I check the CCTV to see if anyone has been rude', p. 204). As I have noted, each day at Michaela is punctuated by recitations of Henley's *Invictus* and Kipling's *If* which are 'central to Michaela's mindset' and part of its 'organisational DNA' (Kirby, 2016b, p. 85). These are memorised by every child and, as is implicit in Kirby's comments, they not only form part of the school's creed but are also a means of control. The repeated group recitations provide a means of channelling the students mentally and physically into a communal activity which entrenches a belief system and promotes group identity. Smith conveys his numinous response to '300 kids recit[ing] the whole of William Ernest Henley's 'Invictus'. Clear, loud, proud, in unison, all eyes front' (2016b, p. 204). He finds it 'very, very hard not to choke up' (*ibid*). It is easy to commend the school for the organisational finesse, knowledge transfer and imaginative and creative endeavour which such poetry recitations seem to imply (see for example, Bennett, 2016b, Johnson, 2016).[29] Yet, it is not clear if Smith is overwhelmed by the sentiment of the poem or his own mastery of the students, which paradoxically seems to have produced 300 conquered souls. There is something distinctly uncomfortable about a young person claiming to be 'master of my fate' whilst being held in the thrall of a controlling master. And certainly, when viewed in the broader context of the disciplinary regime at Michaela where 'every decision for both staff and pupils has been made' (Cullen, 2016, p. 140), a positive interpretation becomes difficult to sustain. There is also a heavy irony in the choice of Kipling (whose legacy is tinged with racist imperialism) to reflect the 'mindset' of a multicultural school like Michaela, which unashamedly celebrates its own assumption of 'The White Man's Burden' as it seeks to inculcate students from 'one of the most deprived boroughs in the country' (Kirby, 2016b, p. 80) with values such as stoicism (Ting, 2020, pp.

[29] It is worth noting, however, that memorising 'Invictus' and reciting it every day till the cows come home will not make children into better people. It may possibly make them into more determined people, but even if it does, that determination may be directed towards good or evil ends. The 74-page manifesto written by Brenton Tarrant shortly before his attack on two mosques in New Zealand in 2019 in which 51 people were killed concludes with the poem 'Invictus'. The poem was also chosen by Timothy McVeigh as his final statement before his execution in 2001 for killing 168 people in the Oklahoma City bombing six years earlier.

256, 263). Literary values, long associated with a modern liberal education, are given a Foucauldian twist at Michaela as they are manipulated into tools of oppression (Foucault, 1977). Indeed, the school demonstrates few features of a genuinely liberal educational institution. Although it claims to 'want children to grow up to think independently' (Staw, 2020, p. 85), I argue that it displays many of the characteristics associated with a religious fundamentalist sect. In a democratic society, which ostensibly eschews the potential extremism such organisations are thought to spawn, it is difficult to reconcile the rigid discipline and the enforcement of compliance at Michaela with the freedom and autonomy which underpin democracy.

My suggested parallel between Michaela and fundamentalist sects may itself seem extreme, especially in view of, first, Birbalsingh's assertion that 'children at Michaela are very happy' (2016d); second, the actual endless smiling faces of the students which populate its publicity materials; third, the first-hand experience of Boris Johnson who describes students 'learning stuff off by heart, they were learning huge screeds of poetry, their times tables, they were learning yards of Shakespeare, goodness knows what and they loved it, they absolutely loved it' (Johnson, 2016, 0:42-0:56); and fourth, Thompson's claim, that 'guests often comment that they [pupils] all seem so happy to be at school' (2020, p. 126). Yet, the response from visitors to the school has echoes of the visit by Japanese tourists to the fundamentalist regime of Gilead in Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale* (1996 [1985]). This incident illustrates not only how quickly the members of such a system become indoctrinated into specified ways of thinking – Offred, the main protagonist, observes that 'it has taken so little time to change our minds' (p. 38) – but also it demonstrates how behaviour resulting from pressure to conform to expectations within such a regime can appear as wholehearted engagement with its norms. Offred's response to the query from the tourists as to whether the handmaids are happy – '"Yes, we are happy," I murmur. I have to say something. What else can I say?' (p. 39) – is telling. Similarly, when faced with 'over 600 visitors a year' who are invited 'to help spread the word' (Birbalsingh, 2020c, p. 228), how else can Michaela students respond but with a smile, if they are guaranteed a detention for 'reacting badly to a teacher's instruction … such as sulking' (Kirby 2016a, para.3)?

Peshkin's study of the Bethany Baptist Academy, a fundamentalist Christian school in Illinois, provides an interesting comparison with Michaela, which, although secular, shares many of the characteristics of such an institution. He describes such schools' 'enormous

investment in socializing children to think and to behave according to the dictates of fundamentalist Christian doctrine as they construe it' (1986, p. 37). Such a fundamentalist interpretation is an instructive means of understanding Michaela's approach which operates through its no-excuses discipline, didactic teaching and restrictive ethos. First, it trains students into the 'Michaela Way' and second, it unites staff 'in a fight for something bigger than delivering great lessons, managing behaviour effectively and producing excellent GCSE results' and the belief that 'they're making a difference in a day when a difference is sorely needed' (Virgo, 2020, p. 33).

Kate Ashford, deputy head at Michaela, demonstrates some awareness of the potential for such an analysis of the school when she states, 'I think some people think I've joined a cult' (2022, 1:39-1:41). Indeed, the comparison of Michaela with a cult may go some way in explaining the apparent commitment of the pupils and staff to 'being Michaela' (Sibley, 2020, p. 112). A cult is a group of people who share a rigid system of belief into which they have been inculcated by a strong, charismatic leader who requires total commitment to the cult's way of life. Lalich and McLaren describe how a cult 'stifles individuality and critical thinking, requires intense commitment and obedience to a person and/or an ideology, and restricts or eliminates personal autonomy in favor of the cult's world-view and the leader's wants and needs' (2018, p. 5). These effects align with those which I argue are an inevitable consequence of the system of discipline operating at Michaela. Furthermore, Lalich and Tobias' (2006, p. 327-8) list of behavioural patterns which characterise such organisations, provides interesting comparisons with the 'Michaela way' (Sibley, 2020, p. 124). First, the staff's unerring praise of Birbalsingh such as that of Ashford is striking. She effuses, 'I've never met anyone I want to follow as much as Katharine and that's how she makes every single teacher feel at Michaela, that we're here to change the world' (2022, 44:58-45:09). This demonstrates not only that 'the group displays an excessively zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader' (Lalich and Tobias, 2006, p. 327), but also that 'the leader is considered the Messiah, a special being, an avatar – or the group and/or the leader is on a special mission to save humanity' (*ibid*).

Second, the chanting of 'lines that have become part of Michaela's organisational DNA' which are repeated 'at 7:30am in the yard, at 8:00am in assembly, at 12:30pm when lunch begins, and at 1:25pm when lunchbreak finishes' (Kirby, 2016b, p. 85), suggest the 'mind-altering practices' which Lalich and Tobias identify in cults. These take the form of 'chanting

… or debilitating work routines [which] are used in excess and serve to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s)' (2006, p. 27). Jeremy Paxman, when reflecting on the pupils after a visit to the school, notes 'the whole theory is that, as far as I can see, you don't give them time to get restless and bored. They're always one, two, three this, one, two, three that. They do seem to spend an awful lot of time running around and not having time to think' (2022, 33:15-33:43).

Third, cults deploy approaches to induce 'feelings of shame and/or guilt in order to influence and control members' (Lalich and Tobias, 2006, p. 327), which again has echoes in Michaela's techniques for ensuring that pupils conform to the Michaela Way. Gazi describes how students are conditioned into following the rules by causing them to feel ashamed in front of their peers: 'exaggeration and careful use of public reprimand is an important tool for teachers, particularly with younger year groups' (2020, p. 280); and Hurst explains how making students feel guilty is a valuable tool in influencing their behaviour: 'part of our strategy though is one of building up a sense of guilt' (2020, p. 335).

Fourth, Michaela's certainty, commitment and belief in the rightness of its approach places it in opposition to other educational institutions – a recurring theme in its teachers' testimonies (see Dyer, 2016, p. 37; Porter. 2016a, p. 70; Smith, 2016c). Lalich and Tobias describe this as an aspect of a cult which surfaces as a form of elitism, causing the group to claim 'a special, exalted status for itself' (2006, p. 327). This is apparent in the comparisons staff make with other institutions. For example, when Birbalsingh states, 'That isn't to say that other schools don't instil character in children, but at Michaela our values and ethos are unique' (2020a, p. 22); when Butterfield concedes that pupils 'would certainly pass their GCSEs at other schools, but it is hard to argue they would reach the same heights we've seen here today' (2020a, p. 106); and when Ashford reveals knowledge uncovered at Michaela 'that we fear other schools may not be aware of' (2020b, p. 380). Bryan Wilson, in his study of the development of sects,[30] describes how 'the behavioural correlates of [a sect member's] ideological commitment also serve to set him apart from "the world"' (1959, p. 4). In the case of Michaela, 'the world' takes the form of 'other schools'. The teachers' sense of identification with, and dedication to, the school, as exemplified in their canonical texts (Birbalsingh, 2020b and 2016a), is similarly consistent with Wilson's characterisation of the sectarian's commitment which is 'always more total and more defined than that of the

[30] Wilson adopts the term 'sect' to refer to both cults and sects. See Wilson (1959, p. 5, fn.7)

member of other religious organisations' (1959, p. 4).[31] It is this all-consuming aspect of their ideological position that prompts them into the fundamentalist concept of the '24-hour umbrella' which Peshkin identifies as a feature of the Bethany Academy. He explains, 'by this concept, Bethany considers its students, wherever they are, to be fully subject to its rules and regulations. Students, teachers, and parents pledge themselves to obey and reinforce the school's behavioural obligations' (1986, p. 37). Barry Smith makes this approach explicit in his description of the 'Michaela magic' (2016b, p. 202), which ensures students are cleaning their shoes in unison on a Sunday evening. Birbalsingh similarly identifies such an umbrella policy as an integral aspect of the school's success: 'I ask the children and the parents to do their duty and follow the rules' (2020c, p. 233). This means that 'on the whole, our children stay silent even when a teacher is not around, because they are bought in to the system and culture that keeps them all safe' (Brierly, 2020, p. 314).

When Michaela is understood within this framework it becomes easy to identify the school in line with King's scornful disdain for 'fundamentalism, with its born again regression, its pink-and-gold concept of heaven, its literal mindedness, its rambunctious good cheer … its anti-intellectualism … its puerile hymns … and its faith healing' (1990, p. 87). Swept up in the dogmatism of the fundamentalist mind-set, one might go so far as to identify Michaela's 'born again regression' in its eschewal of progressive educational methods (Staw, 2020, p. 97; Burkitt, 2020b, p. 99; Smith, 2020, p. 148); its 'concept of heaven' with its aspirations for students to attain places at Oxbridge and other top universities; 'its literal mindedness' as encapsulated in its no-excuses approach; 'its rambunctious good cheer' exemplified in its publicity photographs; 'its anti-intellectualism' as an integral aspect of its drill and didactic teaching; 'its puerile hymns' typified in the unsophisticated, whole school chanting of poetry, and its 'faith healing' in its numerous accounts of reformed students (Ting, 2020, pp. 251-264; Allan, 2016, pp. 252-263). Such dogmatism highlights the problematic nature of a fundamentalist mind-set in educating young people towards critical openness and moral autonomy.

Whilst fundamentalism in schools with regard to religion is condemned as an insidious means of promulgating non-liberal values (see, Miah, 2017 on the Trojan Horse affair; Fenton, 2017 on Christian fundamentalism; Pidd, 2014 on Islamic fundamentalism), what is essentially a

[31] I would suggest that 'religious' might be read as 'educational' in this context.

fundamentalist approach to discipline is often encouraged (see for example, Strickland, 2021; Porter, 2016a). In everyday speech, fundamentalism is a negative term (cf. Pinnock, 1990, p. 40; Barr, 1977, p. 2) and usually refers to what is seen as an obsessive form of religious belief and observance. Peels characterises fundamentalism as 'reactionary in its rejection of liberal ethics, science, or technological exploitation' and 'modern in seeking certainty and control, embracing literalism and infallibility about particular scriptures' (2023, p. 729). It is this approach to sacred texts as the ultimate authority in life that causes western liberal humanists to look down on fundamentalism as unsophisticated, inferior, and potentially dangerous. Ruthven characterises the mind-set as 'hard, factualistic and philistine, impervious to the multi-layered nuances of meaning that reside in texts, in fictions, in music and iconographies, in the cells of art and culture' (1991, p. 142). Such an interpretation goes some way in explaining why western society might be suspicious of fundamentalist ideology in the cultivation of young minds: if education is concerned to open up the mind to new and innovative ways of thinking, then fundamentalism might indeed be judged to stand in opposition to such aims.

In *A Handmaid's Tale* (1996 [1985]), through her treatment of radical feminism, Atwood draws attention to the fact that fundamentalism is not isolated to religious belief but is a state of mind which can potentially inform any ideological framework. And so it is with 'no-excuses' discipline, as favoured and promoted by Michaela. There is something absolutist about the schools' belief in the rightness of its policy and the rigidity of its application:

> 'no excuses' means … that the same rules will apply to you whether you're rich or poor, black or white, two parents or no parents at all. Because the argument I want to set out here is that if you are not a 'no excuses' school then you are necessarily a 'some excuses school', where you are prepared to flex the rules, on occasion, to adapt to the background of a particular child. You believe in different standards for different pupils. (Porter, 2016a, p. 70)

Here we have the crux of a fundamentalist attitude: apply the word, in this case the rules, literally because it is 'inherent ambiguity' which undermines the behaviour policies in other schools (*ibid*). The scant respect such an approach implies for the complexity and diversity of human nature, experience, understanding and circumstance demonstrates a preoccupation with the rightness of the rules above the needs of the individual. But Porter justifies such strictness and lack of compromise as in the interests of the students: 'pupils hate ambiguity' (p. 71), and indeed, staff at Michaela operate on the belief that students 'crave boundaries'

(Raichura, 2020, p. 142). Atwood demonstrates how, within a repressive culture, such beliefs become a reality for those under its influence: Gilead's handmaids 'were losing the taste for freedom, already we were finding these walls secure' (1996 [1985], p. 143). It is not difficult to understand how students easily fall prey to the security of an unambiguous discipline system, how they too 'feel purposeful and safe under the caring eye of their teachers' (Brierly, 2020, p. 314).[32] If those in authority can provide a clear, unequivocal answer for every situation, one doesn't have to think, or make decisions or take responsibility for one's own destiny; life becomes a simple matter of painting by numbers. The controlled nature of such a regime might present a semblance of perfection to observers like Boris Johnson or the Japanese tourists in Gilead but those educationists seeking to develop free-thinking, autonomous young people will be disturbed by the practices at Michaela. Claeys describes dystopias as evoking 'disturbing images' (2017, p. 3) and I believe that Michaela is establishing a dangerous foothold in an increasingly dystopian educational landscape. This may seem to be a somewhat extreme suggestion in view of the very positive mission it has set itself – to improve the life chances of under-privileged students. However, Atwood's recognition that 'most dystopias are attempts at planned societies that originally say they are going to make life better and then somehow go off the tracks' (1999, p. 24) is revealing. Birbalsingh clearly has a vision for improving the future of society:

> While standing in front of a classroom may not seem much like battling for the future of a civilisation, the truth is that a battle is indeed underway, and what happens in our classrooms has a much greater significance than we may immediately recognise. For, if the culture of our schools affects the character of our pupils, and the character of our pupils then eventually shapes the culture of our society, undoubtedly what we teach our pupils does make a genuine difference to the world around us. (2020b, p. 34)

Yet the basis on which she seeks to achieve this is fundamentally flawed in the context of a modern liberal democracy. However laudable the aims of Michaela may be, its methods are unethical and diametrically opposed to the values of liberal education.

[32] In Atwood's Gilead, the citizens are under the constant watch of Eyes (the secret police) who monitor their behaviour and ensure the smooth running of the panoptic state. The parting expression, 'Under His Eye' acts as a further reminder to Gileadeans that even outside the view of the Eyes, God is always watching (1996 [1985], p. 54).

3.6. An Ethical Critique of Discipline at Michaela

As already noted, a major theme running through the remainder of the thesis is that any approach to school discipline must be not only educationally but also ethically justifiable. This suggests that the values underpinning school discipline should be morally sound. Ideally, children will develop moral understanding and moral commitment from what they experience and observe at school – through relationships, school rituals, discipline procedures and so on – as well as from what they are taught. The best way to learn how to respect others is through being respected oneself, rather than being simply told to 'show some respect'.[33] Moral values and unspoken expectations are necessarily embedded in any school's organisation and practices, and children may be confused if the values underpinning school practice are not in harmony with the values they are taught directly in the classroom. The present chapter draws attention to some of the problems with the ethical foundations of Michaela's approach. For example, teachers expect students to respect them by listening to every word they say, but they don't show similar respect to students by listening to an explanation of why the students arrived one minute late to school: the 'no excuses' policy entails an automatic 30-minute detention, and any attempt to query this simply results in further disciplinary action. There may be many occasions where students need a quiet word rather than an automatic detention, but Michaela's policy does not allow for this. The fact that an unfair policy is applied equally to all students does not make it fair, as Birbalsingh implies; it simply confuses children's understanding of basic moral concepts like fairness and equality. The school does not seem to realise that treating students the same when in relevant respects they are different can be just as unfair and unjust as treating them differently when in relevant respects they are the same. The banning of some (but not all) outward expressions of religious faith is not only a questionable practice in a multicultural school, but is likely to confuse students in view of the requirement that the school should promote the shared British value of 'mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (DfE, 2014a).

Although Michaela does not appear to be directly linked to the character education movement which I discuss in Chapter Five, it shares some of its concerns and practices. In particular, the school prioritises the development of certain qualities of character such as obedience, gratitude, politeness and kindness in its children. It adopts a virtue ethics approach in its moral education which focuses on developing the students into a particular model of the

[33] The topic of respect is explored in more detail in Chapter Eight.

good. As Birbalsingh notes, 'What is also exciting and interesting about Michaela is the character we instil in our children – the types of adults they will grow up to be' (2020a, p. 22). Leaving aside the question of whether character can be 'instilled' into children at all, the overt curriculum aims entailed in such a process are focused on an idealised version of young people, both socially – 'teaching them to be kind, considerate and responsible for their actions' (Staw, 2020, p. 98) – and academically – guiding and helping 'them to see that their long-term success comes at the cost of short-term effort, hard work, and sacrifice' (Smith, 2020, p. 149). These aims, summed up in Michaela's school motto, 'work hard, be kind' (Porter, 2020, p. 50) may be as seemingly uncontroversial as the title of Lorenz Diefenbach's novel, *Arbeit Macht Frei* (1873). However, Michaela's black and white view of the world has repercussions for students' developing moral understanding. Birbalsingh too often sees moral decision-making as a choice between two extremes – total silence in the corridors or total chaos; 'tough love' on the part of teachers or being seen as a 'soft touch'; the total control of children at Michaela or the 'wild freedom' of other schools – and ignores the possibility of a 'golden mean' (in Aristotelian terms) between the two.

Throughout this chapter, some potentially problematic aspects of moral development at Michaela have become apparent, particularly the lack of preparation students are given to help them to exercise freedom and autonomy appropriately when they leave school. When students are faced with a dilemma which needs careful evaluation of possible courses of action, they may have difficulty acting without clearly defined rules. At Michaela, there is little time for students to create spontaneous friendships. They are actively dissuaded from activities which cultivate these, receiving a demerit for talking in the classroom or the corridor (Michaela, 2024c), not being allowed to walk side by side along the corridors or choose who they share lunch with or sit next to in class. Social interaction at lunch is both carefully orchestrated ('Teachers lead pupils in a conversation topic, which is explained in the dining hall each day by the member of staff leading lunch': Taylor, 2020, p. 339) and strictly monitored (Severs notes that staff are posted 'like sentries around the room so every child is in eyeline all of the time' during lunch: 2018, n.p.). Even the short period of thirty minutes after lunch, when students 'may do homework or spend some time socialising in the school yard' (but, significantly, may not pray),[34] is 'closely supervised by adults' (Michaela, 2017),

[34] The prohibition of prayer at Michaela has recently led to an action before the courts, as a student has issued a case of judicial review against the school on the grounds that the prayer ban is discriminatory and breaches the right to freedom of religion (as set out in article 14 of the UNCRC, 1989). I discuss this case in more detail in Chapter Eight.

reducing the students' capacity to relate freely with their peers. Although students may be equipped with the traits of 'kindness and integrity' (Cullen, 2016, p. 140), they are not given the freedom to explore how such virtues might be exercised, as 'this intense character-building necessitates a constant teacher presence: in the corridors, at the gates, outside school, even at the bus stop' (p. 142). This again illustrates the fundamental lack of trust of the students at Michaela which determines the way they are treated; the potential outcome is that students who aren't trusted become incapable of trusting themselves (see Goodman, 2013, p. 94). I suggest that it is the sense of low self-esteem resulting from this lack of trust that facilitates the intensification of gratitude at Michaela, particularly with regard to 'appreciations' (Sibley, 2020, p. 121).

Training the students to show gratitude, as already noted, is the major thread in moral education at Michaela, a habit which teachers unashamedly 'inculcate in Michaela students' (Raichura, 2020, p. 140). This is achieved through the repeated use of 'gratitude-related narrations' which 'aim to imbue pupils with a sense that they are incredibly lucky to be at Michaela' (Thompson, 2020, p. 127), lucky even to be given detentions. Students are expected to thank teachers after every lesson and every detention; teachers repeatedly remind pupils 'how many hours they and other teachers have spent creating booklets … and planning lessons', and ingratitude is reprimanded (*ibid*). In such circumstances, gratitude ceases to be a spontaneous feeling of thanks prompted by the actions of another but a trained response to certain conditions. Indeed, at Michaela 'pupils have a duty to be grateful to their teachers for the gift of their education' (p. 125). However, it is unclear where this duty derives from; and Claudia Card remarks that 'a duty to *be grateful* sounds like a joke' (1988, p. 117). This observation is particularly apposite in the context of Michaela's narrations whereby the inculcation of gratitude at the school has the potential to brainwash children into a state reminiscent of Stockholm Syndrome.[35] The relative power positions of teachers and students seriously problematises this imposition of the feeling of gratitude. As Card remarks,

> Those who are relatively powerless may develop a certain misplaced gratitude to those with power over them … Perhaps undeserved gratitude

[35] Stockholm syndrome is a condition whereby a person suffering abuse develops positive feelings towards their abuser as a coping mechanism. Those suffering from this condition exhibit the following characteristics:
A belief that they can prevent abuse/maltreatment through good behaviour;
A powerful emotional or psychological bond between a victim and their abuser;
A belief in the inherent goodness or humanity of their perpetrator;
A desire to please or appease the person abusing, controlling, or mistreating them;
Adopting the goals or aligning with the values/objectives of their captor or abuser. (Shafir, 2022)

> seems harmless or even beneficial to others and therefore not cause for concern. However, it indicates a misjudgment of others, a lack of self-respect, or both. Either can have serious consequences for interpersonal relationships. (p. 115)

I shall leave open the question of whether teachers at Michaela deserve their students' gratitude, but when teachers wield authority to ensure that their students give thanks for receiving what is their right (education), or for punishments which they are forced to endure, it becomes difficult to distinguish the students' motives for expressing gratitude. There is equally some ambiguity surrounding the teachers' motives for imposing an ethos of gratitude at Michaela. If, as Thompson claims, it is essential young people are taught to be grateful because they are 'self-centered' with 'bad habits of ingratitude' (2020, p. 128), it becomes difficult to reconcile her approach – repeatedly reminding students how many hours she has spent preparing lessons for them as a means of training them to be grateful – with the fault she seeks to remedy. This rhetoric – demanding recognition for her work – demonstrate her own self-preoccupation which is the very trait she condemns in her students.

The problem with moral education and the general approach to discipline at Michaela is encapsulated in their mantra 'our actions become our habits, our habits become our character, our character is who we are' (Porter, 2020, p. 49). By focussing on habit formation, which involves repeating an act or way of being until it becomes automatic, an approach which neatly complements the conditioned behaviour resulting from no-excuses discipline, Michaela can sidestep the problem of teaching children about the complexity of decision making and thinking about reasons for acting in certain ways. Limiting children's freedom to the extent that they are not allowed to think for themselves may result in impeccable behaviour and rows of polite and enthusiastic pupils who do exactly what their teachers dictate, but do these students actually develop any character? Although Sibley claims that 'the idea of 'being Michaela' is an attempt to create a counter-community to other communities that might tempt them to become worse people' (2020, p. 112), we need to ask if it is the role of education to create the uniformity implicit in the term 'being Michaela' that is necessary for the success of this venture.

This chapter has sought to identify the potential pitfalls of Michaela's approach by highlighting how closely it relies on techniques of behaviour control similar to those adopted by cults and other fundamentalist regimes, which result in both the staff and pupils being subject to discipline; how it denies students the freedom to think and consequently the

opportunity to make independent decisions; how it undermines students' sense of self-respect and self-worth through the promotion of the Michaela way; and how it deploys a rhetoric of tradition to subvert modern liberal understandings of freedom and respect to construct an understanding of children which justifies their ultimate repression.

PART TWO

The Character of Discipline and the Discipline of Character

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSING THE DILEMMA OF DISCIPLINE

4.1 Introduction

Part One of the thesis has identified some problems with authoritarian approaches to discipline in schools and provides the context for an exploration of the concept of discipline. The starting point for the current chapter is to reach a clear understanding of what discipline is. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*, 2024) distinguishes discipline as punishment from discipline relating to training. The punitive model of discipline is defined as 'punishment (esp. physical punishment) imposed with the intention of controlling or correcting future behaviour; castigation for a misdemeanour or transgression, usually with the implication of being salutary to the recipient; chastisement'. The training model describes discipline as 'instruction or teaching intended to mould the mind and character and instil a sense of proper, orderly conduct and action; training to behave or act in a controlled and effective manner; mental, intellectual, moral, or spiritual training or exercise'. Both suggest that discipline is an action intended to control behaviour, but this control is effected in different ways. The former is concerned to prevent certain types of behaviour whilst the latter seeks to produce specific modes of behaviour. Nevertheless, both establish the condition of being disciplined. In the case of the first model, this is achieved by the application of punishment, whereas in the second it involves training and habituation into ways of thinking and being. It is of note that both senses of discipline seem to assume that the act of controlling behaviour is a positive one in being salutary when punishment is involved and, where teaching is involved, in effectively facilitating 'proper' behaviour. Thus, both rest on the assumption of a predetermined view of the good to justify the imposition of a particular way of behaving.

These definitions draw attention to what seem to be two key features of school discipline. First, that punishment is used as a response to disobedience or unwanted behaviour; and second, that discipline is not an end in itself, but is intended to produce a positive effect on children's behaviour or character. However, if the positive impact of discipline is judged in terms of children's ability to obey rules and act in a controlled and orderly fashion, this raises important questions about the implications of such aims and whether the use of discipline has

the potential to go beyond ensuring simple compliance with rules towards developing children's ability to make informed choices about how to behave.

This chapter seeks to move beyond a narrow understanding of discipline as a mechanism of control to arrive at a fuller and more nuanced interpretation. This will take full account of discipline's educational and ethical potential when operating in the context of the school, as well as the nature of the child as a developing person. The first part of the chapter explores understandings of discipline. It begins by examining the terminology of 'positive discipline' favoured by many schools and queries how positive the experience of discipline in schools actually is. The focus then moves to examine the views of two 20th century philosophers of education who have written in some detail about school discipline – R. S. Peters and John Wilson. In the next section I am concerned with how discipline is enforced through punishment and control and how the assessment of discipline reinforces this approach. I begin by exploring Joan Goodman's (2023) argument about a necessary distinction between discipline and punishment. I then examine the language of punishment adopted by schools and the implications of this for disciplinary practice and move on to look at the role of control in discipline. The section concludes with an appraisal of Ofsted's approach to the assessment of behaviour, and thus discipline, in schools which, I argue, fails to acknowledge the full potential of the child. The final section is concerned to establish a new way of thinking about discipline. I begin by establishing three educational objectives for it which I use to develop an approach to discipline which can accommodate these, along with what I argue should be the ultimate aim of school discipline, the development of moral autonomy. The section then concludes with an exploration of Kant's approach to discipline which informs the rationale for my argument that discipline in schools must be both ethical and educational.

4.2 Understanding Discipline

4.2.1 Positive Discipline

The prevailing rhetoric around discipline from within schools is that it is a positive endeavour. Whether this is a means to placate anxious parents, satisfy government calls for the restoration of adult authority or merely a way of making the whole business of reining in young people more palatable is a moot point. However, the term 'positive discipline' has

been used in schools to denote what is presented as a pro-active and successful approach to dealing with behaviour issues.[36]

The terminology of 'positive discipline' is grounded in the work of Alfred Adler (1930) and Rudolph Dreikurs (see Dreikurs and Cassel, 1972) and was popularised in the USA by Jane Nelson in the early 1980s. Nelson makes an important distinction between discipline and punishment, a point I return to later in this chapter, in her belief that effective discipline is essentially non-punitive and must meet five requirements. It should:

1. Be kind and firm at the same time (respectful),
2. Create a sense of belonging and significance,
3. Be effective long term,
4. Teach valuable social and life skills for good character,
5. Develop in children a sense that they are capable. (see Nelson, 2024)

She emphasises that 'punishment does not meet any of these criteria' (1996, p. 16).

Whilst some schools fully embrace such a genuinely positive, educational approach to dealing with behaviour (see Halliday, 2018)[37], there is a disjunction between the origins of positive discipline and much current practice. For example, the Rodillian Academy, part of a multi-academy trust in West Yorkshire, prides itself on its 'exceptional' behaviour which is achieved through a 'traditional' approach to discipline codified in its 'positive discipline ("PD") policy' (Rodillian, 2024a; 2024b).[38] In line with Goodman (2023), the school website asserts, 'discipline is not the same thing as punishment', and to this end the school makes 'sure our methods of discipline are always fair, considered, caring and positive' (Rodillian,

[36] For example, the Rodillian Multi-Academy Trust which oversees the running of five academies promotes positive discipline as its key strategy for improvement. The former executive head-teacher Andy Goulty explains: 'the first thing we always do is introduce positive discipline', 'positive discipline for us is the bedrock of everything we do and we feel that it is the major factor in our success, not only in Rodillian, but in the other academies that we run' (Rodillian, 2022, 1:09-1:21).

[37] The school Halliday refers to, which adopts 'unconditional positive regard', is 'a special school for nearly 100 children, aged 5 to 16, with a range of social, mental and emotional health (SMEH) issues' and may not be representative of practice generally, despite his claim that '"unconditional positive regard" towards even badly behaved pupils is growing in popularity' (2018, n.p.).

[38] Its emphasis on the 'traditional values of discipline and respect' (Rodillian, 2024b) echo the 'small c conservative values' of Michaela noted in Chapter Three (Birbalsingh, 2020a, p. 24). Indeed, although Michaela adopts a 'no excuses discipline' approach (p. 17), it promotes a strong rhetoric of positivity in its use of discipline. For example, 'the fact he accepts wrong doing is noticed as a positive and is seen as a redeeming feature of his mistakes' (*sic*) (Sibley, 2020, p. 117); 'when pupils make the right choices, the consequences are positive; wrong choices are sanctioned' (Raichura, 2020, p. 134); 'there needs to be positive consequences for telling the truth' (Gazi, 2020, p. 279).

2024b, n.p.). However, until 15 August 2022, the executive headteacher was promoting positive discipline at the school as 'not a cosy experience, it's set out as a punishment and it is a punishment' (Rodillian, 2022, 2:04-2:10). Whilst this description no longer features on the school's website, which may denote a change in the school's approach, its discipline policy document seems to suggest this is not the case. It devotes three times as much space to explaining the use of sanctions and punishments as it does to rewards, which seriously problematises the claim that 'discipline is not the same as punishment'. Staff are also subject to the same 'positive' disciplinary regime. Those 'who "opt out" of the agreed [disciplinary] framework should be prepared to face the consequences' (Chief Executive Rodillian Trust, 2023, p. 5).[39] Indeed, the school's policy reveals there is little to distinguish its approach, other than its 'positive' title, from the no-excuses model promoted by Michaela, as it states, 'when a particular misdemeanour takes place an identified sanction or range of sanctions must follow. The identified sanction is not open to negotiation or debate' (Chief Executive Rodillian Trust, 2024, p. 8).[40]

What does it mean to describe discipline as positive? Does it simply mean that it has a positive effect on those subject to it? If so, what might this effect be? Does it seek to suggest that discipline is simply good *per se*, making it difficult to challenge its use? Does positive discipline describe a particular type of discipline which is non-punitive as distinct from punitive discipline which might then be termed negative? Is discipline to be understood as a discrete concept separate from punishment which is often associated with it and gives it a bad name? Is positive discipline merely a rhetorical device intended to sweeten the inevitable degree of control involved in discipline? In the following section I touch on some of these questions whilst seeking to reach a clearer understanding of discipline.

4.2.2 Discipline, Rules and Authority

If discipline is integral to the provision of education, it is inevitable that, as Haroun and O'Hanlon state, 'educators formulate their definitions according to their particular view of

[39] It is of note that in the most recent version of Rodillian's behaviour policy, effective from 27 August 2024, the language has been toned down in relation to disciplining staff and now states, 'Staff must also understand the importance of operating within the recognised framework for sanctions' (Chief Executive Rodillian Trust, 2024, p. 4).

[40] Sheppard's analysis of school behaviour policies found that those adopting titles such as '"Positive Discipline", "Positive Behaviour", "Climate for Learning" and "Ready to Learn" … included phrases such as "non-negotiable", and "follow rules first time, every time"' and that they 'shared other key features, including: prescriptive expectations, rules and procedures' (2020, p. 10).

the purposes of education' (1997, p. 237). Indeed, John Wilson condemns P. S. Wilson's (1971) account of discipline on the grounds that it 'frequently abandons any serious attempt to investigate normal usage in an effort to sell a particular educational line' (1977, p. 34).[41] There is always the danger that any attempt to define discipline will be a subjectively charged normative assertion. However, if the values from which it is derived are justified ethically and educationally, a viable assessment of the concept as appropriate for use in schools can be achieved. The following discussion assesses some such attempts.

Philosophical analyses of discipline in an educational context typically involve certain key concepts including rules, punishment, authority, order, control, obedience, training and learning. However, of these, rule following is the central aspect of discipline, as R. S. Peters notes: 'it conveys the notion of submission to rules or some kind of order' (1966, p. 267). On this view, being disciplined involves yielding to some recognised expectation. These expectations can, according to Peters, be established by an external authority or by individuals themselves and thus self-discipline is merged with discipline.[42]

For John Wilson, rule following and authority are central to an understanding of discipline as 'obedience to established and legitimate authorities as such' (1977, p. 39). He believes the justification for obedience to rules is 'because they are authoritative', regardless of whether they derive from 'an admired source' or whether the rules are 'good rules, or sensible rules, or rules required for the purposes of the institution' (p. 38). This suggests there is value in rule following and authority *per se* and adds support to his claim for 'discipline as an educational objective in its own right – not just as a facilitator for education' (p. 43). His justification for this rests on three claims (p. 44). First, that children must survive in structured groups like the family and school. Such institutions require discipline and obedience to authority which act as a springboard for other learning. Second, if children fail to learn to accept rules and authority in the contexts of the family and school, they will be incapable of doing so in later life. Third, discipline is a prerequisite for survival in any society to which children will ultimately belong. The problem with such a view is that it appears to create a rationale for encouraging unquestioning obedience in children. Wilson does, however, provide a response to such criticism in his assertion that,

[41] P. S. Wilson's (1971) account of discipline is a child-centred one which prioritises, and is led by, the interests of the child.
[42] I explore the value of self-discipline as an educational goal in Chapter Five.

> Just as it is conceptually true that human beings must accept some authority and obey it if they are to get anything done, so it is also conceptually true that – if they are indeed human beings, and not robots or zombies – questions will inevitably arise about whether particular authorities are legitimate, whether their scope is properly delimited, whether the form and methods by which they operate is as good as we can make it and so forth. (p. 55)

This accurately captures the tension between the need for rules and authority in any institution and the natural human tendency to question. Where schools like Michaela go wrong is in emphasising the first of these without even acknowledging the second. Students are not allowed any space to question or criticise the legitimacy of school authority or the way that authority is wielded in the life of the school. Teaching children to accept rules and the authority from which they emanate *per se*, first, risks making them more like robots than human beings, as Wilson notes; second, fails to develop their capacity to challenge and question the *status quo*; and third, renders them virtually powerless. The example of students unsuccessfully protesting at a prayer ban at Michaela demonstrates that even if students can overcome the robotic expectations of strict disciplinary policies the balance of power in school settings is such that any challenges to authority have very little chance of success.[43]

Although there is significant overlap between Peters and Wilson with regard to discipline being centrally about rules and the creation of order, their accounts diverge in relation to the nature of authority which ensures discipline. As became clear in Chapter Two, Peters' model of authority involves an acceptance of it by those to whom it applies but on Wilson's view this acceptance is more tenuous because of the natural human tendency to question the legitimacy of any given form of authority. Wilson acknowledges 'so far as is possible … we ought to adopt the standard liberal practice of negotiation rather than imposition' (1966, p. 59). Peters and Wilson are in agreement, however, on the purpose of discipline in an educational context – to promote learning by creating order through the enforcement of rules emanating from a source of authority.

[43] I examine the implications of this case in Chapter Eight. In 2023, 20% of teachers reported student protests occurring in their schools (Booth, 2023). These were predominantly related to issues of school uniform and access to toilets. It is of note that, according to *Schools Week*, 'Geoff Barton, the general secretary of the heads' union ASCL, said that some pupils had protested, although no rules had changed in their schools' (Booth, 2023).

4.3 Enforcing Discipline: Punishment and Control

4.3.1 The Role of Punishment in School Discipline

If discipline is the means of ensuring compliance with an authoritative set of rules this necessarily entails some means of enforcing such rules. This generally takes the form of punishment and indeed, the *OED*'s punitive model of discipline illustrates that discipline can be understood as punishment. It is quite common to hear the words used interchangeably, particularly in schools where children are 'disciplined' rather than 'punished'. However, Peters seeks to distinguish punishment from discipline, considering it 'at best a nuisance. It is necessary as a deterrent, but its positive educational value is dubious' (1966, p. 279). On this view, punishment is thus an unpleasant side-effect of discipline. However, for Wilson who complains that 'too many people see rules, punishment and authority as forbidding only, when in fact they are also enabling' (1977, p. 61), punishment is positive and integral to discipline. He states that 'in so far as there are clear and operative norms or rules, then precisely to that extent failure and breaches will be penalized in *some* way' (p. 52). If discipline is concerned to ensure obedience to rules established by authority and failure to obey them necessitates punishment, Wilson's three 'enabling' concepts (rules, punishment and authority) comprise the necessary aspects for an account of discipline.

For Peters the distinction between discipline and punishment rests on the 'proclivity to punish' being merely a means of securing discipline (p. 267). Discipline, he confirms, is a 'very general notion which is connected with conforming to rules' whereas punishment is a 'much more specific notion which is usually only appropriate when there has been a breach of a rule' (pp. 267-268). Yet if discipline is concerned to effect submission to rules, the concept itself must involve some mechanism for ensuring that submission, which in practical terms will require the use of punishment or at least the threat of punishment or some form of unpleasant consequence to deter rule violations. Indeed, Peters' statement that 'education cannot go on unless minimum conditions of order obtain, and punishment may on occasions be necessary in order to ensure such conditions' (p. 279), establishes something of an educational justification for discipline as punishment with the intention of altering behaviour for the better.

4.3.2 Punishment as a Way of Encouraging Moral Growth

Goodman, after reviewing various approaches to discipline, presents a description of discipline as it in fact operates in schools: 'it is the enforcement of sanctions securing submission to rules. Submission presumably produces a tone of self-restraint and orderliness in the school' which is intended to facilitate learning (2006, p. 216). She highlights that discipline in schools is generally viewed as punishment executed in the furtherance of learning in response to the violations of rules. Yet, for Goodman, the way punishment is deployed by school discipline policies is problematic. Due to the failure to distinguish moral transgressions from breaches of conventional rules in the assigning of punishments, she claims that schools appear to 'moralize everything' or conversely 'all discipline is assimilated to the conventional' (p. 218). She describes how identical disciplinary measures are applied to a child engaged in deceptive (immoral) practices and one who flouts (conventional) rules on uniform with the effect that this 'blurring of ethical distinctions is extremely unhelpful to children's moral development' (p. 225). Goodman gets to the heart of the problem with prevailing approaches to discipline in schools where the educational and ethical value of discipline is questionable. Her response to this issue is to restrict the use of punishment to intentional, immoral acts (p. 224) which is a persuasive suggestion and consistent with the argument I am promoting in this thesis. However, as Smith rightly points out, in response to a similar case put forward by P. S. Wilson, 'the idea that punishment confirms or teaches the moral order or is an appropriate deterrent only where specifically moral wrongs are in question is plausible only with a drastically simplified view which reduces morality to a clear-cut set of rules' (1985, p. 77).

In addressing her title 'Should School Children be Punished?' Goodman distinguishes what she terms educative discipline from punishment. She explains that 'the object of punishment is to restore a moral equilibrium by inflicting suffering on an offender for a past offence. The object of educative discipline is to redirect an offender through a remedial action that will ameliorate future learning' (2023, p. 14). On this view the former is concerned with retribution and the latter with reformation. Discipline becomes a positive educational endeavour distinct from punishment which is appropriate only when children commit serious moral misdemeanours. However, there may still be a role for punishment within an educationally justified model of discipline. Goodman acknowledges the potential for punishment to 'stimulate remorse, guilt and arouse a sense of justice' (p. 31). The prompting of these morally relevant emotions suggests that appropriately applied punishment may not

be distinct from 'educative discipline' (p, 14). I argue that punishment does have a role to play in an educative model of discipline, if its use is justified, proportionate and of educational value, and to ensure the latter, punishments must always be accompanied by an explanation. It is the explanation that teaches children moral understanding, but the punishment may have a role in introducing children to certain morally relevant emotions and experiences such as the remorse that Goodman identifies.

4.3.3 The Intention Behind Punishment

Rather like a crime meriting punishment, administering punitive discipline seems to involve the coalescence of act and intention. As the *OED* definition stipulates, this model of discipline is 'imposed with the intention of controlling or correcting future behaviour' or has 'the implication of being salutary'. On this view, punishment when applied as a means of retribution, social protection or restitution is not discipline. This accords with Goodman's argument. In these cases, the primary intention is to make the punished pay a price for the misdemeanour – any subsequent effect on behaviour is peripheral to the intention. The deterrent effect of punishment further problematises this understanding of discipline from an ethical perspective as the effect on future conduct is not restricted to the person who is punished.

A useful hypothetical example is that of Jill and her brother Jack, both of whom finds it difficult to resist chocolate. One day Jill finds her mother's chocolate bar which she has specifically told the children not to eat. Jill immediately eats the chocolate. Soon afterwards her mother discovers the empty wrapper and severely punishes Jill. Later, Jack finds that his mother has replaced the chocolate with another bar. This poses a strong temptation for Jack, but reason takes hold as he recalls his mother's fury at Jill's recent lapse of restraint, and he walks away. Yet Jill soon discovers the replacement bar and notwithstanding her recent chastisement and the inevitability of another much harsher punishment is unable to resist.

As this example shows, there may be cases where the punished experiences no salutary effect as a result of being punished and therefore has not been successfully disciplined but their neighbour is deterred from pursuing a planned course of conduct as a result of witnessing the punishment even though the person administering the punishment had no intention of disciplining anyone other than the direct subject. This suggests that discipline may operate vicariously, and such a scenario presents some justification for the idea that punishment used

as a deterrent is a valuable form of discipline. However, this raises two issues. First, creating a direct line of causation from the witnessing of a punishment to a consequential act of self-restraint is problematic. Although it was stated that Jack's conduct was driven by the reprimand of Jill, there may have actually been a range of other motivators such as natural self-control, a desire not to displease his mother, a strong ethical sense or deciding he'd prefer a piece of chewing gum. Second, the ethics of punishing an individual for the benefit of another are shaky, particularly where the punishment has no salutary effect on the primary subject and where the effect on the secondary subject is at best tenuous.

Whilst the potential vicarious aspect of discipline may appear peripheral to the concept, it is not insignificant with regard to discipline in schools and merits attention. The importance of consistency of approach in relation to behaviour issues in schools is highlighted by Ofsted (2024, para. 471). It continues to emphasise the value of students *knowing* 'what is expected of them and the consequences that follow should they fall out of line' (Ofsted, 2014, p. 25; see also Spielman, 2019; Ofsted, 2024, para. 312). Such knowledge may be acquired through the clear publication of rules combined with the consistent and public meting out of punishment which suggests that its vicarious effect is important to the success of disciplinary measures adopted by schools. This raises serious ethical questions regarding such use of punishment in an educational context.

On the punitive model of discipline, punishment executed with a salutary intention is disciplinary, meaning that the outcome of a disciplinary act is a positive change in behaviour. However, the *OED* definition does not specify the subject of the behavioural change. Due to the potential for a change of behaviour beyond the individual to whom the discipline was first directed, clarification of the nature of the intention driving it is necessary. In a clear-cut case, the intention to change behaviour is directed at the individual being punished. However, in the case of vicarious discipline the intention may be directed at the punished (Jill), but the result may affect a third party (Jack). There are four ways into this scenario which give differing perspectives on intent. The punishment may be directed first with the specific intention of altering Jill's future conduct, and any effect on Jack will be completely unintentional (unambiguous primary intention). Second, with the intention of affecting the behaviour of both Jill and Jack (ambiguous primary intention). Third, with the intention of affecting Jack's behaviour because Jill is a lost cause but deserves to be punished (unambiguous secondary intention). Fourth, with the intention of affecting any of the

children's playmates who happen to be around at the time of punishing Jill (ambiguous secondary intention). In all these cases the intention is salutary, but it becomes increasingly removed from the initial subject. Once the realm of secondary intention discipline is entered, the intention to punish, *vis-à-vis* Jill, which must necessarily be deemed the primary intention, is no longer justified by the disciplinary intent with regard to the primary subject and so can be regarded as unethical. This suggests that, ethically, for an act of punishment to be disciplinary the primary salutary intention must be directed at the punished and the primary justification for punishment in schools must be reformative. This argument does not exclude deterrence as an outcome of punishment but points to the fact that the primary focus of punishment must be on the perpetrator of the wrong and that the intention of punishment as deterrence to others can only be secondary to this.

This conclusion creates something of a conundrum in exposing situations where a punitive act may be discipline but falls outside an ethical understanding of the term. Whilst a retributivist or deterrent approach to punishment might argue against this claim, in the context of a school where the subjects are minors the idea of punishment as a form of vengeance or as a means of setting an example to others without any necessary intended benefit for the punished child is morally wanting. In an environment where the prevailing objective is to educate, the justifying element for punishment ought then to be that it is educative with regard to the subject of the punishment, and this will derive from its disciplinary intent. If the justification for punishing children is primarily to deter others this involves treating children as a means to an end rather than as ends in themselves and as such fails to treat children as worthy of respect, a point I explore fully in Chapter Eight.

4.3.4 The Language of Punishment

In this section I explore the terminology used for punishment in schools and what this reveals about how punitive discipline is administered and the extent to which this accords with what I have established to be its ethical and educational aims.

i) Sanctions

Whilst both sanctions and consequences may be forms of punishment, they demonstrate specific characteristics which distinguish them from punishment *per se*. Sanctions traditionally operate within a legal or political framework, are understood in terms of 'a specific penalty enacted in order to enforce obedience to a law' (*OED*, 2024) and usually

involve the imposition of a loss in order to produce subsequent hardship. I argue that the type of punishment which falls within the notion of the sanction limits its appropriateness as a form of discipline in schools.

Punishment essentially involves the imposition physical or emotional discomfort on another which would be deemed unethical without the justifying trigger of wrongdoing by the punished. It is administered by a party with some form of ostensible authority and power over the punished. This party has the power to judge and to immediately stop the purported wrongdoing by implementing measures which seek to restrict the perpetrator from committing the act again. However, the sanction emanates from a different power base. In common parlance sanctions are generally associated with putting to rights cases of wrongdoing in the international arena or for a breach of administrative rules and are applied by states, organisations or administrative bodies. They are targeted to alter a specific aspect of conduct and whilst the international sanction is accompanied by a strong degree of moral opprobrium it is imbued with less hostile connotations than punishment. This is because first, sanctions generally operate amongst parties of seemingly equal standing being applied by states in the international arena and bureaucrats at a national level and second, they rarely comprise the direct application of pain but take some time to bite, being underpinned by a desire not to affect long term relationships between the parties involved. The lack of ostensible authority in the party administering the sanction means that responsibility for its application becomes rooted with the deviant party whose conduct has forced the hand of the administering party and who also has the power to effect the removal of the sanction by modifying their behaviour in accordance with expectations.[44]

However, the use of a sanction may also allow for the conclusion that the condemned conduct is to some extent tolerable as the action of the sanction is dissuasive rather than absolutely preventative. Indeed, the wrongdoing often continues whilst the sanction is in place, with the sanction carrying no guarantee of success. Its duration maybe indeterminate as it is intended to endure until the desired conduct is achieved. Its success is dependent on its effect being sufficiently punitive to outweigh the benefit of the wrongdoing. The decision to accede to a sanction may thus be based on a strategic balancing of practicalities rather than moral compulsion and so the right behaviour which may result from the actions of a sanction may

[44]Michaela takes full advantage of the sanction focusing responsibility for its imposition on the perpetrator's actions: 'in making pupils responsible for their choices, we avoid the toxic scenario of pupils blaming their teachers for sanctions they receive' (Andrews, 2020, p. 300).

be achieved for the wrong reasons – not because of a recognition that the conduct is bad but because it is more convenient to behave in accordance with the sanctioner's stipulations.

A sanction, as noted above, is defined as 'a specific penalty enacted in order to enforce obedience to a law' (*OED*, 2024). This sparse delineation connotes something of the functional nature of a sanction which operates to train those who violate the law at a national level into strict obedience to it. Thus, it is appropriate to think of sanctions applying to crimes which are legally referred to as strict liability offences where a person is found guilty of committing an illegal act regardless of their intention to do so. Such offences are generally regulatory in nature as opposed to true crimes (see Sweet v Parsley, 1969, UKHL J0123-1) and include for example, road traffic or health and safety violations. The absence of *mens rea* (the requisite criminal intention necessary to establish a true crime) in these cases demonstrates that no moral blame attaches to the commission and punishment of these offences. They merely trigger the sanction, comprising the payment of a fine, which is implemented by an administrator rather than a judge. The sanction is an ultimately functional form of punishment. It is perhaps this functionality which makes it an attractive mode of punishment in schools as it allows teachers to side-step any thorny issue of judging students' moral culpability by prioritising a dogmatic adherence to rule following. The danger of this approach in a school context is that whilst English law makes a distinction between true crimes and regulatory crimes, the blanket adoption of the sanction may result in schools increasingly treating all misdemeanours as regulatory offences.[45] The ensuing failure to acknowledge the wide range of motivating factors which underpin student behaviours and often provide explanations for students behaving in particular ways means that the opportunity to provide discipline with a truly positive effect on the child is lost.

ii) Consequences

Consequences, the other means by which students are punished in schools, are similarly problematic in terms of their disciplinary effect. The stumbling point is that a punishment is imposed by a third party whereas a consequence derives from an act. For example, if Jill eats copious amounts of her mother's chocolate she may as a consequence of the act become obese, develop tooth decay and become disposed to acne, but these results are not a

[45] Goodman makes a similar point in recognising that in schools, 'the rules and sanctions within the [discipline] codes fail to distinguish moral from non-moral transgressions' (2006, p. 213). However, by failing to distinguish sanctions as a particular form of punishment, she overlooks how the interchangeable use of these terms potentially compounds this problem.

punishment even though they may not be welcome and may ultimately have a salutary effect. If her mother decides that Jill's consumption of the chocolate is so bad that it should be punished and she is banished to her room for the rest of the day, this punishment may be construed as a consequence of the chocolate eating. However, whilst the punishment is related to the excessive consumption of chocolate, it is not a consequence of it *per se*. It is a consequence of her eating being discovered, the discovery being by someone with power and authority over Jill, and her mother's decision that the act merited punishment.

Whilst the description of a punishment as a consequence of an act is logically strained, schools remain under pressure to adopt this rhetoric.[46] The use of consequences in schools to manage the behaviour of young people has its roots in the work of two psychologists – B. F. Skinner (1953) and Alfred Adler (1930). Both believed that behaviour could be developed through the use of positive stimuli and that punishment is an ineffective means of effecting long-term change in behaviour. Skinner sought to apply his work on programming behaviour in animals to the education of young people, believing that 'the application of operant conditioning to education is simple and direct. Teaching is the arrangement of contingencies of reinforcement under which students learn' (1965, p. 429). The learning process which takes place through the use of consequences is akin to Skinner's (1953) operant conditioning which is concerned to strengthen or weaken voluntary conduct in accordance with a pre-determined model of behaviour. The approach adopted by schools does, however, overlook the fact that neither Skinner nor Adler believed in any positive long-term benefits resulting from punishment. Regardless of this oversight, schools operate a system of consequences where the goal is to make the occurrence of a punishment seem an inevitable outcome of an action, with the effect that students learn to associate unpleasant results with bad behaviour and so ultimately become conditioned not to engage in certain conduct. The effectiveness of such an approach depends on the consistent and dogmatic application of pre-determined punishments to specific misdemeanours. To be truly 'effective', consequences, like sanctions, need to operate on a system of strict liability with no regard for motives or justifications for action. Indeed, consequences are the ultimate strict liability punishment as they are primarily concerned to condition students into right behaviour without recourse to any mental

[46] Ofsted explains that in schools where behaviour is judged to be outstanding, 'students know what is expected of them and the consequences that follow should they fall out of line' (Ofsted, 2014, p. 25). This establishes the features of an 'outstanding' approach to discipline – clarity (for understanding), consistency (to ensure rigour of application) and the use of consequences. Indeed, the term 'punishment' does not feature in Ofsted's approach to behaviour (see Ofsted, 2024)

engagement. They encourage an automatic response akin to rote learning rather than intellectually rooted learning, making their success in genuinely educational terms questionable.[47]

The language of punishment underlines the marginalisation of moral growth in approaches to disciplining children in schools. If punishments are to be used in schools it is essential that they are proportionate to the wrong committed, take account of the nature of the wrongdoing, and are always accompanied by explanation and guidance from the teacher to ensure the aims of discipline are an ongoing consideration. Whilst punishment of children is ethically contentious (see Thompson and Tillson, 2023), it remains a feature of children's school experience. This being so, rather than fudge the reality of its existence by using the terminology of sanctions and consequences which discourage moral engagement, it would be educationally and ethically more appropriate for children to understand the nature of punishment as punishment, the moral apportioning of blame, the importance of proportionality, different kinds of responsibility and the justifications for its use in particular circumstances. Mintz similarly argues that any distinction between punishment and consequences should be rejected. He urges, 'parents and teachers ought to respond – as many already do – to a minor's misbehavior not by identifying consequences and punishments but, rather, by considering what kind of outcome is appropriate to the misbehavior while enabling the minor to assume some responsibility for addressing the misbehavior' (2023, p. 211). If schools were to adopt such an approach, it would help teachers to appreciate how different students respond to punishment, make them accountable to their students for its use and provide a springboard for encouraging moral autonomy as students begin to understand the reasons for rules. The alternative, when punishment is applied without a moral context, is that discipline becomes anti-educational and merely a means of controlling children. In next part of this section, I explore the implications of this.

4.3.5 Discipline as Control

This chapter has so far established an understanding of discipline as the enforcement of authoritative rules through the use or threat of punishment in order to change behaviour for

[47] The use of the term 'learning' in this regard may be something of a stretch as it is questionable whether a conditioned response involves learning or a reductive form of training which suppresses thought and self-determination. I explore the moral and educational learning which arises from the use of consequences more fully in Chapter Six.

the better. It is the potential for positive behavioural change inherent in discipline that lies behind the key argument of this thesis – that discipline can be a means of furthering moral education if it is used to help children learn about the reasons for rules. However, when the justifications for rules are ill-founded and inconsistent with students' growth towards moral autonomy, this problematises the use of discipline. When discipline is used to enforce adherence to rules which further neither the purpose of education nor students' moral development, it is difficult to explain its use other than as a means of control.

In Chapter Three, I explored how discipline, presented as being in the furtherance of educative order, can become a form of control. An example of this can be seen in the rule at Michaela which requires students to always walk down corridors in single file and in complete silence. Violation of this rule sets in motion a process of punishment. This is justified on the basis that when this rule does not apply, 'Fights break out, kids push and shove each other, they run, shouting and screaming, doors flying open and slamming against the walls' (Brierly 2020, p. 313). Silence is presented as a means of preventing such behaviour because, it is claimed, it 'shows them [students] that the adult is in charge' (*ibid*). In this case children are punished for speaking but the justification for this is the anticipation of behaviour that has not actually happened. This might be viewed as an example of the *OED*'s model of discipline as training, to the extent that it will 'instil a sense of proper, orderly conduct and action'. However, if discipline is used to pre-empt bad behaviour rather than as a response to it, it becomes a means of control with the result that all children are subjected to restrictive rules regardless of whether they would actually be badly behaved. Such an approach would not be tolerated in relation to the law, for example – the courts do not send a person to prison in anticipation of them committing a crime. It expects the worst of children in assuming that, unless they are subject to high levels of control, they will inevitably engage in unruly behaviour. It ignores basic knowledge of children and the high value they place on friendship (see Halstead and Xiao, 2023). It disregards the fact that teachers are not the sole source of the learning that occurs in schools and that children develop as a result of their interactions with each other. When discipline is exercised through punishment this is a response to certain unacceptable modes of conduct, but punishment employed in anticipation of such behaviour is a means of control.

It has been argued by P. S. Wilson (1971), and following him Clark (1998), that there is a clear distinction to be made between discipline and control. Wilson argues that both involve

compulsion. Control, he claims, achieves obedience through extrinsic motivation, in the form of physical or psychological sanctions; whereas compliance, in the case of discipline, arises from having been taught about the intrinsic value of the required action (1971, p. 77; see also Clark 1998, p. 295). This distinction is difficult to reconcile with normal usage of control and discipline when, like discipline and punishment, the terms are frequently used interchangeably and indeed, the *OED* definitions of discipline posited at the opening of this chapter demonstrate that control is a key element in discipline. However, the distinction draws attention to an important question about the operation of discipline in schools regarding the justification of controlling students through the use of, or if Wilson is correct, in the guise of, discipline.

In pursuing this question, it is important to clarify the ultimate aim of discipline in school. In Chapter One, I showed that the aim of discipline is widely viewed as the creation of an orderly environment to facilitate learning. However, my argument is that discipline must move beyond the pragmatic to being expansively educative and its use must be ethical. By educative, I mean that it must encourage children to engage their critical faculties and so to think.

Clearly, an orderly environment is important in a classroom situation if, as John Wilson puts it, schools 'are to get anything done' (1977, p. 55). But the point is how that order is achieved. Discipline establishes order by ensuring adherence to rules. Ensuring adherence to rules means there is an inescapable element of control in discipline, but this potentially conflicts with the educative endeavour of encouraging children to think. Discipline as control involves the use of training, conditioning, indoctrination, or habituation which are concerned to establish behaviours as habit or automatic responses to certain stimuli. This is the form of training used for animals as it does not involve the capacity to think. When schools habituate children into unnatural forms of behaviour, they are treating them like animals unless they engage the children's minds and encourage them to think about the reason for the rule enforcing such conduct. The problem is that a lot of school rules do not withstand critical scrutiny and if children were encouraged to engage with the reasons for their existence, they would most likely conclude that they are absurd and unjust and be inclined not to abide by them.[48] This means that if these rules are to be successfully applied it is in the interests of the

[48] An example of such a rule would be the wearing of a specific colour of sock. It is difficult to justify such arbitrary rules which have no academic, safety or ethical justifications.

school that students do not think critically about them but are conditioned into obedience through the threat of punishment. Such control is neither educational nor ethical as it limits children's development and shows scant respect for them as people.

4.3.6 Ofsted's View of Discipline

My analysis of the language used to describe punishment by many schools and my exploration of how discipline can become a means of control reveal a preoccupation with actions over intellectual engagement in the use of discipline. I now argue that Ofsted's approach to assessing moral development in schools falls foul of the dilemma of discipline which I posited in Chapter Two. This refers to fact that disciplined conduct cannot be assumed to be indicative of moral awareness.

Discipline in schools is generally achieved through the imposition of a negative act (the application of punishment of some kind) aligned with a positive intention (the improvement of behaviour and personal growth of the student). However, its use in the highly accountable context of the school, where competing demands are in operation (the meeting of concrete targets in relation to exam passes as opposed to the less tangible goal of nurturing the interests and talents of each child), the interpretation of a positive outcome of discipline may potentially be influenced by the prioritisation of practical expectations which can be assessed, verified and used to promote the successful character of the establishment. Positive outcomes of discipline may then be understood in terms of a clean, tidy and ordered environment where students ostensibly behave in accordance with the rules governing their conduct around the school and in relation to other members of the school community. For example, Ofsted's full report on Michaela which judged behaviour as outstanding, evidences this in the following terms:

> Pupils are polite, well mannered and very respectful. They conduct themselves exceedingly sensibly around the school. In class, they are reliably composed and attentive to teaching staff … They follow the school's conduct guidelines conscientiously so that lessons run very smoothly and without interruption. The school is an extremely calm and safe learning environment. It is very well maintained, and graffiti- and litter-free. (Ofsted, 2017, pp. 5-6)

Good discipline is thus judged in terms of ostensible compliance with rules which in turn becomes a mark of students' personal development. Where schools apply the sanctions and

consequences approach (Michaela adopts the language of both, see Michaela, 2023) which operate on the basis of judging behaviour simply on the basis of actions, there seems to be little scope for students to develop on a personal level. Indeed, the recent recategorization of Ofsted's key judgment areas which now treat 'behaviour and attitudes' as separate from 'personal development' (including moral development) (Ofsted, 2024), may mean that schools increasingly marginalise discipline as a means of cultivating moral learning and understanding. This has the potential for the aims of discipline to become increasingly removed from any ethical and educational foundations. However, there remains significant overlap in the categories as moral development includes:

- ability to recognise the difference between right and wrong …
- understanding of the consequences of their behaviour and actions
- interest in investigating and offering reasoned views about moral and ethical issues and ability to understand and appreciate the viewpoints of others on these issues (Ofsted, 2024, para. 346)

The weighting towards behaviour does suggest that ostensible conduct is seen as a marker of moral growth but, if that behaviour arises from externally imposed rules, it is difficult to align it with moral development. Category one suggests an approach to moral development, which assumes there are 'right and wrong' answers which can be taught, and which morally engaged children can take on board as their own. Such an approach allows Ofsted to make judgments about children's moral growth which fail to recognise the complexity of moral judgments and fail to investigate whether students are engaging in thoughtful reflection and growing towards autonomous decision making. However, there is an indication in the third criterion of the importance of students learning to think about the reasons for actions, which I argue is integral to moral growth. The ability to engage in discussions with others regarding ethical issues can be a good indication of moral growth, but it is of note that Ofsted are merely looking to identify 'an interest' in this rather than the capacity to do so. If schools continue to be assessed entirely on the basis of the external markers of good discipline, there will be little incentive for them to create opportunities for students to engage the mental processes which inform truly moral behaviour.

4.4 Towards a New Understanding of Discipline

The understanding of discipline that has emerged from the analysis in this chapter is of discipline as the means of enforcing obedience to rules through the exercise of authority and punishment resulting in controlled behaviour. However, when authority and punishment are prioritised at the expense of encouraging children to think about the reasons for rules, discipline is not educational or ethical but can become a means of indoctrination. In this final section of the chapter, I argue for an approach to discipline that prioritises thinking as the overriding objective of discipline in schools and aims to resolve the dilemma of discipline.

4.4.1 Three Educational Objectives of Discipline

Discipline is an integral part of school life. There must be a minimum level of order for any institution to operate and this requires a degree of compliance with certain modes of conduct from those working within it. However, if order is achieved through control which is at odds with the cultivation of thinking this may have implications for the students' ability to exercise their critical skills in relation to their academic studies. It is not coherent to encourage them to be critical in response to a historical text, for example, but not in relation to the school's discipline policy. The educational character of schools requires that an appropriate balance is achieved to ensure this requisite level of conformity does not hamper students' freedom to develop as individuals. To ensure the balance does not tilt too far in either direction whereby students could on the one hand become conditioned into unthinking obedience and on the other act irresponsibly and without due consideration for others, it is essential to be clear about what discipline in school is seeking to achieve and how its objectives can be reconciled with its educational purposes.

There are potentially three forms of educational development that can stem from discipline and be established as its aims: functional, social and personal. Discipline for functional development has the most tenuous link with the individual development of those subject to it but has some value in an environment where a common goal is sought. The aim of this form of discipline is to promote certain behaviours which contribute to the smooth running of an organisation and may be considered a form of training. Michael Gove, former secretary of state for education, promoted the necessity of this form of discipline as a prerequisite of an effective learning environment: 'Unless classrooms are ordered and purposeful places, then teachers can't teach and children can't learn' (2014, n.p.). Rules governing movement around

the school, dictating the times at which lessons begin and how lessons are to be conducted fall within this category. Arguably, rules concerning school uniform fit within this category on the basis that they establish a sense of identity with the institution.[49] Such rules are purely functional and operate by virtue of the existence of the establishment not its educational character. Their educational value lies in teaching students the importance of a degree of order in the operation of an institution where a group of people are working together. Although there are aspects of the social here causing it to lead on to the second objective, I consider this a discrete purpose of discipline in that there is no moral compulsion operating to justify discipline for functional development.[50] Its rationale is purely practical as it governs an individual's behaviour in relation to the immediate environment.

Discipline for social development, on the other hand, is concerned with the cultivation of behaviour that contributes to positive interactions with others, thus introducing the element of the moral. It is predominantly concerned to ensure compliance with the rules which govern social interactions. Such rules in schools will range from putting up one's hand in the classroom before speaking through to rules about serious issues concerning for example, bullying or stealing. The educational value of discipline for social development lies in the guidance it provides on acceptable standards of behaviour and at best it leads students to understand justified reasons for the existence of rules. The rule-based nature of this form of discipline means that the impetus for behaviour lies outside the individual and whilst the character of such rules may fall within the moral domain, the following of them may not necessarily comprise a moral act because the motivation for right behaviour here will always be uncertain.

The final aim of discipline is more complex and involves a shift in our understanding from discipline as punishment with a salutary intention, which involves training, towards the guidance aspect of discipline and teaching children to think. The fulfilment of this aim

[49] However, as school uniform infringements are often the trigger for the imposition of punishment in schools one would expect there to be some better objective behind such disciplinary measures. As there is little educational justification for the wearing of uniform generally (see Ansari *et al*, 2022; also, Gentile and Imberman, 2011, p. 5; Brunsma and Rockquemore, 1998), and rules of this nature are inevitably arbitrary, it is difficult to justify the use of discipline to enforce them. Hand (2020) sees rules relating to school uniform as rules of etiquette and as such rightly suggests that a breach of them does not justify the imposition of punishment.

[50] Hand (2020) distinguishes three types of rules which operate in school. Rules of etiquette which include those governing school uniform and politeness; scholastic rules which facilitate the process of education, and moral rules. He argues that the latter two impose an obligation on children to obey due to their importance in the 'foundational endeavour' of education (p. 16).

involves focusing on the importance of moral understanding to assist personal development through a significant shift in behaviour from rule following to autonomous judgment making. The fulfilment of this aim is dependent on students being trusted and treated with respect which means that punishment ceases to be an appropriate means by which to achieve it and guidance becomes the dominant means of accomplishing this goal.[51] Order may sometimes need to be sacrificed to facilitate this educational and ethical goal for discipline. It involves teachers relinquishing control and allowing students the freedom to argue, to challenge, to make mistakes and to think for themselves. It involves teachers helping students to develop their own motivation for action and to do the right thing because they have judged it to be so. It involves the motivation to behave in a way that looks like disciplined behaviour but is in fact self-determined, not imposed by externally established rules. Indeed, what is achieved here is not discipline at all but merely the semblance of a disciplined state which is attained by the individual's independent reasoning and motivation to behave in a particular way. The term 'discipline' used in this context operates as a metaphor to illustrate the element of control involved, albeit self-control.

In order to ensure that discipline in schools can achieve these aims it is necessary to adopt a more nuanced approach to discipline than that suggested by the *OED*'s punitive and training models set out at the beginning of this chapter. The functional and social objectives can be fulfilled by either of these approaches to the extent that both aims can be achieved through the implementation of rules which can be enforced through the use or threat of punishment or through habituation. The successful fulfilment of these aims can be seen to be achieved by ostensible conformity. Whilst, as I have noted, the social objective may involve moral learning, whether this actually occurs within the framework of these models of discipline is a moot point and demonstrates the dilemma of discipline which I highlighted earlier in this chapter in relation to Ofsted's approach to discipline. However, to accommodate learning which comprises the third and what might be seen as the truly educational aim of discipline – the capacity to think independently – it is necessary to establish a fuller understanding of the term.

[51] I address the importance of respect in relation to teachers' use of discipline in Chapter Eight.

4.4.2 Two Types of Discipline

For discipline in schools to be educationally and ethically justified it must be directed beyond the creation of an orderly environment to facilitate learning and ostensibly well-behaved students. I argue that the development of children as free-thinking, moral agents must be a primary goal whenever teachers seek to alter their behaviour. To realise this objective, it is necessary to establish how and if this conception of discipline can exist within our use and understanding of the term.

I argue that there are two types of discipline which are integral to education and which I refer to as outer discipline and inner discipline. Outer discipline is concerned with the way one conducts oneself and the impact of one's ostensible behaviour on others or on one's environment. It is concerned with the externally verifiable markers that signal a person is following rules which have been created by a body external to the individual. Outer discipline usually involves the imposition of rules on an individual along with punishment and training to ensure compliance. This form of discipline is encompassed in the *OED*'s punitive and training models in that it is achieved predominantly through fear of punishment and processes such as habituation. It extends to all modified behaviour whereby a person unthinkingly follows externally established rules. It encompasses moral training, 'creating a culture' (described in Chapter Two), self-discipline and character education (both of which I will examine in Chapter Five) and all other conduct which is achieved through fear of punishment, conditioning, control or calculated praise.

In order to recognise the full educational and ethical potential of discipline, this model must be extended to include a second type which I call inner discipline. This form of discipline describes a state of mind marked out by autonomy and can lead one to do the right thing even against one's inclinations. It presents a problematic notion of discipline in that the element of freedom which is essential to its character runs counter to popular conceptions of discipline and as I explained earlier the word 'discipline' is used metaphorically in this context because it leads to an individual behaving in ways that outer discipline may seek to achieve and looks very like outer discipline. However, it is distinguished from literal discipline because such conduct is self-determined and not due to external pressure which is characteristic of outer discipline. *Prima facie*, inner discipline may appear to be the same as self-discipline but, as I will argue in Chapter Five, self-discipline involves the internalisation of externally established rules and a personal commitment to following those rules. As such, self-discipline

falls under the umbrella of outer discipline as the impetus for behaviour is external to the individual. Inner discipline can best be understood as ethical self-determination. It leads an individual to behave in a way which takes account of and respects others because he or she has concluded, after careful deliberation, that such behaviour is the most appropriate in all the circumstances. It involves establishing one's own rules for behaviour based on principles one judges to be right, not because one has been told they are right. It may be accomplished through a process of guidance from a teacher or parent, but it will not be achieved through punishment and training. It involves encouragement from teachers but relies on autonomous decision-making on the part of students. It does not involve obedience as such, but is focussed primarily on individuals making a free choice without the external pressure of punishment, praise, habituation, indoctrination, or any form of compulsion. Inner discipline has much in common with moral autonomy.

What is becoming clear is that for discipline in schools to be judged positive in the sense of being ethical and educational, it must be administered with the intention of promoting the child's functional, social or personal development, with the latter being the overriding, ultimate aim. When punishment is used to ensure disciplined behaviour, it must be accompanied by a salutary intention which must be primarily directed at the individual whose behaviour has breached the relevant rule. The dominant aim is to have a positive effect on the child. This being so, the 'positive' modifier of discipline becomes superfluous. Perhaps it would be more accurate for schools to extol a system of positive punishment, but schools veer away from the vocabulary of punishment, preferring a terminology rooted in sanctions (see Steer, 2009, p. 18; Elton, 1989, p. 26) or consequences (see: Ofsted, 2014, p. 5; Rogers, 2000; Canter and Canter, 1992) as a means of making discipline seem 'positive'.

4.4.3 A Kantian Perspective on Discipline

As I suggested earlier in this chapter any normative claim about discipline in schools depends on one's wider beliefs and values. In Chapters Two and Three, I identified small–c conservative and neo-liberal values along with negative conceptions of the child as being the driving force behind the beliefs of the influential voices shaping government policy on school discipline. In contrast, the approach to discipline which I am seeking to promote is rooted in the modern liberal value of respect for persons. My means of achieving this is through a broadly Kantian approach to morality. This acknowledges all humans as essentially rational

beings with free will, capable of establishing their own rules or standards for behaviour in the context of the key values of justice, freedom, and equality. Kant argues that this capacity for self-determination is the basis of an 'absolute inner worth' (1996 [1797], p. 186), which means all humans deserve to be treated with equal respect. As children take time to develop their rational capacity, it might be tempting to argue that they lack the inner worth Kant describes as necessary to merit respect, and indeed, Kant does not explicitly include children in his line of reasoning. However, as I argue more fully in Chapter Eight, my own starting point is the belief that children are fully human and as such merit respect, which places a duty on teachers to appreciate and cultivate their pupils' potential to become fully autonomous. An essential aspect of this is the acknowledgment of their ability to think. This necessitates an approach to discipline which accommodates children's developing autonomy, recognises their ability to make independent choices about their actions based on key principles rather than externally imposed rules, and suggests the importance of what I have termed inner discipline in the process of education.

In order to highlight the importance of inner discipline and offer a further perspective on the nature of discipline itself, I conclude this chapter with a brief exploration of Kant's approach to disciplining children. Kant describes discipline as necessary for children to develop into free moral beings. He identifies its improving effect as essential to the fostering of humanity – 'Discipline changes animal nature into human nature' (2003 [1803], p. 2). This resonates with Bennett's view that children are like animals, which I discussed in Chapter Two. However, Kant is at pains to distinguish animals from humans. Unlike Bennett who, I argue, sees discipline and obedience as good *per se* and as such presents discipline as an end it itself, for Kant discipline and obedience are merely the means to a more educationally and ethically viable end – independent thought and moral self-determination.

Although Kant sees discipline as a major stage in the process of education, he does not align it with intellectual growth. Rather, he views it as a purely functional endeavour with the purpose of 'merely restraining unruliness' (p. 18). It seems that it is this element of restraint which suggests the conclusion that: 'Discipline, thus, is merely negative, its action being to counteract man's unruliness. The positive part of education is instruction' (p. 3). Like Goodman above, he views discipline as an inevitable aspect of education with little to commend it as the positive experience schools often present it as being. Indeed, Kant recognises that 'nothing does children more harm than to exercise a vexatious and slavish

discipline over them with a view to breaking their self-will' (2003 [1803], p. 48). This is precisely what the zero tolerance and no-excuses discipline operated by some schools, and exemplified by Michaela, achieves. MacAllister's claim, that 'zero-tolerance approaches are perhaps the best example … of Kantian-type thinking about discipline in educational practice' (2017, p. 45), is incorrect. As I described in Chapter Three such practices result in students doubting their own agency which is completely at odds with Kant.

The ultimate goal of discipline for Kant is the ability to think (2003 [1803], p. 20), which is the aim of what I have termed inner discipline. He identifies the two approaches to managing behaviour with which my characterisation of outer and inner discipline broadly aligns. One is concerned with external control and the other with personal reflection. He explains:

> Man may be either broken in, trained, and mechanically taught, or he may be really enlightened. Horses and dogs are broken in; and man, too, may be broken in. It is, however, not enough that children should be merely broken in; for it is of greater importance that they shall learn to think. By learning to think, man comes to act according to fixed principles and not at random. (p. 20)

I have argued that current approaches to discipline are weighted towards training and mechanical teaching and fail to progress towards teaching children to think and become morally autonomous individuals. For example, Bennett's repeated comparison of children with animals justifies his advice to teachers that 'your chief asset is the ability to grind them down over time, and all but the toughest kids will break before this' (2010, p. 105). That children have the potential to be broken belies their vulnerability which behaviour policies such as zero tolerance and no-excuses discipline ignore. If discipline breaks children, surely the result will be irreparable damage. Kant believes that 'breaking a child's will makes him a slave' (2003 [1803], p. 57), and yet the disciplinary approaches of Bennett and schools such as Michaela where, as I illustrated in Chapter Three, students are freed from the responsibility of making their own decisions, promote slavish conformity to rules.[52]

To avoid denying children's capacity to act as free moral agents the scope of discipline in schools needs to extend beyond teaching the value of compliance with externally imposed

[52] This image is loaded with the idea of loss of freedom, identity and autonomy. Indeed, slave owners notoriously deprived their slaves of education for fear that this might induce them to develop their own ideas which might lead to them questioning their captivity.

rules to create the semblance of moral behaviour. Cultivating children's ability to think by seeking to promote inner discipline demonstrates respect for their worth as people and avoids the 'self-disparagement' Goodman discovered amongst students in schools operating rigid discipline regimes (2013, p. 94), which I discussed in Chapter Three. Outer discipline does have its place in schools which necessarily require a degree of order to function, and it can provide an important step on the path towards inner discipline. However, for children to fulfil their potential as people, or genuinely 'flourish',[53] inner discipline needs to be established as the goal of disciplinary practice in schools. As Kant recognises, this is a difficult task due to the conflicting requirements of the educative process which I highlighted at the beginning of this section:

> One of the greatest problems of education is how to unite submission to the necessary *restraint* with the child's capability of exercising his *free will* – for restraint is necessary. How am I to develop the sense of freedom in spite of the restraint? I am to accustom my pupil to endure a restraint of his freedom, and at the same time I am to guide him to use his freedom aright. Without this all education is merely mechanical, and the child, when his education is over, will never be able to make a proper use of his freedom. (2003 [1803], p. 27)

That this tension between freedom and restraint remains unresolved is testament to the ultimately irreconcilable nature of the problem at the heart of discipline. The best that can be achieved is a position of balance, but repeated attempts at striking this tend to result in claims that the swing is too strong to one side or another, with the progressives placing too much emphasis on freedom and the traditionalists prioritising restraint. Perhaps the way forward is the recognition of the two types of discipline I have identified. The co-existence of these in schools could help build a bridge from disciplined conduct to autonomy, the primary focus being on moral development. However, for schools to embrace this approach it will be necessary for them to rethink current approaches such as zero tolerance, no-excuses and the misleading term, positive discipline. Unless there is a shift away from ostensible compliance with rules as a marker of good moral development, the possibilities for schools to genuinely focus on the moral will be limited. Kant recognised this: 'If we wish to establish morality, we must abolish punishment. Morality is something so sacred and sublime that we must not degrade it by placing it in the same rank as discipline' (2003

[53] See Chapter Two for my discussion of flourishing and how the word has been appropriated to sugarcoat the purported need for unquestioning obedience in schools.

[1803], p. 84). But if Ofsted continues to adopt a reductive, behaviour-focussed approach to assessing personal and moral development, the future looks bleak. However, in view of Kant's suggestion that 'the first endeavour in moral education is the formation of character' (2003 [1803], p. 84), the increased emphasis on character education in schools which arose during the period when the Conservative government was in power, merits closer attention. The next chapter will therefore look at the implications of this emphasis on character development, questioning whether it is a means of moral education or merely another disciplinary tool.

CHAPTER 5

CHARACTER EDUCATION AS A DISCIPLINARY PRACTICE

5.1 Introduction

The concept of character education hovers somewhere between developing virtues 'that benefit the individual person and serve the common good' (Lickona, 2018, p. 54) and the creation of well-mannered, compliant, patriotic young citizens who 'appreciate and comply with rules and regulations established for control and management of their behaviour by others' (White and Shin, 2017, p. 50). The first of these definitions emphasises such virtues as fairness, respect, kindness and honesty (though the longer the list of virtues becomes, the more controversial it is), the second promotes behaviour such as responsibility, duty, gratitude and grit. Western traditions of developing children's character have a long history, with roots that go back to teaching in the early Jewish scriptures and early Greek philosophy, and initiatives to encourage good character in schools generally assert their lineage from an established academic pedigree. The 19th century revival of character education that occurred particularly in America drew heavily on Jewish and Christian values,[54] such as 'Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it' (Proverbs 26. 3, *AV*), whereas the more recent revival (in both America and England), towards the end of the 20th century, has been largely secular, drawing inspiration from Aristotle. For example, the expansive vision of the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues[55] – 'not simply to research past and present attitudes to character and virtues, but shape the future attitudes and behaviours of the British people' (Arthur, 2024) – claims justification from its 'neo-Aristotelian model of moral development' (Jubilee Centre, 2022, p. 21).

[54] The widespread emphasis on character education at this time can be judged by the popularity of McGuffey's *Eclectic Readers* (1836), which sold over 100 million copies between 1850 and 1890 (Leming, 1994). McGuffey was a Presbyterian who sought to instil into young people qualities of character compatible with his Calvinist beliefs.

[55] The Jubilee Centre, based in the School of Education at the University of Birmingham, describes itself as 'a world-leading pioneering interdisciplinary research centre focussing on character, virtues and values in the interest of human flourishing' and a 'a leading informant on policy and practice in this area' (Jubilee Centre, 2023, n.p.). It promotes character education in schools and has developed a comprehensive package of resources for implementing it.

The aims of character education set out by the DfE in its non-statutory *Character Education Framework Guidance* (2019) are somewhat less ambitious than those expounded by the Jubilee Centre. These are presented as contributing to schools' duty 'to promote the spiritual, moral, social, and cultural (SMSC) development of pupils and prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life' (p. 4). It suggests that 'positive character traits' enhance relationship, sex and health education and can 'promote good mental well-being' (*ibid*) and 'open doors' for their future careers (p. 5; see also Morgan, 2024). However, it also links character development and good behaviour on the basis that having 'high expectations of behaviour towards others in and beyond the school community, underpinned by a clear understanding of the kind of young people the school wishes its pupils to become' is a benchmark in the provision of good character education (DfE, 2019, p. 8). The implication is that schools which foster 'good' disciplinary practices create an environment conducive to the development of good character.

In this chapter I argue that character education as currently conceived in England is more to do with training than education, and more to do with managing students' behaviour than genuine moral education. By moral education I mean activities that help children and young people to become informed and critically reflective autonomous moral agents, to develop the skills needed for moral judgments and to be motivated to take morality seriously. Character education, by contrast, has been criticised for 'limiting young people's agency in their role as moral actors' (Hart, 2022, p. 5). I contend that programmes such as those promulgated by the Jubilee Centre, whilst shrouded in a rhetoric of Aristotelian morality, are essentially a form of ideologically charged discipline. And, with pressure from the Department for Education and Ofsted for schools to implement such strategies for character development, the potential for young people to autonomously develop their behaviour and attitudes may be seriously curtailed through this discipline by stealth. The combined impact of character education as a means of controlling behaviour and the kind of discipline discussed in earlier chapters may well produce orderly schools and a compliant workforce, but at a heavy cost in terms of the suppression of individuality and diversity and the loss of personal freedom, political participation, moral maturity and a sense of what it is to be human, as 'the British people' adopt a prescribed, jubilant model of the good.

5.2 Competing Approaches to Character Education and Moral Education

'Character education' is about shaping the characters of young people, but there is significant disagreement about its goals and methods. The differences of approach are generally expressed in terms of a binary distinction, for example, traditional / progressive (Dishon and Goodman, 2017), non-expansive / expansive (McLaughlin and Halstead, 1999), and conservative / liberal (Gutmann, 1987). What all these distinctions are negotiating is how character education seeks to teach students about virtue and the nature of moral education. The difference in the contrasting approaches is rooted in the degree of confidence they place in students to reach their own conclusions about what is virtuous.

The traditional/ conservative/ non-expansive approaches are founded on what Gutmann terms 'conservative moralism' which relies on a respect for authority which she believes is symptomatic of a 'deep pessimism concerning the human disposition to be moral' (1987, p. 56). Such approaches have as their starting point a distinct set of character traits, chosen by a panel of authoritative experts (Arthur *et al*, 2015), into which they habituate students through various activities. These may be book exercises which provide examples of particular 'virtues' such as humility or courage and are aimed to teach students how to put these into effect in their own lives (see Francis *et al*, 2018), or, for example, sporting activities and voluntary work which are believed to develop grit, resilience and determination (DfE and Hinds, 2019). I argue that these methods of instilling character comprise moral training or habituation rather than education and bring a reductive approach to morality.

The contrasting approach involves the cultivation of autonomous moral decision making and its starting point is moral uncertainty rather than a predetermined conception of the good. It is focused on developing students' ability to think independently. Rather than being spoon fed a strict diet of virtue, they are encouraged to explore a wide menu of moral possibilities, make judgments on the basis of principles and thus reach their own conclusions as to appropriate modes of conduct. It is concerned to cultivate critical reasoning rather than instil virtues, and consequently character development is incidental to the more significant development of moral understanding. Such an approach has its roots in Dewey (2007 [1916]) and in Kohlberg's moral reasoning and just community schools (1981-1984). This, I argue, is genuine moral education.

Critics of this liberal approach to moral development dismiss it as progressive, tending towards relativism and failing to teach children the basics of right and wrong (see Kilpatrick, 1993; Lickona, 1991, p. 12). Yet, such criticisms take for granted a general consensus on moral issues, believing it is possible to teach students an uncontroversial model of the good, which is the case with the approach promoted by the former Conservative government and, as I demonstrated in Chapter Three, Birbalsingh.

The Jubilee Centre, a major player in the provision of character education programmes in England, describes its mission to 'aid students in learning to know the good, love the good, and do the good. Schools should enable students to become good persons and citizens' (Jubilee Centre, 2022). As this suggests, they champion a traditional/ conservative/ non-expansive approach, confident in their ability to achieve their goal because it is founded on an uncontentious understanding of 'the good' and, as Suissa points out, a conflation of the 'good person' and the 'good citizen' (2015, p. 107). This whitewashing of complexity provides a rather shaky foundation on which to justify their initiation of students into certain behaviours which are aimed at producing a specified model of the 'good' person.

An example of such an approach which comes under the umbrella of the Jubilee Centre is the Narnian Virtues Programme. It is based on twelve key virtues – wisdom, love, fortitude, courage, self-control, justice, forgiveness, gratitude, humility, integrity, hard work, and curiosity – which feature in C S Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1959-1965). Lessons focus on certain 'goods' or 'virtues' which are first defined and then students move on to 'virtue analysis' by engaging with one of Lewis' novels and identifying examples of the virtues and vices with different coloured highlighter pens (Pike and Lickona, 2016; see also Pike and Lickona, 2019). Its proponents pull no punches in expressing their aims: 'We want students to understand the virtues displayed by the Narnia characters; care about these virtues (admire them, want to possess them, be repelled by their opposing vices); and, finally, act upon them with increasing consistency in their own lives' (Pike and Lickona, 2016, p. 3). Putting to one side the reductive response to literature this approach encourages, there seems little room for genuine analysis here. If students were given space to consider the broader context of the Narnia books, they may begin to question the cultural and religious assumptions which underpin the novels, their stereotypical characterisation and the nature and validity of the power wielded by the four Pevensies and the successors to their colonial venture. Even if they are supreme exemplars of virtue, what right do these outsiders

have to wield power over a nation they stumble on at the back of a wardrobe? Are they not imposing ways of thinking, doing and being on the creatures they govern over? Indeed, this is the very challenge which is levelled at models of character education which have such specified goals and are at pains to habituate students into specific modes of behaviour (see for example, Boyd, 2011).

Traditional/ conservative/ non-expansive approaches to character education are based on moral certainties as they are founded on the belief that there is a 'right' answer to any given moral dilemma. Such approaches are often shrouded in a rhetoric of autonomy – 'we emphasise our view that character education is not about indoctrination or mindless conditioning, but rather the development of critical, reflective, and applied thinking' (Arthur *et al*, 2017, p. 2). However, the research carried out by Arthur and his colleagues at the Jubilee Centre demonstrates that their methods are at odds with their rhetoric. Moral dilemmas were presented to students through short stories and assessments of their responses were made as follows:

> Each possible response to a moral dilemma (choices and justifications) was scored as 'acceptable', 'neutral' or 'unacceptable'. This code underpins all calculated scores. For example, best and worst scores for choices and reasons can be calculated to achieve a 'total good' and 'total bad' score that represents the extent to which judgements correspond or contrast with the expert panel. (Arthur *et al*, 2015, p. 12)

The fact that an 'expert panel' has already decided what 'choices and justifications' are correct eliminates the possibility of any dilemmas. To be judged as morally virtuous, students must conform to a pre-determined model of the good which seems more akin to 'indoctrination and mindless conditioning' than 'critical, reflective and applied thinking' (Arthur *et al*, 2017, p. 2). Indeed, *The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools* explains that 'in late adolescence and early adulthood, the young gradually begin to develop critical thinking and reflection and revisit critically the traits with which they were originally inculcated' (Jubilee Centre, 2022, p. 20). As late adolescence, the period between the ages of 18 and 24 (see Allen and Waterman, 2024), and early adulthood occur post compulsory education, this demonstrates that such an approach to character education assumes that children under this age do not engage in critical thinking or reflection. This absolves schools from any responsibility to develop children's autonomy and allows them to focus on what the Jubilee Centre describes as the '"caught" and "taught" methods' whereby

students ‘internalise moral habits by copying what they see being done by their role models’ (2022, p. 20). This form of habituation or ‘inculcation’ relies on children developing a set of virtues which are imposed on them by an outside source in the same way that the outer discipline I described in Chapter Four creates a set of external rules of behaviour for students in schools. Like outer discipline, such character education encourages reliance on others for moral guidance rather than independent thought and moral autonomy. However, the Jubilee Centre claims that ‘depending on the nature of the education that moral learners receive, they may progress rather seamlessly through a trajectory of habituated virtue, developing into autonomously sought and reflectively chosen virtue, which in turn provides them with intrinsic motivation to virtuous action’ (*ibid*). Yet this fails to explain how children move from habituation which is dependent on passive acceptance to being able to think for themselves. The process of habituation or inculcation is predicated on the imposition of virtue, which is fundamental to its success. There are also certain socially divisive assumptions at play here. Those children who are, according to the Jubilee Centre, ‘fortunate enough to have been brought up by good people (as moral exemplars), exemplifying moral habits, and endowed with sufficient material resources’ are likely to achieve what is described as ‘intrinsic motivation to virtuous action’ (*ibid*). However, ‘those slightly less fortunate, brought up under more mixed moral conditions’ are ‘less amenable, originally, to character virtue development’ (*ibid*). This seems to suggest that those children who conform to certain expectations of behaviour, because they have been raised in homes which share the values of the character educators, are deemed to be making the ‘right’ moral choices and are judged to be thinking autonomously, but those who are less amenable to conformity are not. The point is that the reliance implicit in habituation is directly opposed to critical thinking and autonomous action. Peters calls this the ‘paradox of moral education’ and explains:

> given that it is desirable to develop people who conduct them selves rationally, intelligently and with a fair degree of spontaneity, the brute facts of child development reveal that at the most formative years of a child’s development he is incapable of this form of life and impervious to the proper manner of passing it on. (2015, p. 51)

Kristjánsson, a proponent of character education and member of the Jubilee Centre, offers a somewhat unsatisfactory resolution to this paradox: ‘we know from experience that, however theoretically puzzling this may seem, habituated reason develops, if all is well, into critical reason, and heteronomously formed selfhood develops into a self that can make autonomous decisions’ (2006, p. 120). ‘Experience’ fails to provide a convincing academic justification for

the inculcation of predetermined virtues through habituation, rather than supporting children to develop the skills to respond critically to a range of alternative versions of the good. As Peters observes, 'it makes all the difference, too, at what age and in what manner such habits are formed, especially under what aspect particular acts are taught' (2015, p. 60). If children are to develop moral autonomy their ability to think for themselves needs to be recognised and cultivated long before late adolescence. The Jubilee Centre's model of character education fails to take account of children's stages of development and their individual characters which, I argue, should be allowed to develop from within themselves, rather than being imposed.

5.3 Character Education as Moral Education

Whilst such traditional/ conservative/ non-expansive approaches present themselves as antidotes to what is perceived as the moral decline of today's youth and society more generally (see Lickona, 1991, pp. 3-22; Arthur, 2003, pp. 1-9), it is difficult to construe them within a framework of moral education as opposed to moral training. Walker and Thoma provide an instructive distinction between moral and character education:

> Traditionally, moral education is concerned with the interpretation and strategies one uses to understand moral phenomenon and defines the moral person as a predominantly thinking entity, whereas character education emphasizes the development of habits and dispositions as a precondition for the moral person. (2017: n.p.)

This suggests that the former emanates from within the individual and has much in common with what I have described as inner discipline whereas the latter is imposed from outside them which aligns character education with outer discipline. I argue that character education as it is promoted in England is distinct from moral education in the Kohlbergian sense which develops autonomy. I suggest that traditional/ conservative/ non-expansive approaches have much in common with discipline in terms of the methods they adopt and the goals they aim to achieve which are envisaged in terms of modifying future behaviour and encouraging obedience to rules and authority, and humble, unquestioning acceptance of the *status quo.* However, rather than thinking about character education in terms of a politically engaged conservative/ liberal understanding, a pedagogically focused traditional/ progressive interpretation, or a philosophically astute non-expansive/ expansive analysis, a basic distinction between character education and moral education directly highlights the

difference between them. I understand the former to be concerned with training children to conform with a pre-determined model of the good person and the latter with equipping children with the tools to make independent decisions about how to behave morally in any situation. In the next section, I explore Kant's approach to character and moral education to clarify this distinction.

5.4 Kant on Character and Moral Education

Kant's approach to character education and moral education derives from his belief that 'everything in education depends upon establishing correct principles and leading children to understand and accept them' (2003 [1803], p. 103). Kant sees education as falling into two discrete stages – the 'physical' and the 'practical'. The former is focused on developing that 'which man has in common with animals' (p. 30). The latter, which Kant also refers to as 'moral training' or 'moral formation', is concerned with the cultivation of the child as an autonomous individual (2003 [1803], p. 30, p. 66; 2013 [1803], p. 448).[56] Kant's distinction between the 'physical' (where the child is 'passive' and learning depends on 'exercise and discipline') and the 'moral' (which involves the child actively thinking) (2003 [1803], p. 77), provides a valuable framework for understanding approaches to character and moral education. Although Kant does not supply a neat definition of what he considers to be character education it is possible to draw an understanding of what he deems appropriate on the basis of his view of character: 'Character consists in readiness to act in accordance with "maxims". At first they are school "maxims", and later "maxims" of mankind. At first the child obeys rules. "Maxims" are also rules, but subjective rules. They proceed from the understanding of man' (2003 [1803], p. 84). As maxims 'train the mind to think' (p 83), it is appropriate to view Kant's version of character education which he aligns with 'moral formation' as moral education (2013 [1803], p. 448). It contrasts with the approaches to character education I have addressed, which focus on habituating children into a predetermined set of virtues and do little to encourage critical thinking. Kant notes that 'the more habits a man allows himself to form, the less free and independent he becomes' (2003

[56] Churton's translation uses the term 'moral training' (2003 [1803], p. 30), but Louden and Zöller translate the same text as 'moral formation' (2013 [1803], p. 448). Although I primarily use Churton's translation to reference Kant, I will adopt Louden and Zöller's translation when more appropriate and consistent with Kant's overall position.

[1803], p. 45). By failing to explore the complexity of virtues,[57] these methods of training children to be good contribute little to the development of young people as 'free beings' (p. 30), and thus fit within Kant's physical model of education.

As Kant describes 'character formation' as 'the first endeavour in moral education' (p. 84), this seems to position his version of character education within moral or practical education and as such aimed at the cultivation of autonomous moral reasoning. Yet, this first step for Kant is more in line with the training that McLaughlin and Halstead, critics of conservative/ traditional/ non-expansive approaches, acknowledge as necessary but certainly not sufficient for full moral development: students 'need to receive initial training in the virtues and it is not coherent to object to such training as involving illicit influence' (1999, p. 149). It is appropriate to view this as an initial scaffolding exercise which takes the form of training or habituation. At best it acts in the same way as Straughan sees school rules – as a kind of 'temporary bridging device' (1982, p. 67), between the immature response of conforming to the wishes of an adult and the mature response of understanding or thinking through the reasons for an action oneself. However, at worst, habituation, rather than being a temporary scaffold to independent thinking, becomes an immovable brick wall. In this case, as in that of outer discipline, the impetus for action will derive from an externally imposed notion of the good. Character, like inner discipline, derives from within an individual. Imposing it from the outside, as is the case with character education, is merely a means of enforcing compliance or outer discipline.

The ultimate goal of character education for Kant is that 'the child does right on account of his own "maxims", and not merely from habit' (2003 [1803], p. 77). Therefore, his approach to the development of character illustrates Peters' paradox of moral education, due to the rigid regime of rules and compliance Kant recommends: 'If we wish to form the characters of children, it is of the greatest importance to point out to them a certain plan, and certain rules in everything; and these must be strictly adhered to' (p. 85). The disciplinary slant of this conflicts with his goal of moral autonomy, unless he has in mind something like Straughan's 'bridging device' (1982, p. 67). If this is so, this first 'step' seems to be poised on the cusp between his physical and moral sides of education with the potential for inappropriate programmes of character education to fall squarely within the physical in failing to move

[57] As Smith notes, 'the virtues on offer are unstable. They are best understood as sites on which we contest our understanding of what it is to be a good person rather than reach conclusive answers' (2022, p. 889).

beyond habituation and training. Kant acknowledges this in warning, 'all will be spoilt if moral training rests upon examples, threats, punishments, and so on. It would then be merely discipline' (2003 [1803], p. 77).

Of the three aspects Kant identifies as central to the development of character in a child – obedience, truthfulness and sociableness – the first is a characteristic that can be readily associated with discipline. However, at the heart of Kant's theory of education is a developmental approach which takes account of the capabilities of the child and his approach to character education is appropriately tuned (2003 [1803], p. 93).[58]

Thus, in identifying the importance of obedience he is careful to distinguish 'obedience to the absolute will of a leader' from 'obedience to the will of a leader who is recognized to be reasonable and good' (2013 [1803], p. 469). The first results from compulsion or constraint and is 'very necessary' whilst the second, which is 'very important', 'arises out of confidence' (2003 [1803], p. 86). The element of compulsion in the former seems to place it within the physical side of Kant's model of education, i.e. discipline, as the child is passive having no choice but to obey. Consistent with this categorisation, such obedience appears to resemble that which we would expect from animals in that it does not require any thought. The necessity for this derives from its goal of initiating children into some of the expectations of future citizens – 'it prepares the child for the fulfilment of laws that he will have to obey later, as a citizen, even though he may not like them' (p. 86). This is not to suggest that Kant envisages a society of unthinking conformists, quite the opposite. He sees this form of obedience as appropriate for children in order to introduce them to the idea of duty, for although they may not initially understand the reasons for this, they will be initiated into the position of being obliged to behave according to the duty appropriate to a child (p. 87). This then provides the grounding for the more mature (and more moral) form of obedience which 'consists in submission to rules of duty' and, as Kant explains, doing 'something for the sake of duty means obeying reason' (p. 90).

The legal philosopher Herbert Hart makes a similar distinction when he differentiates behaviour elicited by a threat of punishment (which he calls 'being obliged' to obey) from

[58] Kant advises, 'Children should be taught only those things which are suited to their age … a child should be clever but only to his age. He should not ape the manners of his elders. For a child to provide himself with moral sentences [aphorisms] proper to manhood is to go quite beyond his province and to become merely an imitator' (2003 [1803], p. 93). This is in marked contrast to the Jubilee Centre's approach which, as I have noted, emphasises the need for students to 'internalise moral habits by copying what they see being done by their role models' (2022, p. 20).

behaviour resulting from an internalised commitment to rule-following (which he calls 'being under an obligation'). He says,

> The statement that someone is obliged to obey someone is, in the main, a psychological one referring to the beliefs and motives with which an action was done...The statement that a person had an obligation, e.g. to tell the truth or report for military service, remains true even if he believed (reasonably or unreasonably) that he would never be found out and had nothing to fear from disobedience. (Hart, 1961, p. 80)

According to Hart, it is not the just the threat of punishment that obliges us to obey rules, but the internal motivation to obey, that arises from understanding that the concept of 'rule' itself implies an obligation to obey.[59] In other words, self-discipline is preferable to discipline enforced through punishment (cf. Hirst and Peters, 1970, pp. 124-130). There is a co-relation here with Kant's goal for character education – 'our ultimate aim is the formation of character. Character consists in the firm purpose to accomplish something, and then also in the actual accomplishing of it' (2003 [1803], pp. 98-99) – which sounds remarkably like self-discipline – an aspect of character education I shall return to later in the chapter.

However, the transition that underpins Kant's version of character education seems to be from being obliged to follow the rule because of its authority as a rule, to being under an obligation to do so because the rule derives from a rationally ascertained duty.[60] The first stage of 'very necessary' obedience resonates with both the respect for authority rationale that Gutmann (1987) identifies at the heart of conservative moralism, which underlies conservative/ traditional/ non-expansive character education, and with Wilson and Cowell's approach to discipline.[61] Inherent within their concept of discipline is the idea of authority (one of their 'logical inevitabilities', 1990, p. 24) so that 'to accept rules as authoritative, in the sense required for discipline, consists ... in accepting them as reasons for action' (p. 25).

This view is also established on the basis of conservative moralism as Wilson and Cowell imply a mistrust of children and young people to act in an appropriate way unless compelled to do so. Indeed, they suggest that disruptive behaviour by young people is due to the fact that 'the very concepts of blame, responsibility, rule-breaking and so on, have, in many areas of

[59] I will return to Hart's interpretation of rules in Chapter Nine.
[60] This understanding of being under an obligation is broader than that put forward by Hart. For Hart it is the acceptance of the force of the rule *per se* that places a person under the obligation to obey, rather than an understanding and acceptance of the justification of the rule.
[61] This is a restatement of Wilson's (1977) approach to discipline which I have referred to in previous chapters.

behaviour, simply not been introduced into their lives' (p. 97). This criticism could equally have been levelled as part of Lickona's 'case for values education' (by which he seems to mean character education), where he lists ten 'troubling youth trends' which comprise 'violence and vandalism', 'stealing', 'cheating', disrespect for authority', 'peer cruelty', 'bad language', 'sexual precocity and abuse', 'increasing self-centredness and declining civic responsibility' and 'self-destructive behaviour' (1991, pp. 13-18). He similarly claims:

> The school's role as moral educator becomes even more vital at a time when millions of children get little moral teaching from parents and when value-centred influences such as church or temple are also absent from their lives. These days, when schools don't do moral education, influences hostile to good character rush in to fill the values vacuum. (p. 20)

There is a very fine line here between what Wilson and Cowell see as lack of discipline and Lickona interprets as lack of moral guidance. Thus, it seems that the starting point for the operation of both discipline and character education is a concern that the behaviour of young people does not conform to an expected model.

Wilson and Cowell's response appears to posit rules as an end in themselves rather than a means to an end. Indeed, they describe discipline as 'an educative objective in its own right and not just as a facilitator for education' (1990, p. 28), and suggests that well-disciplined children obey 'because authority says so' (p. 30).[62] Such an approach seems to instil discipline and obedience to authority with value more akin to a virtue than the necessity Kant considers it to be. And indeed, correlations have been made between discipline and good character. Demos research demonstrates that 'a "tough love" approach to parenting that combines high levels of emotional warmth and care, with consistent enforcement of discipline, was found to have the strongest correlation with character capabilities among children' (Birdwell *et al*, 2015, p. 26); and an earlier study by Wynne found that schools engaged in character education programmes typically stressed firm discipline (1991). On the other hand, Boccanfuso and Kuhfeld (2011) present character education as an alternative to zero tolerance approaches to discipline. The relationship between discipline and character education is complex and in need of further discussion.

[62] There is, however, a tension in Wilson and Cowell's approach which I have highlighted in relation to Wilson (1977) in Chapter Four, and which I will address in Chapter Nine where I return to Hart's approach to rules.

5.5 Discipline, Self-discipline and Character Education

Discipline and character education are not generally presented as compatible bed fellows. Discipline is seen as a restrictive, curtailment of behaviour whereas character education is presented as a form of personal enrichment. Indeed, Arthur is explicit about this demarcation – 'character education is not the same as behaviour control, discipline, training or indoctrination, it is much broader and has much more ambitious goals' (2003, p. 8) – despite some subsequent obfuscation. Accordingly, character education is 'not the same as behaviour control' but 'seek[s] to change behaviour' (p. 8). It is 'not the same as…training' but Arthur, who has elsewhere described character education as teaching 'the acquisition and strengthening of virtues' (Jubilee Centre, 2017), approvingly quotes McIntyre who states, 'virtue is not inborn, but a consequence of training' (1967, p. 64, quoted in Arthur, 2003, p. 32). And, whilst character education 'is not the same as…indoctrination', Arthur is concerned that 'talk of indoctrination and brainwashing often excuses the teacher from the difficult task of thinking what values they might consciously inculcate' (2003, p. 114).

But to what extent are discipline and character education the same? Outer discipline, which I earlier likened to character education, essentially relies on the overt threat of punishment in order to establish preferred behaviours and character education does not, but if Arthur is correct in stating that the latter 'actually seek[s] to produce certain kinds of character' (p. 8) and 'above all is about what people do' (p. 9), there is significant overlap in terms of goals. Indeed, character education falls squarely within the *OED* training model of discipline referred to in Chapter Four – 'instruction or teaching intended to mould the mind and character and instil a sense of proper, orderly conduct and action; training to behave or act in a controlled and effective manner; mental, intellectual, moral, or spiritual training or exercise'. This reinforces the clear potential for character education to involve behaviour control, training and indoctrination, despite claims to the contrary, and raises important questions as to its actual agenda.

Ofsted assesses discipline in schools in relation to the evidence of certain behaviours and attitudes. The 2024 guidelines specify three areas of behaviour which demonstrate outstanding practice:

- Pupils behave with consistently high levels of respect for others. They play a highly positive role in creating a school environment in which commonalities are identified and

celebrated, difference is valued and nurtured, and bullying, harassment and violence are never tolerated.

- Pupils consistently have highly positive attitudes and commitment to their education. They are highly motivated and persistent in the face of difficulties. Pupils make a highly positive, tangible contribution to the life of the school and/or the wider community. Pupils actively support the wellbeing of other pupils.

- Pupils behave consistently well, demonstrating high levels of self-control and consistently positive attitudes to their education. If pupils struggle with this, the school takes intelligent, fair and highly effective action to support them to succeed in their education. (2024, para. 471)

There are four types of behaviour here which evidence an outstanding approach to discipline – respect for others, being an active member of the community, self-discipline and commitment to education. And, if these are what Ofsted are looking for during their inspections, it can be assumed that they are destined to become, if they are not already, the goals of discipline for schools that want to be judged as outstanding. But how do these goals of discipline relate to those of character education?

The NatCen Social Research Report which presents findings from a DfE survey on character education in schools defines it as 'any activities that aim to develop desirable character traits' (DfE, 2018, p. 3). These include,

- Resilience, perseverance and persistence.
- Hard-work, self-control, discipline and good time-keeping.
- Self-confidence, leadership and team-working.
- Honesty, integrity and respect for others.
- Curiosity, problem-solving and motivation. (*ibid*)

They are primarily intended to equip young people to become 'well-rounded and successful adult(s)' (*ibid*). The report states that the DfE believes these traits

- Can support improved academic attainment
- Are valued by employers, and

- Can enable children to make a positive contribution to British society.

(pp. 3-4)

Thus, the aims of discipline and character education are indistinguishable. But how can this be if as Kant claims, 'morality is something so sacred and sublime that we must not degrade it by placing it in the same rank as discipline (2003 [1803], p. 84), and character education is primarily about moral development?[63]

The answer lies first in confusion about the nature of discipline and second in the way character education operates. In the previous chapter, I distinguished three types of developmental aims for discipline: functional, social and personal. The first two are driven by externally imposed (but gradually internalised) rules which govern behaviour, ensuring the smooth running of an organisation and positive social interactions respectively. These aims are achieved through what I term outer discipline. The latter aim of discipline is distinct from these in being purely self-motivated and as such is somewhat paradoxical in that it indicates one is able to moderate one's own behaviour without external control. This is what I have called inner discipline and is in fact the means by which a morally mature individual operates when Straughan's (1982) temporary bridge of rules has been crossed. With reference to the four goals of discipline identified by Ofsted, respect for others and active community membership can be located within the social and functional aims of discipline. Commitment to education is more ambiguous as it is identified through positive attitudes. However, such attitudes are assumed when students are well-behaved and hard-working, which suggests a close link with the remaining goal of self-discipline (see Duckworth and Seligman, 2005).

There is substantial support for self-discipline as an ultimate goal for school discipline and education more broadly (DfE, 2024a; Porter, 2020; Raichura, 2020; Andrews, 2020; Bear, 2010). Whilst self-discipline may *prima facie* seem akin to inner discipline, in that it involves an element of self-determination, I argue this is not the case, due to self-discipline's problematic relationship with autonomy. Hirst and Peters explain that:

> Cases of self-discipline are thought to be desirable because the submission to rules springs from the individual's own decision in which some kind of autonomy is displayed. They are contrasted with

[63] The Jubilee Centre's 'Framework for character education' is based on a model for moral development (Jubilee Centre (2017).

> cases when the acceptance of rules springs from other people's desires. (1970, pp. 125-126)

There is an assumption here that self-discipline involves submission to rules and ignores the form of self-discipline whereby an individual decides to follow a course of action (such as doing 150 sit-ups every day), even though they don't want to, because they believe it is a good thing to do. This is akin to Kant's version of self-discipline and is a truly autonomous discipline, or inner discipline. I prefer to call Hirst and Peters' first example pseudo-autonomous discipline which I distinguish from inner discipline. They argue that self-discipline is not simply a means of achieving a desirable end but that it is integral to certain virtues such as integrity and courage which they identify as 'human excellences' (p. 127). For them, self-discipline then is a virtuous goal in itself and has 'a close connection with autonomy, which has been suggested as a human excellence, and hence as an educational end' (*ibid*). They justify their view on the grounds that:

> science, mathematics, and philosophy, which … are preconditions of excellences such as autonomy, are often themselves called 'disciplines'. Presumably they are so-called because the learner submits himself to the rules which are implicit in them. His consciousness becomes gradually structured by their procedures. He thus adopts an increasingly disciplined approach. But this is part of the characterisation of an educated man. Such discipline is constitutive of what is to be aimed at in education. (p. 127)

What Hirst and Peters are describing here is the internalisation of the differing truth criteria or rules of the different disciplines. But it is difficult to see how this process of internalisation is linked to autonomy, except that the process is a voluntary one. They seem to be stretching the meaning of discipline to make it educationally palatable. Their assumption as to why academic subjects are known as disciplines is unconvincing. It is more likely, in view of their identification of the etymological root of discipline as the Latin 'disco' meaning 'I learn', that the term is a reference to these subjects as fields of learning. There is also some ambiguity as to what they mean by 'rules implicit in' subjects. It seems most likely they are referring to what Hirst has elsewhere termed 'forms of knowledge' which are not so much rules as characteristics or 'distinguishing features' (1974, p. 44). If, however, they mean the socially constructed modes of study which might be considered as the rules of engagement with a subject then these are comparable with rules of games such as bingo or football which participants submit to, but these are not referred to as disciplines. However, the form of self-

discipline that Hirst and Peters envisage is one whereby the learner 'subjects himself to the rules' and internalises these so that 'his consciousness becomes gradually structured by their procedures' (1970, p.127), which indicates a relinquishing of autonomy. This acceptance of the rules which are integral to the subject studied puts the student into a position of compliance in the sense that Hart identifies as being under an obligation. The student is still disciplined but not because of fear of punishment, rather by an understanding of the necessity of rule-following to achieve a goal.

The problem at the heart of Hirst and Peters' analysis of discipline is their belief that 'the notion of self-discipline is very closely connected with the ideal of autonomy' (1970, p. 125). This connection is at best tenuous in that self-discipline comprises a complete surrender of autonomy in order to conform to rules. It is the final paradoxical act of autonomy to choose to abandon self-determination in favour of adopting someone else's rules of conduct and the apotheosis of discipline in that it achieves total compliance without the need for a continuing threat of punishment. I distinguish self-discipline from self-determination which I argue is the case when one chooses to follow rules that one has chosen or created for oneself and so although one's behaviour may correspond to disciplined conduct it does in fact emanate from personal choice and is an example of inner discipline.

There are two major issues with self-discipline as a goal of both school discipline and character education. The first is that it seems to boil down to an acceptance of rules whether intrinsic to an activity or established by a figure of authority, and the act of rule-following is the same regardless of the individual's reason for obeying. This may result from an autonomous decision to obey, a desire to please a teacher, an effort to avoid punishment, or an unthinking act of compliance which has come about though manipulation, habituation, indoctrination or brainwashing. In an educational climate where judgments are made on the basis of visible results it may be difficult to distinguish between self-determination, self-discipline and docility (Foucault, 1977, p. 156).

Secondly, the value of self-discipline *per se* is questionable if it is actually about following rules because they create an obligation to obey. James MacAllister (2017) is dismissive of self-discipline which, following Duckworth and Seligman (2005), he elides with grit and accepts as meaning self-controlled, not impulsive or prone to distraction, able to delay gratification and make sensible financial decisions. Although he acknowledges that self-discipline has been found to favourably improve exam attainment (Duckworth and Seligman,

2005), this is at the expense of cultivating students' ability to think (MacAllister, 2017, p. 135). The form of discipline he promotes does, however, resonate with Hirst and Peters' take on self-discipline: 'discipline can be a valuable personal quality without which learners may lack the motivation, focus and structure to achieve the life goals to which they aspire' (MacAllister, 2017, p. 6). He prefers to define this as 'personal discipline' which is 'underpinned by the view that students are necessarily thoughtful, reasonable and relational in nature' (p. 136). This does have links to what I describe as inner discipline which aims at personal development. However, his version of personal discipline 'stresses that new, revised and improved social orders will only become possible when students, educators, policy makers and other community members collectively think about, value and work together towards the common good' (p. 136). This goes far beyond my conception of inner discipline which emphasises the cultivation of personal autonomy. MacAllister extends the remit of school discipline to create an overly expansive model 'in service of a wider set of purposes' so that 'communities might yet still be reborn for the better' (p. 143). He implicitly incorporates citizenship education, character education, moral education, and academic growth (pp. 136-137), under the heading of discipline. Whilst these somewhat ambitious aims for discipline demonstrate a positive attempt to position it on an educative and ethical foundation, they divert attention away from the core purpose of discipline which is to ensure compliance with rules that establish pre-determined modes of behaviour. Though discipline can provide an initial step in facilitating students' moral development, such development is primarily an educative endeavour, rather than a disciplinary one. MacAllister's adoption of a broad understanding of discipline extends its meaning beyond a rule-based model, which he rightly suggests should aim to be 'morally educational' (2019, p. 1). In addition, he claims that discipline has the potential to connect 'student interests and motives to the material to be learned' and 'helps students to overcome the human tendency towards egocentricity' (*ibid*)[64]. The suggestion that discipline is sufficient to achieve these objectives is problematic. If it is accepted that these aims are achievable simply through the use of discipline, there is a danger that this may become a justification for further extending its remit in schools. I argue it is preferable to limit the definition of discipline. By adopting the distinction I have proposed, between outer and inner discipline, and being mindful of the fact that inner discipline is always metaphorical in its use of the term 'discipline', it becomes easier to understand what might be deemed necessary in the school context (outer discipline) and what sufficient for

[64] In Chapter Six I explore how current approaches to discipline in schools actually encourage self-interest.

moral autonomy (inner discipline). My aim is to avoid the danger I am seeking to expose in this chapter, that when discipline becomes all-embracing, citizenship education and moral education may potentially be hijacked by disciplinarians and subsumed within the disciplinary venture of encouraging compliant rule following in the service of a 'common good'.

5.6 The Shortcomings of Character Education

The preceding chapters have shown that authoritarian approaches to behaviour in schools focus on two ways of creating an orderly learning environment or, more colloquially speaking, of stopping students from being a nuisance. The first operates by means of the rigorous punishment of every misdemeanour on the basis of zero tolerance and no-excuses discipline policies. The second involves inculcating good behaviour by 'creating a culture' of good behaviour which involves habituating students into virtuous action, particularly obedience, compliance, respect for adults, humility and acquiescence. To this extent school discipline and character education are two sides of the same coin and are mutually reinforcing.

Defenders of character education may argue that such an interpretation fails to acknowledge the possibility within the subject to encourage moral growth and understanding. Curren emphasises the potential for teachers to 'engage pupils in ethical enquiry that allows them to think through the moral landscape of their experience without pressure to adopt views they do not find reason to accept as their own' (2017, p. 31). In the best cases this may occur. However, Curren is a co-author of research discussed above which adopts a panel of experts to find the 'right' response to moral issues (Arthur *et al,* 2015). This certainly problematises his goal in relation to approaches which are widely promoted. Perhaps the point is that character education is not the best means of promoting moral growth and understanding because it is easily susceptible to ideologically focused agendas, which I explore in more detail in the following chapter.

Despite the optimism which Kant's claims, regarding character development and moral growth, bring to the project of character education, this is not fulfilled by current approaches. For Kant, character education forms the bridge from discipline to moral autonomy as shown in his distinction between 'very necessary' obedience and 'very important' obedience (2003 [1803], p. 86). Current approaches fail to provide such a bridge but rather offer a dead end which curtails autonomous development and ultimately creates a

means of discipline which runs in parallel with conventional approaches. This is because character education falls foul of six major problems.

First, it lends itself to manipulation by those whose interests start and finish with economic growth and success. The aims of character education endorsed by the DfE demonstrate this. The traits it identifies fall into three groups. The first comprises the functional character traits of resilience, perseverance and persistence, hard-work, self-control, discipline and good timekeeping, self-confidence, leadership, team-working and motivation (White *et al*, 2017, p. 17). These characteristics are those which lead to certain approved behaviours necessary for success in an economy driven, neo-liberal society. This neo-liberal agenda is indeed verified by the DfE's articulated aims for character education set out above, which focus on employability (academic attainment being a criterion for this) and contribution to society (DfE, 2017, p. 3). The second grouping comprises social and moral characteristics (honesty, integrity and respect for others, p. 6) and the third intellectual (curiosity and problem-solving, *ibid*). The comparatively small number of characteristics identified in these latter categories queries their significance in the broader context of the traits, and arguably they each sit quite comfortably within the functional grouping in that these are characteristics which undoubtedly fit young people to operate successfully in an economic setting. Honesty, integrity and respect for others are the attributes of good citizens and employees, and curiosity and problem solving are necessary skills for development and economic growth. In the context of the DfE's aims for character education, moral and intellectual development are not prioritised as good in themselves but as the means to the economic goal of employability. Damien Hinds, former Minister of State for Schools, appears to confirm this interpretation in his speech to the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership conference. Here he states that, 'character must be grounded in virtues, in strong values' and acknowledges that with regard to virtues 'the sort of things people have in mind are kindness, generosity, integrity, humility, tolerance and integrity' (DfE and Hinds, 2019, n.p.). Despite the emphasis on integrity, the cultivation of these not wholly uncontroversial moral traits does not appear to be in Hinds' mind as the goal of character education. In response to his own rhetoric, 'How do we instil virtues? How do we build character?' he side-steps questions of values and morality, preferring to extol the benefits of 'public school confidence', 'courage' and 'grit' (*ibid*). These seem to be presented as the foundations of good character and ultimately, he asserts, 'Character and a positive outlook are all intrinsically linked to employability' (*ibid*).

Second, character education discourages *thinking*, as it merely presents a pre-packaged set of virtues. Indeed, Ofsted's definition of character (perhaps inadvertently) advocates this:

> a set of positive personal traits, dispositions and virtues that informs their motivation and guides their conduct so that they reflect wisely, learn eagerly, behave with integrity and cooperate consistently well with others. This gives pupils the qualities they need to flourish in our society. (Ofsted, 2024, para. 338)

Despite the distinctly moral aspect to this view of character development, with its reference to motives, reflection, integrity and co-operation, the problem here is the assertion of a 'set of positive personal traits'. This reinforces the validity of the prescriptive programmes of character education discussed above where motivation and guidance for actions is non-negotiable.

Ofsted sees character development as a preparation for future flourishing 'in our society' but when independent motivation and conduct are compromised by strict guidelines a third problem arises in that character education facilitates the control and de-politicalisation of the workforce. Purpel points out:

> The values taught in schools are very much in the line of Puritan traditions of obedience, hierarchy and hard work, values which overlap nicely with the requirements of an economic system that values a compliant and industrious work force, and a social system that demands stability and order. There is an ideology here that puts very strong emphasis on control – adult control of children is mandated and legitimated and children's self-control of body and mind is demanded. (1997, p. 146)

As the aims of character education and discipline become increasingly indistinguishable, the mission of making students 'good' becomes a more pervasive venture of control as the moral rhetoric of character education becomes a justification for the inculcation of values through a process of unthinking habituation. Eccleston believes that it is the psychologising of behaviour that legitimates the behavioural intervention implicit in character education as 'discourses of well-being and character both recast virtues and moral values as psychological constructs that can be trained without requiring moral engagement' (2012, p. 476). However, Purpel is more forthright in considering the psychological explanation for moral decline favoured by character educators as a means of positioning blame with the individual rather than the state. Thus: 'society is being victimised by unvirtuous (lazy, selfish, indulgent and

indolent) individuals rather than seeing individuals as victims of an unvirtuous (rapacious, callous, competitive, and heartless) society' (1997, p. 150), and character education becomes the means of both creating and perpetuating oppression and inequality. Interestingly, Suissa has noted that character educators have achieved a 'complete expunging of the language of politics from their rhetoric' (2015, p. 110), so that references to the political are made only

> in the context of 'political participation', as if what is important is that children be prepared for participating in something already defined as the political system; not that they engage in meaningful thought and discussion about just what such a system is, what it should be, what participation in it consists in or why it may be valuable. (*ibid*)

What Suissa recognises in relation to political education is symptomatic of the bigger picture of character education this chapter has sought to expose and which can be summed up in the final three problems with character education. The fourth is that its closed vision of the good means that inculcation and training become the most useful and effective modes of teaching. This in turn leads to the fifth problem - that it does little to develop personal autonomy, creativity or a full sense of what it is to be human. Through its closing down of the possibilities of debate and critical thinking, it disciplines students into modes of behaviour which prioritise obedience over thinking for oneself. Finally, those whose 'attitudes and behaviours' have been shaped by programmes such as those of the Jubilee Centre (Arthur, 2024), may come to resemble Auden's 'Unknown Citizen':

> One against whom there was no official complaint,
> And all the reports on his conduct agree
> That, in the modern sense of an old-fashioned word, he was a saint,
> For in everything he did he served the Greater Community….
> Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd:
> Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard. (2007 [1940], p. 93)

The double yoke of the external threat of punishment combined with an internalised, pre-determined understanding of the good compounds a way of being drained of character, political engagement and free thinking. This model is very much at odds with the one Kant conceived as the product of character education: 'a free being who is able to maintain himself and take his proper place in society, keeping at the same time a proper sense of his own individuality' (2003 [1803], p. 30). For Neo-Aristotelean character educators, one's sense of self does not arise from one's autonomous self-awareness; a person's individuality is derived heteronomously, i.e. it is dependent on external factors. Kristjánsson explains: 'Aristotle's

notion of selfhood is of a self both derived from and essentially sustained through social recognition and admiration' (2006, p. 118). This notion of the self, 'sustained' by comparing oneself with others, is key to the functioning of a competitive, successful marketplace. In the next chapter, I argue that such basic assumptions, which underpin the prevailing approach to character education, mean that character education works in harmony with strict no-excuses and zero tolerance approaches to discipline to create disciplined characters suited for life in an economically driven neo-liberal society.

PART THREE

Two Underlying Assumptions of Contemporary Disciplinary Practice

CHAPTER 6

THE INFLUENCE OF NEO-LIBERALISM ON DISCIPLINE IN SCHOOLS

6.1 Introduction

The impact of economic values on education has been widely documented over the last twenty years (see Giroux, 2019; Sims, 2017; Patrick, 2013; Exley and Ball, 2011; McGregor, 2009; Apple, 2001; Tooley, 1998) and condemned for its effect on, for example, the management of schools, the undermining of teachers' professionalism, the focus on results and the over standardisation of the curriculum. Yet there has been little attention given to its effect on the use of discipline in schools, children's moral development and how the marketisation of education has affected the hidden values which permeate the lives of schools. This may be because, although the functioning of the system is liable to change, the fundamental liberal values which underpin it remain deeply entrenched. Indeed, the former Conservative government were confident enough in the immutability of these values to promote the 'core British values' of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance (DfE, 2014a, p. 5). These are clearly consistent with the modern liberal values of freedom and equality on which they are based. However, there is something of a mismatch between these values and those which lie at the heart of neo-liberalism – the economic focused form of liberalism which has developed as the ideological backdrop of children's experience in school. This chapter exposes a tension between (a) the explicit affirmation of traditional British values which schools are required to promote (DfE, 2014a) and (b) those values which children are learning as a result of the marketisation of education. This tension permeates the way children are disciplined in schools in England and has implications for their moral development.

Through the analysis in Chapters Two and Three of the values underpinning the authoritarian approaches to discipline promoted by Bennett and Birbalsingh, I have established that the economic-based values of neo-liberalism are integral to such approaches. These encourage responsibilised self-improvement through discipline and positive character development to prepare students for future economic success. This chapter addresses how these values underpin the strict disciplinary practices operating in schools and the disciplined behaviour

resulting from neo-Aristotelian character education, thus normalising a neo-liberal morality of self-interest in schools. The first section explores how the rise of economic liberalism has impacted on, and affected the values at the heart of, the business of education. The second looks at how the practice of discipline has been mobilised in the cause of furthering the neo-liberal agenda of promoting the value of self-interest in order to achieve economic efficiency. Finally, the last section draws character education into the argument by demonstrating that those programmes which rely on an Aristotelean version of virtue acquisition are complicit in promoting behaviour which encourages an individualistic, self-serving version of the good.

6.2 Economic liberalism and its Effect on Education

6.2.1 The Rise of Neo-Liberalism

Economic liberalism is founded on a belief in the overriding value of freedom. Yet, as in modern liberalism, there is some debate regarding the issue of inequality, even amongst economists who promote individual liberty. For example, Hayek (2006) is more open to modest equalising government interventions such as health insurance and a minimum wage than Friedman (1951). However, what binds such thinkers is their commitment to reducing the role of the state by prioritising the right of the individual to freely engage in and fully benefit from the economic marketplace. This shifts responsibility for survival from the state onto the individual, business or institution whose right to operate free from government intervention entails the responsibility to succeed through competitive engagement in the self-regulating market which society is destined to become.

Influenced by this approach, the Thatcher government of the 1980s set about implementing a legislative and ideological framework which had profound and enduring repercussions on the values buttressing the operation of society and consequently the provision of education in England (see for example: Exley and Ball, 2011; Paterson, 2003; Ball, 2016; Monbiot, 2016; Blakely, 2021). As the government stepped back from its responsibility to manage major state organisations, this necessitated institutions such as the education system and the NHS adopting market values in order to operate in an era which prioritised a ubiquitous market economy.

The Education Reform Act 1988 became the cornerstone of the marketisation of education. Its enactment prepared the way for a seismic shift in the *modus operandi* of education, a shift which has shaken the foundations of educational beliefs affecting the attitudes and values which have traditionally reinforced practice. The provisions of this legislation created *inter alia* the national curriculum, key stages for the assessment of attainment and a shift away from local authority control of education. Such measures allowed for comparative analyses of the success of schools through the introduction of league tables. This in turn created a platform for parental choice which theoretically would drive up standards on the basis that high performing schools would thrive, driven by their popularity and low achieving schools would necessarily 'pull their socks up' in order to attract parents and pupils to their establishments. This marketised version of educational provision rested on a model of education at variance with that which had previously operated and has had deeper ramifications than merely affecting the means by which schools identify themselves as institutions in a competitive marketplace. The result is that the commodification of the service of education has caused a shift in values which has had a significant impact on current understandings of the nature of education *per se* and, more specifically for this thesis, discipline.

The fundamental problem with straightjacketing educational provision into an economic mould is simply that it doesn't fit, unless the concept of education is reconfigured to ensure greater compatibility. Over the last thirty years there has been a fundamental shift of priorities in education in England. Ball characterises the changes emanating from the 1988 Act in the Foucauldian vein of 'technologies' (2016, p. 1046) which at once conjures ideas of mechanisation, scientific method, inputs, and outputs. The character of education is now deeply embedded in a discourse of result-based practice which is inextricably linked to economic enrichment. For example, the DfE document, *Economic Benefits of Meeting the Ambitions Set Out in the Schools White Paper*, lays bare the financial motivation behind the former Conservative government's educational initiative of 'levelling up':

> Increasing the national GCSE average grade both in English language and in maths by 0.5 is estimated to have the following benefits:
>
> - Increased discounted lifetime earnings of £9,800, for each pupil that improves their attainment in GCSE English language and maths by 0.5 grades in 2030.

- Discounted lifetime earnings benefits of £6.05bn, for a cohort of pupils in 2030.
- Whole economy benefits of £34.3bn, associated with the improvement for this cohort of pupils in 2030. (DfE, 2022a, p. 3)

Whilst the rhetoric of this scheme is one of equality through the promotion of 'opportunity for all' (DfE, 2022b), the language and tone above, which is representative of the whole document, exposes a value system where opportunity is narrowly elided with the possibility of financial enrichment. The educational focus is thus necessarily diverted from developing and nurturing students' individual, diverse talents and interests in order to equip each 'cohort' with the requisite skills to improve ascertainable achievement and ultimately fuel the economy. The fundamental value which dictates educational policy has become that of economic gain. Students are thus viewed in purely monetary terms, necessitating a literal view of enrichment whereby students' educational success and ultimate worth are judged in terms of their contribution to the national economy.

This emphasis on economic considerations has accordingly resulted in an education system which values financial efficiency and thus competitiveness, productivity, accountability, good management and the discipline to effect these aspirations. Schools compete against each other to attract the best pupils, strive to achieve the best exam results, make public these results and are subject to a regular round of inspections. They seek to ensure their success in these areas through sound management practices and a team of staff who respect and reinforce the values of the school. Ball's 'technologies' of 'market, management and performance' are, he suggests, the means by which these modes of operating have become the defining characteristics of educational practice (2016, p. 1049). He sees these changes as fundamental: 'They do not just change what we do; they also change who we are, how we think about what we do, how we relate to one another, how we decide what is important and what is acceptable, what is tolerable' (p. 1050). Whilst Ball raises an important point here, his focus is on the effect of this on the way the professionalism of teachers is understood. I am interested in the implications of how shifting understandings of acceptable behaviour, which are the root of Ball's claim, impinge on students' moral development particularly through their experience of the explicit and implicit strategies employed in schools to control the way

they behave. However, I first need to look in more detail at the shift in values which the rise of economic liberal ideology in schools has triggered.

6.2.2 Establishing the Moral Foundations of Neo-Liberalism

The previous chapters have explored how approaches to discipline in schools which value authority and unquestioning obedience are eroding the modern liberal values of democracy, freedom, equality of respect, justice, autonomy, critical reflection and the avoidance of indoctrination, which have traditionally formed the foundation of educational thinking in western democracies. I now build on this argument by examining how the rise of economic liberalism has been instrumental in a shift of emphasis within education, towards freedom understood as unfettered, self-interested individualism and a flawed notion of equality that is restricted to equality of opportunity, thereby guaranteeing inequality of outcome. I begin this section with a brief exploration of how economic liberalism, which I refer to as neo-liberalism, is conceived before moving on to an analysis of attempts to construct its driving motivation – self-interest – as an acceptable moral imperative. This provides an important first step in establishing how the values of neo-liberalism impact on disciplinary practices in schools.

In order to explore the values of neo-liberalism, it is important to establish what the term refers to. There is considerable disagreement over this as illustrated by the disputes as to its actual name – Ward notes 'the plethora of competing terms' adopted to reference it (2017, p. 3) – and a rather vague, potentially shifting notion of the actual concept. Shamir presents it as 'a complex, often incoherent, unstable and even contradictory set of practices that are organized around a certain imagination of the "market"' (2008, p. 3;[65] see also, Vercelli, 2016; Mirowski, 2014). Whilst acknowledging the potentially contentious nature of the term, I use neo-liberalism in a broad sense to refer to the ideas that underpin the belief in the value of a free market to cultivate wealth and opportunity amongst competing, self-motivated, free individuals unfettered by state intervention.

Indeed, rather than establishing the parameters of the term my main concern is with the even more problematic matter of ascertaining the ethical foundations of this ideology. This

[65] This definition has been much repeated by Ball in multiple publications (2012, p. 3; 2013, p. 6; 2015; 2016, p. 1047) and many others looking at education in this context (see for example, Tzanakou and Pearce, 2019, p. 1193; Cordelier *et al*, 2021, p. 137; Huppatz *et al,* 2019, p. 73; Pearce, 2020, p. 812).

problem could stem from the difficulty in determining the concept itself or simply from there being a lack of an identifiable moral basis. Boas and Gans-Morse's view is indicative of the former. They comment on the fact that neo-liberalism's 'meaning is not debated, and it is often not defined at all' (2009, p. 156) and go on to suggest that: 'If neoliberalism is to be of analytic rather than rhetorical value to social scientists, it must regain a common substantive meaning, returning to its etymological roots and conveying the concrete notion of a "new liberalism"' (*ibid*). This suggestion takes for granted that there is indeed a liberal basis to neo-liberalism without questioning how liberal neo-liberalism actually is.

Whilst the origins of neo-liberalism go back much further, I shall focus on the values which can be traced from its adoption through the policies of the Thatcher government in the UK. The Thatcher era is notoriously characterised as somewhat devoid of moral integrity and portrayals of the period paint a bleak ethical picture. Evans considers that 'Britain by the late 1980s had become a more grasping, greedy and mean-spirited society' (2004, p. 124) on top of being 'less tolerant … and far less humane' (p. 121). Young explains that although 'everything was justified as long as it made money … materialistic individualism was dressed as a virtue, the driver of national success' (2013). Although this seems to be straining the idea of virtue, Sutcliffe-Braithwaite argues that 'we should see Thatcherism as underpinned by a *moral* vision', a moral vision which she argues was grounded in self-interest (2018, p. 146).

The question of whether self-interest is a sufficient basis for a moral code is a moot point and one which goes to the heart of establishing the values central to neo-liberalism (see Rogers, 1997; Singer, 1997). If a neo-liberal society prioritises free market capitalism as its main goal it will necessarily be peopled by competing individuals striving for financial reward. With competition for financial gain being the motivating force for participating in that society, its citizens will have little cause to act in the interests of others with whom they are competing for finite rewards. In this context self-interest becomes the most reasonable ground on which to base decisions on how to behave, as any other would compromise one's competitive edge. Yet, according to Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, Thatcherites considered that this unfettered pursuit of personal gain was conducive to both a prosperous and a moral society because Thatcher, influenced by her Methodist roots, believed that 'self-interest was the basis of the "bourgeois virtues" of hard work and responsibility which she aimed to spread' (2018, p. 146). Whilst hard work can be seen as a product of self-interest in that it can bring about great personal

reward, it is more difficult to reconcile self-interest with acting out of care for others. Thatcher disagreed. She asserted:

> There is not and cannot possibly be any hard and fast antithesis between self-interest and care for others, for man is a social creature, born into family, clan, community, nation, brought up in mutual dependence. The founders of our religion made this a cornerstone of morality. The admonition: love thy neighbour as thyself, and do as you would be done by, expresses this … This embodies the great truth that self-regard is the root of regard for one' s fellows. (1977, p. 12)

By eliding self-regard with self-interest, Thatcher presents a totally misleading interpretation of Christian teaching. Whereas self-interest involves prioritising one's own interests above those of others, the teaching of Jesus about loving one's neighbour as oneself precisely rejects the prioritisation of one's own interests and instead promotes the value of treating others equally. Thatcher thus misrepresents the core doctrines of Christianity, from which she claims to be drawing her morality. The teachings of the New Testament actually promote selflessness: 'but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain' (Matthew 5. 39-41, *AV*).[66] They also disparage the idea of a market economy as an appropriate sphere for moral growth: 'Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth … but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven … For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also … Ye cannot serve God and mammon' (Matthew 6. 19, 20, 21, 24, *AV*). Yet, alongside Thatcher's inconsistency with the religious doctrine she claims to espouse, she ignores one of the central strands of her own economic policy – that a market economy presupposes competition and competition presupposes putting one's interests before those of others. Essentially, one cannot reconcile the prioritisation of one's own interests with Thatcher's 'regard for one's fellow man' (1977, p. 12).

[66] There is an argument to be raised that behaving morally in accordance with religious teaching is acting out of self-interest as it is done on the basis that one will achieve eternal salvation. However, this is a rather cynical view of religious belief which can be challenged by the argument that religious believers act morally because they believe it is the right thing to do.

Though Thatcher's appropriation of a firm religious foundation for neo-liberal values is novel, her wider sentiment is broadly in line with that of Adam Smith's 'invisible hand'.[67] He depicts the businessman who:

> intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. (1976 [1776], p. 456)

Whilst the 'invisible hand' resonates with a divine force for good it fails to address issues of moral responsibility – if one does not intend any good and if the conduct which creates the oblique positive outcomes is not intrinsically good, can one ever be deemed to have behaved in an ethical manner? Hayek seems to dismiss such a query:

> We still esteem doing good only if it is done to benefit specific known needs of known people, and regard it as really better to help one starving man we know than to relieve the acute need of a hundred men we do not know; but in fact we generally are doing most good by pursuing gain. (2013, p. 302)

But as Whyte observes, Hayek 'offers little other than "confident assertion" that the market will self-correct, and the pursuit of self-interest by the rich will bring "succour" to the poor.' (2020, p. 7).

Seeking to reconcile self-interest with a viable ethical code in the context of a market economy is problematic. Hayek's evolutionary explanation of the development of human values is at least consistent with the nature of economic competition and it is somewhat telling that he does not offer an ethical foundation. As Foucault succinctly puts it: 'economics is an atheistic discipline; economics is a discipline without God' (2008, p. 282), and perhaps the best explanation of the 'morals of the market' is that of Whyte who defines them as 'a set of individualist, commercial values that prioritized the pursuit of self-interest above the development of common purposes' (2019, p. 11). If self-interest, seemingly

[67] David Steel, then leader of the Liberal party claimed, in a speech in the House of Commons, that Thatcher was 'pervert[ing] the free market theories of Adam Smith by transplanting them to Britain in 1980 … plundering the Liberal philosophical tradition … [to] suit her own argument. Those elements which enhance individual liberty, while stressing compassion, humanity and the claims of a wider society, she completely ignores' (1980, column 31). For an argument which suggests that Smith's ideas create the basis for a morally acceptable market economy, see MacDonald (2023).

unhampered by a viable ethical code, is the key attribute needed to operate successfully in society, how does this affect the way children are taught and more importantly for this thesis, disciplined, in schools whose management has become inextricably linked to the values of a neo-liberal market economy?

6.3 An Economic Model of Discipline

6.3.1 The Value in the Commodification of Discipline

In view of the strong emphasis that schools place on behaviour, the legal requirement for them to uphold fundamental British values and the focus on character education as integral to spiritual, moral social and cultural education, it is easy to dismiss concerns about pupils developing values (see DfE, 2014a; Ofsted, 2024, paras. 336-338; DfE 2019). It seems that this aspect of education is extremely well catered for. However, this section will argue that despite the rhetoric of British values there is a hidden moral curriculum at the heart of the prevailing approach to discipline and character education which aligns with the key value of neo-liberalism – self-interest.

Schools are deeply committed to the importance of students behaving 'appropriately'. There is a strong belief that good behaviour is the foundation for success in school and later life. Indeed, there is a body of material which gives credence to such a view (Spengler and Damian, 2018; Bennett, 2017, p. 9). However, as the previous chapters have argued, this correlation is open to debate. The emphasis on behaviour, exemplified in a school like Michaela, operates first, to position it as central to a good education and second, to deploy it as a useful distraction in the neo-liberal endeavour. It serves to direct attention away from central issues within education such as lack of government funding which has resulted in a lack of resources and staffing, and impacts negatively on student experience and staff morale.[68] A focus on student behaviour positions responsibility for any failings within the system in the hands of first, students who are presented as out of control and not working hard enough, second, teachers who aren't discipling their students, and third, bureaucrats

[68] A report for the Institute for Fiscal Studies confirms a reduction in funding since 2010: 'we have just seen a historically unusual real-terms cut in spending per pupil' (Sibieta, 2024, p. 6).

who are wasting time by diverting attention from the 'real' issues.[69] In an interview, prior to the February 2023 teachers' strike, Birbalsingh posited student behaviour as a major problem for teachers, claiming that 'it is the bureaucracy and the behaviour that we need to fix. But, as usual, we think the solution is more money' (quoted by Turner, 2023).[70] Such rhetoric presents students as a root problem within the education system with the implicit corollary that a comprehensive programme of successful discipline will improve them and their attainment. This justifies strict discipline policies in schools, the dual purpose of these being first, to 'improve' schools and make them more popular in the educational market; and second, through this 'improvement', to create enhanced career prospects for students which will ultimately fuel economic growth.[71] Schools take the task of steering young people in the 'right' direction very seriously, and in line with government policy, manage student behaviour to fulfil their obligation to ensure 'calm, safe and supportive environments which children and young people want to attend and where they can learn and thrive' (DfE, 2024a, p. 5).

As I have discussed earlier in this thesis, the central tenet of discipline in schools is that if young people know and understand the consequences of their actions, they will quickly learn which modes of conduct are acceptable (DfE 2024a, p. 11). In Chapter Four, I argued that implicit within this belief is the idea that if students are seen to be complying with the expectations of behaviour policies, this is indicative of their developing moral awareness. Ofsted criteria for assessing this include students' 'ability to recognise the difference between right and wrong' and their 'understanding of the consequences of their behaviour and actions' (2024, para. 346). In the context of school behaviour strategies these criteria are conflated. Consequently, being moral becomes a matter of how well students conform to a school's behaviour policy. This being so, the moral content of, and hidden curriculum operating within, such policies is a key issue, which has important implications for the kind of society the students, subject to this approach to school discipline, will populate.

[69] See DfE and Gove (2010), where the then Secretary of State for Education sets out the then newly elected Conservative coalition government's approach to education, stating, 'We believe that teachers - not bureaucrats and politicians - should run schools.' This shifts responsibility from the state into the hands of teachers, a move consistent with the neo-liberal approach of reducing state intervention in the lives of individuals.
[70] Chapter Three of this thesis has examined the role of Birbalsingh in current educational discourse and her role in influencing popularist thinking on education, particularly in relation to behaviour.
[71] See Stevenson, who argues that concern for the moral decline of society has spawned the growth of the academy school system which is tasked with 'the revival of a "civilizing project" aimed at the transformation of the working-class and ethnically diverse population' (2015, p. 539).

The very fact that students' moral growth is now a matter of assessment to be judged alongside other performance indicators demonstrates the all-pervasive spread of economic values in schools.[72] To measure this intangible aspect of development necessitates its commodification, so that, in order to show they know the difference between right and wrong, children have to be demonstrably 'good'. This emphasis on Ball's neo-liberal 'technology' of performativity, noted above, and on measurability, undermines the essence of ethical conduct relating to motives for action and inevitably relates moral conduct to a narrow, context-driven notion of what it is to be good.

This commodification of student's ethical conduct is exemplified in the work of Doug Lemov,[73] whose approach to discipline also provides a useful context for the subsequent discussion on the use of consequences in schools. He champions their use as an efficient means of moulding students' behaviour and gives the following example as a useful approach: 'Scholar dollars are an example of a consequence system that is designed to be incremental and therefore allow teachers to negatively reinforce behaviour at a low cost. Typically students start the week with 50 scholar dollars. Calling out might result in a two-dollar deduction' (2021, p. 474). This is an efficient way of rewarding and punishing children through the use of a financially derived incentive.[74] It allows an accurate measure of behaviour violations each week by calculating a student's financial standing whilst providing students with the opportunity to learn that certain forms of behaviour can be financially beneficial and others detrimental. Of course, scholar dollars are a metaphor, but the use of such terminology is loaded with neo-liberal assumptions and expectations about the basis of personal enrichment. This linkage of behaviour to financial loss and gain has serious potential to affect students' motives for action. Deciding on a course of behaviour becomes a matter of calculating how much one could potentially gain or lose as a

[72] See, for example, the National Behaviour Survey Reports (DfE, 2024c).

[73] The work of Lemov, an American writer on behaviour and other teaching techniques, has been very influential in England, particularly with the Teach First programme and multi-academy trusts. The influence of his behaviour control techniques can be seen at, for example, Michaela and Dixons Multi-Academy Trust. He has acted as adviser to the Ark Multi-Academy Trust and has been commended, along with Tom Bennett, by Will Bickford-Smith, who was appointed as a Senior Strategy Advisor at the Department for Education under the Conservative government (see Ark Academy, 2015; Bickford-Smith, 2020). On the neo-liberal bent of Lemov and the Teach First programme see, respectively, Cushing (2021) and Elliot (2018).

[74] Lemov's whole approach seems grounded on an ideal of economic efficiency so that he presents the process of applying consequences in the language of the market. When a teacher applies a punishment, it is presented as akin to a brisk, objective financial exchange: 'Consistently using the same language reduces the transaction costs involved with giving consequences, and also makes them more legible to students, for example, "Michael please don't call out, two scholar dollars"' (2021, p. 450). Behaviour management becomes subject to the same expectations as any other interaction in the marketplace.

consequence of it. For such an approach to be successful the motive for action necessarily becomes self-interest. Although consistent with the DfE's agenda of preparing young people to operate successfully in the economic market, the 'scholar dollar' raises serious questions about the kind of moral agents that future employees will become. Although the 'scholar dollar' is not currently used in schools in England there are analogous systems of merits and demerits whereby students accumulate points to receive rewards which can often be used to make purchases in a school's reward shop.[75] The market-based foundations of these approaches are akin to those inherent in Lemov's approach and have similar implications for students' moral learning.

I shall now look at the nature of consequences in more detail and how their use as a means of managing students' behaviour has the potential to affect young people's moral development in line with neo-liberal values.

6.3.2 Consequences as a Means of Neo-Liberal Behaviour Modification

In Chapter Four I began to explore how the rhetoric of consequences permeates both government policy and guidance on behaviour, and Ofsted's approach to inspecting this aspect of school provision (see DfE, 2024a; Bennett, 2017; Ofsted, 2024). Whilst the use of consequences is now the dominant approach to discipline in schools, it is the subject of considerable debate (cf. Mintz, 2023; Arjo, 2020; Melling and Swinson, 1998; Rigoni and Walford, 1998; Wood *et al*, 1996; Robinson and Maines, 1996, 1994**;** Maines and Robinson, 1995; Swinson and Melling, 1995). It is based on the presupposition that young people can be conditioned through the consequences of their actions. The basic premise is that they like being praised and correspondingly don't like being punished, therefore, they will ultimately engage solely in behaviour which produces a pleasant result. But what does such conditioning mean in terms of young people's understanding of moral behaviour? If it is accepted that consequences are a means of conditioning students to behave in specific ways, as I argued in Chapter Four, they teach nothing about behaving for the right reasons. Yet, if as the proponents of consequences argue, they force children to make choices about how to behave by encouraging them to consider the implications of their actions, consequences provide a positive means of developing autonomous action. In this section I argue that rather than

[75] Companies such as Lawford Education Ltd market comprehensive rewards packages for schools; see Pupil Reward Points (2023).

encouraging moral autonomy consistent with moral liberal values, the use of consequences provides a means of embedding self-interest and other neo-liberal values.

6.3.3 The Operation of Consequences

The use of consequences in schools became widespread throughout the Thatcher years with the use of 'assertive discipline' which was developed in the 1970s by Lee and Marlene Canter (1976). Like no-excuses and zero-tolerance approaches, its focus is on training teachers to assert their authority and take control in the classroom. This is achieved through the use of consequences. The Canters explain consequences as 'actions which students know will occur should they choose to break the rules of the classroom' (1992, p. 82) whereas 'punishment is something teachers *do* to students' (p. 82). Punishment is imposed by an active adult on a passive pupil. Consequences, however, are presented rather differently. They are 'actions' which 'occur' due to a rule infraction, but, distinct from punishments, the 'action' is devoid of a doer. This sits rather awkwardly with the Canters' earlier advice to teachers: 'by carefully planning effective consequences, and by determining what *you will do* when students misbehave, you will have a course of action to follow' (p. 80, my emphasis). So, in order to make the distinction between punishments and consequences a reality, two sleights of hand are required. First, consequences 'must be *seen as* natural outcomes of inappropriate behaviour' (p. 82, my emphasis). Thus 'actions' come to be defined as 'natural outcomes', avoiding the need of a doer. This fabrication of inevitability removes responsibility from the teacher and the necessity of accountability in the administering of consequences. Second, consequences 'must be *presented to* students as a choice' to 'place responsibility where it belongs, on the student' (p. 81, my emphasis). How does this operate in practice?

Action A is defined by teacher T as unacceptable. T prescribes C as a consequence if A occurs. If student S chooses to do A, does C inevitably occur? There are two possible outcomes depending on whether T witnesses A. If T does not, then A will occur without C. If T does see S doing A, they must police and judge the wrong in order for C to occur. Thus, S might choose A, but as C only occurs when T intervenes, S does not choose C. Consequences, on this view, are thus what 'teachers *do* to students', i.e. punishment. However, both the choice fallacy and the inevitability fallacy of consequences in this approach operate to remove responsibility from the teacher with regard to punitive discipline.

This responsibilisation of the student is a familiar neo-liberal strategy, which reduces accountability and ultimately any moral culpability from those who create and implement government policy. Guthman explains that within the discourse of neo-liberalism,

> to exercise choice freely, one must be shaped, guided, and moulded into one capable of exercising freedom. The neoliberal critique of too much intervention returns improvement to the individual, who is expected to exercise choice and become responsible for his or her risks. In that way, neoliberalism also produces a hyper-vigilance about control and self-discipline. (2009, p. 193)

As I discuss later in this section, choice, in the guise of freedom to take control of one's own behaviour, is a means by which students are acclimatised to the expectations of a neo-liberal society through the operation of school discipline. I now examine three types of consequences and then explore the different kinds of moral learning that result from them.

6.3.4 Three Types of Consequences

A consequence is something that occurs as a direct result of a preceding action or circumstance and may be positive or negative in character. In an educational context the essential element of a consequence is its direct correlation with the act that produces it. If a consequence is predictable students can learn from the outcomes of their previous actions to make predictions about the results of their conduct in similar and novel situations. On this basis, judgments about the most appropriate form of behaviour in particular situations will be made on consequentialist principles. However, in order for this to be effective in educating young people towards moral behaviour they must have some means of assessing the value of a consequence.

Consequences fall into two distinct categories, natural and constructed, with the latter comprising both logical and contrived consequences.

i) Natural Consequences

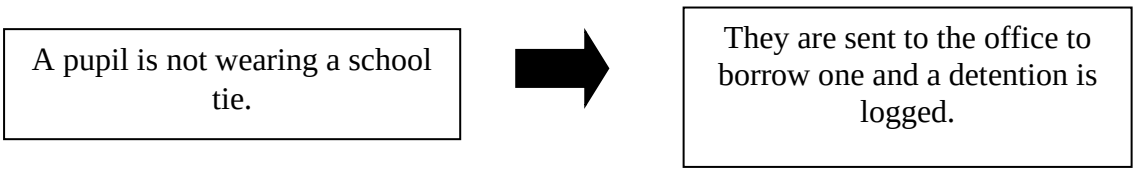
These occur in the natural course of events as a result of an action without any third-party intervention. For example, I put my hand in a fire, therefore I burn my hand. There is an inevitability about this consequence due to the characteristics of fire and human skin and I am unlikely to repeat the action due to the pain of burning. I learn from the physical consequence of the act on myself.

ii) Logical Consequences

In schools, teachers have a duty to protect their students from certain natural consequences and by a process of reasoned extension can seek to develop students' understanding of behaving appropriately through logical consequences. It would be unethical to allow students to burn their hands in order to learn about the dangers of fire. Instead, a set of safety rules will be established to avoid burns. For example, in the science lab students will not be allowed to take part in practical experiments if not wearing goggles or gloves when using a Bunsen burner. The consequence suffered for inappropriate conduct by a fire source is logically shifted from a direct physical one to what might be termed a loss of privilege for a rule violation. It is constructed in the best interests of the child to bypass the natural consequence but paradoxically to teach him what he would have learned if it had not been avoided. The experience of this consequence is a long way from the natural one but can be justified in terms of safety and educational benefit for the student and would be called a logical consequence. Dreikurs and Cassel define these as 'structured and arranged by the adult', and needing to 'be experienced by the child as logical in nature' (1972, p. 62). So, logical consequences are (a) created by an individual with the authority to do so, (b) for educative purposes and (c) must have sufficient connection with the originating act to be deemed justified and reasonable.

iii) Contrived Consequences

When a constructed consequence lacks one of the criteria required for it to be termed logical it may be referred to as a contrived consequence (see Tauber, 2007, pp. 155-7). This lacks logical connection with the originating act and is thus purely arbitrary. Its effectiveness 'resides within the teacher's authority' (Shrigley, 1985, p. 30) and so ultimately its purpose is to teach respect for authority *per se*. The Canters do not stipulate the need for logical consequences in their approach to discipline and contrived consequences are an inevitable feature of their approach and that of no-excuses or zero tolerance discipline. The consequences that students commonly experience for not having correct uniform in schools fall into this category. For example, the Michaela school has the following behaviour and consequence regime:



(Michaela, 2024c, section E)

The connection between the action – not wearing a tie – and the consequence – detention – is tenuous. It is neither natural nor logical, and it is difficult to establish a rational connection between wearing a tie and detention. It might be justified by the claim that in suffering an unpleasant consequence, students will learn the importance of rule following *per se* (although the educational value of this is a moot point), looking smart, or conforming to the expectations of the group. However, the consequence of the action remains contrived and difficult for students to accept as just (see Thornberg, 2008a).

6.3.5 Learning through Consequences

It has become apparent that in the shift from a natural consequence to a constructed consequence, rules have a role to play. Indeed, Curwin and Mendler explain, 'Consequences are directly related to the rule. They are both logical and natural, and they help the rule violator learn accepted behaviour from the experience' (1988. p. 70). However, a further distinction needs to be made. In the case of a natural consequence the rule emanates from the consequence – once I burn my hand I will, most likely, make it a rule for myself not to put it in a fire. Whereas for a logical or contrived consequence to be constructed there must be a rule establishing the required behaviour in place before it can be violated, and the consequence applied. The learning process involved in the experience of a natural consequence is thus very different from that of a logical consequence. Natural consequences facilitate a process of ascertaining appropriate behaviour for oneself, encouraging inner discipline and autonomous learning. Constructed consequences, logical and contrived, encourage compliance with a mode of behaviour which has been pre-determined and so are a form of outer discipline. However, there is a further distinction to be made between the two types of constructed consequences. For a consequence to be considered logical it should have a justifiable correlation with the potential outcome emanating from the act that activates it. This is not possible with a contrived consequence for as we have seen above, its relation to the triggering act is a fiction which merely teaches students about the arbitrary nature of some rules.

The learning process which takes place through the use of constructed consequences is an example of Skinner's (1953) operant conditioning which, as noted in Chapter Four, is

deployed to manipulate voluntary conduct to accord with a pre-determined model of behaviour. On one level, this appears to accord with the role of the school which is tasked with the duty to develop students' behaviour to equip them for life as independent adults in a democratic society. However, the use of consequences to mould students' behaviour raises questions about the type of citizens this method of discipline creates by virtue of the ideological and ethical assumptions which underpin it.

The rhetoric on which the use of consequences in schools is founded is that of freedom and the right to choose one's own fate. For example, Andrews, a teacher at Michaela, claims, 'When rules are explicitly communicated and consistently upheld, the consequences of poor decisions are not "my teacher's fault"; the pupil knew the rule and chose to break it' (2020, p. 300). She later explains, 'instead of negative freedom, we seek for our pupils a higher, positive freedom – their freedom to be the masters of their fate' (p. 302). Similarly, Canter advises teachers: 'by letting the students know they will be choosing whether they do or do not receive consequences, you are no longer the bad guy' (2010, p. 93).

I have touched on the process of responsibilisation through the use of consequences above and I shall now argue that although the promoters of consequences claim to offer students a choice, this method of discipline trains young people into a mindset of obedience by distorting the notion of freedom and subtly promoting the benefit of acting out of self-interest.

Canter focuses on consequences as a choice for students and offers the following example of good practice for teachers:

> Teacher: Nick, it is time to get to work on your journal entry.
> Nick: Why are you on me? Other students haven't started.
> Teacher: Nick, that's not the point. You need to get to work on your journal entry.
> Nick: But why do I have to if other students don't?
> Teacher: I said that's not the point; time to start on your journal.
> Nick: Man, you're on my case.
> Teacher: Nick, you have a choice: immediately start working on your journal, or you will choose to receive lunch detention. (2010, p. 3)

In this scenario Nick is being taught to follow the rules and expectations of the classroom – getting on with work. Side-stepping the question of whether he is being unfairly targeted and

is justified in his response, he is forced to make a decision on the basis of the consequences of his chosen action, not on the value of the required act. He is encouraged to understand and make sense of the situation in terms of its outcome. Reflection and discussion on the reasons why he ought to get on with his work, if his behaviour might be adversely affecting others, or if an injustice has indeed occurred, is not possible.[76] With this focus away from any moral considerations, the reasons for Nick's 'choice' are narrowed.[77] His judgment about his options becomes centred on assessing the potential harm he will suffer by virtue of the detention. The relevant questions for him to consider, in deciding whether to comply or suffer a detention, become, what are the consequences for myself and what choice should I make to ensure I suffer the minimum pain and maximum benefit? The management of Nick's behaviour depends solely on the expectation that he will not want to suffer a detention as it is clearly a punishment. In fact, he is not being offered a choice at all; if punishments were to become an outcome that people would choose, they would rapidly lose their validity. So, in forcing Nick to 'choose' in this way, the teacher directs him towards making a judgement on what course of action to follow solely on the basis of self-interest.

In schools which operate a zero tolerance or no-excuses approach to discipline – the norm in academy schools spawned from the marketisation of education – consequences have to be applied consistently which restricts the possibility of discussion.[78] When this is the case there is no opportunity for students to learn about the justifications of the rule and learn to act on the basis of underlying principles.[79] The main consideration becomes the efficient and consistent application of punishment for rule violations.

The problem with consequences is the illusion of freedom they create through the rhetoric of choice. Students are not free to take control of their own behaviour but have to submit to being controlled because it seems to be in their best interests to do so. By being given the

[76] As Canter explains, 'When teachers with the Voice [ie. authority] tell students to do something, you'll never see them engaging in a discussion or argument with them until they do what they have asked' (2010, p. 3).
[77] Bennett openly concedes the reality of choice for students: 'the language of choice gives notional control of the situation to the student; they can pick an option. In reality the teacher is framing the reality of the situation, and suggesting to the student how they should view their present moment' (2020a, p. 312).
[78] Bennett's government-sponsored review of behaviour in schools states, 'All schools should have a clear and clearly communicated policy on consequences, what they are, how they are incurred and avoided. Most importantly, they must be used consistently, across the whole community. The absence of this consistency is one of the key factors in the failure of a school behaviour policy to sustain or support good behaviour' (2017, p. 42). This demonstrates both the ubiquity of consequences in schools and the uncompromising approach with they are to be applied.
[79] I develop an argument regarding the value of students understanding the principles underpinning school rules in Chapter Nine.

choice to make the 'right' decision, students are, as Guthman describes above, being 'shaped, guided, and moulded into … the individual, who is expected to exercise choice and become responsible for his or her risks' (2009, p. 193). Indeed, when one makes a decision solely in the interest of oneself, the risks relate only to oneself. The disciplinary practice of consequences reinforces this atomistic model of morality, aptly preparing students to become moral agents equipped to operate in a market economy.

6.4 Character Education and Neo-Liberal Morality

Overt behaviour policies are, however, only one means of cultivating certain 'desirable' behaviours in young people. In Chapter Five, I argued that character education programmes such as those promulgated by the Jubilee Centre, whilst shrouded in a rhetoric of Aristotelian morality, are essentially a form of ideologically charged discipline. I also explored how the aims of discipline and character education are becoming inextricably linked, as virtues are commodified into bitesize packages to be consumed and assumed by children, to make them into demonstrably 'good' students. I described how character education, with its pre-determined model of the good, seeks to shape 'the attitudes and behaviours of the British people' (Arthur 2024). Yet, despite this utopian vision there has been a recent flurry of concern at the role of character education in the acculturation of young people into a neo-liberal mindset which prioritises the individual at the expense of the wider community (see for example, Hart, 2022; Jerome and Kisby, 2020; Allen and Bull, 2018). Jerome and Kisby argue that character education is founded on a 'highly individualised and self-centred' notion of character (2020, p. 20) and Suissa sees it as 'an educational approach that puts all pedagogical emphasis on individuals' (2015, p. 114). Both works are centrally concerned with the threat character education poses to students' potential to be thinking, active, engaged, citizens, an issue which I have discussed in relation to discipline in schools in Chapter Five. In the previous section of the present chapter, I argued that the use and threat of consequences in schools promotes a moral code which priorities self-interest as the foundation for making the 'right' choice. On the basis that character education is a further means of disciplining young people, I now focus more narrowly on how the individualistic ideology which underpins the character education packages that are widespread in schools in England is consistent with and reinforces the moral agenda I have located in approaches to discipline operating in these schools.

In the postscript to the third edition of *The Jubilee Centre Framework for Character Education in Schools* (Jubilee Centre, 2022) it is claimed that 'the Jubilee Centre has … addressed explicitly the charge that an Aristotelian character education is somehow individualistic and anti-social' and refers the reader to articles by two of its members, Andrew Peterson (2020) and Kristján Kristjánsson (2022). The Jubilee Centre is fiercely defensive of its position as 'a leading informant on policy and practice' (Jubilee Centre, 2023) and Kristjánsson as a seasoned scholar of Aristotle is well-practised in using his knowledge to defend this position. However, I shall now look more closely at his interpretation of Aristotle and the use of Aristotle as a model for the contemporary neo-liberal development of moral understanding in schools.

For Aristotle, the ultimate goal of life is *eudaimonia* – the state of human flourishing – which the Jubilee Centre suggests is 'now widely considered to be the ultimate aim of schooling' (2022, p. 18). But if this is in fact the *raison d'être* of schooling, it raises questions about what constitutes human flourishing and who is qualified to act as the arbiter of such a judgement. According to Aristotle, 'human good turns out to be activity of soul in conformity with excellence, and if there are more than one excellence, in conformity with the best and most complete' (*NE*, I, 1098a, 16-18).[80] However, the attainment of this state seems to be dependent on one's circumstances as 'it needs external goods as well; for it is impossible, or not easy to do noble acts without the proper equipment' (*ibid*). Such equipment comprises

> friends and riches and political power as instruments; and there are some things the lack of which takes the lustre from blessedness, as good birth, satisfactory children, beauty; for the man who is very ugly in appearance or ill-born or solitary and childless is hardly happy … happiness seems to need this sort of prosperity in addition for which reason some identify happiness with good fortune, though others identify it with virtue. (*NE*, I, 1099b, 1-8)

In the aftermath of the Johnson government it is difficult to extricate such a view from notions of the good life which seem to depend on power, influence, wealth and taking advantage of the goodwill of others whilst prioritising external markers of success and the neo-liberal obsession with material aggrandisement.[81] But this view is far from that of Aristotle who urges, 'we must not think that the man who is to be happy will need many

[80] I use the following abbreviations in references to Aristotle's works: *EE*, *Eudemian Ethics*; *NE*, *Nichomachean Ethics*; *PA*, *Parts of Animals*; *Pol*, *Politics.*

[81] See Oborne's (2021) perspective on the morality of Johnson's government.

things or great things, merely because he cannot be blessed without external goods; for self-sufficiency and action do not depend on excess' (*NE*, X, 1179a, 1-3). As in all things for Aristotle, there is a balance to be struck in the terms of such prosperity and consequently, although he is committed to the idea of private property, for this is the basis for progress, he believes in common usage and commends the Spartans who 'use one another's slaves, and horses, and dogs, as if they were their own' (*Pol*, II, 1263a, 37-38). The virtue of such usage lies in the personal fulfilment it affords as 'there is the greatest pleasure in doing a kindness or service to friends or guests or companions, which can only be rendered when a man has private property' (*Pol*, II, 1263b, 7). At the heart of virtuous action there seems to be a self-gratification that is at once its motivation and its fulfilment, for in being in a state of virtue one achieves *eudaimonia*, the pleasure of which drives one to maintain it. The prerequisite for the attainment of this is self-love. According to Aristotle, 'the good man should be a lover of self (for he will both himself profit by doing noble acts, and will benefit his fellows)' (*NE*, IX, 1169a, 12-13). So, when Thatcher promoted 'the great truth that self-regard is the root of regard for one' s fellows' (1977, p. 12) to justify the self-interest which lies at the heart of neo-liberal policy, rather than there being a religious foundation for this, the true source of her claim seems to be Aristotle. He believes that good men are moved to act altruistically by the desire to attain nobility: 'they will throw away wealth too on condition that their friends will gain more; for while a man's friend gains wealth, he achieves nobility; he is therefore assigning the greater good to himself' (*NE*, IX, 1169a, 26-29).

But is this truly altruistic? Although the friends benefit from the good man's renunciation of wealth the greatest ultimate gain accrues to the good man. The benefit received by the friend rather than being the desired end becomes the means to the good man achieving *eudaimonia*. The means in such a scenario are commendable, but the motive for action – achieving the greater good for myself, i.e. self-interest – raises questions about the motivation of the good man. Such questions seem particularly apposite in the context of neo-Aristotelian character education as promoted by the Jubilee Centre, particularly when this underlying assumption as to the basis of ethical conduct is so closely aligned with the moral code of neo-liberalism.

Kristjánsson's extensive work on Aristotle forms the backbone of the Jubilee Centre's approach to character education and thus provides a useful context for understanding the ethical and philosophical underpinnings of neo-Aristotelian character education which I argue neatly harmonises with neo-liberal ideology to discipline young people. Indeed, he

characterises his *Aristotelian Character Education* as 'a personal crusade as much as an academic pursuit' and explains that 'it holds the very key to the research focus of the research centre where I am currently employed' (2015, p. 41). His personal involvement means that his own philosophical standpoint and interpretation of Aristotle has a significant impact on the direction of the Jubilee's Centre's work and, due to the influence the Centre has had on government policy in this area, the direction of this aspect of educational provision in England.[82] What is striking about Kristjánsson's work is his ability to express controversial ideas through a rhetoric of academic palatability. For example, in his critique of what he arbitrarily terms 'the five mantras of liberalism' (2007, p. 177), he demonstrates at best a conscious sidestepping of the salient issues and at worst a wilful misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the foundations of liberalism.[83] Ironically, he assigns similar failings to those who seek to query the values motivating the work of the Jubilee Centre, who, he claims, 'have systematically circumvented the neo-Aristotelian credentials of the Centre and its uniqueness in the UK character-education landscape – or, where that fails, have offered inaccurate accounts of what neo-Aristotelianism really is' (2021, p. 375).[84]

The problem is that like the authors he condemns, Kristjánsson is 'preoccupied with hustling [his] own agendas, simply enlisting Aristotle as a mouthpiece, a ventriloquist's dummy, to further those agendas' (2007, p. 175). This is not to deny his extensive and committed scholarship in the field of Aristotle, but rather to suggest that his view is merely one interpretation; and in view of its potential impact on the moral education of a generation of

[82] See Arthur's *Policy Entrepreneurship in Education* (2017) where he gives advice on how academics can create impact with their work and uses the Jubilee Centre as an example of how to link research and policy.
[83] Kristjánsson's assertion that 'liberalism has become something of a latter-day Leviathan that disregards or squashes every idea that it cannot appropriate for its own aggrandisement' (2007, p. 178) is rather ironic in light of the efforts of what Allen and Bull term the 'UK character education policy community' (2018). Jerome and Kisby demonstrate how this community 'compromises academics, politicians, think tanks, and other organisations and individuals, and … seeks to influence the policy agenda in this area' (2019, p. 41).
[84] See for example, Kristjánsson's claim that 'Liberalism inflates the value of autonomous choice' (2007, p. 178). He argues that the choice itself is subordinate to its role in expressing and fulfilling one's personal values. Rather disingenuously, he eschews autonomy on the grounds that 'tellingly, Aristotle does not even possess a concept of autonomy in the modern sense' (*ibid*). It is unclear quite what this *tells* us, as Kristjánsson fails to elaborate other than to assure the reader that 'after you acquire Aristotelian *phronesis*, it does matter that choices are yours, but what matters more is that they are morally informed and proper' (*ibid*). The clear implication is that there is something amoral about the liberal exercise of autonomy. This demonstrates a gross failure to engage with the key principles of liberalism. The exercise of rationality is a means of resolving the conflict between the competing values of freedom and equality and although a choice may demonstrate one's personal leaning towards one value rather than the other, an autonomous choice is concerned to achieve one's best approximation of justice. Thus, it is not about prioritising oneself but tempering one's interests in consideration of those of others.

young people in England, a concerning one, particularly as a result of the role I argue character education has in disciplining and controlling young people's behaviour.

It is clear that Kristjánsson is keen to defend the Jubilee Centre and the pivotal role of Aristotle in the evolution and maintenance of its vision. Therefore, I wish to pre-empt the response my argument will elicit. My claim is that the character education package created by the Jubilee Centre works in harmony with the neo-liberal agenda operating within schools due to the main motivation for Aristotelian virtue being self-interest. Kristjánsson might feel that he has dealt with such a claim in his rebuttal of ten 'assumptions' about Aristotle. My interpretation seems to fall broadly within assumption H: 'Aristotelian virtue is primarily about self-improvement. There is little room for other regarding virtues (benevolence does not even count as a virtue) and therefore little to be learned from Aristotle about why we should help people in dire straits' (Kristjánsson, 2007, p. 5). At the heart of this 'assumption' is the claim that within Aristotelian thinking the individual is prioritised in the quest to attain *eudaimonia,* at the expense of the wider community. Unsurprisingly, Kristjánsson asserts 'Assumption H is wrong' (p. 137) as, he concludes, is each of the other nine, but his own assumptions resonating through the body of his work tell a different story. In fact, he endorses 'assumption H' when he explains that 'Aristotle takes for granted the rationality of a prudential outlook, according to which the reasonableness of morality must ultimately appeal to prudential considerations; namely, to the agent's own interests' (2006, p. 105). There is clearly an element of academic playfulness in his work as he seeks to challenge conventional views on what constitutes virtuous action in his promotion of jealousy, pride and shame as virtues fitting for a well-rounded and fulfilling life. Such toying with ideas is acceptable within the confines of his 'ivory tower of pure theory' (2021, p. 368). However, when the purported rationale for such views creeps into national educational policy, the approach is open to question.

It is difficult to take seriously Kristjánsson's belief that jealousy should be treated as 'a virtue to which pride of place should be given in a well-rounded life' (1996, p. 164; see also 2015; 2018, pp. 102-121). Even more questionable is his assertion that it 'should be fostered in moral education' (1996, p. 164). This is because of the elitist, individualistic conception of the 'good man' which it promotes, in that 'the value of jealousy, as that of shame, lies in its reflecting a fuller conception of personal and social identity' (p. 178). The social identity inherent in this model is one whereby the individual is justified in defending his own position

when he feels it has been usurped by another, as jealousy is deemed to be an appropriate response.[85] Kristjánsson dismisses anyone who chooses the Christian path of turning the other cheek (see Matthew 5. 39-40) as a 'servile sheep', who 'is incapable of jealousy, cannot be leading a life of eudaimonia … cannot in any coherent sense be considered a real *person*. He is incapacitated in an important way qua moral decider because he must lack an apposite sense of self-possession and self-worth' (1996, p. 178). This imposes a vision of what it is to be a morally good person and the basis on which one acquires self-respect. To dismiss the committed altruist as a non-person demonstrates a lack of respect to those who espouse such a moral code and an intolerance of those who do not share one's own values.[86] The key failing of the servile sheep is its failure to assert and prioritise its own desires and needs which, according to Kristjánsson, are necessary to a life of *eudaimonia*. The characteristics of self-assertion and self-prioritisation in combination with jealousy are useful attributes in a competitive market economy. If schools adopt programmes of character education based on Aristotelian ethics as expounded by the Jubilee Centre, the virtues inculcated in the students will work in harmony with the neo-liberal character of current educational practice. The overt discipline exercised through behaviour policies and the more subtle disciplining operating through character education and the hidden curriculum create a consistent moral imperative – act in your own best interests. This has the potential to create a generation of young people who have been trained to engage in society and behave on the basis of self-interest. Although it might be reassuring that the pursuit of one's own interests can, according to Kristjánsson, be morally justified from an Aristotelian perspective of just desert, it is difficult to distinguish where the boundary between self-interest and selfishness lies. Faulhaber notes how the 'motive of self-sacrifice has gradually lost its status and force. Simple selfishness as "self-interest" has become generally respectable and expected behavior, and its opposite an object of suspicion' (2005, p. 418).

I am not arguing for school classrooms populated by flocks of servile sheep any more than packs of green-eyed monsters. What I am arguing is that there should be a place within moral education and through policies on behaviour in schools to accommodate alternative views of the good. If the methods of controlling behaviour in schools, which I have argued promote

[85] Kristjánsson seems to be offering a stipulative definition here according to which jealousy means indignation at injustice. Fredericks considers 'this account to be overly narrow' and thinks 'we should reject it' (2012, p. 64).

[86] I examine how this prescriptive notion of the good is integral to models of character education which are current prevalent in England in Chapter Five.

self-interest, continue to be the norm, we may be heading towards the society envisaged by Hobbes where 'the life of man [is] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short' (1651, p. 63). There will certainly be little room to give more than lip service to the fundamental British values of democracy, rule of law, respect and tolerance, and individual liberty, still less the unacknowledged value of equality.

In this chapter I have demonstrated how approaches to managing behaviour in schools – both discipline and character education – function within a neo-liberal ideological framework to promote self-interest as the dominant motivating consideration for actions. When self-interest becomes the primary motive for action, considerations of equality and respect for others are necessarily subordinated in the interests of individual freedom. However, in the context of strict disciplinary practices in schools and the prescriptive nature of virtue acquisition inherent in programmes of character education, the potential for genuine moral autonomy and self-determination are limited. The limiting effects of the strategies intended to improve students' behaviour highlight the inadequacy of their actual educational value, particularly in terms of moral development. For them to be truly educational as well as ethical, not only should their *modus operandi* be morally justifiable but also the values they promote should encourage young people to develop those which are conducive to life in a modern liberal democracy. Such a society depends on mutual respect and tolerance in order to secure equality and temper the unfettered individualism which arises from self-interest. However, as I argue in the following chapter, conceptions of the child which underpin current thinking about discipline in schools create a further issue which hampers the development of these values.

CHAPTER 7

THE ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CHILDHOOD WITHIN SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

7.1 Introduction

School discipline is something administered by adults on children. Regardless of its form, it involves a number of largely unquestioned assumptions about the nature of childhood and about relations between children and adults. These assumptions, which are interspersed among the earlier chapters of the thesis, are now brought together in summary form as an introduction to a discussion about the nature of childhood and the concept of the child, which form the topics of the present chapter.

- Underpinning the approach to school discipline described in Chapter Two is the assumption that adults are superior in every respect to children, and that they therefore have a natural right to wield absolute control over the children in their 'care'. As Bennett says in *The Behaviour Guru,* 'They can shut the hell up and listen to us … We are the adults … They are the children' (2010, p. 19). This view provides the foundation for his discipline regime: children are by nature unruly, uncontrollable, and lacking in morals, and cannot be trusted to behave sensibly without the threat of adult intervention. Children are more like animals than humans and need to be 'crushed' (p. 31) and have their spirits 'broken' (p. 46) before they learn to be persons worthy of respect.
- The assumptions about childhood that emerge in Chapter Three are very similar to Bennett's; indeed, it is not surprising that he describes Michaela as 'the best that there's ever been' (quoted in Economist, 2023). The school operates on the belief that 'unguided and left to their own devices, children will inevitably rebel, rejecting generally agreed standards of how civilised people should behave' (Butterfield 2020b, p. 316). Children therefore need to be treated with authoritarian, military-style discipline based on the fear of punishment; they are trained to comply with adult expectations, to accept adult authority, and to respect the wisdom and experience of adults. The children have no right to equal respect as independent thinking individuals because they are not judged capable of

appropriate self-determination without firm adult intervention. The school's emphasis on control, conformity, uniformity, compliance and obedience without question, first time every time, burdens the children with what Blake calls 'mind-forged manacles' (1970 [1789], 'London'), and leaves them little or no room for self-expression, spontaneity, genuine choice, autonomy, personal growth or independence of spirit or will.

- Character education is based on two assumptions - that children need to be trained and habituated into virtuous behaviour like obedience, hard work, grit and humility, and that children's character and attitudes can indeed be shaped or moulded through programmes such as those devised by the Jubilee Centre at Birmingham University. Chapter Five argues that such programmes form the flipside of schools' discipline policies and prepare children to become part of a compliant, responsible and industrious workforce in an economy-driven neo-liberal society.
- Chapter Six discusses the ideological backdrop of children's experience in schools and explores how the marketisation of education has affected the values promoted by schools. In this context children are not valued as children but are commodified into potential sources of future income. They are trained to act on the basis of self-interest, on the assumption that in due course they will become active economic participants, freely pursuing their own interests and taking responsibility for their own actions. On a neo-liberal view, the child has value only as a potential adult, which echoes the view of Aristotle.

The aim of the present chapter (and the remainder of the thesis) is to call into question these largely unquestioned assumptions about children and childhood, and in doing so, to find a way forward in response to the two issues that lie at the heart of the thesis. The first of these is whether it is ethical to treat children in line with assumptions such as these that underpin many school discipline policies, especially when it would be considered ethically unacceptable to treat virtually any other sub-group of human beings in this way. The second is whether this approach to school discipline is educationally sound, in the sense that it is the best way to support children in their development towards maturity as autonomous human beings, building on the developing personality and distinctive qualities of the individual child. Any discussion of these issues needs to start with an investigation of the concept of

'the child' and the nature of 'childhood', rather than assuming, as so often happens, that these are simply a self-evident matter of commonsense.[87]

Most dictionaries offer two definitions of childhood, one biological and the other legal. Biologically, childhood refers to the period of the human lifespan that begins at birth (some people say before birth) and extends to puberty; it is a time of comparatively rapid physical growth and the development of a multiplicity of abilities, including cognitive, motor, social, emotional and linguistic skills, autonomous decision-making and problem-solving. There is something rather odd, however, in the failure of this definition to take account of the developmental aspect of childhood by merging babies and teenagers on the threshold of adulthood under the same heading. Legally, the term refers to a minor, i.e. an individual human being who has not yet reached the age of majority; in England and many other countries, this is set at the age of 18,[88] and this is also how a child is defined in the UNCRC (1989). But again, there is something odd about this definition because there are many activities that are primarily thought of as appropriate for adults which people who are still children on this definition are legally permitted to engage in.[89] Beyond the biological and legal definitions of childhood, however, there exists a very wide range of divergent cultural, social, moral, economic, religious and historical conceptions of childhood. For example, children may be viewed as innocent and naturally good (Rousseau, 1993 [1762]) or as born in sin and inherently wicked (Edwards, 1840; Perman, 2006); they may be seen as like animals (Bennett, 2010) or like miniature adults (Ariès, 1986); they may be treated as possessions belonging to their parents (Aristotle, *EE*, IV, 1134b, 9-10) or as free individuals with a sophisticated set of rights (UNCRC, 1989); they may be thought to be born as a *tabula rasa* with their knowledge deriving entirely from their experiences (Locke, 1856 [1690], p. 75), or to be born with the capacity to make sense of the world from their own inborn resources (Descartes, 1985 [1637], p. 131); and childhood might be seen as a time of fun, play,

[87] In an otherwise excellent volume entitled *Can We Teach Children to Be Good?* (1988), Roger Straughan starts by exploring the concept of being good and the concept of teaching, but he fails completely to examine the nature of childhood and the relevance of this to his chosen title.

[88] Under the s105(1) Children Act 1989 we are told that a 'child means … a person under the age of eighteen'. An exception under schedule 1, 16(1) allows a person over the age of eighteen to be considered a child for the purposes of financial payments made after the separation or divorce of their parents if that person is undergoing education or training or other special circumstances apply.

[89] Children in England can be charged with a criminal offence at age 10, legally join the army at age 16, drive a car at age 17, consent to sexual activity at age 16, but since 27 February 2023 cannot get married until the age of 18. The flexibility of the law in this regard perhaps merits consideration by those schools which apply the same school rules rigidly to all students until the age of 18. Religious rites of passage symbolising the transition from childhood to adulthood similarly occur at a wide range of different ages.

simplicity, exploration, wonder, imagination and happiness (Cohen, 1993), or as a time when children need harsh discipline and to be broken (Bennett, 2010, p. 46). William Blake presents two opposing versions of infancy in his poems 'Infant Joy' and 'Infant Sorrow' (1970 [1789]); the former presents the child as a source of reciprocal joy and harmony; the latter illustrates a discontented character struggling against restraint by adults. Blake's juxtaposition of innocence and experience, passivity and energy, freedom and restraint, not only illustrates different ways of responding to children but also enters directly into their experiences, showing how adults can share an infant's joy but also restrain its natural behaviour. Blake himself sees all restraint as negative and harmful to children.[90]

So how are we to think about children in the 21st century? Do the assumptions about childhood and the relations between children and adults with which this chapter started represent the best approach to the subject for contemporary society? Should adults always expect the worst from children? Do children's lack of experience, their dependency on adults, their undeveloped rationality and skills, their apparent inability to make 'wise' choices and their comparative physical vulnerability provide an adequate justification for treating them as of less worth than adults, in need of strict control until they are habituated into obedient, compliant, respectful behaviour? Are adults the ideal model to which children should aspire (see Wildemann Kane, 2016; Kennedy, 2006; Matthews, 1994), or are they the main source of moral corruption in the world, as Rousseau suggests? Is there a sense in which children may be a model to which adults should aspire, perhaps in terms of innocence, purity and simplicity?[91] Do children in fact have their own distinctive worth, even if it is different from that of adults? Gareth Matthews argues that even young children can be 'fresh and inventive thinkers' (1994, pp. 17-18). If adults *are* deemed to be more rational than children, it seems fair to ask at what point children can be considered sufficiently rational to act independently. Or is this equating of rationality with the competent adult an imposition of a patriarchal liberal theory which marginalises children until they have become adult (see Huang, 2019;

[90] Among the adult figures who feature in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, there is an important contrast between the benign watchfulness of the shepherd (in 'The Shepherd'), the wise guardians of the poor (in 'Holy Thursday 1'), the nurse (in 'Nurse's Song 1'), and God Himself (in 'The Little Boy Found'), and the moral guidance of the mother (in 'The Little Black Boy') on the one hand, and the oppressive restraint of teachers (in 'The School-Boy'), the father (in 'A Little Girl Lost'), priests (in 'The Garden of Love'), and the nurse (in 'Nurse's Song 2') on the other (Blake, 1970 [1789]).

[91] In Matthew 18. 3-4, (*AV*), Jesus tells his disciples: 'Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.' The suggestion that adults have much to learn from children and that they are far from inferior to adults is surprisingly radical, and challenges Old Testament views of the child.

Wildemann Kane, 2016; Arneil, 2002)? Such questions form a suitable starting point for any exploration of childhood.

In the remaining four sections of this chapter, I shall argue that the assumptions with which the chapter started are unjustifiable and that children and adults are essentially the same (i.e. fully human beings) and thus worthy of equal respect and deserving of equal rights. Since most of the supporters of the assumptions about children's inherent wickedness and their need for moral training and character education with which this chapter started trace their views back to Aristotle, the first section presents a critical discussion of Aristotle's views on children and childhood. The second section examines two of the significant challenges to Aristotle's views that emerged with the start of the Enlightenment; these are the more liberal perspective of Locke, who demonstrates a greater 'sympathy with the world of the child' (Smith, 2001, p. 49) and a greater respect for the child as an emergent individual; and the more child-centred perspective of Rousseau, who believes that children have certain natural qualities like innocence and deserve the freedom to learn at their own pace and make their own choices. The third section looks at children as rights-holders and considers what sort of rights children can legitimately lay claim to. How people respond to the question, whether children should have the right to decide for themselves how to live their own lives, is clearly linked to how society perceives children. The final section considers the claim that children should be considered as of equal worth to adults, and argues that their essential personhood means they cannot be denied any rights (such as a right to respect) that belong to all people as a result of their being fully and equally human.[92] The implications of the belief that children should be treated with equal respect to adults are then discussed in Chapter Eight.

7.2 Aristotle's Conception of the Child as an Unfinished Human Being

Both Bennett and teachers at Michaela directly express their indebtedness to Aristotle. As noted in Chapter Two, Bennett in *The Behaviour Guru* (2010) claims to be 'into Aristotle' and he expands and explains this in his discussion of 'flourishing' (*eudaimonia*) as the main aim of education in *Running the Room* (2020a). On the other hand, his maxim that 'we discipline them because we care about them' (2010, p. 62) seems to be based on an Old

[92] It is worth noting that since all human beings have some experience of childhood, but not all have any experience of adulthood, it is possible to argue that childhood is more central to our understanding of what it means to be a human person than adulthood is.

Testament version of parental love which dictates that 'he that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes' (Proverbs 13. 24, *AV*). Staw in his contribution to the volume *Michaela: The Power of Culture* expresses a similar idea when he writes, 'Sometimes telling a child off is the most compassionate and caring thing you can do because you are helping them progress towards a better future' (2020, p. 93). Other contributors show how Aristotle provides the underpinning for Michaela's educational philosophy – including principles such as true freedom coming from self-discipline and self-control (Porter, 2020, p. 48) or character development depending on habituation (Staw, 2020, p. 92) – and stress the importance of giving students some understanding of Aristotle's ideas (James, 2020, p. 192). However, the main issue is whether Aristotle's understanding of childhood and the relations between children and adults is in fact the best one for contemporary society.

There is no treatise on child-rearing or sustained statement about the nature of the child extant among Aristotle's works.[93] Just as the poetry of Sappho has been collected piecemeal from a wide range of sources (including damaged papyri where the first and last word of each line of verse is missing alongside brief fragments now lost but quoted in the works of later authors, often to illustrate a point of style or grammar) (Reynolds, 2001, especially Chapter 1), so Aristotle's views on children and childhood have been pieced together from random remarks or incidental comments made while he was discussing other topics, particularly in *Eudemian Ethics, Nichomachean Ethics* and *Politics*.[94] From these sources it is difficult to tell whether Aristotle actually paid much philosophical attention to the nature of childhood or not. A further problem facing scholars is that the fragmentary remarks that are available do not always fit together into a coherent guide to child rearing. It is tempting (but perhaps not entirely academically honest) for the contemporary scholar simply to ignore any incoherencies and to restructure Aristotle's disparate ideas about children into something more suitable for the 21st century; perhaps this is what neo-Aristotelianism does (see below).

[93] Tress suggests that Aristotle refers to a treatise on child-rearing in *Politics* (*Pol*, VII, 1335b2), but this is a tenuous reference and, as Tress notes, there is no evidence of the continuing existence of this work today (1998, p. 19), if it ever existed.

[94] For example, in his discussion of temperance, Aristotle makes the point that human appetites should be under the control of reason just 'as the child should live according to the direction of his tutor' (*NE*, III, 1119b, 14). The 'tutor' is the *paidagōgos*, a slave who took special responsibility for the discipline and general education of a child, and the simile gives us some incidental insight into Aristotle's assumptions about the need for children to learn restraint and docility and to accept the authority of his teacher.

Nevertheless, Tress argues that ‘a comprehensive account of the child’ that is true to the diversity of Aristotle’s works is possible (1998, p. 20; cf. Fossheim, 2017).

7.2.1 What are Children Like?

Aristotle’s conception of the child is unflattering, to say the least. Children are repeatedly used alongside invalids, lunatics, animals, bad people, slaves and dwarfs as a foil to emphasise the ideal state found in the adult male. Aristotle states that children share ‘many views’ with invalids and lunatics ‘but no sane person would trouble himself about them’ (*EE*, I, 1214b, 29-30), suggesting a lack of sanity in children. Children also have much in common with women. Essentially, they lack the attributes of the mature male due to physical failings. However, certain other physical attributes (their ‘upper portion is large and the lower is small’ (*PA*, x, 686b, 8-9), and their perceived intellectual failings, lie behind Aristotle’s claim that ‘all children are dwarfs’ (*ibid*, 12). Whilst Aristotle does concede that ‘even among human beings, children when compared with adults, and dwarf adults when compared with others, may have some characteristics in which they are superior’,[95] he is forced to conclude that ‘in intelligence, at any rate, they are inferior’ (*ibid*, 24-27).

Children’s inability to think and act in a rational manner means that whilst children, like animals, are born ‘just and in a way temperate and brave’, such characteristics are actually ‘harmful’ due to ‘the absence of intelligence’ (*EE*, V, 1144b, 4 -8). Indeed, children lack the ability to think because, like animals, they pursue pleasures and ‘pleasures get in the way of thought’ (*EE*, VI, 1152b, 16). They are prone to engage in pleasure that ‘the temperate man shuns’, that the ‘wise man seeks to avoid’ and that ‘makes an intemperate man intemperate (*EE*, VI, 1153a, 31-35). In fact, children are incapable of experiencing ‘real pleasures’ which are ‘good and noble’ and thus the sole preserve of adults, for, like wild animals, children’s relation to adults corresponds to that of ‘a bad and foolish man to a good and wise one’ (*EE*, VII, 1236a, 3-4). Indeed, children are not capable of self-determination and cannot attain *eudaimonia* (happiness, flourishing, wellbeing) as they lack the necessary virtue and

[95] Aristotle does not describe what he considers these characteristics to be.

experience (*NE*, I, 1100a, 1-5),[96] and this lack of virtue means they are incapable of choice (*NE*, III, 1111b, 5-9).

Aristotle does not pull any punches in expressing his views about the unsavoury character of childhood, a state to which he considers 'no one in his right mind could tolerate returning' (*EE*, I, 1215b, 22-23). He claims that children are disposed to find pleasure in evil activities (*EE*, III, 1228b, 21-22), prone to act recklessly due to their ignorance and inexperience (*EE*, III, 1229a, 16-17), intemperate (*EE*, III, 1230b, 4-7), self-indulgent and prey to their appetites (*NE*, III, 1119b, 5-6). As a 'senseless creature' in whom 'the desire for pleasure is insatiable' (*ibid*, 7) a child needs to be 'checked' and 'pruned' (*ibid*, 4). Indeed, for Aristotle, the one positive of childhood is its temporary nature.

7.2.2 Children and Adults

Aristotle's main concern regarding children is that (on his view) they lack the characteristics and qualities of an adult. He has no notion of valuing the child *per se* or indeed anyone (women, slaves, etc) who does not match up to his ideal of the rationally moral individual. This basic assumption of inequality – 'the slave is entirely without the faculty of deliberation; the female indeed possesses it, but in a form which lacks authority; and children also possess it, but only in an immature form' (*Pol*, I, 1260a4) – makes friendships between adults and children an absurdity. The problem is that children are incapable of forming a 'friendship based on virtue and on the pleasure of virtue'. The relationships 'found among children and animals and bad people' are merely metaphorical versions of this 'primary friendship' (*EE*, VII, 1238a, 30-32; see also 1239a, 4-6), and this has implications for family relations as it means that 'fathers, though they are concerned about their children's existence, prefer the company of others' (*EE*, VII, 1240a, 29-30).

Whilst Aristotle acknowledges that 'children are a good common to both parents', he does not recognise them as intrinsically good but rather of value in terms of the positive effect they have on maintaining their parents' marriage (*NE*, VIII, 1162a, 28-29). Indeed, children do not

[96] One of the main differences between Aristotle and neo-Aristotelians is the fact that Aristotle says that children are incapable of achieving *eudaimonia*, whereas neo-Aristotelians like Kristjánsson (2015, 2020) see the attainment of *eudaimonia* as the main purpose of education. Modern liberals often describe the related concepts of well-being (White, 2011) or flourishing, in the sense of the optimal development of human potential (Wolbert *et al*, 2015; de Ruyter & Wolbert, 2020), as the key aim of education (see Chapter Two).

feature as members of society worthy of respect, as Aristotle groups them alongside other possessions of the father. As such, like slaves, they do not need to be afforded any protection by law 'because there can be no injustice towards things that are one's own' (*EE*, IV, 1134b, 9-10). To a father, children are 'part of himself' and since 'no-one chooses to harm himself' a father cannot commit an injustice to his own child (*NE*, V, 1134b, 8-12). Although children may benefit from a system of 'household justice', such 'justice can be displayed more truly to one's wife than to one's children and chattels' (*ibid*, 16, see also NE, V, 1134b, 9-13). The notion that children are the property of the father echoes a similar view in the Old Testament where Abraham does not question his right to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22. 1-10).

7.2.3 Training the Child for Adulthood

Aristotle believes that children do have the potential to develop through chastisement (*EE*, III, 1230, 4-7) and the guidance of a tutor (*NE*, III, 1119b, 13) for, as already noted, the 'natural virtue' present in children is potentially 'harmful' to them 'in the absence of intelligence' and is only a mere shadow of 'true virtue' which comes with wisdom (*EE*, V, 1144b, 7-16). It is only through nurture and discipline that a child's natural tendencies can be curbed and habituation into virtue can be achieved.[97] 'Nurture' includes affection, shelter and sustenance, and although we are not given as much information about Aristotle's understanding of 'discipline' as we have for discipline in Europe in medieval times (Ariès,1986, pp. 163-9, 242-57) or even for discipline in Old Testament times (Proverbs 13. 24; 23. 13-14; 29. 15), we are at least told that for Aristotle discipline has two dimensions – discouraging acts of wildness (defined as acts that are motivated by passion and desire rather than reason and wisdom) and encouraging acts of virtue.

There has been significant disagreement among commentators on Aristotle's views about the nature of children and whether he considers them to have any element of the human (see *EE*, VII, 1240b. 30). For example, Keyt says, 'On Aristotle's theory of personal development a child lives the life of an animal' (1989, p. 19) and Broadie maintains, 'In Aristotle's ontology, a child or childlike member of the species is not a complete human substance; it could no more ethically exist apart from guardian or guide than a foetus physically could from the mother-animal' (1991, p. 64). But Tress argues (and I am inclined to agree with him) that it

[97] See Tress for an account of the process of 'tempering the child's wildness through nurture and discipline' (1998, p. 32).

would be wrong to think that an ontological transformation occurs in children's nature as they grow up and acquire rationality and moral virtue. He notes that 'the human child must be regarded as a substance that is and comes to be, growing and developing to completion as a human adult … This substance … is determinate from the start as human' (Tress, 1998, p. 20). If the child is 'always human' (p. 37), that is, born with the nature of a human being, what distinguishes children from adults is that the former are 'unfinished' humans (p. 21). This suggests that children are equal to adults in their status as human beings, but unequal in most other respects, particularly in terms of their initial lack of certain uniquely human qualities (such as their deliberative capacity) which can only be attained gradually through extended nurture, training and discipline. These educational experiences facilitate children's growth towards their full physical potential, their training in virtue, and their preparation for adult life as responsible and intellectually competent citizens.

7.2.4 Aristotle's Continuing Influence

Despite the problems with Aristotle's approach, he established enduring parameters for the philosophical consideration of children. For example, writing in the 17th century, Thomas Hobbes similarly equates children with 'fools' and 'madmen' by virtue of their lack of reason (1651, p. 82), which also excludes them from the remit of law and participation in society: 'Over natural fools, children, or madmen there is no law, no more than over brute beasts; nor are they capable of the title of just, or unjust; because they had never power to make any covenant, or to understand the consequences thereof' (p. 140). His expectations of children are extremely low as he considers them to be less judicious than animals since 'there be beasts, that at a year old observe more, and pursue that which is for their good, more prudently, than a child can do at ten' (p. 18). King characterises Hobbes' view of childhood as 'a period of servitude we would call slavery' (1998, p. 67) and indeed, the child is, according to Hobbes, 'in most absolute subjection to him or her, that so bringeth them up, or preserveth them' (1969 [1640], p. 134). Although children may escape this life of servitude 'not by the right of the child, but by the natural indulgence of the parents' (p. 135), parents' rights over the child are absolute, and the child is akin to a possession to be disposed of at will (p. 134).

Even today, as Matthews and Mullin point out, 'the dominant view of children embodies what we might call a broadly "Aristotelian conception" of childhood' (2023, n.p.) – or at least a

kind of bowdlerised Aristotelian conception.[98] The Aristotelian roots of Bennett's comparisons of children to animals have already been noted, though Bennett appears to use the analogy as a way of insulting and disrespecting children, whereas Aristotle highlights similarities between the early physical growth of children and that of animals as a way of understanding the nurture and discipline children need during this period if they are to embark on the long journey towards the moral and rational maturity of adults. Similarly, the Aristotelian (or, more accurately, neo-Aristotelian) roots of some school policies can be seen at Michaela, especially the emphasis on virtue ethics, character education, habituation and the shaping of children into a pre-determined model of adulthood. Yet the imposition of extreme and inappropriate disciplinary practices, alongside a failure to trust and respect children's developing autonomy, makes it harder for children to achieve the rational development that Aristotle seeks and that is essential for future self-determination. However, the continuing influence of Aristotelian and neo-Aristotelian perspectives on contemporary educational provision should not be allowed to close off any discussion of the important alternative philosophical and psychological perspectives on children and childhood that have emerged, particularly since the start of the Enlightenment. The next section focuses on two of these alternative perspectives.

7.3 The Conception of the Child as of Individual Value

7.3.1 John Locke (1632-1704)

Locke has been described not only as the father of liberalism, but also as one of 'the originators of *child-centred education*' (Jeffreys, 1967, p. 51). That may or may not be true. Certainly, he demonstrates 'a sympathy with the world of the child' (Smith, 2001, p. 49) that

[98] I use the term 'bowdlerised Aristotelian conception of childhood' because the neo-Aristotelianism that emerged from the mid-20th century onwards has discarded some of Aristotle's more bizarre and offensive assumptions. Thus Kristjánsson, for example, concedes that Aristotle 'often got his empirical assessments wrong – as in the case of women, slaves and labourers', though he continues to insist (quite wrongly in my view) that 'there is thus no essential elitism in Aristotelianism, no *a priori* assumption of moral difference' (2007, p. 179). If we accept that an 'elite' refers to 'a group or class of people seen as having the most power and influence in a society, especially on account of their wealth or privilege' (*OED*, 2024), then it is hard to find a better text-book example of elitism than Aristotle's view of free adult males. They were, after all, the only group of humans who were considered by Aristotle as appropriate to receive extensive training in virtue at the heart of their educational experience. It would be interesting to know what reasons Kristjánsson would give for not including children alongside women, slaves and labourers as groups the empirical assessment of whom Aristotle got wrong (2007, p. 179).

distances him from Aristotle and his followers, but this should not be taken to indicate a lack of interest in the steps needed to prepare children for future adulthood. The key point is that with Locke, children are no longer seen as the property of their parents or as inconsequential beings with little to redeem them beyond their potential to become adults; indeed, Locke's appreciation of and respect for children illustrate a strong commitment to their interests *per se*.[99]

Locke established the idea that at birth a child's mind is 'a white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas' (1856 [1690], p. 75). However, this does not mean they are without intelligence as Aristotle suggests, rather they are 'travellers newly arrived in a strange country, of which they know nothing' (Locke, 1830 [1693], p. 156). Locke emphasises that this lack of knowledge is not indicative of an absence of sensitivity or comprehension in children who 'easily perceive when they are slighted or deceived, and quickly learn the trick of neglect, dissimulation, and falsehood, which they observe others to make use of' (*ibid*). As such, it is incumbent on parents to demonstrate the behaviour they expect of their children to ensure the child is subject to experiences appropriate to the development of their reason (because it is from experience alone that the mind is furnished with ideas). The parent is more akin to a facilitator in the acquisition of knowledge and skills rather than the Hobbesian dictator above, who has absolute authority over the child:

> parents have a sort of rule and jurisdiction over them, when they come into the world, and for some time after; but it is but a temporary one. The bonds of this subjection are like the swaddling clothes they are wrapt up in, and supported by, in the weakness of their infancy: age and reason as they grow up, loosen them, till at length they drop quite off, and leave a man at his own free disposal. (Locke, 1947 [1689], p. 147)

This demonstrates a relationship between parent and child whereby the development of the child dictates the limits of the parents' power over it. It is grounded on an implicit respect for

[99] There are certain aspects of Locke's *Some Thoughts on Education* which appear quaint by today's standards, such as Locke's concern that children be shielded from the temptations afforded by the 'unwholesome juice' of melons, peaches, plumbs and grapes (1830 [1693], p. 49), other aspects which demonstrate unacceptable class assumptions (p. 91) and an overarching failure to consider girls as worthy of the same education he recommends for young gentlemen. However, in terms of the fundamental values which underpin Locke's thinking, his model of education shows an empathy with, and understanding of, the child which is missing in Aristotle.

the child as an emergent individual which negates the notion of the parent as absolute authority.[100]

Locke acknowledges that 'children … are not born in this full state of equality, though they are born to it'.[101] The idea of being 'born to' equality resonates with the idea that they are in fact equal in their being human. With a mild rebuke to Aristotle, he asserts that from the outset children have 'a mind that can reason, without being instructed in methods of syllogizing: the understanding is not taught to reason by these rules; it has a native faculty to perceive the coherence or incoherence of its ideas, and can range them right' (1856 [1690], p. 438). Thus, Locke's belief that children have the potential for reason and that they consequently should be treated with respect are key assumptions that underpin *Some Thoughts on Education*.

Although Locke believes in the necessity of disciplining children in order to educate and socialise them into acceptable modes of behaviour, his model of discipline imposes a duty on parents and teachers to act in a manner which is consistent with what they are seeking to teach the child. This stems from an appreciation of children as valuable human beings rather than the questionably human creatures Aristotle presents. Locke emphasises that children 'are to be treated as rational creatures' (1830 [1693], p. 69) and is at pains to assure the reader of his awareness of what is 'due to their tender age and constitutions' (p. 63). Therefore, he is 'very apt to think, that great severity of punishment does but very little good; nay, great harm in education: and I believe it will be found, that, *cæteris paribus*, those children who have been most chastised, seldom make the best men' (p. 64). The upshot of this is that rather than imposing authoritarian methods of discipline on children Locke prefers a more progressive approach which he recognises may be considered somewhat unconventional – 'it will perhaps be wondered, that I mention reasoning with children: and yet I cannot but think that the true way of dealing with them. They understand it as early as they do language' (1830 [1693], p. 102).

For Aristotle and Hobbes, the presumption that children lack the ability to reason justifies their dismissal of them as unworthy of adult respect. However, Locke advises parents: 'he that

[100] Locke describes the extent of parental authority as limited by the best interests of the child: 'power reaches no farther, than by such a discipline, as he finds most effectual, to give such strength and health to their bodies, such vigour and rectitude to their minds, as may best fit his children to be most useful to themselves and others' (1947 [1689], pp. 151-152).

[101] The equality referred to here is 'that equal right, that every man hath, to his natural freedom, without being subjected to the will or authority of any other man' (Locke, 1947 [1689], p. 147).

will have his son have a respect for him and his orders, must himself have a great reverence for his son. *Maxima debetur pueris reverentia*' (1830 [1693], p. 91). The fact that Locke recognises children's abilities means he is acutely aware of their responsiveness to the nuances of adult behaviours and the implicit messages conveyed through the mode of discipline applied alongside any overt lesson it is intended to teach. Therefore, he warns, 'if you punish him for what he sees you practise yourself, he will not think that severity to proceed from kindness in you, or carefulness to amend a fault in him' (pp. 91-92). It is incumbent on adults to take care that the discipline they administer is reasonable to ensure its educational impact on the child, as Locke recognises that the parent or teacher needs to earn the respect of the child by virtue of their own conduct:

> As children should very seldom be corrected by blows; so, I think, frequent, and especially, passionate chiding, of almost as ill consequence. It lessens the authority of the parents and the respect of the child; for I bid you still remember, they distinguish early between passion and reason: and as they cannot but have a reverence for what comes from the latter, so they quickly grow into a contempt of the former. (p. 97)

Locke's view of the child which generates his approach to discipline is at odds not only with Aristotle but also with the present-day approaches to education described earlier in this thesis, with their excessive dependence on rules as a means of teaching students how to behave. Locke's approach to rules is that parents and teachers should 'make but few laws, but see they be well observed, when once made' for

> if you burden him with many rules, one of these two things must necessarily follow, that either he must be very often punished, which will be of ill consequence, by making punishment too frequent and familiar; or else you must let the transgressions of some of your rules go unpunished, whereby they will of course grow contemptible, and your authority become cheap to him. (p. 76)

Locke considers the use of discipline in terms of its impact on the child. He is aware that a child may learn much more from discipline than just its desired goal; for example, if it involves a teacher shouting or getting angry, this may result in the child learning something quite different from what was intended (see Halstead and Xiao, 2023).

This child-sensitive approach promoted by Locke is being increasingly marginalised by a swell of opinion exemplified by the claim of former Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, who has condemned 'pupil-centred learning' as a 'misplaced ideology [that] has let

down generations of children' (quoted by Curtis, 2008). Gove's view is shared by the Michaela school which I argued in Chapter Three fails to respect its students,[102] and illustrates a contemporary understanding of childhood which unlike Locke's undermines respect for the child *per se*.

7.3.2 Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778)

Rousseau was an admirer of Locke (whose *Thoughts on Education* was first translated into French in 1695) and accepted many of his ideas, including encouraging children's curiosity as the best motivator for learning, paying more attention to their physical education, and supporting their freedom to act independently. But Rousseau's approach to childhood and children's education is more revolutionary than Locke's. He does not accept Locke's views about the need to teach children obedience (1993 [1762], p. 62) and submission to adult authority (pp. 156-7), and he rejects any punishment of children (pp. 66, 143). He does not think that children should be reasoned with or taught reason at an early age (pp. 63, 64), that they should be trained in habits of virtue (p. 68) or that they should be made to conform to social expectations. Indeed, he opens *Émile* with the premise that 'we know nothing of childhood' (1993 [1762], p. 1) and that even the wisest writers make matters worse by starting with the question 'what a man ought to know' instead of 'what a child is capable of learning' (p. 2). Rather than 'looking for the man in the child', we ought to pay more attention to what the child is 'before he becomes a man' (*ibid*.).

Childhood, Rousseau says, should be held 'in reverence' (p. 84). Children are naturally innocent, until corrupted by adults, society, public schooling, and social convention: 'God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil' (p. 5). Parents and others need to protect children's innocence from these corrupting influences, so that the child's natural self is free to develop without constraint. The child should be treated as a child, not as an imperfect adult.

Jimack (1993, pp. xxvii-xxviii) implies that Rousseau approves of treating children with 'a kind of judicious, health-giving neglect', but this is not really the case. He watches over Émile's development with great care, though he has very different priorities for his student

[102] Birbalsingh seeks to distinguish Michaela from other schools whose values, she claims, 'understandably tend to reflect the progressive values of the 21st century' (2020a, p. 23).

from other 18th century educationists. He stresses the importance of bodily exercise (1993 [1762], p. 105-108) and physical skills (p. 133) for children and wants them to spend most of their time out of doors, leading the natural, free and vigorous life of a young animal (p. 28). He devotes a large part of Book II of *Émile* to learning through physical experience, training the senses and delaying the education of the mind (p. 68). He wants children to become hardened to pain (pp. 16-17, 49), uncomplaining about extremes of temperature, for example. Common features of education are anathema to Rousseau: in particular, there should be no use of books or learning by rote, since books tell children what to think whereas Rousseau wants them to learn to think and to reason for themselves, from their own experiences (p. 256). Teachers should never be authority figures to the child, giving them orders, demanding obedience, or punishing them (pp. 77, 72, 143, 161) – or even trying to reason with them too early (pp. 62-66). Children should not be forced to develop habits because they encourage laziness and an unthinking response; 'the only habit the child should be allowed to contract is that of having no habits' (p. 34). Rousseau wanted children to be brought up naturally and to be guided by nature and by their own developing reason, which involves learning (a) from experience and (b) through their own feelings, desires and needs, and following their own inclinations.

Moral education is not about teaching children virtue as early as possible (p. 68, but see pp. 79-81), but initially at least about the avoidance of vice and the corrupting influences that surround them. The one moral rule of which Rousseau approves is 'Never hurt anybody' (p. 81). Of course, the child will learn natural virtues like hard work, patience and courage from experience of the natural world (pp. 204-5). Parents should not spoil children or show them excessive affection (pp. 56-7) or allow them to demand things through tears (pp. 38, 40, 48, 59, 60, 61-2). Children also have to learn to submit to the inevitable and thus not to ask for (or even desire) things that are not available. The surest way to make children unhappy is to let them have everything they want (p. 60). They must learn only what they want to learn through natural curiosity (pp. 156, 161). Children will learn, but they must not be taught. Ignorance is preferable to false knowledge and second-hand opinions (p. 185). Rousseau encourages the development of critical thinking by encouraging children to ask, 'What is the use of that?' (p. 170). They will thus learn what is useful, and will understand what they learn and make it truly their own (p. 203).

Rousseau values both freedom and equality most highly, and *Émile* is an attempt to describe how these values can be encouraged and developed in childhood. Children should be free from birth to explore the world and expand their horizons, acquiring a mass of physical/sense experience in the process. As Rousseau says in the opening sentence of *The Social Contract*, 'Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains' (1968 [1762], p. 49). He rejects all forms of confinement or restraint (from swaddling clothes onwards; cf. Blake, 1970 [1789], 'Infant Sorrow') and wants children to learn through autonomous discovery and to make their own decisions, rather than being told what to do by adults.[103] At the same time, he notes approvingly that 'all men are equal in [Émile's] eyes' (1993 [1762], p. 149), and comments, 'Hitherto I have made no distinction of condition, rank, station or fortune … Natural needs are the same to all, and the means of satisfying them should be equally within the reach of all' (pp. 187-8). These values perhaps lie behind Rousseau's emphasis on the need to learn a manual trade (carpentry in the case of Émile, p. 195ff). This makes him aware of his civic responsibility and prepares him for an uncertain political future and the possibility that the existing order will be overturned. It also serves to show him the importance of self-sufficiency.

In contrast to Aristotle, who has no notion of valuing the child *per se* and whose conception of the child is as an unfinished human being, Rousseau says that 'every age … has a perfection, a ripeness of its own' and he uses the term 'a grown child' to encapsulate 'the beauties of childhood' that shine forth from a 12-year-old brought up in line with the educational principles he has set out (pp. 146-7). Such a child has 'reached the perfection of childhood', but 'his progress has not been bought at the price of his happiness, he has gained both. While he has acquired all the wisdom of a child, he has been as free and happy as his health permits' (p. 150).[104] The next three years are a key stage in the child's life, a time of rapid development marked out by 'work, instruction and inquiry' (p. 154). But the child's learning (whether in the fields of geography, geometry or any of the sciences) must still emerge from curiosity, interest, desire and practical experience, never from compulsion or constraint. Books are still to be avoided (except for *Robinson Crusoe*) because discovery learning is much more effective and permanent. Rousseau calls these few years 'the peaceful

[103] Adults may of course influence children indirectly, for example, by setting them a good example.
[104] The time scales given here are only approximate, but Rousseau identifies five distinct stages of childhood: infancy (0-2 years); early childhood (3-12 years); later childhood/ pre-adolescence (13-15 years); adolescence (15- 19 years); post adolescence/ marriage (20-25 years). His stages make an interesting contrast with those of later stage-theorists such as Piaget (1932) and Kohlberg (1981-1984).

age of intelligence' (p. 161) before the passions charge in at puberty and awaken his emotional, moral and aesthetic faculties. After the age of 15, Émile is ready to study history (which will show him how the natural goodness of an individual is corrupted by society), to engage with religion (not through compulsion, instruction and training but through personal reflection), and to interact with society as a wise and self-sufficient individual.

Émile became famous for promoting the reform of childcare and education, such as the abandonment of swaddling clothes, the promotion of breast feeding and the increased emphasis on physical exercise, play and fresh air. Rousseau has influenced many later educational theorists and thinkers, most notably the supporters of child-centred education, and his approach was perhaps most fully realised in practice at A. S. Neill's Summerhill School (Neill, 1996). However, his understanding of childhood is not to everyone's taste, and he represents the total opposite of Aristotle's views of the child. For those who don't like what he says (including Tom Bennett and Katharine Birbalsingh), it is not difficult to find things to criticise: his treatment of his own children, who were all sent to a local orphanage; his tendency to contradict himself (for example, at one point he says, 'Never punish a child', at another he says that punishment should always 'come as the natural consequence' of the child's fault' (Rousseau, 1993 [1762], pp. 66,77)); his approval of discrimination against women in some contexts;[105] his tendency to treat what he calls 'the lower classes' as inferior (p. 117); and the impracticability of many of his suggestions. Like Oscar Wilde, he likes turning popular ideas on their head for rhetorical effect. The book is full of quotable aphorisms. Thus he writes: 'The only habit the child should be allowed to contract is that of having no habits' (p. 34). 'Reverse the usual practice and you will almost always do right' (p. 68). 'Exercise his body, his limbs, his senses, his strength, but keep his mind idle as long as you can' (*ibid*).' 'Let them learn nothing from books which they can learn from experience' (p. 256). But actually, his belief in natural goodness does not blind him to the existence of what other people might call natural faults. And his belief that freedom is 'the greatest good' (1993 [1762], p. 56) does not prevent him from planning (and sometimes indeed controlling)

[105] Rousseau takes pains to emphasise the similarity of the sexes on several occasions in *Émile;* this occurs both in relation to children, about whom he says, 'Up to the age of puberty children of both sexes have little to distinguish them …; girls are children and boys are children ; one name is enough for creatures so closely resembling one another' (1993 [1762], p. 206), and in relation to adults, about whom he says, 'But for her sex, a woman is a man' (p. 384). On other occasions, however, he is grossly sexist: 'woman is specially made for man's delight … to please and be in subjection to [him]' (p. 385).

things behind the scenes in a way that seems manipulative and infringing of Émile's liberty. The key thing is that Émile feels free.[106]

Of course, the educational system proposed in *Émile* is impracticable. It is impossible for all children to have a full-time one-to-one tutor, as Émile does. The whole process is unrealistic. But that is not the point. The point is that Rousseau proposes a fresh and more enlightened way of thinking about children – seeing them as children rather than as miniature or unfinished adults, and valuing and respecting them as such. True child-centredness does not involve paternalistic decision-making that claims to be in the best interests of the child (which may in practice allow adults to impose their beliefs on the child), but rather positions children in charge of their own learning through their interaction with their environment.

7.4 The Conception of the Child as a Holder of Human Rights

Since the middle of the 20th century, discussions about the nature of childhood have often focused on the extent to which children have rights. The UNCRC (1989) marks an important turning point in thinking about this topic. Just as Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) took the liberal doctrine of inalienable human rights and applied them to women, so the UNCRC (1989) took these same rights and applied them to children. This is a further radical extension of liberal ideas, certainly not accepted by all philosophers, politicians and educationalists. However, in England although the Convention has been ratified it is not incorporated into national law, meaning that children cannot defend any rights conferred by the Treaty in the British courts by relying solely on its provisions.[107] Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to investigate the Convention fully, including the sort of rights involved and the justification of rights claims made on behalf of children, the debates about them are relevant in what they reveal about the prevailing fundamental beliefs regarding the nature of childhood. The case for giving rights to children is inextricably linked to how society perceives children, which in turn determines the types of rights they are granted.

[106]Purdy argues that the 'real Rousseau' adopts an essentially 'manipulative approach' to 'restrict choices and lead to consequences selected by teachers' (1992, pp. 99-100). Rousseau does indeed advise, 'Let him [the child] always think he is the master, while you are really master. There is no subjection so complete as that which preserves the forms of freedom; it is thus that the will itself is taken captive' (1993 [1762], p. 100).
[107] England operates a dualist system with regard to the incorporation of international treaties meaning that it does not adopt them directly but seeks to ensure existing and future legislation is compatible with them.

There are two main groups of children's rights which at best have an uneasy co-existence and sometimes appear to be in direct conflict. The first group is rights to protection and welfare, which assume (a) the dependency of children on adults, (b) the responsibility of adults who owe children a duty of care, (c) the importance of paternalistic decision-making in 'the best interests of the child' and (d) adults having power and control over children. Raz's definition of being respected as being able to say 'I have a right to have my interest taken into account' illustrates this understanding of rights (1986, p. 190); it is very different, for example, from the right to have one's voice heard.

The second group of rights comprises rights to freedom and self-determination, which implies that children should be treated as autonomous individuals even though their personal autonomy may be incomplete and subject to continuing development. Clearly the claim that children should have similar rights to those held by adults is in tension with the assumptions that underpin rights to protection and welfare, particularly assumptions relating to children's dependency and adults' power and control. Children's right to liberation from dependency is supported by Holt, for example, who argues that children generally suffer as a consequence of prevailing notions of the child which result in them 'being wholly subservient and dependent [and] being seen by older people as a mixture of expensive nuisance, slave, and super-pet' (1974, p. 18). Consequently, Farson claims, 'our world is not a good place for children' (1974, p. 1) and Firestone bluntly asserts that 'childhood is hell' (2015, p. 55). Holt sees rights to freedom as the best solution to the current oppression of children and failure to take account of their wishes; he proposes that 'the rights, privileges, duties and responsibilities of adult citizens be made available to any young person, of whatever age, who wants to make use of them' (1974, p. 18).[108]

At the opposite extreme is Purdy who argues against (freedom) rights for children on the basis that the latter lack instrumental reasoning, prudence and morality (cf. McGillivray, 1994). By 'instrumental reasoning' she means 'the ability to judge what steps are necessary to attain a particular goal', which constitutes 'a major component of any worthwhile notion of intelligence' (Purdy, 1994, p. 227). Whilst she does concede that babies, like cats, do have some capacity to achieve certain ends, she believes they lack the sophistication of mature, adult thought. Purdy demonstrates little trust in children's ability to exercise any common

[108] See Archard (2015, pp. 64-79) and Matthews (1994, pp. 68-80) for detailed explorations of the case for and against child liberation.

sense (a faculty she repeatedly claims to rely on herself) and tends to make unjustified, sweeping generalisations such as that children 'will tend to choose immediate gratification over more long-term benefit, and will tend to prefer their own interests to those of others' (p. 236). There is much in her thinking that demonstrates the enduring influence of Aristotle's notion of the child.

Brighouse believes 'there is something very strange about thinking of children as bearers of rights' (2002, p.31). This is because children do not conform to what he considers to be the model rights holder, that is 'the liberal model of the competent rational person' (*ibid*). A failure in the ability to exercise rationality is deemed to be the disqualifying criterion for agency rights. I suggest a more promising view might be developed from a modern liberal perspective, that children are growing towards autonomy, but have not 'become' autonomous yet and therefore cannot be granted unlimited freedom rights.[109] On this view, a certain amount of freedom might help children and young people to understand what autonomy is and help to set them on the path to full adulthood (i.e. as rationally autonomous individuals). This is an argument for limited freedom agency rights for children in line with their developing autonomy.

Whilst the majority of the provisions in the UNCRC (1989) are essentially paternalistic, some confer freedom rights: children have the right to have their opinions respected (article 12) and to privacy (article 16), as well as certain freedoms such as expression (article 13), thought, belief and religion (article 14), and association (article 15). There is an underlying tension within the Convention between the desire to protect children and the desire to ensure their freedom as independent, rational agents. What is clear from the UNCRC (1989), however, is the recognition of children as valuable members of society whose rights are worthy of respect. The British courts did, however, recognise the importance of respecting the child prior to the ratification of the Treaty, as was made clear in the decision of the House of Lords in Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority [1986] AC 112. This case focused on the question of whether children under the age of sixteen could be given contraceptive advice and agree to medical treatment without the consent or knowledge of their parents. The court ruled that the rights of the parents apply only to the extent that they safeguard the best interests of the child, and that in the cases of medical treatment any such

[109] Barbara Arneil rejects this view of the child as 'becoming' (i.e. as adults in the making) rather than 'being' and argues that only a focus on the child as 'being' allows adults to form care-giving and loving relationships with children and 'truly embraces children as full beings' (2002, p. 93).

right would cease ‘if and when the child achieves sufficient understanding and intelligence to understand fully what is proposed’ (Lord Scarman [1986] AC 112, 187[D]). This judgement has become known as the Gillick competence test and is applied by the courts in medical and family law cases in order to allow children’s views to be incorporated into legal decisions which affect them. Thus, the English legal system demonstrates the importance of reconciling the protection of children required by their lack of experience with the need to ensure they are respected as equal members of society. However, the necessity of this balance is not afforded such recognition or addressed with such reasoned objectivity in other social institutions.

The debate about children’s freedom rights is clearly relevant to the issue of school discipline. To discipline and punish children implies that in some way the children are themselves responsible for the morality or immorality of their actions. If children lack the agency which would qualify them as rights holders and mark them as individuals in control of their actions, how can they be held responsible and punished for acts which do not conform to society’s expectations? If the children lack responsibility when performing such acts, it is the teachers who should rightly be held responsible for any misbehaviour by the children in their care. On the other hand, if we believe, like Tiboris, that ‘children, even very young ones, have access to moral agency and can be genuinely morally responsible for their actions’ (2014, p. 85), this implies that they have at least some degree of autonomous freedom to make their own decisions, and must therefore hold some freedom rights. If children are indeed held accountable for the morality or otherwise of their actions, then we are forced to question what exactly it is that distinguishes the rights of children from the rights of adults, if both are equally morally responsible for their actions. So how can we justify treating children differently from adults in such cases? To punish children for an action (like wearing socks of the wrong colour) which would not result in similar punishment if the perpetrator were an adult is unfair and demonstrates a serious lack of understanding of children’s rights. Further, it implies a failure on the part of teachers to educate the children, a failure to help them to develop mature moral values, and, even more fundamentally, a failure to respect the essential worth of children.

7.5 The Conception of the Child as of Equal Worth to Adults

In this section I shall argue that all interactions between children and adults should be governed by what I term the principle of equal worth. While this principle is completely alien

to Aristotle's concept of the child, its roots, as we shall see, can be traced back to both Locke and Rousseau, and also to the proponents of a rights-based understanding of childhood. The principle of equal worth derives primarily from the fact that both children and adults are fully and entirely human beings; in the words of Article One of the UDHR (1948), 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.' Children's equal worth thus has nothing to do with the quality of their contribution to the wellbeing of their community or the broader society, nor with the value (or potential value) of children to the market economy. Nor is it dependent on their merit or desert. At the same time, it is clear that children's supposed intellectual deficiency or lack of rationality and moral awareness cannot be used to justify a lack of respect for their equal worth.

Children's essential personhood means they cannot be denied any rights (such as a right to respect) that belong to all people as a result of their humanity. As noted in the previous section, children have an equal right to protection and welfare in line with their distinctive needs as children, just as adults have a right to protection and welfare in line with their own distinctive needs as individuals and/or members of different groups. Children also have an equal right to freedom as independent moral agents, though their capacity to exercise this right may be limited when they are very young. They also have the same right as adults to have their dignity as human beings recognised, and not to be treated as property (like slaves) or as animals, and not to be exploited (as a means to the ends of other people).

At first glance, this view of children's worth might be challenged by those who think of childhood simply as a time of preparation for adulthood; in one of his epistles St Paul states that, one 'puts away childish things' when one becomes an adult (I Corinthians 13. 11, *AV*). Adulthood is seen as the goal, that is once and for all accomplished at a certain age, separate from and superior to childhood. On reflection, however, this view is clearly untenable. One does not remain static as an adult, not even physically. Adulthood, like childhood, is a time of change and development, and not always for the best (again, not even physically). Childhood may actually be a time of greater creativity, imagination, and philosophical exploration (cf. Matthews, 1994, especially chapter 10). And as noted earlier, for Rousseau, the move from childhood to adulthood is a move from innocence to corruption; and in the New Testament, the child is presented as a model for the adult to emulate.[110] Of course, children are different

[110] See footnote 91 above.

from adults, but younger adults are also different from older adults. It seems impossible to draw any dividing lines based on age alone that enable us to say that this human being is worth more than that human being. This may not be a view shared by everyone (see Archard, 2015, p. 36), but the conclusion that children are of equal worth to adults seems inevitable.

If children are recognised as of equal worth to adults, this implies that they should be treated the same unless there are some morally relevant grounds for differentiated treatment. It has long been recognised that there can be as much injustice in treating people the same when in relevant respects they are different as there can be in treating them differently when in relevant respects they are the same. So a commitment to the equal worth of children does not imply that they no longer need guidance and support as they develop towards maturity; on the contrary, as already noted, it implies that they have an equal right to have their distinctive needs as children met. In fact, children may be the last sub-group of human beings not recognised as having the status of equal worth, following in the footsteps of women, racial and ethnic minorities, and other historically marginalised groups.

As noted in the previous section, the equal worth of children received a big boost with the publication of the UNCRC in 1989, though the implications of this convention are still under debate and the equal worth of children has only partially been recognised so far. Indeed, the principle of equal worth is still missing in many people's treatment of children, with the result that their assumed position as inferior to adults is compounded. This is the case in the current neo-Aristotelian view of the child as an animal or inferior form of human being. This view rests on an assumption that children are incapable of reasoning and so are suited to forms of discipline such as no-excuses or zero tolerance, which habituate them into an automated response. Children's assumed failure to understand the nature and implications of their actions is thus taken to justify treating children in a fundamentally different way to adults in similar circumstances.

The principle of equal worth would preclude such unequal treatment. Locke seems to acknowledge this principle when he declares (as already noted) that children 'are not born in this state of equality, though they are born to it' (1947 [1689], p. 147). *Prima facie*, this suggests a prioritisation of the child as 'becoming' (to use Arneil's (2002) terminology); but 'to be born to something' suggests a natural predisposition for that particular way of being, which is consistent with Locke's belief 'that all men by nature are equal' (1947 [1689], p. 147). Thus, if children are 'born to' equality, even though they may not be treated the same as

adults in practice due to their size and certain vulnerabilities, they are worthy of equal respect and any grounds for treating them differently need to be carefully justified.[111]

In light of the above, it is important to consider what obligations a recognition of the equal worth of children might place on schools and on adults more generally. I shall argue that these obligations fall into three main categories:

1. Children are owed some things simply by virtue of being children. For example, if childhood is a time of life characterised by curiosity, playfulness, innocence, dependence, spontaneity, creativity and asking unconventional questions (Gheaus, 2018, pp. 2, 5), then schools can try to provide whatever they need to flourish now, including opportunities to develop their imagination, and the time and space to play.[112] At the same time, if adults are not sensitive to children's needs and do not recognise children's vulnerability, the children can suffer psychological harm and emotional and mental disturbance as a result of over-strict discipline and behaviour management.[113]

2. Children are owed some things as future adults, particularly things that will help them to become autonomous, self-directed people and to develop their capacity for practical

[111] Justifiable grounds could relate to physical considerations or issues of vulnerability. On the importance of fairness to children see Halstead and Xiao (2023).

[112] A recent report in the *Guardian* highlights the significant loss of space and time for outside play at schools in the UK that young children have experienced in recent years because of the increased demands of the curriculum, staffing shortages to supervise playtimes, shortage of funding to care for school grounds, and the growing use of playgrounds to host temporary classrooms (Grant, *et al*, 2024).

[113] Concern has been expressed by the National Education Union about the effects of repressive disciplinary policies in the UK on students' mental health (see Weale, 2019) and there have been extensive debates regarding the potential outcomes for students in schools using isolation rooms to punish them (see, Perraudin, 2018). A study on the latter issue by the Centre for Mental Health suggests that first, young people who have previously been subject to trauma are likely to suffer further harm as a consequence of such practices, and second, that such a system of behaviour management ultimately aggravates behaviour issues rather than resolves them (Centre for Mental Health, 2020). There is also growing academic interest surrounding this issue (see for example, Sealy *et al*, 2023). The upshot of this research and the subsequent media attention regarding this issue (see Kacheri, 2022, Weale, 2020), has been a slight shift in the government guidance on behaviour management in schools. Advice to headteachers and school staff now refers to 'removal from classrooms' (DfE 2024a, p. 22) as opposed to the 'use of isolation' in its earlier versions of the document (see DfE 2014b, p. 12) and there are additional criteria to be considered in the use of such a measure, including the need to 'consider whether any assessment of underlying factors of disruptive behaviour is needed' (DfE, 2024a, p. 24). This suggests a growing awareness of the potential psychological impact of excessively strict disciplinary practices on young people. However, it is questionable whether there is a fundamental difference between the use of isolation and removal from the classroom. Indeed, Tom Bennett speaks in support of the practice of isolation and, whilst adopting the terminology of 'removal rooms', dismisses any concerns as 'hysteria' (Bennett, 2018).

reasoning and moral understanding more fully.[114] On the other hand, negative childhood experiences, such as being subjected to 'threats or punishment to control or pressure a child to obey' may dispose those subjected to such treatment to engage in aggressive behaviour or be more vulnerable to such behaviour by others (Li, 2024, n.p.; see also Gómez-Ortiz *et al*, 2016). Contemporary psychological research confirms the negative effects of stress, adversity and maltreatment experienced by children on their emotional and mental well-being and cognitive ability in later life (see Hanson *et al*, 2015; Richards and Wadsworth, 2004; Pechtel *et al*, 2014).

3. Children are owed some things because they are human beings and share the rights of all other human beings. Many of the rights set out in the UDHR (1948) fall into this category (for example, the right to recognition as a person, the right to freedom of opinion and expression and the right to food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services),[115] but for the purposes of the current thesis perhaps the most important of these is the one which is given pride of place as the first article of the UDHR (1948), their recognition as of equal worth. This has massive implications in the context of the school, and for school discipline in particular.

Any examination of these implications needs to start with a careful exploration of the concept of 'respect' – and this is the starting point for Chapter Eight of the thesis. The chapter then discusses the role of respect in children's developing moral understanding. The argument is put forward that an ethical approach to school discipline must be founded on respect for the child, which requires that children be considered of equal worth with adults. It is the failure to recognise this fundamental principle that results in unethical and anti-educational approaches to discipline being introduced in schools.

[114] If students have reached the stage of autonomous morality (which Piaget suggests starts soon after their arrival at secondary school), then a discipline policy such as Michaela's (which is based on a heteronomous approach) will be at odds with their current level of understanding and is thus likely to appear unjust, irrational and disrespectful.

[115] It is worth noting that in spite of the theoretical recognition of children as of equal worth to adults, at least in terms of measurable rights, children are less likely than adults to have their basic rights met. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2024), 'Around 3.8 million people in the UK experienced destitution (where they could not afford to meet their most basic needs to stay warm, dry, clean and fed) in 2022. This included around one million children. These figures have more than doubled since 2017 … Children have consistently had the highest poverty rates.' Nearly 30% of children were in poverty in the UK in 2021 -2022, compared to around 20% of working age adults and about 17% of pensioners.

PART FOUR

A Way Forward

CHAPTER 8

RESPECTING CHILDREN

8.1 Introduction

Drawing on my claim in the concluding section of the previous chapter, that children and adults are of equal worth, I shall now put forward the case that treating children with respect is a fundamental obligation deriving from core liberal values, and that this has significant implications for the establishment of ethical disciplinary practices in schools. The central arguments of this chapter are, first, that the equal worth of children points to the need for equality of respect for children; second, that equality of respect for children is compatible with a recognition that children need help and support from adults as they grow and develop towards rational autonomy and moral maturity; third, that it is unreasonable to expect children to respect adults unless they are treated with respect by adults; and fourth, that adults, and teachers in particular, must take care not to undermine children's dignity and self-respect, but must always treat them as fully human beings who are worthy of respect.

I begin this chapter with a close examination of the concept of respect, including its various meanings, its central position within a framework of modern liberal values, and the problems that arise from incomplete or inadequate definitions of respect. I then turn my attention more specifically to the matter of respecting children, including whether children have the same right to respect as adults and whether children's dependency on adults reduces their right to equal respect. In the next section, I consider what respecting children involves, why respect is important for children, and what behaviour adults need to adopt if they are to demonstrate respect towards children. Finally, I directly address the relationship between respect and school discipline.

I argue that when teachers exercise coercive power and control over children, this is incompatible with showing them respect. Insisting on obedience, enforcing particular behaviours, humiliating children, demanding respect from children, subjecting them to unjustified constraints, failing to listen to children, prioritising rules over the needs of individual children, being dismissive or condescending towards children – are all signs of disrespect towards young people. Such conduct can undermine children's dignity and self-

worth, making them despise themselves and feel they count for nothing. I shall argue, in conclusion, that the only kind of discipline that is justifiable in schools is discipline that has a moral foundation and purpose, and that the principle of showing respect to children lies at the heart of this.

8.2 The Concept of Respect for Persons

In spite of some attempts to provide a single, unified, all-encompassing definition of respect (see, for example, Giorgini and Irrera, 2017, p. 4), a close examination of the concept shows that there are at least two distinct meanings of the word. The first is the attitude or feeling one has towards a person who is exceptional in some way. This feeling may be one of honour or deep admiration or looking up to someone because of their personal qualities, their moral worth, their excellent judgment, their independent behaviour or their superior abilities, or it may be the experience of a sense of awe at their power of personality or their achievements. In other words, respect in this sense is related to merit, and it is something one can earn (or lose); it is not usually reciprocal. The second sense of respect involves a recognition of the equal worth of human beings in spite of physical, social, economic, cultural, intellectual and other differences which distinguish them, even if the individuals concerned are not independent or self-sufficient. Respect in this sense is not something people have to earn, nor is it anything to do with the way we respond to people's power, wealth, authority, superior intellect or any other form of real or supposed merit. On the contrary, it is something which is owed to individuals on an equal footing with all other people simply by virtue of their being human, irrespective of their social position, achievements, or moral excellence. From a religious perspective, people may be said to be equal before God, but the foundation of respect in this sense does not require religious belief, simply an acceptance that they all share what Kant describes as 'an absolute inner worth' which is the foundation of human dignity:

> A human being regarded as a *person*, that is, as the subject of a morally practical reason, is exalted above any price; for as a person (*homo noumenon*) he is not to be valued merely as a means to the ends of others or even to his own ends, but as an end in himself, that is, he possesses a *dignity* (an absolute inner worth) by which he exacts *respect* for himself from all other rational beings in the world. He can measure himself with

> every other being of his kind and value himself on a footing of equality with them. (1996 [1797], p. 186)[116]

According to Kant, people are never to be valued merely as a means to other people's ends, but as ends in themselves. Respect for persons in this latter sense has been taken by some liberal philosophers to be the ultimate principle of morality (see Peters, 1966, pp. 208-215; Downie and Telfer, 1969, pp. 15, 64).

In his earlier work on respect, Darwall (1977) uses the term 'appraisal respect' (p. 39) to denote the first of its two meanings, which is about merit, moral esteem and approbation, and the term 'recognition respect' (p. 38) to denote the second, which implies dignity and standing as a human being. This initial distinction is an important one, and for ease of communication I shall continue to use Darwall's terminology. However, a number of questions arise from the distinction which needs to be addressed. First, do these two kinds of respect cover the full range of meanings of the term, or are there other, possibly less important, meanings that need to be taken into account in any considered investigation of the concept? Second, does it make sense to talk of respecting things (such as the law, or private property, or the terms of an agreement) just as much as respecting people, and if so, does the meaning remain the same? Third, when respect is used as a verb, does it carry the same significance and connotations as when it is used as a noun?

With regard to the possibility of other kinds of respect in addition to appraisal respect and recognition respect, one candidate for inclusion might be the kind of respect that is due (it is commonly claimed) to people because of their membership of a particular sub-group of human beings. For example, Confucianism teaches that one should respect one's elders simply because they are older than oneself (see Sung, 2001); Judaism teaches that one should respect one's parents (Leviticus 19. 3, *NIV*), and this does not seem to be conditional on the quality of their parenting; teachers often assume that they merit respect simply because they are the ones in charge of the classroom; and other groups that are sometimes considered worthy of respect by virtue of their career choice include politicians, police persons, lawyers and medical professionals. This kind of respect (which we may call deferential respect) is clearly very different from recognition respect because it is the exact opposite of a

[116] Kant appears to be talking about rational beings here. The debate about whether and at what age children qualify as such is touched on in the previous chapter. The argument which I develop in this chapter is based on the belief that simply by virtue of being human one possesses the absolute inner moral worth that Kant refers to.

recognition of the equal worth of all human beings which renders them worthy of respect by virtue of their personhood, irrespective of their social position, achievements or moral excellence. But it also appears to be different from appraisal respect because it does not claim that the individuals concerned are exceptional in terms of their achievements or moral worth, simply that they are members of a group of people who provide a service of some sort to others. However, I contend that this is not a different kind of respect at all; it is a socio-cultural construct that draws on an old-fashioned understanding of society as hierarchical, in which individuals are required to show obedience or some other form of subservient response to anyone higher than themselves in the hierarchy. In the contemporary world it is very hard to find any justification for calling this kind of relationship one of respect at all; of course, some (perhaps many) elders, parents, teachers or other professionals deserve to be looked on with (appraisal) respect – but this is because they perform their role well, not simply by virtue of occupying a certain role. The fact that they are able to exercise some kind of authority or control or dominance over people lower in the social hierarchy does not in itself give them any claim to be treated with respect.

In relation to the question of whether respect can be shown to things, not just to people, common usage of the word suggests that this is the case. We talk of the need to respect things that are potentially dangerous, like the sea, the elements, someone's temper or a dangerous tool like a circular saw; we also talk of respecting public property, school property or the property of others; perhaps most significantly, we talk of respecting the law (see Raz 1986, pp. 94-8), or the rules of the game, or the terms of an agreement, or the requirements of society. I suggest that most of these are metaphorical uses of the term respect in the sense of appraisal respect: admiring the wisdom of the law, for example, or comparing the feeling of awe that we have towards something that inspires fear or wonder or caution (like the sea, or someone's temper) to the feeling we have towards someone who is exceptional in some way. Respecting property, on the other hand, may be a form of showing equal recognition respect to the right of all those who have a legitimate claim to use the property. Kant suggests that respect for the law actually precedes (and thus serves to justify) the duty to respect individual persons (2012 [1785], p. 16), but it may equally be argued that respect for the law is actually a consequence of respect for people, because people's equality in the face of the law must necessarily be linked to the equal worth as human beings on which their right to recognition respect is based. If respect for things is a metaphorical use of the term respect (even if it's a dead metaphor), there is no need to treat respect for things as a different meaning of the term.

Respect when used as a verb has the same two core meanings as the noun respect. To respect someone means to show them respect. Appraisal respect involves two parties: one does the action of respecting and the other (which may be a person or, metaphorically, a thing) receives the respect. There must also be a basis of respect, i.e. what makes a particular individual merit respect, and the reason for respect may be different for each person who is held in high esteem, though it necessarily involves some admirable quality or achievement. Appraisal respect may thus be little more than the attitude ordinary people have towards someone extraordinary, an attitude of looking up to someone or holding them in awe – or to put it even more simply, it may often be seen in an emotional response of liking or approval of a person one admires.

Recognition respect, on the other hand, is grounded on a belief in the equal worth and dignity of all individual human beings regardless of their social, cultural, intellectual or physical differences. In addition to its universalism as the justification for the philosophical principle of respect for persons, however, it provides the basis for respect in one-to-one relationships (such as the situation described in Aretha Franklin's song *Respec*t, 1967) and for respectful relationships between different social groups and cultures. Later in the chapter, I argue that children are a group who merit recognition respect. To respect people is to treat their beliefs and opinions as worthy of attention, not to dismiss them out of hand without due consideration and evaluation and, more importantly, to acknowledge that the people themselves are distinct centres of consciousness and self-determining agents with their own particular feelings and purposes, their own aspirations and view of the world, their own beliefs and opinions.

Other differences between appraisal respect and recognition respect, as already noted, include:

- the fact that appraisal respect is (normally) a one-way street, whereas recognition respect usually involves interactivity between different parties;
- the fact that appraisal respect can be earned, or at least deserved, whereas recognition respect is owed to all individuals simply by virtue of their status as human beings, irrespective of their achievements or moral deserts;
- the fact that appraisal respect involves putting someone on a pedestal in a sense and looking up to them, whereas recognition respect involves treating others with the

> same decency with which one would like to be treated oneself, paying due regard or consideration to their feelings or wishes or rights or autonomous decisions or their privacy and confidentiality.

Before moving on to the topic of respecting children, however, we need to look more generally at the recipients of recognition respect, whom I have already identified as either individuals or groups or the whole human race. In his more recent writings on respect, Darwall (2004; 2009) provides an account of the concept that implies that X has a right to expect or demand respect from Y because Y has an equal right to expect respect from X. In other words, it is the mutuality and reciprocity of the duty to respect others that gives that duty its moral force. He calls this the 'second person standpoint' and illustrates what he means by this term by reference to the person he calls the 'underappreciated Michigan ethicist', Aretha Franklin (Darwall, 2004, p. 43). He describes her song *Respect* (1967) as an example of what he meant by the term 'recognition respect' (Darwall, 1977), where the singer calls on her partner to 'give me my propers' (i.e. to show her due respect) when he comes home (Franklin, 1967); there must be a reciprocity in their relationship, and it is the give-and-take on both sides that makes the relationship a respectful one (Darwall, 2004, p. 43). However, expressing some dissatisfaction with this interpretation of respect, he draws on Franklin's song *Think* (1968) to illustrate his new approach, based on the centrality of the 'second-person standpoint'. The key message of this song, according to Darwall, is that we should respect each other as persons of equal worth and each should recognise the other's authority to make demands of oneself. Showing others due respect as equals involves listening to their demands and carrying out any specific requirement which they have the authority to demand compliance with. We are thus accountable to others for our own response, and a relationship of accountability is by its very nature a second-person relationship. It is equally respectful in such a second-person engagement (because each has equal authority to make demands of the other) to demand that the other complies with these requirements and indeed to hold them to account for doing so. He argues that this is precisely what Franklin is singing about when she advises, 'You better think … Think about what you're tryin' to do to me' (1968). Being a person, Darwall notes, is simply having 'the authority to address demands *as a person to other persons,* and to be addressed by them, within a community of mutually accountable equals', that is, a community where all have equal authority (2004, p. 51). So how, on this view, should people respond to any apparent affront to their dignity, and particularly to the kind of disrespect that assumes that the

interests of other people may be sacrificed for one's own convenience? Rather than seeking retaliation (which involves meeting disrespect with further disrespect), Darwall's approach requires respectfully holding the other to account, recognising the equal dignity, and hence the mutual accountability, of both parties. This is all implied, he suggests, in the two songs by Aretha Franklin.

Darwall's article was written as an attempt to 'rethink … the nature of respect for persons' (2004, p. 43). The approach is certainly original and potentially stimulating, drawing as it does from the author's expertise on Kantian ethics as well as on his own extensive research in the field of the second-person standpoint in ethics (Darwall 2006; 2013). But as an innovative and authoritative statement on the nature of respect for persons, it has a number of shortcomings. First, instead of focusing initially on what respect is and on what it means to respect others, its starting point is a person's complaints about being shown a lack of respect by someone else, and it is this complaint that informs the argument throughout. This means that we are left without answers to many crucial questions about respect such as whether all human beings deserve respect, whether individual human beings should always be respected, what treatment respect involves (and excludes), what sort of a thing respect is and why it is morally important. It also means that respect is linked to the pursuit of self-interest, in that the central questions with which Darwall is concerned can be formulated as follows: 'How can I get someone to show me the respect I deserve?' or 'How can I hold another person to be responsible for compliance with my moral demands?' It is his emphasis on the authority to demand respect (and his assumption that others should be accountable to him for their compliance) that seems to tie respect to self-interest in his view. Although he does not acknowledge this, his underlying concern appears to be how to reconcile respect with the neo-liberal value of self-interest, but this is counter-intuitive because the concept of respect is essentially other-focused, not self-focused.[117] Unlike the more altruistic understanding of respect that draws on liberal moral values (particularly social justice), a self-interested approach prioritises *my* demand that *you* respect *me* over *your* right to expect some respect from *me*. This echoes a situation which may occur in schools, where the teacher's demand to be respected by the children is not matched by any corresponding right for children to be respected.

[117] When we talk about 'self-respect', the criteria of respect that have been discussed so far no longer apply.

Secondly, Darwall argues that it is the equal standing of persons that gives them the authority to hold one another mutually accountable for compliance with the moral demands they make as equal free and rational agents; it is always reciprocal. However, his insistence that mutuality is central to an understanding of recognition respect is misleading, for two main reasons. First, it wrongly implies that if someone fails to reciprocate the respect you show them, then there is no reason to continue to show them respect. Second, it suggests that someone who is not in a position to reciprocate (a young child, for example) cannot expect to be treated with respect (see Darwall, 2009, p. 128). I argue that one has a duty to treat people with respect because it's the right thing to do, not because one has a right to be treated with respect by them in return – in other words, not because it's a mutual duty of respect or a relationship dependent on mutuality. The rightness of treating people with respect is determined by its relationship with fundamental values like freedom, equality and justice. Darwall's position seems to be based on a misunderstanding of the two songs by Aretha Franklin, which are not centrally about mutual accountability, or about respecting someone's authority to make demands of one. They are actually about respecting the equal freedom of others and treating them with justice and fairness – and these are all values which underpin the liberal principle of respect for persons.

Thirdly, the emphasis Darwall puts on first- and second-person interaction, which he says is what operates 'within a community of mutually accountable equals' (2004, p. 51), implies that people need to have something significant in common (more than just a common humanity) in order to give and receive respect. The outcome of this is an approach to respect similar to that in ancient Greece, where respect was limited to one's friends, fellow citizens and equals, but was not considered an appropriate attitude towards people from other groups such as slaves or labourers. The danger of respecting only one's social equals or those who belong to the same community or inner circle or who share a key characteristic such as nationality or race, is that it totally undermines the liberal principle of respect for persons, which (as already noted) is based on an acceptance of the absolute inner worth of all human beings; accordingly, this principle requires that respect is owed to all people equally, simply by virtue of their personhood, irrespective of their membership of any particular community or group. The problem with Darwall's position is that it allows for total disrespect to be shown to third person groups while respect is maintained within second-person relationships. After the appointment of David Cameron as Foreign Secretary in 2023, Jacob Rees-Mogg said he was 'delighted, of course, to have an old Etonian back in government' (2023. 15:28-

15:32), even though he disagreed with him on many things; but it would be unlikely he would have shown the same respect for others he disagreed with if they were not members of the same club. Another example of respect being shown to those within Darwall's 'community of mutually accountable equals' (2004, p.51) but not to those outside the community can be seen at the funeral of the Israeli terrorist Baruch Goldstein in 1994, where the officiating Rabbi Yaacov Perrin claimed that even one million Arabs are 'not worth a Jewish fingernail' (Kraft, 1994, n.p.).

The emphasis on the second person aspect of moral obligation may thus offer a good reason for me and you to respect each other, but it offers no reason for 'us' to respect 'them', i.e. third person individuals or groups. In a situation where there are unequal power relationships, or where one group has traditionally been oppressed by another, it is not enough to call for a tit-for-tat approach to respect, i.e. a relationship of mutual accountability in which each party has the authority to demand respect from the other. Darwall has little to say about how traditionally under-respected minority groups (like racial minorities, women, the disabled or LGBTQIA groups) can actually attain equality of recognition respect. Respect in this situation cannot be focused on second-person interaction but must involve the recognition of and respect for difference (i.e. third-person groups). True recognition respect can only be attained through a recognition that all individual human beings are of equal worth, regardless of their membership of any of a diversity of human sub-groups. Darwall's version of respect does not really extend to groups outside the inner circle whose members form a 'community of mutually accountable equals' (2004, p. 51). As already noted, recognition respect, most commonly called respect for persons in philosophical circles, is rooted in and intertwined with the liberal values of equality, freedom, dignity, tolerance, justice, autonomy, diversity, fairness and recognition for all persons, and it is unlikely to be found in societies which do not take these values seriously.

8.3 The Need to Show Respect to Children

This section examines how far what has been said in the previous section about respect applies to respect for children as well as for adults. The distinction made in the previous section between appraisal respect and recognition respect is of particular significance when discussing whether and how to show respect to children. Since appraisal respect involves looking up to someone because of their moral maturity or sustained high levels of

achievement, it is normally considered inappropriate to use the term respect in the sense of appraisal respect when talking about children – simply because (if for no other reason) it takes time to develop moral maturity or sustain high levels of achievement in other areas of life, and children by definition have not had as long as adults to do so.[118] Children will only very rarely be judged to merit appraisal respect when judged by the same criteria as adults.[119] When it comes to recognition respect, however, which is something owed to individuals on an equal footing with all other people simply by virtue of their being human, irrespective of their social position, achievements or moral excellence, this section will argue that children have the same right as adults to be recognised as of equal worth and therefore to be recognised as deserving equal respect. For the remainder of this chapter therefore, since it is concerned with respecting children, the term respect will be used only in the sense of recognition respect (or respect for persons), never in the sense of appraisal respect unless this is specifically identified.

The section begins with an examination of the case in support of treating children with the same respect as adults, and then considers possible counterarguments to this. In the following section, I discuss the question of whether children's dependence on adults disqualifies them from being treated on an equal footing with adults. In section four, reasons why being treated with respect is important for children are examined, alongside the problems that arise for children if they are not treated with respect. I then proceed to explore what difference showing respect makes to the way adults treat children and what behaviour adults need to adopt – and what to avoid – if they are to demonstrate respect towards children. The final section then narrows the focus even further, by concentrating on the issue of respecting children in school, particularly in relation to school discipline.

The combination of the arguments in the last section of Chapter Seven and those in the first section of the current chapter generates the following syllogism, which provides a useful starting point for the discussion of respecting children in the current section:

[118] It is recognised that this view of children and adults is not held universally. When Jesus says, 'Unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' (Matthew 18. 3, *NIV*), he appears to turn this standard view on its head by suggesting that children provide an appropriate model for adults to look up to and emulate.

[119] Exceptions to this generalisation that readily come to mind include Malala Yousafzai, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2014 at the age of seventeen, or Greta Thunberg, who rose to world fame as an environmental activist from the age of fifteen.

1. All individual human beings are owed (recognition) respect on an equal footing simply by virtue of their being human.
2. All children are fully human beings, in other words, persons of equal worth with adults.
3. Therefore, all children are owed (recognition) respect as much as adults.

The first premise has already been discussed in detail earlier in the present chapter, where it is argued that recognition respect (more often known by philosophers as respect for persons) has nothing to do with people's achievements, their authority, their social standing, their degree of independence and self-sufficiency, or any other real or supposed merit; rather, it involves recognising the equal, inherent and absolute moral value of human beings as persons, independently of their deserts. Each person is a distinctive centre of consciousness whose shared absolute inner worth provides the justification for treating all people equally. Rawls recognises this type of respect as a defining feature of fundamental equality which 'is owed to human beings as moral persons' (1999, p. 447).[120] Similarly, recognition respect is *a priori* what Dworkin describes as the 'most fundamental of rights … the right to equal concern and respect' (2013, p. 7). According to Kant, people should be treated as ends in themselves, not simply as a means to the ends of other people (as someone treated as a sex object, for example, might be). Respect thus acknowledges a person's dignity, and Peters argues that we cannot have a concept of 'the person' at all without reference to respect (1966, p. 215). Recognition respect cannot be demanded, or enforced, or earned, or abolished; it is something we are owed as part of our essential humanity.

With regard to the second premise, I have already argued at the end of Chapter Seven that children are persons of equal worth. This claim is based on the fact that children are fully human, and it is this that means they cannot be denied any rights (such as a right to have their essential humanity respected) that belong to everyone as a result of their being persons. By fully human, I do not mean that their personal autonomy and moral identity are necessarily as fully established as adults', or that their intellect is as fully developed, or that their contribution to the market economy is as great. Rather, I mean simply that their essential equality by virtue of being human makes any distinction of treatment unacceptable unless it is

[120] However, as Brennan and Noggle note, Rawls 'pays almost no attention to the moral status of children' (1998, p. 203).

'based on some morally relevant criterion of difference' (Downie and Telfer, 1969, p. 50). A commitment to the equal worth of children does not imply that they no longer need guidance and support as they gain more experience and develop towards maturity; what it does imply is that they have as much right to have their distinctive needs as children met as adults have to have their own distinctive needs met as individuals or as members of different groups. They also have the same rights as adults not to be exploited or treated like animals or treated as the property of others. Probably the most well-known statement in support of the equal status of children comes in the UNCRC (1989), though the main purpose of this document is to set out the responsibility of states to protect and respect the rights of children. The document starts by setting out (in its Preamble) its fundamental commitment to the 'inherent dignity' and the 'equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family', which equates the worth of children and adults, and also by emphasising (in Article 2) that no child matters more than any other child, especially in terms of the right to be protected from discrimination. It also asserts that children have an equal right to freedom as independent moral agents (Articles 12-16), though their capacity to exercise this right may be limited when they are very young.

With regard to the conclusion of the syllogism, that children should be shown the same respect as adults because they are of equal worth, this has the potential to transform the way adults respond to children, and in particular the way that teachers think about children and the way they approach school discipline. It is not just about showing children goodwill or kindness or concern. It does not mean that children should be treated the same as adults in every respect, just that an underlying basis of respect requires that any grounds for treating them differently need to be carefully justified.[121] I argue that teachers should see children from the point of view of their absolute inner worth and the respect they are owed as fully human individuals. Before I examine more closely what is involved in this sort of respect for children and why it makes so much difference to children to be treated with the same respect as adults, however, we must look more carefully at any counter-arguments that have been raised against children being treated with equal respect.

[121] Justifiable grounds could relate to physical considerations or issues of vulnerability. On the importance of fairness to children, see Halstead and Xiao (2023).

The only way that this conclusion can be challenged is by undermining or disproving one or both of its premises. The first premise has in fact been challenged in two different ways: by rejecting the definition of respect as recognition respect;[122] and by denying that all individual human beings should be treated on an equal footing with regard to (recognition) respect. As noted in Chapter Two, Bennett seeks to implicitly undermine the first premise in both ways when he defines respect as 'deferring to agreed hierarchies, accepting authority sources' (2020a, p. 123).[123] To respect someone on this view is no longer a matter of recognising their equal, inherent and absolute moral value as an individual human being, independently of their deserts, their authority or their social standing; on the contrary, it is precisely their authority or their superior social position in a given hierarchy which provides the reason why they should be shown respect. Bennett's definition also denies the right of all individuals to receive recognition respect on an equal footing. His use of the term 'agreed hierarchies' implies that some individuals are more deserving of respect than others – and of course children are at the bottom of any hierarchy of respect: they need to show respect to anyone of higher rank but have no claim themselves to be offered respect by others. The notion of a hierarchy of respect has a long history: as already noted, in ancient Greece, one was not expected to respect slaves, women, labourers, children or anyone lower than oneself in the hierarchy. Bennett's definition of respect also fits very well into a neo-liberal framework of values, in which entrepreneurs and other creators of wealth occupy a position at the top of the hierarchy of respect and politicians are deemed worthy of respect because of their position of authority, regardless of their moral worth. But this definition of respect is seriously lacking in coherence and far from persuasive. Aretha Franklin articulates a better understanding of respect than Bennett. She does not seek more respect from her partner because she has a higher standing in an agreed hierarchy than he does or because she has the authority to tell him what to do. She is simply asking him to show her equal respect i.e. to treat her with the same respect that she shows him.[124]

The second premise raises a different set of issues. There is a strand of thinking about children that has a long history going back to Aristotle that claims that children cannot be

[122] For example, France and Meredith suggest that the Respect Task Force set up by Tony Blair in 2005 uses the word 'respect' as a synonym for 'good behaviour', 'good manners' and 'responsibility' (2009, p. 78).
[123] This is drawn from Bennett's idiosyncratic rewriting of the seven 'universal' moral rules identified in Curry *et al* (2019).
[124] This could in fact provide an appropriate model of equal respect for the classroom, ensuring that the teacher expects the children to show her the same respect that she shows them.

counted as fully human beings and cannot be considered as of equal worth with adults. Indeed, on some views they cannot be considered persons at all – at least, if a person is defined as someone who possesses a rational will which allows them to make free choices, formulate purposes and carry through decisions, i.e. to be fully self-determining. Children, it is claimed, lack the necessary experience, maturity, moral awareness and capacity for rational, autonomous decision-making that would allow them to be considered as equal to adults. They are too small, young and immature to be shown respect, and are best viewed as emergent and incomplete human beings (George, 2009, pp. 2, 6). From a neo-liberal perspective, children don't have any significant place in the economic life of the community; they don't contribute anything and are simply a burden. Bennett suggests that children's resemblance to animals in terms of behaviour (see Chapter Two) means that they have to be subject to adult control, basic training and rigid discipline until they learn compliance, and he implies that to talk of respecting children makes no sense until a compliant attitude has become second nature. At the heart of the objections to the second premise is the claim that children do not deserve to be treated with respect simply by virtue of the essential dignity they have as human beings. Additional attributes are required for them to warrant respect, including being 'a free moral agent who is simultaneously autonomous and responsible' (Perelman, 1982, p. 119). On this view, these attributes are generally deemed to be lacking in children and so this justifies their not being equally worthy of the respect due to adults.

However, there are a number of problems with the claim that children cannot be considered as persons of equal worth with adults. Taken to its logical conclusion, it implies that there are two types of human beings – one which may be correctly called persons because they are fully human and one which may not because they are immature, under-developed or incomplete (including children, the senile, the brain-damaged, etc). However, to claim that there are two types of human being – persons and non-persons – seems counter-intuitive. Downie and Telfer try to get round this problem by proposing that 'children are potentially persons, and to some extent already persons although still children' (1969, p. 34), but this does not actually bring a solution any nearer. Peters rightly persists with the question, 'When do children reach the stage when we can treat them fully as persons?' (1966, p. 289), and correctly points out that 'there is no magical age at which a sudden transformation takes place' (*ibid*). Clearly, some children at the age of nine or even younger are more rational, more morally mature and more capable of self-determination than some adults, not all of

whom are essentially independent and self-sufficient. If there are two distinct types of human being, it is impossible to know how or where to draw the line between them. This leads to the conclusion that all post-natal humans are persons and that the words person and human can be used interchangeably After all, a greyhound is no less a greyhound because it is not yet old enough or muscular enough to appear on the track. One can be a fully human being without being a fully developed human. However, once it is conceded that all children are fully human beings, then it can no longer be denied that anything (such as recognition respect) which is owed to all human beings equally, is owed to children.

The growing acceptance of this conclusion, that children are just as much persons as adults are and just as deserving of respect, is reinforced not only by the UNCRC (1989) (cf. UNICEF *et al*, 2006), but also by the findings of fairly recent psychological and other research, that even very young children are capable of reasoning and autonomous decision-making and able to understand the nature and implications of their actions (George, 2009; McAuliffe *et al*, 2017; Halstead and Xiao, 2009, 2023). The research described by Halstead and Xiao (2023) involved a researcher sitting in the same class of 8–9-year-olds for many weeks, experiencing everything the children experienced and discussing with them everything they did and every decision they made. The children were only too happy to talk to the adult researcher because she genuinely seemed interested in what they had to say and she never told them off, and they initiated many quite sophisticated discussions about the inner struggles and the moral choices they faced in the classroom (Xiao, 2008). For example, the children rarely responded uncritically to their class-teacher's instructions, and they were particularly concerned about the fairness or otherwise of the instructions. Sometimes the 'goodie girls' (their terminology) did what the teacher told them to do anyway, either because they were too lazy to complain, or they felt sorry for the teacher, or they wanted to 'please the teacher', or they were able to see things from his standpoint, or they (somewhat apologetically) agreed with him, or else they understood the power relations in the classroom and were resigned to the inevitable (Halstead and Xiao, 2023, pp. 377-378). The 'daring boys', on the other hand, were more likely to respond to boring activities or constant surveillance by the teacher with a variety of 'subversive practices like distraction, disruption and time-wasting' (*ibid* p. 373; Xiao, 2008). Resistance and subversion were widespread on minor matters, but this does suggest that the children were thinking about and engaging with the teacher's demands rather than being purely passive, which points to their potential for

rational autonomy (cf. Halstead and Xiao, 2009). George (2009) offers two case studies that provide evidence of children's capacity to demonstrate personhood at a much earlier age. One involved children aged 4-8 years in a variety of primary school settings in Israel, and sought to introduce respect in practice in the classroom. The initiative's success seemed to depend on teachers' willingness to listen to the children's ideas and wishes. However, some school leaders ended up reverting to a policy of coercion and disrespectful language to reinforce their authority. The other case study involved children aged 0-3 in day-care environments in eastern Germany, and drew on claims that dependency should not be used to justify the denial of respect for, or the withholding of autonomy from, even very young children (see Sennett, 2004, pp. 176-7). The study found that the latter were able to indicate their wishes relating to food and clean nappies non-verbally even though they were totally dependent on adults to provide for these needs, and could therefore be thought to have some responsibility for their own lives. More recent research by McAuliffe *et al*, (2017) links respect to fairness and provides evidence that a sense of fairness often emerges in children by the age of 12 months. The issue of dependency, and the question whether human beings who are weak or needy or heavily dependent on others still deserve to be recognised as of equal worth and treated with respect, needs closer investigation, and it is to this topic that I now turn.

8.4 Respecting Children: The Issue of Children's Dependency

The Enlightenment ushered in the view that only adults deserve full respect because they are broadly self-sufficient and have full responsibility for their own lives as autonomous beings, whereas children need constant guidance and support from others. They are viewed as incomplete human beings, until, as Sennet describes, they reach the critical point of maturation and, like moths, emerge fully formed from the chrysalis (2004, p. 113); to put it bluntly, children are seen as a burden on others, and people don't like parasites. But is this, as George suggests, just a conceptual bias against children (2009, p. 5)? Why *is* a child simply not recognised as a 'full human being whose presence matters' (Sennett, 2004, p. 3)? Why is a child constantly 'disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations or in everyday life interactions' (Fraser, 1998, p. 7)? Does dependency disqualify people from being shown respect? Is dependency always to be understood as the opposite of autonomy? Or is it in fact possible for children to be dependent and autonomous and worthy of respect at the same time? In this section, I argue that in the case of children, dependency and respect should go

hand in hand. I examine and build upon some of the arguments developed by Richard Sennett in his book *Respect* (2004), and especially Chapter Four, 'The Shame of Dependence'. Although Sennett's focus is primarily on the lack of respect shown to people from economically challenged communities, from racial or religious minorities and from lower social classes, much of what he says can be more fully extended to children.

Sennett suggests that dependency has two faces – one private and the other public (2004, p. 102). On this view, the first involves dependence on a parent, a spouse, a lover or a friend, which belongs to the private, intimate sphere, and implies a relationship of trust. In this context, there is nothing shameful about asking for help; dependency implies a recognition that one is incomplete in oneself, and one needs the resources of someone else in order to attain a feeling of completeness. The other face of dependency belongs to the public world and can generate feelings of shame because it makes people think that to be dependent is to have failed in some sense in the quest for self-sufficiency. From a political perspective, particularly a neo-liberal one, there is a need to wean people away from dependency and towards economic independence. It may be argued that this perceived political need has impacted on our present-day understanding of children's dependency and led us to think less of children because of their necessary dependence on adults. I maintain that far from being mutually exclusive concepts, dependency and the experience of being respected are both essential aspects of the experience of the child and that the interplay between the two is complex but necessary for a child's balanced growth towards maturity and autonomy. Sennett finds evidence in the work of Erikson (1980, p. 70) and Winnicott (1958) to reinforce his arguments about the 'psychological possibility of combining dependency and autonomy' (2004, pp. 172, 120). This implies that dependence does not necessarily make children passive, nor that adults have no alternative in their treatment of children to being disrespectful of children's feelings and opinions. I give a few examples from the lifespan of a child to help clarify this point.

Young babies are completely dependent on their mothers for food, but when they have had enough, they (normally) turn their faces away from the nipple or press their lips shut. At first this may be just an instinctive reaction to feeling full, but in due course it becomes an autonomous choice to stop feeding. So long as the mother respects this choice, a balanced relationship between dependence, autonomy and respect is established. A similar process might occur if a young baby runs her fingers over her mother's skin; at first this may happen

entirely by chance, but if it results in a pleasant sensation, the action may gradually become intentional on the baby's part, and the mother will (normally) respect and encourage it, seeing it as a gesture of intimacy. Once again, the mother's respect for the baby results in a positive combination of dependence and autonomous action.

When 5-year-olds learns to read, they are dependent on an older person for help and support, and without this guidance the process of learning would at best be a very messy one. But once children have learned, they may autonomously decide to read nothing but comics (though it would be unlikely that this was the teacher's primary intended outcome). Nonetheless, the adult will probably respect and support the children's choice, for two reasons: comics may be seen as just a step on the route to more mature reading matter, and children will normally be more eager to use their new skill if their views about their own reading preferences are listened to. In this scenario, we can again see the three elements of dependency, autonomy and respect operating in harmony in the development of the child, and there is certainly nothing shameful in a child's dependence on adult support when learning to read. As the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child points out, young children require nurture, care, guidance and protection, but this must be combined with respect both 'for the feelings and views of the young child' (UNICEF *et al*, 2006, p. 40) and for their individuality and evolving capacities (p. 37). The term 'evolving capacities' refers to the 'processes of maturation and learning whereby children progressively acquire knowledge, competencies and understanding' (p. 42), and they should be seen as positive, enabling processes, not as 'an excuse for authoritarian practices that restrict children's autonomy and self-expression' (*ibid*).

As the years pass by, autonomy (and especially autonomy tempered by respect) comes to play a bigger part in a child's life, and dependency a correspondingly smaller (but still not insignificant) one. Arguably, respect is even more important for children at this stage when, as pre-adolescents, they are demonstrating the capacity to behave with a degree of autonomy. The research by Halstead and Xiao (2023) mentioned earlier in the present chapter highlights the capacity of 8–9-year-olds to understand the nature and implications of their actions, to reflect on complex moral issues and to engage in moral reasoning and autonomous decision-making. According to Ariès (1986), the denial of children's autonomy is a modern phenomenon. He presents material describing how the typical medieval family kept their children at home only 'till they arrive at the age of seven or nine at the utmost' when 'they

put them out, both males and females, to hard service in the houses of other people' (1986, p. 356). Following Ariès, Sennett states that, in the 17th century (and before), 'a human being aged 8 or 9 was treated as an 'incipient adult', accorded adult powers and responsibilities, marrying even before he or she could biologically procreate' (Sennett, 2004, p. 110). Whilst the invention of adolescence in the modern age and the (perhaps artificial) extension of childhood to the age of 18 may be viewed as inevitable and appropriate in view of economic factors and increased life expectancy, it has had numerous consequences for children.[125] Dependency has been encouraged; respect for young people's feelings, opinions and decisions has declined; the move towards full autonomy has been delayed. In short, the natural interplay between dependency, autonomy and respect has been interfered with and not been allowed to develop normally. The outcome is anti-educational and requires excessive control (often disguised as authority) to maintain. In many secondary schools, like Michaela, students' basic freedoms are meticulously regulated with an 'authoritative teacher presence' in toilets and in corridors, where talking to friends is a punishable offence (Andrews, 2020, p. 303). Sennett argues strongly against the imposition of 'a demeaning, willing passivity and blind obedience' on adolescents (2004, p. 107). It is hardly in children's best interests as they get older to be blocked from developing the capacity to reason independently and rationally, so that they end up either rebelling, or else regressing to the passive dependency of childhood, unable to do anything without permission. What adolescents need is more respect, not less, especially respect for their growing independence.

Once the conclusions are accepted, that children are just as much persons as adults are and just as deserving of respect, and that children's dependence on adults does not disqualify them from respect, we can turn to more practical matters. What implications do these conclusions have for children's day-to-day life at school? How can teachers show respect for children in practice? How can they create an atmosphere of respect in the classroom? What benefits does the feeling of being respected bring to children? What harm is caused by a lack of respect? These questions form the framework for the next section.

[125] Children's dependence on their parents may of course extend well beyond the age of 18, as is seen in the increased use of the 'Bank of Mum and Dad' as a source of funding for a deposit for house purchase.

8.5 Fostering Respect for Children in Schools

In previous sections, I have argued that if 'respect for people is, and is generally acknowledged to be, a central moral duty' (Raz, 2001, p. 125) and if the category of 'people' includes all children, then respect for children is a central moral duty – for parents and care-givers, for health and other professionals, for the police, politicians and the media, and particularly for teachers. Treating children with respect is simply the right thing to do. It's not a matter of mutuality (i.e. that if adults respect children, then the children are duty-bound to respect the adults in return), as some writers have claimed (see Sennett, 2004, pp. 209-226; Darwall, 2004). Adults should show children respect without any necessary expectation of reciprocity. The normativity of my claim derives primarily from the fact that such respect is good *per se*, but the educational potential of such conduct is a further factor in recommending it to teachers. Demonstrating respect for children has a positive outcome – adults are setting a good example from which children will hopefully learn. Most adults (and perhaps especially teachers) are aware that children learn through observation and imitation and will understand the need to reflect carefully on what sort of example they are setting. It is therefore problematic when children are severely punished for not showing adults 'proper' respect. From an educational perspective, treating children with respect shows children what respect is, and thus it becomes a model for their relations with others; indeed, children will normally learn to respect adults only by being shown respect themselves by adults. Not only does treating children with respect foster positive relations, it also motivates children to succeed and helps them to flourish. From a psychological perspective, it boosts children's self-confidence and self-esteem, their sense of self-worth, their mental and emotional health and well-being (Malti *et al*, 2020). The moral importance of being shown respect is that it builds a foundation for children's own moral development and for learning about other modern liberal values like tolerance, autonomy, empathy, rights, dignity, equality, and freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion. The philosophy of respect that has been discussed in the earlier part of this chapter also acts as a counterbalance to 'the power relations that are inherent in adult-child relations' (Lansdown, 2005, p. 1), and helps to discourage the marginalisation and exclusion of children.

But what does it mean to show respect to children? What difference does showing respect make to the actual ways adults treat children? In what follows I give examples of the kinds of behaviour that teachers need to adopt – and the behaviour they need to avoid – if they are to demonstrate respect towards the children in their care and contribute to their moral

development. As well as contributing to individual wellbeing, this behaviour is an affirmation of human dignity and worth, it promotes the common good, and provides the basis for a commitment to democratic values. The kind of teacher behaviour that will demonstrate a commitment to respecting children and create an atmosphere of respect in the classroom includes:

- Being tactful and sensitive to children (e.g. not mocking them or laughing at their mistakes, or being impatient with them, or shouting at them, or calling them names);
- Allowing children a voice, and listening to what they want to say;
- Making it clear that children's opinions matter and that their ideas are valued;
- Being kind, caring, thoughtful and helpful in all one's dealings with children;
- Paying due regard to children's emotions and never belittling them;
- Supporting children's rights, including their right to privacy and confidentiality;
- Recognising the importance to children of their personal space, property and friendships;
- Listening to children's problems rather than ignoring them, and asking them for their own views on how to manage them;
- Acknowledging and commending children's positive qualities and behaviours, including their curiosity, creativity, energy, enthusiasm and sense of fun;
- Keeping promises made to children;
- Thinking about one's language and tone before one speaks (e.g. avoiding sarcasm and talking down to children);
- Boosting children's self-confidence and self-esteem, their sense of self-worth, their mental and emotional health and well-being;
- Involving children in decision-making;
- Listening to children and refraining from premature judgments and assumptions and from making unduly negative comments;
- Showing children trust, for example by giving them responsibilities, even if they let one down sometimes;
- Not forcing children into situations where they feel uncomfortable;
- Encouraging children's independence, so that they can have a sense of achieving something worthwhile through their own efforts;

- Encouraging children to learn in a way that is appropriate for their own capacities and strengths, rather than forcing them all into the same pre-defined approach;
- Allowing children to learn by experience when appropriate, without too much interference by the teacher;
- Acting fairly, whilst acknowledging that children's understanding of fairness might be different from that of the teachers;
- Being courteous and practising good manners (e.g. by giving children one's full attention and not interrupting them or talking across them when they are speaking);
- Being willing to admit one's mistakes and apologise to children where appropriate;
- Recognising children's equal worth, which means accepting them as they are, even if they are different from oneself or one does not agree with them;
- Praising children's efforts and achievement without appearing condescending;
- Showing acceptance and sensitivity towards differences in children's religious, cultural and other beliefs, opinions and practices;
- Encouraging children to express themselves and to join in discussions, dialogue and democratic decision-making, and supporting them as they do so.

Some teachers may not realise just how disrespectful to children a lot of current practices in schools, that are simply taken for granted as normal, actually are. Such practices include saying negative things about children, making them feel small or humiliating them; making children feel they have no value and count for nothing, so that they end up with a sense of inferiority; prioritising rules over children's needs or feelings; expressing excessive anger to a non-compliant child; treating children with arrogance or condescension; treating them dismissively or in a bullying or discriminatory way; assuming children are not trustworthy; looking down on them as of less moral worth. Such behaviour on the part of teachers not only sets a bad example for children, it also makes children feel bad about themselves and may act as a self-fulfilling prophecy, prompting a deterioration in children's behaviour (Assor *et al*, 2005). For the remainder of the present section, I shall examine in more detail three examples of disrespect for children that feature in the educational thinking of the 'dominant voices' discussed in Part One of the thesis.

The first is the ban imposed by Michaela on Muslim children performing any of their obligatory Islamic prayers on the school premises during the school's lunch break. The issue came to a head during the holy month of Ramadan in 2023, when some Muslim children at

the school began spending five minutes in prayer during the lunch hour, using their blazers as prayer-mats. Rather than setting aside a classroom for use as a prayer room for a few minutes every day (as many schools throughout England already do on a regular basis), Michaela decided on a more confrontational approach and made it a punishable offence for any child at the school to pray in the playground or a classroom, or even to bring a pocket prayer-mat into the school. A female Muslim student challenged the school's decision in the High Court on the grounds that it was discriminatory and breached her right to freedom of religion (as set out in article 14 of the UNCRC, 1989).[126] Although the court ruled against the girl, this is a clear example of failure to show adequate respect to a student at school. Far from listening to children, paying due regard to their feelings, supporting their rights, showing sensitivity to cultural difference and boosting their sense of self-worth, the school left the student feeling (in her own words) 'like somebody saying they don't feel like I properly belong here' (quoted in Salih, 2024). What makes this a core example of disrespect is the headteacher's refusal to recognise and support the requirements of the student's faith (a central part of her distinct personhood), but also her determination in her media interviews to present the child as a troublemaker (see Taher, 2024).[127] But it is not only disrespect at a personal level which is at issue here. Multicultural policies in schools are based on the core values which all schools are required to promote, especially 'individual liberty' and 'mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs' (DfE, 2014a, p. 5); in her actions, the headteacher is showing scant respect for these core values, and for the pluralism which is central to contemporary British society (Millie, 2009). The Israeli child psychologist Haim Ginott has observed:

> I have come to a frightening conclusion. I am the decisive element in the classroom … As a teacher I possess tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of

[126] The claimant was not, however, able to base her case on the right conferred by the UNCRC (1989) as it has not been incorporated into British law (see Chapter Seven). It was argued, *inter alia*, on the grounds of article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (1950) and s85(2) Equality Act 2010. Linden J. found, first, regarding Article 9 ECHR that the school's prayer ban did not interfere with the student's right of religious freedom as she was aware of the school's approach to religious expression when she had chosen to attend, and she was free to attend an alternative school where prayer was permitted. Also, the girl was able to mitigate her failure to prayer at the required time by performing *Qada* prayers. Secondly, with regard to the Equality Act, the court ruled that although the prohibition on prayer did create a particular disadvantage to Muslim pupils (who comprise 50% of the students at the school) this was 'outweighed by the aims which it seeks to promote in the interests of the school community as a whole, including Muslim pupils' (Linden, J., 2024, p. 51).

[127] Disrespect has equally been shown in the headteacher's many media interviews towards Muslim parents and members of the local community, who are also presented as troublemakers threatening the school's safety and security (Pilgrim, 2024). Her actions are reminiscent of those of the Bradford headteacher Ray Honeyford in the 1980s, who was forced to take early retirement following publication of insulting accounts of the actions of Muslim parents at his school and the actions of members of the local community (cf. Halstead, 1988).

> inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated, and a child humanized or de-humanized. (1995, p. 7)

It seems that through her lack of respect on this occasion the headteacher of Michaela School is intent on escalation.

The second example of failing to respect children is the use of insulting language and derogatory imagery to describe them. As we saw in Chapter Two, Tom Bennett is a master of the use of disrespectful language about children, comparing them variously to 'angry drunks' (2010, p. 47), 'wolves' (p. 16), 'monkeys' (p. 13), 'worms' (p. 12), 'raptors' (p. 16), and generally as out-of-control, threatening animals 'sniffing around the fences' and determined to break through the metaphorical barricade of rules (*ibid*). But he is not the only one. It is ironical that the best-selling book *Getting the Buggers to Behave* contains a section devoted to advice to teachers on how to deal with 'serious verbal abuse' in the classroom (Cowley, 2006, p. 226-231).[128] What clearer example of serious verbal abuse can we find than teachers calling their pupils 'buggers'?[129] How does it make the children feel if they see a book with this title on their teacher's desk and it dawns on them that the word 'buggers' is a reference to themselves? Is it going to make them want to behave better?

The third example of treating children with disrespect can be seen when schools prioritise communal unity and conformity to their own idiosyncratic policies over the needs of individual students. The students are treated as a means to the end of enhancing the school's reputation rather than as ends in themselves. The Michaela requirement to move around the corridors in single file and in total silence will hardly prepare students for life outside the school, though it will reinforce the school's reputation for strictness. Similarly, Michaela's Manifesto Rule No 2, which requires students to spend the first five minutes after a school meal offering 'appreciations' (a few words followed by two claps on the count of two) for

[128] It is of note that the sixth edition of this book has been published under the new title of *Getting Your Class to Behave: The Must-Have Behaviour Bible*. Cowley explains, 'I need to listen to people who have said they are uncomfortable with the title's wording. Originally intended as a jokey allusion to what exasperated teachers might say in the privacy of the staffroom, this book's original title has had its day' (2024, p. ix). Whilst this change is encouraging, Cowley's motivation for change does not appear to come from her own understanding of the disrespect the original title illustrates towards children. Indeed, the language adopted in the new volume continues the disrespectful tone of the earlier editions, referring to young people as, for example, 'predators sensing a weakness in their prey' (p. 7).

[129] Ginott offers useful guidance in this regard: 'Refrain from using words that you would not want the child to repeat', and 'If you want your children to improve, let them overhear the nice things you say about them to others.' Both quotations are included in the Wikipedia article on Haim G. Ginott, though neither is sourced.

anything they might feel gratitude for, bears no relation to the way people express gratitude in real life. The school claims to be 'instilling' a sense of gratitude in its students (Andrews, 2020, p. 301), but even the word 'instilling' is educationally suspect, with its connotations of indoctrination and brainwashing. The uncritical acceptance of anything based solely on the teacher's authority is anti-educational, disrespectful to children and the last thing schools should be encouraging. Michaela's requirement of robotic conformity and total obedience to the teachers' orders is prioritised over any attempt to encourage the children to deliberate carefully and choose for themselves what they ought to do or how they might develop their own individual style of emotional response, which Halstead and Xiao's study (2023) demonstrates 8–9 years old are capable of. The school thus denies the humanity and the moral being of its students, which they have as persons who are learning to be self-determining agents. There is nothing more irksome, in Peters' view (1966, p. 212-3), for someone who is learning self-determination, than the restraints put on him/her by others: 'to be treated as a moron, or merely as an instrument of the purposes of other men, and to have his feelings completely disregarded, is intolerable' (p. 213).

Perhaps the area of school life where children are least likely to be shown respect is school discipline, though I shall argue that there is no area of school life where respect for children is more important. This topic forms the final section of the present chapter.

8.6 Respecting Children and School Discipline

In the early 2000s, the language of respect came to be increasingly used in British politics and social policy in attempts to target anti-social behaviour, particularly among young people, and to encourage responsible citizenship. The then prime minister, Tony Blair, set up a 'Respect Task Force' in 2005, which launched a 'Respect Action Plan' early in 2006. The leader of the opposition, David Cameron, produced a 'Real Respect Agenda' the same year (Millie, 2009). These were an unashamed attempt at the enforcement of morality, which brought with it a number of familiar problems: first, respect requires that we do not impose our views on others, but the new policy implied that *they* (the young people with low standards of behaviour) need to adopt *our* superior moral standards and sense of responsibility; second, teachers cannot just tell young people to be more respectful and expect them to obey, any more than a government can tell its citizens to improve their standards of behaviour; third, if young people expected respect to be a two-way experience (in which each

party respected the other equally), they were mistaken – because they were told that *they* (unlike adults) had to *earn* respect.[130] In spite of these philosophical obstacles, this has remained the dominant approach to school discipline over the last 20 years, mainly through the efforts of people like Michael Gove, Tom Bennett and Katharine Birbalsingh, though with an even greater emphasis on obedience and control and an even smaller commitment to respecting children. Children are considered too morally immature to make their own moral choices (and therefore they have to be told what to do), but they are still treated as responsible for their actions (and therefore in need of chastisement) if they do the wrong thing. They are thus treated as both responsible and not responsible at the same time.

From the start, there has been a small number of dissenting voices to this approach to discipline. For example, John Sentamu, then Archbishop of York, in his comments on the 2006 'Respect Action Plan', said:

> If we expect young people to be respectful, we should show respect. If they are not treated lovingly and forgivingly, they will be unforgiving. If we do not trust them, they will not trust us. (2006, n.p.)

According to Millie (2009, p. 7), Sentamu was expressing the idea of mutuality, but it was more than this: he was saying that adults have to initiate the enactment of positive moral qualities so that children have a model to follow. More surprisingly (and perhaps untypically), Cameron made some similar points in his 'Hug a Hoodie' speech (2006), where he at least appears to be suggesting that the onus is on adults to initiate positive (and respectful?) interactions with teenagers.[131] The argument I have put forward in the present chapter has similar roots to Sentamu's, namely, that all people (including children) have the right to be treated with respect, and that children learn to respect others by being treated with respect themselves. In other words, the starting point for learning about respect is what the individual is owed *by* others, not with what the individual owes *to* others.

If by discipline we mean the ways teachers uphold rules, guide and correct children's behaviour and help children understand expectations and principles and why certain kinds of behaviour are unacceptable, this can be done either respectfully or disrespectfully. Disrespectful discipline involves the humiliation and shaming of children, or the exercise of

[130] France and Meredith have argued that the claim that young people have to 'earn' respect is counterproductive (2009, p. 79).
[131] Cameron actually denies that he ever used this phrase himself, though the speech has always been known by this name.

oppressive control. If teachers insist on obedience without listening to what the children have to say, if they enforce particular behaviours without explaining why, if they demand respect from children without first showing them respect, if they subject children to unjustified constraints and call them 'defiant' if they complain, if they turn every situation into a confrontation marked out by a clash of wills which they inevitably win, if they prioritise classroom rules over the needs of individual children, if they make punishment the first response to inappropriate behaviour rather than the last resort (as Bennett recommends: 2010, p. 15), if they are dismissive or condescending towards children, in all of these cases they are simply familiarising children with disrespect and undermining their dignity and developing sense of self-respect. In the end, children, like other oppressed groups, may 'come to find it quite natural to count for nothing' (Weil, 1965, p. 35), and learn to endure oppression and the misuse of power 'as I endure the frost and the rain' (p. 34). Seidler quotes John Lennon's song 'Working class Hero' to illustrate some of the pain of being a child:

> As soon as you're born they make you feel small
> By giving you no time instead of it all
> Till the pain is so big you feel nothing at all.
> They hurt you at home and they hit you at school
> They hate you if you're clever and they despise a fool
> Till you're so fucking crazy you can't follow their rules.
> (1986, p. 165)

Coercive and disrespectful discipline makes schools unpleasant places to work and impedes the development of the capacity for self-determination in children and young people. Children need to feel that they can achieve something worthwhile through their own efforts, and this means they have to learn self-reliance rather than submission to and over-dependence on teachers' instructions. Downie and Telfer argue that to be a person is to be both 'self-determining' and 'rule-following' (1969, p. 27-29), and schools can help children to develop both these capacities.[132] Children learn best by being put into situations where they have to make real choices about how to act, rather than being forced to behave in unnatural ways like walking along school corridors in silence and in single file (see Deci and Ryan, 1987). They also learn by being engaged and stimulated, and by being given time, attention, care, trust and especially respect.

[132] Learning about rules and rule-following is one of the key topics in the next chapter.

I argue throughout this thesis that the only kind of discipline that is justifiable in schools is discipline that has a moral foundation and purpose, and that the principle of showing respect to children lies at the heart of this. In Chapter Nine, I argue that school discipline should also be educational and help children to learn about the reasons why rules, relationships, social responsibility, collective values, respecting others, tolerance, understanding, and problem solving are important in a society or institution. However, none of this can happen without a foundation of respect. Respecting children is the best way to start teaching them social and moral values, so that they learn not only how to behave well, but also why. If children feel they are being treated with respect, this can have a significant and positive impact on their behaviour.[133]

[133] Although the present chapter has been written from a broadly philosophical perspective, such empirical research as has been carried out on the benefits of respecting children generally comes to very similar conclusions, namely that 'if young people are shown respect and their opinions are valued within school it creates a climate of mutual respect which improves young people's "lived experience" of school. Improving the day-to-day experiences of pupils in this way also helps to improve behaviour, attendance and achievement' (France and Meredith, 2009, p. 90). See also Inman, 2002; Covell and Howe, 2007; Adalbjarnardottir, 2007, 2010; George, 2009.

CHAPTER 9

A PRINCIPLED APPROACH TO BEHAVIOUR: LAW AND SCHOOL RULES

9.1 Introduction

The basic premise of this thesis is that in order to justify discipline in schools, which involves placing limitations on children's freedom by enforcing conformity to rules, it must be both ethical and educational. In Chapter Seven I present the case for children to be treated as of equal worth with adults. This argument provides the rationale for the ethical approach to school discipline which I develop in Chapter Eight and is grounded in respect for children and their developing moral autonomy.

The present chapter focuses on the importance of the educational aspect of discipline but its justification is deeply embedded in the reasoning of the previous chapter. I argue that in order to justify the restrictions placed on children in schools through the use of discipline, discipline must be either directly or indirectly educational. By 'educational' I mean that it should facilitate or result in learning that is purposive and useful. If discipline does not have such a consciously educational aim, one of two outcomes is likely. First, children may actually not understand why they are being disciplined if nothing of value is being achieved through its use. They may not learn anything from disciplinary measures, or they may simply be conditioned into a set of robotic responses which require no thinking on their part. The approach to discipline adopted at Michaela is in danger of falling into this trap. Second, if discipline is not designed to be educational any learning that occurs as a result of such measures is more likely to be hidden curriculum learning, i.e. learning that is not intended by the teacher (Halstead and Xiao, 2023, p. 365). Such unplanned learning may be unhelpful to children and have negative outcomes; for example, children may come to think that the teacher is just giving vent to their frustration, or may decide that they need to take more care not to be caught next time, or may conclude that life is easier by and large if one does what the teacher says, even if one does not know why.

For discipline to be educational it must meet three criteria:

1. It must further education either

(a) directly, by teaching students about appropriate, justified ways to behave, or
(b) indirectly, by creating an environment conducive to learning.

2. It must be exercised in a respectful way that takes account of children's equal worth as human beings.
3. It must contribute to the future cognitive and/or social development of the child.

First, examples of discipline which is directly educational involve situations where teachers provide explicit, justified explanations for rules when they administer discipline, whereas indirectly educational discipline occurs through the hidden curriculum. In such cases children will gradually learn through the experience of justified rules that, for example, it is useful for them to remain silent whilst the teacher is talking so that they can hear and understand what is being taught. Second, the importance of treating children with respect in the application of discipline has been dealt with in Chapter Eight. However, it is worth noting that if children's experience of discipline is tempered by respectful treatment and takes full account of them as human beings of equal worth, discipline will always be educational. Children will learn – through the example of their teachers' behaviour and their own experience of being respected even when they are being subject to discipline – the importance of respecting others in their social interactions with them. Third, for learning to be educational I suggest it must be useful in terms of furthering children's understanding and their development into mature, rational, and morally autonomous agents. The requirement for discipline to produce useful learning means that arbitary rules, such as those which dictate the colour of socks that must be worn in school, cannot be justified within an educational model of school discipline. Similarly, rules such as those enforced at Michaela which require silence in corridors fall foul of the useful criterion as teaching children to be silent in a situation which in any other context would not be required cannot be justified on the basis of its usefulness. Whilst it might arguably be of use for teachers to be able to control their pupils, it fails to equip students with useful learning, in the terms I have set out.

Building on the educational importance of discipline, I argue that school discipline can play an important role in educating children about citizenship and especially the rule of law – so long as it does not consist merely of threatening children with punishment for disobedience, but also involves explaining the need for discipline, the justification for specific rules and the principles and values that lie behind them. I thus conclude the thesis by presenting an approach to school discipline which develops the integral aspect of rule-following into an

educative tool to teach children about the law and its underpinning values, including democracy, justice, freedom and equality.

As set out in Chapter Four, discipline in schools is established through rules, the dual function of which - creating order in the classroom (McGinnis *et al.* 1995), and teaching children how to behave – has long been recognised (Wilson, 1977 and Peters, 1966; see also Friales *et al*, 2023; Thornberg, 2007; McGinnis *et al.* 1995). However, my exploration of the implementation of school rules at Michaela has revealed that their more educational potential is often overlooked, despite research emphasising the importance of this function (Warnick and Scribner, 2020; Gable *et al.* 2009; Thornberg, 2008a; Boostrom, 1991). Indeed, they have a valuable role in teaching students moral values, helping them to learn about living with others, initiating them into citizenship and giving them some understanding of the law. In this chapter I focus mainly on the last of these but in doing so necessarily involve all of the former in my argument.

Although I argue that helping children to understand the law can be one of the main educational functions of school discipline, the contemporary educational climate (as described in Chapters Two and Three) is not conducive to such learning. It may be suggested that current approaches, which seek to create order through compliance and the unquestioning acceptance of the teacher's authority, do at least help children to learn what it means to *obey* the law. But an examination of legal theories relating to rules suggests that these uncompromising methods of discipline (based on authority) have less educational value than a more respectful approach that helps children to understand the principles and values on which the rules are based and which provide good reasons (beyond fear of punishment) for acting in accordance with the law. If schools encourage participation in rulemaking and commitment to core principles like justice, rights and respect rather than developing ever stricter discipline policies, they may paradoxically find that creating order in the classroom is less of a problem.

However, as I have sought to make clear in this thesis, when school discipline policies fail to recognise children as people of equal worth and deserving respect, they are neither ethical nor educational. Such approaches prioritise outer discipline at the expense of inner discipline,[134] and obedience becomes an end in itself. When the chief motivation for improving behaviour

[134] The significance of these terms is explained in Chapter Four above.

is control, this will simply result in students learning obedience rather than developing a reasoned approach to behaviour. This may be educationally advantageous in terms of creating an orderly environment conducive to further learning, but if discipline is to make a contribution to the learning itself, schools need to see beyond the functional benefits of outer discipline. Once inner discipline comes into play, this can have an impact on students' personal development as autonomous individuals and help to facilitate both their understanding of citizenship and their moral education. The distinction between moral education and character education is important to note, since current approaches to the latter (as described in Chapter Five) impose a pre-determined notion of the good, which may result in an unthinking and tightly controlled individual.

The next two sections of the present chapter explore the processes through which school rules can contribute to children's personal development and in particular to their developing understanding of citizenship and the law. They examine the nature of rules generally and the current dominance of authoritarian models such as no-excuses and zero-tolerance discipline in the thinking of Ofsted and in the practice of many schools, which because of their emphasis on automatic, unthinking obedience threaten to undermine children's potential learning about the law through school rules. The fourth section considers the theory of rules and their educative role and the fifth extends this analysis by examining two approaches to rules drawn from legal theory – the positivist or rule-based approach associated with Herbert Hart and the principle-based approach associated with Ronald Dworkin, which puts much more emphasis on liberal values, especially equality, justice, respect for persons, rights, freedom and personal responsibility. It is argued that children are more likely to understand that there are good reasons to obey the law if they understand the core principles and values on which the law is based. The final section returns to school practice and argues that by contextualising discipline in the broader setting of law a principled approach becomes compelling. Such an approach not only fulfils the educational potential of discipline in schools but also means that the justification for its use becomes embedded in a framework of modern liberal values which provide an ethical framework for its operation. If schools were to adopt such an approach to school discipline it could make a valuable contribution to students' human, cultural, social, and intellectual development in the progressive terms required for an initiation into life in society beyond the classroom.

9.2 The Role of School Rules in Students' Personal Development

If learning to respect school rules initiates children into acceptance of the requirements of the law, this is likely to be because both rules and the law involve the control of behaviour. Kant draws attention to the potential parallel between the law and school rules, which he describes as the means by which 'men are placed in subjection to the laws of mankind, and brought to feel their constraint' (2003 [1803], p. 3). With this connection in mind, the current chapter examines how school rules can prepare pupils for an understanding of the law, by exploring theories of rules, the nature of authority and the duty to obey the law. Before focusing specifically on the contribution school rules can make to children's understanding of the law, however, I shall briefly consider their contribution to children's personal and moral development more generally.

Schools may be seen as a microcosm of the broader society (Dewey, 2007 [1916]), and the way that the broader society is regulated is paralleled on a smaller scale in the rules and regulations of the school, with the teachers representing the politicians, the judiciary, the police and the social services and the children representing the citizens (cf. Peters, 1966, p. 288). Schimmel sees school rules as 'a form of law that applies to students' (1997, p. 70), although this might be overstating the correlation. To use the language of Baudrillard (1983), school rules may be a 'simulation' of the law in the world outside the school. This is not, of course, to denigrate their value as a source of learning; on the contrary, children frequently learn much through simulations (for example, children may learn about property ownership through playing Monopoly). Perhaps more apposite to current practice, school rules for Foucault may be a means of disciplining children and making the body 'docile' (1977, p. 156) through a system of constant supervision and total control, which is after all (he suggests) what they will find life like when they are adults. However, if school rules are to make an important contribution to children's learning (rather than just help to create a suitably orderly context in which learning can take place), it is incumbent on teachers to reflect on what children are actually learning from them and whether school rules operate in a way that facilitates appropriate learning.

As already noted, school rules serve two interconnected purposes – organisation and education. These objectives are not completely exclusive, for learning about the need for self-control and taking account of the needs of others (for example) may result in a 'safe, orderly, and productive classroom' (Gable *et al*, 2009, p. 196). Often, rules are narrowly presented as

management tools for teachers, and many guides are available on how to implement them in the classroom (Bennett, 2020b; Dabell, 2017; Malone and Tietjens, 2000; Grossman, 2004; Gable *et al*, 2009; McGinnis *et al*, 1995). Harber claims that the way school rules are currently enacted and implemented is indicative of 'the priorities of schooling as a system' which he condemns as 'controversial, problematic, and antipathetic to democratic values and practices' (2021, pp. 93-94). My argument seeks to address this criticism by recognising the educational potential of school rules in helping pupils to develop some of the skills of citizenship, including coming to understand the role of social rules in the broader society (DfE, 2015; DfE, 2013b; QCA, 1998, p. 46).

Despite the contribution the appropriate use of discipline in the form of school rules can make to student's social, moral and personal development, as noted in Chapter Four, Ofsted has separated personal development from behaviour and attitudes, to create two discrete areas of judgement (Ofsted, 2019). Prior to this, these aspects of learning had been considered together in school inspections, suggesting that school discipline has a role to play in social, personal and moral growth. However, this demarcation between behaviour and personal development suggests that school rules are increasingly viewed solely as a means of controlling behaviour and establishing order. Ofsted's assessment of behaviour and attitudes is now based on a consideration of 'how leaders and staff create a safe, calm, orderly and positive environment in the school and the impact this has on the behaviour and attitudes of pupils' (2024, para. 311). One of the factors which is highlighted as contributing to this is 'the setting of clear routines and expectations for the behaviour of pupils across all aspects of school life, not just in the classroom' (*ibid*), that is, the establishment of rules. No connection is made between these rules for discipline and the discrete 'personal development' area of judgement. It seems particularly bizarre that students' ability 'to recognise legal boundaries and, in doing so, respect the civil and criminal law of England… [and to] understand the consequences of their behaviour and actions' (para. 346) should be included within Ofsted's 'personal development' area of judgment rather than 'behaviour and attitudes'.

Ofsted's decision to focus on external markers of good discipline, such as compliant students and a clean environment, which I noted in Chapter Four, seems to discourage schools from cultivating young people's moral autonomy. Thus, schools where pupils 'diligently' follow rules such as walking 'silently between lessons' are considered to demonstrate outstanding behaviour (Ofsted 2018, p. 6). The decision to assess behaviour and personal development

separately further indicates a failure to acknowledge the potential role school rules have in cultivating moral development. Ofsted insists their role is 'to see that policies are effective and consistently applied' (quoted in Whittaker, 2019), which means that whether the rule itself is ethical or educational becomes irrelevant. This may be why increasingly harsh forms of discipline have been seen in schools in recent years and the role of discipline as a crucial teaching vehicle is being overlooked in the interests of maintaining order and control.

Chapters Two and Three have shown how the strict enforcement of rules in schools has become the means by which absolute obedience to authority is effected, and orderly environments are created. The growing prevalence of schools that choose to encourage students to obey school rules without question seems to be rationalised on the basis that compliance is conducive to learning. For example, Michaela punishes students for breaking rules regarding, *inter alia*, which side of the corridor they walk on, the tucking in of shirts and, rather arbitrarily, 'anything else that a pupil has previously been reminded about by a teacher' (Michaela, 2023), on the basis that 'excellent behaviour and excellent learning should be second nature' (Michaela, 2024d). However, training children to be obedient does nothing to help them to understand the reason for rules, and will thus not lay the foundations for understanding the law or its basis in moral principles, as Straughan makes clear:

> Although this kind of procedure may occasionally be justifiable, the fact remains that a system of control which tries to transmit a particular code of conduct to children, simply by pointing to the fact that that code is prescribed by some authority, cannot claim to be doing anything that can be called either moral or educational. Getting children to be obedient is not the same as teaching them to be good. (1988, pp. 76-77)

Kant (as noted in Chapter Five) justifies the imposition of obedience to absolute authority on the grounds that 'it prepares the child for the fulfilment of laws that he will have to obey later, as a citizen, even though he may not like them' (2003 [1803], p. 86). However, for Kant obedience is not an end in itself, but rather the first step in teaching children about their duty as future citizens, and he offers the examples of paying rates and taxes (p. 87). These are a necessary if somewhat irritating aspect of life in a civil society and justifiable in terms of facilitating the rights and duties which allow for the fair operation of that society. However, it is difficult to construe rules such as walking down a corridor in absolute silence with any developmental potential for students regarding their future duties as adults. This is more akin to the 'vexatious and slavish discipline' exercised over children 'with a view to breaking their self-will' which Kant warns against because 'nothing does children more harm' (p. 48).

Although Bennett, whose repeated advice to teachers is to 'wear them [students] down' (2010, pp. 77, 87, 113, 172, 184), concedes 'silent corridors needn't be compulsory', he also extols them as 'an example of what is possible with patience and faith', claiming they 'are one harmless way of promoting calm' (quoted in Whittaker, 2019). However, as I argue in relation to Michaela in Chapter Three, it would be a mistake to consider the absolute, unquestioning obedience which underpins the effective enforcement of such rules as 'harmless'.

9.3 Learning about Citizenship and the Law through School Rules

Donbavand and Hoskin state that 'government policy on Citizenship Education in England has departed in more recent years from an agenda of political participation toward character education and moral responsibilities' (2021, p. 2). The potential negative effect of this on students' political engagement (Suissa, 2015; Purpel, 1997), combined with teaching pupils to obey rules without question, suggests a move away from the democratically informed citizenship education as envisaged by the Crick Report on which the subject of citizenship in the English National Curriculum was based (QCA, 1998). In 2018, the House of Lords Select Committee Report on Citizenship and Civic Engagement confirmed that 'the current state of citizenship education is poor' (House of Lords, 2018, p. 30). It explains that

> One of the concerns about the direction of citizenship education is whether it has moved from a collective political conception of citizenship towards a more individualised notion that focuses on character and promoting volunteering. This concern about a thin concept of citizenship being promoted which ignores the political elements of being a citizen has been a consistent theme throughout the inquiry ... The concern is that citizenship education is being consumed within character education. (p. 29)

Lord Hodgson, chair of the Select Committee, describes the then Conservative government's response as 'very' disappointing, and Ofsted as having 'little grasp of the issues and lack of understanding of what the report had said' (2023, column 177GC). The follow-up report of 2022, where the Committee expressed that it was 'deeply concerned with Ofsted's disregard for citizenship as a statutory curriculum subject' (House of Lords, 2022, para.72), elicited a similar response from both government and Ofsted (see, House of Lords, 2023, column 617). Yet citizenship education remains a required National Curriculum subject at Key Stages 3

and 4 in maintained schools (DfE, 2013b) and an expected, albeit non-statutory, one at Key Stages 1 and 2 (DfE, 2015).

The purpose of citizenship education is to prepare students for political, legal, social and economic life in the broader society to which they belong or to promote 'a desired kind of citizenship in a given society' (Hämäläinen and Nivala, 2023, n.p.). It is typically conceptualised in terms of knowing (the 'informed citizen'), doing (the 'active citizen') and being (the 'good citizen') (see Halstead & Pike, 2006, pp. 34-40). The 'informed citizen' is a person who is politically literate, knowing, for example, about the nature of government, public spending, human rights, national and international law, and knowing how to perform practical tasks like voting and filling in a tax form. The 'active citizen' is a person who puts this knowledge into practice by developing skills of participation, decision-making and responsible financial management, and who is able to stand for public office, lobby for change, support voluntary groups, make appropriate use of public services, and make a difference in the neighbourhood, the community and the wider society. The 'good citizen' should not be thought of as someone who is blindly obedient to civil authority in its various forms, but who displays appropriate civic virtues. Enslin & White include such qualities as justice, tolerance, trust, honesty, loyalty, mercy and decency in their list of civic virtues (2003, p. 124; see also Evagorou *et al* 2023, p.103). Underpinning all three ways of conceptualising citizenship (which, of course, are not mutually exclusive) are the vital elements of critical thinking and enquiry and the ability and motivation to take informed and responsible action (DfE, 2013b, p. 5), including holding those in authority to account where necessary. The mature citizen does not merely know how to vote but understands why voting is important; does not simply support voluntary groups but understands the benefits that result from voluntary action; and does not merely tolerate diversity but understands why tolerance is necessary in a pluralist society.

One of the most important arenas of public life into which citizenship education initiates young people is the legal (Eng *et al*, 2017, p. 7; Kiwan, 2008, p. 62-73). The Crick Report argues that children even at primary school should learn about 'concepts of fairness and attitudes to the law, to rules, to decision making, to authority, to their local environment and social responsibility, etc.' (QCA, 1998, p. 11). The report also emphasises the need for children and young people to develop a 'respect for the rule of law' (p. 10), links a knowledge of the law and the justice system to the rights and responsibilities of individual

citizens (p. 19), and argues that citizens must be 'equipped with the political skills needed to change laws in a peaceful and responsible manner' (p. 10). Interestingly, the National Curriculum non-statutory framework for Citizenship at Key Stages 1 and 2 focuses almost exclusively on rules rather than on laws (DfE, 2015), whereas the statutory requirements for Key Stages 3 and 4 include the study of political, legal and human rights, the role of the law and the justice system, and how laws are made, but make no further reference to rules (DfE, 2013b). The underlying assumption is that there is a natural progression from an understanding of rules at the classroom level to a more general understanding of the functioning of rules in different situations in society, and ultimately to a fuller understanding of the role and operation of national and international law.

The legal aspects of citizenship education can be analysed in exactly the same way as citizenship education generally. In order to be considered educated in the law, young people first need some knowledge of the law, including such things as the criminal and civil justice systems, different sources and types of law (statute, common law, European law, etc.), different areas of law (family law, employment law, contract law, etc.), the role of the police and the courts in the enforcement of law, and 'how the law helps society deal with complex problems' (DfE, 2013b, p. 3). But they also need, secondly, to avoid illegal behaviour, to defend their own and other people's legal rights, to campaign to change unjust or inappropriate laws and generally to behave in accordance with the law. Thirdly, they need to develop appropriate attitudes and values in relation to the law; good citizens will be responsible, law-abiding individuals and will have an attitude of respect for the law. Finally, educated citizens should understand why the law is important, why it applies to all citizens equally, what is involved in obeying the law and why being law-abiding is a civic virtue.

Not all of these elements that together make up the legally educated person can be taught in the same way. The transmission of legal knowledge is comparatively easy; at least, it is just as straightforward as (or no more complex than) the transmission of other forms of knowledge. What is more difficult is developing dispositions that are appropriate to the law, building up children's understanding of the law and of the reasons why it is important to respect the law, and encouraging them to develop a commitment to the value of law-abidingness. What is required is some way of socialising them into the law and developing certain patterns of response to legitimate authority, so that they come to understand and accept it. This may be more of a hidden than an overt curriculum task, in that learning by

example and through the school ethos may be more effective than direct teaching, and this is doubtless the reason why the National Curriculum makes learning about school rules the first stage of learning about the law. But in schools which enforce unquestioning obedience and where rules are considered an end in themselves it is difficult for such developmental learning to take place.

By being required to respect school rules, children are potentially learning more than just how to play their part in maintaining an orderly environment in the school (Gable *et al.*, 2009; cf. Crick, 1999). Indeed, in their research into teachers' attitudes to citizenship education, Davies *et al* found that many teachers considered there to be significant links between citizenship, morality and school rules: 'The idea of educating for citizenship is highly connected with expected behaviours, both in terms of compliance to rules and moral and "right" behaviour' (1999, p. 80).

It has already been noted that learning to respect school rules (even simple things like taking turns) helps children to understand the way the law works, and to develop appropriate attitudes towards the law. The Crick Report, for example, suggests that it is appropriate for children by the end of Key Stage 1 to

> Know about the nature and basis of rules in the classroom, at school and at home; also, where possible, know how to frame rules themselves; understand that different rules can apply in different contexts and can serve different purposes, including safety, safeguarding of property and the prevention of unacceptable behaviour. (QCA, 1998, p. 48)

The Report further claims that such learning about school rules will help children at Key Stage 2 to understand 'the need for laws and their enforcement in shaping behaviour and tackling crimes and why certain behaviour is prohibited' (*ibid*).

Both schools and the state have an interest in encouraging compliance. However, Straughan has argued persuasively that the idea of 'obeying rules or authorities *as such* turns out to be literally vacuous' (1982: 65). He points out that when young children adapt their behaviour to the wishes of adults in order to please them or to avoid their disapproval or punishment, this has nothing to do with 'understanding and following rules as such' (*ibid.*). It is simply a matter of doing what one is told. But if the children have moved on to an understanding of the fact that there are good reasons to behave in a certain way, then this has nothing to do with

rule-following either; they are beginning to behave rationally and autonomously. The claim that school rules prepare children for an understanding of the law is clearly in need of more careful investigation. The extent to which the claim is justified depends on factors like the relationship between rules, authority and other related concepts such as discipline, obedience and punishment; the underlying moral values and principles on which both school rules and the law are based; and the nature of the obligation to obey school rules and to obey the law. Because of the difference between the nature of the authority that lies behind the law (which is subject to democratic constraints, including the autonomy of individual citizens) and the nature of the authority that lies behind school rules (which emanates from an individual adult, the teacher, and which may therefore be perceived by students as an oppressive power relationship), teachers cannot assume that every attempt to uphold school rules automatically prepares students for an understanding of the place of law in society. Teachers need to ensure that the school rules are appropriate both in terms of content and in terms of the way they are applied and enforced. This in turn raises questions about the willingness of schools to see beyond the role of school rules in creating an orderly environment and to pay attention to their contribution to learning.

The next section examines the nature of rules generally and the way they operate within the specific context of the school. I consider the assumption of some authors that the requirement for students to follow rules is linked to their moral education (Wilson and Cowell, 1990). A key question is whether children should be encouraged to see compliance with rules as an end in itself, or as a means of learning more about the fundamental principles and values that have given rise to both rules and law.

9.4 The Theory of Rules and their Educative Role

From a close examination of some model cases of rules (such as the rules of football, of grammar, of etiquette, of chess or of a monastic order) it is possible to identify the most essential features of a rule. These include the following:

1. Rules impose an obligation to behave in a particular way in a particular situation.
2. Rules apply to members of specific groups or communities.
3. The stipulated behaviour is considered so important that individual freedom of action can legitimately be curtailed in order to ensure its occurrence.

4. Rules are obligatory because they originate from an authoritative source (such as a sport's governing body).
5. The rule may be enforced by explicit or implicit sanctions or punishments imposed by those with the authority to do so.
   (cf. Hart, 1968, pp. 4-5; Wilson and Cowell, 1990, pp. 9-13, 131-135).

I shall now consider these general characteristics of rules in relation to the way rules operate within the specific context of the school. The enforcement of certain behaviour in schools may be justified either in educational terms, such as developing students' moral understanding, or in terms of meeting social needs, such as seeking to ensure the safety of the students, to create an optimal environment for learning or to facilitate the smooth running of the school. Hand describes the latter as 'scholastic rules without which the activities of teaching and learning would founder' (2020, p. 19). Adopting Hart's analysis, he argues that both 'scholastic' and moral rules are rules of obligation and impose a duty of obedience on students. Rules of obligation, he argues, are generally backed by punishment of some kind and the presence of such rules in schools provides the justification for the use of punishment there.

If good behaviour is deemed of such value that it is worth the sacrifice of individual freedom (the third essential feature of a rule), however, it should at least be directed towards achieving a justifiable goal that will benefit the individual and/or the broader group or society. Wilson and Cowell suggest that 'disadvantaging [individual freedom] is logically entailed by the notion of social interaction' (1990, p. 10). Underpinning this view is a conception of order as the undeniable 'good' that is to be achieved by the imposition of rules. The achievement of this order necessitates 'some kind of disposition to obey' on the part of students (p. 23), which in turn involves discipline. Wilson and Cowell thus appear to offer a conceptual foundation for the current approach to school rules whereby the authority of a rule derives from its being a rule rather than its content or the objective underpinning it. This suggests that discipline refers to people's reactions to rules, i.e. whether they obey them or not (Loukes, Wilson and Cowell, 1983, p. 45), and the rule becomes the primary motivation for behaviour.

I turn now to the use of sanctions and punishment and other ways of motivating or obliging children to follow school rules. According to Foucault, the enforcement of conformity is achieved most efficiently through punishment for any deviation from a rule; he writes of

‘making the slightest departures from correct behaviour subject to punishment ... so that ... each subject finds himself caught in a punishable, punishing universality’ (1977, p. 178). Foucault’s perspective on punishment draws attention to two central paradoxes that are apparent in Wilson and Cowell’s arguments. First, as already mentioned in Chapter Four in relation to Wilson (1977), there is a tension between their belief that every social institution requires certain rules to which its members must submit, under threat of punishment, and their belief that human beings will inevitably ask questions about the appropriateness of the rules and the legitimacy of the authority that puts them in place. Secondly, there is a tension between their belief that rules become reasons for action through the exercise of discipline and authority, and their concern for ‘people doing things for the right reasons’ (Wilson and Cowell, 1990, p. 99). On their view it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the ‘right reason’ for behaviour would normally be that it is stipulated by a rule emanating from an appropriate authority. However, the right reasons for action are generally viewed in terms of internal rather than external motivation – a distinction which is inherent in Hart’s analysis of reasons for action referred to in Chapter Five. For Hart, ‘being obliged’ to obey a rule results from external factors such as the threat of punishment whilst ‘being under an obligation’ comes about from an internalised commitment to rule-following (1961, p. 80): we are internally motivated to obey by an understanding that the concept of ‘rule’ itself implies an obligation to obey. Hart seems to acknowledge that the first approach to rule following is not conducive to engaged citizenship, being held by ‘those who reject … rules and are only concerned with them when and because they judge that unpleasant consequences are likely to follow violation’ (1961, p. 88). The second approach, on the other hand, seems preferable because an internal motivation to obey rules suggests self-motivation. However, for Hart the critically reflective element which establishes what he terms ‘the internal aspect of rules’ (p. 55) is concerned with ascertaining that certain behaviour is governed by a rule and levelling criticism against those who do not conform, rather than at the rule itself:

> What is necessary is that there should be a critical reflective attitude to certain patterns of behaviour as a common standard, and that this should display itself in criticism (including self-criticism), demands for conformity, and in acknowledgements that such criticism and demands are justified, all of which find their characteristic expression in the normative terminology of ‘ought’, ‘must’, ‘should’, ‘right’, and ‘wrong’. (p. 56)

As being under an obligation to follow a rule thus rests on a belief in the value of a rule as an end in itself, it is questionable whether this appproach will open up the possibility that students might feel free to question the validity of a rule by asking, for example, whether the 'punishment of moral infractions in schools' is 'proportionate and warranted' (Hand, 2020, p. 18), or even to reflect on whether *it's the right thing for the teachers to do*. This approach to rules is consistent with Hart's positivist approach to legal interpretation, which I examine in the next section, in that it is stuck at the level of the rule rather than understanding the importance of the principle behind the rule.

If schools teach students that rules provide the right reason for behaviour because they impose an obligation to obey, they could rightly be accused of producing automatons (cf. Wilson, 1977, pp. 54-55). What makes rules a source of learning rather than merely an obligation is that children are taught to think about them rather than simply to obey them. In order to embrace the full educational potential of rules, students should be encouraged to engage beyond the force of a rule to the principles that lie behind it (cf. Odih and Knights, 1999). It is not enough to tell students that they have a duty to obey, they need to know why.[135] They must understand the nature and justifications of such duty, otherwise punishment for a breach of it will result merely in training in conformity rather than a positive educational experience.

To accept school rules as a means to an educative end suggests that they have specific characteristics that go beyond the common characteristics of rules in general. On this view, Warnock's claim that it does not matter what the school rules are so long as there are some rules (1977) is a kind of nonsense. I do not wish to challenge the claim that schoolchildren are in need of guidance in the form of rules about expected behaviour emanating from and

[135]There is research evidence to suggest that some children accept what teachers say about the obligation to obey rules without question; Cullingford, for example, found that Year Six pupils place greater emphasis 'on obeying rules rather than on the morality of their actions' (1988: 8). But this merely suggests that they are at an early stage in Kohlberg's stages of moral development (Kohlberg 1981): stage one emphasises deference to those in power or authority and obedience as a way of avoiding punishment, and stage three emphasises conformity to rules and authority as a way of gaining approval by living up to the expectations of others. On a Kohlbergian view, however, schools have a responsibility to lead children to a deeper understanding of rules and the law by explaining the way laws help to maintain a functioning society (stage four), the way laws serve individuals and communities and are open to challenge (stage five) and the way they are based on universal ethical principles like justice, freedom, rights and respect (stage six). However, the debate in the current chapter is not so much about developing an incremental understanding of rules as about two fundamentally different approaches to school rules – one based on unquestioning obedience to the authority of the teacher, and the other on an understanding of the values and moral principles on which the rules are based. The legal debate between Hart and Dworkin discussed in the next section clarifies this issue.

enforced by a representative of authority. However, rather than children being motivated to act by the thought 'because authority says so' (Wilson and Cowell, 1990, p. 30), I suggest that the process of education should develop their motivation to act in accordance with school rules *because the rules themselves are sensible, helpful and rational*. This will be achieved through the transition from outer discipline, where children obey rules because they are rules, and which provides an often necessary first step in their development, towards inner discipline whereby they develop the understanding to exercise moral autonomy. This may initially require an enforcer who will inevitably be the teacher, but it is clear that the role of the teacher in relation to school rules must evolve beyond the pure authority model as the child matures. Pring recognises the importance of the changing nature of rule-following as the student develops:

> The basic structural change with regard to rules ... lies in the shift from what Piaget calls *heteronomy*, where rules are given by external authorities ('moralities of constraint'), to autonomy, where rules are mutually agreed and internalised ('morality of co-operation') and thus can be adapted to changing situations. (1984, p. 38)

Recognising this with regard to school rules would involve a reassessment of what Parker-Jenkins sees as 'the power relations between teachers and children' (1999, p. 96) and would require 'the opportunity for the pupil's voice to be heard in an acceptable manner and form' (p. 97). Where children are involved in creating school or classroom rules, the key issue is not whether or not they come up with the same rules that the teacher has in mind, but how much learning goes on through the process of involvement in the endeavour of generating the rules. As Enslin and White point out, encouraging children to participate actively in the life of the school will 'prepare the way for a reasoned choice to be made about active participation in the adult society' (2003, p. 124). On this model teachers would gradually cease to be the enforcers of right behaviour in the classroom, meting out punishment to children to control how they act, and would become instead co-workers and co-decision-makers with the children, guiding them and preparing them for an active role in society. This does not mean that rules become redundant in the school or that children will be justified in refusing to obey rules which are not sensible, helpful or rational.[136] What it is does mean is that as children develop, rules become less about teacher dominance and control, and more

[136] If discipline is educational within the criteria I set out at the beginning of this chapter school rules will necessarily be sensible, helpful and rational.

about children learning about justice, rights and responsibilities, and about the role of the law in society. Like active citizens in the broader society children will learn how to lobby to change rules they have reasonable grounds for objecting to through rational, democratic means. However, the change in the relationship between teachers and pupils that is involved in this process requires a shift away from the strict authority and discipline paradigm that dominates many schools today. Indeed, such an approach poses a particular challenge when influential voices on school discipline, such as Tom Bennett, believe that allowing students a say in school rules is 'an inversion of the natural process of teaching' (2010, p. 139).

9.5 Learning to Respect the Authority of Rules and Laws

The different attitudes to rule-following discussed in the previous section imply that rules themselves may be understood in different ways. The present section will examine two approaches to rules drawn from legal theory – positivism and the principle-based model – and will relate these to a consideration of the importance of school rules in initiating students into an understanding of, and respect for, these rules and more generally for the law.

i) The Positivist Model

Hart's positivist views (1961) are based on the premise that only laws that have been established by the approved law-making authority within any given society can properly be recognised as valid law. From this perspective, a law is not binding merely because someone who wields physical power demands it but because it emanates from someone with authority. The parallel with school rules is obvious. But in the context of the law, positivism faces a dilemma which it can only resolve with a problematic contradiction. Often an issue comes before the court which has not yet been legislated for (i.e. no rule exists) and the judge is faced with a conundrum. On the positivist view, *prima facie* the case cannot be decided because an applicable valid law emanating from the law-making authority cannot be identified. So how is such a case resolved when there is no relevant rule? Hart confesses, 'Here at the margin of rules and in the fields left open by the theory of precedent, the courts perform a rule-producing function' (1961, p. 132), in which case the rule of law emanates from a body which does not have the requisite authority, for judges have no democratic mandate for making law. Dworkin highlights the problem of this approach: 'This theory holds that a legal obligation exists when (and only when) an established rule of law imposes an obligation. It follows from this that in a hard case – when no established rule can be found –

there is no legal obligation until the judge creates a new law for the future' (2013, p. 62). But what are the implications of such an approach in relation to school rules? Positivism's emphasis on law deriving its validity by virtue of its authoritative source is consistent with Wilson's belief that to accept rules as '*reasons for action* ... is verified by whether, in the practical situations involved, the motivating thought is something like "It's a rule"' (2000, p. 70).[137] Both Hart and Wilson position the rule itself as creating the duty or reason to act rather than an underlying moral obligation existing independently of the rule. Positivism creates problems in relation to school rules. First, in situations where there is no rule but there is clearly the need for some form of teacher intervention to resolve a challenging situation, the teacher is required to make up rules spontaneously which could result in students thinking the rules are arbitrary and unjust. Second, students may feel justified in behaving in an inappropriate or immoral way if there is no rule prohibiting such conduct. If a positivist interpretation of the law is accepted, it would seem that teaching students that school rules must be followed because *they are rules* would indeed prepare them for an understanding of the law. They will enter the adult world able to ascertain their rights and obligations by close reference to the letter of the law. If they become involved in a situation where these rights and responsibilities have not been enshrined in legislation, the question arises how these young people will begin to formulate appropriate modes of behaviour.

ii) The Principle-based Model

Ronald Dworkin has expounded a theory of law challenging the assumptions underpinning positivism by recognising the shortcomings of the claim that 'rules are applicable in an all-or-nothing fashion' (2013, p. 40). For him the law consists not just of a body of rules but encompasses 'principles, policies and other sorts of standards' (p. 38). Therefore, when a case for which a legal rule has not been established comes to court, judges are not creating new rules as such. By using certain principles, which underpin the legal system as a whole, the judge is constrained to establish a new rule consistent with the principles or moral standards that give cohesion to the society in which the law operates.

This approach relies on a more integrated and interdependent view of law and morality. Legal rules are constructed on the foundation of principles such as 'no man shall profit from his own wrong' which provide 'the background standard' (p. 45) against which legal rules are read, interpreted, and applied. The consciousness of a moral principle provides the basis for

[137] For a critique of Wilson's views, see chapter one of Straughan (1989).

understanding the justification for, and rightness of, a rule; and it is this understanding in turn that contributes to the motivation to respect the law and be law-abiding. Crick calls these principles 'procedural values' and identifies five that fall into this category: 'freedom, toleration, fairness, respect for truth, respect for reasoning' (1999, p. 343). His list has much in common with the 'civic virtues' mentioned earlier in the chapter.

This discussion of legal theory identifies two possible justifications for the existence of rules in the context of the school. The first rests on the premise that to follow rules teaches respect for authority *per se*, while the second considers rules as an invaluable tool in learning to act for the right reasons. As the preceding discussion implies, the existence and implementation of school rules cannot be considered in isolation from other concepts such as authority and punishment. But it is also necessary to consider what drives an individual to comply with a rule. As indicated earlier, Wilson and Cowell seem to suggest that the motivation to comply derives from a recognition that the rule simply is a rule and that it emanates from a legitimate authority; indeed, they are sympathetic to the view that 'unquestioning obedience' is, at least in one sense, 'required by the very notion of authority' (Wilson and Cowell, 1990, pp. 13-14).

My misgivings about the current trends in attitudes to school rules and school discipline more generally arise from a number of points, particularly to do with the unplanned learning that may result from them. First, there is a danger that authoritarian treatment in schools (which emphasises unquestioning obedience to rules rather than the understanding of the moral principles that lie behind them) may lead students to question the validity of rules more generally (see, Thornberg, 2008b; Raby, 2008) and may result in alienation from institutional systems outside the school, including the law (see Gouveia-Pereira *et al.*, 2003). Secondly, the authoritarian application of school rules teaches students little about the role of the law in the broader society and certainly does not help them to understand the links between the law and fundamental principles like justice and human rights.[138] Thirdly, where school rules are used solely as a control mechanism, they may deprive students of a sense of agency (Goodman, 2013; Raby, 2008; Sherman, 1996) and create moral dilemmas for students (for example, should obedience to the rule take priority over helping a friend? See Thornberg, 2006). Finally, and more fundamentally, this kind of approach may actually be anti-educational

[138] Research relating to zero tolerance policies in schools in America has found that strict discipline in schools creates an increased the risk of young people having negative experiences with the legal system. Those attending such institutions are more likely to be arrested and sent to prison (see Bacher-Hicks *et al*, 2021 and Hemez *et al*, 2019).

because it fails to respect students' developing autonomy; as Smith points out, it underestimates the importance of *understanding* in relation to the motivation to comply: 'Where I perceive a moral imperative as authoritative or a moral rule as binding I do not perceive it as a rule 'as such', as though there were no more to be said of it than that it was a rule' (Smith, 1985, p. 40). Without understanding, the behaviour would not be rule-following or rule-breaking but 'of a Pavlovian sort' (p. 41), i.e. lacking in any rational thought. Callan calls this a state of 'ethical servility' (1997, p. 152) and argues that the answer is to prioritise the development of autonomy as a goal for education.

9.6 The Need to Understand the Principles on which the Law is Based

The argument so far has demonstrated the failure of the respect for authority model of rule-following to acknowledge the importance of moral understanding when thinking about rules, and this suggests that the model will do little to prepare children for an understanding of the law and life in a modern liberal democracy. This section considers the effect of the current emphasis on unquestionong obedience to adult authority in the practice of many schools, and sketches some of the practical benefits (in terms of student learning) of adopting a principle-based model.

It has become clear that the main problems with the authoritarian approach to school rules are that, at best, in the context of the present argument, it contributes little to children's understanding of the law and of why the law is important, and that it does little to help them to develop into responsible, law-abiding citizens who are aware of, and capable of exercising, their democratic rights and responsibilities. At worst, it may actually damage and undermine their growth into mature citizens, in various ways. First, it does nothing to help students to understand the moral dimension of the law, or even of some school rules; on the contrary, it encourages immature attitudes and may hold children back in what Piaget calls the 'heteronomous' phase of moral development, where children understand the right thing to do in terms of acting in accordance with fixed, external rules created and monitored by adults (1932, p. 104ff).[139] It may also encourage children to act out of the wrong motives (such as pleasing the teacher or avoiding punishment) rather than out of conviction based on moral principles and a sense of personal responsibility; this may have the further outcome that there

[139] However, Lennox (1991) claims that children may be capable of moving beyond this narrow view of rules by the age of four.

may be little motivation to act well when there is no threat of punishment (Gribble, 2013a). Second, it changes the role of the teacher into a police officer who does things *to* students (controls, reprimands, punishes) rather than working *with* students in a way that helps them to understand the principles of democracy, co-operation and participation (see, Kohn, 2006, p. 73). Third, the proliferation of school rules may exacerbate the very problem that they are supposed to solve, especially where the rules are perceived by students as petty (like many rules about school uniform) or random, arbitrary and unfair, especially when teachers appear to make up rules spontaneously, without any apparent basis of principle (Gribble, 2013b). The breaking of such rules may be a welcome distraction from the demands of learning (Halstead and Xiao, 2023, pp. 376-378). Even more seriously, if students come to see such school rules as random or even unjust, there is a danger that this may lead them to the assumption that the law is petty and arbitrary too. Fourth, practices like requiring students to follow rules without question and controlling the minutiae of classroom behaviour (when to stand up, when to speak, when to open their books, even when to go to the toilet; see Harber 2021, p. 81) give students no experience of making mundane decisions let alone moral decisions, diminish their sense of self-respect, and discourage their growth towards personal autonomy (see Goodman, 2013, p. 93-93; Goodman and Uzun, 2013). Far from being equipped to challenge injustice and to defend their own rights and those of others, they are discouraged from even thinking about these issues, and the only way left to them to express their individuality is to reject the rules (see Booker, 2021).

The authoritarian model of rule-following may actually prepare students more for life in what Spinner-Halev calls ‘a community of obedience’ than for life in a modern liberal, democratic society (2000, p. 54). A. S. Neill knew this, and at Summerhill School he created an environment where the making, revising, abolishing, and policing of school rules is democratically handled by the students themselves. These principles, clearly designed to develop the children’s understanding of the law, of legitimate authority and of the reasons why it is important to respect the law, run completely counter to Ofsted expectations, and in 1999 Ofsted issued a notice of complaint, effectively seeking Summerhill’s closure. Yet, it was the very learning that arose from this principled approach that was at the root of the successful legal challenge raised against Ofsted in which the students were fully involved:

> After three days of the hearing at the Royal Courts of Justice in London, which most of the children attended, the DfE capitulated, asking for an agreement with the school. This was duly drawn up and voted for in a

> unique Meeting held, by permission of the judges, in the Royal Court itself. This was a historical moment - probably the first time a democratic meeting had been held in a Royal court of law and certainly the first time a children's meeting had done so. (Summerhill, 2024)

The notice was annulled following this court hearing (see Ofsted, 2013).

If students and teachers are aware of the shared principles which tie the school together as a community, then there is much more chance that they will come to understand both the way that school rules contribute to the smooth running of the school and the parallel with the law in the broader society. They will learn to respect the law because of the law's basis in sound principles and values, and law-abidingness will take its place among other civic values that they see the point of. This engagement at the level of principles and values will develop their broader moral engagement and understanding, thus cultivating their inner discipline. As children develop from heteronomy to autonomy with regard to rules, they will cease looking to the rules themselves as the standard for right behaviour but begin to acknowledge the principle as their motive for action. Teachers will be equipped to resolve novel situations equitably by reference to principles that the whole school community will be able to acknowledge as just.

Approaching school rules in this way presents a practical method for schools to meet the fuller requirements for citizenship education in secondary schools. In view of Ofsted's failure to recognise the importance of this subject, as demonstrated by its response to the recommendations of the House of Lords Select Committee Report on Citizenship and Civic Engagement noted above, such an approach is increasingly necessary if students are to become engaged citizens.

It is of note that subtle adjustments were made to the Key Stage 3 programme of study in 2013. The 2012 DfE guidelines required that pupils 'learn about their rights, responsibilities, duties and freedoms and about laws, justice and democracy'; be encouraged 'to challenge injustice, inequalities and discrimination' (DfE, 2012, p. 3); and begin 'participating actively in different kinds of decision-making and voting in order to influence public life' (p. 4). This active and engaged form of citizenship is absent from the current guidelines for Key Stages 3 and 4 which make no mention of 'challenge', 'decision making' or 'freedom' and put forward aims of a more passive and academic nature in terms of 'knowledge and understanding' rather than practical experience (DfE, 2013b, p. 1). Although students are

expected to use this theoretical understanding as the basis for ‘informed action’ schools are only required to provide ‘the opportunity to participate actively in community volunteering, as well as other forms of responsible activity’ (p. 3). What constitutes ‘responsible activity’ is not described.

However, if students’ experience of school discipline is of a cohesive set of rules governing behaviour based on an understanding of principle, they will be equipped to extend that knowledge to the legal rules and social expectations governing the broader society. They will not only be aware of the basis of law and of the reasons why it is important to respect the authority of the law, but also be motivated to become law-abiding citizens. At the same time, if they have good reason to consider any piece of legislation unjust, they will be equipped to challenge it on the grounds of principle, thus participating as educated citizens in a democratic state. The rules which comprise school discipline will then have a genuinely educational effect. In learning that the rules which discipline them in school are based on clear principles, they will actively learn how their rights and responsibilities within the school are derived, and this can provide not only an important bridge to an understanding of the law and their civic rights and responsibilities but provide the means of encouraging children to think about the justifications for their actions and so help them develop into morally autonomous individuals. Adopting a respectful approach to school discipline, which teaches about school rules and the law from the perspective of principle and drawing attention to the parallels between them, provides a practical means of directing children on the road from outer discipline to inner discipline. It also offers a clear example of the way that discipline can make an important contribution to children’s education.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the centre of the arguments I have presented in this thesis is a concern for children; not just for their future prospects, which have become the dominant thread in the planning of educational policy in England, but also for their present experiences. The thesis has taken one aspect of school life and demonstrated how widespread misconceptions of the child as an uncivilised nuisance, combined with an economically motivated agenda of enforcing responsibilised behaviour, have given rise to an approach to school discipline that is neither educational nor ethical. Schools have too often become rigid production lines, where strict discipline is needed to create model citizens, ready to slot into their roles as efficient, co-operative workers. But this approach fails to take account of children as they are, or to harness their potential to think for themselves and behave as lively, intelligent, self-motivated people.

My response has been to rethink school discipline and related concepts like authority, rules, punishment and character education from first principles. I have attempted to set out a new approach that is a more appropriate reaction to behaviour issues in schools than the mere escalation of sanctions, and more educationally and ethically justified. The starting point is based on respect for the child as a human being who is of equal worth to adults. In a modern liberal state, which prioritises values such as democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs (DfE, 2014a), the central principle of equality must not be neglected. Indeed, it provides the ethical foundation, I argue, for all adult interactions with children. This has profound implications for how schools are run and, as I have demonstrated, particularly for the operation of school discipline.

The potential changes to children's experiences of schools that this research suggests are necessary in order to ensure they are valued as of equal worth to adults, will require a massive shift in the outlook and practice of many stakeholders in education. The implications for government are significant. The DfE will need take a lead in clarifying the principles which underpin all educational policy, including their own perspective on childhood. This will necessitate a change in the role of Ofsted from being primarily concerned with judging schools and holding them to account, to a primary goal of supporting schools.

Schools will begin to prioritise the principle of putting children's interests first, and teachers will be liberated from the rigid expectations of authoritarian discipline and able to exercise their own discretion rather than being tied to an unnatural consistency. Freed from the requirement to apply blanket policies regardless of the individual needs of the child, teachers will be able to show respect to students, recognise their status as children, support and encourage them, and learn to recognise what is important to them. A reduction in the number of school rules, especially petty ones, will be conducive to a more harmonious environment and remove many of the points of conflict which lead to escalating punishments. Discipline will be recognised primarily as a facilitator of moral education which, unlike character education, encourages children to see beyond self-interest, to reflect on the consequences of their actions and to be open to new possibilities in their lives. Teachers will understand that their students will never reach personal and moral autonomy through the imposition of virtue but by the cultivation of the ability to think and understand the reasons for behaving in certain ways. Rule violations will no longer be viewed as opportunities to force children into compliance but educational opportunities for discussion, development of critical faculties, moral learning and growth.

The effect of this re-thinking of school discipline will be to usher in a fundamental change in children's experience of school. Since children will be respected as they are now, not just for who they will become, this means that when they are at school account will be taken of their current values as children (including 'friendship, fun, fairness and freedom', Halstead and Xiao, 2023, p. 373), and their voices will be listened to. The removal of the fear of punishment that hangs over children under authoritarian discipline schemes is likely to improve their mental health, increase school attendance and reduce behaviour problems. Once children realise that they are being respected, many of the tensions in the classroom will be eliminated and the school will be viewed by both teachers and students as a pleasant, useful and productive place to be.

This broadly philosophical research is timely because it challenges the less than rigorous thinking of currently dominant voices in debates about discipline. It also addresses questions about discipline that cannot be answered by empirical research. However, it is clearly not meant to be the last word on the subject of school discipline, and the 'findings' are presented as a means to further challenge and change. It is hoped that my work will stimulate interest, further debate, discussion and additional research on related topics, which may ultimately

contribute to the improvement of children's experience of school. Let us also hope, finally, that in the not-too-distant future, those training to be teachers will be attending lectures on behaviour management which are grounded in a recognition of children as human beings equally worthy of respect.

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