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The Formation of Character in Education: From Aristotle to the 21st Century, by J. Arthur, London and New York, Routledge, 2020, 242 pp. £120 (Hardback) ISBN 978-0-367-20602-4, £40 (ebook), ISBN 978-0-429-26246-3

The launch of the interdisciplinary Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue at the University of Birmingham in 2012 was a bold and innovative move to integrate research and teaching in the important and ever-necessary study of character and virtue. The Centre claims to advance ' a moral concept of character in order to explore the importance of virtue for public and professional life'. This is a bold claim to make in the current climate in which the ripples of relativism have spread across educational systems in many parts of the world.

This new volume by the Director of the Centre, Professor James Arthur, offers a clear and insightful introduction to the principal features of Character Education as offered by both the historical record and contemporary policy documents. The book has three sections. Section I explores the Foundations of Character Education with a focus on a) Classical Foundations, b) Early Medieval Foundations, c) Early Modern Foundations and d) Scottish Enlightenment Foundations. Section II considers some of the practices associated with Character Education, especially a) the English Public School, b) Victorian Character Formation and c) 20th Century Influences. Section III offers Contemporary Policies and Issues and a Conclusion. There are thirteen appendices, each with extracts of varying lengths, from some key texts from history which deal with the themes of the book. As well as a list of References to works cited in the text, there is an extensive Further Reading list of important works from History and Philosophy.

The book has emerged from course notes from an MA Module on Character Education offered by the Jubilee Centre. This is a crisply-written text which deals with host of hot topics which have continuing relevance for contemporary education. A clue to the complexity of the subject-matter is offered by the opening sentence of the Introduction: 'The formation of character has been a perennial aim of education, and yet it does not lend itself to a single fixed definition not to superficial analysis.' Quite so. This leads to the wider and perhaps difficult set of questions on the place of Character Education in education today: can it be taught and, if so, how? Is an explicit Character Education curriculum the best way and if so what would it contain and who would design it? Interestingly, we are informed on p. 171 that in 2019 the English Inspection Agency for Schools, OFSTED, 'issued its draft guidelines for inspecting schools which, for the first time, contained a requirement for schools to build the character of their student'. It will be good to see what arises from this.

Alternatively, is it better to have aspects of Character Education seeded throughout a range of subjects? If the latter, who would oversee it and does this offer the danger of reducing Character Education to another broad and often loosely-defined educational aim such as globalisation, ecological education, diversity and inclusion and such like. Educators across the globe reel under the weight of the such terminology and its implications for what and how they teach. Perhaps the solution to this conundrum, so to speak, lies in seeing Character Education as a phenomenon which includes aspects of schooling but also relies of 'larger institutions of socialisation' (p. 161) such as the family, friendships, membership of community associations and such like.

Professor Arthur's approach to such questions is to step back a little from the fray and place Character Education in a broad historical context. Methodologically, this is an important way to investigate the contours of a subject: contemporary approaches to educational studies in the university tend to eschew deeper study of historical influences which reach beyond the period known as the Enlightenment. As such, the book gains in stature considerably as it shows that the formation of character is more than simply one set of 'outcomes' of education but is, rather, the ultimate and, hence, most important aim of any educational endeavour.

An important feature of the book is the treasure-chest of definitions of Character Education which are found throughout. These variations on a theme provide ample material for study and considered reflection. As noted above, the methodological approach is primarily historical. The reader is guided through the educational work of figures who should be very familiar to students of the 'history of ideas', perhaps less so to contemporary teachers: Plato, Aristotle, Quintillian, Plutarch, Clement of Alexandria, St. Augustine of Hippo, St. Thomas Aquinas, Leon Battista Alberti, Erasmus of Rotterdam, Martin Luther, Robert Owen and John Dewy are all part of the cast. In Chapter 4, potted biographies of the following figures are included: Thomas Hobbes, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill. These are names which need reclaiming by the community of educators.

We see from the examples above the strong family resemblance between Character Education and the wider history of education. This also highlights the proper connection between education and philosophical thinking, which is also a feature of one of the principal works in the History of Education, James Bowen's masterful three-volume *History of Western Education*. Arguably, any commitment to rediscovering the importance of philosophy and history to Education Studies lies far from the approaches of many university programmes in teacher education today which, as we know, lean heavily on the Social Sciences. This leads to further consideration of the audience for this book. While the volume is demonstrably and unapologetically geared towards Character Education—which some

might say is a niche interest—the scope of the book demonstrates with little doubt that the study of education in the academy can be enhanced considerably by a more philosophical approach. In other words, there is a strong argument that the issues raised in the text should be ripe for inclusion in Initial Teacher Programmes.

The book is well presented, as we would expect from Routledge. The text is clearly set out in an attractive Hardback format. There is an e-version available and a paperback version will be published soon. The book is an pleasing addition to the bibliography for specialists in the field of Character Education but the content allows for a much wider audience.

Perhaps in the next edition, the heading 'UK Policy on Character Education' on pages 142 could be reworded as the section refers solely to policy in England and Wales: as a fellow Scot, I am sure Professor Arthur is aware that we do things differently here!

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