Symposium on Michael Hand’s *A Theory of Moral Education*

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INTRODUCTION

Symposium on Michael Hand’s A Theory of Moral Education

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The short articles in this symposium have their origins in a seminar held at the University of Birmingham in January 2018, to mark the launch of my book, A Theory of Moral Education (Hand 2018). The seminar was chaired, with customary charm, by my colleague Ben Kotzee and included comments on the book by Andrew Copson, Angie Hobbs and Andrew Peterson, along with a response from me. Peterson’s comments appeared in print a few months later in his review of the book for British Journal of Educational Studies (Peterson 2019). Here, Copson and Hobbs present revised versions of their comments, Kotzee steps down from the umpire’s chair to offer his own assessment of my theory, and I attempt to answer their criticisms.

In A Theory of Moral Education I try to show that moral education can and should be fully rational. I propose that, for the purposes of teaching, moral standards and the arguments advanced to justify them should be divided into three groups, and that different pedagogical aims are appropriate to each. The first group comprises justified moral standards and sound justificatory arguments: here the pedagogical aim is to cultivate full moral commitment through a combination of moral formation and directive moral inquiry. The second group comprises moral standards and justificatory arguments whose status and soundness are matters of reasonable disagreement: in this case the appropriate pedagogy is nondirective moral inquiry, aimed at equipping children to form their own considered views. The third group comprises unjustified moral standards and unsound justificatory arguments, for which the appropriate pedagogy is a form of directive moral inquiry that discourages allegiance to the standards and arguments in question. As long as the contents of the moral domain are taught in accordance with their epistemic credentials, the threat of indoctrination is no greater in this area than in any other.

The book has been widely reviewed (Cam 2019; Drerup 2019; Ferkany 2018; Hambrick 2019; Maxwell 2019) and its central arguments subjected to close scrutiny (Aldridge 2019; Clayton and Stevens 2019; de Ruyter 2019; D’Olimpio 2019; Tillson 2017, 2019; White 2016, 2017). The lines of criticism pursued by Copson, Hobbs and Kotzee are, however, interestingly different from those advanced elsewhere. Copson, while sympathetic to my view, takes me to favour a definition of morality that is likely to preclude the implementation of my theory in schools. Hobbs worries that my focus on disagreement about the content and justification of morality leads me to overlook the significance of disagreement about the application of morality. And Kotzee objects that I am unduly preoccupied with the danger of indoctrinating children and insufficiently
attentive to the danger of improperly shaping their attitudes. These are important criticisms and I am grateful for the opportunity to address them.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

**References**


