

# JOHAN DAHLBECK

# ON CHILDHOOD AND THE GOOD WILL

Thoughts on Ethics and Early Childhood Education





**ON CHILDHOOD AND THE GOOD WILL**

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Malmö University, 2012  
Faculty of Education and Society

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For Birgit and Birgitta, who were such that they saw small things

‘Now, can we say that some thirsty people sometimes refuse to drink?’

‘Yes, lots of them,’ he said. ‘Often.’

‘What can be said about these people, then? Can’t we say there is something in their soul telling them to drink, and also something stopping them? Something different from, and stronger than, the thing telling them they *should* drink?’

‘Yes, I think we can say that’, he said.

‘The thing which stops them in these cases – doesn’t it arise, when it does arise, as a result of rational calculation, whereas the things which drive or draw them towards drink are the products of feelings and disorders?’

‘Apparently.’

‘It will be a reasonable inference, then’, I said, ‘that they are two completely different things. The part of the soul with which we think rationally we call the rational element. The part with which we feel sexual desire, hunger, thirst, and the turmoil of the other desires can be called the irrational and desiring element, the companion of indulgence and pleasure.’

‘Yes’, he said, ‘that would be a perfectly natural conclusion for us to come to.’

– *Plato,*  
*Republic, Book IV*

Inclination is blind and servile, whether it is kindly or not; and when morality is in question, reason must not play the part of mere guardian to inclination but, disregarding it altogether, must attend solely to its own interest as pure practical reason.

– *Immanuel Kant,*  
*Critique of Practical Reason, 5:118*

‘And every day’, he went on, ‘we lead two lives, and the half of our soul is madness, and half heaven is lit by a black sun. I say I am a man, but who is the other that hides in me?’

– *Arthur Machen,*  
*‘Psychology’*



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Malmö, 2012

*Johan Dahlbeck*

# STUDIES INCLUDED IN THE DISSERTATION

## Study I

Evaluating Life: Working with Ethical Dilemmas in Education for Sustainable Development

Co-author: Moa De Lucia Dahlbeck

Published: Published online 2011, *Law, Culture and the Humanities*, DOI: 10.1177/17438721111425977

## Study II

On Childhood and the Logic of Difference: Some Empirical Examples

Published: 2012, *Children & Society*, 26(1), pp. 4–13, DOI: 10.1111/j.1099-0860.2010.00298.x

## Study III

‘Needle and Stick’ Save the World: Sustainable Development and the Universal Child

Co-author: Moa De Lucia Dahlbeck

Published: 2012, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 33(2), pp. 267–281, DOI: 10.1080/01596306.2012.666080

## Study IV

Towards a Pure Ontology: Children’s Bodies and Morality

Published: Published online 2011, *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, DOI: 10.1111/j.1469-5812.2011.00775.x

# INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

## **The setting up of a problem**

The present thesis deals with a problem concerning how one can understand and deal with human coexistence. It is an endeavor to analyze the way in which this seemingly eternal problem is being dealt with presently – within the field of early childhood education – and to study the effects of it in terms of how it shapes the world and how the world may be shaped in turn.

It concerns ethics insofar as ethics is about the problem of coexistence and insofar as the ethical challenge has traditionally been concerned with inquiries into human well-being and the good life (Nadler, 2006). Education and ethics seem bound together as the project of education involves an endeavor to ensure human well-being in the future.<sup>2</sup>

Why, then, would one want to pose a problem in connection with something as seemingly self-evident and natural as the need to organize the social world according to the demands of human coexistence?

Because, as there are (potentially at least) different ways of organizing human coexistence it appears to be of some importance to understand the effects of doing it in a particular way so as to become aware of its inherent limitations. In order to understand the limitations of a particular organizational scheme one needs to investigate its conditions; that is, one needs to map out what is pos-

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis has been carried out within the Research School of Childhood Learning and Didactics (RSCLD), financed by the Swedish Research Council: Educational Sciences 721-2007-3671.

<sup>2</sup> This proposition presupposes the validity of the claim that education, at the most fundamental level, serves to ‘influence the well-being of individuals and nations’ (Lauder et al., 2006: 1).

sible to do and say given the implicit and explicit rules of the framework. In a sense, then, the only way to get to the conditions of a particular way of conceptualizing and organizing human coexistence is to look at its constitutive surfaces; i.e. its embodiment in terms of inscriptions of language (Deleuze, 1990/1995: 87). Language, in this sense, is where we may look in order to perceive what is utterable and what is not, given the conceptual restraints of a particular form of ethics. One of the principle tasks of language, taken from this point of view, is to establish limits (Deleuze, 1969/2004: 11). As such, the present thesis serves to constitute the surface of a particular form of ethics – manifested and proliferated within the institutional setting of contemporary Swedish early childhood education (ECE) – so as to make visible what lies hidden; i.e. its conditions.

How, then, does one go about when studying this problem practically?

Given that the purpose is not to understand the conditions of the prevailing ethics just so as to be able to establish an origin (in other words to establish what it *is*), but in order to understand the rules by which it functions so as to be able to understand what ethics *does*, it appears important to study examples of ethics at work, as it were.

The problem with taking the question of what ethics *is* as a starting point is that it appears to presuppose an already established (stable) identity in the form of a preexisting (metaphysical) idea (Deleuze: 1962/2006: 75–78). This idea is then grounded in empirical relations that mainly serve to confirm the validity of the original idea. Asking what it *does*, in contrast, seems to allow for understanding ethics as inherently pluralistic; that is, as being composed of many different relations of constituting practices that function to stabilize the idea locally. The main difference, then, is that looking at what ethics does assumes that the idea of ethics – as well as its constituting practices (the concrete ethical relations) – may be treated as historically specific and therefore changeable rather than universally valid.

This, of course, involves studying the way ethics interconnects the sphere of ideas with the sphere of practices. Gilles Deleuze re-



lates his (and Felix Guattari's) methodological approach in terms of analyzing arrangements in a way that could be said to serve as a model for this thesis. He writes as follows:

We set ourselves the task of analyzing mixed forms, arrangements, what Foucault called apparatuses. We set out to follow and disentangle lines rather than work back to points: a cartography, involving microanalysis (what Foucault called the microphysics of power, and Guattari the micropolitics of desire). We looked for foci of unification, nodes of totalization, and processes of subjectification in arrangements, and they were always relative, they could always be dismantled in order to follow some restless line still further. We weren't looking for origins, even lost or deleted ones, but setting out to catch things where they were at work, in the middle: breaking things open, breaking words open. We weren't looking for something timeless, not even the timelessness of time, but for new things being formed, the emergence of what Foucault calls 'actuality'. (Deleuze, 1990/1995: 86)

In the present thesis, investigating 'processes of subjectification in arrangements' means looking at how an idea about ethics interacts with various practices so as to be able to determine what – given the ethical framework of the institutional setting of Swedish ECE – children can do, say and become. As such, focusing on the constraints of a particular form of ethics (as it is played out in practice) serves to open up for alternative ways of understanding ethics; understanding ethics not as an already solved problem (that may need to be better implemented), but as a never finished, and never fully stabilized, problem in need of constant work.

Let us begin by taking a concrete example.

### **An exemplification**

A national curriculum is an interesting document as it provides valuable insights into what it is to be and to become human in a given place at a given time in history. It provides a glimpse into what is 'thinkable' and what is 'knowable' in a specific historical

context and it tells us something about the normative aspirations and hopes of a given society at that particular point in time. If we understand education to be about changing people (see Popkewitz, 2007) then a curriculum may inform us about what the conditions for those processes of change are. It may provide a paradigmatic example, if you will: an example to be ‘deactivated from its normal use, not in order to be moved into another context but, on the contrary, to present the canon – the rule – of the use, which can not be shown in any other way’ (Agamben, 2008/2009: 18). In a sense then, such an example may function as an indicator of the practical limits of knowledge. It is with this in mind that I wish to start by quoting the Swedish curriculum for the pre-school. Under the heading of ‘Norms and values’ the following statement may be read:

The pre-school should strive to ensure that each child develops [...] their ability to discover, reflect on and work out their position on different ethical dilemmas and fundamental questions of life in daily reality. (Skolverket, 1998: 8)

The purpose for relating the above quote is twofold. First, it serves to establish an explicit link between working with ethics and the institutional setting of ECE. Second, it demonstrates a potential problem within the discourse in that it rather unproblematically asserts the normative ambition of shaping young children so as to render them capable of navigating in ethical dilemmas. The most immediate question then, of course, is what – from the perspective of the curriculum – is to be regarded as an ethical dilemma and how does one go about when reflecting on and working with it? This, in turn, raises questions about what an ethical life consists of and about how to identify the fundamental questions of life. The curriculum referred to provides us with clues insofar as it appeals to democratic foundational values such as ‘[t]he inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between the genders as well as solidarity with the weak and vulnerable’ (Skolverket, 1998: 3), in what may be read

as a general appeal to the normative ideal of universal human rights.

This leads me to circle in on my research problem. That is, what is the connection between the conditions of the ethical framework of human rights – as exemplified and put to work by ECE in Sweden – and what is ‘thinkable’ and ‘knowable’ in this specific context? And, in extension, how does one teach and learn about what being human means by way of establishing and codifying ethical norms? In order to approach these questions in a tangible way I will first turn to my own experiences as a researcher studying the work with ethics in ECE and I will then give a brief example of how the work with ethics may turn out in practice.

Over the course of writing this dissertation I have been fortunate enough to have been invited to different research seminars to present parts of the thesis. One of the interesting things I have found when doing this is that claiming to investigate the conditions of a normative ideal<sup>3</sup> – such as the human rights framework – is often perceived as problematic in itself. Several times I have sensed that whereas analyzing and problematizing different implementations of a normative ideal is perceived as both interesting and necessary, the opposite seems to be – in my experience – true for studying its conditions. That is to say, when looking at ways in which implementations may fail or be misdirected there is still a general trust displayed towards the normative ideal in itself – that is, we presuppose that we at least share a common understanding of the importance of the values relied on or appealed to – whereas focusing on the conditions of the normative ideal appears to communicate an almost unhealthy distrust in fundamental values, to the point that one is suspected of not wanting to do good in the first place. This, I suspect, might in fact indicate that one is approaching the conceptual limits for what is ‘thinkable’ and ‘knowable’ in a particular context.

Returning to the above quote, one might be led to believe that working with ethics in ECE relies on us simply accepting the domi-

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<sup>3</sup> This approach is informed by Deleuze’s and Guattari’s proposal that: ‘The first principle of philosophy is that Universals explain nothing but must themselves be explained’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994: 7).

nant understanding of what ethics is and how the process of learning to become an ethical subject works – implying that it is a fully automatized process depending upon our supposedly inherent ability as rational subjects to reflect on and reason our way out of ethical dilemmas. When read in terms of a paradigmatic example, we might even suppose that it comes with a tacit understanding that we are in fact not supposed to look beyond it. Drawing focus from what it means to reflect on something and to reason about something tends to add a mysterious gloss to this complicated process where its components are largely unknown and therefore understood to be beyond our reach. This, in turn, appears to favor a conception of ethics where importance is placed on learning to recognize an ethical action as an action that corresponds to the normative ideal. This leads me to another brief example.

In the context of ECE, I first came upon this problem – the inherent struggle connected with the conditions for shaping ethical subjects – when I was introduced to the internationally fast-spreading project of education for sustainable development (ESD). This introduction took place in a Swedish pre-school where children and teachers were working on an educational theme derived from the program of Green Flag (Grön Flagg), a Swedish rendition of the international network Eco-Schools, targeting the issue of sustainable development in education.

Watching young children (age one to three) sorting garbage under the pretext that they were actively contributing to a global project working towards an ethically sustainable world gave rise to questions concerning the presumed relation between individual expressions and normative ideals: a relation that seemed to be more or less taken for granted within the discourse of ESD. It appeared to say something important about the status of childhood and childhood institutions as political instruments in terms of their importance for establishing normative ideals that are assumed to exist apart from any specific context and for laying the foundations for such an ethics, ensuring its wide circulation throughout society.

Why study early childhood when asking questions about the conditions of ethics and, in turn, whether abstract ideas about ethics are translatable into educational practice? A possible answer to

this question would be because early childhood is where we – as a society – invest our shared beliefs about what the world should be like and what life should be like. Childhood, in this sense, is conceptualized as a politically important instrument insofar as it becomes burdened with the normative hopes and aspirations aiming – on the highest level – at ensuring the survival of the human species and the natural environment. The fields of early childhood and ECE, then, may be perceived in terms of concrete expressions of how the relation between ethical principles and human interaction is typically conceptualized and it may also serve to illustrate some of the inherent limits with what I will identify as the dominant form of ethics: an ethics that relies on a conception of the self as divided<sup>4</sup> and that appeals to the recognition of formal principles when evaluating human actions and interactions.

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<sup>4</sup> The notion of the self as divided harks back to the ancient Greek understanding of the mind and the body as being composed of two distinct substances (making for a metaphysical dualism that lends support to the doctrine of the immortality of the soul); a notion that Descartes confirmed when differentiating between extended (non-thinking) and non-extended (thinking) things on the most basic ontological level (Descartes, 1641/1996: 54).

# AIMS AND SCOPE OF THE THESIS

The purpose of this thesis is to critically examine how ethical principles are conceptualized and applied in educational contexts, focusing on the intersection of early childhood education (ECE) and education for sustainable development (ESD).

Its main contribution to educational research and to the field of educational philosophy in particular is to:

1. discuss the presumed connection between ethical principles and individual actions and how this connection may be said to frame the understanding and application of ethics in concrete educational situations.
2. problematize the conditions for how ethics is understood and applied by examining empirical examples of disturbances in the relation between ethical principles and its individualizations, informed by a philosophy of immanent ethics.

The empirical data that provides the four different studies in this compilation thesis with a basis for analysis are drawn from material on different levels. What all data samples have in common is that they have been considered to display a paradigmatic value insofar as they tell us something important about the conditions for conceptualizing and applying ethics in ECE. ESD has been selected, as a specific field of interest, precisely because it focuses on ethical questions and because it may be understood in terms of what

Hemrica and Heyting (2004) labels an *institutionalized communication device* that serves to disseminate pedagogical tools aimed at facilitating an ethical discourse within the field of education. Moreover, ESD is of particular interest as it serves to connect the field of education with a broader social project in the common quest for an ethically sustainable global community. In addition, official statements on childhood and sustainable development are drawn from continuously as they are taken to represent a codification of shared ethical values and as such they provide a material substitute for the formal ethical framework relied on. Consequently, they are taken to provide a fair image of the ethical framework appealed to when evaluating actions in an educational context.

In the first study included, ‘Evaluating Life’ (De Lucia Dahlbeck & Dahlbeck, 2011), the empirical material is drawn mainly from the Swedish project of Green Flag which is an educational program for working with ESD aimed at all pedagogical practices. The Green Flag material is relevant for my purposes here as it represents the largest environmental educational network in Sweden and as it is a branch of the international project of Eco-Schools which interconnects 40 different countries in an (internationally called for) investment in ESD. As the study aims to analyze the Green Flag material in terms of a concrete example of how abstract values are conceptualized and applied in an educational context, and as it serves to illustrate how these values are being transported from the level of normative ideals to the level of individualizations, it also looks at some key political statements that make for internationally recognized codifications of ethical values. These include official documents on sustainable development, on education, as well as on children’s rights.

‘Evaluating Life’ responds to both aspects of the purpose of this thesis as it describes how the ethical framework of Green Flag presupposes that individual actions performed by children correspond to and are constrained by pre-given ethical principles and as it seeks to introduce a more locally grounded understanding of ethics which troubles the notion that individual actions may be decontextually judged in a universal sense.

The second study included, 'On Childhood and the Logic of Difference' (Dahlbeck, 2012), is concerned with investigating some of the preconditions of contemporary childhood such as it is communicated through official documents on children's rights in order to open up for other thinkable ways of conceiving childhood; ways that are less concerned with unifying childhood and more inclined to acknowledge the inherently differential nature of childhood. It is argued that rather than adjusting any individual expression of childhood in accordance with the inherently limited and perspectival concept of childhood, breathing life into the concept so that each unique expression adds to the concept rather than disqualifying any expression that does not readily serve to validate the concept would open up for a more dynamic conception of childhood. For the purposes of this overall thesis, it serves to map and to trouble a foundational notion of childhood such as it is communicated through national and international political discourses and through the concrete examples more specifically related with ESD. The empirical data analyzed are composed of the three key children's rights documents spanning from 1924 to 1989. In addition, a brief overview of the development of western childhood is provided in order to contextualize the modern conception of childhood and in order to identify some gaps within the official discourse that may open up for different conceptions of childhood.

This study is primarily focusing on the first aspect of the purpose of this thesis as it seeks to delimit the ethical subject (or subject-in-the-making) of the child in relation to the overarching framework of values by which it is constrained. It serves to illustrate that the idea of childhood is contingent rather than fixed and that as such it may be understood in terms of a historically conceived political instrument for furthering foundational ideas about how we should live. As children everywhere are understood to be automatically oriented towards the same ethical principles, the children's rights project may be understood in terms of a political project for establishing a common for all framework of normative ideals which in turn has implications for how we may conceive of individual childhoods.



In the third study, “‘Needle and Stick’ Save the World’ (Dahlbeck & De Lucia Dahlbeck, 2012), we study a particular expression – the Swedish TV-series *Needle and Stick Save the World* – of the ESD discourse in order to make visible the underlying logic – the logic of separation – that enables a certain order (in terms of the social organization of life) but that at the same time serves to disqualify any other notion of what childhood and a good life could be. From the point of view of the overall thesis it also connects the project of education with this underlying logic and in doing so it returns to some of the key political statements (such as national curricula and official documents on sustainable development and children’s rights) in order to trace this logic from a local expression to a national and international political level. The TV-series *Needle and Stick* is deemed to be a paradigmatic example of some importance as it is governmentally produced and distributed – ensuring a wide national audience – and as it conceptualized in terms of an educational tool to be utilized in ECE institutions when working with the project of ESD.

This study focuses on the second aspect of the purpose of this thesis as it sets out to destabilize the notion that human rational activity is the central productive force propelling the progression of the natural world. In doing so it also destabilizes the foundational idea that human rational activity is exceptional in the sense that it benefits from privileged access to universal ethical principles (through the presumed faculty of reason). As this idea is central for ESD in general, and *Needle and Stick* in particular, we claim that by illustrating the arbitrariness of the ethical framework relied on, it may be called for to engage in a more in depth discussion on the conditions of ethics within the discourse of ESD rather than focusing exclusively on establishing ever more implementations of the existing framework.

Finally, in the fourth study included, ‘Towards a Pure Ontology’ (Dahlbeck, 2011), the empirical material is provided by, on the one hand, a personal reflection about the meaning-making process underlying the practice of displaying laminated signs with ethical values in a Swedish ECE context. On the other hand, it draws on a philosophical discourse (studying texts of Spinoza, Nietzsche, and

Deleuze) on the tensions between an ontology of identity – where Being is defined in terms of recognizing material expressions as mere instances of preconceived categories – and an ontology of difference – where Being is understood in terms of an immanent process where the material world is understood to give rise to shared ethical ideas in a reciprocal sense.

In this final study I focus on both aspects of the purpose in that, on the one hand, I aim to describe the conditions of the existing ethical framework as founded upon the recognition of individual actions as instances or reflections of already established ideals, and in that, on the other hand, I outline an alternative ethical framework grounded in an ontology of difference.

Having formulated the aims and described the scope I will now turn to the overall disposition of this thesis in order to facilitate the general orientation of the reader.

## OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

In what follows I will first make some clarifying notes about the use of the concept of childhood before contextualizing this thesis by relating the interconnecting fields of ECE and ESD with one another. I will make some all-to-brief notes on the history of ECE in Sweden and on the concept of sustainable development and the emerging international practice of ESD. I will also touch upon the conception of childhood as a political instrument by trying out the notion of *the child as messenger* (see Dahlbeck & Tallberg Broman, 2011). As this thesis is not a comparative historical analysis, this section is designed to provide a practical starting point for the philosophical and educational discussion to follow, and as such it serves to indicate some historical references relevant for connecting ECE in Sweden with the emerging global practice of ESD.

Having contextualized the convergence of ECE in Sweden and ESD, I turn to the concept of cosmopolitan education (and to the concept of universalism) in order to place the current trend of ESD within a relevant educational field of interest and in order to relate the different educational projects to a common ethical framework. This framework, I conclude, is one that may be understood in terms of an ethics very much influenced by Kantian idealism. In this section I provide a brief description of the educational discourse of cosmopolitanism and I relate some relevant critique of the notion of cosmopolitan education with regards to ethics.

As I argue that ESD may be understood in terms of an expression of cosmopolitan education, and as contemporary cosmopolitan education is commonly associated with the ethical philosophy

of Immanuel Kant, next I set out to provide a fairly detailed account of Kantian ethics. The purpose for doing this is twofold. On the one hand the purpose is to provide a deeper understanding of the ethical framework (and its conditions) relied on within ESD, being a form of cosmopolitan education relying on values appealed to within the human rights framework. On the other hand, it serves to illustrate some inherent limitations of this ethical framework: limitations that I argue are to be considered intrinsic to the codification of Kantian ethics.

As a response to the limitations of codifying Kantian ethics I turn to the immanent ethics of Nietzsche and Deleuze. I do this partly in order to outline a philosophical alternative to the framework of Kantian ethics, but more importantly I do this in order to be able to formulate a philosophically grounded contribution to the discussion on ethics and education, moving from an ethics primarily concerned with facilitating the recognition of already established ethical ideals to an ethics focusing on the creation of new values.

At this point I draw up some suggestions concerning how to approach ethics and education in a manner that is more sensitive to the perspectival nature of knowledge. I refer to this pedagogy as *affective learning*. In doing so I reconnect the ethical writings of Nietzsche and Deleuze with the ethics of Spinoza (a connection that is established and elaborated in ‘Towards a Pure Ontology’ (Dahlbeck, 2011)) and I provide an account of some of the possible implications of affective learning informed by some recent contributions within the field of educational philosophy.

Next, I will situate the present thesis within the interconnecting fields of ethics and education focusing primarily on educational studies grounded in traditions of the philosophy of ethics. I will refer to Swedish as well as international studies but as the present thesis is set in a Swedish context I will pay extra attention to studies related to Swedish conditions.

Having done this I set out to describe the methodological foundations of this thesis, making for an approach that is termed (borrowing from the work of Giorgio Agamben) *working with paradigmatic examples*. Next, the actual process of choosing and ana-

lyzing the various examples in the different studies included in this thesis is described in some detail.

Following the section on method there is a summary of each of the four studies included in the order in which they appear. I first motivate the order of presentation and then connect each study with the overarching purpose of the thesis and then proceed by giving a brief account of the content and findings of each of the studies.

To conclude, I offer some final thoughts on ethics, universalism, and education and on the relation between young children's learning and ethical frameworks.

Directly following the list of references, the four studies of this thesis are included.

# ECE, ESD, AND THE CHILD AS MESSENGER<sup>5</sup>

## **Childhood as an abstract idea: what is a good childhood?**

Before discussing the institutional setting of ECE in Sweden it is called for to make some brief comments about the concept of childhood and its relation to ethics and social change in a broader sense.

It is important to bear in mind that, for the purposes of the present thesis, childhood is understood and treated as an abstract idea rather than as a natural matter of fact.<sup>6</sup> This means, in short, that the idea of childhood is perceived as socially and historically determined and that it is therefore understood to be subject to change (Ariès, 1960/1962). Consequently, childhood understood in this sense may be described in terms of a social construction, indicating that its ascribed meaning is continuously being shaped and reshaped under the influence of a flux of historical events, social forces, shared beliefs, cultural practices, and everyday experiences and actions (James & James, 2004: 13; Hacking, 1999: 2).

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<sup>5</sup> Parts of this chapter were drawn from a previously published book-chapter coauthored with Ingegerd Tallberg-Broman (Dahlbeck & Tallberg Broman, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> For childhood to be understood as a natural matter of fact, its discrete objects – the individual members of the category of childhood – need to be perceived as being joined metaphysically by a transcendent and universal idea of childhood. That is, the essence of childhood must be presumed to precede the concrete and discrete examples so that it can function by turning many different objects into instances of the same, i.e. into full members of the category. Childhood, in this sense, is taken to exist independent of social forces – by virtue of its transcendent origin – and would therefore be construed as a natural matter of fact rather than as a facilitative idea set up so as to serve to alleviate the cognitive process of making sense of the world.

While it is certainly true that childhood is an idea that is concretely manifested in the particular bodies of particular children, it is equally true that these particular children cannot be completely encompassed by their corresponding idea in any full sense. That is, the essence of the idea of childhood cannot simply be equated with the individual body of any given child. Another way to put it is to say that any given child is always more than the identity of a child; it is always also a brother, a sister, a friend, a son, or a daughter etc. While this inherent plurality seems to hold true for all things to which ideas refer (Smith, 2003), childhood is particularly interesting as it is contained by and subsumed via the abstract convention of age rather than by physical attributes or tangible abilities.

You could very well argue that a child is denoted by inherent characteristics such as softness in the skin, limited motor skills, vulnerability, developing speech abilities, or small size, but any one of these characteristics could just as well be denoting other individuals that are not necessarily classified as children. Connecting an abstract idea with a concrete thing, then, always involves making a selection, giving preference to certain characteristics while disregarding others. Nadler relates a Spinozan understanding of universals that serves to explain this relation well. He writes:

Universals are abstract concepts that are ordinarily derived from attending to certain aspects common to a number of ideas of things and ignoring others (namely, those wherein the ideas differ from one another), and thereby forming a distinct but not necessarily clear idea of only those common features. (Nadler, 2006: 176)

In legal terms at least, the idea of childhood is primarily delimited by the convention of age. As such, childhood can be understood in terms of a social and political convention constructed so as to facilitate the social organization of a particular form of society. In the light of this (as I argue in 'On Childhood and the Logic of Difference' (Dahlbeck, 2012)), universal documents such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child are not simply reflecting childhood in an innocent and unprejudiced way, but are social and historical

documents constructed for the purpose of furthering the normative ideals reflected in a particular conception of what society *should* be like.

Accordingly, any normative claims made with regards to the idea of childhood – that children should not work for example – must be considered social and political conventions, primarily serving the purpose of furthering a particular form for organizing the social world (Cunningham 2005: 140–146). In a differently conceived social order, for instance, there would be no reason to posit that children should not work (as we have seen historically). This simply means that there is no reason to assume that there is anything natural about the fact that children are not supposed to work (in the sense that it is an inherent quality in the natural constitution of the child), but that given a particular social organization – i.e. the liberal welfare state – such a principle makes sense as it corresponds to the overall ethical framework relied on. In a different social, geographical and/or historical context it could very well be nonsensical. The idea of childhood, then, can be understood as a normative model for individuals to strive for so as to help secure the social model collectively aspired for.

This is clearly where ethics and childhood intertwine. Childhood, as it were, becomes an important piece in the puzzle of constructing and maintaining the modern welfare state. It may be conceived in terms of an instrument facilitating the distinction made between Good and Evil in a universal sense. Good and evil, from this perspective, are not taken to be immutable objective standards or natural features of the world but comes to represent ‘an evaluative measure of the degree to which a thing corresponds to some stipulated standard or model’ (Nadler, 2006: 215). From this we see that the idea of childhood, rather than being conceived as simply denoting a natural phase in every human being’s life, can also be understood in terms of a politically viable instrument for working towards a specific model of social life which is especially beneficial for those people that are positioned at the center of this model as it were. A good childhood, then, is not simply a natural fact, but must be conceived of as being good from a particular point of view. Nadler explicates:



The evaluative labels [good and evil] are, likewise, always to be understood in the context of a thing's relationship to a standard or a model. Something is 'good' if it is a means to a chosen end. More particularly, it is good if it promotes what appears, in the light of that standard, to be an individual's well-being and helps move it closer to a stipulated ideal condition; and it is 'evil' if it is detrimental to what is perceived as to be an individual's well-being. The result is that 'good' and 'evil', like 'perfect' and 'imperfect', are totally relative terms (relative, that is, to the conception of some individual's interest), and what is good for one person may not be good for another person. (Nadler, 2006: 216)

The concept of childhood that is at the focus of the present thesis, then, is not to be confused with the individual or collective lifeworlds of children or the actual day-to-day lives and experiences of children, but refers instead to childhood as a commonly held idea understood to alleviate the cognitive process of making sense of and furthering a certain conception of the human social world. Accordingly, the social institution of ECE is taken to be an important instrument for engineering social change. As such, it appears called for to outline some historical notes on Swedish ECE, on the emerging project of ESD, and on the role of the child as a messenger advocating social change.

### **ECE in Sweden: the shaping of a better future**

ECE in Sweden has been formulated in terms of an institution of modernity – founded on a firm belief in the potentials of institutional child rearing and pedagogy – towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The establishing of ECE institutions was conditioned and actuated by major societal changes such as urbanization, industrialization, as well as subsequent changes in the family structure. The doctrine of German pedagogue Friedrich Fröbel – emphasizing the importance of play and children's own activities as key components of child rearing – act as an important point of reference in terms of connecting contemporary ECE practices with their historical roots. Fröbel aspired – through his work-

ing models – to teach children how to perceive connections in the natural environment. Some aspects of these models have been downplayed over the years but the focus on the natural environment, on holism, on contextualization, and on the importance of morality and ethics are made present through the predominant pedagogical ideals and the governing values of contemporary ECE practices in Sweden.

The doctrine of Fröbel – striving to develop practices for younger children with the intention of providing a solid framework based on useful values and knowledge – found a supportive tool in the female-intensive philanthropy of the time. The concept of philanthropy was used in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century to denote a number of fostering and nurturing responsibilities carried out in order to cope with what was perceived as more or less serious threats to society. Through philanthropy, women were allowed access to what was previously considered out of bounds areas of society and the extent to which they could engage in social reformation publically were considerably increased in the process. For this reason philanthropy has been discussed in terms of female emancipation<sup>7</sup> (Åberg, 1988; 1995). Philanthropism, described by Alva Myrdal as a pedagogy of the rational and the humane (Myrdal, 1935), provided a makeshift solution to the increasing demands for mass-education in Sweden. In recent times ECE and school institutions have been claimed to be confronted with the so-called postmodern doubt (Battail, 2005) in terms of questioning the hopes and expectations associated with Enlightenment and mass-education. Focus has been increasingly placed on the process of learning rather than on knowledge and the content of education as such. Even so, these institutions are still very much relying on the normative ambitions of working for a better society and a better future using the instruments of pedagogy and child rearing. ESD is a telling example of how these ambitions are still very much permeating the institutions concerned.

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, however, that in contrast to this understanding of the relationship between philanthropism and female emancipation it has also been critically analyzed and has been found to be a dissonant rather than a harmonious one (see for example Hammar, 1999).

## **Traditions and values**

In the early history of the Fröbel-inspired ECE practices focus was often placed on recreating what was perceived as lost values and opportunities. The content of education was prioritized and through this content the legacy of the earlier agrarian society was being preserved and perpetuated. Children were taught to churn butter, dip candles, to carpenter, and to craft. Practices such as sowing and reaping, gardening and land management were featured as important parts of the educational agenda and were carefully planned out. In contemporary research, the late modern history of Swedish ECE is often described as focusing more on the ‘how’ than the ‘what’ of education, which is typically being contrasted with the current trend of focusing on the ‘what’ as is visible in the curriculum for the Swedish pre-school (see Utbildningsdepartementet, 2010). When considering the early history of Swedish ECE, however, it is evident that the content – the ‘what’ – was prominently featured from the start. Through this content, then, an understanding of natural connections, of the surrounding world, of health and of moral and ethical values was being communicated. Extensive themes – often spanning over month-long periods of time – connecting various concrete practices with the natural world, the different seasons, the home, traditional festivities and crafts were believed to enable children to incorporate a foundational knowledge about, as well as establish a strong connection with, their immediate surroundings and their natural environment. Traditions linked with seasonal festivities such as Lucia, Christmas and Easter were carefully tended to and preserved and singing activities aiming to educate and to establish central values were frequently being performed. In a sense, this may be described in terms of an early form of value-system primarily dealing with promoting health, morality and cleanliness and towards combating what was perceived as subversive elements in society.

Pedagogical work was typically based on a center of interest [Monatsgegenstand] such as the sheep (from sheep to cardigan), the seed (from wheat ear to loaf of bread) or the seasons of the year (the fall being most prominently featured of these). For example, the Moberg sisters’ collection of singing games for the kindergarten provides several examples of these focal points or centers of

interest (Tallberg-Broman, 2010; Moberg & Moberg, 1913; 1923). Firmly anchored in this tradition, Swedish ECE practices were part of a greater national and international project promoting pedagogic and social ideological values. Participating in an international movement with far greater aspirations than to just care for, educate, and foster young children distinguishes the early history of Swedish ECE.

Working with a center of interest, as a pedagogical principle, would seem to place a particular focus on impelling children to make broader connection and to appreciate a holistic understanding of the natural world (Tallberg-Broman, 1991; Morgenstern, 1867). More recent educational practices and the gradual transition from working according to the doctrine of Fröbel to working with themes seem to indicate that the overarching ambitions of working for a better childhood – promoting a better future and combating external threats – is still very much a central part of contemporary Swedish ECE. It is therefore reasonable to assume that these earlier examples may be considered predecessors of sorts to contemporary practices such as ESD. The focus on health (dietary and life style issues), for example, runs as a common thread through the history of Swedish ECE. The playful combating of ‘the liquor troll’ [brännvinstrollet] is followed by the dissemination of information about the hazards of alcohol and drug consumption. This is subsequently incorporated into a broader focus – through expressions of cosmopolitan education such as peace education – on ‘peace on earth’ and on spreading messages of peace. The common denominator in all of these efforts seems to be that children are conceived as being both the primary targets and the key disseminators of these messages of ethical values to be disseminated in their homes and to their respective families. As such, children are perceived to be holders of the keys to the future and as convenient links, by way of their parents, to society at large. This gives the child, as a political actor, a crucial role to play in the shaping of a future society.

This brief retrospect is intended to make visible some of the characteristics of the historical development of Swedish ECE in order to link the contemporary practice of ESD with some of its his-

torical predecessors. It goes to illustrate that, much like their historical predecessors, contemporary ECE practices working with ESD are addressing children as messengers of ethical values with the ambition of establishing foundational moral ideas about what the human social world *should* be like. These moral ideas are then incorporated into the educational practice through suggested methods and through state-sanctioned teaching programs such as Green Flag (De Lucia Dahlbeck & Dahlbeck, 2011) and via state sanctioned educational television such as *Needle and Stick Save the World* for example (Dahlbeck & De Lucia Dahlbeck, 2012). Moreover, it may be noted that the dissemination of central ethical values through educational practices has been, and still is (in political and intellectual life), championed to a great extent by educated women with a high degree of social and cultural capital, connecting it with what may be labeled a philanthropic tradition. This tradition has been incorporated into – as well as functioning as a transformative agent of – pedagogical principles adjusted according to various national, local and culturally specific demands (class, gender, and ethnicity), while at the same time tapping into a rapidly growing international movement promoting a better childhood and a better future through the concrete project of ESD.

### **ESD as a transporter of ethical values**

Sustainable development is, relatively speaking, a recent concept commonly claimed to originate in the so-called Brundtland report (WCED, 1987). The concept was formally established in the conference declaration of the global environment conference in Rio de Janeiro (UNCED, 1992), where the concept (in Principle 1 and 4) was launched as the core normative principle with regards to international protection of the environment. However, because the Rio Declaration lacks a definition of the concept it is customary to refer to the Brundtland report for this purpose. In the Brundtland report sustainable development is defined as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (WCED, 1987: 43). The vagueness of this definition, however, leaves much room for interpretation. This makes it, on the one hand, vulnerable to critique on

account of its inherent vagueness, while on the other hand it is precisely this vagueness that enables it to encompass virtually any conceivable aspect of human relations, be it social, economic, or environmental.

In the context of ESD, the social dimensions of the concept have been given priority, which has meant that focus has been placed on establishing commonly held ethical values promoting a particular kind of human relations. Accordingly, values such as social equity are (as we discuss in 'Evaluating Life' (De Lucia Dahlbeck & Dahlbeck, 2011)) being promoted as parts of an ethical framework encompassing and including issues concerning environmental protection and/or economic development. As such, these issues are subordinate to a set of ethical values that provide a framework for working towards what is perceived as a more equal society. Hence, transmitting these values is of central concern for the project of ESD (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009; Pramling Samuelsson, 2008).

Education has been identified as an area of special relevance within the international discourse of sustainable development. It has been perceived as a means by which to instigate important social changes on a local as well on a global level. Accordingly, education has been described in terms of an efficient instrument for achieving the goals and for establishing and disseminating the values and the knowledge foundation held as central in international agreements such as Agenda 21 (2005) (UNESCO, 2007). More recently, focus has been increasingly placed on targeting ECE specifically (EPSD, 2010; Davies et al., 2009; Hägglund & Pramling Samuelsson, 2009). This, in turn, may be explained by the fact that ECE (by tradition) makes for a favorable channel through which families and, by extension, the whole of society, may be reached. Through ECE, young children (whose governing ethical values are still considered to be formable) may be accessed, and through the children one may access and influence the behavioral patterns of their families.

In a Swedish educational setting, ESD has resulted in the recent rapid uptake of projects such as Green Flag where focus is placed on establishing and disseminating commonly held ethical values (De Lucia Dahlbeck & Dahlbeck, 2011). These values may be un-

derstood in terms of ethical principles as they rely on children being able to judge concrete practices according to a fixed scale of 'right' and 'wrong'/'good' and 'evil' in a universal sense. Working with different suggested educational tools, teachers are encouraged to instigate discussions on issues concerning quality of life and happiness versus consumerism, equity, solidarity and child labor and so forth. The premises for these discussions seem to suggest that children, in their daily lives (when selecting toys in their local toy store for instance), are acting as agents on a global political level (implying that child laborers may be potential producers of some of the toys). As such, everyday choices and decisions that children make are made to correspond with central ethical issues which in turn transform these seemingly insignificant decisions into potentially critical decisions. Even if the link between the local and the global often appears to be somewhat tenuous, the discourse of ESD appears to be founded on presuppositions about how rash decisions in everyday life are – in the long run – likely to result in global injustice and in an unequal distribution of resources.

Every conceivable aspect of human relations appears to be contained within the framework of ESD and the various practices – such as Green Flag – that make for its concrete components. For example, within the Green Flag theme of 'Lifestyle and health' anything from eating habits to democracy and global equity is being dealt with. This goes to illustrate that the relation between local practices and global trends is acting as an ever present focal point. This feature, in turn, can be traced back to the ambitions of Fröbel emphasizing the importance of having children perceive and appreciate the connectedness between themselves and the surrounding world. The difference is that there appears to have been a shift from looking more specifically at local relations – the immediately surrounding natural environment – to looking at presumed broader interrelations between the local and the global – including social and economic relations. To be sure, the local focus of Fröbelian pedagogy could be conceived as a concrete way of manifesting a very broad metaphysical connectedness far from local in its concern. In a sense, then, working with the immediate surroundings of the child would serve to illustrate a fundamental connectedness be-

tween the individual child and the natural world at large, albeit not in concrete political terms.

This shift from expressing a metaphysical connectedness through focusing on the materiality of the local environment to expressing it through presumed interrelations between local acts and global political relations, in turn, may be related to and discussed in terms of an expression of the broader project of cosmopolitan education that will be further dealt with in the next section. An important aspect of this focus on supposed holism seems to be that ESD is a normative project aiming to combat external threats to what may be described as a distinguishably Western model of (liberal) society. Despite the differences, the overarching aim of this project, then, is in many ways similar to that of earlier normative educational projects of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Suggested discussion topics of Green Flag such as ‘Health maintenance for the soul – what makes us happy?’ indicate that working with ESD involves much more than establishing a common knowledge base relevant for working with concrete environmental issues. Using environmental issues as a means for taking on the broader issue of *what a good life is* turns it into a strategy for establishing a desired value-system with the aspired goal of a sustainable future. The good life is functioning as a kind of symbol for a moral and health promoting struggle carried out against anything that may be taken to threaten this idea of a good life, be it excessive consumerism, bad eating habits or undemocratic phenomena in general. ECE, then, functions as a kind of seedbed for a movement aspiring to transform society and that addresses not only children but – via the children – all members of society. As in the earlier examples – such as ‘the liquor troll’ and the peace project – the child as messenger re-emerges as a prominent feature of the modern day practice of ESD. On the one hand, then, through ESD, the child emerges as a democratic citizen (or at least a democratic citizen-in-the-making) expected to partake in democratic decision-making in an educational context. But on the other hand, as these processes of decision-making are always subordinate to foundational values established *a priori*, one might propose that ‘democratic citizenship is less a solution to political problems than a



strategy of government' (Cruikshank, 1999: 1). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that ESD echoes earlier (governmentally sanctioned) educational projects (such as peace education) in that it makes for a normative project aiming to bring about profound changes in society by combating commonly held lacks, and to establish the necessary preconditions for what is understood to be a better future for all.

What appears to unite these various historical as well as contemporary expressions is the ambition to steer society (and its members) in a particular direction, indicating that there exists some form of pre-given consensual agreement about which foundational values to aspire for. These expressions, then, all appear to be guided by the normative ethical question: how *should* we live? This, in turn, implies a particular ethical framework relying on universal values; a framework that may be labeled transcendent as it appeals to values that are understood to be formally rather than materially conditioned. In order to strengthen the connection between such an ethical framework and education and to situate the practice of ESD within a relevant educational context it seems appropriate to turn to the concept of cosmopolitan education.

## A NOTE ON UNIVERSALISM AND COSMOPOLITAN EDUCATION

Cosmopolitan education may be perceived in terms of an educational answer to the cosmopolitan challenge which may be very briefly related as follows: ‘to make persons formed in their local community aware of their obligations and responsibilities to global others’ (Rönström, 2011: 280). This ‘cosmopolitan pedagogical ideal’ (Papastephanou, 2005: 534) – evoking images of ‘students from diverse groups enjoying a common curriculum of universal logical and ethical principles and imaginative world literature to foster rational thinking about global ethical and political issues’ (Waks, 2009: 589) – is widely understood to require some form of commonly held framework of foundational values so as to enable people everywhere to communicate across cultural and political borders. This major political and social challenge has been the object of many theoretical debates and has caused several influential thinkers – such as Kant (1795/1996), Nussbaum (1994), Habermas (1998/2001), Appiah (2006), Beck (2006), and Benhabib (2006), to name a few – to (in different ways and with varying degrees of critical attitude and appeal to universalism) tackle the problem of how to maintain a peaceful global community while ensuring the freedom of each individual without at the same time compromising the freedom of others. In this context, cosmopolitanism has sometimes been regarded as a potential solution to a global problem and sometimes as part of the global problem itself. Not surprisingly, education has come to be at the centre of many of these debates as it makes for a globally established social institution ideal for shap-

ing future citizens, and, in extension, for shaping future societies (see Popkewitz, 2007; 2008).

Recalling the aforementioned shift in the history of Swedish ECE – from expressing universal connectedness through cultivating an appreciation and understanding of local relations to increasingly talking about global political relations and the presumed connections between local acts and global social changes – cosmopolitanism (in its many shapes and forms: from rooted to moderate to universalist cosmopolitanism) and cosmopolitan education may be understood in terms of related answers to a modern political challenge growing out of ‘the recognition that previously isolated groups now live in close proximity, and this new reality gives rise to significant new opportunities as well as new challenges to be confronted and overcome’ (Waks, 2009: 590).

And although there are divided opinions within the theoretical discourse of cosmopolitanism and cosmopolitan education as to whether to found a global community (and to base education) upon universal ethical principles<sup>8</sup> or upon other forms of less universally inclined ethical frameworks such as communitarian particularism for instance (see Waks, 2009), it seems quite clear that within the official international discourse of ESD, as well as in the Swedish context of ECE, there is a strong tendency towards appealing to ethical universalism. This is perhaps not so surprising as the educational program of ESD may very well be considered a form of implementation of the human rights framework: a framework founded upon the appeal to universal ethical principles (as we discuss in the article ‘Evaluating Life’ (De Lucia Dahlbeck & Dahlbeck, 2011)). In fact, one might, as Thomas S. Popkewitz, argue that:

The reforms of society were to produce transcendent ethics in the search of progress built on human rights and the hospitality to others. The school pedagogy embodied that optimism of a future that was to be guided by the reason and rationality of cosmopolitanism. (Popkewitz, 2008: 1)

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<sup>8</sup> Martha Nussbaum being one of the most adamant contemporary advocates of this standpoint (see Nussbaum, 1994). For a less universalistic take on the cosmopolitan project see for example Appiah’s (1994) reply to Nussbaum.

As such, transcendent ethics may be conceived of as playing a central role in the shaping of modern cosmopolitanism – as an expression of Enlightenment thought – heralding the supposedly inherent capacity of rational beings to establish communities guided by universal ethical principles and to utilize their free will in order to strive to progress towards an ethically sustainable global society. These ideals – marked by a strong belief in the virtue of rationality and the inherent goodness of the rational and free will – have come to characterize the modern image of thought insofar as they appear to permeate the foundations of all major social institutions of modernity, of which education is one of the most important. The appeal to rationality, in turn, has, as Popkewitz (2008) notes, led post-Enlightenment educational discourse to give rise to forms of education that ‘teach a universal reason that tamed passions, desires, and sentiments’ (104). This is something that we will have reason to return to in the next section as it indicates one of the major challenges of transcendent ethics: namely the problem of how to establish and maintain a link between the material world of experiences and the formal sphere of the moral law. Or, to put it differently, how to reconcile between the different parts – the rational and the instinctive/corporeal – of the divided self.

One way of approaching this problem, in the context of contemporary cosmopolitan education, is by perceiving of this link in terms of the educational shaping of rational subjects capable of acting (of their own accord) in accordance with the prevailing normative ideals. As such, the overarching educational task in a project such as ESD might be critically understood in terms of the making of ‘subjects of responsabilization’, whereby children are targeted ‘as actors influencing family consumption practices through negotiation’ (Larsson et al., 2010: 130–131) for instance. The tacit purpose of ESD, when viewed from this perspective, is one of shaping children into responsible citizens of the world (see for example Larsson, 2011). This, in turn, may be perceived in terms of historically conditioned technologies for facilitating ‘the joining of the uncertainty of the future with stability and harmony of the processes and practices of action and reflection’ (Popkewitz, 2007: 69) carried out within the meaning-making framework of

transcendent ethics where reason and rationality are appealed to in terms of universal faculties rather than ‘cultural practices that have historically ordered and generated principles for reflection and thought’ (65).

In order to more fully understand the connection between ESD – as an expression of cosmopolitan education of sorts – and the normative ideals (embodied by the human rights framework) that it appeals to and seeks to implement, it seems called for to provide a more in depth account of the idea of transcendent ethics (and especially of the secularized form of transcendent ethics that appeals to universal reason rather than to a divine will) and to investigate its impact on modern educational thought and practice. One way of beginning to do this is to turn to Kantian ethics and its legacy for contemporary liberal education.

It appears important to note that what is being critically discussed in what follows is not Kant’s account of ethics in itself but rather Kantian ethics such as it has come to be perceived through and incorporated within the conceptual apparatus of human rights and subsequently through discourses on education and ethics visible in projects such as ESD. In order to do this, however, I believe I need to outline some influential features of Kantian ethics – identified as originating in Kant’s work – not for the purpose of evaluating the moral theory of Kant (for which it is clearly insufficient) but for the purpose of identifying some key elements therein that appear to have been most influential in terms of informing and molding the modern human rights discourse as well as contemporary liberal education and in terms of providing a secular ethical foundation for these to rely upon.

*It is true that I may have (or, to anticipate, that I certainly have) a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless, on the other hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.*

– René Descartes,  
*Meditations on First Philosophy, Sixth Meditation: 78*

# ON THE CONDITIONS OF INDIVIDUALIZING NORMATIVE IDEALS: CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION AND THE GOOD WILL

## The Kantian legacy

Why, then, does Kantian ethics appear to offer a suitable starting point for a thesis on how ethics is conceptualized and applied in contemporary education? Before attempting to answer this question it goes without saying that it offers but one of many possible starting points. It does, however, single itself out in the sense that if the ethics communicated through contemporary liberal education is understood to be secularized – in the sense that it appeals to human reason<sup>9</sup> rather than to a divine will – then Kant may be understood as representing a decisive breakpoint in the history of the philosophy of ethics: a breakpoint that is crucial for understanding the modern development of ethics. This is so as Kant formulated a comprehensive ethical theory where ethics is not conceived as being dependent upon a divine will but one that is based instead on the presumed ability of rational beings to make correct decisions in relation to a universal moral law rather than in relation to a divine law.<sup>10</sup> And as we will see in this thesis, ESD (as an expression of

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<sup>9</sup> Reason is defined by Kant as ‘the faculty of principles’, being the faculty that ‘determines the interest of all the powers of the mind but itself determines its own’ (Kant, 1788/1996: 236).

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting, however, that critics – most notably perhaps Arthur Schopenhauer – of Kantian ethics argue that it is in fact an ethics very much dependent upon a theological framework in order to make sense as it relies on central theological concepts such as *duty* and *law* (in an unconditioned and universal sense) which appears to imply a duty towards a higher being (which in Kant’s case is em-

cosmopolitan education) provides us with contemporary examples of how this idea is put into practice through various educational methods relying on this supposedly inherent ability of the autonomous individual to navigate in ethical dilemmas using a map of universal morals. As Nodding (2007) notes: ‘...under the influence of Kant, ethics became highly individualistic; that is, ethics was liberated from the authority of the church, ruler, and even community and was thought instead to rest on the individual’s “good will” and logic’ (177–178). The idea of ‘the good will’ appears to make for a foundational belief in terms of how ethics (in modern terms) is thought to travel from the sphere of abstract ideas to the material world. This requires some further explications however.

Kant postulates that normative ideals precede the concrete actions that they correspond to or are claimed to give rise to. In this sense, the principles are believed to exist *a priori* while the actions arise *a posteriori* as they (by virtue of their essence) belong to the empirical world. The empirical world, in turn, is not to be mixed up with the pure (formal) sphere of the principles other than through the temporary connections established (by reason) when an action is performed for the sake of the principle (Kant, 1785/1996: 45). When a normative ideal is individualized, then, the principle is duly recognized while at the same time the action as such may be motivated based on its affinity with the principle invoked. The action is appointed its ethical value based on its relative proximity to the principle (Smith, 2007: 67), regardless of circumstances such as in what context and by whom or why the action is being performed. Correspondingly, the motivation for the action is ideally to be found in what Kant labels the good will<sup>11</sup> which may be understood in terms of the underlying link between normative ideals and the actions that they give rise to (Kant, 1785/1996: 49). The good will – being a capacity grounded in reason – serves to motivate and guarantee actions as corresponding with or conform-

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bodied by reason rather than God). Schopenhauer explicitly criticizes Kant for constructing an ethics implicitly relying on the presumed existence of a higher being while at the same time explicitly denying the same, rendering it in Schopenhauer’s view a rather badly concealed and insufficiently grounded form of theological morality (see Schopenhauer, 1840/1998: 53–55).

<sup>11</sup> In this context, the will should be understood as ‘a capacity to choose *only that* which reason independently of inclination cognizes as practically necessary, that is, as good’ (Kant, 1785/1996: 66).



ing to the principles for which sake they are performed. Without the guidance of the good will (a kind of built-in transporter of normative ideals) the action risks appearing as arbitrary or even egoistic as the acting individual (unable or unwilling to adhere to a good will) is then left at the mercy of natural inclinations and affects that are notoriously whimsical and untrustworthy. In order to be able to suppress and control ones natural inclinations and ones passions and desires in the right manner and for the right reasons, the autonomous individual must learn to utilize the underlying good will that is supposedly capable of counteracting these (empirically based) impulses and urges.

The good will functions as a rational guiding force steering the actions of a person; a force that enables a person – motivated by duty, not by affects or desires – to regulate behaviors and suppress subjective desires in accordance with normative ideals rather than in favor of more or less short term personal gains. As such, it may be described in terms of an ever present corrective in the form of a reliable moral compass. In order for this type of self-governing behavior to be effective, however, it needs to be internalized<sup>12</sup> and automatized. For the good will to function smoothly without excessive disciplinary measures, education (along with the other key institutions of society) in its many forms is relied on to give shape to ethical subjects. As such, a central aspect of education may be understood in terms of a training process that serves to facilitate the recognition of ethical choices and to automatize behaviors in accordance with the good will. In doing so it latches on to a social project concerned with the ‘gradual shaping of social life into a recognizable (reasonable) pattern’ (Fitzsimons, 2007: 560). This – to align the will of the individual with the prevailing normative ideal – may be interpreted as the key role of education with respect to the administration of ethical principles. The goal to strive for may be formulated in terms of a practical principle postulating ‘the idea of *the will of every rational being as a will giving universal law*’ (Kant, 1785/1996: 81).

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<sup>12</sup> Kant writes that: ‘For, the ends of a subject who is an end in itself must as far as possible be also *my* ends, if that representation is to have its *full* effect on me’ (1785/1996: 81).

Before looking in some detail into the ways in which education engages with ethics (that is, looking at how normative ideals are approached, applied, and individualized in an educational context), it seems called for to outline some of the basic conditions of Kantian ethics.

### **Some conditions of Kantian ethics**

The ethics formulated by Kant appears to presuppose (among other things):

1. the existence of (formal) ethical principles preceding any actions subjected to judgment
2. that empirical phenomena are measurable in relation to these principles
3. that ethical principles serve to facilitate the suppression and governance of a person's natural inclinations and desires, implying in turn that these are to be understood in terms of an ever present threat against an ethically sustainable social world

The first condition involves understanding the faculty of reason as belonging (by right) to a different sphere altogether than the empirical world. Pure reason, as it were, has the inherent ability to transcend the empirical world and may therefore be said to originate from the pure sphere of the principles (in the same sense that Plato's Ideas are inherently separated from the sphere of the simula-cra). An ethics that is founded on the distinction made between actions (being of a material nature) and principles (being of a formal nature) can be described as transcendent. This, in turn, means that ethical principles, in this case, are not to be considered founded on experience but rather as existing *a priori*. That is, the ethical framework is founded on knowledge about events that precede the actual events. Being informed by principles that exist *a priori*, this ethical framework is inherently able to guide every rational being and tell us how we *should* act in any given situation without as-

suming that we know (or that we have to know) anything about the circumstances leading up to that situation. Kant explains:

From what has been said it is clear that all moral concepts have their seat and origin completely a priori in reason, and indeed in the most common reason just as in reason that is speculative in the highest degree; that they cannot be abstracted from any empirical and therefore merely contingent cognitions; that just in this purity of their origin lies their dignity, so that they can serve us as supreme practical principles; that in adding anything empirical to them one subtracts just that much from their genuine influence and from the unlimited worth of actions; that it is not only a requirement of the greatest necessity for theoretical purposes, when it is a matter merely of speculation, but also of the greatest practical importance to draw its concepts and laws from pure reason, to set them forth pure and unmixed, and indeed to determine the extent of this entire practical or pure rational cognition, that is, to determine the entire faculty of pure practical reason. (Kant, 1785/1996: 65)

The second condition concerns the administration of the relation between principles and individual actions. For an action to be judged as morally sound in a general sense it has to be evaluated without prejudice. That is, the evaluation can be neither arbitrary nor subjective. To solve this dilemma (without having to appeal to a divine will) Kant introduces the categorical imperative saying that: ‘We must *be able to will* that a maxim of our action become a universal law: this is the canon of moral appraisal of action in general’ (Kant, 1785/1996: 75). A maxim, in Kantian terms, is the subjective principle of acting which must then be made to correspond with and conform to the objective principle, that which Kant calls the practical law, in order for it to be properly guided by the good will. The guiding principle for individual actions – communicated through the maxim – is a form of test that every individual action has to pass: a test that serves to establish whether the action truly is ‘consistent with the idea of humanity *as an end in itself*’ (Kant, 1785/1996: 80). This idea is then taken to correspond

with a practical law that precedes all conceivable actions that are subsequently judged in accordance with it: a law that is taken to exist *a priori* and is therefore to be considered transcendent (that is, it is formally rather than materially determined). When it comes to administering this relation (between principle and action) it appears likely that instruments such as universal documents on human rights, for instance, have come about (in modern times) in order to facilitate and instrumentalize the evaluation of individual actions (individualizations) according to practical principles (normative generalities). As such, this concerns a codification of principles connecting certain types of actions with certain purposes in order to facilitate the identification of a given action as being either ethical or unethical. These codifications (such as universal documents on human rights, for instance) function as material substitutes of sorts for the principles (being purely formal and therefore unattainable in any material sense) and will come to represent the practical law in case of a public evaluation. In other words they form a kind of concretized link between ethical principles and actions through which the good will may identify an action as corresponding or agreeing with a principle.

In order to deepen our understanding of the third listed condition we may consider the following passage from Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*:

The human being feels within himself a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty, which reason represents to him as so deserving of the highest respect – the counterweight of his needs and inclinations, the entire satisfaction of which he sums up under the name happiness. (Kant, 1785/1996: 59)

The task for reason, then, is to – by adhering to the good will – seek to overcome the needs and desires that struggle for domination over which is to be the guiding principle of the actions. Hence, it may be derived from this that it is every rational being's responsibility to ensure that his or her actions are truly performed by duty, regardless if the action appears to be dutiful or not, which in any case does not necessarily mean that it is performed with duty

as its principle driving force but may equally well mean that the duty and the inclination just happens to coincide temporarily. Because, as Kant explains:

From love of humankind I am willing to admit that even most of our actions are in conformity of duty; but if we look more closely at the intentions and aspirations in them we everywhere come upon the dear self, which is always turning up; and it is on this that their purpose is based, not on the strict command of duty, which would often require self-denial. (Kant, 1785/1996: 62)

To be able to separate actions performed by duty from actions that rather happens to coincide with duty one has to be able to control and suppress ones inner drives – inclinations, preferences, needs, and desires, etc. – as these may be said to influence ones reason by, as it were, putting on the costume of duty for their own subjective purposes. In this sense, the relation between duty and ethical principles is constantly being threatened by disturbances from inner desires and inclinations. Desires and inclinations, in turn, originate from the empirical world (that is they do not exist *a priori* but are materially conditioned) which means that whatever influence they have on reason (with regards to ethical judgments) is to be understood as ‘highly prejudicial to the purity of morals’ which is why we must turn to the good will in order to safeguard the inviolability in ‘the principle of action being free from all influences of contingent grounds, which only experience can furnish’ (Kant, 1785/1996: 77).

### **Kantian ethics and education: recognizing ethics, or, learning to make the ‘right’ choice**

As the purpose of the present thesis is not to formulate a critique of Kantian ethics as such – as this implies far greater philosophical labor than the present thesis, being of an educational nature, allows for – the focus should rather be on the codification (i.e. the implementation via documents that function as material stand-ins for the formal principles) of Kantian ethics such as it is carried out in the

human rights discourse. The human rights discourse is understood to be a tangible representation of a transcendent ethical framework, providing ethical principles to be implemented in various forms of cosmopolitan education (such as ESD). This approach appears to open up for a critical examination of the effects of the implementation of a predominant (secularized) ethical framework (or evaluative system) in the educational intersection of ECE and ESD.

Before looking closer at how a contemporary educational discourse such as ESD can be understood through a lens of Kantian ethics, however, it seems called for to briefly comment more generally on the relation between Kantian ethics and the development of Western education.

Fitzsimons (2007) places Kantian ethics in a central position in relation to modern Western education, emphasizing the importance of the idea of the rational beings' supposed access to the good will for education as an Enlightenment project. He concludes that:

The rational 'self' is the subject of modernity and of Enlightenment thought, and so evolved as the focus for education in Western society. Based on the idea of the reasoned will, the Kantian subject is supposedly capable of free choice and moral autonomy. (Fitzsimons, 2007: 560)

One of the key roles of education, then, from a Kantian point of view, would be to allow children and students to train themselves in the ability to recognize – by relying on their inherent ability to use their faculty of reason – right from wrong in relation to a universal moral law (as opposed to a divine law). Accordingly, in his lectures on education Kant notes that: 'The human being shall make himself better, cultivate himself, and, if he is evil, bring forth morality in himself' (Kant, 1803/2007: 441). This type of self-governing behavior – serving to familiarize oneself with and to learn to act according to a universal moral code – may be understood as the foremost aspect of the Kantian legacy for Western education and can be interpreted in terms of a 'prescription for internalizing the moral law' (Fitzsimons, 2007: 563). In short, it con-

cerns being able to recognize individual actions as conforming to a moral law that exists *a priori*, and then to learn to make the right choices based on this knowledge of a universal framework of ethics. Accordingly, Kant proposes that the key to moral education is for the child/student to be able to establish connections between particular actions and the universal moral law using their faculty of reason. He suggests that:

Understanding is the knowledge of the universal. The power of judgment is the application of the universal to the particular. Reason is the faculty to see the connection of the universal with the particular. (Kant, 1803/2007: 461–462)

Furthermore, this training in making moral judgments (adjusting subjective maxims so that they correspond with and conform to already established ethical principles) is conceptualized in terms of an ever present aspect of education – as a form of interdisciplinary element – serving to allow children and students to cultivate these capacities in a manner that allows them ‘to practice them by combining them with other kinds of education’ (Moran, 2009: 478). And as we shall see, the focus on having moral education permeate other forms of education – be it subject-based or theme-based – is one that rings true for the case of ESD which is designed to cover several subject areas or themes and in doing so provides a form of ethical framework for the entire educational practice (see Dahlbeck, 2011).

In sum, this central aspect of modern (moral) education – the cultivation of a reliable ethical compass – is one that resonates in the empirical examples drawn on in the different articles of this thesis, very much indicating the importance placed on being able to internalize and automatize an ethical code that is typically not spelled out explicitly but rather implicitly relied on as a form of precondition for appreciating the underlying ethical framework. Part and parcel of this project – of producing self-governing ethical subjects – appears to be a foundational idea emphasizing ‘the value and importance of educating those concerned so that they discipline themselves, that is, develop both their character to constrain

themselves and their disposition to act upon sensuous inclinations' (Roth, 2011: 304). To be able to make good judgments of actions – as being either ethical or unethical depending on its relative proximity to or distance from a normative ideal – requires the ability to separate ones will – by appealing to reason and by postulating the moral duty as an end in itself – from ones inner drives and inclinations. This is so as the inner drives and inclinations – from a Kantian perspective – tend to cloud ones potentially unprejudiced view by introducing subjective aims and desires grounded in the empirical world and therefore being necessarily perspectival and prejudiced. From this point of view, moral education requires that the child/student is able and willing to look beyond inner desires and inclinations in order to perform a duty towards a normative ideal, an ideal which is then conceived of as an end in itself and as existing *a priori* in that it is conceived of as both independent of experience and as universal and necessary (Deleuze, 1978a). Consequently, to aspire for the normative ideal is conceived as a central part of the project of education. This aspiration, however, is conditioned by the degree to which we – being those who are educated – are able to coordinate our own will with the normative ideal that we are all understood to strive for. Unlike animals, Kant would argue, who are guided solely by their instincts (making them naturally determined) insofar as they rely on these to inform them about what choices to make in life, humans are endowed with a free will. Humans are therefore in need of education – as a governing instrument applied externally – so as to be able to coordinate their own will with the normative ideal that they are striving for. Because, as Giesinger points out:

The fact that we are naturally undetermined does not mean, for him [Kant], that our natural destiny is not fixed – morality is our destiny. To live as a moral agent, however, involves self-determination. We reach our destiny only when we are able to act autonomously in accordance with the moral law. (Giesinger, 2011: 7)



The coordination of these two (sometimes seemingly incompatible) foundational claims – the autonomy of the free will and the determinism of a transcendentalist framework<sup>13</sup> – emerges as an important task for ESD (being a device for disseminating and implementing normative ideals) and as such it is visible in the Swedish implementational program of Green Flag (De Lucia Dahlbeck & Dahlbeck, 2011). Insofar as the overarching ambition of education – from a Kantian perspective – entails that human beings should ‘acquire the disposition to choose nothing but good ends’ (Kant, 1803/2007: 444) there emerges an interesting tension – visible in Kant’s own lectures on education as well as in contemporary educational examples implicitly relying on a Kantian ethical framework – between learning to make use of one’s own free will (through participatory decision making) and learning to make the ‘right’ choice with regards to a fixed normative ideal; that is, being able to identify an action as being in accordance with the prevailing moral law.

In sum then, moral education is not so much about learning to behave in a certain way as this is taken to be a potentially natural behavior given that as rational beings we are always subject to the moral law, whether we choose to adhere to it or not. Instead, it would be about learning to recognize and to identify (that is, to be made aware of) ethics in the sense that by connecting certain types of actions with certain maxims one is taught to constantly affirm the prevailing moral law. As such, the aim of moral education is to ensure that ‘the agent becomes aware of, understands, and explicitly accepts what he has already presupposed’ (Giesinger, 2011: 9).

Now, arguably, a moral education founded on Kantian ethics would not *have* to concern itself primarily with automatizing ethical decision-making in a decontextualized sense. Johnston (2007), for instance, expresses concern with what he takes to be an overly rigid and formal type of moral training that he claims is largely due to a misreading of Kant’s ethical theory where *obeying* the moral law (i.e. learning to behave correctly) is given prominence over the actual *forming* of subjective maxims – which in his reading is the

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<sup>13</sup> For a lengthier discussion on the tensions between free will and determinism in education see Giesinger, 2010.

only conceivable way of accessing the moral law in any case. Rather than guiding children so as to have them make the ‘right’ choice in any given situation he proposes a take on moral education that is oriented towards conceptualizing the *process* of moral-maxim formation: that is, the ongoing testing out of different possible maxims in relation to different possible scenarios in order to find out what the moral validity of the maxim is in relation to the moral law. He proposes that:

Children thus begin learning ‘the rules’, how these rules are ordered, where and when they apply, and most importantly, how to make judgements of particular cases in light of these. Having internalized these rules, those cases that fit and those that do not, together with the resulting challenge to the rule, the child is ready to undertake *conscious* maxim-formation. (Johnston, 2007: 244)

Certainly, this type of more practical or experimentally inclined moral training makes for an interesting educational form to explore. However, it seems that in so far as Kantian ethics provides an epistemological foundation for constructing educational exercises on ethical decision-making, such as they appear in ESD for instance, there is a tendency to treat morality as a universally valid code for making ethical decisions. This, in turn, would seem to result in the rather pragmatic conclusion that morality is in fact something that can be taught and learnt once and for all and that can be subsequently applied to any thinkable situation regardless of context. Whether or not we focus on learning moral maxims by heart – learning to recognize and to make the ‘right’ choice – or on sharpening our ability to form subjective maxims that are in conformity with the moral law, we nevertheless approach ethics in terms of a fixed formal guide for living in accordance with a moral law that is conceived of as existing *a priori* and as being transcendent.

As already indicated, and as I aim to show in the studies included in this thesis, ESD exhibits a strong tendency to focus on having children train their ability to recognize and to make the ‘right’

choice as prescribed by the codifications of ethical principles appealed to within the program (such as universal declarations of human rights and children's rights etc.). This, in turn, may be explained by a reliance on an overarching ethical framework clearly indebted to Kantian ethics in that it appears to presuppose an inherent link between the good will of the individual and the transcendent moral law. However, in order to open up for a different approach to moral education we may want to consider the implications of altering some of the conditions of ethics. Before doing so, however, let me just briefly comment upon a potential problem in assuming that Kantian ethics – as a theoretical system – can be readily codified and instrumentalized in the first place.

### **When Kantian ethics becomes dogma: a cautionary note**

Kant's ethical theory (such as it is drawn up in *Critique of Practical Reason* and in *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*) is formulated in terms of a set of philosophical presuppositions for an ethical life rather than a dogma to be implemented and obeyed as such.<sup>14</sup> This is important to note as the ethical framework communicated through the human rights discourse, for instance, is difficult to conceive of in any other way than a dogma. Not least since it may well be argued that in many parts of the world human rights have taken on the roll formerly held by religious constitutions in so far as it dictates how humans *should* live and act towards each other. In fact, in *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?* (1784/1996) Kant specifically advises against relying on dogmas when pursuing enlightenment. He warns that these new dogmas (prejudices) will – instead of freeing rational individuals from the bonds of dependency – ‘serve just as well as old ones to harness the great unthinking mass’ (18). While Kant is clearly targeting religious constitutions – as a prime example of an imposed dogma – it is worth noting that Kantian idealism has – through implementational measures such as the human rights discourse – itself been transformed into a dogma heralding universal reason as a transcendent source imposing its moral law on all rational be-

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<sup>14</sup> In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, for example, Kant claims that ‘[t]hese postulates are not theoretical dogmas but *presuppositions* having a necessarily practical reference [...]’ (1788/1996: 246).

ings. As such, the idea of a universal reason – when appealed to in the various codifications of human rights – is manifested as an artificial measure effectively hindering the progression of the rational individual as it is translated into a set of constraining rules in the form of a universal moral code (Smith, 2007).

From this we may conclude that there appears to be a certain tension between Kantian ethics – as a purely theoretical system – and the ways in which Kantian ethics can be said to have been codified and institutionalized in various key aspects of the practical organization of the modern human social world, such as politics, law, and education etc. In some respects then, Kantian ethics appear to have been transformed into precisely the kind of dogma that Kant himself warned us about when he proposed that: ‘People gradually work their way out of barbarism of their own accord if one does not intentionally contrive to keep them in it’ (Kant, 1784/1996: 21). As Kantian idealism is being mixed up with the empirical world – which appears inevitable if it is taken to provide the theoretical basis for any form of political constitution – it is automatically transformed into the kind of prejudiced (perspectival) instrument that the divine law would turn into in the hands of a worldly ruler for instance.

Notwithstanding this (perhaps unavoidable) danger of confusion, however, it is still valid to pose critical questions to Kant’s philosophy of ethics in order to continue pushing the boundaries of what ethics *could* be. This is so not least because one might assume that there is some form of correspondence between the image of ethical thought (that is, the theoretical system as such) and its various practical expressions (via ideas about how one is to learn to become an ethical being etc.) within an educational context. Giesinger relates this inherent tension between philosophical ideas and implementational measures as follows:

Transcendentalism, however, is not designed to explain processes of moral learning and education. So, we might conclude that we misunderstand Kant’s moral philosophy if we criticise it from an educational point of view. Still, it is disconcerting when a theory of moral justification and motivation seems to obstruct

the development of a corresponding theory of learning.  
(Giesinger, 2011: 5)

This tension between the theoretical framework of Kantian ethics and practical educational implementations is one that – although it may not cast much of a shadow over the theoretical construction of Kantian ethics as such – may lead us to look for other forms of ethical models; models that are more readily grounded in the world of experience.

And so it is at the level of philosophical inquiry – rather than at the level of implementation – that philosophers such as Nietzsche and Deleuze have tackled the question of what ethics might be, and in doing so have continued (although taking it in a radically different direction perhaps) the philosophical labor of Kant.<sup>15</sup> In what follows I will sketch out some of the key components of Nietzsche's and Deleuze's contributions to ethical theory in order to then situate these in an educational setting by asking how an immanent ethics (in ways different from a transcendent ethics) might impact educational thought and practice through what has come to be known as *affective learning* or *affective education* (see Dahlbeck, 2011; Sellar, 2009; Semetsky, 2009; Watkins, 2006; Watkins, 2007).

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<sup>15</sup> For a lengthier discussion on the (often understated) affinity between certain aspects of Nietzsche's and Kant's ethical theorizing see Cartwright (1984) and for a discussion on the relation between Deleuze's and Kant's philosophical work see for example Smith (2006).

*From what has been said it is plain, therefore, that we neither strive for, wish, seek, nor desire anything because it is good, but, on the contrary, we adjudge a thing to be good because we strive for, wish, seek, or desire it.*

– *Benedictus de Spinoza,  
Ethics, Part III: Proposition IX, Scholium*

# ON THE POSSIBILITY OF AN IMMANENT ETHICS: CREATING NEW VALUES

Daniel W. Smith describes the guiding principle of an immanent ethics as follows:

Rather than 'judging' actions and thoughts by appealing to transcendent or universal values, one 'evaluates' them by determining the mode of existence that serves as their principle. (Smith, 2007: 67)

Already we can discern a radical difference between an ethics founded on the appeal to a universal law (via the faculty of reason) and one that turns instead to the material world, i.e. the differentiated world of experience, when formulating its guiding principle.

What Nietzsche and Deleuze ask of us (being informed by the univocity of Spinoza) is that we consider the possibility that our social constitution – being part and parcel of the empirical world – actually produces our sense of individual reason and through our reason our sense of morality. And that subsequently, our values and ideals are materially conditioned products of our social constitution and that as such they are empirical expressions. That is, the genealogy of values is bound up with underlying social desires and drives (and affections) that give rise to our sense of reason in so far as we derive 'the genesis of individuals from pre-individual forces and materials' (Cox, 2006: 500) and not from an essentially for-

eign – purely formal – substance. If we assume that ethical values have an empirical basis then we may also assume that values are more or less contingent or that, at least, there is nothing in the material world (which is all we, as humans, have access to) indicating that they exist separately from the context in which they are applied.

Wood's account of Kantian ethics reflects an idealized conception of ethics where moral values remain indifferent to the material world as they are essentially foreign to it. He writes:

Kant's moral rationalism is in part a recognition that however the psychology of human beings may vary in time, place, or culture, the fundamental standard of moral good and evil does not vary along with them. It is as independent of empirical human nature as the laws of arithmetic or Newtonian physics. (Wood, 2008: 37)

This account provides a solid framework for how one *should* live ethically in so far as it posits a non-negotiable standard of good and evil that appears incorruptible in itself. However, the problem is that if we take Nietzsche's account of the genealogy of morality (1887/2008) seriously then we may have to consider the fact that if values are not 'time-less absolutes' but rather 'reflections of the concrete interests of those who subscribe to them' (Smith, 2008: xv) then even the seemingly stable standard of Good and Evil have to be considered conditioned by human desires and drives.

How then are we to understand an immanent ethics that at first glance may appear to open up for complete value nihilism as it sets out to destabilize the universals of Good and Evil? This requires a more detailed look into some of the conditions of an immanent ethics as proposed by Nietzsche and Deleuze in particular.

### **Immanent ethics according to Nietzsche and Deleuze**

In what follows of this section I will first outline some key Nietzschean concepts (I will focus on the concepts of *perspectivism* and *drives*) before attempting to briefly account for a Deleuzian understanding of the concepts of *desire* and *modes of existence*.



The purpose for this is to construct a conceptual framework that I believe is necessary for establishing a better understanding of the (often elusive) idea of an immanent ethics and for subsequently applying the idea of an immanent ethics to an educational context via the concept of affective learning.

### **Nietzsche's perspectivism and the theory of drives**

To be sure, there is a kinship between Nietzsche's ethical theorizing and Kantian ethics. And although the two thinkers are typically regarded as philosophical opponents in many ways, there are some interesting affiliations that seem important to note. Nietzsche, for instance, shares with Kant a highly critical attitude toward pity (Cartwright, 1984). He also rejects utilitarian and consequentialist ideas about ethics on much the same grounds as Kant. A central feature of both philosophers' ethical writings is the concept of *the will* insofar as it concerns an idea of a pre-individual will that functions subconsciously but that we can be made conscious of, and it is to this end – to conceptualize (and to control) the will – that both Kant and Nietzsche dedicate much of their moral philosophy. In a sense, then, we may conclude that 'the autonomy of the will is their central ethical conception' (Cartwright, 1984: 83). Beyond these similarities there are some key differences however.

While Kant's conception of the will is of a free will that automatically (and compelled by duty) seeks to conform itself to an already existing moral law, Nietzsche's famous concept of a *will to power* reflects a conception of the will capable of creating moral laws; that is, a will that possesses the ability to create new values.<sup>16</sup> Kant's will is always constrained by the law (that always already exists) while Nietzsche's will is always creative in the sense that it creates the law. Correspondingly, whereas for Kant, the autonomous individual is a presupposition for morality in itself, for Nietzsche, 'the autonomous individual equipped with a free will and conscience has to be viewed not as an ontological presupposition but as an historical creation' (Ansell-Pearson, 1991: 275). This, in turn, reflects a more foundational difference as it could be said that

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<sup>16</sup> For a lengthier discussion on Nietzsche's conception of freedom and 'the free will' see Solomon (2002).

while Kant seeks to recreate an original moral order (natural goodness), Nietzsche is more concerned with arguing for the perpetual creation of ethics (and ethical values) through the will to power. In doing this, Nietzsche is obviously attacking the idea that morality exists in any stable and unconditional (ahistorical) sense and hence it is not a specific form of morality he is targeting but it is ‘virtue itself in itself, that is to say the pettiness of true virtue, the unbelievable mediocrity of true morality, the baseness of its authentic values that he attacks’ (Deleuze, 1962/2006: 90). In contrast, Kant attempts to recreate a lost moral order which – somewhat paradoxically – appears to bring him back to a theological form of morality that he has already rejected. It is so as it appears to presuppose an original order that may be traced back to the Judeo-Christian myth of the Garden of Eden and the Fall of Man. With this in mind, consider the following take on Kant’s conception of morality as understood by Wood:

*Morality*, in other words, is essentially the response to a human condition that has been torn away from natural goodness, where we must fight our way back toward goodness, or even forward to a higher kind of goodness than mere innocence could even so much as imagine. Moral worth involves the exercise of a new power, the power of reason and will. This is a power that arises in us only because our human nature, corrupted by the social condition, is fundamentally in need of correction, or even a revolutionary upheaval. (Wood, 2008: 29–30)

While the Kantian will ‘is thought of as independent of empirical conditions and hence, as pure will’ (Kant, 1788/1996: 164), Nietzsche’s will is conditioned by the empirical body and its capabilities insofar as a body (any body) consists of relations of pre-individual forces and insofar as the empirical world is composed of ‘nothing but quantities of force in mutual “relations of tensions”’ (Deleuze, 1962/2006: 40).

Grounding morality in the body (as opposed to in pure reason), Nietzsche has to reject the idea that there exists a common for all moral law – applicable to everyone everywhere on the same terms

– in favor of an ethics that is explicitly perspectival; that is, that respects the fact that as it is of this world – i.e. empirically grounded – it cannot speak (at least not credibly) as if it was positioned above or beyond this world (as is the case with an ethics that appeals to a universal moral law). Consequently, Nietzsche may be said to advocate ‘an ethics of self-cultivation’ (Ansell-Pearson, 2011: 180) meaning that in order to become ethical one needs to be able ‘to cultivate the shoots of one’s drives and affects’ (181) rather than to learn to recognize and conform to a universal moral law.

From this perspective, working with ethics in ECE would involve going beyond teaching children to recognize the prevailing ethical norms (by, for example, recognizing the act of recycling as corresponding to the principle of sustainable development by right), moving towards looking at how our behavior and our actions (in the particular setting of ECE) affect and is affected by our immediate surroundings and by those around us. It would involve experimenting with formulating subjective principles in such a way that they accord with our mode of existence and evaluating our principles in order to have them increase our ability to act while not decreasing the ability of others to act. This, of course, requires approaching ethics in terms of how it makes us feel and of how it makes people around us feel and not just in terms of how we are supposed to feel given the ethical framework that we have subordinated ourselves to (which, it seems, inevitably results in an ethics fueled by bad conscience and reactivity).

A key difference, then, is that Kant’s will appears to be primarily reactive in the sense that ‘the relation of such a will to this law is *dependence* under the name of obligation’ (Kant, 1788/1996: 165) which means that the will – being inherently susceptible to the influence of subjective inclinations and desires – ‘needs a resistance of practical reason which, as moral necessitation, may be called an internal but intellectual constraint’ (165-166). Formulating a *reactive* will, in turn, appears to result in what may be labeled a form of moral asceticism. Nietzsche’s will, on the other hand, is conceptualized as primarily *active* in the sense that it is identified as the driving force behind what is understood as the affirmative activity

of creating new values, not in order to constrain life, as it were, but in order to affirm life by creating values that resonate well in relation to a particular life and a particular configuration of drives. And this, obviously, is not something that can be done in any *a priori* or universal sense, as each life requires its own unique set of values in order to fit with the particular configuration of drives that compose that particular life.

It makes no sense, then, to relate arbitrary actions of a child (in the setting of ESD) to global (environmental or otherwise) consequences (established beforehand, as is done within the program of Green Flag for instance) as this means appealing to an assumed, i.e. already determined, cause and effect relation inherently blind to the conditions of the particular lives involved. It seems to automatically assume that meaning is encapsulated within the action itself (wherever, whenever, and for whatever reason it is carried out) and that judgments can be passed without considering the particularity of the action within its specific context. Within the conceptual framework of an immanent ethics one would, on the contrary, pay close attention to the particularities of the situation – the configuration of drives involved – as this is the only way of determining (on a subjective basis) whether an action is to be considered ethical (in relation to the context) or not.

From this perspective, any given configuration of drives can be either good or bad – depending on what they actually do with that particular life; i.e. whether they serve to affirm it or decompose it – but it can never be Good or Evil, as this presupposes a fixed set of values that precede the actual configuration and that function by judging instances of life in beforehand. Consequently, Nietzsche's perspectivism is based on the understanding that our drives actually give shape to our sense of self and that, therefore, a philosophical discourse on immanent ethics – in Nietzsche's view – should begin at the level of the drives. This is so, as in order to be able to cultivate ones drives, one need first be made conscious of ones drives. Hence, as Smith notes:

[I]t is our drives that interpret the world, that are perspectival – and not our egos, not our conscious opinions. It is not so much

that I have a different perspective on the world than you; it is rather that each of us has multiple perspectives on the world because of the multiplicity of our drives – drives that are often contradictory among themselves. (Smith, 2007: 69)

In sum, Nietzsche's ethics does not seek to conform – and to constrain – life to a universal moral law that presupposes a common for all standard that in itself must be conceptualized in relation to a specific configuration of drives; a configuration of drives that cannot be made applicable to all as it cannot be separated from the actual corporeality that it originates from. Rather, Nietzsche's proposal is that we cultivate our drives (that is, we need to learn to know them and to learn to know how to cultivate them so as to increase rather than decrease our power to act), and in order to do so we must pay close attention to the particular body that harbors the drives. Cultivating the drives, then, may be understood in terms of a conscious process of affirming life in the sense that it remains faithful to the Spinozan question: what can a body do?<sup>17</sup> As such:

To affirm life is to unburden: not to load life with the weight of higher values, but to *create* new values which are those of life, which make life light and active. There is creation, properly speaking, only insofar as we make use of excess in order to invent new forms of life rather than separating life from what it can do. (Deleuze, 1962/2006: 185)

One of the shortcomings of the predominant morality (hinged upon an appeal to the moral law) is – in Nietzsche's view – that it is utterly dependent upon the recognition of behavior as already familiar and as already determined in relation to a set of constraints that, in effect, tend to obstruct the creation of anything new. As

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<sup>17</sup> As argued in 'Towards a Pure Ontology' (Dahlbeck, 2011), the immanent ethics promoted by Nietzsche and Deleuze owes a great deal to the philosophy of Spinoza as he rejects the notion that the (transient) body and the (eternal) mind are of two different substances in favor of a univocal understanding of Being. Based on the idea of the univocity of Being, Spinoza proceeds to elaborate an ethics that does not appeal to transcendent values but that relies instead on an understanding of the productiveness of life itself; a productiveness that is intrinsically connected with what a body is capable of doing.

such, it is at the mercy of tradition in the sense that what is deemed ethical is what accords with traditional ways of acting and being. The problem, then, is that tradition can never foresee that which is not yet, and that therefore it may not be a reliable judge of things to come as it serves to conform these things to what has already been without considering what they could be. Nietzsche writes:

As, for instance, right away with the very *first proposition*: morality is nothing other (therefore, above all *no more!*) than obedience to mores, no matter what ilk they may happen to be; mores, however, are merely the *traditional* manner of acting and evaluating. In matters where no tradition commands, there is no morality; and the less life is determined by tradition, the smaller the orbit of morality becomes. The free human being is unaccustomed and immoral because, in all things, he *wants* to depend upon himself and not upon a tradition. (Nietzsche, 1881/2011: 10)

This is certainly applicable to the context of ESD as one of the main concerns of the discourse of ESD is to seek to establish new patterns of behavior in order to break with a (postindustrial) tradition of living unsustainably. It seems that seeking to establish new ways of living by appealing to an ethics that functions mainly by recognizing behaviors as corresponding with what is traditionally considered ethical is somewhat contradictory. Because, in order to be able to formulate new ways of living, it seems that – if we follow Nietzsche’s line of thought at least – we would also need to formulate new values so as not risk recreating that which already is (that which has been deemed unsustainable in the first place). This sets up a major task for education as this would be the institution where coming generations have the opportunity to formulate new values more in line with the social order that is currently being sketched out and that would then need to focus more on creating than recognizing values as it were.

The inherent tension between recognition and production – as touched upon in the above quote – is one of the central points of contact between Nietzsche’s and Deleuze’s philosophy. And so it is

to Deleuze that we will now turn, in order to continue fleshing out the concept of an immanent ethics.

### **Deleuze, desire, and modes of existence**

In a 1978 lecture on Kant, Deleuze outlines the rule of recognition versus the rule of production in a way that serves to illustrate one of the key differences between a transcendent ethics and an immanent ethics. In brief, transcendent ethics, according to Deleuze, relies on the rule of recognition insofar as it requires that we impose established values on many different things in a manner that does not necessarily allow us to come up with a schema; that is, a rule of production for creating new values. It only ever allows us to produce a synthesis of an empirical phenomenon when we relate it to the moral law. That is, it allows us to recognize things as corresponding to the moral law. Deleuze provides us with an example:

The synthesis of a house is the rule of recognition according to which I say 'it's a house'. You say 'it's a house' in front of very different things. You effect a synthesis of the given such that you relate them to the any-object-whatever 'it's a house'. The schema of the house is very different, it is not a rule of recognition over random diversities. The schema of the house is a rule of production, namely that you can give yourself a concept of house. (Deleuze, 1978b: 3–4)

The task for an immanent ethics, then, is to establish a schema of ethics that enables a differentiated evaluation in the sense that it does not tell you how you should live according to the rule of recognition, but that provides you with an instrument by which to produce values that accord with your particular configuration of drives. Consequently, the question one would ask oneself from the point of view of an immanent ethics is not then; how *should* one live (in a manner that resembles that which already is); but rather, what is my schema; of what am I capable given the concept that I correspond to? As such:

It is not a matter of judging life in the name of a higher authority which would be the good, the true; it is a matter, on the contrary, of evaluating every being, every action and passion, even every value, in relation to the life which they involve. Affect as immanent evaluation instead of judgement as transcendent value: 'I love or I hate' instead of 'I judge'. (Deleuze, 1985/1989: 141)

We see now how different an immanent ethics (as compared with a transcendent ethics) is with regards to the empirical. Whereas Kantian ethics very much seeks to separate the formal from the empirical – assuming that the essence of ethics lies beyond the material world – immanent ethics is constantly turning to the empirical for ways of extracting the formal, that is, extracting the inherently differential principles for living an ethical life from each life.

To relate it to the field of education one might say that following Deleuze's conception of ethics, the interesting pedagogical challenge is not about how we may best illustrate the governing ethical principles in our daily lives but about learning to constantly be on the lookout for ethical encounters that allow us to cultivate and sensitize our ability to perceive how we are shaped by everyday encounters and how our own ways of being affect those around us. As such, working with ethics in education would concern focusing on the individual processes of learning to act in such a way that we maximize the encounters that enrich us and minimize the encounters that decompose us.

Deleuze suggests that our unconscious desires function as an immanent organizing principle for the perceived material world. Much like with Nietzsche's perspectivism, however, the concept of desire should not be mistaken for our conscious desires or our personal outlook on life in terms of reflections of our personal aspirations and dreams. Rather, it concerns a pre-individual conception of desire that 'constitutes the condition of any decision' (Smith, 2007: 73). In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize this pre-individual configuration of drives and affects in terms of a machine that produces desire; a *desiring-machine* (1972/2004: 1–57). It is a fruitful description insofar as it clearly highlights the



productiveness of life itself and insofar as it serves to facilitate the understanding of our drives and inclinations as ‘already part of what Marx called the infrastructure’ (Smith, 2007: 71) rather than as mere effects on the self, actuated by external influences. As such, we are concerned here with a form of empiricism suggesting that ‘reason is not, strictly speaking, a faculty of ends’, but that ‘[t]hese are referred back to a basic affectivity, to a “nature” capable of positing them’ (Deleuze, (1963/2008: 1). In an educational context, then, to begin to know the nature that produces our presumed faculty of reason – i.e. our individual and collective desires and drives – would be the first step towards being able to formulate subjective values that accord well (in such a way that they do not constrain us) with the particular lives we live.

It makes sense, then, to evaluate a life (any life) in accordance with its immanent modes of existence rather than in relation to an external framework, whether we refer to this framework as a divine will or as the moral law. Deleuze and Guattari elaborate:

There is not the slightest reason for thinking that modes of existence need transcendent values by which they could be compared, selected, and judged relative to one another. On the contrary, there are only immanent criteria. A possibility of life is evaluated through itself in the movements it lays out and the intensities it creates on a plane of immanence: what is not laid out or created is rejected. A mode of existence is good or bad, noble or vulgar, complete or empty, independently of Good and Evil or any transcendent value: there are never any criteria other than the tenor of existence, the intensification of life. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1991/1994: 74)

As an attempt to facilitate the evaluation of life based on immanent criteria, and to conceptualize this process in terms of a pedagogy, the concept of affective learning has proved useful insofar as it lays out the schema for living ethically without subordinating life to transcendent values. As such, it concerns an attempt to formulate an applied immanent ethics in an educational context.

### **Affective learning: a possible immanent ethics in practice?**

Affective learning, as I argue in ‘Towards a Pure Ontology’ (Dahlbeck, 2011), concerns a conception of learning that embraces – rather than denies – the fact that ‘there is more to this world than appears to common sense in immediate experience’ (May & Semetsky, 2008: 143). Instead of settling for ordering and labeling that which is already known, affective learning tends towards encouraging the experimentation with ones capacities to affect and be affected by things in an endeavor to embrace that which has yet to be; the new and the unexpected (see Deleuze, 1968/2004). This involves viewing the world as a place full of differences rather than similarities, full of things that are subject to constant changes rather than mere reflections (inferior copies frozen in time) of general categories. It does not mean doing away with recognition, as that would appear to render life unbearable, but it means that the subsumption of a particular action or event under a pre-given category is denaturalized and historicized. As such, it concerns acknowledging the historical aspects of ordering events according to evaluative labels. From this perspective, an action is neither good nor bad in itself (by nature) but is rendered either good or bad in a given context and from a particular point of view. As such, paying attention to specific historical contexts – in this case – involves recognizing things and events as analogue while at the same recognizing that the analogy is always temporary and particular. Hence, while subsuming actions and events under general categories may be regarded as necessary for facilitating the cognitive ordering of the world, it does not mean that it must be treated as natural or that a thing necessarily belongs to a given categories by right. Judge Holden, a central character of Cormac McCarthy’s *Blood Meridian*, says the following when approached about this subject:

The truth about the world, he [Judge Holden] said, is that anything is possible. Had you not seen it all from birth and thereby bled it of its strangeness it would appear to you for what it is, a hat trick in a medicine show, a fevered dream, a trance bepopulate with chimeras having neither analogue nor precedent, an itinerant carnival, a migratory tentshow whose ulti-

mate destination after many a pitch in many a muddled field is unspeakable and calamitous beyond reckoning. The universe is no narrow thing and the order within it is not constrained by any latitude in its conception to repeat what exists in one part in any other part. Even in this world more things exist without our knowledge than with it and the order in creation which you see is that which you have put there, like a string in a maze, so that you shall not lose your way. For existence has its own order and that no man's mind can compass, that mind itself being but a fact among others. (McCarthy, 1992: 256)

The problem with a kind of learning that is primarily preoccupied with recognizing and identifying that which is already known – rather than one that is prepared to embrace the unknown as altogether unrecognizable and differential – is that we end up relying on a reversed sense of causality. This is so as the world we set out to teach about turns out to be nothing but a poor reflection of our presumed faculty of reason and therefore finite. As such, we can only ever teach or learn about things that we already know and as a result the world we address is a world that has been stripped of every quality and feature that cannot already be accounted for.

By focusing on identifying individualizations of the normative ideals (as appears to be the case with ESD), the process of learning is restricted by the extent to which we are able to connect concrete expressions (of, for instance, waste management) to abstract principles (of, for instance, ecological sustainability) in a chain of signification that seems inherently unwilling to handle material aspects as constitutive; that is, as being unique expressions whose ascribed meaning depends entirely upon our perspectival (embodied) ways of looking at and perceiving it.

We – as teachers and human beings who are relying on our presumed faculty of reason – construct a finite world that primarily serves to validate itself as it were. We posit ourselves as the cause of the world (and not the other way around) – by making sense of it – and in doing so we restrict ourselves into thinking that nothing new can ever be discovered, as it would then be utterly unrecog-

nizable by default. Nietzsche describes this reversed causality as follows:

Man's three 'inner facts', the things he believed in most firmly – the will, the mind, the I – were projected out of himself: he derived the concept of Being from the concept of the I, and posited the existence of 'things' after his own image, after his concept of the I as cause. No wonder if, later on, he only ever re-discovered in things *what he had put in them*. (Nietzsche, 1888/2006: 470)

Why, then, are we so adamant about identifying learning as the act of recognizing the already known? If we are to believe Nietzsche it has to do with a fear of the unknown, a deep-seated fear of the unaccountable. He writes:

Tracing something unknown back to something known gives relief, soothes, satisfies, and furthermore gives a feeling of power. The unknown brings with it danger, disquiet, worry – one's first instinct is to *get rid of* these awkward conditions. (Nietzsche, 1888/2006: 471)

Recognizing patterns in the world as already given or as analogue or opposed to something already identified can be thought of as a rather convenient way of doing away with the perceived dangers of the unknown using a reversed causality as a kind of means by which to familiarize and neutralize the world. Nietzsche elaborates:

In truth all these so-called explanations are states which *result* from something, a kind of translation of feelings of pleasure or displeasure into the wrong dialectic: one is in a position to hope *because* one's basic physiological feeling is strong and rich again; one trusts in God *because* one is calmed by a feeling of plenitude and strength. – Morality and religion belong entirely under the *psychology of error*: in every single case cause and effect are confused; or truth is confused with the effect of what is

*believed* to be true; or a state of consciousness is confused with the causality of this state. (Nietzsche, 1888/2006: 472)

Instead, affective learning would strive to undo this reversed causality by taking as its starting-point the affective encounter between individual bodies and then by considering the possibilities of the kind of world or the kind of life that the affective encounter would open up for: a life that is always more than can be conceived *a priori*.

To embark on a journey (as teacher or learner) where the end is forever shrouded in uncertainty requires a great deal of courage however. It also requires acknowledging that the process of learning (the journey) is not necessarily subordinate to the end (the knowledge aspired for). It requires creativity in the sense that to be able to confront something new requires the creation of new concepts capable of handling that which is not yet known – capable of handling difference on its own terms. It requires acknowledging that the mind is inseparable from the body (in a Spinozan sense) and that the body, as a result, is inseparable from the world. The mind, in this thinking, does not cause the world as it is always entangled in the world (via the body) and human knowledge is therefore always to be considered embodied. The idea, then, that the mind is capable of objectively judging and evaluating life – of ordering and labeling it according to preexisting general categories – is inherently limited as judgments are always being passed from within life itself. As Nietzsche puts it:

You would need to be situated *outside* life, and at the same time to know life as well as someone – many people, everyone – who has lived it, to be allowed even to touch on the problem of the *value* of life: reason enough for realizing that the problem is an inaccessible problem for us. Whenever we speak of values, we speak under the inspiration – from the perspective – of life: life itself forces us to establish values; life itself evaluates through us *when* we posit values ... (Nietzsche, 1888/2006: 467)

Accordingly, learning is being severely restrained when subordinated to value judgments that presuppose a higher rank from where they are derived: a higher order thought of as being somehow separate from the world and from life.

In 'Evaluating Life' (De Lucia Dahlbeck & Dahlbeck, 2011) we are discussing a kind of educational setting that (we argue) is very much relying on an understanding of learning as facilitating the recognition of that which is already known and on the preconception that any given situation can in fact be judged *a priori*. ESD, such as it appears in our examples from Green Flag, is primarily concerned with automatizing value judgments and in promoting an all-encompassing moral framework that is common for all. We mean to show how these conditions make it difficult to work with particularities as being constitutive and as differential. Lefebvre describes an alternative – Deleuzian – conception of international law, seeking to break with a tradition of relying on abstract rights – one that is relevant for my purposes here as it proposes a more creative and relational approach to the idea of right holding. He writes:

A concrete situation breathes life into the right, giving it a creative evolution. It is an operation that makes sense of rights and situations through their connection, endeavors to ameliorate a situation, and creates a new sense to the right. The right lives only in its creations and, in turn, these creations are themselves re-created by being introduced into new situations and new encounters. (Lefebvre, 2006: 414)

Similarly, affective learning is required to constantly redifferentiate itself as it is perpetually being reenacted in new situations and through new encounters: encounters that cannot be known in advance as they have not yet been experienced. Recalling Nietzsche's reservations about the supposed human ability to objectively judge life from within life, affective learning relies – in line with Nietzsche's thinking – on the assumption that the outcome of learning *cannot* in fact be known in advance as it is inevitably entangled in the ongoing process, making it both situational and perspectival by

default. Learning, in this conception, is not so much about producing and reproducing *an image* of the world, but about *creating* the world through the ongoing process of affective experimentation (cf. Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/2004: 12).

## RELATED STUDIES ON ETHICS AND EDUCATION

The present thesis interconnects and relates to several fields of study simultaneously. It relates – on a general level – to studies on philosophy and education as is evident from the chapter on Kantian ethics and education and the passages on affective learning in particular. Empirically, it relates to studies on the educational and political field of ESD as demonstrated in the chapter on ECE, ESD, and the child as messenger. In particular, however, it relates to studies on ethics and education, focusing empirically on the institutional setting of ECE in Sweden.

In order to position the present thesis in relation to studies on ethics and education I aim to comment briefly on some relevant studies from this field of research. This is done mainly so as to be able to highlight some of the specific contributions of the present thesis, not least with regards to its methodological and theoretical points of departure.

It is important to note, however, that the primary function of this section is facilitative in the sense that the intention is not to establish and/or confirm the existence of a clearly delimited field of research but rather to provide a manageable framework for understanding the approximate position of the present thesis in relation to other studies of interest. As mentioned initially, I will pay extra attention to studies that specifically target, or relate to, Swedish conditions as the empirical focus of the present thesis is placed on discussing examples primarily borrowed from a Swedish context.



Traditionally, educational studies on ethics have placed considerable focus on children's meaning-making with regards to ethics. This has been done by either focusing on children's cognition (drawing from the theoretical writings of Piaget (1932/1960) and Kohlberg (1976) for instance); children's emotional capacity and studies on empathy (drawing from works such as Eisenberg and Strayer (1987) and Hoffman (1987)); or, as is the case more recently, on ethics as socio-culturally conditioned where the focus is on understanding how children interact ethically (see for example Corsaro, 1987) and on the educational setting as an ethical/moral arena (see Tholander, 2002) (Johansson, 1999: 43-61). Roughly speaking one might say that educational studies on ethics – particularly with regards to early childhood – have undergone a shift from being firmly grounded in moral theories concerning children's ethical abilities (Piaget, 1932/1960) to being more inclined towards relational ideas such as Noddings' ethics of care (Noddings, 2002). Noddings' notion of care ethics is typically conceived as an alternative to the traditional way of teaching ethics through character education insofar as its proponents 'rely more heavily on establishing conditions likely to encourage goodness than on the direct teaching of virtues' (1). This involves focusing more on the concrete interaction between moral agents than on the relation between abstract principles and ethical behavior.

For all their differences, what these three approaches have in common is that they concern attempts to understand how children in some sense *perform* ethically, given different ways of conceptualizing ethics – spanning from understanding ethics as founded upon preexisting universal principles that can be taught and learnt to ethics understood as inherently relational albeit often conditioned by the transcendence of the Subject.

Researchers such as Halvars-Franzén (2010) and Holmgren (2006) have carried out educational studies on ethics, where ethics is perceived as inherently relational and as socially conditioned while still being very much conditioned by the transcendence of the Subject. They have turned to the philosophical writings of Emmanuel Levinas in order to draw on his conception of ethics as originating – and manifesting – in the concrete encounter between

the Subject and the Other; an ethics that may be said to be transcendent insofar as it relies on the categories of the Other and the Subject or the Ego – categories that must be understood as residing beyond, or being otherwise than, Being (which is always limited by possible experience) by virtue of their status as abstract/pure ideas (Smith, 2003).

Halvar-Franzén has studied the institutional settings of preschool and school as places where ‘becoming ethical’ can take place with the intention to ‘follow the everyday lives of children by exploring their ethical space and the encounters which take place in it’ (2010: 185). Methodologically, the study is based on ethnographical field studies which, again, emphasizes the focus on ethical encounters between individuals (understood in this context as Subjects).

Holmgren has approached the ethical relationship between teacher and student from a Levinasian perspective, arguing that the practice of teaching is to be understood as an ethical relationship where ‘the Subject (or Ego) [is] being constructed in its encounter with the Other’ (2006: 137). His study is based on an ethnographic approach. The aim of the study is to inquire after ‘[w]hat kinds of phenomena manifest themselves in the teacher-student relationship?’ (138) as perceived in the empirical material and understood through the lens of an ethics formulated by Levinas.

Dahlberg (2003) and Dahlberg and Moss (2005) have studied ethics in ECE in terms of its emancipatory potential for childhood institutions, applying a Foucauldian governmentality-perspective on a policy-level together with a Levinasian take on ethics aspiring to imagine ‘a democratic political practice, where education takes the form of a pedagogy of listening related to the ethics of an encounter, and a lively minor politics confronts dominant discourses and injustice’ (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005: 178). One might, however, detect a certain degree of tension between the Foucauldian understanding of discursive practices as being constitutive of subjectivity<sup>18</sup> (and subjectivity, as an effect, then, being understood as inseparable from the world of experience) and the transcendence of the Levinasian Subject.

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<sup>18</sup> For a more in depth discussion on the Foucauldian understanding of the production of subjectivity and subjectification see Deleuze, 1990/1995: 113–114.

In a Swedish ECE setting, Johansson (1999; 2007) has investigated ethics from the child's perspective, focusing on 'children's lived experiences of values and norms' (1999: 271) in the context of the preschool. Looking at preschool children's conception of ethics, Johansson has enquired after the norms and values that children hold and to what extent children take responsibility for one another in their actions. Evidently, the relational aspects of ethics are at the very center of the study. Theoretically, Johansson turns to Merleau-Ponty so as to be able to grasp and interpret the life-worlds of the children involved in the study. In this sense, ethics – as relational – is taken to represent a process of learning where children are constantly trained in testing out values and norms in relation to their peers as a way of negotiating between their own rights and the rights of others.

Tholander (2002) has also focused on the collaborative actions of students as a way of understanding how morality is 'done' in a Swedish school context. Methodologically, the study is based on an ethnographic approach, focusing on analyzing informal classroom communication taking place between students. The purpose for doing this is to investigate the moral implications of students' dialogues, relying on the assumption that 'social norms are best seen when the participants themselves identify transgressions of these norms' (71). Theoretically, Tholander draws on what he calls 'a conversational alternative to cognitivist models of morality and moral development' (33) where moral cognitivism, as a tradition, is being largely ascribed to the theorizing of Kohlberg. Again, arguing against morality as a decontextual phenomenon, Tholander situates his study among those taking a relational perspective on ethics and morality, where morality is thought of as being constructed in social interaction.

As becomes clear from the above, Swedish educational studies on ethics and/or morality have focused mainly on looking at how ethics is being performed in an educational setting. Most studies mentioned above have approached ethics by way of ethnographic field studies, looking at the concrete interaction between children or between children and teachers/preschool teachers. This is typically done so as to allow for an informed understanding of how

children conceptualize ethics, how they act ethically, and what kinds of values they hold.

What the present thesis is concerned with, however, is rather to place focus on the ethical framework itself (by way of its effects<sup>19</sup>), not in order to grasp how children act ethically or how children understand ethics and ethical values, but in order to map out the conceptual limitations of the ethical framework: an ethical framework that I perceive to be the predominant apparatus for evaluating instances of life in contemporary Western societies. This is done by studying various early childhood practices as localized empirical examples of how the ethical framework is manifested rather than as providing exclusive insights into how children think and behave ethically.

In the following chapter I will describe the methodological points of departure of the present thesis, discussing some of the implications of working with paradigmatic examples as an instrument for analyzing texts, in addition to describing the methodological approach in relation to each of the studies included.

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<sup>19</sup> This method relies on the Spinozan tenet that the only way to form adequate knowledge about a cause is through its effects (Nadler, 2007: 47-48).

## ON METHOD: WORKING WITH PARADIGMATIC EXAMPLES

In *The Signature of all Things* (2008/2009) Agamben describes his methodological approach in terms of working with various paradigmatic examples that are taken to ‘constitute and make intelligible a broader historical-problematic context’ (9) rather than merely treating them as actual historical phenomena that serve as individual building blocks in a larger historiographical reconstruction. This approach, according to Agamben, presents an alternative to the inductive – moving from the particular to the general – as well as the deductive – moving from the general to the particular – analysis, introducing ‘a third and paradoxical type of movement, which goes from the particular to the particular’ (19), and in doing so appears to question ‘the dichotomous opposition between the particular and the universal which we are used to seeing as inseparable from procedures of knowing, and presents instead a singularity irreducible to any of the dichotomy’s two terms’ (19). The paradox of the movement lies in the fact that it ‘transforms every singular case into an *exemplar* of a general rule that can never be stated a priori’ (22).

Working with examples in this manner – in order to identify tacit rules – is not about uncovering universals at work beyond the materiality of the examples but is instead about asking what the underlying epistemological and ontological conditions for these examples are? What are the presuppositions needed to make it possible to talk about a certain phenomenon (a particularity) in a certain (general) sense? And what would be the possible consequences

if these presuppositions were to be momentarily destabilized and if the presupposed link between the particular and the general were not to be taken for granted?

This methodological approach relies on an ontological position that presumes that I can only ever make claims about universals such as they are manifested in the examples observed, that is, I cannot make claims about whether or not the universals actually exist independent of and beyond the concrete examples, or if and how the concrete examples correlate with abstract laws. In this sense, it concerns a kind of empiricism that is not interested in setting out to establish causal relations (either inductive or deductive) as these are to be considered unobservable metaphysical ideas rather than actualities.

### **A note on the gap between what we see and what we say and on where to go from there**

In a reflection on what might be learnt from the overall methodological approach of Michel Foucault (corresponding well with Agamben's reasoning about paradigmatic examples), Deleuze points out that:

We have to take things and find visibilities in them. And what is visible at a given period corresponds to its system of lighting and the scintillations, mirrorings, flashes produced by the contact of light and things. We have to break open words or sentences, too, and find what's uttered in them. And what can be uttered at a given period corresponds to its system of language and the inherent variations it's constantly undergoing, jumping from one homogeneous scheme to another (language is always unstable). (Deleuze, 1990/1995: 96)

To pay attention to (and to describe) these flashes is, by and large, what the present thesis is primarily concerned with. In this sense, working with paradigmatic examples is very much concerned with analyzing language and the variations in language as language is taken to correspond with a system and as the mapping out of this system is assumed to provide insights insofar as it indicates the

supposedly stable points that function as the prevailing parameters of possible knowledge(s). Methodologically, then, it concerns the setting up of ‘relations between the visible and the utterable’ (Deleuze, 1990/1995: 107) so as to be able to discern the as of yet unutterable and so as to enable the mapping out of the as of yet unchartered territory that education (as one of the core ethical enterprises of contemporary society) may indeed come to inhabit.

The overarching aim or guideline then, methodologically, has been to indicate certain perceivable fissures between ‘what we see and what we say’ (Deleuze, 1990/1995: 107), not so much in order to give an account of existing flaws in the system, but in order to indicate possible starting points for transforming the system from within. To this end then – that is, in order to be able to identify ways in which one might begin the transformation of a system of language and the ethics that corresponds with it – the present thesis is relying on the inherent instability of language insofar as it looks to linguistic inscriptions as indicators of appropriate points of entry for experimenting with the overall system of language (and ethics). I have termed these appropriate points of entry paradigmatic examples.

In what follows I will explain the process by which I/we have selected the empirical material; have selected examples to be analyzed from the material; and have proceeded to analyze these examples in relation to my/our theoretical resources. I will recapitulate this process on a study by study basis.

## **Study I**

The initial process of mapping out the empirical territory of ‘Evaluating Life’ involved working on different levels simultaneously in order to allow us to trace discursive statements from a local level – focusing on the Green Flag material – to a national level – looking at national curricula – and to an international level – surveying international documents on children’s rights and sustainable development, international political statements concerning ESD, and international statements concerning the issue of child labor. In addition, it involved mapping out what we perceived to be the theoretical foundation of these statements: a foundation that, we argued,

would provide us with an understanding of the conditions making it possible to talk about these issues in a particular way (while simultaneously blocking other ways of talking about it).

We started out by collecting statements (from all levels), sorting them under different headings indicating the subject addressed and/or the theoretical challenge that they posed. This required a thorough review of documents and statements deemed to be of interest for the study. We then proceeded by picking out specific examples from the documents that linked the various materials with one another so as to end up with two parallel texts in progress: one providing an assemblage of bits and pieces from our empirical material and the other summarizing our theoretical vantage points via quotes and passages particularly relevant for making connections between these empirical bits and pieces.

Next, we started bringing these two parallel texts together, resulting in a comprehensive document intercutting empirical examples with theoretical passages intended to breathe life into the examples and, at the same time, to narrow down our scope so as to allow us to identify which examples would be most appropriate for our purposes and which theoretical lines of thought would be most productive to pursue and which we were better off abandoning at an early stage.

At this point we put together a fairly substantial descriptive overview of Green Flag, describing its different components and relating the project to the international program of Eco-Schools so as to place it in a wider context. This was done mainly in order to come up with a preliminary map of the field of interest allowing us to perceive of the connections being made within the material at hand to international documents and agreements appealed to. To a large extent this overview was not included in the final piece, but it did, however, serve as a practical guide to be utilized in the work process.

Having identified what we perceived to be the logic at work behind our empirical examples (at all levels) as one conditioned by transcendence – as the statements all appealed to values understood to be universal, accessible through the presumed faculty of universal reason – we then proceeded to identify concrete examples



within the Green Flag material that appeared to benefit from acknowledging a more locally grounded (perspectival) gaze in order to make sense. This allowed us to narrow it down to two parallel aspects illustrating this perceived tension while serving to illustrate the paradigmatic importance of ESD (in terms of allowing us a glimpse into what is ‘knowable’ in the prevailing social order); one looking at Green Flag in terms of an instrument for evaluating life by appealing to decontextualized values; and the other focusing on the problems with applying the abstract concept of child labor in different concrete situations.

In doing this, we employed a Nietzschean critique of value judgments (in the case of the evaluation of life) and a Deleuzian critique of representation (in the case of the concept of child labor). This enabled us to destabilize the naturalness of the idea of an impartial evaluation of life and to problematize the chain of signification linking concrete expressions of children’s work with the abstract concept/category of child labor.

A possible weakness with this mode of procedure – which may or may not occasion a certain amount of criticism, particularly since the study claims to be studying concrete examples in relation to abstract principles – is the complete absence of practical examples such as observations of the practice of working with Green Flag in an ECE setting or interviews with the involved teachers and children. As the overarching aim, however, was to identify, highlight, and critique what is possible (and correspondingly, what appears impossible) to think and do within this particular context given the ethical framework relied on, we decided early on to focus on different forms of official statements (as embodiments of cultural practices) as they may be said to provide valuable insights into the conceptual limits of a project such as Green Flag.

## **Study II**

The work process that would eventually result in the finished article ‘On Childhood and the Logic of Difference’ began with a period of reading up on the history of Western childhood (see for instance Ariès, 1960/1962; Cunningham, 2005) in order to gain a better understanding of how and under what conditions the mod-

ern conception of Western childhood was formed. I did this in order to be able to identify the historical emergence of an ideal childhood; a normative ideal against which to measure and judge every instance of childhood such as they appear in the world of experience. Having identified this normative ideal in terms of an historical construction (heavily influenced by Enlightenment ideas about the presumed human faculty of reason and of subjectivity) I decided to focus on analyzing the key political instruments – so called institutionalized communication devices (Hemrica & Heyting, 2004) – geared for establishing and reaffirming this ideal. As the ideal childhood is typically being communicated in terms of a universally valid standard it seemed especially important to understand the mechanisms allowing for it to work in a specific way. For this purpose I decided to focus the analysis on identifying common traits in these key statements so as to be able to determine some of the presumed stable components of modern childhood.

Having first scanned the field of children's rights, I narrowed down on three key documents that provided me with an understanding of the historical development of the children's rights discourse as well as an opportunity for making a comparative analysis between historically different statements. I decided to treat these documents as paradigmatic examples in the sense that they would say something about the conceptual and practical limits of the discursive field of universal childhood. That is, they would allow me to say something about what is possible to think and say about childhood given the particular configuration of its components.

Next, I did a close study of the three documents – the Geneva Declaration of 1924, the Declaration of the Rights of the Child of 1959, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 – in order to identify potential themes for constructing the analysis around; themes focusing particularly on revealing the limits and constraints of the prevailing conception of childhood.

I identified two main themes clearly visible in all three documents: (1) the dichotomy of adulthood and childhood, and (2) the parallelism between the shaping of the child and the shaping of society at large. Having identified the two themes I proceeded by selecting a series of excerpts from each document, ordering these ex-

cerpts according to each respective theme so as to provide empirical examples from all three documents in relation to both themes.

As a means by which to theorize about the two themes I decided to adopt a philosophical lens – informed by a Deleuzian critique of representation – working with the concept of difference so as to allow me to understand the hierarchical ordering of childhood as politically significant insofar as childhood would then be understood in terms of a differentializing instrument by which to produce social sameness. The concept of difference was identified as a condition for understanding the modern conception of universal childhood insofar as it – to a large extent – appears to be determined by its binary relationship with adulthood, and insofar as it provides a sense of unity to the disparate sensory impressions that we habitually label childhood, which in turn lends a sense of unity to the predominant social order (thereby differentiating it from other, less desirable, forms of social order).

Through this theoretical endeavor I concluded that the children’s rights discourse – such as it appeared in view of my examples – could be argued to have less to do with the presumed emancipation of individual childhoods and more to do with claiming the right to define, determine, and order the discursive field of universal childhood at the expense of other possible understandings of childhood.

### **Study III**

The preparatory work preceding the writing of “‘Needle and Stick’ Save the World’ consisted of both authors viewing all ten episodes (each episode is nine minutes long) together, taking notes and afterwards discussing possible vantage points for constructing an analysis of the material. At this point we studied the accompanying guide to *Needle and Stick* describing the educational aim and focus of the TV-series in order to relate the material to – and place it within – a relevant political discourse; that of education for sustainable development.

Following the initial viewing I made detailed transcriptions of all ten episodes, describing sound, image, and story respectively. Reading through the transcriptions we then selected a few especially relevant excerpts to focus on in the analysis. At this point we sat

down for another viewing, focusing on the episodes containing the selected examples.

Parallel to this we began working out the theoretical framework of the piece, focusing on finding possible ways of describing the underlying logic of the TV-series. We identified an overarching theoretical problem having to do with the taken for granted relation between individual actions and the presumed fate of the natural world as tacitly communicated in the material. From this, we outlined two interrelated themes visible in the material, themes that we connected with tacit presuppositions needed in order for *Needle and Stick* to make sense in a concrete political and educational discourse.

The first theme revolved around what we referred to as the teleological journey (O'Doherty & O'Shea, 2005). The teleological journey provided us with a model for understanding the conditions necessary for connecting individual actions with the fate of the natural world in the sense that it described a process by which Being is turned into labor. This, in turn, entailed that we understood individual actions (such as recycling) represented in *Needle and Stick* as inherently linked with and subordinate to the greater good of saving the planet. Other necessary conditions for this model were found to be the presumed existence of stable categories and rigid identities. When working with the teleological journey as a theoretical tool we set out to identify examples from the material that we claimed served to illustrate a tacit dependence on these conditions, and in doing so it also excluded other possible ways of understanding and making sense of the individual actions being represented.

The second, interrelated, theme was connected to the logic of separation, appealing to Agamben's (2002/2004) critique of the Aristotelian definition of life where life is essentially understood in terms of a series of rigid divisions between various faculties and potentialities. In this conception, human labor is treated as exceptional as it is believed to be naturally oriented towards the greater good of the goal of the community aligning the logic of separation with the teleological journey in the sense that for an individual action or a form of activity to be considered meaningful it needs to

be related to the greater good; i.e. the common goal to be aspired for. For this to be possible, life would need to be broken down into identifiable parts belonging to already established categories and entrenched identities. Hence, we set out to identify examples from the material where the human activities represented would appear senseless unless connected to the greater good of saving the planet.

In connection with this analysis we brought in various relevant (national and international) policy documents relying on a similar logic so as to relate the examples from the material to a prevailing political discourse indicating that the TV-series could indeed be interpreted as a political tool of sorts. This led us to discuss the political roles of universal childhood and education in relation to a society's striving towards a greater good illustrating how the same conditions – stable categories, rigid identities, teleology, and the logic of separation – that we identified as foundational for *Needle and Stick*, where appealed to on a more general level as well.

This led us to backtrack in order to contextualize the material of *Needle and Stick* at the onset of the piece. We found this to be a way of strengthening our claim that *Needle and Stick* could in fact be interpreted as a paradigmatic expression allowing us a glimpse into the conditions for making connections between individual actions and the fate of the natural world in the first place. In order to support this claim we briefly related the history of Swedish educational television so as to be able to argue, in a convincing way, that *Needle and Stick* could actually be conceived as a political instrument very much aligned with a tradition (since the late 1960s) of making and distributing governmentally produced television for educational purposes. As such, we argued, it could also be interpreted in terms of an expression of governmentality which led us to go back to the material again and to highlight some concrete examples of how *Needle and Stick* could be said to be about the shaping of children's subjectivity and the shaping of a particular form of humanity (via the appeal to human conscience) and to incorporate this into the analysis.

## Study IV

Methodologically, 'Towards a Pure Ontology' set itself apart from the other studies presented in this compilation thesis as it did not involve working with an empirical material in the same sense that the other three did. Instead of working primarily with empirical examples taken from the converging fields of ECE and ESD or the children's rights discourse – be it official statements or various forms of teaching material – I decided to focus almost exclusively on conveying and problematizing a philosophical discourse that could be said to provide the foundation or framework for how learning about ethics is typically being conceptualized in contemporary liberal education. Besides critically examining the current order, I was especially interested in investigating alternative ways of conceptualizing teaching and learning about ethics which meant that 'Towards a Pure Ontology' would be more focused on – or at least more explicitly concerned with – exploring possible trajectories of thought than what the other studies had been.

I began, however, by relating a personal experience from ECE in order to find a tangible point of entry through which I might then gain access into a philosophical problem concerning ethics in a more general sense. I identified the problems intrinsic to the prevailing conception of ethics – informing the rationale of my example – as having to do with the reliance on abstract ethical values, disembodied and universal in the sense that they are conceived of as already and always existing. In contrast to this I wished to try out a different conception of ethics – one where ethics would be conceptualized as embodied and situational – in order to raise questions concerning how such an ethics would affect the educational context of my opening example.

In order to do this, I set out to relate a different tradition of ethical thought – one that I traced from the philosophical writings of Spinoza, via the works of Nietzsche and on through to Deleuze's (and Deleuze's and Guattari's) philosophy of immanence. I did this mainly by way of reading Deleuze's works on the two earlier philosophers (see for example Deleuze, 1962/2006; 1970/1988) and by studying a selection of the key works of all three philosophers with particular regards to ethics; focusing especially on Spinoza's

*Ethics* (1677/2001), Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887/2008), and Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1968/2004). In terms of interpreting Spinoza's text I was – besides being guided by Deleuze's lectures on Spinoza (see Deleuze, 1980a; 1980b) – much helped by Spindler's (2009) recent work on the philosophy of Spinoza.

Having contrasted the prevailing disembodied (transcendent) ethics with an embodied (immanent) ethics, I then focused on strengthening the connection with education by trying out the concept of affective learning. This involved steering the piece more pronouncedly in the direction of the field of philosophy of education, linking it to the related work of May and Semetsky (2008), Sellar (2009), Semetsky (2003; 2004a; 2004b; 2009), and Watkins (2006; 2007). This also involved a slight shift in focus from studying ethics and how ethics – such as it is manifested in ECE institutions – is conceptualized philosophically to looking at how learning might be affected by focusing less on recognizing and validating that which already is (such as ethical principles taken to exist *a priori*) to experimenting with understanding one's bodily capabilities and the affective relations that the body is entangled with so as to be able to palpate the as of yet unknown and so as to be able to create new values '*in accordance with* our inborn abilities and limitations' (Solomon, 2002: 75).

All in all, 'Towards a Pure Ontology' acquired the characteristics of an argumentative philosophical discussion utilizing philosophical texts as its main source to draw from and, simultaneously, as its main object of study as it were. This meant that the methodological approach relied less on the analysis of empirical data using a philosophical lens and tended more towards the construction of an argument – viable for educational queries – based on the critical comparison of two different philosophical traditions. Based on the conclusions drawn from this comparison I then focused on making reasonable assumptions as to what the implications for educational theory and practice might be given such a radical shift – from a disembodied to an embodied ethical framework and pedagogy – in the conditional parameters.

## SUMMARIES OF STUDIES

I have decided to present the studies in the following order so as to be able to convey a certain movement that I perceive as follows:

In the first study we provide a fairly thorough account of the convergence between the fields of ECE and ESD. In doing so this study provides a good introduction to the core empirical material of this thesis; that is, the individual expressions of an ethical framework that we set out to scrutinize. We tackle both aspects of the purpose of the thesis; we describe the conditions for linking individual actions to normative ideals and for judging them according to the same; and we give examples of disturbances in the relation between normative ideals and its individualizations by problematizing the category of child labor in particular.

The second study involves taking a step back insofar as it provides an account of the category of childhood such as it appears within the official children's rights discourse. As such, this study serves to establish the political importance of childhood which helps explain; (a) why studying ethics in relation to childhood is important in the first place; and (b) why childhood and education are so prominently featured aspects within the official discourse of sustainable development. In this study the main focus is on the first aspect of the study as it concerns establishing the connection between individual childhoods and the general category of childhood, which from the perspective of the material at hand may be put in terms of striving to relate all individualizations of universal childhood to the normative ideal of a good childhood in a universal sense.



The third study involves taking a step ahead, looking at a very particular expression of ESD – the Swedish educational TV-series *Needle and Stick Save the World*. This means that we look closer at various disturbances of the discourse of sustainable development; disturbances that are evoked by tampering with the epistemological foundation insofar as we experiment with the material by trying out the notion that all life work (as opposed to treating human labor as somehow exceptional due to its supposed ability to be guided by a good will) and then observing how this move seems to affect the perceived meaning of the material. As such, this study responds to the second aspect of the purpose as it explicitly focuses on disturbances in the discourse of ESD.

The final study involves taking a step back yet again, this time in order to be able to (a) relate the conditions of the predominant ethical framework to a concrete educational setting and to the form of learning that this framework allows for; and (b) to focus on formulating suggestions for moving ahead with an ethical pedagogy grounded in embodied rather than disembodied knowledge and in a pedagogy of creation rather than a pedagogy of recognition. As such the final study of this thesis corresponds to both aspects of the purpose.

### **Study I: Evaluating Life: Working with Ethical Dilemmas in Education for Sustainable Development**

*Moa De Lucia Dahlbeck and Johan Dahlbeck*

In the first article of this thesis we aim to investigate some of the effects of individualizing the normative framework of human rights in the specific context of ESD. For this purpose we analyze some examples from the Swedish educational program of Green Flag. We specifically target the ethical dimension of ESD, looking at how ethical dilemmas are presented and treated within the discourse. In order to identify a tension between the particular and the general we oscillate between looking at exercises from Green Flag to looking at official national and international statements concerned with childhood, education, and sustainable development. The problem we identify has to do with the reliance on rigid identification and

already established ethical guidelines on the one hand and the presumed free will of the children and teachers involved in ESD on the other.

First, we place the program of Green Flag within the discourse of ESD and in doing so we identify it in terms of a social and political program very much aligned with the pronounced goals and aspirations of the international discourse on sustainable development and human rights. As such, we argue that Green Flag may be understood in terms of a political instrument for shaping ethical subject in a very specific sense; namely in the sense that it functions to facilitate the automatization of ethical decision-making in an educational context. If understood this way, we claim that Green Flag may provide an illustrative example of some of the conceptual limits of the normative framework of human rights.

Next we account for some of the conditions of the normative generality of human rights by discussing its philosophical presuppositions in terms of the three concepts of identity, subjectivity, and values. We assume that for an ethical framework based on the evaluation of particular instances (actions) in relation to formal ethical values to function smoothly it needs to rely on a particular conception of identity – as stable and non-changeable – and subjectivity – as capable of reflecting universal rationality – and values – as existing *a priori* and as transcendent. In the analysis to follow we identify some possible tensions resulting from these presuppositions.

On the one hand we focus on the conditions for determining and evaluating quality of life – quality of life being a recurring concept within the Green Flag material – in order to problematize such an evaluation by looking at its implications for what a life is; i.e. a materially determined and measurable entity to be judged according to a formal (that is, non-empirically grounded) framework rather than a series of materially grounded affective encounters that derive its meaning from its specific configuration which is inherently dependent upon historically and geographically specific contexts. We identify a specific political model – the modern welfare state – upon which the evaluation is hinged which in turn raises issues concerning the perspectival nature of knowledge. The question we

ask may be formulated thus: how is it possible to evaluate life in any objective sense if the model for evaluating life appears to be derived from a specific historical and geographical context?

On the other hand we look at a related problem concerning the identification of a child laborer arrived at via the theme of consumerism in the Green Flag material. Again, this problem reflects the broader issue of the conditions necessary for being able to pass *a priori* judgments in particular cases. More specifically, we investigate the problems involved with having children make ethical choices in specific situations where the ethical value of the decision is not determined by looking at the material conditions at hand but by presupposing that certain patterns of behavior (such as excessive consumerism) automatically produces global problems such as that of child labor. The problem that we identify is that this judgment depends upon an overly simplified identification of the child laborer as an abstract subject – a deviation to be eradicated by abolition – rather than in terms of a general category harboring many different kinds of subject positions always conditioned by historical and geographical contextual relations making them inherently temporary and particular.

In conclusion, we draw on theoretical resources borrowed from Nietzsche and Deleuze in order to suggest a reevaluation of the evaluative framework of human rights, and in extension of implementational devices such as Green Flag and ESD. We argue that in order to construct a framework more sensitive to the perspectival nature of knowledge it would be called for to account for the inherent arbitrariness of any evaluative framework and to upgrade the status of the local and the differential vis-à-vis the global and the standardized.

## **Study II: On Childhood and the Logic of Difference: Some Empirical Examples**

*Johan Dahlbeck*

Based on a close reading of a selection of official children's rights documents, the second article of this thesis argues that childhood – such as it is represented in the children's rights discourse – may be

understood in terms of an effect of rigid identification where childhood is constructed in opposition to adulthood. This representational scheme, in turn, relies on a foundational idea of identity where difference (particularities) is habitually made subordinate to sameness (general categories), and where, as a result, processes of recognition and identification are valued higher than creativity and mobility. In response to this foundational claim, this article argues for a different conception of identity – drawing on the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze – where difference is understood not as a reactive means by which to establish similarities or oppositional pairs (corresponding to universal ideas as individual instances of generalities) but as pure difference in itself (corresponding only to itself as situational and relational particularities).

As such, the article formulates a critique of general principles (universal rights) that does not – and cannot – account for every thinkable particularity in every thinkable context. Moreover, it argues that in claiming to be able to account for every instance of the category of childhood, these principles blur their own perspective. That is, as they appear to emanate from nowhere and everywhere at the same time, they are denying the specificities of the historical and political context that gave rise to them in the first place.

Empirically, the article is focusing on three key documents of the children's rights discourse, these being the 1924 Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, the 1959 UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. These documents were selected as they are taken to represent the historical development of the modern children's rights discourse from the 1920s up to the present day.

The close reading of these texts indicates that two prominent characteristics can be traced from the Geneva Declaration, via the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These characteristics can be summarized as follows: first, the dichotomization of adulthood and childhood is a recurring feature that draws on the abstract idea of the liberal political subject making for a fixed norm against which the idea of the universal child is constantly being measured. This implies a rigid hierarchy where childhood is subordinate to adulthood by virtue

of its relative distance from the liberal political subject on an imagined scale. Second, corresponding to the dichotomization of adulthood and childhood, there is support in the documents concerned for suggesting that childhood may be conceptualized in terms of a political project very much aligned with the political project of the modern liberal welfare-state. This means that the shaping of childhood – such as it appears in the children’s rights discourse – corresponds with the overall shaping of a liberal society in that the former is carried out for the purpose of securing the latter. This in turn means that the political shaping of a liberal society appears to be dependent upon what I have labeled *a logic of difference* hinged on processes of rigid identification and hierarchization. It also illustrates the political importance of childhood as a key arena for establishing and disseminating commonly held values.

In the concluding part of the article I argue that it may be called for to reevaluate the framework of children’s rights insofar as it tends to entrench taken for granted historically conditioned notions about childhood rather than facilitate any real changes within the discourse of children’s rights. This reevaluation involves critically studying the conditions of children’s rights rather than merely elaborating further implementational tools which would always reflect the framework insofar as it furthers foundational ideas about what childhood is without asking questions concerning what childhood could be. A possible way of reevaluating children’s rights, then, would be to problematize the ontology of identification and by doing so to trouble the notion of childhood as eternally fixed and as unified. This ontological question will be further elaborated in the final article of this thesis.

### **Study III: ‘Needle and Stick’ Save the World: Sustainable Development and the Universal Child**

*Johan Dahlbeck and Moa De Lucia Dahlbeck*

The third article included in this thesis turns to a specific example within the discourse of ESD – the Swedish educational TV-series *Needle and Stick Save the World* (*Needle and Stick*) – in order to make visible a foundational logic of separation facilitating a specif-

ic understanding (while at the same time excluding any other understanding) of what childhood and a good human life is and what it could be. In doing so, we argue, *Needle and Stick* provides an example of the productive power of knowledge in that it not only functions to reflect a foundational understanding of human relations and the relation between humans (children in particular) and the natural world but by validating this understanding it also produces it. Troubling the notions furthered in *Needle and Stick*, then, is a way of destabilizing the rigid positions of the child and nature in a more general sense.

We begin by establishing *Needle and Stick* as a normative political expression by placing it in a specific sociopolitical, geographical, and historical context: namely that of the educational project of Swedish governmentally produced and distributed television established in the late 1960s. This helps explain the potential political impact of this form of educational entertainment as it is automatically guaranteed a wide circulation through the Swedish Broadcast Corporation and a significant educational impact through its state sanctioned affiliation with public educational institutions. Understanding childhood in terms of a politically significant field for establishing foundational ethical (and cosmopolitan) values makes *Needle and Stick* into an interesting example as it widens the scope from it (in terms of a local educational expression) being relevant in terms of a local concern – shaping a sense of national belonging through establishing connections between children and their local environment etc. – to a global concern where the direction of the social world at large seems to be at stake. It is the conditions for this leap – from a local expression to a global concern – that is the focus of the study; a leap that leads us to study the preconditions for talking about local childhoods and individual children’s behavior and normative ideals with claims of universality in the same breath. We identify hints of these preconditions in national and international official statements on education, children’s rights, and sustainable development. This is so as these documents inform us about the normative ideals that they are intended to reflect and whose implementation they are intended to facilitate.

The problem we perceive is twofold. On the one hand, it concerns the way in which the different components are structured – individual human actions positioned as the determining factor of the fate of the natural world – and the consequences of presenting this structure as natural, i.e. as universally valid. On the other hand, it concerns understanding the process by which this structure is being validated as inherently limited. This, we argue, has to do with referring to certain conditional features as transcendent, i.e. as meaning-making mechanisms located beyond the material world, rather than as materially conditioned historical constructs.

The first step of the analysis targets the teleological features of *Needle and Stick* as constitutive. We look at specific segments as exemplifying the underlying logic of the discourse where individual actions of throwing garbage, for instance, are understood to be decisive for the survival of the planet. We investigate the implications of this, insofar as it indicates the necessity of governing individual behaviors and shaping ethical subjects and insofar as it positions human rationality as the constituting entity of the universe. In so doing it grants a prominent position to the concept of human activity/labor.

This brings us to the second step of the analysis in which we discuss the inability to handle life – according to an Aristotelian logic of separation – in a univocal sense (despite the somewhat contradictory appeal to holism made within the discourse of sustainable development) but that requires instead a conception of life as constituted by series of pre-given hierarchical divisions and distinct cause and effect relations always related to universal values. In this segment we look at the role of the expert as it is portrayed in *Needle and Stick*; a role that we claim may be understood to represent the natural ability of human rationality (by virtue of its supposed universality) to order and give meaning to the world. It falls upon the expert, in this case, to ascribe foundational meaning to individual acts of recycling or any other action that may be understood as part of the infrastructural organization of society. One of the aspects of this conception of life that we wish to problematize is the way in which it sets up the dichotomy of activity versus inactivity, where activity is understood in terms of rational behaviors directed

towards the common good of mankind whereas inactivity is understood in terms of irrational behaviors effectively hindering the progress of humanity. We turn to the philosophy of Michel Serres as a means by which to evoke a different conception of life; one where all kinds of life work by virtue of their inherent productivity. In light of this, there is nothing exceptional about human labor as it is to be considered an example of the productivity of life which may be compared with other examples such as the productive behavior of any living organism. The main difference, then, would be that whereas human labor is understood to be consciously directed towards a higher purpose – one of saving the world – other forms of activity are understood to be purely instinctive. This link – between human labor and salvation – is one that we argue may be considered historically conditioned rather than fixed which would mean that it is but one way of understanding Being out of many possible.

Based on this understanding we sketch out the role of education as an important instrument for furthering foundational claims about what a good life is and for assigning the role of furthering these claims to children in particular. This is evident not least as we show how this divisional understanding of Being is appealed to in various key documents on human rights; documents that function as representations of normative ideals permeating modern liberal education through their influence over the design of steering documents and national curricula.

To conclude we suggest a reevaluation of these tacit and often taken-for-granted claims communicated through implementational instruments such as *Needle and Stick*. On the one hand we wish to show the potential impact of local expressions of ESD – as means by which to establish certain perspectives at the expense of others – and on the other hand we wish to suggest a more in depth discussion on some of the conditions of the predominant perspective.



## **Study IV: Towards a Pure Ontology: Children's Bodies and Morality**

*Johan Dahlbeck*

In the final article of this thesis I set out to draw some educational conclusions from a philosophical debate on the conditions of learning based on two different ontological positions. I argue that learning – such as it is facilitated when rooted in an ontology of identity – is traditionally directed towards recognition and that therefore it can only ever account for that which is already known and therefore perceived to be finite. A conceptualization of learning rooted in a different ontological position – one that may be labeled an ontology of difference – however, would be more inclined to regard learning in terms of an ongoing process of creation, that is of acknowledging that learning involves (besides recognizing the familiar) creating new concepts by which to describe things and processes that are inherently differential and constantly changing and therefore to be regarded as infinite and as sensitive to the unique configurations of bodies rather than determined by formal ideas. For the purpose of conceptualizing a pedagogy rooted in this second ontological position, I turn to the emerging concept of affective learning.

I start out by relating a personal reflection of an episode that takes place in a Swedish pre-school in order to illustrate the inherent limitations of a pedagogy of recognition. The example I use is one where higher values (i.e. commonly held ethical principles that are conceived as preceding any actual value judgment) are displayed in the form of laminated signs making for a conceptual framing of the entire educational setting. I argue that these signs function by supplying every instance of learning with an overarching evaluative framework so that learning – in this context – by and large comes down to being able to recognize individual practices and interactions as corresponding with and conforming to a normative ideal that is conceived as disembodied and as existing *a priori* (i.e. as transcendent). To trouble this notion of learning as inherently limited by what is already known I turn to a tradition of

immanent philosophy identified in the works of Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Deleuze.

In Spinoza, I identify what may be labeled a pure or an embodied ontology; that is a univocal understanding of Being where the empirical and the formal are – on the most basic ontological level – of one and the same substance (expressed through affective encounters between bodies) as opposed to an understanding of Being as composed of two separate substances – one being formal (non-extended) and the other material (extended) – where the material world is conceived of as an inferior reflection of the formal world. Being, in this sense, is taken to be wholly corporeal in the sense that the idea of the mind as eternal is understood to emanate from the material world. I identify some key prejudices that Spinoza seek to overturn through his ontological shift. These include the idea that Being is defined by a perpetual lack resulting from the presupposition that the mind is striving to overcome the transience of the body, reaching for higher values that are always positioned beyond the material world and that therefore these ideals are to be considered unattainable. It follows from this that ethics – when conceived of as purely formal – is understood in terms of a set of constraining rules (what Nietzsche labels morality) serving to facilitate the mind's perpetual striving towards the formal sphere. In response to this, Spinoza proposes an affirmative conception of ethics where ethics is understood in terms of an instrument for alleviating the process of working towards increasing one's own power to act (in a manner that composes rather than decomposes life) so that it corresponds to one's unique configuration of drives and that therefore ethics is to be considered materially grounded.

This is taken to be a condition for appreciating Nietzsche's critique of traditional morality in that it serves to facilitate his conception of perspectival knowledge in the sense that all knowledge – providing we entertain the idea that Being may in fact be understood in a univocal sense – is embodied and therefore inherently perspectival. Nietzsche establishes tradition as the driving force behind higher values and in doing so he disqualifies the notion that there exists an impartial framework for judging actions and that this framework is somehow elevated beyond the inherent prejudic-

es of the empirical. In historicizing and contextualizing morality he places focus on the active/positive human ability to create values rather than on (what he takes to be) the reactive/negative human ability to follow commands.

To strengthen the link made between the philosophy of Spinoza and the philosophy of Nietzsche I turn to Deleuze, partly because he has written extensively on the works of both philosophers but more importantly because he has utilized central strands of each philosopher in order to construct a highly influential conception of immanent philosophy himself. From Deleuze's (and Deleuze's and Guattari's) work I derive a conception of production versus recognition (comparable to the active and the reactive in Nietzsche and to the good/affirmative and the bad/decomposing in Spinoza) where life is conceived of as productive in itself (that is it does not acquire meaning through external intervention but through immanent processes of affective encounters) and where recognition is conceived of as a central part of a dogmatic image of thought insofar as it denies the inherent differentiability of life by relating instances of life always to commonly held ideas appealing to the universal standards of Good and Evil.

To conclude and to reconnect the article with its educational starting-point I try out the concept of affective learning as a means by which to formulate an educational framework grounded in creation rather than recognition. I provide a brief account of the emerging field of affective pedagogy and I go on to list some of the characteristics of an educational encounter understood to be thoroughly embodied rather than primarily defined by the preconceived relation between an embodied learner and a disembodied framework.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

To sum up, I will now return to the initially stated purpose of this thesis which was *to critically examine how ethical principles are conceptualized and applied in a particular educational context*, namely that of the converging fields of Swedish ECE and ESD. I dealt with this purpose in two ways. On the one hand, I set out to critically assess the presumed connection between ethical principles and individual actions (in an educational context). I did this because the notion that the value of an action can be established by determining its relative proximity to an ethical principle appears to make for a central claim of any transcendent form of ethics. This claim, in turn, may be conceived as important for understanding the basic premises of the ethical framework relied upon within the discourse of modern liberal education. On the other hand, I set out to destabilize some of the basic presuppositions of a transcendent ethics in order to be able to evaluate it in the light of an alternative ethics; that of an immanent ethics, concretized in an educational context via the pedagogy of affective learning.

In order to approach this issue I started out by giving an account of some of the conditions of the prevailing ethical framework codified through universal human rights; a framework that I – having first linked the contemporary practice of ESD in the Swedish setting of ECE to the international discourse of cosmopolitan education – understood to be clearly indebted to (and grounded in) Kantian idealism and the Kantian form of transcendent ethics. I proceeded by identifying ‘the good will’ (Kant, 1785/1996) as a key concept within the discourse of ethics and education. Within

this discourse, I concluded that the concept of the good will functions by allowing individual children (through their actions) to gain access to and to implement the normative ideals of human rights in an educational setting. The educational task, in this context, was thereby conceptualized as one of teaching young children to – by appealing to their supposedly inherent good will – internalize and automatize the normative ideals so as to be able to make the ‘correct’ ethical decisions in their daily lives; i.e. to be able to recognize individual actions as corresponding to normative ideals by right. This process, whereby normative ideals are being concretized and validated through the tacit approval of certain behavioral patterns and the tacit disapproval of others (in a universalized sense), was identified as a central feature of the contemporary practice of ESD (visible for instance in the values exercises of Green Flag etc.).

A possible way of understanding the presumed connection between normative ideals and its individualizations is that – as the normative ideals are assumed to exist *a priori* – it concerns a reversed form of causality in the Nietzschean sense discussed earlier. This is so as the material expressions – that are to be understood as necessarily unknown as they have not in fact been expressed in exactly the same way before – are traced back to something known – i.e. the normative ideals – whereby they are being familiarized and judged according to how well they conform to that which is taken to be always already known. However, as the only tangible way of accessing the normative ideals is through its individualizations one might argue that the ideals have to be (originally) extracted from its individualizations and not the other way around. That is, having first decided that a certain action is to be deemed ethical, that action is then abstracted into a principle that in turn is claimed to have always existed irrespective of the material world (which is, of course, where it is only ever manifested). This model fits with Nietzsche’s analysis of how the prevailing form of morality was once established. He suggests that:

The judgment ‘good’ does *not* derive from those to whom ‘goodness’ is shown! Rather, the ‘good’ themselves – that is, the noble, the powerful, the superior, the high-minded – were the

ones who felt themselves and their actions to be good – that is, as of first rank – and posited them as such, in contrast to everything low, low-minded, common, and plebeian. On the basis of this *pathos of distance*, they first arrogated the right to create values, to coin the names of values. (Nietzsche, 1887/2008: 12)

This means, to put it in the context of ESD, that whatever children and teachers do or say in any given situation (when they are working with ethics by way of ESD), focus seems to be automatically placed on being able to understand and to relate to the ethical framework – by learning to recognize individual expressions as corresponding to, or failing to correspond to, normative ideals – assumed to exist somewhere beyond (and independently of) the concrete setting of ECE, thereby constraining the concept of ethics in a way that – given other alternative understandings of ethics – it need not be constrained. From a different perspective, for instance, it would be less interesting to establish whether the action, in itself, is ethical in a decontextual sense as doing this necessarily seems to involve disregarding the pre-individual configurations of desires and affects that – from a Nietzschean and Deleuzian perspective – has given rise to the normative ideals in the first place.

Approaching ethics, then, in a manner that assumes that the ethical principles needed for facilitating an ethical life have already been established requires the perpetual abstraction of actions into norms (that are understood to be always already there), making the whole process of learning constrained by its form insofar as it appears difficult to move beyond recognizing and validating the prevailing normative ideals. It also renders it more or less impossible to conceptualize education on ethics to be about creating new values as the ethical values are assumed to have always existed. For such a conception of (immanent) ethics to be possible (and, in extension, to be educable), it seems that one first has to reassess some of the conditions of the prevailing ethical framework. Only then can ethics in education take on any other form than that of recognition.

One of the perceived problems with relying on an ethics of recognition seems to be that it functions by furthering an unreflect-

ed reinforcement and perpetuation of a current social order (as concluded in De Lucia Dahlbeck & Dahlbeck, 2011). This appears to be inherent in the form of recognition, and, as an effect tends to shape any system or social institution relying on this form. The traditional Western form of schooling, for instance, is very much relying on the form of recognition insofar as it appears preoccupied with affirming and reaffirming the predominant social order. This, in turn, appears to risk leading to an inability to perceive of things outside the very limited scope of what already is.

Hence, to reassess contemporary education would involve – much like with the reassessment of ethics – focusing on the very mechanisms allowing for a certain order of things; that is, focusing on explaining and problematizing the conditions of that particular order so as to denaturalize it and thereby open up for other possible ways of imagining and configuring the social order.

My aim has not been to deconstruct the prevailing ethical framework in order to offer any conclusive answers as to how ethics and education should be conceived ideally or how ethical concerns should be expressed or dealt with in contemporary ECE. This is precisely the kinds of answers that I am unable to present given the theoretical foundation of this thesis. That is, I cannot tell you what ethics *is* without resorting to abstract ideas that would only serve to confirm the assumed link between the idea of ethics and the particular actions that it is believed to give rise to. I can only ever account for what it *does* in particular situations; situations where the ethical framework is invoked and thereby manifested. By doing this, I have endeavored to offer an informed glimpse into what is ‘thinkable’ and ‘knowable’ within a particular social order, through the use of paradigmatic examples from ESD in the context of Swedish ECE. These examples, in turn, have been picked out so as to reveal some of the conceptual limits of the conditions of that particular social order.

By identifying some of the fissures in the educational practices invoking the ethical framework, I have attempted to identify a starting point for thinking about ethics in new and different ways: ways that are a little less restricted by that which already is and perhaps more geared towards territorializing the unknown. As

such, one might begin to map out an ethical foundation that is less concerned with conforming things and events to recognizable patterns and more curious about what a particular social configuration seems to open up for in terms of possible trajectories. By destabilizing the notion that ethics can be traced back to a supposedly transcendent source, I have attempted to complicate the seemingly stable relation between ethical principles and individual actions. Without a universally valid and reliable yardstick with which to measure and evaluate actions, the meaning of every action and event seems to depend on the specific context in which they appear. In order to begin to think in terms of constructing educational tools geared for handling things on their own terms (rather than arranging things according to a pre-given order) it seems called for to instigate a serious discussion about identifying new ways of understanding the configuration of the social and the ethical.

On a fundamental level, such a discussion could for instance involve a reevaluation of ethics, moving from an ethics that proceeds from the given (that is, from the assumed stability of ethical principles) to an ethics that proceeds instead from an absence of the given. Such a shift would mean – among other things – that our conception of good and evil would need to be constantly reevaluated in relation to where (in what social and historical context) we are, to what purposes we have, and to what claims we assert. In an educational context this would involve opening up for a continuous preparation of ethical approaches that would be necessarily and inherently changeable as they would be conceptualized in the encounter with the unknown. From this perspective, the evaluative labels of good and evil could never be known beforehand, but would need to be temporarily established in relation to the specific ethical encounter between discrete bodies, informed by an understanding of the perspectival nature of knowledge. As such, it would involve doing away with the preconception that we have the ability to imagine (and understand) what other people experience and how other people are affected. Such an ethics would depend instead upon the acceptance of the assumption that the only way we have access to the external world is through our own bodies and



that therefore our conception of good and bad is inevitably under the constant influence of our bodily drives and affects.

As the ethical framework surrounding ESD practices in the context of ECE seems primarily equipped to alleviate the identification of ethical actions in relation to *a priori* principles – as being either ethical or unethical in a universal sense – there is a tendency to treat the standards against which actions are being evaluated as unproblematic and stable in themselves. Perhaps these standards ought not to be taken at face value however. Perhaps they ought to be treated as conceptual tools for making sense of and organizing the external world rather than immutable standards readily available in the external world. To this end, it is worth considering the words of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus:

[5] But standards of reasonableness and unreasonableness vary from one person to the next – just as we consider different things good or bad, harmful or beneficial. [6] Which is why education has no goal more important than bringing our preconceptions of what is reasonable and unreasonable in alignment with nature.

[7] But this not only involves weighing the value of externals, it also means considering what agrees with our own, individual nature. (Epictetus, 2008: 5)

Accordingly, to acknowledge the inherently prejudiced nature of knowledge – in the sense that all knowledge appears to be grounded in particular perspectives – also means upgrading the status of the understandings of the individual. Because, if the yardstick with which we measure an ethical life can never be one and the same for all (unless it is taken to originate from a transcendent source), it would appear that it needs to be firmly rooted in the specific needs of the individual. That is, it would need to be geared for guiding the individual's will to control towards that which is within its reach. As the will of the individual seems to have no power over universal ethical principles, it appears reasonable to assume that it would be more productive to direct it towards one's personal evaluations and one's responses to external forces. Accordingly, by de-

stabilizing the ethical standards that are manifested through the human rights framework we find that it sets in motion a series of potential changes from the most abstract to the most concrete level. From an educational perspective, this is most interesting, as it gives rise to a host of new problems and questions to be dealt with within the converging fields of ethics and education.

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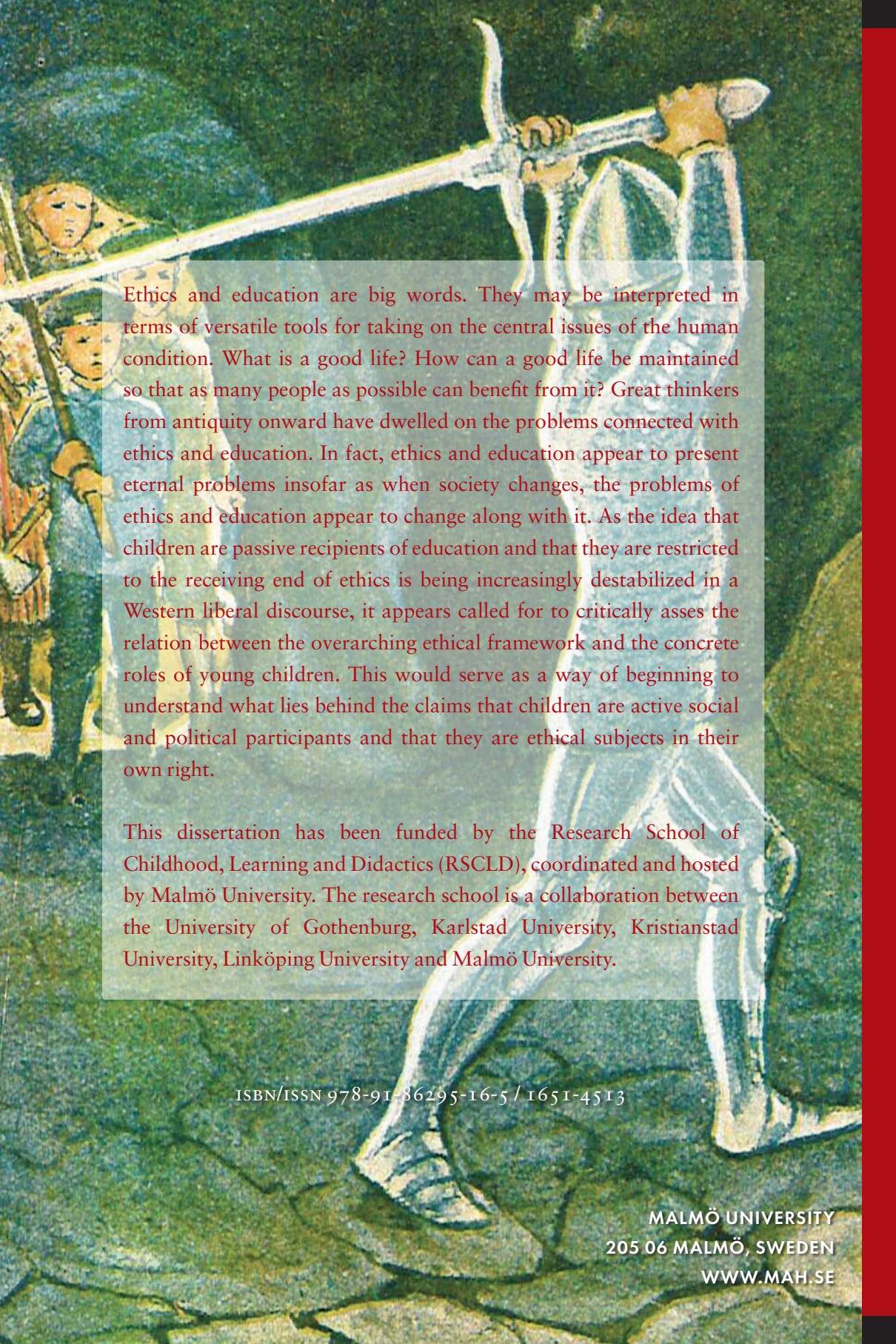


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Ethics and education are big words. They may be interpreted in terms of versatile tools for taking on the central issues of the human condition. What is a good life? How can a good life be maintained so that as many people as possible can benefit from it? Great thinkers from antiquity onward have dwelled on the problems connected with ethics and education. In fact, ethics and education appear to present eternal problems insofar as when society changes, the problems of ethics and education appear to change along with it. As the idea that children are passive recipients of education and that they are restricted to the receiving end of ethics is being increasingly destabilized in a Western liberal discourse, it appears called for to critically assess the relation between the overarching ethical framework and the concrete roles of young children. This would serve as a way of beginning to understand what lies behind the claims that children are active social and political participants and that they are ethical subjects in their own right.

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