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Practices, Virtue Ethics, and Music Education

An issue of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* devoted to dialogue about Chris Higgins' *The Good Life of Teaching: An Ethics of Professional Practice*

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Wayne Bowman, Guest Editor

Music education is generally equated with the act of teaching music. On one level, that's quite reasonable, of course: music educators do indeed teach music. But on another level this equation of music teaching to music education is rather misleading because not all music teaching leads to educational ends: not all music teaching is educational in intent or result. Indeed, music can be and often is taught in ways that are at odds with education understood liberally and in contrast to training. This equation (teaching + music = music education) does not necessarily balance, then; or rather, it balances only when we assume that (a) "music" is a body of skills and content to be transmitted to the student; (b) successful transmission means successful music education; and (c) the musical skills and knowledge transmitted pretty much exhaust the benefits to be derived from the teaching/learning situation. In other words, to balance this equation we have to overlook the fact that music teaching can lead to ends that are either educative or miseducative, and we have to assume that musical skills and knowledge are invariably and inherently educational—educational, that is, regardless of their outcomes or the uses to which they are (or are not) put.

For many musicians, these are tempting assumptions: music is self-evidently paramount, and learning about it and developing skills in it are the sole reasons for teaching it. Concerns about its educational value for those being taught are either irrelevant or are trumped by aims deemed "properly" (purely, or genuinely) musical. As I have argued elsewhere,¹ this is hardly a desirable state of affairs in a profession that calls itself *music education*.

On the other hand, attention to educational outcomes may and sometimes does lead to neglect of "the music."² An uncompromising focus on the educational reasons for learning

music—the numerous and diverse ways it may benefit students’ lives—may slight the substantial musical accomplishments upon which such educational aims and claims are predicated. This is clearly undesirable from the perspective of those concerned to be *music* educators. The balance between emphasis upon music and upon education is a delicate, even a precarious one.

What does this suggest about the person charged with achieving and maintaining this balance: the music educator herself? Interestingly, both musical and educational concerns tend to divert attention from the teacher—the ethical agent, we might call her (given the obviously ethical nature of the balance problem I have been describing here)—focusing attention on things other than her actions, choices, motivations, and character. These are unfortunate omissions given her crucial role in the process. To describe this problem another way, the personal satisfactions afforded by acts of teaching music are rendered peripheral or incidental by these orientations to musicking and to educating, respectively. They (music, and education) are taken to be the ends the music education profession exists to serve. The personal satisfactions of teaching thus stem only from the teacher’s service to musical “goods” on the one hand, or to educational ones on the other. Such goods are not attained through the growth and accomplishments of the teacher but rather of her students. Thus, the satisfactions afforded by teaching music are derivative and vicarious: they come from one’s service to musical or educational ends as they become manifest in the accomplishments of one’s students.

This, too, is reasonable—as far as it goes. But on this view—at least as I have described it here—the idea of teaching can be reduced to a selfless, altruistic act, one devoted exclusively to helping students attain their own musical and educational goals. Music education is, so conceived, a “helping profession.” From this perspective, a teacher who is overly concerned with her or his personal growth and pursuits (whether musical or educational) is selfishly unprofessional. The profession exists, after all, to serve students’ needs and their advancement. This is captured concisely in what many regard as a cardinal rule or principle of professional practice: “A teacher’s first responsibility is to her students.”³ Teachers tend to the becoming of others. End of story.

But shouldn’t the practice of music education also serve the continual becoming of those who do the teaching? What happens if the satisfactions of teaching are solely derived from helping others?

In the remarkable book that orients the essays in this issue of *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, Chris Higgins argues, among other things, that the view of teaching as a helping profession—one that is selflessly and exclusively devoted to helping others—neglects things that are crucially important to its viability, vitality, and sustainability: it neglects important goods that are *internal* to the practice of teaching. These include the resources teaching offers for self-cultivation and self-growth, the benefits that accrue to teachers as professional practitioners: the things that keep them growing and thriving, the things that propel them forward rather than leaving them used up, with nothing more to give or little worth giving. Higgins alerts us to the centrality of the teacher’s own thriving in the educational enterprise and thus to another of the precarious balances inherent in music education: the one between self-cultivation and self-neglect. The rhetoric of service (teaching is a ‘helping profession’), Higgins worries, leads too easily to a culture of self-denial or self-deprivation that has a way of emptying teachers out, leaving them either burned-out or, more seriously, “burned in”—his apt way of characterizing teachers who continue to teach despite being burned-out.

In Higgins’ neo-Aristotelian view,⁴ human practices like educating or teaching (or, I would argue, musicking) share a central concern for human “flourishing” or, as the ancient Greeks called it, *eudaimonia*. We cannot account adequately for the good life of teaching, he argues, solely in terms of what it provides others—its functional benefits for “clients.” To be sure, among the things that make for teacherly flourishing—the things that make a life devoted to teaching rewarding and worthwhile—are the growth and accomplishments of students. These are important aspects of who teachers are and what they seek. Here’s the problem, though: where teaching is understood as a purely altruistic undertaking—as selfless service to students or, say, to music—teachers’ concerns about their own growth, satisfaction, and flourishing may be misconstrued as selfish. Self-interest is self-indulgent and unprofessional.

Where assumptions like these prevail, the life of teaching is arguably not-so-good. Where the teacher’s responsibility to her students is taken to define her, to constitute the sole basis for her own growth, satisfaction, and pleasure—where ministering to the needs of her students necessitates that she neglect or deny her care for herself—the result may be a life that, for the person actually living it, is not one we would characterize as thriving. This might

be the case even where one's teaching is (gauged by fulfillment of one's duties to student growth and well-being) largely satisfactory.

Where service to others entails self-neglect, a professional calling like teaching may deteriorate into mere labour, a job to be done: a role governed by duties and obligations rather than drawn forward by the satisfying pursuit of endeavors that serve both student and teacher growth. Where helping others implicates self-denial, Higgins submits, the life of teaching cannot flourish. The educational ideal of continual growth upon which teacherly flourishing ultimately relies (education *is* the enactment of visions of human flourishing) becomes elusive. The music educator's capacity to help others is rendered unsustainable.

Similarly, music teaching that is conceived exclusively as preparing students to execute musical tasks or acquire purely musical understandings (which is to say, music teaching conceived technically—as training⁵) may deprive students of opportunities to enrich and cultivate their personhood (their own *eudaimonia*) through musical decisions and creative actions. Instead of approaching music-making as a vital practice for exploring such important questions as “What kind of person is it good to become?” and “How can music help me realize this goal?” instruction may proceed as if students' sole responsibilities are to “the music”—an entity, or a set of skills. In both these situations—teaching music and students' pursuits of musical education—concerns about personal thriving may be misconstrued as beside the point, irrelevant to the primary aims of the practice at hand. Worse yet, concern for personal thriving may be misconstrued as hedonistic: a threat to the selfless devotion definitive of the practice.

According to virtue theory,⁶ on which Chris Higgins bases much of his work, all healthy human practices⁷ cater to goods both internal and external. While both are “goods”—in the sense that they benefit those involved in the practice—internal and external goods differ in important ways and are not always compatible with one another. A practice's internal goods, those the practice exists primarily to deliver, may also be undermined or threatened by the many external goods it also serves. So it is very important to be clear which are which and how they differ.

A practice's *external* goods include things like financial security, power, prestige, praise, and so on. While these are undeniably among the reasons people engage in practices and find them rewarding, external goods benefit practitioners differentially. Practitioners compete for them: there are winners and losers, and benefits accrue to winners as individuals.

Again, there is nothing inherently wrong with this: without external goods, practitioners might be hard pressed to deliver the internal goods at the core of the practice.

While external goods are important, however (it is hardly unreasonable for a teacher to expect to be paid for her work), practices cannot remain viable and sustainable *as practices* unless their *internal* goods are protected and delivered. Internal goods are those that can be attained only through the particular practice. They are, moreover, fully discernible only to practitioners. A practice's internal goods benefit and sustain practitioners' involvement by providing them with experiences they can drape their lives around—things that become prominent aspects of their identities and character. Internal goods are what keep a practice alive as a practice, in no small part because they keep its practitioners thriving. They are linked in important ways to the ways practitioners live their lives—to the kind of people the practice uniquely enables them to become. There is no competition for a practice's internal goods: they are available to all who engage properly, faithfully, authentically in the practice at hand. The successful attainment of internal goods benefits both individual practitioners and the practice at large.⁸ Still, what these internal goods *are* is always an open question: the nerve of a practice is not something fixed and given but an ongoing ethical concern for each and every practitioner. It is, we might say, an ever-moving target. A practice, writes Higgins (2012), is a “socially rooted, complex, coherent, and cooperative activity that grows over time into its own ethical world.”

Music and Music Education as Practices

What might it mean to conceive of musicking and educating musically as *practices*—as socially rooted, complex, coherent, and cooperative activities that have grown over time into distinctive “ethical worlds”—worlds that, as ethical, are ever being questioned, revised, extended, or reconstructed? What difference might this make to the way we think of and engage in the processes of musical education? Although these are fundamentally important questions, the essays that comprise this issue of *ACT* do not answer them definitively. In the first place, practices are processual and changing: as Higgins says, they are socially-rooted, ethical worlds. Practices consist in and are sustained by human action. They are social, multidimensional, interactive, and emergent.

Rather than offering definitive accounts of music education as a practice, the essays in this issue ask, each in its own way, what sort of practice music education is: of what kinds of

interactions does it properly consist? How does it contribute to the flourishing of its participants and beneficiaries? What kinds of issues and insights arise from conceiving of music as a practice—rather than, say, an object of aesthetic appreciation—and of teaching as a practice rather than a mere job or occupation? What are the advantages and challenges that attend thinking about music and music education as *ethically-oriented practices*? What are the fundamental goods that musical and music educational practices exist to serve? What are their internal goods? What supports these goods, and what threatens them?

The “practice turn” in philosophy and social theory is rich in implications for music and music education, and warrants careful attention. Some of the preliminary ground work is well under way. Elliott (1995), for instance, has urged that we think of music as a “diverse human practice,” and has offered a number of helpful insights into the potential ramifications of that understanding. Others (Regelski and Bowman among them, in various issues of *ACT* and elsewhere) have sought to extend and elaborate accounts of music as practice or praxis—as modes of ethically-guided human action and interaction, rather than entities, objects, pieces, or works: to situate music, we might say, amidst the cultural action. Still others (Sparshott [1987], Nettl [1995], and Small [1998] for instance) have helped us see music-making, music-taking, and music teaching as fundamentally social processes. Behind all these efforts lie convictions that music and its meaning are not singular, unified, or static, and that its values are plural, negotiated, and constantly changing. The conception of music-makings and -takings as social practices is a potentially fruitful way of understanding and respecting the range, diversity, fluidity, and power of music.

Higgins’ book aims to show that teaching (or, more broadly, educating?) is a practice, and that there are very important reasons for construing it as such. In elaborating on this idea Higgins shows us quite a lot about what practices are and how they work, and in turn the kind of things that threaten them.⁹ These are crucial concerns. As Joseph Dunne (2005) has observed:

We speak of a species as endangered when, no longer responding adaptively to the imperatives of its environment, it fails to meet the implacable requirements of natural selection. . . For decades now the greatest dangers to living species have come from environmental changes caused by human intervention and assault. And practices have their own similar ecology: they too are exposed to drastic changes in their human environments that threaten their continuing viability. (367)

Where practices are widely valued, Higgins explains, people build institutions to preserve and protect them. However, these institutions preserve and protect both internal and external

goods; and important though external goods are to practices and their practitioners, they may also compete with or undermine a practice's often fragile internal goods. When that happens the viability and sustainability of the practice is threatened. The institutions created to preserve and protect a practice (here, let us say music education) may come to undermine its viability *as a practice*. The many robust external goods that become associated with it over time may undermine the ethical "nerve" that is intended to guide and sustain the practice.

Music educators who aspire to engage in their practice (in their *praxis*) authentically—in ways that are faithful to and supportive of its internal goods—do not adhere primarily to codes, rules, or lists of professional duties. Their guidance stems, rather, from personal character developed through ethically-guided adherence to what they take to be their practice's internal goods. The viability and sustainability of a practice rests upon its practitioners' ability to honor and preserve these goods.

Faithful adherence to the (never-fixed) nerve of a practice is essential both to its preservation and to its transmission. If students are to become engaged, successful apprentices—if they are to be effectively inducted into the practice—the music educator must *exemplify* faithful adherence to the nerve that sustains it. She must also exemplify appropriate balance between devotion to internal goods and the pursuit of those that are external. These are not mere technical matters: they are ethical concerns, guided by commitment to acting rightly where "rightness" is not (and cannot be) set in stone.

"Right" and "wrong" here are not technically derived, moralistic, rule-governed affairs. Instead, they consist in ethically-oriented ways of being and becoming—they take their guidance from the kind of person one is, from one's implicit understanding of the kind of person one must be to engage in actions that are genuinely musical or educational. A fundamental part of what music educators seek to do is to help induct the young into these ways of being by exemplifying what it might mean to thrive musically and educationally.¹⁰ Chief among the aims of musical education, then, is to show others how to explore the fundamental ethical questions: What kind of person is it good to be? What kind of person do I want to become? How might musicking help me realize this goal?

Again, where teaching (or musicking) cease to be guided primarily by the ways they enable their practitioners and beneficiaries to flourish or thrive the existence of the practice is threatened. Perhaps the most obvious threat is loss of members: after all, people do not seek continued engagement in actions that are not rewarding in some way. There is, however,

another, more significant threat. Where music education's external goods eclipse those internal to the practice, music educators can no longer model for their students the kind of thriving that is uniquely musical or musically educational. Instead of inducting students into musical and educational modes of being, students are merely taught about music, or merely trained. Musical learning is reduced to the routine acquisition of skills and information in much the same way the idea of teaching as self-denying service reduces it to a job governed by duties and obligations.

The primary challenge Higgins sets for himself in this book is to resolve the dualistic, dichotomous relationship between selflessness and selfishness. His strategy involves reconceptualising teaching practice as “self-ful”—the kind of action that benefits students and teacher alike. His aim, as I understand it, is not so much to eradicate the concept of teaching as helping (or the rhetoric of service in which it is implicated) as it is to qualify them in important ways. He does not advocate an approach to teaching that is self-occupied, self-absorbed, and indifferent to the needs of students. His concern, rather, is that altruism not devolve into asceticism. Commitment to helping others is necessary but not sufficient to thriving educational practice. The point is to acknowledge that both self-interest and other-interest are goods internal to educational practice—goods that are co-involved and mutually dependent. Professional practice in music education consists in an intricately and densely woven fabric of both these threads, and musical ones as well.

On the view Higgins advances, the idea that music education is fundamentally a helping profession gets us into difficulty because it fails to address how the thriving of the music educator is implicated in the practice of educating musically. If professionalism consists solely in service to students and entails a teacher's self-suppression, the losses for educational practice become unacceptably high: the very things teachers and their students most need to share if the practice is to remain vital and sustainable. If we define music education solely in terms of helping others¹¹ (or solely in terms of musical knowledge and skill acquisition), we risk losing the aspects of musical and educational meaning most worth sharing.

Or is this too facile a conclusion? Clearly, we are on equally thin ice if we assume that self-interest is good without qualification. The ranks of music educators arguably include many who derive their primary satisfaction from selfish pursuit of musical ends in which their students figure primarily as means.

This is not an easy knot to untie. But perhaps the point is not so much to untie the knot as to loosen it—to acknowledge the delicate yet necessary balance between the undesirable extremes of selfishness and altruism, the intricate balance between our continual development as practitioners and the growth we seek to facilitate in our students.¹² At the heart of both our practice as educators and our students' practices as music-makers,¹³ Higgins suggests, are questions like: What kind of person do I want to become? How should I live? What would make my life richer and more rewarding? These need to be linked for the music educator to questions like: How is my teaching (and my continued learning, and my musicking) connected to my answers to these questions? Or, to draw more directly on Higgins' words: "What do I value most, and how does teaching [or my musicking, or my ongoing growth in either] put me in touch with it?" The obvious difficulty of these questions is no excuse for avoiding them, for they raise matters that belong at the very heart of an ethics of practice—musical, educational, or music educational.

The Intricate Fabric of Virtue Ethics¹⁴

The convergence between my comments about musicking (and teaching) as practices and matters of character or identity is no mere coincidence. Indeed, as Higgins argues persuasively, practices are among our most important resources for the development of character—in particular, the ethically-oriented character that is a primary concern of virtue ethics. In contrast to duty ethics (which takes its guidance from categorical obligations and rules) or consequentialist ethics (which seeks to gauge the rightness of actions by their results), the concern at the heart of virtue ethics is the personal integrity—the character¹⁵ if you will—of the actor or agent. It is in human practices rather than in rules or the technical/rational weighing of the potential pros and cons of their actions that people develop their capacities to discern and pursue right courses of action.¹⁶ The ability and the inclination to right action stem from *who one is* (or, perhaps more precisely, who one is in the process of becoming) rather than from abstractly weighing obligations that originate outside oneself and one's experience. The concern and the capacity for right action that people learn through induction into practices—the kind of ethical discernment that inclines those who have it to ethical action rather than to ethical theorizing—is largely inaccessible through rules or abstract intellection.¹⁷ Ethical dispositions and fluency are not amenable to transmission in

absolute or universal terms; nor are they amenable to formulaic application. The gap between general rules and the particulars of actual ethical encounters is just too large.

Although space prevents elaboration here, it is crucial to an adequate understanding of virtue ethics that we acknowledge its profound divergence from modern “moral” theory. In this regard, Higgins quotes Bernard Williams:

Many philosophical mistakes are woven into morality. It misunderstands obligations, not seeing how they form just one type of ethical consideration. . . . [It] makes people think that without its very special obligation, there is only inclination; without its utter involuntariness, there is only force; without its ultimately pure justice, there is no justice. Its philosophical errors are only the most abstract expressions of a deeply rooted and still powerful misconception of life. (Williams 1985, 196; quoted by Higgins on page 21)

In short, in its myopic focus on what is *right to do*, contemporary moral philosophy has acutely neglected what it is *good to be*.¹⁸

Ethical action requires that we encounter the concrete particularity or uniqueness of the situation at hand, features to which general rules are seldom if ever a precise fit. Ethical judgments involve the determination of the right course of action in situations that, however strongly they may resemble others, are always unique in important ways.¹⁹ To act ethically, then, involves acting rightly in a situation where rightness cannot be stipulated in advance or fully determined aside from the particulars of the situation at hand. Under such circumstances, our most reliable ethical resources are those that comprise who we are: our character, our personal integrity, our identity: who we have become or the kind of people we are in the process of becoming.²⁰

Again, and importantly, the primary places we develop and refine our character as ethical agents is in human practices (and music-making and educating are human practices). It is there that we learn what it means to act rightly in circumstances where rightness cannot be fully determined, in circumstances where the results of our actions directly impact other human beings. It is there that we develop the ability to act rightly in light of consequences that cannot be fully foretold. It is there that we develop the practical wisdom and the agility essential to respond to the concreteness and particularity of novel circumstances, as opposed to coercing them into existing categories, reducing them to more-of-the-same. It is in and through practices that we develop our sense of the delicate balance between their internal and external goods, learning how to weigh their respective benefits and consequences. It is there that we develop the sense of interdependency, of “we,” the intricate tapestry woven of self

and other (or more accurately, of selves and others, plural—our subject positions always being multiple and shaped by our interactions with others whose subject positions are similarly plural and shaped by ours). It is there that we develop our commitment to things, processes, and values greater than ourselves. It is there that we learn the difference between mere activity and action, the difference between mere behavior and investing ourselves in processes whose integrity is communally created and sustained.

If these claims leave you reaching to see if your wallet is still there, you can hardly be blamed. But their foreignness is an indication of how far we have drifted from this character-based understanding of ethical disposition, ethical agency, and ethical action. Perhaps the difficulty of understanding this orientation is evidence for how strongly it diverges from our now-habitual recourse to rules-and-obligations-governed understandings of ethics. Or perhaps the seeming peculiarity of this way of looking at things is an indication of how vulnerable it has become to our “modern,” technical ways of thinking and reasoning—to prevalent assumptions that technical rationality exhausts our supply of reliable epistemic resources. Perhaps we are losing our ability to appreciate, nurture, and sustain the goods at the heart of practices generally, and of musicking and educating in particular. More to the point, perhaps in our quest to make of music education a rigorous, predictable, scientific domain, we have lost track of things at the heart of music education practice—the things that make it momentous, even crucial, to human life, living, and thriving.

Rather than envisioning musicking and educating musically as instances of praxis—of ‘right action’ guided by the character-guided ethical discernment known as *phronesis*—I submit that we have come to approach music education as a technical affair where rightness consists in conformity to predetermined codes and standards, and in the avoidance of error.²¹ The point of teaching and learning music is music itself—a tidy and comforting formulation. However, this is not unlike painting by numbers. It omits the development of character and identity, neglects the ways processes like musicking and educating rely upon and contribute to the development of ethical discernment. Its purview is pathetically narrow and, if I am right, seriously underestimates the power and importance both of music and of music education.

It is not at all an inconsequential or trivial matter whether we conceive of musicking and teaching as practices—at least, if we define practices as I have been urging here: as distinctive “ethical worlds” replete with resources for the development of character, processes

whose influence and significance extends well beyond the fictional boundaries of “music itself.” If Christopher Small was right—and I believe he was—that “how we music is who we are” (Small 1998, 220), then it is imperative that we approach music making and music education as sites for the formation of identity and character. That these (music-making, music teaching) are two different practices, with potentially divergent sets of internal goods, only makes more apparent the urgency of the need for their continued exploration.

Contributions to This Issue

The articles in this issue demonstrate the range and importance of the issues raised by Higgins’ book.

In her essay, Charlene Morton seeks to apply Higgins’ more general arguments about teaching to the music education profession, and to teachers of school music in particular. She suggests that our understanding of music educators’ motivations (the satisfactions music teaching affords) must extend beyond the act of teaching to our seemingly insatiable needs “to perform and to please.” More than other teachers, she believes, music educators find themselves in a work culture where they are expected to please others. She examines the place of what she variously calls “rituals of spectacle” or “rituals of display” (i.e., musical performances) in the professional lives of music educators, and the “hyper-busy-ness” these often entail. She suggests that music education is not just a helping profession but a “hyper-helping” one: a community of practice doubly devoted to self-sacrifice, where the intensity of the work—its demands upon one’s time and one’s personhood—is widely regarded as a badge of honor. To demonstrate one’s devotion both to one’s students and to music, requires, she maintains, that one be excessively busy. Morton explores the causes and consequences of hyper-busy-ness in music education, and also the profession’s seemingly insatiable consumerist appetites. In so doing, Morton offers intriguing insights into music educators’ often-unwitting assumptions about what it means to flourish as music education practitioners. She concludes by suggesting an alternative vision of flourishing, one rooted in self-cultivation, friendliness toward the self, and kindness to others: Buddhism’s “middle way.”

As mentioned earlier, Higgins maintains that self-cultivation and self-regard are significant concerns for all healthy practices because the flourishing of practitioners is among their essential internal goods. Characterizing teaching as a helping profession is thus a conceptual move he resists. Thomas Regelski takes issue with this stance, however, urging

that the self-fulness Higgins advocates is, while important, not a central condition of ethical teaching praxis: we do not become teachers, Regelski reasons, to help ourselves. For Regelski, teaching is first and foremost a helping profession: the goods it exists to serve are primarily those of its clients—in this case, students. His reasons for this stance deserve close attention, but one in particular stands out from the perspective of music education. Music teachers are, by and large, musicians. Because they tend to see music as their life's project, they find it deeply gratifying to make music with (or, at times, through) their students. The rewards of musical practice are such that music teachers often regard music as automatically educative—when, frequently, it is not. What worries Regelski about Higgins' emphasis upon the self-fulness of music educational practice, then, is the tendency of many teachers (Regelski calls them “musicianists”) to place a higher priority on music's presumed needs, or on their personal musical needs and interests, than those of the students the profession exists to serve. Where “the good life of teaching” becomes one in which music's or the teacher's musical needs trump those of students, claims to ethical practice ring hollow. It makes a significant difference, Regelski asserts, whether the rewards of music teaching are taken to derive from (a) music, (b) music making with children/youth, or (c) helping students achieve lives well-lived through music. When music educators find music teaching less than self-fulfilling, he argues, it is often because they have entered the profession for the wrong reasons—for musical reasons rather than educational ones. Having done so, their teaching is devoted to the wrong ends, is judged by inappropriate criteria, and will inevitably be less than satisfying. The result is teaching that fails to deliver the ‘helping goods’ the profession exists to deliver. The good life of teaching, Regelski concludes, depends upon a life of *good teaching* that benefits both students and teacher. Regelski urges that altruistic teaching is sustainable only if understood and approached as *praxis*—an ethical undertaking that takes as its object the well-being of others—and guided by *phronesis*, ethical responsiveness to the newness in new situations.

Mark Whale indicates in his essay that while he finds excellent much of Higgins' advice for teachers seeking to express themselves through their work, he has misgivings about virtue ethics' ability to resolve the selfishness/selflessness dichotomy. More particularly, he takes issue with virtue ethics' conviction that “the good” is resident in the objects of human desire. He urges that we seek it instead in “human, self-reflexive relations” as described in Martin Buber's account of the I-Thou relationship. The human being, Whale

maintains, is fundamentally relational: “all real living,” he writes, “is meeting,” a function of the desire to encounter and recognize oneself in the other. In Buber’s account, according to Whale, the purpose of human life is not the attainment of an end or ends (or, in the terms I have been using here, the attainment of certain “goods”); rather, human life is its own end. Virtue ethics, he contends, construes teachers’ motivations—their reasons for doing what they do—in terms of an attraction between an isolated individual, or self, and experience outside oneself (I-it). Instead, Whale asserts, what should motivate teachers is the resonance between their ‘whole being’ and the ‘wholeness’ of students’ beings. Where teaching is to be the expression of “one’s personal ambitions and deepest motivations” (Higgins’ phrase), one should begin with oneself as relational, not with a relation between a self and something outside it. Teaching should thus be approached as a “relational field” that nourishes and creates “intra- and inter-personal conversations in which [the teacher] recognizes herself and her students as thoughtful, self-reflective participants.” Whale advocates an understanding of teaching as sharing, a relationship between giver and receiver. Teachers, he urges, are people who are fundamentally enlivened in the act of sharing with their students.

Marissa Silverman finds Higgins’ accounts persuasive and his strategies mostly successful. She has one reservation, however: the extent to which virtue ethics as she understands it starts with one’s character (with oneself), and, as she puts it, builds outward. The problem with this, she suggests, is that the “self,” properly understood, is essentially relational. She worries about the potential for flourishing selfhood to become an end in itself, which would be clearly detrimental to one’s students. The notion of self-ful practice, she worries, neglects the interdependency of self and other: true flourishing of the self is inseparable from the flourishing of others. She advocates, thus, a better balance between what she sees as virtue ethics’ “care about character” and what she calls “care about the act of caring.” Professional ethics in music education, she argues (drawing on the care ethics of Noddings), should be based in reciprocity between the carer and the cared-for. Some virtue ethicists might be inclined to characterize Silverman’s article as an effort to establish that care is a virtue—and to conclude that her argument seeks to situate care and caring among the goods internal to music education ethics. However, she stops short of endorsing the framework of virtue ethics, arguing that despite their similarities, care ethics and virtue ethics remain distinct in important ways. Although it remains to be seen whether Higgins’ self-fulness (a mean between the undesirable extremes of selfishness and selflessness?)

necessarily precludes relationality or interdependency as Silverman thinks it does, her primary point is one that warrants close attention: the good life of teaching, in music as elsewhere, consists in teachers and students working together to create spaces of mutual trust, community, and commitment.

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In a generous response to these essays, Christopher Higgins offers an admirably concise review of his book's main concerns, expressing gratitude to the four contributors for their insights and criticisms and acknowledging the importance of such dialogue to ethical practice. Among the main points he stresses in his commentary is the important distinction between morals and morality on the one hand—the many “oughts” of which so-called codes of ethics are comprised—and the broader understanding of ethics advanced by virtue ethics on the other. “Virtue ethics,” Higgins stresses, “is less interested in the question of whether it is permissible to pursue what I want and more interested in the question of what is worth wanting.” This is key, he explains, because it “widens our focus beyond professional obligation to consider the flourishing of the practitioner.” This in turn, I submit, shifts the focus of ethical deliberation from blame and fault-finding to possibility and becoming: to personal projects devoted to discovering, in Higgins' words, “what is worthy of our attention, what it is admirable to become, and . . . what makes life worthwhile.” Such concerns offer to enrich and extend our understandings of professional practice in music education in ways that make ethics utterly central.

The deliberations that comprise this issue clearly leave certain issues unresolved, certain questions unanswered. However, they are important questions, questions of the kind each of us must address, questions that are in many respects better than those with which music education has been preoccupied in its past. Their pursuit is crucial to responsible professional practice and to illumination of *the fundamental question that is ethics*.

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Notes

¹ Bowman 2002, for instance.

² What “the music” is presumed to mean is no small part of the problem at hand here: whether, for instance, one regards music as patterns of sound or, rather, as practices—as modes of human social action and interaction. In the latter case, who people are and become through the process of musicking are not extramusical concerns, but fundamental aspects of what music “is.”

³ For present purposes, I leave unaddressed the ethical challenges of determining *which* of the student’s diverse needs—immediate and long term, musical and educational, psychological and social, etc.—are “best” served by *which* teacher actions (actions as potentially divergent and various as student needs). This is not to imply that these are unimportant concerns. However, it is to suggest that codes of ethical conduct are fairly blunt and clumsy tools for resolving complex issues like these.

⁴ I use the adjective “neo-Aristotelian” only loosely here, since Higgins’ work is not merely derivative.

⁵ On the distinctions between education and training, see Bowman 2002 and Bowman 2012.

⁶ “Virtue” here has a rather different meaning than the one we are accustomed to. A virtue, in Aristotle’s account (modern virtue ethics have Aristotelian origins) is an action habit that is the mean between two opposed vices or action extremes. Courage, for instance, is the mean between rashness and cowardice; generosity is the mean between wastefulness and stinginess; and so on. Thus the virtuous person avoids extremes and seeks moderation: too much or too little are always wrong; right action lies in the mean. There are thus many ways a person can go wrong, but only one way to act rightly. This may sound neat and tidy, but it is not!

⁷ “Practice” has a very specific meaning here: practices are not mere activities or occupations. They are, among other things: social in origin; social in execution; sources of communal or collective benefits; rooted in historical traditions that are interpreted differently (and sometimes in conflicting ways) by their practitioners; and reliant upon apprenticeship for their transmission. Understanding what “practices” are and how they benefit their practitioners are central concerns of Higgins’ book and are fundamental to understanding virtue ethics.

⁸ Although the point I will make here is one whose importance warrants more than a mere footnote, in the interest of moving the argument ahead I will submit briefly that central among the objectives of music education is the introduction, even the induction, of student learners into the practice in ways that make its internal goods evident—that assist them, in other words, in becoming themselves novice or apprentice practitioners.

⁹ This effort builds in important ways on the pioneering work of Alasdair MacIntyre (1981).

¹⁰ Obviously, the young do not exhaust those about whose flourishing music educators are concerned.

¹¹ An important caveat here: What “helping others” ultimately involves is a key concern. If showing students how the life lived musically (which some might wish to characterize as self-serving) is fundamental to the act of “helping,” then catering to a certain range of one’s personal needs would seem essential to providing help (of this particular kind) to students.

¹² As indicated earlier, a “virtue,” on the Aristotelian view, is precisely an action mean between two excessive and undesirable extremes.

¹³ I write ‘music-makers’ rather than ‘musicians’ because the latter has what are, for me, unacceptable connotations of professional pursuit. I want to include among music education’s aims the development of amateur pursuits as Regelski (2007) and Myers (2007) describe them. I also choose ‘musicker’ because of its active voice and my disinclination to reduce student’s roles to merely receptive ones.

¹⁴ The phrase “intricate fabric” is taken directly from Joseph Dunne (2005).

¹⁵ However, “character” is not individual. Because practices are communal and collaborative, the kind of character they nurture centrally involves care for others, reflexivity, and interdependency—in addition, of course, to individuality and independence.

¹⁶ I do not intend to discount the importance of rational deliberation; after all, one’s inclinations can benefit from critical ballast. However, it does seem plausible that one’s character (as developed, rehearsed, and modified through engagement with other practitioners) delivers deeper commitment to right action than mere reason. And where one’s action choices are between shades of grey or even competing goods, character may be the more reliable resource.

¹⁷ Again, this is not to say that theoretical deliberation has no place in the process. However, ethical action—the decision to act in one way rather than others—while it may be theoretically informed, is ultimately a function of what kind of person one is or seeks to become. “Knowing” the right course of action is no guarantee of its pursuit.

¹⁸ This is Charles Taylor’s way of putting it (Taylor 1989, 3). He goes on to criticize moral theory for its focus on obligation rather than the nature of the good life.

¹⁹ To treat people or situations as if they were nothing but “more of the same”—instantiations of previously existing categories or entities with which we are already familiar—is at variance with the understanding of the ethical stance I espouse.

²⁰ And again, who a practitioner is or is becoming is shaped in important ways by the practice and by the actions of other practitioners. Hence, character-based ethical action is not merely subjective, individualistic, or arbitrary.

²¹ Or, as I have suggested elsewhere (Bowman, 2005), where being “right” is a simple matter of not being “wrong.”

About the Author

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