An analysis of the ethical environment of community education

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Abstract

My dissertation project identifies and assesses the 'ethical frames' that dominate the ethical environment of community organizations focused on youth and community development in North America. I use the term 'ethical frame' to denote a set of loosely interrelated sensibilities and convictions, as well as certain understandings of associated moral concepts. For example, the ethical frame of the 'entrepreneur'—one of the major frames I identify and assess in my dissertation—is oriented around a particular understanding of work and efficiency, and favours what is practical and concrete over what is often pejoratively referred to as theoretical and abstract. There are four ethical frames that I identify as being particularly dominant in the ethical environment—the constellation of understandings of values available to actors in a given setting—of community organizations: the ethical frame of the entrepreneur, the ethic of the activist, that of the artist, and that of the naturalist. I identify these four frames by analyzing the language employed by a set of 12 community organizations, several relevant youth ethnographies, and my own experience in the field. My interpretive analysis pays close attention to cultural and historical context, revealing the contingent origins of these ethical frames within Western modernity. In addition to mapping out the dominant frames, I assess each in terms of how it hampers or reinforces the chief aims of the organizations upon which my analysis is focused, namely, youth and community development. My assessment concludes that each frame has its own strengths and weaknesses, and that none of them, either alone or in combination, will adequately guide the organizations in their work. Finally, I suggest some of the elements of a framework—which salvages the strengths of each ethical frame—that will help community organizations coherently contribute to youth and community development.

Résumé

Mon projet de thèse identifie et évalue les « cadres éthiques » qui dominent l'environnement éthique des organisations communautaires axées sur la jeunesse et le développement communautaire en Amérique du Nord. J'utilise le terme « cadre éthique » pour désigner un ensemble de sensibilités et de convictions plus ou moins liées entre elles, ainsi que certaines interprétations de concepts moraux associés. Par exemple, le cadre éthique de « l'entrepreneur » - l'un des principaux cadres que j'identifie et évalue dans ma thèse - est axé sur une compréhension particulière du travail et de l'efficacité, et privilégie ce qui est pratique et concret par rapport au théorique et à l'abstrait, qui est souvent qualifié de façon péjorative. J'identifie quatre cadres éthiques comme étant particulièrement dominants dans l'environnement éthique - la constellation de compréhensions des valeurs disponibles pour les acteurs dans un environnement donné - des organisations communautaires : le cadre éthique de l'entrepreneur, l'éthique de l'activiste, celle de l'artiste et celle du naturaliste. J'identifie ces quatre cadres en analysant le langage employé par un ensemble de 12 organisations communautaires, plusieurs ethnographies de jeunes pertinentes et ma propre expérience sur le terrain. Mon analyse interprétative accorde une attention particulière au contexte culturel et historique, révélant les origines contingentes de ces cadres éthiques au sein de la modernité occidentale. En plus de dresser la carte des cadres dominants, j'évalue chacun d'entre eux en fonction de la manière dont il entrave ou renforce les principaux objectifs des organisations sur lesquelles porte mon analyse, à savoir le développement de la jeunesse et de la communauté. Mon évaluation conclut que chaque cadre a ses propres forces et faiblesses, et qu'aucun d'entre eux, seul ou combiné, ne guidera adéquatement les organisations dans leur travail. Enfin, je suggère certains éléments d'un cadre - qui préserve les forces de chaque cadre éthique - qui aidera les organisations

communautaires à contribuer de façon cohérente au développement des jeunes et de la

communauté.

Chapter 1: Introduction

My dissertation arises from reflection upon common problems facing community organizations in North America that offer out-of-school programming to adolescents and youth with a view to enhancing their ability to contribute to the betterment of society. While such organizations face many 'external' issues (such as a lack of funding), I focus on 'internal' problems—problems that arise from confusions in thought and ethical inarticulacy about moral purposes. For example, confusions about the concept of 'authority' (e.g., a sense that all authority is bad) can lead to staff shying away from introducing any kind of structure or discipline in the meetings of youth groups, causing frustration on the part of some group members and in general reducing the educational potential of such spaces. My central thesis is that there are at least *four* major patterns of confusion and ethical inarticulacy that tend to generate such problems, which frustrate the work of community organizations in North America.

My project has three dimensions. First, identifying these patterns—what I will later call 'ethical frames'—and tracing their origins constitutes the *descriptive* dimension of my dissertation. I identify these ethical frames by analyzing the language used by a selection of 12 organizations in their reports and on their websites, several youth ethnographies, and my own experience in the field of community education. Tracing the moral and intellectual origins of these ethical frames serves to better underline their contingency and plays a pedagogical role for community educators. Second, through a philosophical analysis of those features of community organizations that are motivated by the frames and of the frames themselves, I show how they can hamper community education; this is the *critical* dimension of my project. If community organizations become aware of how these frames can hinder community education, I will argue, their work could become less tangled by these problems. I suggest, finally, that such

organizations may be able to protect the integrity of their efforts by gradually elaborating a conceptual framework to guide their work—the *prescriptive* dimension of my project.

Initial rationale

A practical concern motivates my dissertation project. I spend most of my time and energy learning about empowering young people to take charge of their own development and to contribute to the betterment of their communities—mostly in the context of neighbourhoods in urban centres in North America. Pursuing this kind of work for at least a few years makes it abundantly clear that our society suffers from numerous interrelated problems. Fundamental changes are required, not only at the level of societal structures, laws, and policy, but also at the level of individual dispositions and attitudes. It is also clear—at least to those who look beyond negative stereotypes (Kurth-Schai, 1988; Lesko, 1996)—that young people have a crucial and distinctive role to play in bringing about these fundamental changes (Shodjaee-Zrudlo & Farahmandpour, 2017). Youth often desire to be involved in their communities and many scholars have argued that any meaningful effort to promote sustainable change would need to include young people (e.g., Nitzberg, 2005). They are also well-suited to do so, given their relative adaptability (Lerner et al., 2005), their energy and resourcefulness, and their openness to new ways of thinking and doing (Finn & Checkoway, 1998).

However, while we should avoid painting youth in a negative light, we should also be wary of accounts that romanticize their powers or downplay the obstacles they face, ignoring the support they need in order to develop their potentialities. Young people, after all, especially in North America, are the target of relentless commercial propaganda that aims to direct their energies towards consumer activities, distracting them from, if not eroding their commitment to,

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social change. They need help recognizing and combatting these and other forces, as well as identifying with moral purposes that are aligned with the kind of social change our society calls for. What kind of people do youth need to become to contribute to such a process of change? What are the relevant moral purposes with which young people would need to be endowed?

Further, what kind of educational program could help promote these moral purposes among youth? The kind of education required could rightly be identified as a species of moral education. Its objectives, however, seem to go beyond what most character or virtue education programs typically promote. The aim is not only to develop a young person's character or virtues in order to enable their individual flourishing; equally important, from the perspective being developed here, is to develop their capacity to contribute to social change. The kind of education I have in mind, then, might also be identified as a form of citizenship or civic education. My emphasis on *moral purposes*, however, which I will explore more fully below and in the next chapter, place it somewhat at odds with at least some minimalist versions of citizenship or civic education (e.g., Callan, 1997, pp. 169-171). Without falling neatly into any of these categories, then, the kind of educational program required will probably resemble and differ from each in some ways.

In what setting would this kind of education be offered? Formal schooling, no doubt, has an important role to play in equipping youth to contribute to the betterment of their communities. However, several factors currently limit the extent to which schools in North America can meet this kind of aim. Contemporary educational reform, for example, tends to push teachers to focus on test preparation at the expense of more socially directed aims. Even citizenship education can be reduced in various ways that obscure or downplay social transformation (Westheimer, 2015). Beyond these issues, the very notion of a common or public education generates certain

questions of justification, particularly if the approach to education promoted is more explicit about values (McLaughlin, 2003), which would certainly be the case for the kind of education I am considering. These issues of justification sometimes generate controversies, reduce the range of moral issues that can be explored, or encourage a minimalistic form of moral education (Drerup, 2018).

It is worth considering, then, the untapped potential that may exist in community educators and organizations to offer the kind of capacity-building program we are thinking of here. Community agents typically have more latitude and flexibility compared to educators working in schools. They can often, for example, foster closer relationships with the families of young people and can operate in many different settings in the community (homes, parks, schools themselves, community centers, etc.). Further, since participation in community efforts on the part of young people is typically voluntary, certain ethical and political concerns that arise in the context of state-regulated schooling are largely attenuated.[1] For example, the question of neutrality is less relevant, as a community organization is in principle free to operate according to a set of values that need not be the object of a broad social consensus or enshrined in law or government policy. Organizations should, of course, still respect basic ethical constraints—they would not seek to indoctrinate youth or otherwise harm them—but again, because participation is voluntary, a young person can always stop participating if they or their family disagree with the particular approach or values of a given organization.

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[1] Of course, in cases where community endeavours are supported in part by public funding, some of the same issues may arise—but again, in an attenuated form. On a related note, the fact that I have the age group of youth in mind also attenuates certain concerns that may arise about indoctrination when younger children are involved.

Another obstacle for schools is that they typically suffer from an organizational constraint—one which might also afflict community organizations, but need not in principle. The vast majority of provinces and states in North America either do not have or have ceased to offer a formal timetabled subject focused on moral education (Lee & Taylor, 2013).[2] Moral education is supposed to be addressed, in theory, in certain broad areas, such as social studies, or in other, more diffuse ways (e.g., via a school's 'ethos'; see Brighouse, 2006). There are in fact issues with treating moral education as a separate, timetabled subject, namely, that it potentially fragments questions of morality from other areas of knowledge. But treating it in a more integrated way is also difficult, especially when there are challenges with fragmentation across the board: different teachers will integrate (or not) moral ideas into their classes in different ways, and it is unclear if any coherent set of moral purposes emerges. Now, some community organizations suffer from these same problems, different staff offering disconnected ideas in largely separate workshops or activities. But in many cases, the content offered by organizations is more consistent, in part because it is focused on a smaller range of topics and is more closely tied to the mission of the organization. The nature of the work also often allows staff to collaborate with one another more closely and to share more intimately in the organization's objectives. And of course, organizations are not tied down by standards and requirements issued by ministries or departments of education. This opens up interesting possibilities for moral education that are more difficult to envision in the context of formal schooling.

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[2] Quebec's education program is an important exception; though its Ethics and Religious Culture course is being changed and renamed, the new course will still include elements of moral education and it is not being dropped as a required subject.

I am not arguing that schools are irrelevant to the aim of community development. It may in fact be that schools could better contribute to preparing youth for social change if they had more and better examples of successful community programs on which to draw or with whom they could partner. Community education efforts that are oriented towards youth and community development (henceforth, simply 'community education efforts', 'endeavours', or 'organizations'), then, may be able to complement what formal schooling offers students by helping youth acquire the additional capacities and moral purposes they require to be able to contribute to the development of their communities.

Two examples of the kinds of community efforts I have in mind would be the YMCA Quebec's environmental engagement program, 'C-Vert', and the Canadian youth leadership program, 'Katimavik' (see Shodjaee-Zrudlo & Farahmandpour, 2017, for detailed descriptions of both endeavours). Both programs offer educational activities that are aimed at raising the capacity of youth to engage in action at the community level in order to tackle one or more problems or issues that are perceived as pressing. C-Vert is focused on environmental education, while Katimavik has more general leadership aims. Participation in C-Vert usually implies weekly meetings of a small group of young people, guided by an older youth, as well as longer sessions and projects carried out during holidays. Katimavik is a more intensive program, involving several weeks of intensive study, discussions, and service, in various communities across Canada. These are the kinds of efforts that have the potential to complement what schools offer young people by raising the capacity of youth and endowing them with the moral purposes they need in order to commit themselves to the development of their communities.

Many of these kinds of community endeavours could justifiably be said to be employing a 'service-learning' pedagogy or approach, although the term is predominantly used in the formal

education context (e.g., Kraft, 1996). Critics of service learning have pointed out that, in practice, emphasis is often placed on the 'learning' side of things, in the sense that service is instrumentalized to serve the purposes of learning, and the supposed beneficiaries of students' services—say, members of underserved communities—do not benefit all that much. Another, related critique is that in some cases the definition of service-learning has become so broad that it includes unpaid corporate internships, essentially providing free labour for private commercial interests (Karlberg, 2005). I share these critical concerns (Farahmandpour & Shodjaee-Zrudlo, 2015). The kinds of educational endeavours I have in mind, then, may resemble some service-learning efforts, but they are not necessarily identical with them.

Young people will likely play a major role in whatever processes of social change will be required to overcome some of the challenges our society currently faces (if it is to overcome them at all). But youth need adequate support to build the capacities required and to identify with the moral purposes needed to contribute to community development—their willingness and ability in this regard is not necessarily guaranteed, particularly given the commercial and political interests diverting them from this aim. Schools can help in this regard, but community education endeavours, less hampered in certain ways, could at least complement what formal schooling is able to offer. There is therefore strategic value—from a broad ethical-political perspective—in supporting the efforts of organizations that are focused on youth and community development. My dissertation project is motivated by this line of thought.

Aims of the project

There are many ways in which researchers can assist and support organizations focused on youth and community development. My project involves a philosophical analysis of the moral

purposes animating community education efforts of this kind. My dissertation maps out these moral purposes and assesses them in terms of their potential to support or hinder youth and community development. Doing so will suggest certain elements of an ethical framework that can guide such organizations.

I have used the term 'moral purposes' to refer both to the 'kind' of person that is needed to contribute to social change (i.e., the youth endowed with the relevant set of moral purposes) and to the kinds of aims promoted by community organizations. I should now say a little more about what I am trying to point to with the expression 'moral purposes'—a somewhat general term that can be interpreted at different levels of specificity. I am employing this term for now simply to orient the reader to my basic argument. In the next chapter, I will provide a more detailed account of how I will conceptualize the idea of moral purposes in the context of my particular study.

It is worth stating at the outset that some conception of moral purposes is necessary for a discussion of moral education at all, regardless of the particular setting in which moral education is taking place. Moral educators are always operating with one or more moral purposes in mind, whether explicitly articulated or not, and therefore a discussion or analysis of moral education endeavours needs to have some workable conception of moral purposes. The following paragraphs will elaborate the conception that I employ in my dissertation, and the next chapter will develop it further, introducing the particular terminology I will use.

In what sense do moral purposes 'animate' community education efforts? Educators involved in endeavours of this kind are constantly thinking and talking about the kinds of communities that their own localities *ought* to become (or what challenges ought to be overcome) and the modes of being and doing that youth and others *ought* to adopt in order to

help bring about these changes. Examples of these 'oughts' (or 'shoulds', etc.) include: 'we ought to do something about the environment' or 'we should help youth become innovative social entrepreneurs.' Some moral purposes may not, of course, be phrased in terms of an ought or should, but imply norms nevertheless, such as an emphasis on the importance of 'life skills', which clearly implies that these skills (whatever the organization means by the term) are good and that they *ought* to be acquired by youth. These moral purposes shape the language an organization uses and the nature of its operations, including the kinds of activities it decides to carry out with young people.

Each individual community education effort is animated by its own combination of moral purposes, and the area as a whole—the broader area that includes all such efforts—could be said to promote a constellation of moral purposes, not all of which will necessarily cohere well together.[3] Moreover, community education efforts themselves are not isolated from the influence of the moral purposes common in society at large. Thus, the competing sets of moral purposes that animate contemporary North American culture (broadly conceived) also have an influence on what moral purposes community education efforts promote and how they talk about them.

In light of this, one could ask: What are the major moral purposes animating diverse community education efforts in North America? Where do they come from? How do they typically shape the language and operations of community organizations? This is the 'descriptive' or 'mapping' side of my dissertation project—its first aim.

The moral purposes animating a given community education effort are usually introduced to the youth participating in the endeavour. Endowing youth with a sense of why these moral

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[3] Again, this is an important difference between community education and public schools. The latter tend to be bound by state-designed and state-enforced official curricular purposes.

purposes are valuable, what is valuable about them, and a commitment to pursue their realization in practice (the desire to acquire 'life skills', the disposition to care about the environment, etc.) is at the heart of their work. However, program participants are far from being blank slates, and are of course not isolated from society at large. They come to community programs with their own sets of moral purposes, acquired from (or in reaction to) their families, peers, schools, and society at large, including popular media. The result, in a young person's mind, is often a cacophony of voices encouraging them to take on a variety of sometimes contradictory moral purposes: 'study hard to get good grades to get a good job to lift you and your family up into the middle class'; 'open your eyes to the injustice all around you and fight for your rights'; 'dig deep within yourself to find out who you really are and find creative means to express your identity authentically'; or 'look at what's happening to our planet—we need to do something about it', etc. The conversations community educators have with program participants often amplify some of these voices while quieting others, introduce entirely new purposes, or articulate existing ones in a new language.

Some moral purposes—or some ways of articulating certain moral purposes—are more helpful than others; some may even hinder youth and community development. To draw on an example I will elaborate in a subsequent chapter, an organization may be committed to the moral purpose of helping young people to be authentic. Assuming a rather popular conception of what authenticity means, the staff of this organization might tell the young program participants that hidden within them is a true self that only they can know for sure, and that their group meetings are safe spaces in which they can discover their true selves and express their true feelings. This way of articulating what we might call the moral purpose of authenticity has a number of associated problems. For instance, what if some of the adolescents involved, after having

absorbed this message, insist that their 'true selves' have no desire to contribute to the betterment of their community? I have witnessed very similar scenes in my own experience. Do the staff then drop the educational objective of endowing young people with a desire to better their locality? This would clearly frustrate the aims of an organization with some kind of vision to better the community. Or do they try to help the program participants see that serving their community *is* a way of being true to themselves? But then, are we saying that the staff may know the program participants' true selves better than the youth themselves? This may be the case, but it would imply a different conception of authenticity, one which may not necessarily be accessible to certain staff members, depending on the intellectual and moral resources at their disposal. Much more needs to be said about authenticity—a subsequent chapter addresses this theme—but this small example hopefully conveys an idea of what I mean when I say that some moral purposes (or certain ways of articulating a given moral purpose) might help an organization achieve its aims, while others may hinder it. Assessing the different sets of moral purposes I will have identified in terms of their potential impact on youth and community development is the 'critical' side of my project—its second aim.

Another reason why moral purposes are so important to keep in view is because community education efforts are 'practical', in the Aristotelian sense. In other words, they are not 'technical', in that the normative ends, educational and social, at which community education efforts aim are not crystal clear and fixed, and therefore their work does not consist of simply identifying the most efficient means to reach pre-determined ends (see Dunne, 1993, for a discussion of this distinction and its relevance for education). In order to make progress, those involved in practical endeavours need to regularly take stock of their ends (and moral purposes are intimately related to such ends), re-assessing their own understanding and view of them. It is

also necessary for them to seek a kind of coherence between the means they choose to pursue and the ends they have in mind: changes in ends may imply changes in approaches. I will return to the question of coherence in later chapters.

A brief example may be helpful to illustrate the 'practical' nature of community education efforts, and the way in which moral purposes are at work here. Organizations often desire to empower the youth who attend their programs (this could count as one of the organization's moral purposes). One way in which they often seek to do this is to give young people space to make their own decisions about the kinds of activities they will pursue. Of course, organizations have other moral purposes: say, social justice aims, or a general aim of community development. Many youth are very much interested in these aims and will naturally direct their energies towards these aims if given space. However, what are the program staff to do when the youth they have attracted do not appear to be interested in these other aims? It is not unusual for young people whose imaginations have been colonized by commercial propaganda (Shuffelton, 2012), for instance, to have difficulty thinking about the development of their community as a worthwhile aim. This dilemma is an opportunity for the organization's conception of empowerment to become more nuanced and developed, and for the means it employs to bring it about to be refined—that is, it is an opportunity *if* the staff are able to reflect on the moral purposes to which they are committed and their relationship to practice.

Ultimately, I will argue, what an organization dedicated to youth and community development requires is a coherent ethical framework for its efforts—one which is gradually elaborated through practice and reflection. This framework would help bring together the relevant moral purposes, thus orienting action. No single researcher is in a position to develop such a framework from their philosophical armchair, as it were. In the final analysis, each

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organization, or network of organizations, needs to develop a framework to guide their efforts. However, the descriptive and critical aspects of my project will naturally bring to the fore certain elements that organizations might wish to incorporate, in one shape or another, in their ethical framework. This is in part because any critique at least implicitly suggests one or more positive ideas, on the basis of which the critique proceeds (Owen, 2002, p. 173). This is the 'prescriptive' dimension of my project—its third and final aim—which will be more suggestive and exploratory than detailed.

Moral purposes are fundamental to the operations of community organizations, shaping their language, operations, and activities. The *descriptive* side of my project involves identifying the major moral purposes that animate a number of real community organizations in North America. The *critical* side of my dissertation involves assessing, from a philosophical perspective, the moral purposes I have identified in light of the interrelated aims of youth and community development. This critical thrust will naturally suggest a few elements that organizations would do well to incorporate into an ethical framework guiding their operations (assuming they have one or wish to develop one); this is the *prescriptive* side of my project.[4]

Points of reference

Having explained the aims of the project, I can now describe my three main 'points of reference' in the world of community education: First, the language used on the websites and in recent reports of twelve community organizations operating in North America, as well as testimonials from some of their participants. Second, a set of ethnographies of young people

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[4] I acknowledge, of course, that neatly separating description, critique, and prescription—especially when it comes to a philosophical analysis of moral purposes—is difficult if not impossible. Nevertheless, these distinctions help organize my project into stages.

involved in community development or social action, most of which contain rather extensive quotations from interviews. Third, my own experience in the field of youth and community development, which largely involves facilitating meetings with groups of adolescents in afterschool settings as well as program coordination—all in urban settings in North America. Below, I take up each 'reference' in turn, to describe it in more detail.

1. *Community organizations*

I am specifically interested in the kinds of organizations that are focused on youth and community development. This is a subset of community education efforts that aim to help youth develop certain abilities or capacities with the overarching aim of improving their community or society. Such programs and organizations typically feel that the world could be otherwise (e.g., more environmentally sustainable, more tolerant of diversity, less stricken by poverty, etc.) and believe that young people can play a significant role in bringing about positive change. They also usually include educational activities, broadly construed, whether this is done through the study of certain materials, workshops of some kind, or one-on-one attention from a mentor. Most of these organizations bring young people together (with varying degrees of regularity and intensity) and involve them in activities that the organization feels will help the youth individually, but also render them more capable and willing to contribute to the common weal in some way, often in general, but sometimes in specific ways that the organization deems important. To summarize my criteria: I am interested in the subset of community education efforts that (a) involve adolescents and/or youth (they may also involve other age groups); (b) develop in them certain abilities of capacities through educational activities, broadly defined; and (c) help or encourage them contribute to the betterment of their communities or society.

In addition to making my project more manageable, focusing on these kinds of community education efforts allows me to maintain a critical foothold: it is on the basis of the general aims of these kinds of efforts—raising the capacity of youth to engage in action aimed at positive change in society—that I will be able to assess the moral purposes animating them. Say, for example, that I were to include a local basketball team within my scope—which may, in a general sense, be considered a community education effort. A local sports team is, of course, also animated by a set of moral purposes. Yet it would seem unfair to assess these moral purposes in light of more ambitious goals (e.g., community development) as opposed to by reference to the team's rather modest aims. In other words, it is likely not the coach's intention to help the members of the team contribute to the development of their community (though in some cases a coach might have this in mind). The coach and responsible organization probably want the members of the team to have fun, to win some games, and maybe to experience some form of positive social-emotional development (learning about teamwork, etc.). But in the case of community efforts that are more explicitly aimed at involving youth in social change—such as C-Vert and Katimavik, which I mentioned earlier—one can more legitimately evaluate their moral purposes in light of this aim, which is what interests me most and motivates my research project in the first place.

I have employed somewhat general terms such as 'social change' and 'community development', as well as other related ideas, such as 'positive change' or 'improving society', when describing the social aims of the organizations in which I am interested. The elasticity of these terms, which can capture rather different visions of 'progress' (another such term), is one reason I use them. This elasticity helps me to avoid narrowing my audience too much, at least at the outset. In other words, although I have already excluded many organizations by focusing on

those that empower youth to contribute to community development, the elasticity of this last criteria (the 'generality' of the concept of community development) allows me to tolerate a plurality of visions of community development, thus interesting more readers. Of course, elements of my own understanding of 'community development' will no doubt become clear as I proceed with my analysis, in some cases as a result of explicit comments and in other cases more implicitly. But I hope that my inquiry will be relevant to many others who do not (at least initially) share my vision of social change. What is more, many of these potential readers are, after all, my peers and colleagues (since I am personally involved in the field of community education), and this proximity demands a certain kind of discourse—one that is, for example, inviting, tolerant, and aimed at building on points of consensus. The general aim of 'community development' is one such point of consensus for the organizations with which I am interested.

Based on the above criteria, I selected a total of twelve organizations for analysis. Some of these are smaller and more local in nature, while others operate nationally in Canada or the United States. Some of these organizations were already known to me, while others were identified using a "snowball sampling" (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004) strategy. While my sample is not representative (nor does it need to be for my analysis), I selected a diverse group of organizations (e.g., not only environmentally focused ones) that met my criteria. As mentioned above, I analyzed the language on their websites and in some of their recent reports and other documentation also available on their websites. Even though all this information is publicly available, given the nature of the field and the purposes of my dissertation, I will not refer to the twelve organizations by name in this study. Instead, each of the twelve organizations was assigned a letter code (A through L). Quotations from their websites and reports, or descriptions of their activities, will therefore be anonymous. This is in part so that, if and when my

assessment turns critical, it does not tarnish in any way the reputations of any of these organizations. The field is already not very well-funded, and its staff are over-stretched. My aim, after all, is not to criticize a certain organization or organizations, but rather to assess general trends in the field. In the final analysis, nothing of substance is gained by mentioning which specific organizations I have selected.

In addition to the language used by the organizations themselves, I often found testimonials from program participants on their websites and in their reports. I have drawn on these testimonials in a few places, again in an anonymous fashion, referring simply to the letter code associated with the relevant organization (I expect that some if not all of these organizations already anonymize these testimonials or assign them pseudonyms on their websites, but I left these out just in case).

2. *Youth ethnographies*

Including a set of youth ethnographies in my analysis fulfills a few different purposes. First, it offers one way of going beyond the 'official discourse' of organizations that work with youth, and getting a sense of what happens on the ground, so to speak. Understandably, there is often a gap between these two. Much of the content of the organizations' websites, for example, is promotional in nature. Reading accounts of the practices of community organizations that work with youth, or of youth involved broadly in initiatives to improve their communities, as well as long excerpts from interviews with program participants, can help fill in the picture. Second, while I already have access to the voices of young people in the testimonials on organizations' websites, the organizations themselves choose these testimonials—which tend to be relatively short and obviously selected to make the organizations look good—so the youth

ethnographies are helpful in giving me a better sense of what youth themselves are saying, feeling, and thinking. This will be helpful in grounding the assessment of the ethical frames.

Some of the youth ethnographies I selected were already known to me, while others were recommended to me by scholars in this area. As the four ethical frames—patterns of confusion and ethical inarticulacy as I called them above, or loosely connected sets of moral purposes— emerged from my analysis, I also tried to seek out specific ethnographies that might illuminate one or another frame, for which I happened to have fewer studies. Each of the central chapters of my dissertation draws on one or more of these ethnographies relevant to the ethical frame in question. For instance, Jacqueline Kennelly's *Citizen Youth: Culture, Activism, and Agency in a Neoliberal Era* (2011) was helpful in illustrating some of the moral dynamics associated with what I ended up calling the ethical frame of the activist. Sarah Pike's *For the Wild: Ritual and Commitment in Radical Eco-Activism* (2017), to take another example, was useful for understanding how the ethical frame of the naturalist has been embraced by young people; it also offered invaluable quotations from interviews that showed how these youth talked about nature. The youth ethnographies thus offered further evidence for each ethical frame as a legitimate explanatory construct. They also helped me show, in some cases, certain contradictions or unwanted effects that the frames generate in practice.

3. *My own experience*

Finally, throughout the dissertation, I draw on my own experience in the field of community education. I have been volunteering and working in youth and community development for over 15 years, mostly in urban settings in Canada, but also supporting similar efforts in the United States. However, I decided not to carry out any formal interviews in this

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context, or to refer explicitly to the materials or specific programs with which I am involved, in part because of the fledgling nature of these efforts, but also because I do not want to compromise the relationships I have developed in these communities. I participate in these efforts, not as a researcher, but as a volunteer, and sometimes simply as a concerned member of a community. It may, then, be inappropriate to submit these efforts to academic scrutiny, and I want to avoid even the impression of using these efforts to further my own academic career.

Given these limitations, I will draw occasionally on my experience in the form of anonymized anecdotes or simply by sharing general observations. In most cases, these will be used to complement or illustrate certain points that come out of the analysis of the two first points of reference, which are certainly more objective in nature. While these are the explicit ways in which I will draw on my own experience, my dissertation as a whole naturally emerges from and builds on what I have learned in practice over a decade and a half volunteering and working to promote youth and community development.

Practical and theoretical benefits of the study

The main audience for my research project includes community educators and organizations dedicated to youth and community development, and those who support them in various ways, whether financially, practically, or at a policy level. The philosophical analysis I will carry out will help those involved in this field to get a clearer picture of the moral landscape in which they operate, to better identify and assess the moral purposes animating their own endeavours, and to refine the framework guiding their efforts (or to develop one in the first place). That this is my primary audience means that I have tried to avoid unnecessary jargon, and have attempted to ground my philosophical analysis in the real language used by organizations. I

am not principally concerned, here, with furthering a debate on a specialized topic that is only of interest to a relatively narrow group of academics in a scholarly community. Above all, I am trying to offer a meaningful contribution to the work of organizations whose concerns are ultimately practical: empowering youth to contribute to the development of their communities.

Beyond those organizations that are focused on youth and community development, it is likely that other organizations who work with young people, even if they are not as concerned with social change, will benefit from the analysis carried out. This is because they often share one or more of the moral purposes I will analyze, and, in any case, they operate in the same broader environment as the organizations with which I am concerned. Of course, my assessment of the moral purposes is based on their ability to help or hinder youth and community development, and in this sense the critique may not speak to every organization (some may not be directly concerned with community development, for example); but the goal of youth development at least is rather broad, and most organizations working with young people share it, almost by definition.

While my focus is the 'informal' or 'nonformal' sector of community education, teachers and administrators in the formal system may also find my study insightful for their own work. After all, many of the same moral purposes animate both community education efforts and formal school programs. Again, the assessment of these aims will not speak to all those involved in the formal school system, but some will undoubtedly find the analysis illuminating.

Researchers in education, generally speaking, will also benefit from this study. The community education context is, in general, understudied compared to the formal school system. This is especially the case in philosophy of education. I am unaware of any other philosophical analyses of community organizations, let alone their moral purposes specifically. My study

therefore constitutes an important initial contribution, inserted within a rather large gap in the literature. My account of the four ethical frames populating the ethical environment of community education is also genuinely novel. Although it draws a great deal on Charles Taylor's work and other theorists that will be familiar to philosophers of education, the mapping I ended up creating constitutes a new way of looking at the moral horizons of modern community education.

More specifically, my dissertation will be of interest to educational researchers in a number of intersecting fields and areas. Briefly describing these fields and areas will help situate my project in relation to adjacent bodies of research.

My interest in the development of the capacity of youth, in nurturing in them relevant moral purposes, is very much related to the study of topics such as "youth development" (e.g., Barcelona & Quinn, 2011; Catalona et al., 2004; Larson, 2000; Lerner et al., 2011; Shek et al., 2019) and "moral development" (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Haidt, 2013; Jonathan, 1995a; Kohlberg, 1975; Lapsley, 2015; Walker, 2004), which is typically carried out by psychologists, though philosophers have certainly been involved in the latter. These researchers are often interested in the ways in which young people acquire various capacities that enable them to flourish, including the ability to reason morally or make good decisions. While my project will not use methods from psychology, I will be analyzing the way in which some participants in community education programs articulate their experiences and what this tells us about the moral purposes they have espoused. There is in fact a long tradition of philosophers and psychologists collaborating to better understand moral psychology and/or debating about the respective contributions of their disciplines to this inquiry (e.g., Kristjánsson, 2009). While I will not explicitly contribute to this debate, the approach I will take will be of interest to those involved.

As I alluded to above, that I am interested in empowering youth to contribute to the development of their communities makes my research salient for those who are interested in fields such as "service-learning" (e.g., Billig, 2000; Claus & Ogden, 1999; Delano-Oriaran et al., 2015; Kraft, 1996; Mitchell, 2008; Warren, 2012). I have published in this area in the past (Farahmandpour & Shodjaee-Zrudlo, 2015) and, while I have reservations about some of what goes under the name of service-learning, my current project shares a basic assumption of much of the literature on service-learning: that involving young people in helping their communities can, under certain conditions, benefit both the youth themselves and their localities. The area of "youth organizing" (e.g., Christens & Dolan, 2011; Christens & Kirshner, 2011; Gillen, 2019; Kirshner, 2009) is another related field that often shares this assumption; researchers in this area are in fact more explicit about the need for structural changes in society, in which I am likewise interested.

The critical stance I take towards modernity and its moral horizons will be of interest to those researching and practicing "critical pedagogy" (e.g., Freire, 1970/2000; Giroux, 2020) and associated areas. A key concern for educators and researchers in these fields is consciousness-raising. One of the central aims of my project is to raise the consciousness of the staff of community organizations (and others working in this area) about the moral purposes involved in their work and to take up a critical or at least a more nuanced stance towards some of them.

Those studying moral education—whether in the liberal-rationalist tradition that stresses critical thinking and citizenship education (e.g., Gutmann, 2021) or the neo-Aristotelian tradition that emphasizes virtue and character (e.g., Kristjánsson, 2015)—will find my study of interest as well. My entire study is about moral education, in a broad sense, although it does not fall neatly into either of the dominant traditions. I prefer to borrow from both traditions, in part because I

find both, at their best, to be full of insight, but also because they each have their blind spots. Liberal-rationalists tend to segregate 'morality' (what is 'right', which, they argue, can become the object of agreement among reasonable persons) from 'ethics' (what is 'good', about which there will never be broad agreement) and thereby seek neutrality in a way I do not think is possible nor desirable (Hand, 2018; Jonathan, 1995b; Zrudlo, 2021b). Neo-Aristotelians, on the other hand, are often (though not always) insufficiently sensitive to the distinctive challenges of modernity (Jonathan, 1993). While my dissertation does not try to achieve a synthesis, I feel the need for one, and this influences the approach I take.

Finally, there are whole fields dedicated to the improvement of communities, such as "community development" (e.g., DeFilippis & Saerget, 2012; Phillips & Pittman, 2009), "community well-being" (e.g., Lee et al., 2015; Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2012), "quality of life", and "sustainability" (e.g., Martínez-Martín et al., 2021), which include researchers from a variety of disciplines, including geography and sociology. I have also published in this area (Shodjaee-Zrudlo & Farahmandpour, 2017), contributing to the discussion about the vital role youth can and must play in the betterment of their communities. My study will therefore be of interest to researchers who are likewise sensitive to the role of young people in community development and are eager to learn more about the kinds of educational programs that can raise their capacity to do so.

Chapter by chapter overview

Chapter 2 will introduce the key concepts of my dissertation and elaborate on the approach I will take to meet the aims of my project. My key concepts include *human kinds*, *ethical environment*, *ethical frames*, and *modernity*. Briefly, 'human kinds' are terms or concepts

that designate a 'kind' of human being (e.g., 'citizen'), and which typically incorporate one or more moral purposes. The ethical environment is the broader climate within which moral purposes circulate. I will thus speak of the ethical environment of community education, which is populated by a variety of moral purposes. Some of these moral purposes or values 'cluster' in particular ways, so that we can speak of 'aspects' of the ethical environment, which I will call ethical frames. The broader context of the ethical environment of community education is the context of modernity, which I will spend some time elaborating as a concept, since it is particularly relevant to analyzing moral purposes in North America. Finally, the chapter includes some further elaborations of my approach, in part by comparing its similarities and differences with Herbert Kliebard's seminal study in the history of education.

The next four chapters—chapters three through six—will examine each of the four ethical frames in turn. Each chapter begins with a description of some of the features of the community organizations in my study—some of the language they use and the activities they carry out—as well as some of the things young people themselves say—in testimonials shared by the organizations or in ethnographic research. It may be immediately apparent to the reader what is potentially problematic about the features I will point out and how they are related with one another—or it may not. I will then shift to a brief intellectual history of the ethical frame that I will claim is at least partially responsible—i.e., provides moral reasons—for the features I have described. So as not to distract from my primary purpose (or bloat my study), I have kept the intellectual history short, drawing mostly on previous work carried out on modernity. As I will explain in more detail in the next chapter, the purpose of preparing these short genealogies is primarily pedagogical: it helps explain the appeal of the ethical frame while breaking the spell of

inevitability associated with it by showing its contingency. Each exercise in intellectual history also helps flesh out the description of the ethical frame.

With the ethical frame's contours in mind, it becomes clearer how the frame motivates the language and practices of the community organizations I highlighted at the outset of the chapter dedicated to that frame. I then identify certain specific issues with these features of the organizations. In some cases, it is a particularly problematic 'human kind' that I critique; in others it is a concept, the understanding of which appears to be distorted by the ethical frame in question, thus creating (potential) problems in practice. In most instances, the issue has a redeemable feature, or a grain of truth, which I retrieve and re-articulate. This examination of a few specific issues constitutes an *assessment* of the ethical frame in question, of its value for advancing the aims of youth and community development. Certain strengths and weaknesses of each frame become apparent as the analysis proceeds.

Given my aim of analyzing the ethical environment of community education as a whole (or at least its major aspects), my treatment of each of the issues that arises with the ethical frames cannot be exhaustive. There is great value in mapping out the area as a whole (for community organizations themselves in particular), even if this means that particular issues get less extensive treatment. Moreover, as mentioned above, I am not primarily concerned with detailed debates between philosophers or the intricacies of theories of youth and community development, but rather with certain widespread trends in the field of community education. However, the two do not live in hermetically isolated worlds. Popularized versions of philosophies and theories are usually what community organizations draw upon in formulating their aims and designing their activities. As Jason Blakely (2020) has recently argued, "the line between the technical 'high' versions of the social science genre and the 'low' popularizations is

not always so easily drawn" (xviii). The same can be said for the line between educational theories and their popularizations.

My point, of course, is not to blame certain philosophers or theories for the problems I will identify in the operations of community organizations. On the contrary, I will be drawing on insightful work in philosophy of education and related areas to make most of my arguments. It is more the 'popularizations' I have in my sights, as it were; the four ethical frames I have described are, in a sense, popularizations. But these 'low-theory' popularizations *do* have more sophisticated counterparts in the world of theory (or, alternatively, the same ethical frames I describe also animate certain philosophies of education), some of which suffer from the same problems I will be exploring in the language and practices of community organizations. I will not be engaging in a systematic critique of such theories or philosophies—again, my purpose is ultimately practical, grounded in the problems of the community organizations themselves—but my analysis of the four ethical frames will necessarily bring out certain theoretical issues, which I will explore within the bounds of my assessment of each frame.

The seventh chapter of my dissertation describes how the four frames interact with one another, thus completing my description and critique of the ethical environment of community education in North America. As I will explain in Chapter 2, the four ethical frames have been analytically separated for the purpose of my study, but most community organizations are animated by more than one of these frames (I provide several examples in Chapter 7). Specific practices of community organizations may also be motivated by more than one frame. For these reasons, it is worth considering, separately, how the four ethical frames interact with one another—sometimes contradicting one another and creating tensions; in some cases remedying

the blind spots of one another; and in yet other cases exacerbating each other's weaknesses. This description will further demonstrate the explanatory power of my mapping.

The eighth and final chapter elaborates and defends the idea that community organizations require a coherent ethical framework to guide their efforts—which was mentioned earlier, but which requires further discussion. This is the final, and brief, prescriptive side of my endeavour. Having made this need clearer, I bring together the salvageable elements that emerged from the previous chapters, which I argue should be incorporated in the ethical framework of any organization focused on youth and community development (alongside other elements that are to be discovered). I conclude by discussing some of the limitations of my study and offering some final remarks.

Chapter 2: Concepts and approach

In the previous chapter, I explained the central aims of my research project: to describe the moral purposes animating community education efforts in North America, to assess them in light of the interrelated objectives of youth and community development, and to suggest a few elements of an ethical framework to guide the endeavours of community organizations. This chapter explains and justifies the key concepts I will deploy as conceptual tools for analyzing the moral purposes of community organizations. It also elaborates the philosophical approach I will pursue over the coming chapters.

Moral purposes and human kinds

Examining the terms that are employed by community organizations to describe their educational objectives, many of which have (or are meant to have) normative significance, gives us an initial sense of some of their moral purposes. For example, C-Vert, a community program I mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, talks about training "young environmental leaders" and organizes activities aimed at "sustainable development" (YMCAs of Quebec, 2021). Katimavik—the other organization I had described—mentions on its website that "life skills" and "volunteerism" are among of its educational aims (Katimavik, 2019). These terms have moral implications—some clear, others more vague. They point to certain ways of being and doing as well as states of affair that the organizations think ought to be aimed at by their youth participants. The practices of an organization are intended to assist these youth to identify with these terms in both an actual and aspirational sense—e.g., to think of themselves as "young environmental leaders" and to make efforts to become such leaders. These terms, then, are one of the keys to understanding the moral purposes animating community education efforts.

Elsewhere, I have called such terms "human kinds" (Zrudlo, 2021a), a concept I borrowed from Ian Hacking (2002), and which has been mobilized in David Bakhurst's work in philosophy of education (2011). C-Vert's notion of a young environmental leader is an example of a human kind, while sustainable development, life skills, and volunteerism are concepts that are closely associated with human kinds (i.e., they point to a *kind* of person who cares about sustainable development, or possesses many life skills, or gives time to volunteering). Other examples of human kinds that circulate in education include 'citizen' and 'activist'; other associated concepts include 'critical thinking' (pointing to a *kind* of person who is a critical thinker) and 'creativity' (a *kind* of person who is creative). Hacking (2002) explains that each human kind has a more or less idiosyncratic historical origin, emerging as a result of novel activities and understandings of individuals and groups, as well as "labelling from above" (p. 111). These two vectors, as he calls them, interact with one another: the labelling, for example, influencing the self-understandings and behaviours of individuals and groups.

Although they do not use this terminology, community organizations employ human kinds and associated concepts to articulate the various moral purposes with which they hope to endow the young people with whom they work. Even seemingly innocuous terms from the field of psychology, such as 'self-esteem', can be thought of as human kinds. To examine the example of self-esteem a bit further: it is closely associated with labels (say, low or high self-esteem) that influence how people think of themselves and act. A person with low self-esteem is a *kind* of human being that only gradually became a real possibility at some point in history as a result of Hacking's two interacting vectors: labelling from above and the novel activities and understandings of individuals and groups. A community organization claiming that its programs boost the self-esteem of youth is an example of its employing the human kind of self-esteem (or,

to be more precise, the human kind of the person with high self-esteem—which exists in contrast with the undesirable state of being of the person with low self-esteem).

The human kinds used in community education, therefore, are not merely neutral terms. They influence the way staff operate, the way they view young people, and how youth see themselves. Bakhurst (2011) explains that human kinds "enable certain ways of being and disable others" (p. 43). A certain kind of emphasis on critical thinking, for example, may discourage young people from pursuing certain forms of life that appear to be uncritical.[5] This is not yet to say that this is a good or bad thing—at least not immediately. The concept of human kind, alone, does not offer an evaluative or critical foothold per se; it is more descriptive in nature. It simply opens our eyes to how terms used by an organization are connected to moral purposes. In the case of my example here, it allows us to describe the way 'critical thinking' as a concept associated with a human kind (e.g., a person who thinks critically, who is a critical thinker) can shape the moral purposes of a young person. Young program participants exposed to one or another human kind will not necessarily adopt them in a normative sense (they may in fact react against them), but they will be influenced by them either way. In any case, looking carefully at the list of human kinds employed by a community organization should give us a sense of at least some of the moral purposes being promoted in community education.

Merely creating a list of the human kinds and associated concepts that one finds in the discourse of community educators and organizations, however, while helpful, would be insufficient—it would not truly get at most of the moral purposes involved. First, two educators or organizations may use the same human kind but have rather different conceptions of what

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[5] The justification of autonomy as an educational aim (and what it means) has been debated in philosophy of education on similar grounds (e.g., Brighouse, 2006).

they are talking about. 'Empowerment' (the associated human kind being 'the empowered individual'), for instance, is a term that is used to mean very different ideas. In different contexts, it might be used to mean economic independence, an ability to politically organize, or the confidence to express oneself. That the term shows up does not tell us much about the moral purposes of an organization, since the same term can be associated with different moral purposes (I take up this specific problem again in a later chapter). Second, certain key terms often have a web-like nature, drawing in other concepts. In other words, the human kinds and associated concepts populating the discourse of an organization generally do not exist in an atomized fashion; they have a loose structure. 'Environment', for example, is often linked to 'sustainable' in some way. Getting at the underlying logic of these structures—which a mere list would not produce—is part of understanding the moral purposes at work.

Third, community education, like education in general, tends to be vulnerable to changing fads and fashions—in part due to the vagaries of funding—which often shift vocabulary significantly without much real change in concepts taking place. One human kind may be swapped for another (e.g., talk of 'skills' may be replaced by talk of 'competencies'), but the kind of thinking involved, and the associated practices, may have changed little if at all. Therefore, understanding the moral purposes animating community educators and organizations implies getting at the deeper understandings at work.

Fourth, the vast majority of the terminology used by organizations originates from outside the area of community education—i.e., it is not unique to the area. There are deep ideological currents in Western modernity that influence which human kinds become popular and how they are deployed and understood. For instance, the focus on 'skills' is better understood when we keep in view the broader context of the rise of, say, the Protestant work

ethic—or, to use a term from Charles Taylor (1989), the 'affirmation of ordinary life'—that occurred during the modern period. A mere catalogue of human kinds used by a set of organizations would leave out the broader moral and intellectual context that shapes our understanding of them.

Due to these and other challenges, meeting the overall aim of my research project—which is to map out and assess the moral purposes animating community education efforts—will require going both deeper (underneath the 'surface level' terminology, which is sometimes littered with slogans) and broader (beyond the area itself to the modern cultural and ideological context in which community education efforts are embedded) than the particular human kinds used by educators and organizations. My analysis will therefore include paying attention to human kinds, but will not be limited to merely cataloguing them.

In "Human kinds in education: An outline of a two-pronged research project" (Zrudlo, 2021a), I suggested three contexts that would help in analyzing human kinds: the cultural context, the historical context, and the conceptual context. Paying attention to cultural context reveals that some human kinds are more culturally idiosyncratic than they appear at first. For example, the idea that a healthy dose of self-esteem is an integral component of flourishing may be a more culturally specific conviction than a universal, cross-cultural truth about human beings (e.g., Henrich et al., 2010). For someone who assumed the latter, this revelation can be ground-breaking, shifting the concept from the category of psychological axioms to cultural oddities. It encourages us to ask what it is about the concept of self-esteem that makes it particularly attractive to North Americans and to wonder if those reasons are healthy.

Historical context brings into focus the contingency associated with some terms. Tracing the history of the popularization of self-esteem, for instance, reveals that it was made famous by

an eccentric politician in California with little scientific evidence but a large PR budget (Storr, 2018). This, again, shifts the concept out of the category of discovered scientific facts. What is more, Ian Hacking (1984) explains that "*Concepts have memories*, or at any rate, we in our very word patterns unconsciously mimic the phylogeny of our concepts. Some of our philosophical problems about concepts are the result of their history" (p. 112). Researching the history of human kinds is helpful because it brings the 'baggage' they carry out in the open. All human kinds have a history, of course, so a historical study does not by itself invalidate the human kind. But some histories are sounder than others, and the history of self-esteem—to which I will return in a subsequent chapter—does not exactly inspire confidence.

Looking to the conceptual context involves situating a human kind in a broader network of ideas and concepts. This will allow me to go beyond an isolated term and to get a better sense of the web-like relationships between sets of the human kinds and their associated concepts, which I mentioned above. These investigations into conceptual context often end up evoking modernity—a concept to which I return further below. Briefly, to use once again the example of self-esteem, the idea has clear affinities with the optimistic side of European Romanticism, with its focus on sincerity, and with the modern concern with authenticity that would later follow (Berlin, 1999). A deeper understanding of modernity and the transformations in thought and sensibility that accompanied it, then, can help one better understand the contours of the human kinds one is analyzing.

These insights inform the approach I take in my dissertation. My analysis of community organizations will often hinge on specific human kinds (or a set of related human kinds) that I will focus on for analysis and contextualization, in order to gain insight into the deeper moral purposes animating community education efforts. My analysis of human kinds will often follow

one or more of the strategies outlined above: looking to the cultural context, the historical context, or the conceptual context.

The ethical environment

In order to delve 'underneath' the variety of human kinds employed by organizations, and to help get at the deeper moral purposes at work, I will adapt Graham Haydon's concept of 'the ethical environment'.[6] Haydon uses the idea of the ethical environment as a conceptual tool to point to and analyse "the climate of values in which people live and in which young people grow up" (2006, p. 1). 'Values' here is meant very broadly to include all kinds of ideas about how we ought to live and what is most important—ideas that exist 'in' our minds, in the minds of others, in patterns of thought and behaviour, in practices and institutions, and in writing and other media (pp. 12-13). For example, if an organization chooses to include in its programming or operations practices that help foster in youth the capacity for democratic deliberation, this choice, and the practices themselves, embody a number of ideas about what is of value, say, autonomy, equality, etc. People in the organization might also evoke these ideas in their discourse. These ideas, values, and terms (including relevant human kinds) all populate the ethical environment of the organization. In fact, all the values that are drawn upon or invoked (whether explicitly or implicitly, consciously or unconsciously) by the youth and staff involved—or embedded in an organization's practices or structures—can be said to be part of their ethical environment.

The term 'ethical environment' "is used to pick out a category of interest, not to make an evaluation" (p. 14); it is not meant to contrast with, say, 'unethical environment'. One can

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[6] Haydon, in turn, draws initially on Simon Blackburn's (2001) use of the term, though he expands beyond Blackburn's account (Haydon, 2006, pp. 11-13).

evaluate a given ethical environment, but one is not evaluating an ethical environment by picking it out as such. The term points to certain features of the environment—ethical features, which have to do with values, in the broad sense mentioned above. Furthermore, the particular *interpretations* or *understandings* of these values, ideas, and terms are *also* part of the ethical environment—or rather, 'values themselves' (which I suppose only exist for value realists) are not part of the ethical environment at all (at least in the sense that I will use the term), which only includes different, sometimes competing, understandings of these values. Ethical environments are therefore usually quite heterogeneous. It is also important to note that ethical environments are naturally fluid and dynamic, changing over time as people's understandings of values, as well as their language and practices, shift.

We can also speak of *the* ethical environment as well as of particular ethical *environments* (p. 15). A youth program or organization has its own, particular ethical environment, in which the youth participants themselves, the staff that work with them, and the organization itself, operate. Beyond this, the entire area of 'community education' has an ethical environment, itself embedded in the broader ethical environment of modern society at large (in the context of my study, I am concerned with North American society). This 'nested' nature of ethical environments implies that an analysis of one ethical environment often says something, but not everything, about any 'smaller' or 'larger' environments that are connected. Analyzing the ethical environment of community education in North America—which is my level of analysis—will yield conclusions that will not hold for the ethical environments of *all* community organizations in North America ('smaller' in this case relative to community education as a whole). Likewise, analyzing the ethical environment of community education will yield insights into the ethical environment of North American society generally, but not a complete picture. It

is important to keep these different 'nested' levels in view, so that my analysis is not misinterpreted as saying too much (e.g., about the ethical environment of North American culture, beyond the scope of my dissertation) or too little (e.g., about a single organization; I am more interested in trends across community education).

Haydon argues that "we cannot put clear demarcations around the range of ideas that constitute the ethical environment" (p. 20). While this might appear to weaken the concept, stretching it too thinly, its indeterminacy is in fact part of its usefulness. As mentioned above, many of the human kinds that are used by educators and organizations in the area of community education are normative in that they point to certain ways of being and doing, or certain states of affairs, which we *ought* to embody or strive for. A vast range of ideas are potentially relevant here and it would be arbitrary to limit this range ahead of time. The concept of the ethical environment encompasses this potential vastness, ensuring as much as possible that everything related to moral purposes comes under scrutiny.

The concept of ethical environment, then, essentially provides the raw set of 'stuff' out of which I will create my mapping of the moral purposes animating community organizations. It helps me point to the kinds of things that I want to map out: understandings of values, moral sensibilities, convictions, ideals, etc. These are all a part of ethical environments. I had mentioned in the previous chapter that 'moral purposes' was a general term that I would later specify in more detail. I can now explain that 'moral purposes' can be understood as one kind of thing that populates ethical environments, among others. The concept of ethical environment gives me access to a wide range of ideas that I wish to map. It also allows me to specify the 'level' at which I will be mapping: at the level of the ethical environment of the field of community education in North America.

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Education, as a concept and a practice, has a particular relationship to the concept of the ethical environment. Haydon (2006) explains that education influences the ethical environment (it can perpetuate it, challenge it, enhance or decrease its quality, etc.) and that the ethical environment, in turn, influences education, shaping it in different ways. "Some ethical environments may contain more potential tensions than others; and some education systems may do more than others to help people to handle the tensions" (pp. 38-39). We can thus ask, from a relatively pragmatic perspective: does the ethical environment of the area of community education as a whole help or hinder its aims? I will turn to this broader question later in the dissertation, after having examined particular aspects of the ethical environment.

A final idea related to the concept of ethical environment that I want to borrow from Haydon, and emphasize in my own study, is the "clustering effect." (p. 41) Sets of ethical ideals and their possible interpretations "are not randomly distributed across individuals" (p. 40). While each individual carries with them a somewhat unique set of values (or rather, *understandings* of these values), there tends to be a great deal of overlap with others, particularly within the same culture. Where does this clustering effect come from? One reason is that "[n]ot all possible sets of ethical ideas, when the interpretation is filled in, can logically hang together" (p. 41). It is also the case that human beings tend to "have some susceptibility to considerations of consistency and coherence" (ibid). Another reason is that human beings that share the same physical space tend to end up sharing, to a certain degree, some of the same ethical ideas; this goes together with our natural desire to belong to a group.

This clustering effect is a crucial idea for my study. My claim, which I will elaborate below and throughout the dissertation, is that within the ethical environment of community education can be discerned several 'clusters' of values or ideals (or *understandings* of sets of

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values or ideals). For the purposes of my dissertation, I will call particular clusters of ethical ideals, 'aspects' of the ethical environment as it were, *ethical frames*—e.g., 'the ethical frame of the entrepreneur', 'the ethic of entrepreneur', or 'the entrepreneurial ethic'. One way of describing an ethical environment, then, is by identifying and describing the major 'ethical frames' that populate it. This would not necessarily constitute an exhaustive description of an ethical environment (if that would even be possible), but it would help offer a good view of the major landmarks dotting the landscape. This is the strategy I will use to map out the moral purposes of community education in North America: by identifying and describing the major ethical frames that populate the ethical environment of the field of community education as a whole.

Aspects of the ethical environment: Ethical frames

My account of these clusters of ethical ideals—aspects of the ethical environment I have called 'ethical frames'—is inspired by Charles Taylor's work (1989), particularly the first part of *Sources of the Self*.[7] Ethical frames, as I will use the term, are not Platonic ideals, existing independently of us. Each is constituted by a set of understandings of a relatively loose group of values or ideals (which can be associated with one or more human kinds and their related concepts), as well as certain related sensibilities and convictions. Ethical frames are not elaborate or philosophically sophisticated conceptual frameworks. Rather, they are background frames of

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[7] I draw here mostly on Taylor's account of what he calls "frameworks", as well as related ideas. There is some overlap between my 'ethical frames' and Taylor's 'frameworks'. I decided to opt for the term 'ethical frame' instead of using Taylor's term in part because 'framework' seemed to imply something more worked out and elaborate than what I am pointing to. I am also operating within a more circumscribed 'sphere' than Taylor (clusters of values at work in the ethical environment of community education in North America today vs. the moral horizons of all Western modernity). I will later refer to 'ethical frameworks', again nodding to Taylor's account, but referring to more elaborate and explicitly developed constructs.

reference, often implicit, that provide individuals with a sense of what is lower and what is higher, what is looked down upon and what is seen as desirable, as good. One person's ethical frame, for example, might elevate the ideas of hard work and economic independence. In this case, idleness is abhorred, and productivity is highly desired.

An ethical frame acts as a kind of map, with which we situate ourselves in relation to what we see as the most important goods. On this map, I can be closer or farther from these goods, and I can be either moving towards them or sliding away from them. If I am farther and sliding away, I may be upset with myself, perhaps even consider myself a failure and be filled with guilt or shame. If I am rightly placed in relation to the goods I see as most important, and even approaching them, I feel accomplished. One's ethical frame, then, is intimately bound up with one's sense of self, with one's identity. It is part of *who we are*, in a very deep sense. Having an ethical frame is an inescapable part of the kinds of beings we are. And again, like with the ethical environment in general, one's ethical frame is not static; it changes over time, sometimes through our deliberate efforts, other times more unconsciously.

Ethical frames populate our ethical environment, meaning that they can be 'in' people's minds but also reflected or embedded in discourses and practices that are prevalent in, say, the work of a community organization. To the extent that an individual (or an organization) takes on the understandings that constitute one or another ethical frame, their sensibilities, convictions, and intuitions are accordingly shaped—i.e., they are ethically 'formed'. We could describe, for example, a frame that elevates the concepts of work, efficiency, enterprise, independence, practicality, innovation, diligence, and progress—let us call this the ethical frame of the entrepreneur. That these concepts are 'elevated' means that they are viewed as eminently desirable. Someone 'inhabiting' or 'influenced by' this ethic (consciously or not) will want to

take on or embody these ideals, will see the world through a lens shaped by these concepts, and will make choices in their light. An educational program developed under the aegis of this entrepreneurial ethic will likely have certain features: for instance, it may emphasize the development of 'skills' and prioritize highly practical activities.

Taylor maintains that our ethical frames—or frameworks, in his terminology—are not (all) arbitrary or merely conventional (though some might be). Rather, they are (at least in part) a *response* to objective goods and values. For example, our modern sensibilities surrounding human rights are in part a response to some characteristic in virtue of which human beings are understood to have or represent some distinctive or at least important value. But talk of 'human rights' is only one possible response to and description of this value. Another ethical frame, for example, might see human beings as created in the image of God, and therefore sacred. Both, according to Taylor, are responses to an objective good or value.

That there exist such different ethical frames, however, is often taken to imply that 'values' have no objective or real existence, that they are projected by us onto an essentially valueless world, or that they are merely expressions of our subjective feelings. Taylor (1989) resists this conclusion, arguing that this "leap [to non-realism] comes partly from the great hold of natural science models on our enterprise of self-understanding in the sciences of human life" (p. 56). Just because the tools of natural science cannot detect values, Taylor reasons, does not mean they are not real or merely subjective. The ethical frames within which we operate, then, are tracking something real.

Taylor's moral ontology is subtle, and its validity and justification, as well as its connection with his philosophical anthropology, have been the subject of much debate (for a detailed overview, see Meijer, 2018). Briefly, according to Meijer (2018), Taylor suggests that

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we might be able to infer something about moral ontology based on a phenomenological examination of our moral lives. In other words, to make sense of our moral intuitions and reactions, we need to suppose some form of moral realism, or at least reject non-realism (Taylor, 1989, pp. 59-60). However, the prospect of obtaining a definite account of moral ontology is dim, even according to Taylor (Taylor, 2003, 2011; Meijer, 2018, pp. 171-172). Though he denies the validity of the kind of modern naturalism that would banish value from reality, he is not arguing for a robust, Platonic realism (Taylor, 1989, p. 56).

While my own study does not depend on even Taylor's nuanced moral realism, some form of realism (or perhaps a non-non-realism) could help explain why the ideals or values around which ethical frames are organized (or clustered) are so attractive. To take up the example I mentioned earlier, what we might call the ethical frame of the entrepreneur values work, efficiency, and diligence. While Taylor's naturalistic opponent would say that value is *projected* by the 'entrepreneur' onto essentially valueless ideas such as work, efficiency, and diligence, one could say that there is something inherently valuable or desirable about efficiency and diligence, etc., which the ethical frame of the entrepreneur attempts (more or less adequately) to articulate and bring into focus. This is, in any case, the line taken by Taylor himself, as well as some of his interlocutors, such as Akeel Bilgrami (2021), and other prominent thinkers in the area of ethics (e.g., Brewer, 2009). Alternative explanations for the attractiveness of certain ideals might include the suggestion that this is somehow a feature of our psychology, and that the convincing illusion of genuine values is simply a necessity for our day-to-day functioning as human beings.

The aim of my dissertation, however, is not to bolster the position of the 'value realists', nor, as I have said, is my argument dependent on any kind of moral realism. Whether one

believes values are merely subjective projections, or that the values exist out there in some sense and are themselves attractive/desirable in some way, the fact remains that the staff of community organizations and the young people attending their programs *value* certain ideals, and this helps explain some of the language organizations use as well as the nature of the activities they choose to pursue. Regardless of moral ontology, providing a map of these 'valuations' is a helpful resource for the community organizations themselves, who need to be involved in an ongoing process of reflection about their ideals, how they cohere, and how they should be pursued, if they are to meet the aims to which they have committed themselves, namely, youth and community development.

An ethical frame, as I will be using the term, consists of a loose set of convictions, sensibilities, and understandings of a cluster of values or ideals that can be found in a given ethical environment. These convictions, sensibilities, and understandings reside 'in' an individual's mind and heart but can also be carried by language and embedded in institutions and their practices. The idea of an ethical frame will help me get at the moral purposes underlying and informing the human kinds and associated concepts organizations are currently employing. Vocabulary might change (e.g., a focus on 'skills' might transform into 'competencies'), without much change in the underlying moral purposes—which are better captured by describing the ethical frame involved.

The four major clusters of ethical ideals

I will now offer an initial description of the four major 'aspects' of the ethical environment of community organizations—or 'clusters' of sensibilities and understandings of ideals, or 'ethical frames'—that I eventually identified, through an iterative process, in my

research. These descriptions will be elaborated and discussed more thoroughly in the next four chapters. The process through which I identified these four frames, which began with the actual problems faced by community organizations, is described further below. For now, I should mention that I conceive of these ethical frames as akin to Weberian ideal types, in that they do "not necessarily have many exact empirical instantiations"; nevertheless, they "reflect motivational connections" which exercise "an important force" among community organizations (Taylor, 1988, p. 812).

First is *the ethical frame of the entrepreneur*, to which I have already alluded above. This ethical frame revolves around the good of 'work'. What is practical, concrete, efficient, useful, and productive is especially valued by those who embrace this ethic. There is a corresponding distaste for what appears to be theoretical, abstract, wasteful, useless, and unproductive. The virtues of diligence, resourcefulness, frugality, initiative, and enterprise achieve a special significance, while the vices of idleness, laziness, lethargy, and sloth become especially important to avoid. Innovation and progress are prized, as is technology. The ability to solve practical problems is also elevated.

Second is *the ethical frame of the activist*. In this case, the good around which the ethic revolves is equality. Injustices and inequalities, whatever is understood to be discriminatory, are especially repellant to the activist. What is seen as fair, just, equal, egalitarian, equitable, and respectful of human dignity is eagerly sought. Authority and power are viewed with suspicion, liable to be abused; constant vigilance and critique is therefore warranted. Transparency and accountability on the part of authorities are insisted upon. Anything that promotes some form of rank between individuals stinks of elitism and is criticized. Versions of this ethical frame exist on a spectrum, from iterations that feel the basic principles of justice are well represented by at least

some modern institutions and that human rights simply need to be extended to all, to more radical ones that feel the struggle for justice has barely begun and demand much more profound individual and social transformation.

Third, there is *the ethical frame of the artist*. The fundamental good here is authenticity, and most of one's efforts are dedicated to the discovery, liberation, and expression of one's true, authentic self. Being sincere, genuine, free, and authentic is valued, while being insincere, constrained, and fake are avoided; we must strive to remove the masks that suffocate us. Society is often conceived of as full of obstacles—such as social conventions, norms, and traditions—to genuine individual flourishing and emancipation. The inner realm of feeling, emotion, and conviction is seen as sacred and inviolable. The artist looks deep within to try to unlock the energies and potentialities that lie hidden there. This ethic has both optimistic and pessimistic versions. Optimistically, the goal of authenticity is possible and social arrangements can effectively promote this search. Pessimistically, it is difficult if not impossible to achieve authenticity, in part because of the irrational and tragic nature of life; the best we can do is take up an ironic and melancholic stance towards the inevitable frustrations that will accompany our struggles. To face up to this truth requires sincere courage.

Finally, there is *the ethical frame of the naturalist*. The heart of this ethic is nature or the environment, which becomes the object of profound respect, genuine concern, and in some cases even awe, love, or reverence. From this perspective, nature is our great teacher. We need to learn to listen to it, to read its signs, and to put in practice its guidance. Any scheme that elevates human beings above nature in some way, emphasizing human beings' distinctiveness, is viewed with suspicion. The destruction of the natural environment is of particular concern. What is understood to be natural is seen as good, whereas the artificial is scorned. So-called modern

civilization is perceived with much ambivalence. In some shape or form, for our own well-being, we need to learn to 'return' to nature, to recover our place within the broader scheme of the natural world. Kindness to plant and animal life is emphasized, the expression of a non-anthropocentric moral egalitarianism. There are both scientific and sentimental dimensions or versions of this ethic: the scientific is particularly awed by the insignificance of human beings in the scheme of natural history and strives to better understand the powerful and beautiful laws of nature; the sentimental is more inclined to discovering a re-enchanted natural world and focuses on the aim of seeking harmony with it.

These four brief sketches should serve to further clarify what I mean by ethical frames. However, I should clear up a couple of misunderstandings that may have inadvertently emerged in the process. First, once again, these ethical frames are 'in' people's minds and hearts or can be embedded in discourses and social practices of various kinds. Participating in a social practice in which a particular ethical frame is embedded might shift one's own ethical frame in that direction over time; conversely, those who set about designing a given social practice are themselves moved by certain ethical frames, and their valuations naturally become to a degree embedded in the practice in question. Ethical frames should therefore not be reified into ontological realities. I will sometimes say that one or another ethical frame 'influences' or 'shapes' the operations of a community organization, or the thinking and feeling of an individual or group of individuals. One should understand by this kind of shorthand that I am talking about a set of understandings, convictions, and sensibilities, whether held by individuals or represented in the discourse of an organization, which make it likely that, for example, certain kinds of practices will be carried out. In this sense, the ethical frames are of course 'real', but they are certainly not fixed or unchanging; they are rather historically contingent formations that have no

agency of their own. (Again, if one is a moral realist, one would say that the values around which the frames are organized are inherently desirable, but this is an optional component of my argument.)

Second, above, I occasionally made reference to 'the activist', 'the artist', etc., as if these ethical frames were ways of categorizing people. This kind of talk comes naturally because of the close link between selfhood and ethical ideals, which Taylor argues for in in *Sources* (1989). But I use it with the caveat that I am not presenting a typology of personalities, nor do the frames designate social roles. The ethical frames are clusters of ethical ideals, constituted by certain interrelated moral sensibilities, convictions, and understandings. Although they are ultimately taken up by real individuals or in the language and practices of organizations, no real person or organization could be adequately or comprehensively 'captured' by one or more of these ethical frames, as this would necessarily be a reductionist move. There is a link, of course, between real people who describe themselves as, say, activists, and what I have called the ethical frame of the activist, but the latter is not primarily meant to designate or refer to the former. My term 'ethic of the activist', for example, has not been constructed to understand flesh-and-blood activists, but rather some of the trends and dynamics at work in community education (which may overlap with some realities associated with self-designated activists).

Third, the descriptions above may convey the impression that the ethical frames are mutually exclusive. Quite the opposite: a single organization can certainly operate with two or more of the frames at the same time. Sometimes the frames are merely compartmentalized, each applied to one aspect of an organization's functioning, or a certain range of its endeavours. At other times they are combined in some way—in some cases this is felicitous since one frame can correct the exaggerations of another, while in other instances the weaknesses of each simply

compound problems. Certain combinations are more likely than others, given conceptual tensions. I address the question of 'interactions' between ethical frames in the work of certain organizations in Chapter 7. Even though they rarely if ever appear in their 'pure' form (they are akin to Weberian ideal types), it is helpful to address each ethical frame separately at first, in part because it helps build a map that is useful for community organizations. It also seems analytically helpful to consider each cluster of understandings and sensibilities in their own right and on their own terms before taking a step back to view the landscape or mapping as a whole, as it were.

These four ethical frames ultimately serve a practical purpose in my study: they will help (1) explain why community organizations encounter certain problems, which hamper their efforts, and (2) clarify their aims. The solution is not, I will argue, to deny the desirability of the values to which these frames point, but rather for organizations to elaborate an ethical framework that brings them together more coherently, and that can therefore help them fulfill their aims of youth and community development. I return to these considerations further below, when I describe the approach of my study.

Comparing my approach to Kliebard's study of the curriculum

There is no single, uniquely justifiable way of identifying the content of the major ethical frame(s) held by community organizations. My own map features the four frames described above. The evidence I point to over the next four chapters will hopefully increase the reader's confidence that this mapping is not arbitrary, in addition to being useful. For now, in order to establish the initial plausibility of the four ethical frames described above, to connect my study with previous work in education, and to begin introducing my approach, I will briefly explore

Herbert Kliebard's seminal study of changes in the American curriculum between the end of the nineteenth century and the middle of the twentieth.

Kliebard's *The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893-1958*, a third edition of which was published in 2004 (the first appeared in 1986), is a foundational work in curriculum studies and the history of education. It offers an account of shifting debates about education and educational reforms over six decades in the United States. Kliebard suggests that one way to understand these debates and reforms is to see them as an ongoing struggle between four competing interest groups, who were engaging in a kind of status politics. Particular reforms might be supported by more than one interest group, but in general each group had different convictions and beliefs about education and what values it should promote—in other words, each group represented a relatively distinct ideology.

The first of these groups Kliebard calls the *humanist* interest group. This group included "the guardians of an ancient tradition tied to the power of reason and the finest elements of the Western cultural heritage" (Kliebard, 2004, p. 23). While they could certainly be described as traditionalists, Kliebard emphasizes that they were not necessarily defenders of the status quo. Nevertheless, the orientation of this group pitted it against the three other interest groups, which saw themselves as more progressive in various ways, and ultimately as the 'real' reformers.

The *developmentalists* were the first of the three groups of reformers. They wanted curriculum to be informed by what they saw as the "natural order of development in the child" (p. 24). Their talk was "infused with romantic ideas about childhood" (ibid) and they were dedicated to scientific research on childhood and adolescent development as well as the nature of learning. They invariably emphasized the needs and interests of children, and the idea that education might release "the natural power within the child" (ibid).

The second group of reformers were those dedicated to *social efficiency*. They also spoke in the name of science, but rather than developmental psychology, they relied on the emerging science of management and "standardized techniques of industry" (p. 24). Efficiency was their ultimate standard for measuring the value of a given curriculum or educational system. The aim of curriculum reform was to match schooling more precisely to the variety of increasingly specialized jobs and occupations that were needed in a rapidly changing and increasingly technologically sophisticated society. Schooling was seen as the preeminent tool for social engineering.

The *social meliorists* constituted the third and final group of reformers (and thus the fourth interest group engaged in the struggle). This group was most interested in "social change and social justice" (p. 24) and saw schools as a means to these ends. They were alarmed by "inequalities of race and gender, and the abuse of privilege and power" (ibid) and thought curriculum should itself focus on such issues, "thereby raising a new generation equipped to deal effectively with those abuses" (ibid).

Kliebard tells the story of how leading humanists, developmentalists, social efficiency reformers, and meliorists struggled for control of the American curriculum. None of these groups ever won, and instead, the curriculum became the result of "a loose, largely unarticulated, and not very tidy compromise" (p. 25). Not every figure from the period can be easily categorized within Kliebard's scheme, however. John Dewey, for example, appeared to find insights in each group's ideology, but also criticized them. As Kliebard puts it, the ideologies of the four interest groups "did not so much present options from which [Dewey] would choose as they represented the raw material from which he would forge his own theory of curriculum" (p. 26). Sophisticated theorists such as Dewey therefore hovered above the debate, as it were, as opposed to being

confined by Kliebard's categorization (see Zrudlo, 2021c, for a discussion of the difficulties associated with categorizing Dewey).

Kliebard's study was immensely influential. It was praised for offering a "middle-way" between reading the history of curriculum as either "a clear-cut march of progress or as an unerring oppression" (Page, 2010, p. 215). Some scholars still see the influence of some of the interest groups he identified—see, for example, Waldow (2015) for a study of the link between early representatives of the social efficiency interest group and 21st century standards-based reforms in the US and elsewhere. Thus, his categorization appears to be more than 'merely' of historical interest. Schiro (2013) has even generalized Kliebard's four interest groups (among other approaches) into four curriculum ideologies, suggesting that one can divide contemporary approaches to curriculum into very similar categories.

The reader may have noticed that some of my 'ethical frames' resemble some of Kliebard's interest groups. The developmentalists share Romantic roots with the ethic of the artist; the group concerned with social efficiency seems to embrace the entrepreneurial ethic; and the social meliorists would certainly identify with the ethic of the activist. The humanists, by contrast, are not so present in the field of youth and community development. And Kliebard does not have an interest group embracing the naturalist ethic. My sense (though I cannot elaborate this hunch here, which I discuss briefly in a later chapter) is that the appearance of the naturalist ethic as a distinct and widespread ethical frame is a later historical development, relatively speaking. During the period investigated by Kliebard, it was more marginal, and was in any case partially represented by the developmentalists, who were certainly concerned with what was 'natural'.

This comparison with Kliebard's interest groups should serve to increase the initial plausibility of my four ethical frames, enough to carry the reader into the next four chapters, which will show in what ways community organizations are committed to these frames. I only encountered Kliebard's study after having developed an initial sketch of my own mapping of ethical frames, and the partial coincidence was encouraging, suggesting that my account was not so far-fetched. Of course, if ethical environments are not hermetically sealed off from one another, nor from the broader culture (in this case of North America), it makes sense that ethical frames of somewhat different areas (the history of curricular reform in Kliebard's study and community education today in mine) would have many common features. It also illustrates the power of the 'clustering effect' that Haydon notes, since Kliebard's interest groups seem to have clustered around similar sets of values.

Beyond the categorization itself, I want to point out a few other similarities between my approach and Kliebard's, and then highlight some important differences. This will further help introduce my approach. First, like Kliebard, I am also particularly interested in the language and slogans associated with each category. Kliebard emphasizes repeatedly that the rhetoric of each group does not necessarily translate *directly* into practice, especially since it competes with several other groups. But the discourse they use is important since it constitutes the area in a sense and does shape practice in various ways, often unpredictably. I will walk the same line in my own analysis, investigating language and terms (many of them human kinds and their associated concepts) and linking these in some cases to particular practices, with the caveat that the link between the two is not always direct. Second, Kliebard acknowledges that certain theorists, such as Dewey, cannot be easily categorized in his scheme. This is not a mark against his mapping, which still captures the vast majority of reformers of the time, but rather a strength

of Dewey's. The purpose of his scheme is not, after all, to categorize philosophers, but rather to explain the history of curriculum reform. In my own case, I am likewise trying to better understand a realm of practice—the operations of organizations focused on youth and community development. Some theories or theorists of education could be classified using my four ethical frames, but this is not often the case, especially when it comes to sophisticated thinkers (nor is it my purpose to do so). Third, Kliebard and I share a major overlap in terms of setting: he examined the United States, while I will be looking at community organizations both in the US and in Canada.

There are also some obvious differences between our two approaches. First, I will not be using methods from the discipline of history, because I am not investigating a past historical period, but rather the *current* language and operations of community organizations, as well as how young people articulate themselves. Nevertheless, I will sometimes follow certain historical threads, especially when fleshing out each ethical frame and in some cases when analyzing certain human kinds. Second, the nature of my categories is quite different. Kliebard constituted particular interest groups with identifiable leaders. These interest groups consisted of real people who struggled for the curriculum. My ethical frames, by contrast, are loosely interrelated sets of moral convictions, sensibilities, and understandings, organized around one or more goods that are seen as higher. I have explicitly warned against conceiving of these frames as personality types or the like. As mentioned above, the organizations I will analyze almost invariably are animated by more than one of the ethical frames I have identified. The distinctions between the different frames are more analytical in nature, rather than, say, sociological.

I should mention before moving on that this comparison with Kliebard is just one example of a mapping that is similar to mine. In my research, I have encountered several other

studies that offer comparable mappings. For example, in the fifth edition of Gary Fenstermacher and Jonas Soltis' well-known book, *Approaches to Teaching* (2009), the authors outline three different approaches to teaching: the executive approach, the facilitator approach, and the liberationist approach. The first resonates with the ethic of the entrepreneur, the second with that of the artist, and the third with the activist ethic (again, the naturalist ethic is embedded elsewhere). Fenstermacher and Soltis' purpose is to help teachers recognize—in themselves and in other teachers—the different teaching approaches and to understand their strengths and weaknesses (in my case I am offering the same to community organizations). However, their prescriptive conclusion differs from mine: they suggest that teachers should become familiar with all three approaches, choosing when to use which one depending on circumstances. I will be suggesting, instead, that community organizations should elaborate a framework that brings together, among other things, the salvageable insights from each ethical frame. All this to say that Kliebard's study is not the only one offering a similar scheme, and that this fact should again reinforce the plausibility of my own mapping and approach.

The overarching context of modernity

I have one more major concept to elaborate before I move onto more detailed aspects of my approach. I mentioned the idea of modernity above as relevant for the broader contexts in which human kinds are situated. The four ethical frames I have identified are also, in a sense that will become clear over the next four chapters, peculiarly modern. Taylor (1989, 2004) argues that our social imaginary in the West has undergone a massive transformation in the course of the modern period. He suggests that we suffer from a kind of inarticulacy regarding our own ethical convictions—partially as a result of modern naturalism, which seeks to explain away or

reduce our moral experiences (according to Taylor, unsuccessfully). Modernity has therefore had an immense impact on our ethical environment. I will thus need to be sensitive to the broader context of modernity—within which community education efforts are carried out.

In my dissertation, I focus on Taylor's writings about modernity (1989, 1991, 2004, 2007), though I will also draw on Hannah Arendt (1958), Isaiah Berlin (1999) and Larry Siedentop (2014), among others. In general, I follow Taylor in conceiving of modernity as a series of interrelated transformations that are still occurring today. Like most of the other authors I just mentioned, he argues that we are still in the midst of modernity. Taylor is skeptical that we have entered a postmodern age, if by this it is meant that we have left behind modern ways of thinking and being. He sees in much of postmodern thought an acceleration or intensification of certain quintessentially modern themes, such as freedom and justice or the critique of reason. There are different readings of postmodernity, of course, to which Taylor might be more amenable (e.g., Burbules, 2009), but my point here is to agree with him that we are still modern, in several important senses. Taylor also avoids the idea of modernity as a radical break with the past. There are still links between the 'premodern' and the modern, certain points of continuity. Nevertheless, our modern period marks a change that we cannot go back on (nor would we want to). There is no turning back the clock, though Taylor encourages an exercise of retrieval. To borrow from his study of authenticity, modernity has both 'boosters' and 'knockers', and we should avoid both extremes in our assessments of modernity.

There is one way in which my usage of the concept of modernity will differ or depart somewhat from Taylor's. I want to distinguish between 'modernity' as a general concept applying to our global situation, and 'Western modernity' as a particular manifestation of modernity that is typical of the West (though it is dynamic and far from monolithic). In other

words, we have multiple 'modernities' (which Taylor acknowledges in certain places, e.g., 2007, p. 5), all of which together make up modernity *tout court*. Of course, it is neither possible nor desirable to hermetically seal one modernity off from another (their mixing is not a uniquely modern phenomenon either, an impression that Taylor sometimes gives; see Schewel, 2017, p. 40). What needs to be acknowledged, however, is that one version or iteration of modernity—the 'Western' one, and often its most superficial and undesirable aspects—is being aggressively propagated globally through various mechanisms, such as political and economic forces, but also education itself. As I already mentioned, I am wary of the wholesale 'knockers' of Western modernity. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the future does not hold a globally homogenized Western culture—even looking to its best dimensions—despite some of the current trends. Because of this, I insist on driving a wedge between the concept of Western modernity and modernity *tout court* (see Zrudlo, 2022, for a lengthier discussion of this point). I will keep this wider perspective in mind while analyzing the ethical environment of community educators and organizations in North America. Thus, I have Western modernity in mind, specifically, when I am referring to modernity throughout my dissertation, conscious that this does not define modernity globally, but is surely the kind of modernity we experience in North America—the context of my study.

I will use the concept of modernity in my dissertation primarily to trace the origins of the four ethical frames I have identified. Of course, simply saying that something is modern in origin does not by itself constitute a critique of it; in the expanded sense in which I am using the term (i.e., not as a term of abuse), almost everything today is, in a sense, modern. Rather, the point is to situate current trends within larger moral and intellectual transformations that have been ongoing for centuries in a way that illuminates the trends in question. For example, the idea of

'authenticity' and slogans that announce it ("Be yourself!") are rather common in educational

discourse and practice (e.g., Bialystok & Kukar, 2018). In North America in particular, these

ideas can seem self-evidently and unquestionably good. Tracing the moral and intellectual

history of the concept of authenticity (which Taylor himself has done, 1991) helps uncover some

of the reasons why this talk of authenticity is so ubiquitous. And, if done well, it also helps us

encounter more sophisticated accounts of the ideal of authenticity (which are often obscured by

contemporary superficial versions), as well as imagine, more fairly, alternative modes of being

and doing that do not emphasize it or hold forth a different interpretation of it (as opposed to it

being simply unthinkable *not* to value authenticity in the particular way most North Americans

do today).

Tracing the modern origins of various aspects of the ethical environment can thus serve

an important pedagogical function. More than this, it might even be central to moral education

itself. This is part of Nietzsche's argument in *Schopenhauer as Educator*. As Douglas Yacek

(2023) suggests:

Nietzsche seems to think that properly educated individuals must understand the

character of the culture and the time in which they live. In particular, they must be able to

recognize the moral traps the modern world sets for them. Moral education will always

require us to be "educate[d] against our age" ..., to practice the virtue of "untimeliness"

(hence the essay's inclusion in the so-called *Untimely Meditations*). One of the

"negative" aims of moral education for Nietzsche is to develop a critical awareness of the

moral character of modernity, and particularly its flattening effects and mechanisms. (p.

77)

Likewise, I feel that community educators and organizations require this sort of critical stance towards the moral character of modernity (without becoming full-on knockers of modernity per se). Young people themselves also need this awareness if they are to contribute effectively to community development. Otherwise, they risk simply replicating modern ways of being and doing, many of which are at least partially responsible for the various crises in which we currently find ourselves. This critical yet nuanced stance towards modernity informs the approach I take in my dissertation, a more detailed explanation of which follows below.

Further comments about approach

The basic features of my approach were outlined in Chapter 1. Here, I will offer a few additional comments that utilize the conceptual elaborations above to further explain how I went about the philosophical analyses that occupy the central chapters of my dissertation. These comments should also help further clarify the concepts themselves and their role in my project.

My research started with reflecting on particular problems emerging in the work of community organizations, which seemed to be impeding progress towards youth and community development (e.g., the chaos that often results when staff shy away from structuring the meetings of their youth groups). I was mostly aware of these problems as a result of my own experience in the field of community education, as well as conversations with other youth workers and program coordinators; the problems are not, therefore, so arcane or obscure, and many educators will probably recognize at least some of them, even if they do not work in the community sector. I then tried to find the sources of these problems, looking at the language and concepts (including human kinds) evoked in their vicinity by youth workers themselves (e.g., 'I don't want them to see me as an authority') and/or in more official discourse (e.g., 'we empower youth

to make their own decisions'). This was the stage at which I began looking more carefully at the websites of community organizations and their reports (though my selection of the twelve organizations I examined for my dissertation took place later), as well as certain youth ethnographies. Researching the origins of this language and philosophical work on these concepts (e.g., authority) clarified some of these problems and led me to identify certain moral sensibilities, convictions, and understandings that explained, in part, how the problems had come about, or why they were particularly likely to come about. This kind of research and philosophical reflection led me back to the language and practices of the community organizations with fresh eyes, helping me connect certain problems I had not previously seen as related to one another. This prompted further philosophical reflection and research on modernity, clarifying the context of the problems I had noticed, and so on. This iterative process eventually yielded the four 'ethical frames' I described above—the ethic of the entrepreneur, of the activist, the artist, and the naturalist. They were not, therefore, the result of pure philosophical speculation (whatever that is).

The ethical frames—which I have mentioned are akin to Weberian ideal types—function somewhat like post-hoc explanatory or heuristic devices. Furthermore, they have been constructed to explain problems rather than to provide positive advice. Community organizations suffer from many kinds of problems (lack of funding, inadequate facilities, etc.), but at least some of their problems relate to their moral purposes. I mean this not in the sense that they have *bad* moral purposes (i.e., immoral purposes)—in fact, in my experience, the vast majority of those who get involved in youth and community development are not in it for selfish ends (one certainly does not make much money in this sector). Rather, as I explained in the previous chapter, community education is an Aristotelian practice, and requires ongoing attention to moral

purposes and ends: better articulating them, bringing new ones to light, and figuring out how to best pursue them in a coherent fashion. Some of the 'problems' of community organizations, then, are not the results of immoral actors, but rather issue from what might be called "a conspiracy of good intentions" (Tyson-Bernstein, 1988). As every experienced educator will know, good intentions are necessary but ultimately insufficient in the long run (they are even said to pave the road to hell). My claim, which I will unfold over the next four chapters, is that there are typical ways in which the four frames that dominate the ethical environment of community education can inadvertently hamper the efforts of organizations to foster youth and community development. These frames limit in various ways the ethical formation of young people. However, these ethical frames can also *strengthen* these same efforts in various ways— in other words, there are salvageable insights at play here, elements that I will recommend be incorporated into an ethical framework that can guide community organizations.

Mary Midgley (1992) has deployed an analogy between philosophy and plumbing that may be helpful in understanding my approach. She reminds us that we do not often think about the pipes running under our floors and in our walls, out of sight. The whole system escapes our attention most of the time—until there is a leak, or things begin to smell. Then we have to yank up the floorboards, and examine the pipes, to see where the problem is located. In a similar way, our systems of *concepts* operate without our paying much attention to them. They invisibly inform our language and our practices, how we think and what we do. It is only when problems arise that we are prompted to examine our concepts to see if they are faulty or need to be adjusted. Systems of concepts are difficult to examine, however, since they are what we think with in the first place. In fact, we can easily find ourselves hobbling along with faulty concepts without being aware of the source of our problems; thus, the need for philosophy, as Midgley

would argue. In my context, I was motivated, as I explained, by problems arising in the work of community organizations aiming at youth and community development. These problems prompted me to yank up the floorboards, so to speak. Underneath I found a variety of moral sensibilities, convictions, and understandings. As my analysis proceeded, I found that they clustered loosely together into what I eventually called the four ethical frames: distinctive patterns of confusion and ethical inarticulacy about moral purposes that are causing problems in practice. Mapping out these frames and showing community organizations how they can cause these problems constitutes the bulk of my project.

Now, like our faulty system of pipes, the ethical frames need not be jettisoned wholesale. There are pieces that can still be put to good use. Along the way, as I assess the ethical frames, I try to point out these salvageable pieces/insights. A good plumber, of course, goes beyond assessing the faulty plumbing and actually fixes the underlying problems, in some cases installing whole new segments of pipe, etc. I will only engage in this task lightly, in the last chapter of my dissertation. This is in part because of the particular nature of the field of youth and community development, and my own role as a researcher. Ultimately, it is the organizations themselves who have to engage in the work of elaborating the conceptual plumbing guiding their operations. I return to this point, and to Midgley's analogy, in the last chapter.

Practically speaking, my analysis of the language employed by the twelve organizations proceeded as follows. I read through the entire content of each organization's website, as well as relevant reports that were available for download, if any. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these websites sometimes included testimonials from young people themselves. If I noticed any expressions or phrases that seemed to be related to some of the practical problems facing organizations (i.e., the language evoked in the vicinity of these problems) or one of the four

ethical frames (by this point, I had already elaborated the four frames through the iterative process described above), I copied these into a table that allowed me to keep track of the source of the quotations as well as the ethical frames with which they were associated. Each quote was associated with at least one ethical frame, but often more than one. Thus, a picture emerged of which organizations were more associated with which ethical frame(s), roughly determined by which frame was predominant in the quotations from a given organization, though this was already somewhat obvious as I had been reading through the websites themselves.

As I looked through the websites and all the quotations associated with a given ethical frame, certain themes emerged, naturally related to various practical problems facing the organizations that had motivated my study in the first place. In some cases, these were also connected to a specific human kind or associated concept that was repeated very often. For example, when it came to the quotations associated with the ethical frame of the entrepreneur, the term 'skill' stood out immediately. I therefore decided that this would be one of the themes of my analysis of that ethical frame. This also prompted me to read additional philosophical analyses of the concept of skill in the philosophy of education, thus allowing me to flesh out my discussion of the potential problems involved. In this way, the language on the websites helped me ground and focus my philosophical analysis. All of this was complemented, as mentioned in Chapter 1, by drawing on youth ethnographies that included interviews with young people who seemed to be influenced by one or more of the ethical frames. Thus, while the analysis of each ethical frame could in principle have gone in a variety of directions, I decided to let myself be guided by the language used by the twelve community organizations and expressed by youth themselves in testimonials and in the ethnographies in selecting the specific themes I would analyze in the discussion of each frame. This approach allowed me to maintain a practical stance,

and hopefully rendered my dissertation more directly relevant to the current concerns and needs among community educators, the primary audience for my project.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the philosophical analysis of each theme could not be exhaustive, in large part because of the extent of the landscape I was attempting to cover. There is value, I believe, in mapping out the ethical environment as comprehensively as possible, even if this limits to a degree the depth to which each theme can be analyzed. Moreover, my analysis of each theme did not necessarily need to be so detailed since the objects in my sights were not the sophisticated accounts of these themes developed by philosophers, but their rather superficial versions embedded in the language and practices of community educators and organizations. For example, the term 'critical thinking' comes under scrutiny in Chapter 4. Much ink has been spilled by scholars on this theme, and an entire dissertation would not be enough to cover the intricacies of all the debates; indeed, entire careers (e.g., Harvey Siegel's) have been dedicated to the idea. But my analysis does not have as its object the academic debate about critical thinking; rather, I am scrutinizing the ways in which it is mobilized by community educators and organizations and I draw on the academic debate in order to do so. This does not mean, I hope, that my analysis is irrelevant to the academic debate. Even philosophers, and perhaps especially philosophers of education, should be interested in how some of the concepts they debate tend to be conceptualized in different contexts (in our case, community education) and what practical dynamics are associated with these understandings. These kinds of analyses are, one hopes, relevant for continued philosophical work on the concepts themselves.

Chapter 3: The ethical frame of the entrepreneur

Introduction

This is the first of four chapters, each dedicated to describing and assessing one of the four major ethical frames populating the ethical environment of community education in North America. As outlined in Chapter 1, I will first identify and describe several 'features' of the community organizations—such as particular human kinds or associated concepts that regularly appear in the language on their websites, or an observation from my own experience in the field. These features are, in one way or another, problematic, or have the potential to create issues that could hamper youth and community development. However, in the first section of the chapter, I will focus on *describing* the features, reporting the language of the organizations themselves and/or the kinds of activities they pursue, and articulating the impressions these convey. There are four features I identify in this chapter: *skill talk, practicality, self-reliance*, and *employability*.

Following this initial description, I turn to a brief genealogical account of the ethical frame that I suggest contributes to motivating these four features—*the ethical frame of the entrepreneur*. To invoke Midgley's metaphor again, this is where I yank up the floorboards and describe the set of sensibilities, convictions, and understandings that yield the kind of language and practices we see aboveground. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the genealogy will be necessarily brief, drawing on the work of others. The aim here is to show the historical contingency of the ways of thinking and feeling that motivates the features I have identified, as well as to flesh out the picture of the entrepreneurial ethic. I strive to offer a fair portrait, and not a caricature. Although the ethical frames are akin to ideal types, and as such not necessarily instantiated

empirically, I still want to offer a fair account that preserves the strengths of each frame: these are still salvageable and should be retained by community organizations.

The final section of the chapter is dedicated to an assessment of the four features identified at the outset in terms of their ability to help or hinder an organization in meeting the aims of youth and community development. Most of the features have salvageable characteristics. The problems are usually an issue of emphasis or proportion, rather than the presence of an element that ought to be categorically rejected. For example, educational programs aimed at youth and community development should certainly develop in participants certain skills. The mere presence of skills among the educational aims of the organizations is not the problem—it is even a good thing. One issue with 'skill talk', however, as will be argued below, is that articulating nearly *all* of one's educational objectives in terms of skill-acquisition can create significant confusion: not all capacities and virtues can be described as skills, for instance, and to do so obscures the fact that some so-called 'skills' need to be developed using very different approaches (e.g., teaching someone to type vs. teaching someone 'leadership').

The ethical frame of the entrepreneur itself likewise receives a mixed review. Ultimately, it is judged insufficient for the aims of youth and community development; the frame even has the potential to work directly against these aims. However, it still offers some useful ideas and convictions, which, suitably re-articulated and re-contextualized, are helpful and even essential for youth and community development. The values around which the frame is clustered, in other words, are not invalid or problematic themselves. It is the ethical frame—a historically contingent set of sensibilities and understandings of those values—that is the source of the problems I will explore below. By getting to the root of the problems, in the frame of the entrepreneur, organizations and educators can become immunized to the appeal of new fads or

fashions in language or programming that merely repeat the problems inherent in the four features I discuss here. For example, if skill talk were to be replaced by, say, 'competency' talk, it is doubtful whether the underlying problems will disappear (this is precisely the argument made by Ruitenberg, 2019). What good is it to discredit skill talk if the problems with it live on under a different disguise? This underlines the importance of addressing the problem at its root (the pipes under the floorboards, as it were), which the approach of focusing on ethical frames allows.

Analyzing community organizations

I will focus on four features of community organizations in this chapter: *skill talk, practicality, self-reliance*, and *employability*. These four features do not characterize *all* the community organizations I analyzed, nor are they present to the same degree in each of the organizations, but they appear to be sufficiently widespread to merit attention. Every single organization's website included at least one instance of language associated with the ethical frame of the entrepreneur. At least two (orgs. A & G) of the twelve organizations I studied used predominantly entrepreneur-tinged language, while four more (orgs. C, D, E, & I) appeared to combine the entrepreneurial frame with at least one other frame (Chapter 7 explores some of these combinations).

Skill talk

One of the striking features of the language used by the organizations I selected is the abundance of references to skills. Here is only a partial selection, directly excerpted from websites and reports: "digital and soft skills" (org. I); "STEAM skills" (org. I); "transferable skills" (org. E); "leadership skills" (orgs. A, B, & E); "communication and life skills" (org. E;

org. D also mentions "communication skills"); "decision-making skills" (org. A); "learn skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, community engagement" (org. A); "giving them the skills and tools they need" (org. A); "life skills" (org. A); "communication is an essential life skill—a critical skill—that all people need" (org. C); "essential life skills, like budgeting" (org. F); "employment skills" (org. D); "heightened skills" (org. H); "21st century skills" (org. G); "learning, literacy and life skills" (which include "problem solving", "collaboration", and "self-determination") (org. G); "learning and innovation skills" (org. G); "information, media and technology skills" (org. G); "life and career skills" (which include "autonomy", "adaptability", and "cross-cultural openness and initiative") (org. G); "professional skills" (org. G); and "survival skills" (org. J). In fact, a good number—sometimes the majority or even all—of the educational aims of the organizations seem to be articulated in terms of skill-acquisition. I will refer to this disposition, following Barrow (1987), as 'skill talk'. I return to Barrow's critique of this tendency further below.

While these specific skills are not human kinds per se, they certainly hold normative significance and point to a certain human kind as desirable, i.e., the kind of human being who possesses the skill or skills in question. The underlying message here is that these skills are desirable, and that they come together to make up the kind of human being youth participating in community education programs should become—that is, if they want to succeed and contribute to the development of their communities in any meaningful way.

Practicality

Skill talk is one obvious manifestation of a more general concern with *practicality*—the second feature I have identified—which pervades many dimensions of the work of community

organizations. This comes out, for example, in the kinds of activities organized for young people: "workshops" (e.g., "skill development workshops" as org. E calls them) and opportunities to gain practical experiences of various kinds. The idea seems to be that education should deal with the real world and help young people develop abilities that help them *do* various things. Besides the idea of fostering skills, some organizations also appeal to the ideas of "experiential learning", "learning through direct experience", "learning through activities", or "service learning" (org. G). The message being conveyed is roughly this: 'here, we won't just be learning dry theories or abstract ideas disconnected from the real world; here, we will be learning *practical* abilities that can help youth do *real* things, to improve their communities in *concrete* ways.' The opposite, it is implied, would be useless or even counterproductive.

In my own experience as a community educator, the concern with practicality is also apparent in discussions among volunteers and staff. Offering a 'concrete' or 'practical' suggestion, for example, is highly valued, while the terms 'abstract' and 'theoretical' tend to be used pejoratively, often to denigrate an undesirable course of action or idea. There is also sometimes a general reluctance to talk, to meet too frequently. It may even be felt that too many meetings will hamper the efficient working of the organization by taking up the time of its precious few human resources. The focus of discussions, then, is usually on relatively concrete questions: How did that event go? What can we do better next time? What are we doing next week? Who will take care of the food? Where can we get a projector? Reflection is often quite practical: e.g., 'last week, we didn't have flipchart paper on hand, we should always remember to bring it; or, next time, we should have a break 30 minutes in, because people got restless.' Planning concrete next steps often takes up much of the agenda. Community educators appear to be actively fighting what they see as a tendency towards abstraction. One of the main issues here,

as I will explore below, is that the notion of 'the practical' being operationalized is unduly narrow, in a way that stifles reflection on concepts.

Self-reliance

Another related feature of community organizations is that they often discuss the aim of fostering a "culture of self-reliance" (Gillen, 2019, p. 60). As one 15-year-old involved in such efforts put it: "We decided that instead of waiting for someone to give us an opportunity, we'd make one ourselves" (quoted in Kruse, 2019, p. xi). Most of the skills youth are encouraged to develop in the course of programming are meant to contribute to self-reliance or associated dispositions. For example, one program aims "to develop life and work skills, self-confidence, and self-efficacy" (org. B). "Young people learn to define problems, structure solutions, and do the work needed to implement those solutions. They also learn non-deferential attitudes toward people who stand in their way, and they learn to surmount obstacles between them and their goals" (Gillen, 2019, p. 60). A certain kind of independence or autonomy is an important educational aim here.

Self-reliance is also a concept that gives shape to a human kind. Young people involved in programs that emphasize self-reliance are encouraged to view it as a desirable disposition, one that is essential, perhaps, to their own well-being, as well as to their capacity to contribute to the development of their communities. They are encouraged to become the kind of human being who relies on themselves, who is independent and in control, and who can do things autonomously, either individually or in small groups—occasionally as a whole community.

This valuing of self-reliance is related to the kinds of moral exemplars for which young people reach. In my own experience, admittedly anecdotally, I am struck by how many youth

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have come to idolize famous and wealthy entrepreneurs, especially in the area of technology. When I ask them about the reasons why, they tend to say that these individuals are getting things done, making a real difference in the world, and, of course, have made a lot of money, in some cases from relatively modest beginnings (this is alleged to be a sign of their intelligence). Their apparent self-reliance is part of what seems to make them attractive exemplars for some young people. As we will see below, self-reliance, if interpreted literally, is an illusory concept. Moreover, the concept can even be psychologically harmful to young people.

Employability

While employment was not a central concern of every organization I reviewed, many do claim to enhance the employability of young people, particularly those that work with older youth who are near the end of high school or who have already finished their secondary education. Several organizations link the idea of acquiring skills with increasing the employment prospects of their program participants. In some cases, economic independence is an explicit aim of programming. One organization, for example, focuses on "employment skills and entrepreneurship training, empowering youth to secure meaningful employment or start businesses" (org. D). Another tries to "help recent, underemployed post-secondary graduates enhance and develop digital and soft skills through valuable work experience that will successfully facilitate their transition into the workplace" (org. I). Other programs promote youth-run social enterprises, and in these cases, organizers describe "the autonomy and empowerment of earning a wage" (Gillen, 2019, p. 61) that youth experience by participating.

The idea is that increasing the employability of young people by endowing them with various skills will be a source of empowerment for them (thus contributing to their own

development) and will, at the same time, help their communities develop as well. As one organization puts it, "promoting equal access to technology and the development of digital skills in rural and remote communities will build a more connected and equal world" (org. I). Although some organizations place less emphasis on technology, many appear to share this general conviction that developing skills related to employment in young people will lead to development. Though it has salvageable elements, this is ultimately a questionable view that betrays a narrow, materialistic perspective on what community development entails.

Origins of the ethic of the entrepreneur

Each of these four features—skill talk, practicality, self-reliance, and employability—is associated with certain issues or problems in the area of community education—or, at least, potential issues or problems. Community organizations tend to embrace these four features in ways that obscure the ethical ambiguities with which they are associated—ambiguities that I merely hinted at above, and will elaborate and analyze below. The analysis will show how obscuring these ambiguities hampers youth and community development.

Before moving on to an analysis of these issues, though, I want to spend some time exploring *why* these four features are so widespread in the first place—what made and makes them seem attractive or common sense to staff and educational leaders within community organizations. To return to Midgley's metaphor yet again: I want to look 'underneath' these features (under the floorboards) to see what motivates their adoption. This is partly a historical question (i.e., how did they *come* to be so attractive), which is why this section will take the form of a brief genealogy. My claim is that there are certain convictions, sensibilities, and understandings of ethical ideals that make skill talk, practicality, self-reliance, and employment

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particularly attractive. What I have called the ethical frame of the entrepreneur motivates the adoption of these four features, at least partially. The concept of this frame helps me point to a particular tangle of pipes, etc., that is underneath the floorboards. Understanding this ethical frame and its origins equips community educators to more effectively explore the issues or problems associated with these four features, which are in part issues or problems with the ethical frame itself (the tangle of pipes is itself problematic in some respects). More positively, keeping in view the values around which the ethical frame is oriented allows us to identify the salvageable elements of the four features and of the frame itself (not all segments of pipe need be disposed of). As mentioned above, and in previous chapters, the purpose of drawing from intellectual history is primarily pedagogical: it helps community organizations to realize the contingency of the ethical frame and to become aware of alternative sensibilities and convictions.

For the purposes of the following, brief genealogy of the ethical frame of the entrepreneur, I will bring together complementary perspectives from a few well-known accounts, all of which offer some insight into the genesis of the sensibilities and convictions that constitute the frame. Below, I draw on the work of Max Weber, Hannah Arendt, Albert Hirschman, and Charles Taylor to develop an account of where the ethical frame of the entrepreneur comes from and to articulate some of its characteristics. Along the way, I also indicate how the frame motivates the four features I identified above. Again, this section does not stray too far into assessment quite yet—which is the task of the third section—and strives to remain mostly at the level of description.

Weber wrote extensively about the religious origins of some of the ideas I have associated with the ethical frame of the entrepreneur. In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber (1930) points especially to the ascetic branches of Protestantism. His central

thesis is that the kind of asceticism and restraint promoted by some of these religious groups, along with the ideas of a calling and the need to dedicate oneself to worldly pursuits, gave birth to an ethic that created fertile conditions for the development of modern capitalism. The Protestant ethic essentially elevated work itself, making it a religious act of devotion (if pursued in the right spirit). Prior to the modern period, Taylor (1989) explains, labour of all kinds was generally subordinated to, for example, the vocation of the priest, which was considered 'higher'. The Reformation, among other factors, helped foster a gradual 'leveling' in people's perception and evaluation of human pursuits. Taylor uses the phrase "the affirmation of ordinary life" to designate some of these evaluative changes. Central to the affirmation of ordinary life, as it eventually evolved, is the conviction that it is morally wrong to prioritize the other-worldly over the 'real' world of the here and now.[8]

These developments, though relatively distant in time, inform the four features of community organizations I mentioned above. Skill talk, for example, is partially the result of a kind of leveling of human abilities, bringing them all—whether they pertain to critical thinking, leadership, communication, "life", etc.—to the level of practical skill, attainable by anybody, in principle (Smith, 1987, p. 197). Practicality, as an overall ethos of community organizations, is seen as a protection against the dangers of abstract other-worldliness, against which the affirmation of ordinary life militates. Self-reliance, as an overall ethos, can be seen as a secularized version of the Protestant ethic ("God helps those who help themselves"—a phrase many mistakenly believe is in the Bible—comes to mind here).

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[8] A sophisticated, contemporary expression of this conviction can be found in Martin Hägglund's *This Life: Secular Faith and Spiritual Freedom* (2020).

In describing the emergence of the affirmation of ordinary life, Taylor (1989) also points to certain modern transformations in our conception of science. He refers to Francis Bacon, for example, whose influential writings in the seventeenth century criticized ancient notions of science as contemplative natural philosophy, arguing instead that we should come to understand the practical workings of nature through experimentation. Bacon also emphasized that the aim of science should be the betterment of the real conditions of humanity. This relatively utilitarian and pragmatic conception of science, which raises the profile of technology, was incredibly influential. John Dewey (1948), for example, referred to Bacon glowingly as "the great forerunner of the spirit of modern life" (p. 28). Dewey felt that Bacon was an early advocate of the pragmatic conception of science he favoured.

Many of the skills community organizations seek to develop in young people are related to technology, e.g., "digital" skills (org. I), etc. Teaching youth to code appears to have become especially popular among community organizations. These skills are often seen as particularly relevant for the kind of human being young people need to become in order to contribute meaningfully to the development of society. Science, if it is mentioned at all, is often also integrated into the realm of skills (e.g., "STEAM skills" (org. I), where the "S" ostensibly refers to science).

From a different angle of approach, Hannah Arendt (1958) charts, in *The Human Condition*, the reversal of the traditional hierarchy of human capacities. She explains that the *vita contemplativa*—encompassing faculties of the mind such as thinking, willing, and judging—used to be held as superior to the *vita activa*, which includes the capacities of labour, work, and action. But over the course of the modern period, the *vita activa* dethroned the life of the mind, and even within the *vita activa*, work and ultimately labour became the dominant capacities,

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sidelining action and bringing to the fore *homo faber* and the *animal laborans*. Our practical skills and abilities therefore came to be valued over the capacities of the mind, leading to a kind of flattening of our mental horizons and a vulnerability to conformism. One of the key factors influencing this reversal of values, according to Arendt, was the expansion of the market economy. This expansion extended the logic of the market—which deals with the categories of production, acquisition, exchange, and consumption—to nearly all spheres of life. The aversion to the abstract in community education, in favour of what is seen as more practical, is certainly connected to the modern devaluation of the life of the mind.

Arendt also described the effects of this reversal in the hierarchy of human capacities on education. She thought that some forms of progressive education were especially influenced by it. The reversal had gradually yielded a new, distinctively modern assumption: that "you can know and understand only what you have done yourself" (Arendt, 1961, p. 182). Arendt claimed that this assumption "found its systematic conceptual expression in pragmatism" (ibid). Applied to education in the twentieth century, the result was to elevate "doing" and the development of skills in education. Skill talk would flourish in the decades that followed. The assumption Arendt has pointed out here is part of what still makes skill talk attractive in community education. Not only has the life of the mind been subordinated to the *vita activa*: the life of the mind itself is now redescribed in the language of skills (e.g., critical thinking skills), which is more related to work and labour. In general, talk of skills is as 'this-worldly' and concrete as can be. Skills (appear to) have nothing ethereal or abstract about them. They are seen as practical and reliable tools that we can use to improve our conditions.

Albert Hirschman (1977), on whom Taylor also draws, has laid out the early political arguments that were voiced in favour of some of the transformations I have been describing. He

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dwells especially on the argument that modern commerce would have a pacifying effect on humanity: that it would help direct self-interest productively, that it would divert passions and energies that were fruitlessly spent in religious wars and conflicts over aristocratic glory and honour, and that it would lead to the development of gentle manners and peace among nations. Versions of this argument were made by, for example, Montesquieu, who famously wrote about the virtues of "*le doux commerce*" ("soft" commerce), which "polishes and softens [*adoucit*] barbarian ways" (quoted in Hirschman, 1977, p. 60). It was argued by some that the pursuit of self-interest, rightly understood ("enlightened" self-interest), would lead to individual and collective prosperity and happiness. Proof of this was the perceived contrast between "the polished nations"—a term used at the time to designate the wealthier, commerce-focused countries in Western Europe—and the "rude and barbarous" ones (p. 61). Hirschman suggests that this contrast might be "the first attempt at expressing a dichotomy that reappeared later under such labels as 'advanced-backward,' 'developed-underdeveloped,' and so on" (p. 61).

While community organizations today do not justify their approach by contrasting it with the prospect of religious wars, many make the claim, implicitly or explicitly, that improving the employability and entrepreneurial acumen of the youth who attend their programs constitutes a meaningful contribution to the development of their communities. The implication is that access to technology and the transfer of a set of skills to some youth will, on its own, allow their communities (often known as 'underserved' or of 'low socio-economic status') to develop and join the ranks of more advantaged localities. This is not so different in nature from the conviction that commerce can soften and polish nations.

The brief genealogy I am offering here would be incomplete without mentioning the gradual expansion of the middle-class itself—the so-called bourgeoisie. The very emergence of

this group as a socio-political reality was prompted by some of the above changes, and of course helped spur them on further. Gradually, their sensibilities and convictions would come to permeate much of the broader culture. The archetype of the bourgeois, at least for Weber, was none other than Benjamin Franklin. He exemplified the virtues David Hume (1965) so admired: "discretion, caution, enterprise, industry, assiduity, frugality, economy, good-sense, prudence, [and] discernment" (p. 86). This list of virtues is especially helpful in bringing into view the moral sensibilities associated with the ethical frame of the entrepreneur.

In a letter written to Benjamin Franklin by an admirer of his, the latter urges Franklin to publish his autobiography, telling him that his life story would "give a noble rule and example of self-education" (quoted in Franklin, 1996, p. 56). He adds that Franklin has made a "discovery" that "estimating and becoming prepared for a reasonable course in life … is in many a man's private power" (ibid). He continues:

> Your account of yourself … will show that you are ashamed of no origin; a thing the more important, as you prove how little necessary all origin is to happiness, virtue, or greatness. As no end likewise happens without a means, so we shall find, sir, that even you yourself framed a plan by which you became considerable; but at the same time we may see that though the event is flattering, the means are as simple as wisdom could make them; that is, depending upon nature, virtue, thought and habit. (pp. 57-58)

The writer of the letter is clearly besotted with Franklin and admires the way in which he was able to forge a path in life through his own power, apparently relying on nothing but his own talents and capacities, which led him to great wealth and prominence. This kind of admiration is of course echoed today in the idolization of modern entrepreneurs, which I mentioned above.

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I hope to have shown how skill talk, practicality, self-reliance, and employment are motivated by, or seen as attractive from the perspective of, a loose set of convictions, sensibilities, and understandings that took shape in the modern period. I suggest calling the contemporary iteration of this loose set of convictions, sensibilities, and understandings *the ethical frame of the entrepreneur*. From 'within' the ethic of the entrepreneur, what is concrete, efficient, and practical acquires a special aura of goodness; what is abstract, wasteful, and theoretical is looked at with suspicion, impatience, and even disgust. Work and a job well-done are elevated; idleness and a lack of productivity are only worthy of pity or contempt, and, if an 'entrepreneur' falls into them, are a source of guilt and shame for him or her. Independence, especially economic, is prized; dependence of any kind is bemoaned. The greatest pleasure is to devise a detailed plan in one's mind and then carry it out oneself, overcoming all obstacles in the way, until the work is complete, and one can enjoy the knowledge that the product was brought about through one's own, indomitable efforts, unaided, relying on one's own self and skills. Technology is typically seen as being at the heart of progress, and innovation in this area is particularly well-regarded. The progress of a community or society is viewed as primarily the result of the efforts of highly motivated problem-solvers who roll up their sleeves and apply their skills to whatever obstacles are preventing advancement.

The ethical frame of the entrepreneur is one of the major clusters of ethical ideals that exists in the ethical environment of community education in North America. But is this ethical frame helpful for community organizations? Or does it frustrate their work?

Assessing the entrepreneurial ethic

Having linked the ethical frame of the entrepreneur with the features of skill talk, practicality, self-reliance, and employment, I will now go on to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the entrepreneurial ethic in relation to the aims of the field: youth and community development. I will center my analysis on the four same features while also speaking more broadly about the frame itself, which will now be under scrutiny. As I mentioned above, community organizations tend to embrace these four features in ways that obscure their ethical ambiguity. Below, I emphasize these ambiguities in order to clarify the potential problems involved and to provide perspective for community organizations. To connect once more with Midgely's metaphor: now that I have shown where the tangle of pipes (the ethical frame) comes from, and how it motivates the features I highlighted at the outset of the chapter (which might be likened to more easily observable elements of plumbing: a faucet, a sink, etc.), I can now point to defects in the tangle of pipes and the faucets and sinks, which can cause numerous problems (leaks, etc.), as well as some of the salvageable components.

Skill talk

Robin Barrow (1987) has outlined some of the issues with skill talk, which he felt, at least back in the 80s, to be "ubiquitous in contemporary educational discourse" (p. 188). In the case of community education, skill talk appears to still be ubiquitous today. Barrow seems to be especially concerned with how skill talk may impede educational aims. A first issue is that the term 'skill' is often used to cover rather different kinds of things. Barrow notes at least a few different categories, some of which are probably even internally heterogeneous: physical or motor skills, intellectual skills, social skills, perceptual skills, and creative skills (and many

'skills' may in fact be difficult to classify, falling partly into different categories). In community education, as we have seen, there is also a rather diverse set of so-called skills on offer, from "life skills" (org. A) to "leadership skills" (org. B) to "employment skills" (org. D). One of Barrow's worries is that the generic term 'skill' may lead to questionable blurring of substantive differences—differences which may have significant educational implications.

Second, the skills to which educators refer also differ in terms of "the extent to which their precise constitution and boundaries can be determined" (Barrow, 1987, p. 188). Digital skills, for example, would presumably be easier to delimit than communication skills and leadership skills. Third, some skills can be learned autonomously (at least potentially), while others almost invariably require instruction or apprenticeship of some kind. This difference also tends to be obscured by indiscriminate skill talk. Fourth—and this comes as a result of the previous points—skills can and need to be acquired in a wide variety of ways, depending on their different natures. Again, the contrast between digital skills and leadership skills is indicative. Fifth, it is also questionable whether skills can even be learned as discrete units, apart from the contexts or activities that endow them with meaning. For example, what does it mean to learn so-called "leadership skills" (org. B), irrespective of the context or field in which one exercises leadership? Focusing on discrete skills might not only be insufficient for developing the relatively complex capacities organizations have in mind, but even antithetical to the project.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Barrow (1987) notes that skill talk tends to leave out "the extent to which such things as understanding, disposition, values and emotional maturity are involved in the acquisition of all but the simplest physical skills" (p. 189). On the one hand, sidestepping or underemphasizing the role of fostering the right understanding, dispositions, and values in skill acquisition will undermine the effectiveness of one's efforts to develop certain

skills in program participants, especially the more complex ones. On the other hand, even if one manages to develop in youth one or another skill, the fact that skill talk underemphasizes the extent to which acquiring skills is ultimately a *value-laden* enterprise means that educators will not realize the extent to which they are shaping the moral convictions and sensibilities of youth. One might, in effect, somewhat unawares, convey the values of the entrepreneur along with the skills. Some of those values are certainly desirable, say, diligence and perseverance. Others may be less so, say, the 'understanding' that work is the most important dimension of life, or that efficiency—defined somewhat narrowly—is the preeminent criteria of success.

"The concept of a skill," according to Barrow, "is closely tied up with notions of physicality, training and perfection through practice, and minimally involved with understanding" (pp. 190-191). He prefers to conceive of skills as a subset of the more general category of "abilities". I am inclined to agree with Barrow here. My sense is that it is unhelpful and perhaps problematic to call certain more complex abilities or capacities 'skills' (see also Winch, 2012). One reason this is the case is that the term 'skill' implies or at least evokes the idea that the activity in question can be perfected through repeated practice and can be successfully detached from context. However, more complex abilities depend a great deal on context. Take, for example, so-called "decision-making skills" (org. A), which some community organizations hope to foster in their program participants: surely, one's effectiveness at 'making decisions' depends on the area in question. It is one thing to make effective decisions about one's personal ecological footprint, quite another to make good decisions about allocating tasks to a team of volunteers. We might even question—as Barrow does in the case of critical thinking—whether decision-making can even coherently be called a single skill. Even more concerning, the 'skill to make decisions' (assuming for a moment that such a skill exists) could potentially be

learned as part of very different kinds of activities—some of which might be ethically questionable.[9] To view decision-making as a single skill may thus also be ethically precarious, as it obscures the way in decision-making is linked to complex, value-laden practices.

Another kind of 'skill' that baffles Barrow is the category of social or (inter)personal skills. I admit to being similarly thrown off by this category, which is frequently evoked in community education. As Barrow (1987) puts it, "in general, being sociable, pleasant, etc. … is a matter of being a certain kind of person and understanding particular people and situations" (p. 194) and not the result of being, for example, "trained to perform particular behaviours and formal cognitive operations" (ibid). Of course, there are certain skills involved in being sociable, pleasant, etc., in which one can be trained, but I take Barrow's point to be that, in order to be more than just, say, 'behaviourally' or 'superficially' sociable, pleasant, etc., one has to not only act in certain ways but also embody a certain way of being or possess certain attributes. One category of attributes that is almost entirely avoided here, or perhaps reduced to skills, are the virtues. More broadly, reducing most educational objectives to skill-acquisition obscures the complex nature of the capacities community organizations hope to develop in young people (i.e., the capacities required to contribute to the development of their communities). This obfuscation also detaches skill acquisition from the aim of cultivating moral judgment.

Behind skill talk, Barrow (1987) detects a "dominant trend of our times that sees education and teaching as essentially a scientific enterprise, and that seriously assumes that … to be successfully educated is … to have developed a set of intellectual and emotional behaviours"

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[9] Would we say that, for example, Adolf Eichmann possessed the skill of decision-making? In a sense, yes, and he was perhaps even good at it; no doubt he made countless logistical decisions every day, many of which were 'successful'. But in another sense, his decision to accept the task of coordinating the transportation of Jews to concentration camps in the first place, and to be good at it, was clearly the wrong one (Arendt, 1963).

(p. 195). Arendt (1961) would probably have echoed this observation. She argued that the elevation of "doing" and skills—which I mentioned above—leads to the *displacement* of learning and knowledge in education (pp. 182-183). The modern reversal in the hierarchy of human capacities, she felt, had largely negative consequences for education. The overemphasis on skills may interfere with the efforts of community organizations to truly foster in young people the complex set of capacities required to contribute to the development of one's community—capacities that certainly rely on a great deal of knowledge and understanding, and which often include numerous virtues.

It should be obvious that much of what I have outlined above applies equally to the so-called "21st century skills" (mentioned explicitly by org. G, but gaining in popularity generally in the field of education). These skills, at least in one of the most famous iterations, are divided into three categories: "learning & innovation skills", "information, media & technology skills", and "life & career skills" (Battelle for Kids, 2019). Learning and innovation skills, which "are what separate students who are prepared for increasingly complex life and work environments in today's world and those who are not" (ibid), include creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication, and collaboration. Under information, media, and technology skills, we find information literacy, media literacy, and ICT (information, communications, and technology) literacy, which are apparently "functional and critical thinking skills" (ibid). Life and career skills, finally, are flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, and leadership and responsibility; these are summarized as "thinking skills, content knowledge, and social and emotional competencies", which are required to, again, "navigate complex life and work environments" (ibid). Even this brief glimpse of the language invoked in the discourse on 21st

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century skills leaves an unavoidable impression of narrowing education to worker preparation. As I will explain further below, under the rubric of employability, I think this aim, if exclusively and narrowly pursued, can conflict with the aims of youth and community development.

However, I hasten to add, dropping *all* mention of skills is certainly not the solution to skill talk (nor is this Barrow's suggestion). It is not that *all* skills are irrelevant to the aims of youth and community development. To the contrary, young people need many skills if they are to contribute to the development of their communities. The point is to remember that not everything they need can appropriately be called a skill, and that even the skills they do need are probably more complex than most educators assume. Richard Smith (1987), though broadly agreeing with Barrow on the invidious nature of skill talk, feels that we should keep in sight the educational value of at least certain skills. He has in mind what he calls "craft skills", such as gardening or carpentry. He explains how the exercise of these craft skills can develop numerous virtues, such as patience and a concern for precision that "shades into devotion to truth and knowledge" (p. 198), and even "brings relief from the nagging demands of the ego" (pp. 198-199). This is in part because craft skills involve

> [w]orking with what is wholly *other*, which has its own nature and cannot be forced in compliance with our desires and fantasies—the plant that requires the right conditions and will grow at its own speed, the wallpaper that will tear unless handled just so … (p. 198)

Smith argues that craft skills can help us maintain our humanity, avoiding the overly-disengaged stance towards the world that modernity has made so common. These are surely helpful effects that would contribute to youth development. They are also, by nature, bound up with specific,

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material contexts of practice (e.g., carpentry), thus protecting them to a degree from being appropriated into ethically questionable practices (like "decision-making" could be).

Incorporating Barrow and Smith's insights into the work of community organizations would certainly imply changes, for example, at the level of the language employed and the kinds of educational activities designed to foster the relevant skills—some of which would be rebaptized as abilities or capacities, presumably implying adjustments when it comes to how they are taught. Recognizing that the bias towards skills emanates from the ethical frame of the entrepreneur allows one to make these kinds of deeper changes in approach as opposed to merely cosmetic ones (e.g., dropping talk of skills, but in practice continuing to favour "doing" over "being" in educational activities). At issue here is not simply 'skill talk' but the *valuing* of skills *over* understandings, virtues, dispositions, and the capacity for moral judgment, which are arguably much more crucial for youth and community development. An unreflective adherence to the ethical frame of the entrepreneur obscures the deeper problems with skill talk.

Practicality

The general emphasis on practicality in community organizations is certainly salutary in some respects. There are real dangers associated with being overly theoretical—the ivory tower disconnected from reality, etc. Academics, for example, are often free to entertain various theories without much concern for practice: they swoop in, conduct their observations and interviews, or carry out their action-research, and then retreat to their tower—interaction usually ends there. They then interpret their data in various ways and milk it to publish as many articles as possible. Then the grant money runs out and the cycle starts again. Ideally, their articles are insightful, and may even circulate back into practice, but this is not always the case (sometimes it

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might be a good thing that some articles remain bound to the ivory tower). The field of youth and community development, however, cannot operate like this. One is responsible for and sees the practical effects of one's ideas. And one is usually in it for the long-term: some program participants, at least, stay with organizations for years. In the final analysis, the work of youth and community development should certainly pay close attention to practical results.

However, the overall stress on practicality can also result in a form of anti-intellectualism that, in the final analysis, leads to an impoverished understanding of the practical. While it is true that *some* 'abstract' or 'theoretical' considerations can hamper the work of youth and community development, this is clearly not always the case. In fact, a blanket tendency to dismiss conceptual questions can lead to its own extremes that can limit the effectiveness of community organizations. This is in part because of the very nature of community development. The concepts and principles that guide youth and community development (e.g., participation, capacity-building, etc.) are in need of continual clarification and re-articulation as the work proceeds. One's ends are not as crystal clear as in, say, an engineering problem. In the latter case, one's end or objective is entirely clear (say, building a serviceable bridge), but the best means must be identified. In the case of youth and community development, not only is there the question of means, but the *ends* need to also be regularly brought into view and clarified. And they will likely change in various ways as an organization gains experience. But it is difficult to carry out this kind of conceptual clarification in an environment that is instinctively averse to the conceptual—that has flattened reality to the practical, as it were.

To raise a conceptual point (e.g., What do we mean exactly by 'participation'? Shouldn't we think a little more deeply about 'motivation'?) often causes other staff to mentally check out. Of course, this is in part because budgets are tight, and time is limited. Nevertheless, a general

aversion to the conceptual can stifle reflection, and, ironically, reduce the overall effectiveness of an organization. For example, this tendency can make one susceptible to quick, technical fixes that often create more problems than they solve. I think this is one reason the field has, according to some scholars, been so susceptible to the infiltration of neoliberal ideals. Kwon (2013), for example, explains how non-profit organizations have often become "a technology of neoliberal governance" (p. 5). To operate almost exclusively in a "doing" mode, moving from project to project, renders one particularly susceptible to fads and fashions in the field, and even subtle forms of cooptation.

The ethical frame of the entrepreneur obscures the dangers of a narrow conception of practicality (or rather, those overly influenced by this frame cannot even perceive that their conception of practicality is narrow). A kind of instrumental rationality, focused more on means than on ends, characterizes the entrepreneurial ethic. Although community organizations may of course occasionally employ an instrumental rationality (e.g., how can we transport the materials for the workshop to the community center?), this kind of rationality is unsuited to the overall work of youth and community development. Community educators require something more akin to the "practical rationality" described by Joseph Dunne (1993), which is sensitive to differing understandings of substantive ends and their role in shaping means. This kind of rationality is associated with Aristotle's conception of *phronesis*, sometimes translated as practical wisdom or judgment. This is how Dunne (1993) articulates the dynamic nature of 'ends' in situations that demand practical rationality:

> Rather than having the end unproblematically available from the beginning—in such a
> way that it apparently provides a clear-cut criterion against which the candidacy of

different possible means can then be evaluated—in one's deliberation one may in fact be defining or refining the very end. (p. 352)

Instrumental rationality—and the over-emphasis on practicality with which it is associated—does not allow much room for defining or redefining ends. For the overly practical entrepreneur, ends are "unproblematically available from the beginning", and there is no point revisiting them—this would be a waste of time. This mentality, it should be clear, will not allow a community organization to progress very far. Community educators need to move beyond instrumental rationality. Dunne's practical rationality is still, well, *practical*—but not in the narrow and anti-intellectual sense mentioned above.

Self-reliance

Self-reliance is often associated with certain praiseworthy attributes, dispositions generally esteemed by the entrepreneur. Some of these might fall in the category of virtues that Richard Peters (1981) calls "executive virtues". This subset of virtues appears to be relatively "content- and teleology-free" in that they do not specify 'what' we should do, only 'how' we should go about it (Peters, 1981, p. 94). While not sufficient in and of themselves, these virtues and attitudes, such as persistence and determination, are certainly necessary for being able to successfully carry out *any* endeavour—including the aims of youth and community development. Young people surely need to develop determination and perseverance if they are to overcome the various obstacles they will inevitably face as they strive to contribute to the development of their communities. Other examples of character traits that are valued by the entrepreneur and could be associated with self-reliance include resourcefulness, diligence, and attention to detail.

However, a focus on self-reliance in particular carries with it numerous issues. There is everything to be said about fostering a spirit of initiative among young people and strengthening their volition. But, as Harry Brighouse (2006) reminds us, "there is something artificial about anyone's sense of self-reliance" (p. 31). He explains that

> all of us operate in a world over which we have limited control, and in which the amount we earn depends on other people's preferences, judgements, and decisions, as much as, if not more than, our own efforts and talents. … We are not literally self-reliant, and it cannot literally be the case that we all put in as much as we take out, as it were … (p. 32)

But, one might ask, what's wrong with believing that "we all put in as much as we take out"? There are two, related problems here.

First, despite our best efforts, the results we obtain (i.e., what we take out) are sometimes relatively minimal or even nil. This might happen because the plans we made were unrealistic, our own capacities are too initial at present, some unpredictable obstacles interfered, or—what is often the case in youth and community development—the task before us is not so straightforward (many professionals with more resources than us are equally stumped) and we need to do a lot more learning to figure out how to tackle it. Some obstacles may also be structural in nature, including racism or other forms of prejudice; marginalized youth in particular often face many of these kinds of obstacles. A blind conviction in the power of self-reliance, however, has difficulty interpreting setbacks as anything but personal failures that reflect on the self. This can easily lead to contempt for oneself; if repeated often enough, one can even slide into self-loathing. Motivation to develop one's own capacities and to contribute to community development drains quickly when one finds oneself in such a condition.

The second problem with self-reliance is equally pernicious. Sometimes, the results we obtain are more than satisfactory: we experience moderate or even immense success. The reasons can be many: luck,[10] supportive conditions, the guidance of experienced peers and adults, and, of course, the intensity of our own efforts. Emphasizing self-reliance, however, causes us to overlook the myriad factors that combined to help us achieve our goals, and we focus on the significance of our own efforts in an individualistic way. As a result, one can begin to develop an unwarranted sense of pride in one's own accomplishments. In addition, one can easily begin to look upon others who are unable—for whatever reason, including structural or systemic issues—to achieve the same kind of 'success' as us, as just not trying hard enough, or perhaps fundamentally incapable. A sense of superiority, combined with a lack of empathy and understanding, can even turn into callousness and contempt. These states of mind are just as detrimental to the goals of youth and community development as self-loathing. Pride and impatience with others hamper the ability of young people to contribute to the development of their communities. These attitudes may help them get ahead in the business world, where ambition and lack of concern for others are sometimes even rewarded, but this is not what the community organizations I have in mind are aiming at.

A study (Lardier et al., 2019) conducted among 85 urban youth of colour in an American city echoes some of what I have outlined above. According to the researchers, many of the youth they interviewed who had made significant efforts "to stay on a positive track" (p. 489) had

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[10] In fact, the perplexing question of moral luck (e.g., Nagel, 1979; Williams, 1981) may be one way of framing the central problem to which the self-reliant entrepreneur is blind. Without delving into the vast philosophical literature on moral luck (for a recent statement of its inevitability, see Cyr, 2021), I can suggest that if it is true that we are not *completely* in control of our own successes or failures, an absolute conviction in self-reliance *has* to be misguided. This suggestion need not land us in determinism. The point is not that *nothing* is in our control, but that the nature of the agency we do have demands some other stance than self-reliance.

benefitted or were benefitting from at least "a thin layer of support" (ibid) from others. They were not, therefore, self-reliant in any literal sense, having relied on family members or others. Despite this reality, the researchers were surprised to find that

> many of them were convinced that the only person they could rely on was himself or herself; that if they were to be successful, it was up to them, and that they would be the exceptions to what they saw around them: "I know I am going to college … because I know I'm getting out of here in a few more years." When asked how they would get there, these teens espoused a sense of individual self-reliance: "Basically myself. Everybody else ain't gonna do it." In essence, they saw themselves as the exceptions to what they encountered daily in their own communities. (pp. 489-490)

The researchers concluded that many of the youth have been essentially indoctrinated into 'the American Dream', which emphasizes self-reliance, and implied that this frame of mind is detrimental to their development:

> They [the youth] articulated an individual analysis of success, the narrative of exceptionality, and accepted the responsibility as individuals for their own success or failure. We found no clear alternative analysis on their part and no demands from the youth that their communities or society offers them more opportunities. They accepted that their fates rose and fell based on their own effort and self-determination, essentially espousing a familiar refrain from the American Dream. (p. 491)

> The grain of truth in all of this, particularly for these young people, is that no one will "do it" *for* them. They *do* need to exert effort and initiative, and cannot wait around for some outside intervention, even if they will almost inevitably need to rely on the help of others at some point along the way. However, the myth of self-reliance goes further than this, assuming that one can

"make it" just by relying on oneself, that relying on others is a form of weakness, and that those who don't make it have only themselves to blame. These assumptions are questionable, both empirically and ethically, and do not help marginalized youth.

If organizations emphasize self-reliance, then, they may be inadvertently leading young people into a bind. Should the youth fail, they will blame themselves, even when it may not be their fault, or not entirely their fault. This orientation can easily sap motivation. Should they succeed, they will be blind to the support that helped them along the way. In the latter case, they may then ignore the necessity of this support in making future plans, avoid seeking it out, or even refuse it when offered—convinced as they are that they can only rely on themselves (I have witnessed this happen many times in my own experience). This attitude may then limit their future development, as well as their willingness to contribute to the development of their community, which, after all, relies on cooperation. Whether young people encounter success or failure, then, the ideal of self-reliance can frustrate youth and community development.

While these two problems—contempt for oneself and a sense of superiority—may seem like polar opposites, and therefore unlikely to spring from the same issue of self-reliance, it is actually rather common for young people to experience both at once. Almost everyone excels in *some* sphere. They may be good at math. Or it could be a particular video game. It may even be the intricate discussions of a rather obscure subculture that thrives online. In some sphere, then, young people may develop a strong sense of self-reliance and even pride, while in others they may develop a deep sense of incompetence and a fear of failure. The two can coexist.[11] It is also

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[11] Some of the researchers who study so-called mindset theory have made a similar observation: that an individual may have a 'growth mindset' in one area, while at the same time possessing a 'fixed mindset' in another. Briefly, possessing a growth mindset means that one believes that one's level of intelligence is not fixed but can grow, and possessing a fixed mindset implies the opposite belief. Some have also

the case that one might naturally excel in a given area, say, mathematics, but that one eventually encounters challenges in this field that are beyond one's natural abilities. An unwarranted sense of pride, which may have been due more to natural ability than personal effort, can then plunge one into despair and lethargy.

The issue is complex. The intensity and quality of our efforts matter, but they do not determine, alone, the results we achieve. If we have made wholehearted efforts and have nevertheless fallen far short of our objectives, it is unreasonable to blame ourselves. We should instead seek to learn what we can from our experience and continue persevering. Capacity takes time to develop, and the process of learning requires patience. And when we do encounter success, we should not let it seduce us into complacency or unreasonable pride, let alone a sense of superiority. An emphasis on self-reliance—which is a common feature of the ethical frame of the entrepreneur—obscures the understandings I have articulated here. Community education programs that center self-reliance may have difficulty fostering the right kinds of attitudes towards success and failure that are required in the realm of youth and community development.

Beyond the problematic psychological effects on young people themselves and their ability to contribute to community development, a focus on self-reliance finds a natural home among so-called neoliberal policies (Peters, 2012). Encouraging young people to rely on themselves, instead of, for example, raising consciousness among them about the link between the extremes of wealth and poverty, is naturally less threatening to the status quo. Many critics have pointed out how the wealthy have come to favour solutions to social and economic

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suggested that one's mindset can rapidly shift from one extreme to the other in response to various external conditions (see Dweck, 2016). I have certain reservations about mindset theory, but they are tangential to my purposes here and do not compromise the point I am making about self-reliance.

problems that place the focus on the victims themselves—e.g., a program for marginalized youth that focuses on fostering self-reliance—as opposed to the unjust systems that generate the victims in the first place (Giridharadas, 2018). There is everything to be said, as I mentioned above, about helping foster initiative in young people; but to pretend that the problems associated with community development are due primarily to a lack of skills and self-reliance is false. Moreover, the ideal of self-reliance can exacerbate individualism, reinforcing an atomistic culture that erodes civic participation (Kirshner, 2009, p. 432).

The issues with self-reliance also raise troubling questions about the moral exemplars to which young people aspire. I mentioned earlier the idolization of Benjamin Franklin and how many youth today look up to tech entrepreneurs or other apparently self-reliant wealthy business people. While this idolization may seem harmless, it has a more sinister, dark side. Symeon Brown (2018), for example, has documented the ways in which Jordan Belfort—the rogue trader convicted of fraud who became known as the "Wolf of Wall Street" (made popular by the film starring Leonado DiCaprio in 2013)—has become an inspiration to "thousands of young millennials from humble backgrounds". Brown focuses on the story of a young Londoner, Elijah Oyefeso, who is one among many who reveres Belfort. Oyefeso, and many others like him, display super-rich lifestyles on Instagram (posting pictures of themselves with expensive cars or videos boarding private jets), claiming to have made their fortune through clever financial trading. In reality, they make their money by drawing in other youth—including under-age teens, many of them residing in underserved neighbourhoods—into what is essentially high-risk gambling managed by shady companies taking advantage of lax financial regulations, promising them they will make money quickly and soon be able to experience their lavish lifestyle. When these youth lose hundreds, or even thousands of dollars, they are themselves drawn into the

process of recruiting others to make up for their losses, thus fostering a massive pyramid scheme spread through social media. Brown calls them the Wolves of Instagram.

Underneath the veneer of the ultra-rich lifestyle projected on Instagram, many of these Wolves still struggle financially, or end up in prison for a time, as Oyefeso did. Brown (2018) concludes that "this apparently young trader was an invention, incentivized by companies happy to exploit the gap between the life millennials are persuaded they should be living, and the harsh economic reality they live in." Far from being examples of self-reliant, rags-to-riches stories (such as, perhaps, Benjamin Franklin), they are in fact victims of exploitative companies. And while Franklin was no angel, at least he was still explicitly concerned with virtue and seemed to retain a sense that a life dedicated to the pursuit of material luxuries was somewhat empty. But even though the examples of Franklin and the Wolves of Instagram appear to be quite distant from one another, in substance and time, they both share the idea that material wealth acquired ostensibly by relying on oneself is a sign of greatness.

The real issue here, as Simone Weil (1952) might put it, is our very "conception of greatness" (p. 209). She argues that our (she was speaking to her French contemporaries) "false conception of greatness" is one of the "obstacles ... that separate us from a form of civilization likely to be worth something" (ibid). In fact, it is "the most serious defect of all, and the one concerning which we are least conscious that it is a defect: at least, a defect in ourselves; for in our enemies it shocks us" (pp. 209-210). She even argues that her contemporaries' conception of greatness is the same conception that "inspired Hitler's whole life" (p. 210). A few pages later, she explains that the only way of

deterring little boys thirsting for greatness in coming centuries from following [Hitler's]

example, is such a total transformation of the meaning attached to greatness that he

should thereby be excluded from it.

    It is chimerical … to imagine that one can exclude Hitler from the title to greatness

without a total transformation, among the men of today, of the idea and significance of

greatness. And in order to be able to contribute towards such a transformation, one must

have accomplished it in oneself. (p. 217)

Weil's characteristic extreme language brings the point home: we may condemn the Wolves of

Wall Street and Instagram, but there is something deeper in us (or at least, those of us influenced

by the ethical frame of the entrepreneur) that admires them. Part of this has to do with the myth

of self-reliance, while the other part will be explored under 'employment' below.

    It is certainly empowering to know that our efforts can have a real impact on our own

prospects and those of our community. But I doubt self-reliance is the right concept to capture

the complexities involved. In fact, in contrast to the other three features I am analyzing here,

self-reliance may even be unsalvageable; at least, I will not attempt to salvage it here. As

mentioned above, some of the ideas associated with self-reliance, such as the executive virtues

and an emphasis on effort and volition, are certainly salutary. But I think they are detachable

from the idea of self-reliance, which need not necessarily be retained.

Employability

    The focus on employment on the part of many of the organizations I reviewed is salutary

to a degree. Some community programs, even among the ones I studied, do not speak to

employment at all, which does not seem satisfactory. Work is, after all, an important dimension

of life, and as such it should receive attention on the part of community organizations concerned with youth development (Gillen, 2019, pp. 29-31). We should also not trivialize, especially in some contexts, the need for certain youth to earn a wage to meet some of their expenses, or to contribute to the income of their family. Young people served by community organizations often come disproportionately from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. If these organizations purport to serve them, they should certainly support them in this aspect of their lives. The attention to employment, encouraged by the way the ethical frame of the entrepreneur elevates work, can therefore constitute an asset, at least in some respects.

However, a relatively narrow focus on employment can also hamper organizations' efforts to advance youth and community development. Suppose a young person attends a community program, develops certain skills as a result, and therefore becomes more employable. They then get a job, perhaps where this had been impossible before, or a better paying job than they would have had access to otherwise. Over time, they manage to achieve some degree of social mobility, perhaps ultimately moving to a more affluent neighbourhood. Through the lens of human capital theory (Schultz, 1961), this might be seen as a straightforward case of an investment (made by whoever funds the community program—and there is also the time invested in the program on the part of the young person) yielding a return (a higher paying job for the former program participant, who is now contributing more to the economy). But, if we look beyond the theory of human capital (e.g., Bouchard, 1998), is this genuinely a case of success? Is it a case of youth and community development? Perhaps partially. But surely not in any straightforward, unqualified sense—unless we rely on a rather narrow, 'economic' definition of youth and community development.

What a narrow focus on employment—and a human capital approach to education in general—often conceals is the implicit assumption that current economic and social arrangements are essentially fine, or need only be adjusted a little, and that youth therefore simply need to be assisted to climb the ladder, so to speak. What is implied here is that all communities are on a teleological path towards the idealized middle-upper-class suburb or the wealthy city neighbourhood. Now, *some* youth programs (few if any of the ones I reviewed, however) are conscious of these implications and seek to avoid them by emphasizing (in addition to the focus on employment) a transformative social justice agenda, one that would create or at least strive towards alternative social and economic arrangements, usually with an emphasis on freedom and egalitarianism. Jay Gillen (2019) writes stirringly about this approach in the context of the work of community organizations:

> We who believe in freedom are devising a system of education for a democracy that does
> not yet exist. This is not about students achieving success by America's current
> standards: income, status, property, and patriarchal authority. (p. 18)

Gillen hints, perhaps, at a change in our conception of "greatness", as suggested by Weil. He suggests that young people should *not* be encouraged to merely obtain work in the wider economy, which functions according to a logic that disadvantages large segments of the population. He argues—drawing on substantive practical experiences—that youth can be assisted to instead uplift their own communities, creating pockets of alternative political economies.

The quote above suggests that Gillen challenges the *worthiness* of income as a standard of success. The community programs he holds up as examples do in fact increase the income of young people, since they involve youth obtaining meaningful work. What distinguishes Gillen's approach from the entrepreneurial frame is that he has dislodged individual employability as an

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end, retaining it as a *means* to a more worthwhile end: community development. Gillen himself

is not so explicit about this re-ordering of goods, but I believe it marks a benign departure from

the ethical frame of the entrepreneur. The programs I reviewed likewise value community

development, but they do not address the potential tension between this aim and enhancing the

individual employability of youth.

Put differently, Gillen does not care much for social mobility as measured solely by

income, status, etc. He believes that community education should aim at building a different kind

of 'ladder', that leads to a different place (a different kind of 'development'). He does not want

the community he serves to simply become like any other ultra-wealthy community in

America—this would somehow not really be to the true benefit of its residents. He certainly

values economic development—again, the programs he holds up as examples are explicitly

focused on meaningful employment for youth—but this aim is seen as a means, if I am reading

him correctly.

There are aspects of Gillen's approach that expose and challenge the *materialism* into

which the ethical frame of the entrepreneur can easily slide—sometimes on purpose, sometimes

inadvertently. But this challenge must be carefully articulated. The genuine material needs of

young people and their communities should in no way be neglected or trivialized. But neither

should a narrow, material conception of success and development be allowed to govern the

direction of progress—lest community education simply replicate current social and economic

conditions. The ethical frame of the entrepreneur does not appear to contain the requisite

intellectual and moral resources to meet this challenge.

Rejecting materialism requires an ethical formation beyond training for employability. It

requires the recognition, for example, that a life dedicated solely to acquiring material wealth is

empty, that greed debases the individual, and that income alone is not a measure of the worth of a human being. Few if any of these kinds of statements can be found in the language of the community organizations I reviewed. Without these convictions (and others), there is nothing to stop the ethical frame of the entrepreneur from sliding into crass consumerism or even the kind of ethic espoused by the Wolves of Instagram.

Moreover, this slide, even when viewed from *within* the entrepreneurial ethic, constitutes a problem, since the entrepreneur values diligence and efficiency and abhors waste, but a consumer culture obsessed with luxuries erodes these sensibilities. In other words, the ethical frame of the entrepreneur, if it dominates the ethical environment of any area, is unsustainable and cannot reproduce itself. William Desmond (2001) argues that some of the dispositions associated with the frame, which he calls "serviceable disposability", cannot, in the final analysis, lead to "the good of the other, or indeed of the self, despite the surface pervasiveness of self-interest" (p. 443). He continues:

> Its necessity in relation to pragmatic affairs is governed by useful expedience rather than excellence beyond expedience. Its relativization of the good to use-values is dissembling, since a complete occlusion of inherent ends would precipitate an inexorable slide towards nihilism. … There would be no point to [togetherness], other than the infinite multiplication of finite satisfactions, none of which proves satisfactory in the end. And so a community lacks ultimate purpose if the business of serviceable disposability exhausts its creative energies. Its freedom refashions itself into a bondage to the products it consumes to slake its own emptiness. The omnivorous devouring of worldly resources does not, cannot, slake this emptiness. (p. 443)

These consequences are not, of course, intended by community organizations influenced by the ethical frame of the entrepreneur. The argument here is that the focus on employment and material gain can lead to an overall attitude that prizes expediency and 'use' over everything else, which can in turn erode moral purpose entirely.

Conclusion

The ethical frame of the entrepreneur brings with it both significant strengths and weaknesses for the work of youth and community development. Its emphasis on the executive virtues, the practical nature of their aims, and work are important assets. It would be difficult to envision succeeding in the aim of youth and community development without endowing young people with diligence and resourcefulness, if programs were entirely theoretical in character, or if they trivialized the role of work and the importance of earning a living. However, emphasizing the practical also has its dangers: skill talk can narrow educational aims and one can become overly practical in a way that flattens vital conceptual questions and generates a mild form of anti-intellectualism. What is more, the ideal of self-reliance promoted by the ethical frame of the entrepreneur is ultimately incoherent. In general, the overall issue with most of these features, and with the frame itself, is that they overemphasize *means*, sometimes mistaking them as ends, or just focusing attention on them to the detriment of ends, which need to be carefully and continuously considered in a practical domain like youth and community development. Community organizations in the thrall of the ethical frame of the entrepreneur are generally more likely to overemphasize means and thereby risk miseducating young people and hampering their ability to contribute to the betterment of their communities.

Should the ethical frame be abandoned, then, despite its strengths? Instead of abandoning it, organizations should undertake a 'sifting' process. This is a task facing those organizations that have decided to devote themselves to youth and community development: they need to recognize the influence of the ethical frame of the entrepreneur on their operations, preserve the insights it offers them, and rein in its excesses. This should help them become more aware of the values they are promoting among young people through their language and activities. With this expanded consciousness, they can then decide how they will adjust their work. This may involve, for example, diversifying their educational aims beyond skill acquisition or refraining from reducing all human attributes to skills; ensuring that conceptual concerns facing the organization are not swept under the rug in the name of practicality; and exploring other forms of agency beyond self-reliance. I address this 'sifting' task in more depth in the last chapter.

Chapter 4: The ethical frame of the activist

Introduction

This is the second of four chapters dedicated to an analysis of the four major ethical frames dominating the ethical environment of community organizations. Similar to the previous chapter, I will begin by identifying certain 'features' of the community organizations that are related to the ethical frame in question—in this case what I have called the ethical frame of the activist. Again, these features will include particular 'human kinds' used in the language employed by the organizations, as well as observations from my own experience in the field and examples from ethnographic studies. I have grouped the features I identified into three interrelated categories/themes: *empowerment*, *critical thinking*, and *the passion for equality*. I will describe these features more or less neutrally in the first section, merely highlighting them and describing some of the sensibilities and convictions that seem to be involved.

The second section traces these sensibilities and convictions to certain general trends in modernity, contextualizing their emergence and further characterizing the patterns of thinking and feeling associated with them. I call this loose set of sensibilities and convictions the ethical frame of the activist, or the activist ethic. Like with the other ethical frames, this is not a sophisticated philosophical position or an elaborate framework. The term picks out a particular tangle of pipes under the floorboards—to return to Midgley's analogy—which motivates the features outlined in the first section, helping to explain their attractiveness. As a reminder, the frame is also not directly related to 'activism' per se—i.e., I am not primarily aiming to describe activists or activism (though the ethnography I will examine does explore youth activism).

Rather, I am pointing out a loose set of convictions, sensibilities, and ways of thinking and feeling that shape the work of many community organizations.

Finally, in the third part of the chapter, I return to the features highlighted in the first section, as well as the ethical frame of the activist that animates them, and assess these in light of the aims of the organizations I have selected: youth and community development. Like with the entrepreneurial ethic, the specific features I have highlighted are not necessarily to be categorically rejected. Some of the convictions and sensibilities involved are even conducive to the ends of youth and community development. However, the analysis below will show that each of these features, as typically interpreted and implemented through the lens of the ethical frame of the activist, yields actual or potential problems for community organizations.

Analyzing community organizations

A number of different features emerged that were related to the ethical frame of the activist. I have grouped most of them, for purposes of clarity, into three categories or themes: *empowerment*, *critical thinking*, and *the passion for equality*. As in the previous chapter, each of these features has certain ethical ambiguities, which I will explore more thoroughly further below. For now, I am simply noting these features and describing their contours, in order to show their link with the ethical frame of the activist. All but three of the twelve organizations I studied (orgs. C, J, & K) included at least one reference to the activist ethic that I found. None of the organizations I examined drew exclusively on language associated with the activist ethic. Three organizations (orgs. B, D, & E) blended the activist frame with human kinds and related concepts connected to other frames (the significance of some of these combinations are explored in Chapter 7).

Empowerment

Many of the organizations I examined are committed to "empowering" (org. D) youth and helping them develop "leadership" (orgs. A, B, D, E, & L) or become "leaders" (orgs. D, H, & I). The terms 'empowerment' and 'leadership' frequently appear in the language on their websites and in their reports. The concept of empowerment that seems most relevant to the ethical frame of the activist is tied to decision-making: it is felt that young people will be empowered when they are given space (i.e., left as much as possible free from interference) to make their own, autonomous decisions about the activities they will undertake as a group, about developments in their communities, etc.[12] (Leadership also sometimes has this connotation.) For example, one organization states in a report that the agency itself was "built for youth, by youth and with youth" (org. E). They explain that "Youth are sought for their input and hired for their expertise; they assume leadership positions and have decision making authority in program planning, recruitment, and governance" (org. E). Another organization explains that "when young people make their own decisions", they "gain a sense of responsibility" (org. B). This kind of empowerment is thus seen as having an important place in the process of youth and community development.

In many cases, the process of empowering youth appears to be conceptualized as a *transfer* of power. It is assumed that adults usually have power (to make decisions, etc.), but that in the context of the community organization's programs, the staff will give up at least some of that power and offer it to the youth. The transfer of power here seems to be motivated in part by

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[12] This is not the only sense in which the term empowerment is used by community organizations. Another sense of empowerment seems to be that of skill-acquisition; for example: "empower rural youth, giving them the skills and tools they need". This kind of empowerment appears to me more connected to the ethical frame of the entrepreneur. I return to the theme of empowerment in Chapter 7.

a commitment to equality: there is a perceived power *imbalance* between the youth and the staff (and/or the wider society), so power needs to be redistributed more equally. This same concern is evident in the focus of many organizations on "accountability" (org. G) and "advocacy" (org. L): engaging in advocacy and calling for accountability are means of ensuring that authorities, who cannot be trusted, remain responsive to those with less power.

Practically speaking, staff often create opportunities for program participants to offer input or to decide what kinds of activities they will carry out. In some cases, there is also emphasis on letting young people make their own mistakes (Gillen, 2019). Even if staff do not let program participants decide on the nature of the activities undertaken, in most organizations with which I am familiar the educators at least strive to 'facilitate' dialogues and projects instead of directing them. Many staff shrink away from the suggestion that they are 'teaching' at all and prefer the title of 'facilitator.' There appears to be a widespread suspicion of hierarchies and of authority generally (which does not mean, of course, that some forms of hierarchy or authority do not exist in such organizations or are not being implicitly promoted). A 'facilitator' appears more egalitarian and democratic, whereas a 'teacher' appears to imply some kind of superior authority, from which the staff instinctively recoils. The role of facilitator is thought to be conducive to 'empowerment', whereas a teacher is not. Again, there appears to be an egalitarian sensibility behind such preferences.

The content of the workshops and dialogues facilitated by staff naturally differs a great deal from program to program. A subset of these—relevant to the ethical frame of the activist— tend to examine one or another social issue or injustice and encourage young people to be critical of and to question existing policies and structures. In some cases, youth are encouraged to

organize and take political actions of one kind or another. These outcomes are related to the conception of empowerment held by the organizations.

Critical thinking

Another aim of several organizations—indeed, the objective of many workshops—is fostering in young people "critical thinking" (orgs. A & H). A manual used by one organization suggests, for example, that this means "calling into question … assumptions underlying our customary, habitual ways for thinking and acting" (org. H). A dissertation on this same organization, written by someone who participated in its programs, indicates that its "workshops use critical thinking about conflicts" to provide "an opportunity to unveil power dynamics and other oppressive forces hidden within social structures" (Meldrum, 2015, p. 65). While the term is not always used in this way (some organizations appear to conceive of critical thinking as a kind of entrepreneurial skill, for example), the above organization conceives of critical thinking as something that illuminates our perception, rendering us sensitive to injustices of which we may not have been aware. With this knowledge in hand, we are supposed to be better equipped to perceive hidden forms of oppression—subtleties that are invisible to those who are deprived of this form of thinking. Learning this kind of critical thinking is also seen as part of the empowerment of young people, as it is a prerequisite for tackling power imbalances in society (how are youth meant to address them if they cannot see them?).

The passion for equality

The passion for equality appears to be a powerful sensibility that suffuses much of the language of the organizations I studied and many of the features of their work. It is also related to the suspicion and distrust of authority mentioned above: authority is suspect in part because it

seems to contradict equality. And another way of describing the desire to 'transfer' decision-making power to youth is a desire to 'equalize' the power held by adults and youth; to rectify a power imbalance is, in a rough sense, to equalize the power held by two or more groups—according to the thinking here. Thus, the passion for equality undergirds the conception of empowerment at work in the thinking of the organizations.

Another indication of the passion for equality is the extent to which the term 'equity' recurs in the language of the organizations. One organization, for example, explains that it is "driven by deeply held values of equity and inclusion" (org. I). Another organization strives to ensure "equity for all peoples of diverse backgrounds" (org. D). The concept of equity is of course related to equality: the use of equity usually indicates an emphasis on equality of outcome, over a focus on equality of treatment that, it is claimed, would ignore certain individual differences that are deemed important. In fact, in popular discourse, equity has largely displaced equality and is often pitted against it (Minow, 2021); the same seems to have occurred in the rhetoric of the organizations I studied. Nevertheless, this preference for equity does not represent an abandonment of the ideal of equality, but rather a further, perhaps even more passionate commitment to it, combined with a particular emphasis on the importance of differences.

Another term that is particularly prominent in the language of the organizations is "inclusion" (e.g., org. I). Beyond the repeated use of this specific term, the commitment to inclusion—which is inextricably linked with the passion for equality—shows in the way these organizations often focus on reaching those who have been excluded, who have been considered beneath or less in worth, as unequal: "under-represented youth" (org. B); "Black, racialized, and newcomer youth" (org. E); and "peoples of diverse backgrounds" (org. D). "We welcome

everyone; diversity is our strength," writes one organization under the rubric of "inclusion" (org. E).

Related to this idea of inclusion, another advertised feature of the spaces created by the organizations is that they are "safe for youth to express their thoughts without being judged" (org. H). In general, community educators are keen to ensure that the educational spaces they organize are judgment-free. This same idea shows up in testimonials from program participants, who will report, for example, that staff "will never judge you" (org. K), or that they can express themselves "and not be judged" (org. K). The motivation behind avoiding judgment derives in part from a commitment to inclusivity and egalitarianism.[13] To judge someone else is seen to be an expression of one's sense of moral superiority in relation to the one being judged, a move that excludes the one being judged from the circle of equality. It is felt, then, that dialogues organized by staff (and other activities within the organization) should be judgment-free.

The passion for equality, which is embedded in the language and activities of the community organizations, also influences the young people themselves who participate in these activities. In some cases, youth will also develop a passionate commitment to equality. To help vividly illustrate this passion, I will refer here to ethnographic research on youth activists. Of course, youth who are directly involved in activism will probably demonstrate this passion more avidly than young people who only participate in the activities of a community organization that is partially shaped by the ethical frame of the activist. Nevertheless, the experience of these young people is valuable to examine, since it represents a logical extension of this same passion.

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[13] Another important rationale for creating judgment-free spaces, which I will not explore in this chapter since it is more relevant to the ethical frame of the artist, is the desire to create a 'therapeutic' environment for young people.

Jacqueline Kennelly (2011) has carried out an in-depth study of youth activist communities in Canada. She found that middle- and upper-middle class youth activists would often purposefully take on elements of a working-class identity—effectively hiding their relatively affluent backgrounds—in order to obtain and maintain credibility ("subcultural capital" in the language of Bourdieu, her theoretical lens) within their subculture. She calls this performance, which is known internally as "being radical", "*performing grunge*" (p. 77). As one of her interviewees explains:

> I think some people, when they become radical politically, they try to deny that they're middle class or that they came from that kind of background. And they go to sort of weird lengths. Like maybe they intentionally work at a lower-paying job or dress poor. (quoted on p. 94)

Another interviewee describes the pressure they feel to act in a similar way:

> I feel this pressure to live without comforts. I mean, I think that activism taught me to appreciate really simple things, which is great. Which is really important to, like, unhook yourself from the cycle of material culture and accumulation that is North America. But it's like, you know, toast and tea for breakfast, supper and dinner does not a sustaining diet make (*laughs*). It was just like, you know, everything that you wear has to be free or second hand, you could never own a house because ownership, property is theft. Everything in your life needs to be really difficult (*laughs*). And, joy can only come from really simple, free things. (quoted on p. 95)

I want to suggest that the motivation to engage in "performing grunge"—what another of Kennelly's interviewees describes as *downward* mobility—may come at least in part from what I have called the passion for equality. This passion is so strong among these young activists that to

even bear the marks of the middle-class is considered to be a kind of moral wrong. Again, most youth participants in the community organizations I studied will not move so far in this direction, but the same kind of passion for equality is at work.

The origins of the ethic of the activist

A number of interrelated developments in modernity can be pointed to as having contributed to the emergence of the particular conception of empowerment described above, with its associated suspicion of authority, the view of critical thinking as a capacity to expose injustices and power imbalances, and the passion for equality. I want to now look more directly under the floorboards, as it were, to see what sensibilities and convictions ground these features, and where they might come from. As a reminder, I will not engage here in any kind of original or elaborate intellectual history of these ideas. My primary purpose is pedagogical: to demonstrate the historical contingency of these ideas, and to better flesh out what I am calling the ethical frame of the activist. Several philosophers, intellectual historians, and sociologists have already developed insightful accounts of the evolution of these ideas. Below, I rely primarily on the work of Charles Taylor, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hannah Arendt, and Larry Siedentop.

Charles Taylor (1992) sees the seed of the passion for equality in the "collapse of social hierarchies, which used to be the basis for honor" (pp. 26-27). The older notion of honor to which Taylor is alluding here was inextricable from inequality; honor in this older sense would be meaningless if everyone had it. The 'equality of souls' that "superseded" honor eventually transformed into the modern conception of "dignity, now used in a universalist and egalitarian sense" (ibid). This modern sense of equal worth naturally motivates us to oppose all kinds of inequalities, fueling the modern passion for equality. While community organizations may not

necessarily use the language of universal dignity, the ones moved by the ethical frame of the activist, and who feel the passion for equality, clearly rely on some such notion.

Siedentop (2014) argues that one of the forces that contributed to the collapse of social hierarchies and the emergence of the concept of the equality of souls is the gradual unfoldment over several centuries of certain Christian ideas and practices, which he traces through theological debates, monastic practices, and the emergence of church canon law. He explains, for example, that there was a fundamental tension between the "Christian vision … of equality of souls in the eyes of God" and its cultural backdrop, "the traditional vision of social order – rooted in the assumption of natural inequality" (p. 157). Of course, the 'equality of souls' was mostly understood in a rather narrow sense that usually excluded non-Christians; nevertheless, according to Siedentop, the seed of equality was sown. Over the centuries, Christian philosophers and canon lawyers gradually came to promote other ideas associated with our modern sense of equality: that one cannot logically force people to act morally; that individual liberty should be defended by appeal to fundamental rights ('natural' rights, as they were called); and that, if souls are indeed morally equal, societies composed of such souls require some form of representative government. With hindsight, Siedentop argues, it appears inevitable that "the moral intuitions generated by Christianity were turned against an authoritarian model of the church" (p. 332) during the Protestant Reformation.

There is an obvious link between the anti-authoritarianism of early church reformers and the distrust of authority and tradition that came to pervade the Enlightenment. Gadamer (1975/2004) traces this link from the Reformation—"which teaches the right use of reason in understanding traditionary texts" as a means of bypassing the "doctrinal authority of the pope"

and "the appeal to tradition" (p. 279)—to the Enlightenment, which established a "mutually exclusive antithesis between authority and reason" (ibid). He continues:

> Based on the Enlightenment conception of reason and freedom, the concept of authority could be viewed as diametrically opposed to reason and freedom: to be, in fact, blind obedience. This is the meaning that we find in the language critical of modern dictatorships. (pp. 280-281)

The notion of critical thinking employed by the organizations I studied—directed primarily against authorities, hierarchies, and all power inequalities—makes more sense against this historical background. It is not a recent development, but rather springs from a long cultural revolt against the very concepts of tradition and authority. This broader context helps us to see why and how critical thinking has become such a desirable human attribute and to better understand the mindset that leads to its desirability.

Hannah Arendt (1961) echoes Gadamer's thought here and expands upon it. She argues that one of the most essential features of modernity is the rebellion against tradition, religion, and authority. She states that "a constant, ever-widening and deepening crisis of authority has accompanied the development of the modern world" (p. 91). Carefully distinguishing authority from both power and violence, as well as tyranny, she claims that "authority has vanished from the modern world" (ibid). In fact, modern sensibilities demand that authority and (what people call) power should vanish, due to the modern "conviction that all power corrupts and that the constancy of progress requires constant loss of power, no matter what its origin may be" (p. 97). Arendt sees modern revolutionary movements as connected to this general rebellion against authority and tradition—though they themselves are, in a sense, trying to establish a new foundation for authority and tradition, a foundation that would be compatible with freedom and

equality. This same suspicion of authority pervades many of the community organizations I examined, and I have seen it in my own experience in the area as well. This wider context helps us understand how this way of thinking became so widespread.

What we see, then, is the emergence of a family of related concepts—freedom, dignity, rights, equality—that combine to inform our modern sense of justice. Taylor (1989) adds to this list the modern "ideal of universal benevolence" (p. 395), which universalizes our sense of justice, pushing it beyond one narrow group (e.g., Christians, Europeans, etc.) to encompass all people, everywhere, and even at all times—at least in principle. This creates a very powerful imperative to struggle for justice and equality, for oneself, for one's group, and for every other group. Thus, the ever-widening circle of dignity is pushed outward via modern struggles for equal rights, which continues to expand the number of groups included, as well as the number of rights. The commitment to inclusion in the language and practices of the community organizations I studied comes in part from this ideal of universal benevolence. Again, organizations may not use this kind of language today (perhaps 'respect everyone' is today's equivalent of universal benevolence?), but they certainly rely on some such notion.

I want to return briefly to the passionate commitment to equality demonstrated by the youth activists interviewed by Kennelly, partly in order to make the connection with the intellectual history here a little clearer. While "performing grunge" may appear to be a rather peculiar subcultural phenomenon among activists operating in affluent neoliberal economies in the 21st century, lightyears away from the origins of the frame that I am tracing here, a direct line between the two can in fact be drawn. Take, for example, the experience of Aleksandr Serafimovich, a member of the Bolsheviks, who instigated the Russian Revolution of 1917. Prior to his role in the revolution, Serafimovich attended St. Petersburg University, where he was

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introduced to Marxism, and worked as a writer and a war correspondent during WWI. He was

not working class—famously, there was not much of a proletariat in Russia at the time of the

1917 revolution—though he had suffered because of his political views. After 1917, he became a

bureaucrat in the new government formed by the Bolsheviks. Finding himself in an elegant

sanatorium in 1926, he wrote to a friend about his moral discomfort with his accommodations:

> the sanatorium is so beautifully appointed that I am afraid I might turn into a bourgeois
>
> myself (what? you say I already am one?!). In order to resist such a transformation, I
>
> have been spitting into all the corners and onto the floor, blowing my nose, and lying in
>
> bed with my shoes on and hair uncombed. It seems to be helping. (quoted in Slezkine,
>
> 2017, p. 224)

The tone of this passage—written nearly a century ago—echoes the nervous laughter of

Kennelly's interviewee. A similar ethical frame moves both individuals. This frame imbues

equality with a special glow, so much so that the material advantages these individuals possess—

relative to the oppressed on whose behalf they struggle—fill them with discomfort. While there

are faint echoes of Christian asceticism here, the discomfort comes not from material possessions

as such, but rather springs from the concern for equality. This is, of course, a rather pronounced

form of the passion for equality. Most youth participating in the activities of the community

organizations I studied will not develop this moral sensibility to such a strong extent. And yet,

program participants may develop a version of it, given the way it permeates the discourse and

practice of many organizations.

There are, quite naturally, numerous debates about the meaning of equality and justice.

No one would argue that, even within the Western tradition, there is agreement about the

meaning of this family of concepts, let alone their implications for practice. Some theorists and

movements even reject equality as a foundational value—though as a result they find themselves 'embattled' in the modern world, in the sense that they are almost always on the defensive. Centering equality requires little justification today; *not* centering it makes one's message suspect. Indeed, Kymlicka argues (1990), following Dworkin, that all plausible political theories today have equality as a basic value; they only differ in terms of how they interpret equality and how they cash out its implications. One might argue against this claim (I would have some reservations), but the fact remains that, in modernity, the commitment to equality has become particularly pervasive. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I am only claiming that the emergence of a relatively widespread commitment to equality and a mounting distrust of authority and power, which, it is assumed, must be submitted to critique, have contributed to the rise of what I call the ethical frame of the activist, which influences the language and operations of many (though not all) community organizations today.

Before moving on, it is worth highlighting a special feature of the ethical frame of the activist, evident when one looks at its intellectual history. The frame appears to have an internal dynamic—propelled by the logic of its concepts—that pushes it to devise ever more critical and radical projects of emancipation. It is somewhat like peeling an onion: each layer of oppression one peels off appears to reveal another, deeper and subtler layer of inequality that the next generation of activists seeks to peel off. Protestant reformers, as mentioned above, attacked what they saw as the despotic and central authority of the Pope; many of the key figures of the Enlightenment, in turn, fought against traditional religion and absolute monarchies; Marx and the tradition he inspired adds to this the battle against capitalists and the logic of the market, and today they fight the neoliberal system; some critical theorists go further and see violence in the very workings of reason itself (e.g., Adorno & Horkheimer, 1944/1997); and some go even

further still, seeing the operations of power behind (or, rather, constituting) nearly every human interaction, including endeavours ostensibly aiming at justice and equality (e.g., Foucault, 1984/2010). This is a heterogeneous list of theorists and movements, many of whom see themselves as rivals. But they share in the general hermeneutical suspicion associated with the ethical frame of the activist. While the latter end of this spectrum is sometimes labeled 'postmodern' (by this point, the 'onion' has more or less been peeled into nonexistence), it typically does not escape modernity in the broad sense I am using here, in part because its sensitivity to injustice is a modern sensibility *par excellence* (Taylor, 2007, p. 256). The deeper one moves through the layers, the more naïve the earlier layers appear. Each generation of activists feels that the previous one did not go far enough and may have even unwittingly made matters worse in some respects.

This same dynamic also influences community organizations. While the ethical frame of the activist shapes youth and community development efforts generally, organizations differ as to how 'deeply' they are influenced by it. The more deeply they have gone, the more critical they tend to be of other entities that operate more superficially, as they see it. For example, an organization that involves youth in direct political action with the aim of making structural changes in society may be critical of another that merely helps youth increase their employment skills, leaving current structures untouched. Some even argue that most community organizations have been captured by the neoliberal state and its apparatuses of control (Kwon, 2013). There thus tends to be some degree of debate and even conflict between some of these organizations, which obscures the fact that they ultimately share in the same ethical frame. With the sensibilities and convictions of the ethical frame in view, we can better see the commonalities among these organizations.

To summarize and bring it into clearer focus, the ethical frame of the activist is distinguished above all by its passionate commitment to equality and its sensitivity to injustice, especially inequalities of all kinds—inequality as such becomes suspect from within this perspective. The sensibilities and convictions associated with the frame gradually emerged over several hundred years, developing from various beliefs and practices,[14] as well as key historical events, such as the Reformation and the revolutions of the eighteenth century. Over time, the passion for equality has become increasingly universal in its scope and aspiration, embracing, at the level of principle, every single human being as an equal. Another key feature of the activist ethic is its distrust of authority, hierarchies, and traditions, and the move to submit these to critical scrutiny. These elements of the frame shape the language and operations of community organizations and influence their program participants as well.

Assessing the activist ethic

So far, I have highlighted three features of community organizations—empowerment, critical thinking, and the passion for equality—and have linked these features with the ethical frame of the activist, whose origins I briefly described above. Each of these features presents certain strengths and weaknesses for the work of community organizations. In this section, I will assess the activist ethic in terms of its ability to help or hamper the work of youth and community development. I have organized the assessment into a number of themes: *authority*, *fostering critical thinking*, *self-righteousness*, *individual and social transformation*, and

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[14] While I highlighted its Christian origins above, this is far from the only tributary tradition that contributed to the emergence of the sensibilities and convictions associated with the ethical frame of the activist. That I am looking at organizations operating in North America simply makes it one of the most relevant tributaries to examine. There are, of course, many indigenous traditions, for example, that contain egalitarian ideals (e.g., Graeber & Wengrow, 2021).

resentment. These are all in one way or another related to problems the organizations face and that arise, I will argue, from patterns of conceptual confusions and ethical inarticulacy associated with the ethical frame of the activist. The tangle of pipes that is the ethical frame contributes to the emergence of these problems. Along the way, I will acknowledge certain strengths of the frame, and will comment on these again in the conclusion to this chapter.

Authority

As described above, community educators animated by the ethical frame of the activist tend to be suspicious and distrustful of power and authority. In my own experience in the field, for example, I have noticed that many do not want to be thought of or perceived as teachers and would rather take up the role of 'facilitator', which appears less authoritative. I have also seen many youth workers shy away from creating disciplined and structured environments in youth groups, partially out of a fear of being too authoritarian, or being perceived as such. Part of this stems from the passion for equality, which has difficulty stomaching the idea of one person or group of people being in authority over others. Empowerment itself is conceived partly as a more equal distribution of decision-making power. Therefore, in order to empower youth, staff often strive to downplay, hide, or even attempt to get rid of their authority. The consequences of this depend on circumstances of course, but I have seen it lead to general chaos as people speak over one another, frustration among the program participants who actually want to discuss and plan activities, the marginalization of those who are less assertive and loud, and in some cases outright bullying as patterns of behaviour common at school or in other places are simply replicated. Why do these problems arise and how are they related to the ethical frame of the activist?

Several theorists have discussed the issues that arise when this distrust of authority permeates educational theory and practice so thoroughly. One of these is Hannah Arendt, whose arguments I will follow here initially. Commenting on what was seen by many Americans at the time as a state of crisis in education, Arendt (1961) explains that the acuteness of the crisis was largely due to a particular political obsession that gripped the country, namely, the "struggle to equalize or to erase as far as possible the difference between young and old, between the gifted and ungifted, finally between children and adults, particularly between pupils and teachers" (p. 180). She observed that progressive educators appeared committed to the idea that a class of children constituted a kind of autonomous society that should be, as much as possible, left to engage in self-government. The teacher, then, "can only tell [the student] to do what he likes and then prevent the worst from happening" (ibid). This hands-off approach is adopted in order to emancipate the student from the authority of teachers; Arendt argues that it typically also leaves the individual child at the mercy of the tyranny of the majority of the students in the group or class. "The reaction of the children to this pressure tends to be either conformism or juvenile delinquency, and is frequently a mixture of both" (p. 182). A few pages later, she continues the same theme:

> Children cannot throw off educational authority, as though they were in a position of oppression by an adult majority—though even this absurdity of treating children as an oppressed minority in need of liberation has actually been tried out in modern educational practice. Authority has been discarded by the adults, and this can mean only one thing: that the adults refuse to assume responsibility for the world into which they have brought the children. (Arendt, 1961, p. 190)

It is the teachers, then, who have shaken off their authority, which, for Arendt, is inextricably linked to responsibility. We moderns, she argues, do not like authority (and we are also suspicious of "power"), but many of us often find responsibility equally distasteful—"the responsibility for giving orders no less than for obeying them" (p. 190).

The trend Arendt is explicitly exaggerating here also influences community organizations today, as we have seen in the language they employ and the ways in which community educators negotiate their roles. Educators in community organizations try to divest themselves of their authority in a variety of ways, some of which I described above. They are trying to equalize or erase the differences between themselves and program participants. While it is a good thing to explicitly avoid being *authoritarian*, authority itself is not necessarily bad. I have heard youth workers, however, say that they do not want to be authorities, or expressing the belief that exercising authority in any way—even to call program participants to certain standards of behaviour, like not talking over one another during discussions—would be teacher-like and disempowering. But to relinquish authority, as Arendt argues, is also to give up responsibility. This link between authority and responsibility is often unclear for community educators.[15]

Relinquishing authority also diminishes the ability of community educators to meet any educational objectives whatsoever, including ones that would be seen as valuable from within the ethical frame of the activist. One of the practices I mentioned above is the tendency for staff to prefer to call and conceive of themselves as 'facilitators' rather than teachers. Under a certain

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[15] There is some debate in philosophy of education and beyond about Arendt's conception of authority in education (Gordon, 1999; Kloeg & Noordegraaf-Eelens, 2022). Without getting into these debates, I should underscore that I am primarily interested in the critical thrust of her argument and her linking of authority with responsibility. Beyond this, I think we need to go to other scholars (below I give a couple of examples) to develop a more appropriate conception of authority for education—which is of course beyond the scope of this dissertation.

conception of the role, a facilitator seems to be more of an equal member of the 'dialogue' (another key concept for activist-inflected education) than a 'teacher'. Their opinion is just one among many opinions held by different members of the group. A facilitator lets the group decide; they may even withhold their opinion entirely. But, as many have pointed out (e.g., Yacek, 2021, pp. 34-39), there is an inherent tension between this egalitarian conception of a facilitator and the aims of any educational activities inspired by the ethical frame of the activist. Herein lies the tension: the hope of educators inspired by this frame is no doubt that, as a result of educational activities they carry out, students develop a stronger sense of justice and arrive at certain conclusions about the injustices and inequalities afflicting society. But what if the 'dialogue' happens to be heading in a different direction? Say, away from injustices in society and into frivolous gossip about celebrities? What is the 'facilitator' to do? If they intervene and redirect the dialogue towards the educational objectives they have in mind, are they not simply asserting a superior role in the conversation, disempowering the participants in the dialogue? What happened to an equal dialogue, one might argue?

There need be no tension here *if* the participants in the dialogue naturally glide towards the educational objective the facilitator has in mind, but this is a big 'if'. More often than not, in my experience, the 'facilitator' has to in fact play a more directive, and thus in one sense less equal or peer-like, role in the dialogue. In other words, the idea of an 'authority-less' facilitator is incompatible with achieving most substantive educational aims, including helping young people become aware of injustices in society. Either the facilitator exercises authority, but in an 'invisible' way (which, since it is implicit, might be considered manipulative), or they truly give up any responsibility to guide conversations, and the discussions migrate in the direction(s) decided by the loudest voices. What is discussed and concluded is then determined more by peer

pressure, which *can* be benign, but can also be detrimental to youth development. Either way, it is by definition out of the community educator's hands.

In my own experience as a community educator, unguided discussions among young people in the context of community programs tend to reflect the kinds of conversations that take place in their schools and online. Unfortunately, in the settings in which I have worked at least, these conversations are often frivolous in the best of cases, and harmful in the worst, in which blatant prejudice is sometimes expressed and bullying occurs. In some groups of youth, for example, racist jokes are commonly thrown about and peers constantly make fun of each other in ways that often escalate to hurt feelings and even fights. Shying away from authority in such circumstances is to condone unsafe spaces for young people and to abdicate responsibility for genuine youth development.

The radical distrust of authority among community educators, then, is both educationally incoherent and potentially detrimental to young people themselves. We do not serve youth by trying to emancipate them from our authority. The intention is good-willed, of course, but it is spurred by a conceptual confusion about the very concept of authority—an assumption that the exercise of all authority is almost always necessarily disempowering—that I traced earlier to various moments and movements in the intellectual history of Western modernity.

But *is* authority necessarily disempowering? What other conceptions of authority exist? A comprehensive analysis of the concept of authority is far beyond the scope of my dissertation, of course, but even a brief mention of alternative conceptions of authority in education may help decrease the distrust of authority and illuminate other possibilities of thought and sensibility.

Hirst and Peters (1970), for example, suggest that teachers (or in our case, community educators) can be conceived of as (non-authoritarian) authorities in the sense that they are

primarily authorities *in* the specific public forms of knowledge into which they are initiating students (pp. 122-124). From this perspective, teachers can be seen as provisional authorities—it is hoped that some of the students will, over time and in turn, become equals to their teachers in such authority, or even surpass them.

William Desmond's (2001) account of the relationship between teachers and students is also worth mentioning here. He argues that to conceive of the relationship as wholly "symmetrical" (what the passion for equality may insist upon) is to "show a failure of nerve: teacher and learner are not simply on a par" (p. 416). The kind of "asymmetry" involved here, however, "must suggest less a superiority that looks down on the learner as the opposite—the teacher must be *for* the other" (p. 416, emphasis added). At the same time, there is, in another respect, a different kind of symmetry between teacher and student:

> … teaching passes back and forth under a norm that is possessed neither by one or the other. This service of truth is not the service of you or me. We participate in an intermediation in which we must be willing to be servants of a good superior to either of us. (p. 416)

Both teacher and student are, in a sense, 'below' the truth they seek to serve. There is a kind of symmetry here that Desmond recovers.

Both examples above (Peters & Hirst's and Desmond's) offer alternative conceptions of the authority of the teacher that would better serve community educators. It helps calm the radical distrust of authority associated with the ethical frame of the activist by directly addressing the worry that the exercise of authority implies a morally objectionable hierarchical relationship in education. Authority, in either of the alternative senses I mentioned, can be exercised in ways that contribute directly to youth and community development as opposed to frustrating them.

Again, I have barely scratched the surface of the literature on authority in education, and do not pretend to have resolved the issues or tensions involved. But even glimpsing a couple of alternative conceptions of authority in education will have served my purpose here, which is merely to disrupt the aura of inevitability and rightness that a community educator enthralled by the activist ethic might feel about their distrust of authority.

Fostering critical thinking

A second, related source of problems for community education stems from the pervasive emphasis on 'critical thinking'. In general, critical thinking is no doubt a salutary attribute for young people to develop. Its defenders in educational theory (e.g., Siegel, 2017) have elaborated impressive accounts of it, many features of which would be useful for community organizations to become acquainted with. An emphasis on analyzing reasons, for example, is one feature of these kinds of accounts. The problem, of course, is that critical thinking is rarely if ever conceptualized by organizations in such a sophisticated way. In the context of educational activities shaped by the ethical frame of the activist, the aim of fostering critical thinking may even become counterproductive, working against the aims of youth and community development. It can become counterproductive because it is often conceived of as a context-free skill in direct opposition to the concepts of authority and tradition, cutting young people off from valid sources of knowledge, causing some to become merely contra-suggestible, and making them vulnerable to conspiracy theories.

The first problem is that critical thinking—viewed from within the ethic of the activist— is often conceived of as diametrically opposed to authority (of course, the same misguided conception of authority analyzed in the previous section is at play here). The assumption is that

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to rely on an authority (in our case, a community educator) for knowledge is unreasonable, perhaps even naïve—or at best a kind of immaturity to be overcome. But this, Gadamer (1975/2004) argues, is a prejudice of the Enlightenment. He explains that authority

> is ultimately based not on the subjection and abdication of reason but on an act of acknowledgement and knowledge—the knowledge, namely, that the other is superior to oneself in judgment and insight and that for this reason his judgment takes precedence— i.e., it has priority over one's own. This is connected with the fact that authority cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on acknowledgement and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitations, trusts to the better insight of others. (p. 281)

The Enlightenment opposition between authority and reason taints popular conceptions of critical thinking. If we teach critical thinking in a way that reinforces suspicion of authority, we may be inadvertently cutting young people off from valid sources of knowledge. After all, most of the knowledge youth can obtain issues from various 'authorities' at their disposal: teachers, parents, books, etc. These sources of knowledge are not, of course, infallible. But if one's ability to trust "to the better insight of others" is eroded by a focus on a superficial version of critical thinking, one will find it incredibly difficult to acquire knowledge. And to be able to contribute to the betterment of one's community, one undoubtedly requires a great deal of knowledge (about e.g., current economic conditions and local ecological realities).

Another issue is that critical thinking is often promoted by community organizations as a kind of context-free skill. In this connection, Hirst and Peters (1970) explain that we need to appreciate that "critical thought" is "vacuous unless people are provided with the forms of knowledge and experience … to be critical … *with*" (p. 31). They continue:

People have to be trained to think critically; it is not some dormant seed that flowers naturally. It is largely a product of the company which people keep, from which they pick up the mode of experience which enables them to manage on their own. Being critical must be distinguished from being merely contra-suggestible … It is pointless being critical without some content to be critical *of* … (pp. 31-32).

Educational activities aimed at fostering critical thinking—inspired by the ethical frame of the activist—can, then, if they are not sufficiently content-rich, sometimes produce "merely contra-suggestible" individuals. True critical thought is not merely a tendency to question whatever is suggested—to say 'no!', as toddlers often do. If we are not careful, we may foster this tendency instead of true critical thinking. Contra-suggestible individuals will find it difficult to participate constructively in genuine consultations about what a group of youth might do to improve their community, for example.

Finally, in some cases, being told to question everything and be critical, combined with a basic suspicion of institutions that generate knowledge, can easily lead to a general distrust of government, 'mainstream' news media, and even science. In this light, conspiracy theories can begin to look particularly appealing. Given the emphasis on a certain kind of critical thinking, largely equated with questioning everything, I am not too surprised when I see young people drawn into the various conspiracies that populate large corners of the internet. This is not only a result of problems associated with social media (though these play a large role); it is also a result of the basic relationship with authority that the ethical frame of the activist promotes, and the suspicion of knowledge-producing authorities that flows from it.

Bruno Latour (2004) noted nearly twenty years ago that the same critical arguments he and others had initially deployed to question "excessive confidence in ideological arguments

posturing as matters of fact" have now been mobilized to create "excessive *distrust* of good matters of fact", which are made to appear "as bad ideological biases" (p. 227). He asks:

> What's the real difference between conspiracists and a popularized, that is a teachable version of social critique inspired by a too quick reading of, let's say, a sociologist as eminent as Pierre Bourdieu …? In both cases, you have to learn to become suspicious of everything people say because of course we all know that they live in the thralls of a complete *illusio* of their real motives. Then, after disbelief has struck and an explanation is requested for what is really going on, in both cases again it is the same appeal to powerful agents hidden in the dark acting always consistently, continuously, relentlessly. Of course, we in the academy like to use more elevated causes—society, discourse, knowledge-slash-power, fields of forces, empires, capitalism—while conspiracists like to portray a miserable bunch of greedy people with dark intents, but I find something troublingly similar in the structure of the explanation, in the first movement of disbelief and, then, in the wheeling of causal explanations coming out of the deep dark below. What if explanations resorting automatically to power, society, discourse had outlived their usefulness and deteriorated to the point of now feeding the most gullible sort of critique? (pp. 228-230)

Philosophers of education have also questioned whether teaching critical thinking can sometimes backfire, particularly in our present social and political circumstances, and increase young people's attraction to baseless conspiracy theories (e.g., Burbules, 2022). In the context of community education specifically, we would also want to avoid inadvertently causing young people to become easy prey for peddlers of conspiracy theories, which are increasingly circulated via ubiquitous forms of social media, to which adolescents and youth are particularly susceptible.

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Becoming obsessed with conspiracy theories would, needless to say, distract the energies of young people, which might otherwise be directed towards the betterment of their communities. Far from contributing to youth and community development, teaching critical thinking in the way outlined above might hamper these very same aims.

Again, these concerns do not invalidate the educational aim of fostering the capacity of young people to think critically per se; however, they call for a much more sophisticated understanding of how it needs to be done and of the complex contexts in which educators labour today. Given the environment in which we find ourselves, 'critical thought' might be more effectively fostered by, for example, assisting young people to develop a profound understanding of the many truths and insights offered by science and other bodies of genuine knowledge, which might allow them to protect themselves from misinformation and falsehoods that masquerade as truth. Schools themselves are obviously struggling in this respect and could probably use the assistance of community organizations. That 'critical thinking' is conceptualized as something different and apart from having an excellent science education—as if one could learn to be critical *of* science without a thorough education *in* it—is part of the problem.

Self-righteousness

Another problem for community education that arises from the ethical frame of the activist is the tendency for self-righteousness to seep into both the culture of organizations and the psychology of young program participants. It can be directed towards those outside the organization but also those within who are not performing in the ways expected. This is best illustrated by returning to Kennelly's ethnography, though I have also witnessed this tendency myself in the field of community education. One of Kennelly's interviewees mentions the

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problem of self-righteousness explicitly (2011, p. 95), linking it with the phenomenon of

downward mobility, what Kennelly called "performing grunge." It seems that some of the

activists who hid their relatively more affluent backgrounds—partially because of their passion

for equality—were susceptible to feelings of self-righteousness.

One story related by Kennelly (p. 97) involves an activist berating another for working

part-time at McDonald's. From the perspective of the accuser, taking up this kind of job was

inappropriate, since it supported corporate America, and clashed with the activist values to which

they were both committed (or so the accuser thought). The activist working the job, however,

claimed to need it to contribute to her family's income. Their family had recently arrived in

Canada from Latin America and were struggling financially. Kennelly relates other similar

examples that suggest that activists from working class backgrounds find themselves in

circumstances where they feel uncomfortable bringing up their own struggles with poverty. This

is, in a sense, the flipside of the "performing grunge" acted out by relatively more affluent

activists.[16] Both are therefore involved in a kind of concealment. It becomes difficult to "be

totally open about things" (p. 98) as one of Kennelly's interviewees puts it. Kennelly suggests

that it is the middle-class activists' self-consciousness of their background that causes them to

sometimes "treat others with derision" (ibid).

Activists are often concerned, Kennelly suggests, with "being the most radical", and the

acquisition of this status "comes only to those capable of mobilizing the complex set of cultural

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[16] To a degree, this phenomenon is not unlike what has been called "passing" (Pease & Ginsberg, 1996), where someone from one identity group "passes" or takes deliberate steps to "pass" as someone from another identity group. In this case, the situation is rather complex: people from a lower socioeconomic class feel the need to pass as members of the predominant socioeconomic class among activists (which is generally middle or upper-middle class)—but in a general context in which *everyone* is trying to pass as working-class (by performing grunge), though in a special sense shaped by the particular subculture.

resources that mark one as 'in the know' … within youth activist subcultures" (p. 98). Among these markers is a certain "authorized language", as well as specific consumption practices and behaviours, even modes of dress (e.g., only second-hand clothes, no logos, p. 104). In addition, many of Kennelly's interviewees "felt there were a set of political beliefs and ideals that needed to be followed" (p. 104). One of her interviewees shared that while activists are "following different ideas" than the mainstream, "people who consider themselves non-conformist are very often just conforming to a different set of ideals" (ibid)—those current among the most radical activists in the group.

The existence of these challenges—self-righteousness, self-consciousness, derision, the relatively strict markers for inclusion/exclusion, and conformism—is somewhat ironic, given the emphasis often placed on creating an ethos where nobody feels judged, where everyone is equal and included. Kennelly (2011) believes the challenges are related to the infiltration of neoliberalism, with its focus on individual consumer choices. She argues that this infiltration leads to "a sectarianism that acts against the impulse for broad-based change" (p. 107). While she is no doubt correct that neoliberalism—and I would add social media as well—plays a role here, I think neoliberalism is not the only source of the problem, but rather exacerbates deeper issues. After all, a similar set of feelings to the one she describes among activists today seems to have existed among the Bolsheviks, who certainly did not live in a neoliberal world.

There is nothing wrong with feeling some discomfort with the fact that one is materially comfortable while others in one's community are living in poverty. That the frame of the activist favours the development of this sensibility is one of its strengths. As a result, one might decide to give more of one's time and resources to the cause of social transformation. Our world would certainly be a better place if more young people developed this inclination. The problem emerges

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when one begins to take on hardships that have little to do with improving one's capacity to help others, and, consciously or unconsciously, wears these hardships like a badge of honour, merely to maintain or enhance one's status in the eyes of one's fellow group members. This self-righteous sense of superiority festers in the human heart. What is more, the tendency to be suspicious that is associated with the ethic of the activist can lead us to project undesirable intentions onto others. As a result, we will tend to see selfishness or lack of commitment everywhere, driving us towards exclusionary practices that ultimately lead to the sectarianism about which Kennelly is worried. Ironically, again, this contradicts many of the ideals to which the ethic of the activist is committed, such as inclusion.

It is of course difficult to feel that one is doing the right thing (or has some knowledge or awareness about injustice that others do not) and at the same time not get swept away in a feeling of moral superiority about this. There is a more religious strand of activism that is acutely aware of this danger, and as a result emphasizes concepts such as humility, self-purification, love, and forgiveness. Martin Luther King Jr. (1964/2018), for example, speaks of these themes; self-purification of the oppressed who want to effect change was a vital step in his conception of non-violent political action.[17] Likewise, the Ghandian non-violent program "attempts to undercut psychological impulses like impatience, bravado, self-righteousness, [and] dogmatism through the cultivation of confidence, trust, and authority through work and service" (Mantena, 2012, p. 15). Both Gandhi and King were keenly aware of the dangers of self-righteousness.

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[17] Of course, 'purification' itself can be misdirected: one can cultivate a sense of self-righteousness or other undesirable attitudes *because* one thinks of oneself as 'purer' than one's enemies. However, the point of genuine self-purification, if I understand King correctly, is precisely to rid oneself of self-righteousness and other attitudes that are not conducive to non-violent political action. In fact, the ideal result of self-purification, in this context, is love of one's enemies.

The community organizations I studied did not appear to be similarly aware (though this does not preclude individual staff members being aware of this problem). And the concepts and approaches suggested by Gandhi or King do not appear to be popular with the organizations either. None of the organizations I examined centered patience or love, and most of them did not even include these qualities anywhere in their lists of educational aims or objectives. In my own experience in the field, I rarely see these qualities mentioned or discussed; if they are evoked by an organization, it is usually explicitly faith-based.

Individual and social transformation

A fourth problem I see with organizations moved by the ethical frame of the activist is a perceived tension between individual and social transformation. One reason community organizations shaped by the ethical frame of the activist find it difficult to deal with self-righteousness is because there is a feeling that the focus should be on the unjust structures, laws, and policies, as well as the vices of the oppressors, rather than on the personal character of the activists, or the larger group of the oppressed who are fighting for their rights. In other words, it may seem that we are blaming the victims and/or the ones who are acting in solidarity with them. Why focus on the character of the activists, whatever small faults they may have, given the egregious injustices being committed by the oppressors? But it is difficult to see how social change could ever be possible without transformation both of individuals (including the activists themselves) and of social structures. Melvin Rogers (2023) makes this same point in a book about the history of African American political thought, arguing that contemporary readers often miss the extent to which 19th and 20th century African American thinkers emphasized the importance of *character* and its development, as well as its relevance for the progress of

democracy, including the question of the inclusion of African Americans. The ethical frame of the activist seems to generate a blind spot here.

It is not that community educators moved by the activist ethic are completely oblivious of the importance of character, but rather that their attention to individual character is often selective. Fostering young people's sense of justice—which, after all, is a at least related to the question of individual character, or perhaps even virtue—is a central aim of educational endeavours shaped by the ethic of the activist. In addition, workshops organized by community organizations often inform youth of the various ways in which they may be privileged and develop in them the habit of 'checking' their privilege. But the point of King's emphasis on self-purification, for example, or Gandhi's concern about impatience, is that a keen sense of justice is not enough. It needs to be complemented by other attributes or character traits in order to help moderate it. One can be acutely aware of one's privilege, for example, but without humility and a knowledge of the dangers of self-righteousness, remain blind to one's sense of superiority. As Iris Murdoch (1970/2014) puts it, everyone possesses a "fat, relentless ego" (p. 51)—regardless of whether one is an oppressor or among the oppressed. A strong sense of justice helps curb the ambitions of that ego, but more is needed. Without the moderating influence of love, as Ricoeur (1995) has argued, a sense of justice can lead to the mere "equilibrium of rival interests" (p. 36). He suggests that our capacities for love and justice need to brought into a kind of dialectic in order to lead to the kind of reciprocity and social cooperation that represents the true spirit of justice.

This tension between paying attention to individual character, on the one hand, and social transformation, on the other, often shows up in youth-focused organizations. Kwon (2013) explains that many such organizations struggle with "the need to address both individual youth

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development … and social justice outcomes, often referred to as the 'youth development—youth organizing divide'" (p. 15). One reason this divide exists, I am suggesting, is that the ethical frame of the activist is somewhat ill-suited to harmonize these two aims. It lacks some of the moral and conceptual resources to do so—at least in its relatively unsophisticated lay iteration, which I have been assessing here. Of course, community organizations often use the *language* of youth development as well as that of social justice and commit to the two aims in principle. But what Kwon is pointing to is that, on the ground, staff and program participants often see the two in tension with one another and struggle to bring them together in practice. In fact, the more deeply one is moved by the ethical frame of the activist—the more one peels layers of the onion away—the more one is likely to think that focusing on youth development is in fact nothing but a neoliberal practice that distracts from the real work of social change. But without an equal focus on the development of character, it is difficult to see how the dangerous habits of mind and heart described above can be avoided, leading inevitably to sectarianism. And sectarianism, as Kennelly suggests, robs the ability of movements to contribute to genuine social change.[18]

Resentment

The final problem I will treat here—which arises for community educators moved by the ethical frame of the activist—is the possibility that the passion for equality may foster resentment. Nietzsche is one of the theorists who has brought this possibility out most forcefully. One of Nietzsche's insights was that the desire for greater equality can in some cases mask a

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[18] For a brilliant and clear analysis of some of the same issues I am describing here, including suspicion of authority and problems with perceiving the link between individual and social transformation, but in the context of social justice organizations more broadly, and how these issues can negatively impact the very functioning of such organizations and the mission of social justice, see Mitchell, 2022.

pathological disposition, which he called *ressentiment*. He recognized that "the thirst for equality" can mean that one desires "to raise oneself and everyone else up (through recognizing their virtues, helping them, rejoicing in their success)" or, and this is where *ressentiment* comes in, "a desire to draw everyone down to oneself (through diminishing them, spying on them, tripping them up)" (Nietzsche, quoted in Jonas & Yacek, 2019, p. 15). Nietzsche obviously favoured the former kind of "thirst for equality" and condemned the latter.

Nietzsche is not alone in his condemnation of the second version of the passion for equality. Alexis de Tocqueville (2000), for example, called it the "depraved taste for equality, which leads the weak to want to draw the strong down to their level" (p. 41). In a similar vein, William Desmond (2001) explains that, if we are not careful, excellence in others can sometimes become the object of resentment, rancour, and aggression:

> We may be secretly shamed by excellence, shame not shown in repentance and renewed
> striving upwards but in rancorous aggression on the excellence for insulting our
> mediocrity with its superiority. We will draw it down to our level instead of consenting to
> being drawn upwards. (p. 262)

Returning to Nietzsche, he points out the rather obvious fact that individuals are clearly not equal in terms of their talents and potentialities—a fact that does not sit comfortably with the ethical frame of the activist. The passion for equality, however, can sometimes lead individuals to entertain the consoling fiction that they are equal in talent to others. If taken in by this false belief, an individual's sense of identity can become distorted: their self-perception becomes skewed. When such an individual finally realizes, consciously or unconsciously (they may lie to themselves about it), that many others are in fact more talented than they are, they can sometimes

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begin to feel alienation, jealousy, and resentment. This prevents them from striving for excellence themselves (Jonas & Yacek, 2019, pp. 116-117).

Jonas and Yacek (2019) also point out that the ideal of egalitarianism is shamelessly employed by populists, who are not genuinely interested in the well-being of the "many" they ruthlessly exploit. Populists speak of equality, telling us that we are just as good as anyone else, that our anger and resentment is justified, and that it is only corrupt institutions and the elite ("the establishment") that hold us back. According to Nietzsche, however, "it is precisely this appeal to individuals' lower natures that keeps them enslaved" (Jonas & Yacek, 2019, p. 154). The discourse employed by populists encourages us to be satisfied with how we currently are, averting our gaze from the heights to which we could potentially reach. People become inclined towards mediocrity, rejecting the pull of their higher natures. *Ressentiment*, then, is not only bad for society at large, but is also undesirable for the individual possessed by it. In the final analysis, *ressentiment* is associated with "an enervating psychological state; it makes individuals weaker by channeling their psychological energy into bitterness, hostility and anger" (ibid).

Yet another problem with *ressentiment* is that in some cases it can create in us the feeling of having been affronted, when in fact we have not. We can even develop the impression that we are marginalized, or our voice is being erased, even if we have a rather prominent social position. This is a rather common phenomenon in North America, where some wealthy individuals complain shrilly about their rights having been curtailed and dispatch armies of lawyers to eradicate the 'injustice' to themselves that they contend they have suffered. While this mindset is especially distasteful in those with economic and political power, it can infect anyone. "The resentful gaze is always looking askance at what others have and what its host does not" (Jonas & Yacek, 2019, p. 165).

Simone Weil (1986) points out that this resentful gaze distorts our very sense of justice. She illustrates this by reference to a child who jealously watches how a parent is dividing up a cake to ensure that the brother does not receive a larger slice (p. 72). The language of equality, by itself, only dictates that the two siblings should have identical (equal) pieces of cake, and if this is all our sense of justice can latch on to, we will have difficulty achieving true justice. This is in part because the 'object' of equality matters (*what* we are trying to equalize) as well as the context. Weil (1986) points out that very often the object of equality is simply privilege:

> To the dimmed understanding of our age there seems nothing odd in claiming an equal share of privilege for everybody – an equal share in things whose essence is privilege. The claim is both absurd and base; absurd because privilege is, by definition, inequality; and base because it is not worth claiming.
>
> But the category of men who formulate claims, and everything else, the men who have the monopoly of language, is a category of privileged people. They are not the ones to say that privilege is unworthy to be desired. They don't think so and, in any case, it would be indecent for them to say it. …
>
> In an unstable society the privileged have a bad conscience. Some of them hide it behind a defiant air and say to the masses: 'It is quite appropriate that I should possess privileges which you are denied.' Others benevolently profess: 'I claim for all of you an equal share in the privileges I enjoy.'
>
> The first attitude is odious. The second is silly, and also too easy.
>
> Both of them equally encourage the people down the road of evil, away from their true and unique good … (pp. 84-85)

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Weil, who was a consistent champion of the oppressed, in both word and deed, poses a very radical challenge here by questioning our deeper assumptions about what is *worth* distributing equally. She was skeptical that her contemporaries' markers of social privilege were worthy of equal distribution—they were not, in her eyes, worthy objects of desire.

What does this analysis of resentment imply for community organizations? What staff might take away from this is that talk of equality (or equity, etc.), if not carefully conducted, can lead to many of the pathological conditions described above: resentment, alienation, jealousy, envy, bitterness, and hostility. It can also inadvertently encourage young people to remain mediocre, ignoring their higher potentialities, and to manufacture harms where there are none. Finally, it can cause them to set their sights on unworthy objects of desire, currently possessed by those with privilege. All of these effects would hamper young people's efforts to contribute to the development of their communities.

Should we then drop talk of equality? Of course not. But more thought needs to be given to the nature of this equality—i.e., in what respect we are equal, or what is the source of our inherent dignity or worth (e.g., Darwall, 1977)—as well as the human attributes that can empower young people to best promote justice. And it is here where the ethical frame of the activist is somewhat lacking in moral and intellectual resources.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by highlighting three general features of the community organizations I studied: empowerment, critical thinking, and the passion for equality. The first two show up in the language of organizations and in their practices, while the third is a moral sensibility that pervades the first two features and other aspects of the work of the community

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organizations; it is also present in youth activist culture. I then explained these three features with reference to what I called the ethical frame of the activist, which is a loose collection of sensibilities, understandings, and convictions, including the passion for equality and the suspicion of authority. These sensibilities and convictions—the ethical frame—shape the language and operations of the community organizations I examined. A brief genealogy of the ethical frame revealed some of the origins of these sensibilities and convictions and helped flesh out the frame itself.

The bulk of the chapter was dedicated to an assessment of the features of the community organizations and of the activist ethic—an assessment carried out in light of the twin aims of youth and community development. The suspicion of authority generally inclines staff to minimize their own authority, which in some cases may lead to their shirking responsibility for meeting educational aims. If discussions among program participants move in directions that are antipathetic to youth and community development, staff may hesitate to intervene, fearing that this may disempower the youth. A focus on critical thinking, if not done well, can foster mere contra-suggestibility and even increase young people's vulnerability to conspiracy theories. The passion for equality can inadvertently foster self-righteousness, which splinters efforts to contribute to community development. In general, it seems difficult to harmonize the aims of youth development and social change solely with the resources offered by the ethical frame of the activist. Finally, the passion for equality can also foster resentment, which is a psychologically enervating disposition that can distort one's sense of justice, among other negative consequences.

This assessment is not, of course, an indictment of the *values* around which the ethical frame of the activist revolves—equality, justice, etc. There are certain convictions at the heart of

the activist ethic—that each human being is inherently worthy regardless of differences; that no group is inherently superior to another; and that profound social transformation is required—that should no doubt be retained by community organizations. The issues that I have described here pertain to how some of these values and convictions—admittedly abstract and underdetermined—are interpreted and implemented. Part of the problem is that community organizations, for various reasons, often do not appear to have the space to explore the nuances of these values and convictions. A generalized passion for equality is allowed to run rampant, for example, erasing the distinction between the two possible versions of this passion that Nietzsche outlined. All of this points to the need for organizations to dedicate adequate time and resources to elaborating their own conceptual frameworks that strive to bring coherence to the various sensibilities, convictions, and understandings that guide their operations. I will address this need more fully in the last chapter.

Chapter 5: The ethical frame of the artist

Introduction

  This is the third of four chapters, each focused on one of the major ethical frames that shape the language and operations of community organizations in North America. This chapter is focused on what I have called the ethical frame of the artist, or the ethic of the artist. I begin by highlighting three prominent features of the community organizations that are connected to this ethical frame: *self-discovery and being true to oneself*, *self-expression*, and *self-esteem and self-confidence*. In this case, these three features are pulled directly from the language employed by the organizations. These are, to return to the plumbing analogy, directly observable parts of the plumbing (faucets, sinks, etc.). I then briefly trace the genealogy of these ideas, sketching some of the developments in modernity that helped generate the context that endows these features with sense. This genealogy helps expose and bring into view the ethical frame of the artist—the more hidden part of the plumbing: the tangle of pipes under the floorboards. The final section assesses the three features mentioned at the outset of the chapter, and the ethic of the artist in general, for their ability to hamper or help meet the twin aims of youth and community development. I first address three significant weaknesses, under the headings of *authenticity*, *self-esteem*, and *the disposition to learn*. These headings help organize major issues that arise in connection with the features highlighted at the outset. I then turn, before concluding, to potential strengths of the ethic of the artist, in part by considering alternative interpretations of some of its key convictions. In other words, in some cases, the faucet (say, authenticity) is not the problem, but rather the plumbing underneath, and once that is changed, the faucet might work fine.

Analyzing community organizations

I have organized expressions—some of which are 'human kinds' or associated concepts—pulled from the websites and reports of the organizations, along with evidence from a youth ethnography, into three categories: *self-discovery and being true to oneself*, *self-expression*, and *self-esteem and self-confidence*. Roughly, the first has to do with fundamental aims, the second with the means to achieve those aims (though these means are often included among the fundamental aims as well), and the third is about the results it is hoped are achieved by focusing on the first two features. Three organizations (orgs. F, H, & L) were predominantly aligned with the ethic of the artist, as were the testimonials drawn from the website of another (org. K). One organization (org. B) presented a combination of the ethic of the artist with that of the activist, while another (org. I) which was primarily entrepreneurial in character also contained a good amount of language deriving from the frame of the artist. All but two of the organizations (orgs. C & D) contained at least one reference to expressions drawn from the ethic of the artist.

Self-discovery and being true to oneself

There are countless references in the language of the organizations I studied to the need for youth to discover themselves and to be true to themselves, both on their websites and in their reports. Young people are encouraged, for example, to "find their voice" (org. F); to "develop [their] sense of self" (org. F); to "feel [their] best in mind and body" (org. F); to engage in "a process of self-discovery" (org. H); to "be themselves" (org. H); to "learn about yourself" (org. H); and to "Discover Your Best Self" (org. L). We can also see this kind of language in comments from program participants themselves. Testimonials from participants often

emphasize that community programs constitute spaces where "I can really be myself" (org. F), "get away from the pressures in life" (org. F), "find out who I am" (org. H), and "helps me to be free and who I am" (org. K). These are just a few examples of the kind of language one finds in the field of community education and among program participants themselves that values self-discovery and the ideal of being true to oneself.

The line of thought here appears to be that, for various reasons, young people are unclear about who they are, or perhaps they are unable to be themselves in other settings (school, family, etc.). In the context of the activities of the community organizations, it is claimed, they should be able to discover who they truly are and be true to that identity (whatever it is). There are several assumptions, convictions, and sensibilities that inform this line of thought, which I will unpack and analyze further below. For now, I simply want to draw attention to the fact that community education emphasizes this theme of self-discovery and being true to oneself.

Self-expression

A second major theme is self-expression, especially of feelings and challenges, and often in an artistic form: many programs "emphasize artistic expression … [and] creative thinking" (org. A); encourage youth to explore "their challenges & difficulties through creative media such as photography and writing" (org. H) and "to bring their voice, creativity, [and] lived experience" (org. B); and ask youth to "express themselves" (orgs. H & I), "in creative ways" (org. H) or "through creative outlets" (org. I). This emphasis also comes out in the words of program participants. For example, one participant notes in a testimonial that "I love that I can be me … I can express my feelings" (org. K). Another young person mentions that participation is "helping me turn my anger and pain into something positive" (org. H).

Kathleen Gallagher's ethnographic research on urban theatre provides further insight into this theme of self-expression and reveals its somewhat darker side. While the study from which I will draw is conducted in schools, the activities in question appear to be sufficiently informal, and some are even optional for students, so the setting is not so different from that of community education. As a reminder, I am drawing on ethnographic studies such as Gallagher's in order to complement what is available on websites and in reports produced by community organizations themselves. The ethnographic research I draw on offers more direct insight into the thoughts and sensibilities of young people themselves—unfiltered by the editorial eye of the organizations, who, for example, choose which testimonials they put up on their websites.

Gallagher (2007) describes a set of drama activities being carried out with a group of young people over several weeks. Students who had written plays mentioned that doing so allowed them to "[e]xpress our feelings … telling a story that might have happened to you, and feeling good about expressing, like … sharing your thoughts, and feelings and your memories with other people" (Gallagher, 2007, p. 104). "Drama's basically expressing your feelings" (ibid), another student agrees, "showing what you have beneath … everything" (ibid). Yet another student says that, in drama, "you just … open up to the real you. Like, you don't gotta … hide. … Just, open your mind, just express yourself" (ibid). The same student goes on: "when I'm in a Drama class, it's just … I'm just gonna be me. That's it. That's just it. I just … I just lash out, and I don't care" (p. 105).

Theatre activities are only one among many that community organizations pursue to allow young people to express themselves. Other artistic activities can serve this end, e.g., photography workshops, various visual arts such as painting, as well as writing poetry and other written media. Another kind of activity that enables self-expression is workshops focused on

various dimensions of emotional and mental health or wellness, which are common among the activities offered by some of the community organizations I studied. These often include some combination of lightly facilitated, therapeutic conversations in which young people can express themselves, along with brief presentations of 'facts' and 'practices', deriving in some way from the field of psychology, or drawing on available 'self-help' resources.

A "safe" (e.g., org. H) environment is often mentioned as necessary for the cultivation of self-expression. The aim is to create an environment in which youth can express themselves "without being judged" (org. H)—a space that involves "honoring and tending to the diversity of emotions that might arise" (org. J). Testimonials from participants often touch on this theme: "it's a really fun, calm and safe space for me to be in" (org. K); "they really know how to make you feel loved and welcomed" (org. K); "you're a part of a really really awesome family that will never judge you" (org. K); and "an environment that everyone is comfortable and happy in" (org. K).

Another feature of the environment that allows for self-expression, according to some of the organizations I studied, is that it be "fun" (org. F) in some way. Some organizations emphasize "play" (org. I) or "games" (org. J) as a general methodology or feature of the environment, with the explicit goal of making "the learning 'invisible' and exciting" (org. J). The assumption here seems to be that if young people know or realize they are learning, they will find the experience dreary or difficult. A 'fun' approach that includes, for example, as many games as possible, masks the inevitable dreariness of learning, making it exciting. This is, in any case, the impression one receives from reviewing the language used by some of the organizations.

Self-esteem and self-confidence

Pursuing self-discovery and self-expression in a safe and fun environment is meant to lead to various outcomes, including the development of "self-esteem" (orgs. B & H); "self-worth" (org. L); "self-confidence" (org. B) and "confidence-boosting" (org. F); "social" and "emotional" "abilities" (org. B), as well as "wellness" (org. L); "emotional intelligence" (org. H); "mental, emotional, and social health" (org. H); "mental wellness" (org. I); "resilience" (org. H); "potential" (orgs. B & J); and "positive identity" (org. F). These developments, the organizations claim, should help youth "make better decisions" (org. B) and in general achieve "empowerment" (org. B).[19] "You are brilliant", one program announces—"You are destined for greatness" (org. L). One participant shares in a testimonial: "You can go as far as your mind lets you. What you believe and what you can achieve is all in the mind" (org. K).

Self-esteem and self-confidence appear to be conceived as emotional or mental dispositions that allow one to excel in various ways. Program activities strive to generate these dispositions in young people, explicitly discussing them with youth and their families. They seem to be especially foregrounded in the language used in promotional materials. As we will see further below, some of this language is problematic, as it can reinforce undesirable dispositions and tendencies in young people.

The origins of the ethic of the artist

The language and features highlighted above can be brought together and explained in part with reference to what I have called the ethical frame of the artist—a loose set of sensibilities, understandings, and convictions that give meaning to these ideas. I mean

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[19] This is yet another example of the different uses to which the term 'empowerment' can be put to use. In this case, it is clearly not about the transfer of power from adults to youth, as in the ethic of the activist.

'explained' in the sense that this ethical frame helps motivate the adoption of the features I mentioned above. In other words, I am deploying the 'ethic of the artist' as a conceptual tool in order to gather together an important set of ideas in the ethical environment of community education—a set of ideas that help give rise to the features in question. These ideas are 'under the floorboards', so to speak, and therefore less visible to community educators. This section is dedicated to a brief genealogy of the sensibilities and convictions that constitute the ethic of the artist and will help flesh them out as well. The next section then assesses the frame—in part by analyzing more carefully the features introduced above—in terms of its ability to hamper or help an organization in reaching the aims of youth and community development.

Some of the sensibilities and convictions involved are captured by Charles Taylor's discussion of our modern sense of "inwardness" and the kinds of transformations in self-conception that gradually accompanied this inward turn (Taylor, 1989). There is an important religious origin here exemplified in Augustine, who tells us: "Do not go outward; return within yourself. In the inward man dwells truth" (quoted in Taylor, 1989, p. 129). For Augustine, and for many Christians that followed him, "inward lies the road to God" (ibid). Taylor points to the radical reflexivity built into this conception of the path to truth: although Truth (God) is still 'out there', the path to it is from within. There is a link between these convictions and the eventual emergence, over several hundred years, of practices and institutions associated with confession, to which sociologists have drawn our attention (e.g., Turner, Abercrombie, & Hill, 1986). The Protestant Reformation intensified the concern with inwardness. Although confession was no longer to a priest, it was, at it were, democratized and further individualized through the use of, for example, confessional diaries (Turner, Abercrombie, & Hill, 1986, p. 53). The Protestant emphasis, particularly in some groups, on intensely emotional personal conversion is another

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manifestation of increased inwardness. These developments demonstrate an increasing emphasis on personal conscience and commitment.

Unsurprisingly, another important strand to follow here is the arts themselves. T. K. Seung (1976) offers a compelling analysis of transformations in sensibility that can be seen in the transition from the European literature of the Late Middle Ages, exemplified by Dante, to the work of key Renaissance figures such as Petrarch and Boccaccio. Dante's *Divine Comedy* demonstrates an allegorical sensibility that is an "expression of transcendent theocentrism" (Seung, 1976, x). And yet, "Dante shifts the medieval attention from God the Great Artisan to man the imitating artisan" (p. 98), foreshadowing the coming changes that will distinguish the Renaissance writers, whom Seung broadly characterizes as possessing a more literal sensibility, expressive of an immanent anthropocentrism that is distinctively modern. Petrarch's work, for example, demonstrates a peculiarly turbulent version of medieval *accidia* (spiritual depression or despair) that borders on paranoia (p. 119); emphasizes the sensible as opposed to the immaterial (p. 121); exalts rhetoric above all other forms of philosophy (p. 129); is attracted to paradox and ambiguity (p. 135); and gives a new role to poetic imagination and therefore to poets themselves (pp. 154-155). According to Seung, Boccaccio's *Decameron* steps even further into modernity in its idealization of the sovereign individual, free from ties to community, anxiety-ridden, and egocentric (pp. 207-209). "The Boccaccian individual has only one ultimate motive: to be oneself, to assert oneself, to fulfill oneself" (pp. 211-212), and moves in a relativistic world of competing wills.

In the centuries following the Renaissance, the role of the artist continued to evolve and increase in importance in the Western cultural landscape. Taylor (1991) elaborates on this point:

Artistic creation becomes the paradigm mode in which people can come to self-definition. The artist becomes in some way the paradigm case of the human being, as agent of original self-definition. Since about 1800, there has been a tendency to heroize the artist, to see in his or her life the essence of the human condition, and to venerate him or her as seer, the creator of cultural values. (p. 62)

Two influential European novels from the late 18th century are worth mentioning in this connection: Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse* (*The New Heloise*) (1761) and Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (*The Sorrows of Young Werther*) (1774). Taylor (1989) argues that these two novels captured, articulated, and helped further disseminate what he calls the "cult of sensibility" (p. 296). Sentiment as such, as long as it was sincere, began to be perceived as noble and morally attractive (Trilling, 1972). Rousseau's novel involves two lovers who cannot marry due to a father's prohibition, and who heroically decide to pursue a chaste companionship instead. The protagonist, Julie, sacrifices her true love for 'dutiful' marriage to another man. Taylor (1989) writes the following about the novel's reception:

The impact of *La Nouvelle Héloïse* when it came out in 1761 is hard to imagine in this more jaded age. Copies were snapped up, and many of those who read it were literally overpowered with emotion. Rousseau received a flood of letters from readers who were "ravished", "in transports", in "ecstasy", moved to [inexpressible delights] and [delicious tears]. The Baron Thiébault came to the end of the book, … "no longer weeping, but crying out, howling like a beast" … François, a cornet in the cavalry, was so moved by his reading … "… that in that moment I would have looked upon death with pleasure" … The readers were not only overwhelmed but morally uplifted. Madame Rolland thought

that any woman who could read the book without being made morally better must have a soul of mud. (p. 295)

Taylor (1989) quotes two common slogans from this period: "nothing is good but loving" and "nothing is true but suffering", which together "capture the animating vision of the cult of sensibility" (p. 295). The concern with suffering, Taylor notes, could also lead to self-indulgence and melancholy. During this period, melancholy came to refer to a mood or feeling associated with detached contemplation of one's own sadness or loss. This shift in meaning allowed it to "exhibit a style, a beauty, even a distinction" (p. 296). Melancholy thus becomes a source of consolation, even a "beguiling pleasure, which can make suffering strangely enjoyable" (ibid). Taylor argues that this background shift in sensibility paved the way for the immense success of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. Emotionally sensitive to the extreme, Werther is tragically driven into melancholy and then suicide. The character of Werther helped create a powerful and influential archetype, that of the despairing young man. Infamously, following the success of the novel, it is said that there was a flood of suicides across Germany, carried out in Werther's name (Berlin, 1999, p. 57).

Together, these two novels represent an important feature of the ethical frame of the artist: its oscillation between, on the one hand, a naïve optimism that believes that, if we are sincere enough, all will work out despite the pressures of society, and, on the other, a dark and tragic pessimism that is convinced that, regardless of what we do, all our efforts are doomed to failure in the end. Isaiah Berlin (1999) notes a similar oscillation between optimistic and pessimistic versions of Romanticism (pp. 106-109). In the optimistic version, we *can* win the fight against the oppressive strictures of society, freeing our hearts from them and liberating ourselves, coming to inhabit a higher and noble state of harmony—we can become who we truly

are meant to be. The pessimistic version closes off this possibility. In this view, "there is something in the dark depths of the unconscious, or of history … which frustrates our dearest wishes" (pp. 106-107). From this perspective, to hope for success is naïve and childish: tragic suffering is our lot, and the only possible triumph is to adopt a resigned and melancholic fortitude, perhaps with a dash of mirthless irony.

While the pessimistic side of the ethical frame of the artist may at first appear to be somewhat extreme and disconnected from informal educational endeavours with young people—with which I am primarily concerned—there is in fact a direct link between the two. Interrupting for a moment the genealogy, it is worth returning briefly to Gallagher's ethnography. She recounts one occasion during which the drama group reads together a play written by one of the students, inspired by Romeo and Juliet. The play has multiple endings, but the conclusion is always marked by death and tragedy. Gallagher (2007) includes excerpts from the play, as well as from the conversation among the students following the reading. Several of the students appeared to have been touched by the play, feeling that it captured "what … we're going through, like, a lot these days" (p. 103). They felt the tragedy communicated the dangers of, for example, early pregnancy and taking drugs. One of the conclusions of the play states: "as you can see life isn't always fair. That's just the way it is" (p. 100). In the course of the class discussion, another student states with conviction that "Nobody really loves anyone" (p. 94) and argues that even Romeo and Juliet "would have fallen out of love if they had waited long enough" (ibid). "Better they died when they did" (ibid), the student concludes.

In my own experience working with hundreds of young people in Montreal, these relatively bleak and cynical sentiments are by no means universal, but they are certainly common—common enough that I am not surprised to see this kind of language appear in

Gallagher's ethnography. These sentiments represent a stark contrast to the positive language that appears on the websites and reports of the community organizations. However, they still fit squarely within the ethical frame of the artist, emphasizing in this case its darker side, which it inherits from the pessimistic version of Romanticism. That Gallagher's ethnography gives me access to the darker side of the ethic of the artist is another reason I am drawing on it; community organizations themselves would never put this kind of language on their websites.

In fact, the Romantic movement as a whole is of crucial importance for the development of the ethical frame of the artist. Its emphasis on turning inward, its attachment to unbridled freedom and spontaneity, and its elevation of sincere and authentic feeling are all important elements of the frame (Shodjaee-Zrudlo, 2021). Taylor (1989) highlights a number of additional Romantic ideals that are still influential today: that everyone is unique and has a particular path of self-fulfilment to tread; that we have 'inner depths' and unexplored, dark recesses; that plunging into these depths to find and bring out or express our authentic and true self is an important if not the most vital existential task of every human being; and that "[no] way of life is truly good, no matter how much it may be in line with nature, unless it is endorsed with the whole will" (p. 185). It is hard to identify the sovereign concept among these interlocking ideals, but if there is one it might be what the existentialists later called authenticity. Indeed, the existentialists could be said to have pushed the Romantic ideals to their limits, digging deeper and deeper into the self in the name of authenticity, ripping off mask after mask, trying to get to the core (Bialystok, 2014). Some of these masks are seen as imposed by society—Lionel Trilling (1972) emphasizes the opposition to society inherent in the concept of authenticity—while other masks we impose on ourselves, consciously or unconsciously.

The ideals of Romanticism also reach us through the field of psychology. There is a direct link between the Romantic emphasis on our inner, unexplored depths and Freud's theory of the unconscious, for example.[20] Freud's emphasis was of course on the darker, pessimistic side of Romanticism. Other psychologists, such as Carl Rogers, were critical of Freud and psychoanalysis, but this did not mean they rejected Romanticism. On the contrary, humanistic psychology—of which Rogers was one of the founders—and the Human Potential Movement that it inspired, are equally Romantic (Storr, 2017), though they obviously draw from its optimistic side. Rogers' notion of "encounter groups" is infused with Romantic ideals: these were

> therapeutic spaces in which people, under his guidance, were freed of the usual social expectations and permitted to be honest with themselves and others, thus creating an atmosphere of trust, daring and 'radical authenticity' in which they could burrow through to each other's perfect core, leading to breakthrough and transformation. (Storr, 2017, pp. 129-130)

It was in such contexts—the apogee of which was the infamous Esalen Institute in California—that the modern notion of *self-esteem* took shape, one of the most pervasive signs of the influence of the ethical frame of the artist today. This notion is nearly ubiquitous in North American life, but it has been most systematically promoted in education. The above description

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[20] Philip Rieff argued that Freud's "somatic theory of desire is a 'scientific' decantation of romanticism" (Gardner, 2006, p. 229). Stephen Gardner suggests that romanticism "is the 'natural religion' of democratic culture, its spontaneous mythology, which Freud baptizes in affording it one of its most sophisticated intellectual justifications and forms. The fundamental exigency of democratic culture is the claim to originality, individuality, or genius. In a world of equality, everyone must distinguish himself in order to count. These are constitutive dogmas of romanticism." (ibid). Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* (1961) is amply seasoned with quotes from Romantic poets and thinkers, such as Goethe and Schiller.

of Rogers' encounter groups would no doubt be embraced by many community organizations as an ideal towards which they are striving in their workshops.

Education in North America has long been influenced by Romantic ideals, in part through the influence of psychology, but also through progressive educational thinkers. The historian William Reese draws a line from the "European romantics [sic] such as Rousseau and Wordsworth and their American heirs such as Emerson and Thoreau" to "the romantic ideas of European educators such as Pestalozzi and Froebel", which then infused "the thought of American educational reformers from Mann and Barnard through Parker, Sheldon, and Dewey" (Labaree, 2004, pp. 140-141). The influence of Romanticism on educational progressivism is evident in the latter's "deep-seated aversion to formal schooling and all its accompaniments (teachers, texts, desks, and discipline) combined with a deep affection for a more spontaneous, natural, and self-directed form of education" (p. 140). That this is the case makes Romanticism even more dominant in the informal setting of community education.

The ethic of the artist, as I have described it in this section, is constituted by certain sensibilities and convictions that gradually emerged over several hundred years. These include the idea that the path to truth lies inward, that personal conscience and commitment are important, that we should strive to be ourselves, that sincere sentiment is sacred, that there is something admirable in melancholy, that each of us is unique, that we need to discover our authentic selves, that we should express ourselves freely, that we should remove the masks imposed on us by society, and that we should esteem our true selves. The figure of the artist stands out from this perspective—their creativity and genius are seen as prophetic and insightful. Finally, the ethic of the artist has a naïve or unduly optimistic iteration, in which the journey for

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authenticity is understood to be in harmony with social progress, as well as a more pessimistic manifestation, in which it is assumed that the only possible outcome is tragic.

Assessing the ethic of the artist

The features highlighted at the outset of this chapter—self-discovery and being oneself, self-expression, and self-esteem and self-confidence—are linked to the sensibilities and convictions that constitute the ethic of the artist. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to an assessment of these features, along with the ethical frame of the artist itself. Like with the previous chapters on the ethical frames of the entrepreneur and the activist, I will be evaluating the ethic of the artist in light of the twin aims of the organizations I studied: youth and community development. In other words, I am looking for ways in which the features highlighted in the first section, along with aspects of the ethical frame that motivate them, might hamper or assist with youth and community development. Some of these pieces of plumbing cause leaks in the work of community education (practical problems that I will provide examples of further below), while others may be fine, but the underlying tangle of pipes is what is at issue. I will begin by looking at the weaknesses of the frame, and then address the strengths in a distinct subsection.

Weaknesses

My discussion of the weaknesses of the ethical frame of the artist and the features of community organizations with which it is associated is organized around three interrelated themes: *authenticity*, *self-esteem*, and *the disposition to learn*.

1. Authenticity

There are a number of problems with the application of the ideal of authenticity, or at least of certain interpretations of this ideal, to educational endeavours (e.g., Bialystok, 2017). Bialystok and Kukar (2018) point out, for example, that to insist that there is a true self—fully-formed and waiting to be expressed—inside each young person (this is one popular understanding of what authenticity means) belies the fact that they are still in the midst of identity formation. Adolescents and youth go through many changes, and it is not evident that the best way to describe these changes is through the binary of authentic (changes that bring the young person closer to the alleged true self, fully-formed and waiting to be expressed) and inauthentic (changes that bring the young person away from that true self). To insist on this conception of identity-formation places unrealistic expectations and maybe even burdens on young people, who are meant to be the final judges as to whether a given disposition or behaviour is authentic—not to mention how coherent this conception of authenticity really is, given the way our identities are organically interrelated with our environment. I will return to this last idea further below.

Another issue is that educational programs are inevitably involved in developing certain attributes in young people, regardless of what their authentic selves might be. The organizations with which I am concerned, for instance, hope to develop in youth capacities that will allow them to contribute to the betterment of their communities. But what if a young person claims that their 'true self' is not interested in community development or social justice, etc.? According to popular conceptions of authenticity, the youth themselves are meant to be *the* authorities when it comes to their own authenticity, or the nature of their authentic selves. What is a community educator to say, then, when a young person's claim about who they truly are conflicts with the

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educational objectives of the organization? In other words, some organizations appear to be

assuming that the authentic identities of their program participants (whatever those end up being)

will necessarily align with the organization's formative educational aims. If this is not the case

(which, in my experience, often happens), one is in a bind if one is committed to the

interpretation of authenticity here: either you force the young person to go along with the

educational objectives of the organization or you let the young person opt out of certain

activities. In the former case, you may either be denying that the youth in question is the final

authority when it comes to their true self, or you are assuming that they will derive certain

benefits from acting inauthentically, at least some of the time (which means that you are

introducing other values besides authenticity). In the latter case, you are essentially giving up

both your authority and your responsibility, and letting the young person be shaped by whatever

other forces are around—whether benign or harmful. Thus, in order to coherently pursue youth

and community development, one has to at least place limits on the ideal of authenticity, or

refine one's notion of it.

     In the Western context, the discourse on authenticity tends to exacerbate an already

pervasive individualism, "prioritizing personal aspirations or convictions over other obligations"

(Bialystok & Kukar, 2018, p. 29). In relation to the individualistic bias associated with

authenticity, it is worth quoting the following passage from Bialystok and Kukar (2018) in full:

     The movement for authenticity in education may give students the message that any

     beliefs or inclinations are morally acceptable, as long as they listen to their 'inner voice'.

     The abstract zeal for authenticity may, in turn, make it difficult for educators to identify

     attitudes that should be challenged on other grounds. Contemporary culture often rewards

     individuals for making provocative, confident declarations, regardless of their content. In

the absence of concrete or nuanced understandings of what constitutes authenticity, we are likely to identify it in the baldest displays of originality, assertiveness, and even hard-headedness (though cultural norms certainly vary). A student who is quietly reflective, or of a moderate persuasion on most matters, will have a harder time earning recognition for authenticity than a vocal provocateur. And once someone's identity has earned the stamp of 'authentic', their pronouncements may be harder to critique. When authenticity's reputation in schools goes no deeper than the permissive slogan, 'Be yourself!' other values are apt to be pushed aside in the name of self-fulfillment. (p. 29)

Ironically, young people striving to be authentic, especially in the context of today's media environment, often end up mimicking the supposedly authentic performances of others (Bauman, 2012). While authenticity is in principle associated with spontaneity and naturalness, it can easily be practiced, perfected, and performed. This is in part why the desire for authenticity can be so effortlessly coopted by commercial interests. Bishop (2018) has shown, for example, how beauty vloggers (video bloggers) on YouTube often produce specially crafted "anxiety videos" "in an attempt to build a representation as real, relatable, and true to one's self" (p. 96). "Authenticity labour," as she calls this kind of work, "can take the form of purposefully clunky editing, minimal cosmetic use, natural and uneven lighting, and audible background noise" (ibid). This is just one image of 'authenticity' that circulates among young people (one of the beauty vloggers Bishop discusses has over 11 million subscribers). The market naturally generates a diversity of 'authenticities' to cater to their consumers: millions of young people who are being told to 'be themselves'.

In an incisive discussion of Rousseau's writings, Bernard Williams (2002) points out other difficulties and ethical and social risks associated with the quest for authenticity. One of the

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assumptions Rousseau holds is what Williams calls the "authority of self-discovery: the idea that sincere, spontaneous, non-deceitful declaration, the product of [Rousseau's] presence to himself, will guarantee a true understanding of his motives" (p. 178). Even though some of our moods are necessarily transitory, it is assumed that this project of self-discovery will yield a true self. The major risk here is of course self-deception. Although the Rousseau of the *Confessions* claims to be able to carry out the project of self-discovery flawlessly, Rousseau later admitted that he introduced distortions into his autobiography. The *authority* with which the discourse of authenticity endows self-discovery would appear to rule out the possibility of self-deception. But how are we to know, in the moment, if we are deceiving ourselves in the process of self-discovery? This is especially difficult to tell in the context of a media environment that is actively working to manipulate our attention and desires.

Another risk that Williams (2002) mentions is paranoia and isolation, which were evident in Rousseau's case. If you assume, as Rousseau did, that your 'true self', despite its flaws, is basically virtuous, and should be warmly embraced by others, you may be surprised when you inevitably encounter pushback, on occasion, from those who are less than pleased with certain aspects of your so-called true self. No one is perfect after all. But how should one interpret this? In Rousseau's case, since he never let go of his conviction that his true self was basically virtuous (this is the positive side of Romanticism), he was forced to conclude that "No-one knows me except I myself"[21] (quoted in Williams, 2002, p. 174). No one could see that he was good and sincere; he felt systematically misunderstood. And if he was ultimately good and striving to show this, then it was society that was bad, corrupting, and inhospitable to virtue. A

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[21] I cannot count the number of times young people have told me this, almost word for word, unwittingly aping a key Romantic ideal, utterly convinced they are being authentic to themselves.

life of social isolation, which he ended up leading, is seen as preferable to being constantly wounded by a wicked society. However, as Williams (2002) notes, it is not necessarily the case "that one best keeps a hold on reality in solitude" (p. 199).

The other way of interpreting the occasional (or frequent) clashes with others, despite one's best efforts to be sincere and authentic, is that perhaps my true self is *not* virtuous. In this case, others are not necessarily misunderstanding or wicked; perhaps I am wicked myself (the negative side of Romanticism rears its head) (Bialystok, 2014). And so what? If others cannot accept my faults, why should I care? I am simply being myself; who else can I be after all? To try to be someone else would be fake. We may justify ourselves by dwelling on the courage required to be true to ourselves, flaunting social conventions. I am reminded of the student whose words were reported by Gallagher (2007): "I'm just gonna be me. That's it. That's just it. I just … I just lash out, and I don't care" (p. 105). Callous libertarianism is hardly conducive to the sound development of young people themselves or their communities (Bialystok & Kukar, 2018).

If community organizations employ the notion of authenticity uncritically, encouraging young people to be themselves, and some program participants 'discover' that their true self is callous, self-centered, and uncaring, staff will once again find themselves in a difficult position. In order to contribute to the betterment of one's community, one cannot be callous, self-centered, and uncaring. Rather, one needs the opposite dispositions: kindness, altruism, and compassion. These qualities are not necessarily easy to develop, and one of the greatest sources of friction we experience in this regard comes from our very own selves. If community organizations emphasize an unsophisticated conception of authenticity, they risk disempowering young people in relation to the development of qualities crucial for contributing to community development.

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In a similar vein, Charles Larmore (2010) suggests that some decisions or actions that appear to be inauthentic (in one sense) are in fact integral to our moral and intellectual progress. For example, we can often benefit "from distancing ourselves from who we are and looking at ourselves through the eyes of another, whose point of view happens to be enlightening" (p. 155). Even imitating someone else, whose actions we find to be exemplary, may be immensely helpful, at least for a time. These experiences need not involve the least trace of bad faith (the chief concern of the arch-promoter of authenticity, Sartre), even if we are, in a sense, distancing ourselves from who we are (at a given moment). As such, Larmore wonders if it might be better to call such episodes "nonauthentic" as opposed to inauthentic (p. 160). He argues that we are normative beings, receptive to reasons for belief and action, some of which will naturally lead us to change and grow in ways that distance us from who we currently take ourselves to be. The kind of discourse about authenticity that circulates in the community organizations I studied can easily cause young people to lose this from view, thereby hampering their ability to progress morally and intellectually.

In its better iterations, the ideal of authenticity is tied to the quest for self-knowledge. This is presumably the purpose of 'self-discovery' after all. While this quest can be distorted in various ways, it is not necessarily a narcissistic endeavour. David Bakhurst (2011) points out that self-knowledge includes "knowledge of oneself as *one of a kind*" (p. 161). He continues:

> When we say of someone that he is one of a kind, we usually mean that he is the *only* one of his kind. I have in mind a more literal reading. Self-knowledge involves understanding oneself as one of a kind; namely as a human being, so that light cast on the nature of the human condition by the study of literature, history, politics, biology, and so on should increase our understanding of the kinds of beings we are and thereby enhance our self-

understanding. To understand your particularity, you have to understand yourself as one of a kind, as a human being. (p. 161)

In a sense, then, the impulse to dig deep 'within' oneself to find out who one is—which I have associated with authenticity and the ethical frame of the artist—needs to at least be complemented by looking 'outward', to sources of knowledge that can tell us about the *kinds* of beings we are. Looking 'outside' of ourselves is important because 'the self' can act as an extremely effective obstacle to self-understanding and paying attention to objects and people outside of ourselves can help quiet our ego. Iris Murdoch (1970/2014) emphasizes this time and again in both her philosophical writing and novels. I will return to her insights further below, when I discuss the potential strengths of the ethical frame of the artist.

2. Self-esteem

The ethical frame of the artist elevates the quest to discover one's authentic self. Once this self is discovered, it is often assumed that it should be *esteemed*. The term 'self-esteem' was nearly ubiquitous in the language of the organizations I studied. Below, I will briefly explore the origins of this concept, showing its close connections with the frame of the artist, and then go on to discuss some of the issues with its deployment in the context of educational endeavours for youth and community development.

Along similar lines as I have been arguing, and drawing on Taylor's work as well, Kristján Kristjánsson (2010) suggests that

… an essential part of the ideological 'inward turn' of modernity has been the exaltation of the self from a mere subject of value (a value-recorder, if you like) to an object of

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value: an object to be prized and valued independently, esteemed, respected and

nourished. (p. 99).

Some of the modern developments I outlined earlier, then, provided fertile ground for the

emergence and triumph of a concept such as self-esteem. William James seems to have given the

concept an initial definition in 1890, but it took nearly a hundred years for it to become

ubiquitous in North American culture. By the 1990s, it had become common sense that low self-

esteem would lead to disastrous social and emotional outcomes, while high self-esteem would

necessarily lead to all kinds of success. Boosting self-esteem became a moral imperative for

education. How did this happen?

Storr (2018) tells this fascinating story, only a few highlights of which I will be able to

recount here. His narrative begins in the 1960s with the infamous Esalen Institute in California,

where humanistic psychologists, including Carl Rogers and some former psychoanalysts, held

workshops aimed at unleashing the potential of attendees for authenticity. Storr describes horrific

'therapy' sessions, involving all kinds of grotesque behaviour, violence, and abuse, all aimed at

helping the participants embrace their true, unfiltered selves. Will Schutz, another of the leaders

at Esalen, "believed that humans are born with all the joy they'll ever need inside them, but

society gets in the way of it, supressing it as we suppress our true selves" (Storr, 2018, p. 139). A

string of suicides at the Institute eventually marred Esalen's reputation, but its influence had

already spread far and wide in the United States, having held sessions with tens of thousands of

individuals and spawning many other imitation institutes across the country.

Around this time, some psychologists already began having doubts about self-esteem.

Abraham Maslow himself, whose famous pyramid of needs included 'esteem' near the top, right

under 'actualization', began to question the construct by the end of his life. Having carried out a number of tests, Maslow wrote the following:

> High scorers in my test of dominance feeling, or self-esteem, were more apt to come late to appointments with the experimenter, to be less respectful, more casual, more forward, more condescending, less tense, anxious and worried, more apt to accept an offered cigarette, much more apt to make themselves comfortable without bidding or invitation. (quoted in Storr, 2018, p. 166)

But these worries, which were echoed in a few prominent journalistic pieces, were largely brushed aside by a set of developments in the 1980s that truly helped propel self-esteem into its current prominence. The catalyst was a project undertaken by the politician John Vasconcellos, himself a regular attendee at Esalen and a disciple of Carl Rogers. The project involved setting up a task force in California to investigate and promote self-esteem over a period of three years. To fund the task force, Vasconcellos convinced the notoriously frugal Governor of California that boosting the self-esteem of citizens would make them more productive and less prone to crime and drug abuse. Crucially, he argued that, given these effects, the state would be able to decrease its spending on social welfare programs. Accordingly, the project was eventually named the "Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility" (Storr, 2018, p. 192). The task force, which was established in 1986, drew on the assistance of several Esalen Institute staff, including Schutz himself. It seems at least one member of Ayn Rand's inner circle was also intimately involved.

It is evident that Vasconcellos, along with most of the task force, were already fully committed to the idea of self-esteem. They were ostensibly meant to discover, with the help of a group of university researchers, *if* self-esteem had the positive effects they believed it had. Media

outlets were initially critical of the task force, but the response of the people of California was overwhelmingly positive. Public hearings were held across the state, at which hundreds of testimonials were offered, singing the praises of the task force and lauding the positive effects of boosting self-esteem, particularly for students. The actual scientific findings that appeared in 1989, which were largely mixed and inconclusive, were effectively ignored or actively distorted. A single line from one university researcher was pulled out of context, convincing most of the public and media that self-esteem had scientific backing. A glowing final report prepared by the task force, combined with a rigorous PR campaign, served to promote the self-esteem gospel far and wide. The campaign even included Vasconcellos appearing on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* talk about self-esteem. Schools in California were quick to incorporate these ideas, which spread across the country and further abroad. The self-esteem craze had arrived.

As Storr puts it, the self-esteem movement was a "rapturous copulation of the ideas of Ayn Rand, Esalen and the neoliberals" (p. 183). Today, the concept of self-esteem is now comfortably institutionalized and has permeated deeply into the popular psychology of North America—this, despite a relatively broad consensus among psychologists that "global self-esteem … matters little for socio-moral functioning in general and educational achievement in particular" (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 112). The claims Vasconcellos and others had advanced about the positive individual and societal effects of boosting self-esteem were almost entirely false. And yet, many of the community organizations I studied list boosting it (or associated ideas) as a primary objective.

Perhaps most worryingly, a focus on boosting self-esteem not only does not bring young people the many advantages that were claimed by its proponents in the 1980s; it may even *hinder* their development. Kristjánsson (2010) has summarized some of the evidence and critiques that

have been levelled against the concept. Some psychologists, for instance, have noted a correlation between high self-esteem and various types of risky and anti-social behaviour, such as alcohol and drug abuse. Both bullies and those who try to stand up to them appear to score high on self-esteem questionnaires (Kristjánsson, 2010, pp. 108-109). As mentioned above, the scientific evidence has been so mixed that the construct of "global self-esteem" has largely been dropped by psychologists. Self-esteem, after all, is not something that flows in our blood, and which can be confidently measured in parts per million; as philosophers would say, it is not a 'natural kind'.

There are also educational objections to the project of boosting self-esteem. Some argue that the focus on improving self-esteem has in some places significantly decreased standards of academic excellence, given that the easiest way to make students esteem themselves more is to lower expectations (Kristjánsson, 2010, pp. 104-105). Even then, this effort may fail, since "transparently undeserved flattery is demotivating rather than motivating, condescending rather than uplifting" (p. 105). It may also inadvertently teach students that it is fine to be hypocritical. Those students that do not see through the strategy do not fare much better, since they get used to feeling good about themselves for having exerted little effort or without having made any significant achievement. Needless to say, this does not prepare them for life outside of school, where they will have to make constant efforts, often without the least outside encouragement. This is the case not only for many kinds of employment, but also parenting and other roles that adults assume. (p. 105).

Finally, there are a number of philosophical objections to boosting self-esteem, including ethical ones. It is unclear, for instance, that having high self-esteem makes you a good person. Risk-takers of various kinds, including bullies, generally score high, as we have seen. Even if

high self-esteem does not necessarily make a person bad, it is hard not to see the connections between the promotion of self-esteem and the "bland, shallow, goal-driven character type" (Kristjánsson, 2010, p. 105). Another important philosophical objection points to the fact that the artificial notion of self-esteem "obliterates important distinctions made in everyday talk among different kinds of self-description" (p. 106). Kristjánsson continues:

> We may describe a person as being mild, quiet, meek, self-effacing, lacking in self-confidence, shy, humble or diffident, for instance. But we would never – unless we had read too many self- help manuals for our own good – dream of describing a person as having 'low self-esteem'. Similarly, in ordinary language, we have a range of terms to describe excessive, unreasonable self-esteem: smugness, conceit, arrogance, pomposity, grandiosity, bravado, big-headedness. The notion of 'high self-esteem' runs those differences promiscuously together …. The general complaint here is that 'global self-esteem' is a banal construct which obscures our rich ordinary-language repertoire of self-evaluation concepts and dislodges any proper criteria for distinguishing between reasonable and unreasonable feelings about oneself. (p. 106)

Another problem that Kristjánsson highlights is related to truth and self-knowledge. Since self-esteem appears to have more to do with our subjective feelings about ourselves, why worry at all if the 'assessment' implied in esteeming oneself is at all accurate? In other words, one is tempted to encourage self-deception if the aim is simply to have all students feel a certain way. As Kristjánsson puts it, "by trading substance for image, we have replaced the time-honoured educational ideal of a truth-seeking self with a narcissistic and cynical chimera-seeking self" (p. 107). This is a particularly damning critique, since the ethical frame of the artist is built in part on the moral imperative to search deep within ourselves to obtain genuine self-knowledge.

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Kristjánsson's comments have the school context in mind of course. However, things are not so different in community organizations. In fact, an aim such as boosting self-esteem may even take up a larger part of the energies of a community organization, given their self-perception as agencies that meet social and emotional needs that cannot be fulfilled by schools, and the fact that they have no academic targets or standardized tests to prepare students for.

Finally, it is worth thinking more about what occurs, from the perspective of a young person, as efforts are made to boost their self-esteem. (These are, in fact, somewhat similar to the issues that arise when we promote self-reliance—as was discussed in relation to the ethical frame of the entrepreneur.) The comments here derive mostly from my own experience working with young people, as well as countless conversations with other community educators. A staff member at an organization tells you that "you are brilliant" and are "destined for greatness" (org. L). There is a spectrum of possible reactions to this message, ranging from cynical disbelief to naïve conviction. The former end of the spectrum runs counter to the intention of the self-esteem-booster. But for many youth, particularly those who are marginalized for various reasons, there is no reason to believe the self-esteem-boosting messages. 'If I am so brilliant,' the thought might go, 'then why is school so difficult? Why do my parents hate me? Why do I not have any friends?' In many cases, then, the self-esteem-booster could be perceived as someone who does not understand. This can reinforce a sense of isolation and despair, or merely amused irony, plunging one deeper into the pessimistic side of the frame of the artist.

In other cases, a young person, for whatever reason, may indeed believe the self-esteem-boosting message, and with all their heart. Let us even say that they are filled with a sense of possibility and hope, confidence and zeal. No doubt, the first task or obstacle with which they will be presented will be tackled with enthusiasm, and a true effort made. They may then succeed

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in it, whereas before they had been unable. As a result, they may develop certain practical skills or capacities that had been out of reach. However, regardless of how many tasks are successfully completed, what happens when they inevitably face a more challenging task and perform less than admirably, or fail completely? Or what happens when they face a series of such obstacles? What will the young person think? 'Am I still brilliant? How come I was unable to overcome this obstacle? Perhaps I am no longer brilliant. Or perhaps I never was.' The optimistic side of Romantic sensibility easily slides into the pessimistic one. And the greater the heights achieved through the self-esteem boost, the greater the eventual fall.

3. The disposition to learn

Finally, there are certain tendencies associated with the ethical frame of the artist that can negatively influence young people's disposition towards learning. I mentioned some of these tendencies earlier, when discussing Romanticism, but I want to show here how they can prevent young people from learning.[22] These tendencies were (1) looking inward, (2) the attachment to freedom and spontaneity, and (3) the focus on authentic feeling. That these tendencies interfere with learning is generally worrying for any kind of educational endeavour. In the context of organizations promoting youth and community development, young people need to become acquainted with a variety of objects of learning, depending on one's conception of what youth and community development imply. For example, if we want to develop capacity in young people to address environmental issues, they would need to better understand concepts related to ecology and climate change, not to mention questions related to consciousness-raising and motivation, as well as policy and governance. But if the ethical frame of the artist exerts

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[22] What follows takes up several arguments I initially laid out in Shodjaee-Zrudlo (2021).

significant influence on the language and activities of an organization, this may inadvertently develop in program participants attitudes that are inimical to learning.

The ethical frame of the artist encourages young people to look inside of themselves to find out what is true and right. I already suggested above that, in the case of self-knowledge, this move has to at least be complemented by looking 'outside' of oneself to obtain knowledge about the kinds of beings we are. Another reason we should be wary of encouraging students to look solely 'inside' is that this seems to represent a misplacement of *attention*. Iris Murdoch (1970/2014) brings this out by offering the example of learning Russian:

> My work is a progressive revelation of something which exists independently of me. Attention is rewarded by a knowledge of reality. Love of Russian leads me away from myself towards something alien to me, something which my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up deny, or make unreal. (p. 89)

To learn something, we need to 'forget' ourselves to a degree and focus our attention on the object of learning in question. In this sense, learning is a moral achievement, requiring and further developing virtues such as humility and detachment. The inward focus of the ethical frame of the artist can, in some cases, hinder this process.

The second tendency I mentioned was attachment to freedom and spontaneity. Some philosophers of education have emphasized the role that *receptivity* plays in learning (e.g., Bakhurst, 2011, writes about the importance of cultivating responsiveness to reasons). Students need to be receptive to an object in order to enhance their understanding of it. But how are we to be both spontaneous and receptive at the same time—to express ourselves unrestrainedly and to be 'determined' by concepts outside of us? Does enhancing receptivity and responsiveness not imply a decrease in freedom and spontaneity? In fact, it is a narrow conception of freedom that

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leads to these problems, which can create resistance to learning. Learning actually *enhances* freedom, rightly understood. The greater the range of concepts I understand, the better I can move about in the world, which is, after all, partially structured by concepts. Some iterations of the ethical frame of the artist obscure this link between knowledge and freedom, creating obstacles for young people in their learning.

As for the focus on authentic feeling, besides the abovementioned concerns about authenticity, the emphasis on emotions and feelings, clearly present in the language of the organizations I studied, can also create obstacles for learning. Not all, but most learning requires effort on the part of the learner, and sometimes these efforts can engender discomfort or difficulty. If one is unduly focused on one's feelings in this connection, attention is diverted from the object of learning itself. Or the object of learning can be mistakenly pinpointed as the source of negative feelings. This creates obstacles to learning. This is especially the case in North America, where there is a general fear of discomfort in the culture.

In general, we can say that some of the tendencies associated with the ethical frame of the artist can reinforce what Murdoch (1970/2014) calls our "fat relentless ego" (p. 51). This dimension of the self acts as a kind of veil between us and reality, frustrating our attempts to connect with objects of understanding, diverting our attention towards our own selves instead of towards others and the world. The aim of empowering young people to contribute to the betterment of their communities—as the organizations I studied say they would like to do—is clearly frustrated by this tendency to focus attention on oneself.

Strengths

The tone of my argument so far may appear to indicate that I see nothing of value in the ethical frame of the artist. To the contrary, I am convinced that it has a redeemable core—a set of genuine insights that are of value to the enterprise to which the community organizations I studied are committed. In fact, these genuine insights are part of what give the frame its undeniable attractiveness and power and go some way towards explaining why it has pervaded North American culture so deeply. Young people and community organizations are not merely labouring under a collective delusion that is socially constructed; there are genuine goods at the core of the ethical frame of the artist, to which they are rightly attracted. Below, then, I will try to retrieve and re-articulate some of these insights.[23]

First, the focus on feeling is not entirely misplaced. A positive disposition towards learning in fact depends on cultivating the right emotions and passions. For example, a love of truth and a dislike of error are certainly necessary components of a proper dedication to learning. More generally, to be able to dedicate time and energy to the betterment of one's community clearly requires a passionate commitment to this end, a passion that youth programs would need to foster. The issue with the ethical frame of the artist is that, at least in some iterations, it can create unnecessary dichotomies between feelings and the intellect. It does this in part by placing an undue emphasis on the mere expression of feelings, whatever they are, as opposed to the cultivation of the right kinds of emotions and passions. For instance, the right feeling to have in relation to the oppressed is solidarity. The sciences, to take another example, should not fill one with fear; young people need to become passionately committed to learning about the natural world, not least in order to protect it.

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[23] Again, some of the points that follows in this section are drawn from an article of mine on Romanticism and learning (Shodjaee-Zrudlo, 2021).

Second, while it is true that the ethical frame of the artist strongly emphasizes the turn inward, it is also the case that some of its more sophisticated sources—including within Romanticism itself—gave attention to the development of sensibility in such a way that could enhance a person's responsiveness to the world around them. To the extent that the ethic of the artist can cultivate a young person's receptivity to the 'goods' around them, it becomes a valuable antidote to an unhealthy obsession with one's inner life (Laverty, 2021). One way of articulating this receptivity is by appeal to the notion of "truthfulness", which Murdoch (1992) describes as "the search for truth, for a closer connection between thought and reality", which "demands and effects an exercise of virtues and a purification of desires" (p. 399). Truthfulness is surely an attribute with which young people will need to be endowed if they are to contribute significantly to the development of their communities. This is an element of the ethic of the artist that community organizations would do well to retrieve and retain.

Third, although the idea of authenticity is generally problematic, there are some alternative interpretations of the notion of "discovering one's true self" that may actually be helpful for youth and community development programs. Nietzsche offers, I think, one such useful interpretation: "your true nature lies, not buried deep within you but immeasurably high above you, or at least above that which you usually take yourself to be" (quoted in Jonas & Yacek, 2019, p. 103). The change in spatial metaphor suggested here has real consequences. Typically, the discourse of authenticity urges us to look deep within ourselves to find our true self. The image here is that the true self is buried under layers of 'fakeness', heaped on by social convention, etc., that need to be removed. Once the true self is revealed, it will necessarily be good (or so the optimistic Romantics assumed). One problem here is that there is no real room for the improvement of the self in this picture. If my 'true self' turns out to be, for instance,

rather impatient and unable to get along with others, all I can do is shrug my shoulders. Nietzsche's image, by contrast, of reaching "immeasurably high above" ourselves, introduces room for growth. Under this interpretation, being authentic is not coinciding with who we take ourselves to be, but rather reaching up, through immense effort, to *become*, in a sense, someone else (our true self). This allows us to shed aspects of our current identity that appear to be unworthy of our true self, say, a bad habit or a vice that prevents us from progressing, without feeling inauthentic. Although such a notion of authenticity is not without its own problems (Bialystok, 2014), it would seem to be more useful for youth and community development programs, given the great changes young people may need to undergo in order to develop the capacities required to contribute to the betterment of their communities. Much depends, of course, on our conception of what our 'true self' might be or 'where' it is located, and organizations will need to dedicate a great deal of thought to these questions.

Finally, Larmore offers a few additional insights that help retrieve yet another key insight from the ethical frame of the artist. He also rejects the idea that we are uniquely able to know ourselves, to dig deep within ourselves and find out who we are: "In self-knowledge, we are far from being irrefutable experts" (Larmore, 2010, p. 135). However, the sense of "special intimacy" (ibid) we have with ourselves—over others around us—is not an illusion. Larmore (2010) argues that

> this basic self-presence consists in our being normative beings who exist only in and through the commitments we make. The "interiority" of the self, if one wants at all costs to hang on to that term, really signifies nothing more than the fact that we alone, no one else in our place, are capable of committing ourselves. (p. 135)

The notions of "commitment" and "responsibility" are key for Larmore (2010). A sincere (a close cousin of 'authentic', Trilling, 1972) statement, then,

> is not to be judged by its conformity to the current psychological makeup of the individual. Everything depends on the resolution that the individual shows in adhering to the commitment he has declared. Thus the good faith of an avowal (as opposed to the truth of a proposition describing an existing mental state) does not relate so much to the present as to the future. (p. 129)

Thus, "being sincere consists in really committing oneself as one has announced" (p. 129). And crucially: "No one else can commit me in my place" (p. 133). This kind of 'interiority' is surely of great value for programs aimed at youth and community development. Such programs need to help young people to take their commitments seriously, to understand that no one else can commit them in their place, and to develop the ability to make sincere commitments to the well-being of their communities.

Conclusion

Three features of community organizations in North America were highlighted at the outset of this chapter: *self-discovery and being true to oneself*, *self-expression and environment*, and *self-esteem and self-confidence*. It was suggested that the ethical frame of the artist—a collection of certain sensibilities and convictions—explains in part the presence of these features. These sensibilities and convictions include the idea that everyone is unique, that we should try to discover this unique self, that to do so often involves peeling off layers of 'fakeness' imposed by our peers and society, that we need to express our true self, and that we need to esteem our true

self. I then briefly traced the origins of some of these ideas, highlighting in particular the prominent role of Romanticism in this history.

The bulk of the chapter was dedicated to an assessment of the three features as well as the ethical frame of the artist as a whole, in terms of the twin aims of youth and community development. I focused on three particular weaknesses: *authenticity*, *self-esteem*, and *the disposition to learn*. Popular interpretations of authenticity were revealed to be questionable for a number of reasons; self-esteem as a concept perhaps deserves to be set aside entirely by community organizations; and the ethical frame of the artist may hamper the ability of young people to learn, by encouraging them to turn inward instead of outward and overemphasizing freedom, spontaneity, and so-called authentic feeling. At the same time, the ethical frame of the artist contains several salvageable insights; in other words, some of its central sensibilities can be reinterpreted to yield helpful elements for community organizations: the importance of cultivating certain passions, the notion of truthfulness, and the vital role of commitment and responsibility.

Chapter 6: The ethical frame of the naturalist

Introduction

This is the last of four chapters, each focused on one of the four major ethical frames that populate the ethical environment of community organizations. This chapter is dedicated to what I have called the ethical frame of the naturalist. The first section explores relevant language from community organizations in this connection, some observations from my own experience, as well as testimonies from young eco-activists collected by an ethnographer. I then trace the origins of the ethic of the naturalist and flesh out my description of it. The bulk of the chapter is dedicated to an assessment of the ethical frame—first looking to its strengths, and then studying its weaknesses—in relation to the twin aims of youth and community development.

Analysing community organizations

I found four organizations (orgs. C, D, F, & J) among the dozen I selected that employed language on their websites or in their reports reflecting the ethical frame of the naturalist. One organization in particular (org. J) heavily emphasized this ethical frame (while also including expressions associated with some of the other frames). It is therefore somewhat less widespread than the language of the three other frames, which cut across most of the organizations. I found it less helpful in the case of this chapter to highlight specific 'features' of the organizations, to be united under three or four headings. Instead, I began by collecting statements made by the organizations that reflected certain fundamental beliefs associated with the naturalist frame; I then brought together statements about education and pedagogy, as well as the kinds of activities they undertake; and finally, I listed some of the effects these organizations hope will result from

their educational program. After this, I drew out insights from a youth ethnography by Sarah Pike (2017) that are relevant for better understanding the naturalist frame.

Some statements made by the organizations express the general conviction that humanity is a part of nature and explains some of the imperatives that flow from this reality. For example: "We are one small part of nature and must respect every other part" (org. C) and "all humanity is interdependent and depends on the natural environment" (org. D). One organization ties in the idea of pre-modern traditions here: "Deep in all our lineages are subsistence traditions that connect us deeply to the earth" (org. J).

While it is already a fact that we are part of nature, from the perspective of these organizations, there is a lot of work to be done to (re)connect young people with the natural world. One website states that participants "will connect with nature and care for the planet" (org. F). Another organization strives to help young people foster "connection with the earth, with others and with themselves" (org. J). In another place, the language used is "fostering personal and experiential relationships with the natural world" (org. J). Even more concretely, one organization speaks of "regular and direct contact with the elements" (org. J). The same agency also states that one of their aims is to foster "kinship with the wilderness inside and outside of ourselves" (org. J).

The strategies these organizations use to foster this connection between young people and nature largely involve activities undertaken outdoors, or educational sessions that help students learn about the environment. Participants learn to use "survival skills" (org. J) and engage in "naturalist studies" (org. J) and art. Staff might organize workshops, games, and storytelling, or do craft activities using available materials from nature (grass, branches, leaves, rocks, etc.).

Some organizations also try to teach a variety of 'survival' activities, such as learning to make and tend fires, track animals, identify plants, etc.

The purposes of (re)connecting with nature appear to be manifold. It is claimed that enhancing these connections "is the most powerful teacher"—that this will help "empower people to achieve their greatest potential" (org. J). Direct contact with nature "keeps us alive in our bodies" (org. J). Developing relevant skills teaches us about "ecology, resiliency, focus, cultivating rich sensory awareness, humility towards life and responsibilities to care take" (org. J). Young people are also meant to develop the "values of respect, curiosity, and stewardship" (org. J).

What emerges from the language used by the organizations I studied is the conviction that we are part of nature, connected with it, and dependent on it, and that these realities have a number of interrelated implications. We should care for the planet and become students of nature. Understanding nature is the key to understanding ourselves. By spending time reconnecting with nature, we are able to develop skills, attitudes, and virtues that are vital for our healthy development, and beyond this, the protection and preservation of the environment and the survival of humanity.

In addition to analyzing the language and programming offered by community organizations, it is useful to understand the convictions and hear the voices of young people themselves, who are also under the sway of the ethical frame of the naturalist. In this connection, I will refer to Sarah Pike's compelling ethnography of young environmental activists. Of course, the vast majority of young people participating in the activities of the community organizations I described above—and even their staff members—are not as 'naturalist' as the activists interviewed by Pike (similar to how the activists interviewed by Kennelly, whom we

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encountered in the activist frame chapter, were more 'activist' than the young people in activist-inflected community education programs). Nevertheless, they move in the same conceptual space. Looking to the way these young environmental activists express themselves and how they understand their work is helpful in that it brings into clearer focus the influence of the ethical frame of the naturalist on young people.

The activists Pike (2017) interviewed emphasized the sacredness of their work: the sacredness of nature itself, the sacredness of the "*relationships* we have with other species and the *sacred duties* and responsibilities we consequently owe them" (p. 7). By investigating the life stories of these activists, Pike found that many had had "conversion" experiences when they were adolescents. For some, "nature and animals, rather than God, become the sacred centers of their lives" (p. 20). That nature is sacred means that it is worth *sacrificing* one's time, energy, and even safety for its protection. Many environmental protests in which Pike participated or which she studied were dangerous for the activists. These dangerous moves "enact activist ideals, including a reality in which the more-than-human living world is valued and protected, even at the cost of human flourishing" (p. 18). This is a direct challenge to anthropocentrism.

But let us hear the young activities themselves: "we are all divine, no hierarchy among individuals, plants, and animals" (p. 40). Here we see a spiritually grounded critique of the idea of elevating humanity above nature. Another activist explains that "Animals and the natural world have always been for me a source of profound joy, wonder and solace, and their mistreatment and destruction a source of indescribable pain" (p. 90). I "see earth mother in all things," says one radical, "Her body making up everything in this infinite universe, so the only real 'law' I follow is treating all things natural, sacred" (p. 93). This kind of naturalistic pantheism is quite common among Pike's interviewees.

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Some activists are explicitly critical of society and schooling. One young woman, who calls herself Spring (they often take on new names), explains that society "denies our spiritual connection to the earth" (p. 4). Another activist says that she eventually rediscovered her "inner child and this really sacred connection to nature that had been suppressed through the school system" (p. 40). Some of Pike's interviewees used the term "rewild" to describe their transformational aims. They said that people should listen to their animal side, rewild their life, and retreat from civilization towards a more feral existence (p. 15). Their vision for the future is one in which "the wild takes over cities and suburbs, as well as their own bodies and souls, reversing what they see as the relentlessly destructive movement of a doomed civilization" (p. 23). They see a 'natural' opposition between modern civilization and nature.

It is worth quoting some longer excerpts from Pike's interviews, especially in relation to what she calls their 'conversion stories.' One of these activists, Jeff Luers, recounts an experience he had when he was a teenager:

I sat cross-legged, my back against Happy [the name he had given to a tree with which he felt a special connection], and I began to meditate. I forgot that there was a plywood platform below me. I forgot that I was a single entity. I felt the roots of Happy like they were my own. I breathed the air like it was a part of me. I felt connected to everything around me. I reached out to Momma Earth and I felt her take my hand. I could feel the flow of life around me. I felt so in tune with the ebb and flow of the natural cycles. I asked Her what it felt like to have humanity forget so much, and attack her every day like a cancer. I told her I needed to know, I needed to feel it …. She granted my request. My body began to pour sweat. I felt the most severe pain all over, spasms wracked my body. Tears ran down my face. I could feel every factory dumping toxins into the air, water,

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and land. I could feel every strip-mine, every clearcut, every toxic dump and nuclear waste site. I felt my body being suffocated by concrete. I could feel every awful thing our "civilized" way of life inflicts on the natural world. The feeling only lasted a second, but it will stay with me for the rest of my life …. My life changed that day. I made a vow to give my life to the struggle for freedom and liberation, for all life, human, animal, and earth. We are all interconnected, we are all made of the same living matter, and we all call this planet home. I vowed to defend my home, I vowed to stand in defense of Mother Earth." (p. 106)

Julia 'Butterfly' Hill, a young activist who spent just over two years sitting in a tree she called 'Luna' as a protest against logging activity in the area, shared the following with Pike (2017):

When I entered the great majestic cathedral of the redwood forest for the first time … my spirit knew it had found what it was searching for. I dropped to my knees and began to cry, because I was so overwhelmed by the wisdom, energy, and spirituality housed in this holiest of temples. (p. 125) …

Each time a chainsaw cut through those trees, I felt it cut through me as well. It was like watching my family being killed. And just as we lose a part of ourselves with the passing of a family member or friends, so did I lose a part of myself with each friend. (p. 128)

Again, the vast majority of young people participating in the community programs I have in mind are not living this kind of radical identification with nature, but it is the logical extension of the kind of language used, convictions held, and experiences promoted, by the organizations themselves.

Origins of the ethic of the naturalist

As with the three previous chapters, I now turn to a brief genealogy of the naturalist frame, which motivates the statements and convictions outlined above. Hearkening once more to Midgley's analogy, I am now looking more explicitly under the floorboards, beneath the explicit statements of the community organizations and the language used by young people themselves, in order to demarcate a tangle of pipes that represents a pattern of ethical inarticulacy and confusion—the ethical frame of the naturalist. This ethical frame constitutes the fourth major cluster of values in the ethical environment of community education. In this section, I will simply describe this tangle of pipes, while in the next I will assess its value, pointing out some of the strengths it brings to community education, as well as some of the leaks it can cause.

Although the ethic of the naturalist, as I envision it, has very deep roots in the past, it is nevertheless distinctively modern. Another point to emphasize is that, like the other frames, but perhaps even more so in its case, the ethic of the naturalist rarely appears in a 'pure' form, and is often mixed with other ethical frames in the thinking and practice of organizations (especially the ethical frame of the artist, because both draw in part from Romanticism). That being said, due to the general modern tendency towards fragmentation and polarization, my sense is that the naturalist ethic is becoming increasingly distinct and separate from other ethical frames, particularly in recent decades. This may be in part because of our growing consciousness of the climate crisis and the increasing attention it is given in popular culture broadly and in education as well. It appears that the 'good' of nature is impressing itself increasingly forcefully on every new generation. This is a good example of the claim I made in Chapter 2 that the ethical environment is dynamic, and not static; it changes over time.

The ethical frame of the naturalist has diverse religious and spiritual origins. Proponents of this ethical frame are often drawn to and draw freely from Indigenous traditions and spirituality, Eastern religions and philosophies, paganism, animism, or pantheism. Henry David Thoreau is a good early example of this syncretism in the American context.[24] He was interested in Native American traditions and Eastern thought and made nature his "symbolic center" (Albanese, 1991). The following passage from *Walden* is typical:

> Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself. I have been as sincere a worshipper of Aurora as the Greeks. I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did. (Thoreau, 1950, pp. 79-80)

Thoreau's appeal to Ancient Greek paganism is of course highly selective. The idea he is latching onto is the identification of nature ('Nature') with the sacred, with what is worthy of admiration, respect, love, reverence, and deference. Thoreau is certainly not trying to resurrect wholesale a particular form of ancient religion—all beliefs, sensibilities, and practices included. This is part of what makes his posture distinctively *modern*, despite its appeal to pre-modern forms of religious life.

To take a more contemporary example, Sarah Pike (2017) points to the widespread popularity of Studio Ghibli movies such as *Spirited Away* (2001), which is heavily inspired by Japanese animism and features a river spirit as a main character (pp. 100-101). She argues that the popularity of these films both demonstrates and further enhances the identification of nature

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[24] Thoreau is not a 'pure' naturalist in my sense. He has a good dose of the artist in him, which is after all quite natural given the common origin in Romanticism I mentioned earlier (and will discuss further below).

with the sacred or divine. These media are an example of the modern move to 're-enchant' nature or to rediscover its sacredness, in part by hearkening back to pre-modern traditions—in this case traditional Japanese religion and folklore. I will return to the question of re-enchantment further below.

Modern science is another important origin of the ethical frame of the naturalist. While the modern scientific enterprise is sometimes described as a technical endeavour focused on dominating and exploiting nature for human purposes (one thinks of Francis Bacon's violent and misogynistic imagery of torturing nature to extract her secrets), this is only one strand, and it may not even be the most representative. There is another important strand of scientific consciousness that stands in awe of nature and of the beauty and elegance of its laws and order. Sometimes this sense of awe is given religious articulation, but even if it is not, nature is clearly held to be worthy of admiration, and therefore 'higher' in some sense. We might call this sensibility a kind of naturalistic piety.

A good example of this kind of naturalistic piety is reported by Charles Taylor (1989), who quotes a scientist who finds "in reductionism the ultimate religion" (quoted on p. 348). The writer continues:

> Perhaps my lifelong training in physics and science in general has given me a deep awe at seeing how the most substantial and familiar of objects or experiences fades away, as one approaches the infinitesimal scale, into an eerily insubstantial ether, a myriad of ephemeral swirling vortices of nearly incomprehensible mathematical activity. This in me evokes a cosmic awe. To me, reductionism doesn't "explain away"; rather, it adds mystery. (Taylor, 1989, quoted on p. 348)

The fact that contemplation of nature evokes in this individual "a cosmic awe" brings this sensibility into the same family as the positions that draw explicitly on certain nature-centering convictions of religions or pre-modern spiritual traditions. Science and religion, then, both play a role in the emergence and shaping of the ethical frame of the naturalist.

Another related vector, documented by Taylor (1989) in *Sources of the Self*, is the efflorescence of sentimental feeling for nature, which accelerated in eighteenth century Europe. Taylor, taking France as an example, points to the spread among the wealthy of an intense longing for the simple life of the country, for walks outdoors, and for the rustic idyll. The longing here was for the noble sentiments aroused in us through direct contact with nature:

> We return to nature, because it brings out strong and noble feelings in us: feelings of awe before the greatness of creation, of peace before a pastoral scene, of sublimity before storms and deserted fastnesses, of melancholy in some lonely woodland spot. (p. 297)

Another example Taylor mentions is the rising popularity of the so-called English garden in France, which was explicitly meant to elicit a variety of profound feelings in the visitor, in some cases by simulating a sense of being untouched and wild.

This new sentimental relationship with nature is not yet the full expression of the ethical frame of the naturalist. The focus is too inward. Even for Rousseau, 'Nature' is often conceived as an *inner* voice. The Romantics deepen this movement inward, claiming in some of the more radical cases that nature emerges *from* 'the Subject'. This brand of subjectivism is, in a sense, antithetical to the ethic of the naturalist. But the Romantic movement also gave birth to some genuine proto-naturalists.

Some aspects of Schopenhauer's thought, for example, point in this direction: he embraced elements of Buddhist thought as he understood it, de-emphasized 'the Subject' in some

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respects (compared to his immediate predecessors and contemporaries), and preached the importance of showing compassion to animals. Another interesting feature of Schopenhauer's philosophy is that Nature is no longer good, but nor is it evil: it represents rather a vast reservoir of unconscious and amoral energy—a blind will to struggle. What is needed is courage in the face of this meaningless torrent of natural force—the source of the philosopher's pessimism. Schopenhauer's picture takes us 'beyond good and evil' (and that is where Nietzsche followed him, taking this idea even further[25]). This move exemplifies a dynamic internal to the ethical frame of the naturalist. The more we reject anthropocentrism and embrace nature itself, the more our merely human ethics can appear peculiar and small-minded. In this context, misanthropy— not incidentally another of Schopenhauer's distinctive characteristics—is not an uncommon product. Most naturalists do not go to this extreme, but there is something internal to the ethical frame that causes one to slide in this direction, unless other convictions are added that can moderate it.

Shifting to the North American context, it is worth mentioning the example of John Muir (1838-1914), an early environmentalist who helped preserve areas of wilderness in the United States. Muir, like Thoreau, was attracted to Native American traditions and practices, and felt a deep spiritual connection with nature. The latter comes out very clearly in the following passage written by Muir, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things, an important conviction for the ethical frame of the naturalist:

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[25] It is worth noting, in this connection, that some scholars have described *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a Spinozan epic about mystical naturalism (Seung, 2006). The Faustian hero Zarathustra's closest companions at key points in the story are in fact animals, and he even appears at times to prefer their company to that of other human beings. This passage is typical: "Mine eagle is awake, and like me honoureth the sun … Ye are my proper animals; I love you. But still do I lack my proper men!" (Nietzsche, 1940, p. 366).

When we try to pick out anything by itself we find that it is bound fast by a thousand

invisible cords that cannot be broken to everything else in the universe. I fancy I can hear

a heart beating in every crystal, in every grain of sand and see a wise plan in the making

and shaping and placing of every one of them. All seems to be dancing to divine music.

(quoted in Taylor, 2008, p. 29)

It seems that Muir's thinking was influenced by some of the Romantics as well as the

Transcendentalists. Bron Taylor (2008) explains that Muir and the environmentalists who

followed him tended to perceive those who trammelled nature with impunity as "desecrating

agents" (p. 41), thus highlighting the sacred status of nature in their eyes. Pike (2017) describes

Muir as emerging from and contributing to a growing concern among nineteenth century

Americans for the preservation of what was perceived as pristine wilderness, in part fuelled by

worries about urbanization. Yellowstone Park was established in response to this kind of concern

in 1872. "With more people living in cities at a distance from the wild, attraction to nature as a

place of respite from urban life grew, as did urban dwellers' support for national parks" (Pike,

2017, p. 44). Thus, while individuals such as radical environmentalists may hold a 'purer' or

more extreme version of the ethical frame of the naturalist, the frame still influences a much

larger percentage of society in a more diluted form, as it were.

Given my explicit concern with youth and community development programs, it is worth

briefly mentioning the genesis of the Boy and Girl Scouts movements (see Baxter, 2008). These

organizations were motivated by a complex set of factors, including nationalism, militarism, and

worries about the effects of urbanization on adolescent girls and boys (e.g., robbing boys of their

manliness, self-reliance, and virility). But a major through-line was the conviction that 'returning

to nature' would be a solution to many modern problems. Again, Native Americans were a major

inspiration here—the precursor to the Boy Scout movement, established by Ernest (Seton) Thompson, was called the "Woodcraft Indians". *The Birch-bark Roll*, the manual written by Thompson for the Woodcraft Indians, contains the following opening line:

> This is a time when the whole nation is turning toward the outdoor life, seeking in it the physical regeneration so needful for continued national existence—is waking to the fact long known to thoughtful men, that those live longer who live nearest the ground, that is, who live the simple life of primitive times. (quoted in Baxter, 2008, p. 98)

Most contemporary programs for youth with an environmental dimension have similar convictions at their heart—though the concerns about nationalism and 'manliness' are either absent or less overt.

Having briefly reviewed some of the origins of the ethical frame of the naturalist, I should summarize some of its chief features before moving on. The ethic of the naturalist holds nature itself or the environment to be a constitutive good, one that is incomparably higher than other goods. This perception shapes sensibility, thought, and action. Nature is seen as a kind of teacher; what is perceived as 'natural' becomes valorized as such. Emphasis is usually placed on the conviction that humanity is inescapably part of nature, that we are simply one kind of animal among others, and that nature as a whole is interconnected, constituting a single reality. To live rightly, to develop oneself properly, necessarily involves humbly learning from nature. Whole communities, likewise, need to 'get back in touch with their roots', and learn to live sustainably.

I see the ethical frame as encompassing a spectrum of enchanted to disenchanted views of nature, provided nature is still 'the center of gravity' in a moral sense. In youth programs, however, enchanted or semi-enchanted views of nature are far more common. There is also a spectrum from pessimistic to optimistic views. Schopenhauerian-style pessimism is in fact not

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uncommon in radical environmental philosophy and activism. But most community organizations tend to be more optimistic—in part due to the nature of educational endeavours (why engage in them at all if one is hopelessly pessimistic?). Finally, the ethical frame has a variety of manifestations, from the more unreflective to the very sophisticated. Contemporary scholarship embracing deep ecology (Pike, 2017, p. 9) or trans- or post-humanism (Le Grange, 2018) usually falls under my conception of the ethical frame of the naturalist. Scholars who affirm these theories often draw from Eastern traditions (e.g., Stables, 2017) and are skeptical of anthropocentrism and what they call "speciesism" (Pike, 2017, p. 10). Youth programs do not typically refer to or engage such scholarship; they are more generally inspired by the likes of Muir. As a result, they tend to be less radically anti-anthropocentric, though there is still an effort to moderate anthropocentrism. Nevertheless, they are also under the sway of the ethical frame of the naturalist.

Assessing the ethical frame of the naturalist

Having laid out some of the origins and key features of the ethical frame of the naturalist, as well as different ways in which it is reflected in the language and activities of the organizations I studied and in the experiences of young people involved in environmental activism, I can now proceed to assess the value of the frame for the work of youth and community development. In other words, how useful is this ethical frame for promoting the general aims of the organizations I examined? What potential problems can this frame create? What advantages does it potentially bring to the table? I will first look at the strengths of the ethical frame, and then its weaknesses.

Strengths

One of the most obvious strengths of this ethical frame is that it offers resources that can be mobilized to help develop the capacity of young people to contribute to efforts aimed at addressing the climate crisis. The necessity and urgency of such efforts are becoming increasingly apparent; this is undoubtedly one of the major crises of our age. Community development endeavours, then, need to pay attention to the environment, at least eventually. Thus, helping young people understand the interconnectedness of nature and our dependence on it, and develop a deep attachment and love for the natural world, are vital educational imperatives today, at least for organizations that have an interest in community development.

What is especially powerful about the ethical frame of the naturalist here is that it elevates nature itself. A purely 'activist' approach to environmental protection, concerned with, say, the effects of climate change on humanity itself, while necessary, may not be sufficient. Nature itself needs to become (or be rediscovered as) an object of moral significance.

One reason this is the case is that the 'disenchantment' of nature (in the eyes of human beings) was one of the factors that, in the first place, created conditions that allowed (and continues to allow) for the large-scale and destructive exploitation of natural resources. Akeel Bilgrami (2021) explains how nature itself was redefined over the course of the seventeenth century and beyond, eventually evacuated of all properties that could not be studied by the emerging natural sciences. Meanwhile, as Charles Taylor (2007) has documented, gradual changes in religious belief led to the popularity of what he calls Providential Deism—which in turn led to exclusive humanism—which located God *outside* of the natural world, effectively desacralizing nature. Bilgrami (2021) notes a third factor:

> a wide range of emerging commercial interests which were keen to desacralize nature so that one could take from nature *with impunity*, without the constraints of an age old

metaphysics everywhere present in popular religion, which placed God in nature and

demanded respect for it of a form that goes back to animist tendencies well before the

emergence of the axial faiths. (p. 57)

In this way, the concept of nature transformed into the concept of natural resources, inert matter

that could be exploited "with impunity" for "progress".

The ethical frame of the naturalist leans in the direction of a kind of 're-enchantment' of

nature. Not all iterations of the ethical frame, however, would get behind this statement. Some

natural scientists, caught up in the philosophical biases of naturalism (in Taylor's polemical

sense), may embrace full disenchantment and call re-enchantment of any kind unscientific. But

like the scientist Taylor quotes, many still have a deep and meaningful moral response to nature.

I would echo Taylor and Bilgrami in saying that this shows a contradiction that is difficult to

resolve without denying our basic moral agency. Moreover, as Bilgrami (2021) argues, one can

only be unscientific if one contradicts some basic truth discovered by science. The idea that

nature does not contain anything that the natural sciences cannot study is not such a truth—

rather, it is a philosophical statement (which may be true or false). Therefore, to attribute a

special value to nature—one that cannot be detected by the tools of natural scientists or

measured—is not necessarily an unscientific move. To assume that it is, which many strict

naturalists do today, is a superstition of modernity, according to Bilgrami.

I will return to the question of re-enchantment below, but my point here is that the ethical

frame of the naturalist elevates nature in a way that need not necessarily be unscientific and may

in fact be crucial in order to empower young people to commit themselves to its protection. But

this depends in part on avoiding iterations of the ethical frame that would cling to

disenchantment, even in the face of deeply felt moral responses to nature.

The other major strength I want to highlight is the educational potential of connecting

young people to nature. Iris Murdoch (1970/2014) gives several vivid examples of this potential.

Murdoch is worried about the way in which 'the self' can interfere with our vision of the world.

Certain states of consciousness and vices—selfishness, jealousy, etc.—can distort our view of

things, generate illusions that distract us, and in general rob us of our vital energies. What, then,

can help us move away from selfishness? One of Murdoch's answers is our experience of beauty,

and one example of this is of beauty found in nature:

> I am looking out of my window in an anxious and resentful state of mind, oblivious of
>
> my surroundings, brooding perhaps on some damage done to my prestige. Then suddenly
>
> I observe a hovering kestrel. In a moment everything is altered. The brooding self with its
>
> hurt vanity has disappeared. There is nothing now but kestrel. And when I return to
>
> thinking of the other matter it seems less important. … we take a self-forgetful pleasure
>
> in the sheer alien pointless independent existence of animals, birds, stones and trees. 'Not
>
> how the world is, but that it is, is the mystical.' (Murdoch, 1970/2014, pp. 84-85)

Experiencing the beauty of nature, then, can promote what Murdoch calls "unselfing"—a vital

part of acquiring the virtues. While they might not use this precise language, several of the youth

programs I reviewed have this aim in mind. And if young people are going to contribute to the

development of their communities, they surely need to acquire a number of virtues, and in

general learn to 'forget themselves' to a degree.

There is another route to unselfing of which Murdoch (1970/2014) writes: the practices

of the sciences and crafts, as well as other intellectual disciplines. Murdoch's specific example is

learning Russian, which we looked at in a previous chapter, but her argument could easily be

applied to any number of crafts and sciences involved in the activities of the community

organizations I mentioned above: learning to track an animal, understand the ecology of a forest, etc. She explains, once again, that a language (in our case, the activity or body of knowledge to which the program participants are being initiated) constitutes "an authoritative structure which commands my respect. … My work is a progressive revelation of something which exists independently of me" (p. 89). The ecology of the forest is not determined by the student: it exists independently and commands her respect (note the reenchantment implicit here). "Attention is rewarded by a knowledge of reality" (ibid). As the program participant pays close attention to the animal track in the snow, she is gradually granted knowledge, learning to which animal it belongs, how long ago it passed by, etc. Love of the forest or the animal "leads me away from myself towards something alien to me, something which my consciousness cannot take over, swallow up, deny or make unreal" (ibid). Focusing attention in this way is conducive to unselfing. Honesty and humility are both required and further developed along the way. Ultimately, this process has to do with truthfulness: "the search for truth, for a closer connection between thought and reality, demands and effects an exercise of virtues and a purification of desires" (Murdoch, 1992, p. 399).

There are therefore ethical and epistemic benefits associated with encouraging young people to pay attention to nature and to develop in them certain related abilities as well as an understanding of natural processes around them. These steps will also help them become better actors in the work of protecting the environment. All of these constitute important strengths of the ethical frame of the naturalist.

Weaknesses

Not every iteration of the ethical frame of the naturalist suffers from the weaknesses I will describe here, but they are all possibilities, internal to the frame itself—to the pattern of ethical inarticulacy and confusion under the floorboards. The issues I will highlight below include *nostalgia*, *lack of scientific rigour*, *ambiguity*, *an inability to account for the dark side of human nature*, and *problems with agency*.

1. Nostalgia

Perhaps as a result of the influence of Romanticism, the ethical frame of the naturalist often contains an important streak of nostalgia. Of course, striving to retrieve or revive specific convictions or attitudes from the past, which have unfortunately been eroded by modernity, is an important component of any strategy for social change. Nostalgia is a more general longing for a past condition, which cannot be entirely resurrected, in part because the historical picture is distorted by the Romantic imagination.

Pike (2017) sees this tendency among the activists she interviews. She explains that the concept of 'nature' deployed by activists is a social construction "situated within a particular set of late modern conditions, including nostalgia for an imagined past in which humans lived more harmoniously with other species" (p. 15). More troubling perhaps, is that "imagining forests or any wild landscape as a place of human absence, a place apart from culture, also depends on erasing the cultures that dwelt and sometimes now dwell there" (p. 15). Not all community programs fall into this trap, but it is certainly a possibility, given the Romantic heritage of the ethic of the naturalist.

2. Lack of scientific rigour

One of the features of pre-modernity that those under the sway of the ethical frame of the naturalist wish to retrieve is, as I explored above, a form of enchantment of nature. A certain kind of re-enchantment, as argued above, seems necessary if we are to make sense of our moral response to nature and become empowered to protect it. However, nostalgia can lead to a kind of *indiscriminate* re-enchantment, which can easily re-introduce some questionable, even unscientific or superstitious ideas. While we should be on guard against *modern* superstitions—such as the idea that nature contains nothing that the natural sciences cannot study—we should be equally wary of reintroducing pre-modern superstitions. Bilgrami (2021), for example, is wary of what he calls "intentional vitalism" (p. 73), a view that nature itself has a form (or forms) of life that includes intentionality (Jane Bennett, for example, is committed to this view). Bilgrami insists that the idea that nature makes normative demands on us (which he supports) is a metaphor. If nature had intentionality, then we could hold it morally responsible; a hurricane, for example, could be put on trial for its destructive acts. This does not make much sense.

In the context of youth programs, nature is often described as a "teacher" (org. J). As a metaphor, this is an insightful idea. But stretching it too far is unhelpful, even counterproductive. Teachers have intentionality; nature does not. For example, one organization's educational philosophy states that, given that nature is the best teacher, it employs a "method of invisible schooling, so that people will connect with nature without knowing it" (org. J). Children, we are told, will "soak up the language of plants and animals as naturally as any of us learned our native language" (org. J). There is no doubt some truth in these statements. But as an overall educational philosophy, it can downplay the kind of effort required for teaching and learning to take place. It also obscures the extent to which young people need to be initiated into bodies of

knowledge—whether traditional or modern, but ultimately 'cultural' knowledge in a sense distinct from 'nature'—that will help them better understand nature. Re-enchantment should not cause us to relax the rigour of science or to lose sight of the important role of educators.

3. Ambiguity

An additional weakness is the ambiguity and indeterminacy of the idea of the natural. Calling something 'natural', within educational programs influenced by the ethical frame of the naturalist, functions largely as a term of approbation. But it is not always clear what the natural thing is to do, or the unnatural course of action, or 'what nature is teaching us'. In this connection, Richard Hofstadter (1963) points out amusingly that Stanley Hall—an early educational reformer in the United States who pushed for the idea that there was a "natural and normal course of child development to which bookish considerations should yield" (p. 371)—argued that it would be 'natural' for children to learn Latin no "later than ten or eleven, and Greek never later than twelve or thirteen" (quoted on p. 371). The educational reformers who followed him had, within a generation, almost entirely set aside learning such languages, partly on the basis that it was 'unnatural' for children to do so. What one generation finds natural, the next will sometimes find unnatural. It is clear that there are other criteria, often unstated, that inform the judgment of these educational reformers, beyond nature. I am not saying that the appeal to what is natural is necessarily empty, just that the appeal is typically not as ahistorical and free-floating as it appears. In my own experience, for example, I often hear that it is 'unnatural' for children to 'sit still' and therefore should not be expected to do so. It is true that it is difficult for *some* children in *some* cultures to be still for certain periods of time. But when this idea is generalized and used as a key datum informing educational methods, we may simply be

announcing a self-fulfilling prophecy. Even if it *were* unnatural (in some sense) for children to sit still, does that mean they should not learn to do it?

4. An inability to account for the dark side of human nature

This line of thought raises important questions about human nature. In this context, I want to say a little about what we might call the 'dark side' of human nature. With this expression, I am trying to gesture at a subset of 'natural' motives that can, under certain circumstances, constitute sources of "wickedness", to use Mary Midgley's (1984) organizing concept in her study of natural evil. The fact that 'wicked natural motives' exist does not sit well with the ethical frame of the naturalist. Let me explain why. There is an important negative moral judgment at the heart of the ethic of the naturalist, namely, against those "desecrating agents" who ravage nature with impunity. This is wickedness from the perspective of the naturalist. But *why* do these people desecrate nature? The naturalist might argue that they have been corrupted by so-called civilizing processes and have lost their connection with nature itself—both within and without. If they were able to reconnect with nature—to rebuild their "kinship with the wilderness inside and outside" (org. J) as one program puts it—they might stop desecrating nature. While there is some truth here, the picture is more complex. First, the opposition is too stark. The source of wickedness is located entirely outside of human nature, which is envisioned as purely good (in opposition to the evil of 'civilization', which corrupts). As Midgley (1984) argues, "to approach evil merely by noting its outside causes is to trivialize it. Unless we are willing to grasp imaginatively how it works in the human heart, and particularly in our own hearts, we cannot understand it" (p. 3). What the ethic of the naturalist has difficulty taking account of are the sources of wickedness that are inherent in human nature. That there

exist 'natural' sources of wickedness creates problems for programs that rely on the ethic of the naturalist. For example, perhaps there are aspects of "the wilderness inside" (org. J) with which *we do not want to seek close kinship*—envy, greed, selfishness, etc. Are these not natural motives? Perhaps the "desecrating agents" *are* in touch with some of these natural motives. In this sense, they are arguably being just as 'natural' as the environmental activists.

There is a sense in which to be good (e.g., to put aside some of our own comforts in order to work for the betterment of the environment, of our community etc.) requires a struggle against (aspects of) our nature. See, for example, Iris Murdoch's (1970/2014) use of the term 'nature' in the following passage: "The direction of attention is, *contrary to nature*, outward, away from self which reduces all to a false unity, towards the great surprising variety of the world, and the ability so to direct attention is love" (p. 66, italics mine). In this passage, the 'nature' contrary to which the "outward" powers of attention and love struggle is the inward, selfish motives of the ego (which is certainly something 'natural'). But, and this does not invalidate Murdoch's insight, the powers of love and attention are also, in a sense, natural—in that they are a part of our nature, the nature of the human being. The struggle against the ego—one part of our nature—is carried out using *other parts of our nature*.[26] What else is at our disposal? This is where we need to pay careful attention to language, in a way which the ethical frame of the naturalist usually does not allow by glorifying nature *tout court*. Human nature is complex. We should be able to explore its darker aspects without resurrecting the doctrine of original sin. In fact, a community program for youth development would be incomplete without such an exploration.

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[26] There are resonances here with one of Nietzsche's famous phrases, "nature against something that is also nature", a phrase that Alexander Nehamas (1985) uses as a title for Chapter 4 of his book on Nietzsche. See also Midgley (1978) for a sophisticated account of our different, often conflicting, 'natural' impulses.

5. Problems with agency

Yet another issue with the ethic of the naturalist is the problem of agency and responsibility. Among the aims of youth programs shaped by the naturalist ethic is the empowerment of young people to take action with regard to environmental issues. Programs often mention the concept of "stewardship" (org. J) in this connection. The intelligibility of the concept of stewardship, however, and moral agency in general, presuppose some form of distinction between human beings and animals—a distinction that the ethic of the naturalist seeks to blur or even erase. Animals are not typically held to be morally responsible for their actions (they are not tried in court, etc.). They may have certain rights (and there is a burgeoning literature on this), but they are not typically held to have duties that they can fail to live up to. Now, if human beings are just a part of nature, like any other animal, it can be meaningfully asked: why is it *our* responsibility to take care of the planet? Why do *we* have to be stewards? Part of the answer is that we are the ones who are causing the problems in the first place. And yet, we would not hold one animal species morally responsible for driving another near extinction and expect them to engage in acts of conservation. Another part of the answer—a more important part—is that human beings have certain powers that animals do not possess (or possess in a much smaller degree), and which grant us the rights and responsibilities of stewardship. There is no *a priori* reason for the admitting of this distinction to automatically lead to a morally odious sense of superiority or to the desecration of nature. We are free of course to reject the distinction between animals and human beings, but then I do not think we can appeal to the concept of stewardship—and youth programs certainly appear to want to use it.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by highlighting certain statements made by community organizations that showed the influence of the ethical frame of the naturalist. I also included some quotations from young environmental activists to convey a better sense of how the ethical frame influences adolescents and youth. I then offered a brief sketch of the origins of the ethic of the naturalist. I included in this sketch religious and scientific threads, as well as the influence of evolving sentiments towards nature, partially a result of the Romantic movement. The chief feature of the ethic of the naturalist was identified as the elevation of nature as an unqualified good. Then followed the assessment. The main benefits of the ethical frame of the naturalist are that it focuses young people on environmental issues, can re-enchant nature to this end in a way consistent with modern science (in some iterations), attracts our attention to the beauty of nature in a way that can lead to unselfing, and encourages us to apprentice ourselves to the disciplines that investigate nature humbly and truthfully. The drawbacks include a sense of nostalgia for a Romanticized past, the possibility of unscientific re-enchantments that reintroduce premodern superstitions, the ambiguity and indeterminacy of what is considered natural, a difficulty in taking into account the dark side of human nature, and issues relating to agency and responsibility that make it difficult to appeal to the idea of stewardship.

Like the other ethical frames, the ethic of the naturalist receives a mixed review. I suggest, therefore, that community organizations separate the gold from the dross, so to speak— that they identify those bits of pipe that can be refitted and reused, and which ones need to be thrown away. This would mean carefully selecting those aspects of the ethical frame that are helpful for the ends of youth and community development and setting aside those that present

challenges, in part by introducing other convictions and principles, somewhat external to the frame. Again, the final chapter will continue this discussion.

Chapter 7: Interactions between ethical frames

Introduction

The four previous chapters were each dedicated to an analysis of one of the four ethical

frames that dominate the ethical environment of community education in North America: the

ethical frame of the entrepreneur, that of the activist, the artist, and the naturalist. This chapter

will complete the analysis of the ethical environment of community education by describing and

assessing common *interactions* between, and combinations of, the ethical frames. To return to

Midgley's analogy: each tangle of pipes I described in each of the four previous chapters are not

hermetically isolated from one another. Rather, they interweave and tangle with one another,

with various consequences, some benign and others less so. This chapter is dedicated to

describing and assessing these 'inter-frame' tangles, filling out the picture of what is under the

floorboards, causing all the leaks.

As mentioned in previous chapters, it is not the case that each organization is only

animated by one of the four ethical frames I identified. Each organization, in fact, has its own

particular set of understandings, sensibilities, and convictions, which bears the influence of at

least one, but usually two or even three of the four ethical frames I described, plus other, more

idiosyncratic elements. All of the ethical understandings and convictions constituting the four

frames (plus some other elements) exist in the ethical environment of community education. This

ethical environment offers a field of possibilities for organizations, from which they draw in

order to articulate their values and aims. Most organizations draw together elements belonging to

different ethical frames. Sometimes the result is benign, in that the convictions belonging to

different frames moderate one another, allowing organizations to combine the strengths of

different frames and to avoid some of the issues I highlighted in the previous chapters. In other cases, however, the weaknesses of the different frames are instead combined, the weaknesses may compound to make things even worse, or the heterogeneous aims may simply pull the organization in contradictory directions.

In addition to completing the description and assessment of the ethical environment of community education as a whole, this chapter will allow me to clarify a misunderstanding that may have arisen over the course of the previous chapters. The reader may have found my 'frame by frame' critique over the past four chapters convincing but come away with the impression that the root problem is simply when an organization leans too much into a single frame, and that the solution is simply for them to combine the frames. There is a grain of truth to this statement (which I will explore in the next chapter), but in fact, 'combining' the frames presents its own challenges and raises new issues. In addition to being wary of the four ethical frames, then, community educators should also be on guard against simply throwing together the sensibilities, convictions, and ethical understandings of the different frames, or even adding one or two features of another frame.

I will focus on three themes in this chapter to describe and assess some of the more typical interactions that I have observed—both in my own experience in the field and in my study of the organizations I selected for this project—between ethical frames: *pervasive pragmatism*, *Romantic combinations*, and *empowerment and leadership*. Examining these three themes will help me address a variety of issues that arise because of the dynamics and influence of the ethical environment as a whole on community organizations. This will allow me to offer a more comprehensive or holistic analysis than in the previous four chapters, which only considered the influence of one ethical frame at a time. It will also bring into focus the

challenges associated with combining different frames, setting up the argument in the next chapter about the need for organizations to develop a coherent ethical framework.

Pervasive pragmatism

Organizations drawing from the ethical frames of the activist, artist, and naturalist are often explicitly critical of some of the key ideas associated with the entrepreneurial ethic. Community educators moved by the ethic of the activist, for example, are often suspicious of the glorification of work and the focus on self-improvement, often seeing in these commitments the pernicious influence of neoliberalism. Those animated by the ethic of the artist are often worried that a focus on work and diligence will crush individual creativity and expression. And the ethic of the naturalist often inclines staff to worry about the effects of unrestrained economic activity on the environment. However, elements of the ethic of the entrepreneur commonly sneak in 'under the radar' as it were, and are especially pervasive among the community educators and the operations of their organizations, regardless of their particular ethical commitments. I call this feature of the ethical environment 'pervasive pragmatism'.

Skill talk, for example, was one of the most common features among the community organizations I studied: every single organization included it, regardless of the particular emphasis of its programming. Most of the educational aims associated with the other ethical frames appear to be (re)described or (re)cast in the language of skills, without anyone seeming to notice the many ethical and educational distortions—detailed in Chapter 3—that result. A young person in an activist-influenced program, for example, is meant to "build decision-making skills" (org. A); develop "leadership skills" (orgs. A, B, & E); and "learn skills such as teamwork, critical thinking, community engagement" (org. A). Leadership, critical thinking, and decision-

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making are all reduced to skills. Artist-influenced programs "support the development of STEAM skills through innovative technology, art and play" (org. I): art and play are offered as means to develop a variety of skills. In the field, generally-speaking, there is pervasive talk of social and emotional skills (often listed among the outcomes for artist-inflected programs), and creativity itself (another feature of the ethical frame of the artist) is often thought of as a skill or set of skills. In naturalist-influenced programs, participants learn a wide range of skills, including survival skills, and are told that these "skills themselves are teachers of ecology, resilience, focus, cultivating rich sensory awareness, humility towards life and responsibilities to care take" (org. J).

Some of this is unobjectionable, of course. But in many if not most cases, the issues raised in the chapter on the ethical frame of the entrepreneur about skill talk are at play. To rehearse some of the key issues here: the marginalization of virtues and moral judgment; the reduction of more complex capacities; the assumption that these so-called skills can be developed merely through repetition and drill; the fact that some skills, isolated from a context of practice, can be mobilized for ethically dubious ends; and the educational issues associated with identifying the contours of different skills. In other words, even though a given organization may perceive itself as 'opposed' to the entrepreneurial ethic, the way skill talk infects its formulation of educational aims and objectives may nevertheless expose it some of the same issues affecting organizations that are explicitly motivated by the ethical frame of the entrepreneur.

One reason skill talk is so pervasive, despite the differences between organizations, is because it applies (or appears to apply) solely to the 'executive' or practical side of the work of community organizations, as opposed to their more substantive ends. In other words, no matter what particular aims an organization has, the 'means' to achieving those aims can be shaped by

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the sensibilities of the entrepreneurial ethic, without any change to the primary aims of the organization (or so it seems). However, as I have mentioned in previous chapters, we cannot easily segregate means from ends in the work of community organizations. Selecting certain inappropriate means may indicate that the ends in question are conceived in a far too narrow way; in a sense, the means are distorting the ends. An organization may want, for example, to help young people learn to express themselves. However, pursuing this aim through the medium of skill-acquisition workshops will influence the way in which the capacity for expression itself is conceived and its development pursued. Similarly, treating leadership as a skill or set of skills in the way one seeks to develop it will influence how people think about leadership, perhaps in ways that are detrimental to the genuine development of leadership. Organizations shaped by the ethical frames of the activist, artist, or naturalist, then, often also utilize skill talk. While incorporating this feature of the entrepreneurial ethic may result in their accruing some of its benefits, they also risk taking on some of its weaknesses and compromising some of the central educational aims associated with other frames.

Another sign of pervasive pragmatism in the ethical environment of community education, in addition to skill talk, is the feature of practicality, which is equally widespread among community organizations—even those that are largely shaped by other ethical frames. It is likely widespread for similar reasons: it can be taken on without any alteration in one's initial aims (or so it seems). In other words, even if a community educator perceives themself as critical of the entrepreneurial ethic and its values, and instead committed to stimulating the creativity and imagination of young people, they may think it only common sense to be as 'practical' as possible in going about this latter objective. What this community educator may miss is that their

very conception of what it means to be 'practical' might itself be influenced by the entrepreneurial ethic (and thus, unduly narrow, as was discussed in that chapter).

An activist-inflected organization, to take another example, may be disinclined (due to the subtle, unnoticed influence of the ethic of the entrepreneur) to explore the nuances of the concept of equality, instead wanting to focus its energies on 'getting the work done' (e.g., getting young people passionate about equality through workshops, etc.). But, as Chapter 4 suggested, the passion for equality needs to be moderated in various ways if an organization is to avoid potential problems associated with this passion, such as inadvertently stoking resentment. An inclination—deriving, again, from the subtle influence of the entrepreneurial ethic—to avoid such a conceptual discussion because it is too 'abstract' or 'theoretical' can hamper an organization's ability to protect young people from resentment. Much the same could be said about a naturalist-inflected organization avoiding an exploration of the concept of human nature in favour of practical activities.

Finally, a bias towards the practical also may hamper an organization's ability to develop a coherent ethical framework to guide their efforts—the subject of the next chapter. As I will argue there, without a coherent ethical framework, organizations will find it difficult to avoid the many issues associated with each of the ethical frames. But organizations governed by this bias towards a narrow conception of the practical—regardless of the particular ethical frame(s) that shape(s) their operations—will find it challenging to even dedicate the requisite resources to beginning the task of developing a coherent ethical framework, given the rather demanding conceptual nature of this task, which seems idle or wasteful to the narrowly practical educator.

Romantic combinations

I pointed out the influence of Romanticism in the genealogy of the ethic of the artist, as well as its presence in the history of the ethic of the naturalist. In fact, Romanticism also influences many iterations of the ethic of the activist, and some of its sensibilities can be worked into the language and activities of organizations that are primarily operating within the ethical frame of the entrepreneur. It should be no surprise, then, that nearly all the organizations I examined, regardless of the ethical frame(s) that most dominated their operations, bore at least some traces of the ethic of the artist—the frame that draws most extensively on Romanticism. In other words, regardless of what other aims an organization might have as part of their explicit mission, that organization's aims are very likely to be shaped by concerns central to the ethical frame of the artist, such as fostering authenticity or self-esteem. Below, I will explore a few different ways in which Romantic sensibilities can combine with the other ethical frames, often frustrating the educational aims of an organization.

First, let us consider how Romantic sensibilities can animate community educators that are also, at the same time, primarily moved by the ethical frame of the activist. The idea that each of us is different and unique—a key conviction of the ethical frame of the artist, and an inheritance from Romanticism—often seems to be an important part of the emphasis on equity and inclusion in community organizations operating within the frame of the activist. As was mentioned in Chapter 4, the preference for equity (over equality *tout court*) is partly because of an acute consciousness of the differences between individuals (their different needs, etc.). Equal opportunity or equal treatment is seen as insufficient (and thus, equality itself is sometimes seen as suspect); rather, these community educators prefer the term 'equity,' which they see as taking into account the different and unique conditions of each individual or group, as opposed to

simply treating them the same or giving them equal opportunities for advancement. Of course, this conception of equity *still* relies on the notion of equality—in this case, equality of outcome. But this nuance is often lost in a superficial contrast between equality and equity.[27] Likewise, the emphasis on inclusion, primarily oriented towards individuals or groups of people who have traditionally been excluded or marginalized, arises in part because of an acute consciousness of the ways in which these individuals or groups are *different* in some way. Insufficient attention to differences, it is thought, results in the exclusion of these groups.

Another result of the interaction between the sensibilities and understandings constituting the frames of the artist and activist is to endow questions of self-discovery and self-expression with a special significance in the struggle for justice. Romantic sensibilities, in other words, tend to direct the energies of community educators moved by the activist ethic towards issues of identity. Questions of self-discovery and self-expression *become* issues of justice and social change, moving beyond the sphere of merely personal fulfillment and meaning. The "process of

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[27] This dichotomy between equity and equality, and the preference for the former, is evident, as mentioned in Chapter 4, in the fact that the community organizations I studied rarely evoked equality in the language on their websites, and frequently mentioned equity. My own experience confirms this preference. Interestingly, there is a popular internet meme, which I have often heard referenced by young people and even community educators, that has helped perpetuate this dichotomy, or at least reflects it. The meme shows three individuals of different heights—one short, the second average, and the third tall—trying to watch a sports game behind a fence. In the panel on the left, the three individuals have each been given a single box upon which to stand. As a result, the average-height and tall individual can see over the fence, but a single box appears insufficient for the shorter man. This panel is labeled "equality": i.e., each individual has been given an equal number of boxes (1). In the panel on the right, the shorter man has been given two boxes, the average one a single box, and the tall man nothing. They now are all able to look over the fence, using the same number of boxes. This panel is labelled "equity". Naturally, this simplistic account dichotomizes equality and equity, obscuring the fact that both panels are a form of equality after all, the one labelled equity simply showing equality of outcome. Other versions of the meme label the right panel "justice" (thus dichotomizing equality and justice—some even add the phrase "equality doesn't mean justice"), and yet another version adds a third panel, in which the fence is simply removed, and labels this "inclusion" or "liberation". Interestingly, the *original* version of the meme—created, interestingly, by an academic—did not even mention equity, and instead indicated that the left panel was "equality to a conservative" and the right panel was "equality to a liberal" (Froehle, 2016).

self-discovery", one organization explains, "empowers them [the program participants] to become leaders" (org. H). Art workshops offered by the same organization help youth "to develop their emotional intelligence, and to become agents of change" (org. H). Discovering oneself, and learning to express oneself, are seen at least partially as means to social change. This conviction is the result of one kind of combination between the sensibilities and understandings associated with the ethical frames of the artist and activist.

Yet another result of this combination is a particular focus on the theme of freedom. I mentioned in Chapter 5 that the ethic of the artist elevates freedom, sometimes hampering the ability of young people animated by this frame to learn. Such a young person may perceive the limitations imposed by 'others'—whether family members, institutions, or even social conventions—as curtailing their ability to be true to themselves, to follow their passions, etc. They can even perceive knowledge itself as a kind of imposition, limiting their freedom (which, as I explained in that chapter, is quite a misleading characterization of the relationship between freedom and knowledge). As for the activist ethic, it is also associated with an interest in freedom, though usually less centrally (the passion for equality is more central). Those moved by the activist ethic might, for example, emphasize freedom from oppressive political authorities so that one can live as an equal member of society—freedom in the more specific sense of political liberty and equality, perhaps. But when combined with Romantic sensibilities, the activist concern for freedom can expand beyond political liberty, encompassing the concerns associated with the ethic of the artist. Thus, community educators animated by this combination of ethical frames may champion the freedom of young people in a rather expansive sense.

Historically, there is substantial precedent for combining Romantic sensibilities with the activist ethic. A classic example can be found in the very person and life of John Stuart Mill. He

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was raised by his father, James Mill, in the philosophy of utilitarianism, and shared many of its

'radical' political commitments to, for example, democracy, equality, and the reduction of

suffering, along with its disdain for prejudice, aristocratic privilege, and the abuse of power.

Famously, J. S. Mill experienced a crisis of meaning as a young adult, when he realized that

meeting all his father's political objectives would not truly leave him feeling fulfilled. What,

then, was the point of it all? He emerged out of this crisis in part by encountering the poetry of

Wordsworth and reading and meeting Coleridge—two luminaries of British Romanticism

(Berlin, 1969, p. 176). Partially as a result of these encounters, it is thought, he came to esteem

individual freedom to pursue experiments in living—over and against social conformism—as

one of the highest values, alongside those of his father's tradition. The freedom of the individual

to make the widest possible variety of choices in their lives was elevated by Mill to an issue of

justice in this combination of Romantic sensibilities and the activist ethic.

One popular iteration of this combination is a widespread variety of modern liberalism.

Richard Rorty (1991) embodied a version of this liberalism: according to him, private life should

be guided by the archetype of the creative artist (i.e., not guided by any clear norms except for

originality), while public, political life should be oriented by the ideal of the reduction of

suffering.[28] Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005)—an admirer of Mill—embraces another version of

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[28] For example, he writes approvingly of "the Romantic individual who is also a citizen of a democratic society" (Rorty, 1991, p. 193). Such an individual is only a Romantic 'in private', as it were. In the private sphere, the Romantic can be passionately dedicated to a quest for self-(re)invention, trying out different experiments for living autonomously and creatively. Publicly, this same individual lives by a very different, or at least very limited moral code. He argues that "the Romantic intellectual can be, for public purposes, your ordinary bourgeois liberal. It is only when a Romantic intellectual begins to want his private self to serve as a model for other human beings that his politics tend to become antiliberal" (p. 194). The standard public goal of the bourgeois liberal, by contrast, is simply to "attempt to alleviate unnecessary suffering" (ibid). One of reasons the latter kind of politics is praiseworthy for Rorty is because it allows for experiments in living to multiply.

this same kind of liberalism. The combination is not free from tensions. Which 'experiments in living' go too far, if any, and which should be outlawed? Only the ones that cause harm? Harm to whom? How do we define harm? (The debates over Mill's harm principle are unending.) What is the line between private and public? Can any such line be meaningfully drawn? These tensions accompany any efforts to combine Romantic sensibilities with the activist ethic, including those made by community organizations working with youth.

Charles Taylor (1992) states another important, perhaps more fundamental tension in this combination. The activist ethic is grounded in a basic passion for equality, and equality depends on some notion of sameness. This sameness can be cashed out in different ways. We should be treated equally because no one is inherently superior to anyone else; we are the same in rank. We should relate to one another horizontally as it were, and not vertically, since we occupy the same moral ground. All human beings share something in common—whatever that something is, it is the same for each of us—and that something deserves respect, so we need to treat every human being with respect. And so on. Now, Romantic sensibilities tell us that we are each unique, each *different*. We are, in an important sense, *not the same*. The activist argues that we should be respected *regardless* of differences. The Romantic agrees to an extent but is irked by the apparent inattention or blindness to difference that results and will insist that *difference as such* should be respected. Both intuitions appear worthy of consideration, and much ink has been spilled on how to reconcile them.

By trying to combine the ethical frame of the activist with Romantic sensibilities, community organizations walk into this thicket of debates. I do not propose to resolve these debates in this section (a tall order in any case). My purpose here is simply to point out that the solution for community organizations to the multiplicity of frames, each attentive to genuine

values, is not simply to throw them together and call it a day. New issues surface that require careful attention and consideration.

Romantic sensibilities are also often combined with the ethical frame of the entrepreneur—this is a second popular combination. Indeed, today, entrepreneurial talk is more often than not thoroughly infused with Romantic notions. Budding young entrepreneurs are encouraged to discover their unique voice, interests, ambition, and talents; to develop creative skills and abilities that will serve them in our increasingly digital world; and to set in motion creative, nonstandard careers (read: gig-style and precarious). Successful entrepreneurs themselves are lauded as innovative, visionary, and creative geniuses, in a way that was usually reserved for great artists. This kind of talk also comes to permeate some community organizations—at least one of the organizations I studied presented this kind of combination.

The inclusion of Romantic language is an attempt to transform entrepreneurship away from the dry logic and cold efficiency with which it is sometimes associated, apparently giving it a warm and beating heart, full of passion and meaning. In the language of my dissertation, this is an attempt to combine aspects of the ethical frame of the artist with that of the entrepreneur. One might argue that this combination would allow an organization to bring together the strengths of the two frames and perhaps even to help overcome their respective weaknesses. The resulting combination however, even if it manages to bring together some of the strengths associated with each frame, often compounds their weaknesses as opposed to resolving them.

I will provide a brief example of this combination. One of the organizations I studied (org. I) is heavily focused on developing technological skills in young people—the importance they give to this objective derives in part from the ethical frame of the entrepreneur. At the same time, they emphasize art and play in many of their activities—an emphasis that is certainly seen

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as valuable through the lens of the ethical frame of the artist. The organization's reductive focus on technological skills as a means for community development, which was already critiqued in Chapter 3, is not remedied by the emphasis on art and play. The latter focus merely inclines the organization to concentrate the development of technological skills on, for example, creating digital art and app-based games.[29] While learning to employ these digital tools is no doubt entertaining for young people and may even perhaps increase their employability down the line, it is unclear if and how it helps contribute to youth and community development. One wonders, also, if the focus on play—which "is at the heart of all we do" (org. I), the organization states on its website—might sometimes inadvertently undermine one of the strengths of the entrepreneurial ethic: the fact that it tends to emphasize virtues such as diligence and perseverance.

Another sign that this same organization is attempting to marry Romantic sensibilities, associated with the ethical frame of the artist, and an entrepreneurial ethic, is its emphasis on so-called "STEAM" (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) education (org. I). The addition of the "A" (art) to the more mainstream STEM education must have appeared especially attractive to the community educators involved in formulating the mission of this organization. The influence of the two ethics being combined here also shows through in how they talk about STEAM education on their website: "STEAM inspires knowledge sharing, playfulness, employment opportunities, and well-being" (org. I). The mention of playfulness might appear

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[29] It is interesting to note that the organization promotes the fact that some of the games developed in the context of their activities have a social justice angle—thus, the activist ethic is also involved. Because of the presence of Romantic sensibilities, however, the conception of social justice at work is directed primarily towards questions of identity: the games that I see featured on the organization's website mostly involve the promotion of marginalized identities (e.g., a main character in a game belongs explicitly to a racialized group, etc.). This organization therefore brings together elements of three of the four frames, and they combine and mix in some of the ways I am outlining in this chapter.

somewhat disconnected here, but it is understandable given the Romantic sensibilities of the community educators involved. That it is followed immediately by "employment opportunities" (org. I) shows the juxtaposition of the two frames neatly. Finally, from what I can tell, there is not much talk of science itself, or substantive science education, beyond the presentation of interesting scientific facts, in their educational materials. Math education also does not seem to be a focus, although program participants probably use some mathematics as they code or develop apps. It seems to me that the ethic of the artist and entrepreneur together tend to marginalize the "S" and the "M" in STEAM and reduce the middle three terms to skill-acquisition activities.

Finally, Romantic sensibilities can also combine with the ethic of the naturalist—the third combination I will explore in this section. In fact, the organization I studied that had more of a naturalist bent (org. J) demonstrated the inclinations of the artist as well. This may be in part because of the way in which progressive education often emphasizes what has been called pedagogical naturalism—a sentimental and enchanted naturalism about the growth and development of the child (e.g., Labaree, 2004, pp. 138-140). This combination, however, often smothers some of the potential benefits of the ethic of the naturalist (e.g., an emphasis on science and understanding reality through disciplined investigation) and imports certain weaknesses (e.g., an unscientific re-enchantment that emphasizes vague notions of growth and 'what is natural', as well as other questionable notions, such as that of 'energy'). Again, the solution to the problems associated with one frame is not simply to add another.

Another detailed example, drawing from a single organization (org. J), will help illustrate this combination more effectively, and the ways in which it compounds weaknesses. This organization often mixes the educational aims values by both the ethical frame of the artist and

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that of the naturalist. For instance, when describing one of its programs for adolescents, the organization's website states that its goals "are to develop participants' wilderness living skills and ecological literacy, develop their self-awareness and self-expression, and nourish their genius and personal gifts" (org. J). Wilderness living skills and ecological literacy are clearly associated with the naturalist ethic, while self-expression, genius, and personal gifts are more related to the ethic of the artist. In this particular statement, the different aims are merely juxtaposed. But it is worth asking whether these goals are indeed coherent in all cases.

The organization states in a number of places that it tries to tailor its programming to the interests of participants, or that staff attempt to use various "teaching styles" to "honor the many different ways people learn" (org. J). Educators moved by the ethic of the artist often make such claims, since they are eager to emphasize the differences between people and the unique character of each. But these promises clearly have limits. For example, the organization's philosophy and the character of its activities preclude any emphasis on digital tools, or even audio-visual media in general. But what if a child insisted that this was the best way they learned, or that they were eager to undertake activities that involved digital technologies? Clearly, such a demand runs counter to the organization's conviction that "fostering personal and experiential relationships with the natural world is the most powerful teacher" (org. J). In other words, one cannot coherently hold the latter idea and at the same time believe that it is always best to match teaching styles to how people learn. The organization's philosophy clearly implies that "fostering personal and experiential relationships with the natural world" (org. J) is the best "teaching style". This problem is not insurmountable, of course. One need only remove the point about adapting teaching styles or moderate it somehow. But then one's Romantic sensibilities

may be wounded. This example shows how these two ethical frames are not necessarily coherent and may pull us in opposite directions, even though they are often combined.

Empowerment and leadership

I discussed 'empowerment' in relation to the ethical frame of the activist but noted elsewhere how the concept can be employed to various ends. As such, the idea of empowerment—and other related concepts, such as leadership—is not tethered to one particular ethical frame. It is worth examining, as a kind of case study, some of the ways in which these terms can be mobilized by different organizations operating within different ethical frames for different purposes—in some cases suggesting potential tensions.

Here are some examples—some of which have been cited in previous chapters—of the variety of ways in which the terms empowerment and leadership are mobilized by community organizations: One organization says that it will "empower rural youth, giving them the skills and tools they need" (org. A), while another states that it is "empowering youth to secure meaningful employment or start businesses" (org. D). Other organizations tell us that program participants will develop "confidence and leadership skills" (org. A), "leadership skills and self-esteem" (org. B) (leadership skills come up *very* often), or "high levels of efficacy, leadership, self-worth, and social responsibility" (org. L). In one case, there is a focus on "supporting learners to become active innovators, creators, and leaders in the use of technology" (org. I). Another organization explains that youth "assume leadership positions and have decision making authority in program planning" (org. E). In one program, youth are given "the confidence to be inspirational leaders" (org. H). Yet another organization states that youth should "bring their voice, creativity, lived experience and leadership" (org. B) to the program. Some community

programs offer "empowerment and self-esteem for youth" (org. B). One organization wishes to "engage youth participants in a process of self-discovery that empowers them to become leaders" (org. H). "We empower youth to become leaders in promoting environmental protection, preservation, and conservation" (org. D), states another organization. Finally, a different organization seeks to "empower people to achieve their greatest potential through connection with the earth, with others and with themselves" (org. J).

Above, I tried to group the examples roughly by ethical frame, but this was not always possible in some cases, and not entirely clear how to do so in others. Some of the uses of 'empowerment' are related to what we might call economic empowerment: the ability to become employed because one possesses certain employable skills or the ability to generate income through starting one's own business. In other cases, it appears youth are to be empowered by transferring to them some degree of decision-making authority—this is one kind of leadership. They might also be encouraged to become "leaders in the use of technology" (org. I) or "inspirational leaders" (org. H). In some cases, the path to empowerment and leadership is through "self-discovery" (org. H), or "through connection with the earth, with others and with themselves" (org. J). Another end of leadership is the promotion of "environmental protection, preservation, and conservation" (org. D). And many forms of leadership require "leadership skills" (orgs. A, B, & E)—whatever these are.

This brief analysis reinforces the imperative to scratch the surface and go deeper when confronted with what appear to be—at least in the area of community education—'generic' human kinds, such as empowerment and leadership, from which little can be concluded about the aims and purposes of an organization, or their vision for the kind of young people they wish to develop. In some cases, the content of these terms is determined largely by the ethical frame that

dominates the work of a given organization. In other contexts, the term may be used in different ways by the same organization, to describe aims aligning with two or more of the ethical frames within which it operates. In these cases, the very meaning of empowerment or leadership may be oriented in contradictory directions. Empowerment through self-discovery seems very different from empowerment through skill-acquisition workshops aimed at enhancing employability, for example, and both cannot be pursued at the same time for the same organization.

All of this suggests that community organizations need to answer several basic questions in relation to empowerment and leadership, at least for their own staff, if they are to avoid tensions associated with these ideas: What is power? What are the sources of power? What does it mean to be empowered? How do people become empowered? What ends does an empowered individual seek? What is a leader or leadership and what does a leader do with their abilities? How does one become a leader? Only by attempting to answer some of these questions would an organization begin to be able to avoid some of the tensions inherent in the use of the terms 'empowerment' and 'leadership' in an environment populated by a diversity of ethical frames that frequently pull young people in different directions.

'Empowerment' and 'leadership' are just two terms that are particularly widespread. Several other terms could be identified that are similarly shared yet torn between the ethical frames. For example, the terms 'communication', 'character', 'participation', 'engagement', 'responsibility', 'voice', and 'confidence' all show up frequently, but appear, even at a first glance, to mean several different things for different organizations. This is yet another complication that arises when striving to combine ethical frames together.

Conclusion

This chapter completed the description and assessment of the ethical environment of community education. The 'map' of the ethical environment was filled out by considering some typical interactions and combinations between the dominant ethical frames. I grouped my observations around three themes: pervasive pragmatism, Romantic combinations, and empowerment and leadership. These further descriptions brought to light some of the challenges associated with trying to combine the existing ethical frames. The effort to bring together their strengths is salutary (more on this in the next chapter), but this is by no means a simple task. Sometimes, the weaknesses of the frames compound.

Another conclusion that can be stated here, perhaps unsurprisingly following the analysis of the previous four chapters, is that the ethical environment of community education as a whole is not as 'healthy' as it might be. The plumbing is inadequate. The major ethical frames on offer each betray several weaknesses and combining them does not necessarily solve their problems. The ethical environment contains many tensions—for example, between authority and freedom—and these tensions represent possibilities for serious ethical and educational dangers of which community organizations are often unaware. Community educators remain unconscious of the way in which the ethical frames shape and guide their efforts, often in contradictory ways. This disempowers staff members, who are usually unable to find ways to reconcile the resulting tensions and to recognize the ethical complexity of the educational tasks that confront them. Organizations operating in a healthier ethical environment might be able to get away with less explicit attention to conceptual coherence. However, the ethical environment being as it is, it is imperative that organizations dedicate adequate resources to the elaboration of a coherent ethical framework for their operations. This is the claim to which the next chapter is dedicated.

Chapter 8: An ethical framework for community education

Introduction

The previous chapter completed the descriptive and critical stages of my dissertation. We now have a general sense of the range of understandings, sensibilities, and convictions that populate the ethical environment of community education in North America—many of which find themselves clustered into four major ethical frames. While some of these understandings, sensibilities, and convictions may assist community organizations in promoting youth and community development, I pointed out several ways in which they are at least potentially problematic and could frustrate these two aims. Combining ethical frames does not necessarily help and can even compound problems. The ethical environment as a whole is therefore not as healthy as it could be, giving rise to numerous issues for community organizations. Given this backdrop, I now move onto the relatively brief and more explicitly prescriptive stage of my dissertation.[30] The prescriptive stage will involve spelling out some of the implications for organizations of the analysis of the ethical environment that I have developed here.

As a first step, community organizations would no doubt wish to avoid the weaknesses of the ethical frames and somehow combine their strengths. If they are convinced by some of what I have argued over the past few chapters, they may wish to, for example, drop an emphasis on self-esteem or to refine their understanding of empowerment to ensure that they do not inadvertently reinforce a radical suspicion of authority among their program participants. However, as the previous chapter suggested, combining the different ethical frames without unintentionally

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[30] While acknowledging that, naturally, the two previous stages of my dissertation—descriptive and critical—contained, at least implicitly, certain prescriptions (e.g., avoid skill talk). One cannot critique without prescribing, in some sense.

compounding weaknesses or generating new problems is not a particularly straightforward

exercise. The situation demands a different kind of response.

What I want to suggest is that community organizations need to give adequate attention

to the task of *developing a coherent ethical framework* to orient their vision and guide their

operations.[31] In this final chapter, I will first defend this statement from potential objections.

Doing so will help me elaborate the statement itself as well as draw out further implications of

my study for community educators and organizations. I will then summarize the insights that

emerged from each of the critiques I conducted of the four dominant ethical frames. This

collection of insights may help community organizations in their efforts to develop an ethical

framework for their operations—though it is just a starting point. I will conclude by discussing

some of the limitations of my study and offering some final remarks.

The need for a framework: Replies to potential objections

An *ethical framework*, as I will use the term here, is akin to an ethical frame, but is more

explicit, articulated, and elaborate. Ethical frames, as I conceived of them, act more in the

background, under the floorboards, whereas an ethical framework is deliberately developed by

an individual or organization. In the latter case, efforts are made to keep the framework at the

forefront of the minds of staff members and to expose program participants to elements of it as

they spend more time with an organization. An ethical framework need not be static, however,

and can evolve over time, becoming more elaborate, as an organization gains experience and

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[31] Though I will not analyse their efforts here, some of the ideas in this section are in part inspired by the efforts of an NGO operating in Colombia—Fundacion para la Aplicacion y Ensenanza de la Ciencia (FUNDAEC). This organization's efforts to elaborate a framework for its endeavours have been described most recently by Farid-Arbab (2018).

reflects on the results of its endeavours. Before proceeding, I will consider four potential objections to my statement that community organizations need to develop a coherent ethical framework for their operations. Considering these objections will also help to flesh out the idea of an ethical framework.

1. Why do community organizations even need a framework? Is this not a bit too philosophically demanding? Why can't organizations simply do their work?

The work of elaborating an ethical framework need not be pursued at the very outset of every endeavour in the area of community education. At times, an organization is established simply to meet a specific need that has been identified in relation to youth and community development—say, working with a small group of youth in one locality, helping them carry out a limited set of objectives. Its activities may then begin relatively simply, without any need for much conceptual sophistication. However, most organizations will, sooner or later, begin to face a variety of practical problems, some of which I have outlined in my dissertation. These problems, if they are treated seriously and not simply ignored, inevitably draw the organizations into deeper and broader issues and questions. To move forward effectively from this point, they will then need to dedicate time and energy to the gradual elaboration of a coherent ethical framework, a task which is partly philosophical.

But what does it mean to say that this task is at least partly philosophical? I return once more to Midgley's insightful essay, this time delving more deeply into its content:

Plumbing and philosophy are both activities that arise because elaborate cultures like ours have, beneath their surface, a fairly complex system which is usually unnoticed, but

which sometimes goes wrong. In both cases, this can have serious consequences. Each

system supplies vital needs for those who live above it. Each is hard to repair when it

does go wrong, because neither of them was ever consciously planned as a whole.

(Midgley, 1992, p. 139)

She then explains that when there are issues with our plumbing, the problems manifest

themselves evidently in leaks, and so on. "When the concepts we are living by function badly,"

however, "[t]hey just quietly distort and obstruct our thinking" (p. 139), generating problems in

practice that are often difficult to diagnose. This is exactly what I have argued in the critical

phase of my dissertation: that certain concepts and ideas employed by community organizations

are, in a sense, 'functioning badly', and as a result generating practical problems. What is

needed, in this case, is a species of philosophical work:

We must then somehow readjust our underlying concepts; we must shift the set of

assumptions that we have inherited and have been brought up with. We must restate those

existing assumptions—which are normally muddled and inarticulate—so as to get our

fingers on the source of trouble. And this new statement must somehow be put in a usable

form, a form which makes the necessary changes look possible. … It needs, not just a

new vision, but also the thorough, disciplined articulation of its details and consequences.

(p. 140).

This work is not necessarily carried out by professional philosophers, Midgley insists.

Poets, novelists, and sages, as well as ordinary people with experience, patience, and insight—

any of these may contribute to this kind of work. The point is that this work is necessary if we

are to face and overcome some of the problems arising in our practice. This is especially so in

the area of youth and community development. If these were straightforward aims, there would

be little need for this kind of philosophical work. But as I have emphasized in previous chapters, this work is practical in nature, in the Aristotelian sense, and requires ongoing reflection on ends as well as means. If organizations facing issues decide to ignore them and simply focus on 'doing their work', they will inevitably become irrelevant to young people and their communities, or, worse, may end up inadvertently contributing to the exacerbation of some of the problems that youth and community development are meant to address.

It is also worth mentioning that, even if one turns away from the task of developing an ethical framework, one will inevitably be operating with some set of sensibilities and convictions, one which is determined, in part, by one or more of the four major ethical frames I have described. Although his terminology is slightly different, this is essentially Charles Taylor's (1989) point about our moral agency: that we inevitably operate with a diversity of background assumptions about what is of value, that this is an essential component of our moral selfhood and cannot simply be set aside at will. In other words, we can delude ourselves into thinking that we do not have any such background assumptions, or that these do not really matter, but we all already think and act within a space that is morally oriented from our perspective. The same goes for community educators and organizations.

Therefore, although the task is admittedly daunting, it is necessary for an organization dedicated to youth and community development to, at least eventually and gradually, develop an ethical framework of some kind that can help them understand and overcome the issues that arise in their practice.

2. One may grant that organizations need to have or develop a framework but argue that they should simply be left free to choose whatever framework they prefer. Why should

researchers have anything to do with this? Should we not aspire to be neutral among frameworks?

Aspiring to some version of neutrality among frameworks, or striving to develop a procedure that would be relatively fair between them, may be of interest to some scholars. In the context of my dissertation, however, I have adopted an 'insider' perspective, as it were, viewing the matter from the point of view of the organizations themselves, who are ultimately concerned with their effectiveness. Community educators are primarily interested in the actual development of young people and their communities. If an existing framework is ineffective in this regard, there is little point in considering it.

Inevitably, there is and will be a kind of 'marketplace' of frameworks, in the sense that different organizations will try different things, according to their best lights. These organizations will then achieve different results based in part on their frameworks, which may render them more or less attractive to others. However, that a plurality of frameworks are on offer only makes it more pressing—from the perspective of the organizations themselves—for there to be an ongoing conversation about the relative merits of each. In a sense, the hope is that this plurality of frameworks is a relatively temporary condition, one that could be gradually overcome if community educators manage to generate learning about how to bring about youth and community development more effectively. This process of learning includes analyzing available ethical frameworks to bring out their strengths and weaknesses. Aspiring to neutrality between frameworks is not so helpful from this perspective.

It is worth adding that the aspiration to neutrality itself arises from within a particular combination of ethical frames: an interesting iteration of the activist, with a dash of Romantic

sensibilities. I discussed this combination and some of its iterations and typical tensions in the previous chapter. The most sophisticated theoretical form this combination takes is a neutralist liberalism that emphasizes fair procedure—Rawls' version being the most prominent (Rawls, 2005). Theorists of this persuasion might press the objection: instead of trying to identify the best frameworks, we (scholars, or the state perhaps) should set up a 'meta-framework' within which organizations can operate, one that is value-neutral or at least as value-neutral as possible, and that offers the maximum amount of liberty to each individual (or organization), while also ensuring equity between them.

Many philosophers have questioned the extent to which such a meta-framework can in fact be neutral. Ruth Jonathan (1995b), for example, argues that, "without reference to *some* beliefs about the nature of man, the good for man and the good society, we cannot cash out—or even make sense of—our procedural requirement of equally respecting the like liberty of all" (p. 104). The problem, she explains, is that, given the realities of social coexistence, the set of co-possible liberties cannot be indefinitely large. There is a need for some way to contain that set in an equitable way—to reconcile, in other words, the demands of liberty and equity. O'Neill (1979) has argued that there is no possible solution to this problem that would be entirely formal or procedural. The chief problem is that setting aside substantive values makes qualitative choices between potential sets of co-liberties impossible. One is forced to appeal to substantive values after all, eschewing neutrality.

Jonathan (1995b) argues, then, that

we cannot remain agnostic about outcomes, urging only that all options remain open for individuals and society so that the development of the maximal autonomy of each might sum to the eventual benefit of all. We can no longer simply assume those connections

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between freedom, reason and morality on which that guiding principle [the procedural principle of maximising the like liberty of all] depends, but must seek to reground them in the light of our most defensible judgements about ourselves and the world—judgements which draw on our current best-available theorising, and which have purchase on the personal aspirations and social realities of the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, that we should ever have thought otherwise, beguiled by the attractions of neutralism, is itself a legacy of those very nineteenth-century beliefs which underpinned early liberalism's social thesis: an atomistic, possessive notion of the individual, an empiricist view of judgement and understanding, a functionalist picture of social relations, and a perfectionist vision of moral and social progress through individual rational development. (pp. 105-106)

Researchers, then, could play a role in organizations' efforts to develop a sound ethical framework for their operations. They can help organizations articulate their values and refine their understanding of some of the associated concepts with reference to "our most defensible judgments about ourselves and the world". Some frameworks are better than others, and it is imperative that we achieve some clarity about this. The descriptive and critical stages of my dissertation constituted a contribution to this aim.

3. Granting this previous point, would the idea be, then, that researchers determine which ethical framework or frameworks are better and then simply inform the organizations? This seems somewhat 'top-down'. Again, would it not be better for the organizations themselves to develop the frameworks?

I agree that this would be a top-down way of going about it, and this is not what I am proposing. Rather, a sound ethical framework needs to be elaborated in the context of action. Such a framework cannot, indeed, be developed in isolation from the ongoing practice of youth and community development. (This is in part why my dissertation drew on youth ethnographies and my own experience in the field.) If researchers are to be involved in the elaboration of such a framework, it would need to be as members, or in close and intimate collaboration with members, of a community organization. Without a close connection to the details of the work, conceptual talk tends to get lost in abstractions. The reverse is, of course, also undesirable: if the conversation within an organization remains overly focused on details and does not also pay attention to the *ends* of community education and the values at play, the work suffers from superficiality. What is needed is a genuine integration of theory and practice. Naturally, this is not easy to achieve, but it is a necessary component of becoming more effective as an organization.

Not all current research arrangements are well suited to meet these exigencies. For example, research grants are often only extended for a period of a couple of years, and the actual contact between researchers and an organization's operations may only last a few dozen hours during this period, if that. I doubt this is enough to truly appreciate the dynamics of action on the ground. In most cases, relationships between researchers and community organizations are simply not intimate or long-term enough. In my own experience, I find that much of my efforts in this regard are conducted outside of the context of formal academic research, on my own time. If researchers are serious about trying to assist community organizations to elaborate a coherent ethical framework to guide their operations, they will need to learn to develop closer and more long-term collaborations. Of course, some organizations may have staff members who can help

develop an ethical framework, without the help of academic researchers. I am not arguing that the presence of one or more researchers is necessary; it is not even sufficient. Some researchers, however, are in a good position to help.

4. A final objection: Why does the ethical framework need to be *coherent*? Is it not inevitable that contradictions will arise in the work of community organizations, given the existence of contradictory values? In the name of pluralism, is it not better to simply bring together as many genuine values as possible and simply help organizations (and young people themselves) learn to compromise?

My critical analysis of the four dominant ethical frames not only revealed issues with each frame, but also highlighted a diversity of genuine strengths and values possessed by each. Some of the frames were criticized in part because they tended to eclipse certain values—some of which were more adequately captured by other frames. My research project therefore assumed the importance of paying attention to a plurality of values. Now, community organizations are sensitive to this imperative at some level, which is why they tend to try to combine the different frames in various ways. As I have suggested, this is a step in the right direction. The very existence of a plurality of genuine values demands that they all be taken into account. We might call this the imperative for *comprehensiveness*.

Charles Taylor (1989) makes a similar argument for comprehensiveness—though he usually speaks of 'goods' rather than values. He suggests that "we have to avoid the error of declaring those goods invalid whose exclusive pursuit leads to contemptible or disastrous consequences" (p. 511). For example, an organization operating within the ethical frame of the

entrepreneur may value practicality (a genuine good) in a way that leads to certain undesirable consequences (which I detailed in that chapter). This does not mean that practicality as a good is thus 'invalidated'. This only shows, as Taylor argues, that the good in question "needs to be part of a 'package,' to be sought within a life which is also aimed at other goods" (ibid). The ethical framework I am suggesting organizations should elaborate would constitute a "package" of all genuine goods relevant to youth and community development. It may sometimes seem that two goods oppose one another, and that one of them must therefore be invalid. "But a dilemma doesn't invalidate the rival goods. On the contrary, it presupposes them" (ibid).

Of course, bringing together this diverse "package" of genuine goods/values is far from straightforward. The previous chapter demonstrated this. The objection here argues that perhaps compromise is the only way out, and we should not worry too much about contradictions, since these are inherent in the reality of value pluralism. Comprehensiveness, the objection might state, is far more important than coherence.

But there are different versions of value pluralism, not all of which require contradictions and compromise to be logically necessary and unresolvable. One of the more famous versions that insists on contradictions is Isaiah Berlin's account of value pluralism. One place in which this account is elaborated is in his well-known essay, "The Hedgehog and the Fox" (Berlin, 1978). The essay draws a loose distinction between those thinkers who "relate everything to a single central vision, one system less or more coherent" (the hedgehogs) and those who "pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory" (the foxes) (p. 22). Berlin's sympathy is evidently with the foxes; the hedgehogs tend to flatten reality, reduce it in some way. Berlin is no emotivist, nor is he an anti-realist in any sense; values are real and genuine, he argues, but there are many of them, and at least some of them are inherently contradictory. It is better, he argues,

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to learn to live with these contradictions rather than unobtrusively sweep them under the carpet, only for them to trouble us later.

Taylor (2001) is in broad agreement with Berlin about the importance of keeping in view the plurality of genuine values or goods. However, he is reluctant to state, as it sometimes seems Berlin does, that the conflicts between goods are "written into the goods themselves" (p. 117). He argues instead that

> It always makes sense to work toward a condition in which two cherished goods can be combined, or at least traded off at a higher level … Such adjudication and balance are possible if we approach value pluralism in an Aristotelian framework. That is, in any given situation, we can weigh the relative importance of the goods that concern us, in some cases upholding one more strongly, and in others another. (p. 118)

He adds, further, that:

> It may also be that what appears as an opposition between goods at one stage of history is seen merely as an incompatibility at a later stage, and that even the incompatibilities may sometimes be overcome. … New conflicts emerge in the course of resolving old ones. But no particular one need be considered immovable. We don't have merely to resign ourselves. (pp. 118-119)

Taylor is worried, in part, that there is a kind of fatalism hidden in Berlin's position. We may, in other words, 'give up' on resolving certain conflicts between a given set of goods because we perceive the conflict as unresolvable, *a priori*. I share Taylor's concern.

Furthermore, the choice between hedgehog and fox may be a false dichotomy. In other words, there may be other options beyond narrow monism and incoherent pluralism. Berlin (1978) himself acknowledges that the distinction may be a bit crude and should not be taken too

rigidly. The Aristotelian approach, which Taylor suggests, is one example of an alternative, where the focus is on good judgment (*phronesis*)—as opposed to reliance on a single, master value (hedgehog), or making little to no effort to achieve coherence (fox). Undoubtedly, community educators require a high degree of *phronesis* in the course of their everyday work; this quality may also serve them in the context of developing a coherent ethical framework.

I have two further, interrelated considerations to add about the idea of coherence. First, there is a tendency to reach for the concept of 'balance' when thinking about how to compromise between competing values. It may even be thought that good judgment is all about 'balancing' and seeking compromises. What is misleading about the image of the balance is that it can imply a give-and-take or zero-sum relationship between the two goods that are 'being balanced'. The pathways into which our thinking is forced by relying solely on the image of the balance or compromise seem inappropriate when striving to reconcile the demands of, say, equality and the natural environment. No one should want to be 'half-committed' to either of those goods. How do we avoid complacency and morally dubious compromises?[32]

> Iris Murdoch (1970/2014) offers useful insights in this regard:
>
> The notion that 'it all somehow must make sense', or 'there is a best decision here,' preserves from despair: the difficulty is how to entertain this consoling notion in a way which is not false. … It is true that the intellect naturally seeks unity; and in the sciences, for instance, the assumption of unity consistently rewards the seeker. (p. 55)

She goes on to suggest that this "assumption of unity" also bears fruit when it comes to the virtues, whose relations between one another points to the existence of some order, "although it

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[32] This is essentially the critique levelled at Charles Taylor by Alasdair MacIntyre (1994) in the latter's review of *Sources of the Self.*

might of course be difficult to state this in any systematic form" (p. 56). She explains that "reflection rightly tends to unify the moral world, and that increasing moral sophistication reveals increasing unity" (ibid).[33] Crucially, unity should not be misconstrued as uniformity or a rigid monistic hierarchy. There is nothing built into the concept of unity to this effect. The idea is to try to achieve a 'higher' perspective from which we can discover and articulate with increasing precision the necessary connections—the coherence—between, say, work, equality, and nature (and other goods beyond these).

A second consideration to keep in mind is that there is a natural tendency, particularly in Western thought, to place goods in opposition to one another, to fragment reality and to create false dichotomies. Some conflicts between goods may therefore be more perceived than real. This suggestion has been made, for example, by some scholars of early Chinese thought, which emphasized coherence.[34] Many early Chinese thinkers strove to bring together apparent opposites under the banner of the concept of coherence (Ziporyn, 2012). Effort was aimed at constantly seeking to *harmonize* diverse elements (Ziporyn, 2012, p. 65). A key strategy was to try to identify the 'center' that brings coherence to a given set of diverse elements. If a given element strays too far from the center in question, it may fail to cohere with the remainder of the elements, therefore contributing to incoherence. Equally crucial is to avoid collapsing the set of diverse elements into the center (narrow monism); a center cannot be a center if it has nothing outside of itself (of what would it be the center?). Discerning the center is the key to discerning the unity or oneness at play. Much more could be said about the early Chinese concept of

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[33] For the opposite view, that ethics has little hope of achieving the kind of convergence we see in science, see Bernard Williams' argument in chapter eight of *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985/1993). For a compelling critique of Williams' view on this matter, see McDowell (1985).
[34] I am reiterating and summarizing here some points I made in Zrudlo (2022).

coherence, but this brief example again suggests that we need not resign ourselves to contradictions and compromises. It also hints at the value and relevance of non-Western conceptual resources for the complex task of elaborating a coherent ethical framework.[35]

Elaborating an ethical framework: Summary of insights

I have maintained that having some kind of frame is inevitable and that organizations should therefore strive to at least go about developing a framework deliberately and explicitly; that problems in their operations are often symptoms of underlying issues with their frames or frameworks and therefore that working at that level is important; that it is not enough and in fact impossible to be neutral among frameworks; that an ethical framework should be developed in action, in a way that integrates theory and practice; and that an adequate ethical framework should strive for comprehensiveness and coherence among the goods relevant for youth and community development, given that contradictions and compromises are not logically necessary or unresolvable.

In light of these points, I will not be offering (and could not offer) a ready-made ethical framework for community educators and organizations. Instead, I will simply pull together the varied insights that emerged from the critical part of my analysis. This collection of insights should help those that wish to begin elaborating or refining an ethical framework for their

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[35] I have not dwelled on this idea in my dissertation—it was briefly mentioned in Chapter 2—but it should be obvious that my study suggests that the four dominant ethical frames shaping community education in North America are primarily Western in origin (though one may find similar frames in other cultures as well). This does not mean they should be rejected wholesale; I have argued that they have both strengths and weaknesses. Each frame has salvageable elements, as it were. However, I doubt it would be possible to develop a comprehensive and coherent ethical framework drawing solely on the conceptual resources of Western thought.

endeavours. By themselves, the next few paragraphs do not make up a framework, but they constitute, I hope, a starting point or springboard for further elaborations.

While paying due attention to genuine skills that young people require in order to contribute to the development of their communities, organizations should ensure that they do not reduce all the attributes they hope to develop in youth to skills. They should also avoid valuing skills over understandings and dispositions that are equally if not more important than skills. An important set of attributes, for example, are what might be called the 'executive' virtues, such as determination, perseverance, resourcefulness, diligence, and attention to detail. Youth should be encouraged to exert effort and to develop their power of volition. One attribute organizations may wish to avoid entirely, however, is self-reliance, which can lead young people to oscillate between arrogant pride and fear of failure. In their operations, organizations should ensure that the practical dimension of their work is not allowed to eclipse adequate discussion of their *ends*, or to precipitate a slide into anti-intellectualism or an aversion to the conceptual as such, which can reduce their effectiveness. Organizations should not trivialize the aspirations of young people for employment, or the economic needs of their communities, but these should not become the sole aims of their efforts. Materialism should be eschewed, and broader visions of human dignity and community development should be explored.

That each human being is inherently worthy, that no social group is inherently superior to another, and that profound social transformation is required—these convictions should be actively promoted by community organizations. At the same time, community educators should be careful that they themselves and the young people with whom they work do not fall into the various traps associated with the passion for equality, such as radical suspicion of all forms of authority, the kind of critical thinking which results in mere contra-suggestibility, self-

righteousness, and resentment. Organizations should strive to integrate the aims of youth development—which includes the fostering of character—and social change. Developing character implies not only sharpening one's sense of justice, but also developing one's capacity to love and forgive, among many other attributes.

The cognitive and affective dimensions of youth development should not be dichotomized. Certain feelings and passions are necessary for young people to cultivate in order to advance intellectually, as well as to contribute to the development of their communities. Separating out 'feeling' and placing an undue emphasis on it can interfere with learning. In general, it would be best to drop the notion of self-esteem from the language of organizations. It is imperative to develop truth-seeking sensibilities in young people. They should not, however, be filled with Romantic notions of authenticity that are ultimately elusive and act as impediments to learning and development, nor should they be taught that they are uniquely positioned to know themselves. Instead, they can be reminded that they are the only ones who can commit themselves to, among other things, the development of their communities; no one else can commit them in their place.

Helping young people to understand their deep interconnectedness with nature and to appreciate it as an object of moral significance can help motivate them to contribute to the protection of the environment—a vital part of sustainable community development. Encouraging youth to connect with and to better understand nature itself can promote moral and intellectual growth. At the same time, organizations should avoid Romantic nostalgia and relaxing scientific rigour. They also need to keep in view the dark side of human nature—not everything that is natural is necessarily good. Finally, they also need to ensure that they promote knowledge of our

interconnectedness with nature without erasing the possibility of human agency, in part so that the concept of stewardship remains intelligible.

These were some of the main conclusions of my analysis. More themes and considerations would need to be added in order to move towards a more comprehensive account of all the goods relevant to youth and community development. I have had little to say, for example, about the theme of family, even though this is of vital importance to young people. The theme of community itself was only briefly discussed. Friendship is another important idea that needs more elaboration—and about which there are many misunderstandings. Bringing coherence to the above insights—and all the others that need to be added—is a further step that is required if a community organization wishes to develop an ethical framework out of them. One way to seek that coherence, if we are to take a hint from early Chinese thought, is to identify some kind of 'center' that could hold all of the relevant elements together. One way of doing so, I assume, would be to flesh out the aims of youth and community development themselves. Indeed, I have used these two aims as critical footholds throughout my analysis. However, I have not spelled out their content in any systematic way. What is an organization's vision of the kind of youth they are striving to 'develop'? What kind of community do they envision?

In addition to the insights that emerged from the critical dimension of my project, the descriptive map of the four ethical frames itself should also be of use to community organizations. Educators and organizations should be able to use the accounts of the four frames to recognize the influence of these frames on (i) their own operations and thinking; (ii) the sensibilities of young people that participate in their programs; and (iii) new language, activities, or methods suggested to them by others, including consultants, government agencies, and entities that provide funding. The map should serve, in other words, as a kind of protection for

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community organizations from certain damaging sensibilities and convictions that can seep into their operations from a variety of places, often in very subtle ways.

Limitations of my study

No research project can be entirely comprehensive, of course, and my own study has several limitations, which I discuss below. Doing so will also help reiterate the rationale for my project and its main objectives, as well as enumerate some possibilities for further research.

One limitation is that this study has been somewhat focused on the particular language used by community organizations at present. No doubt, a decade or two ago, organizations used different terminology, and a decade or two from now, they will have taken on new terms. As such, my study may not be as directly applicable some time from now, once the language has shifted. Of course, the focus on specific terms that now appear fashionable (e.g., self-esteem) makes it more relevant to community organizations today. Moreover, the fact that I connected organizations' current terminology with historical trends in modernity will make it easier to continue to see the ethical frames at play, even if the language changes. Organizations may abandon the specific language of 'self-discovery' for example, but they will probably not—not anytime soon in any case—abandon the general concern for authenticity. The ethical frames have a longer lifespan than the particular fads and fashions that make their way through the field; this was, after all, one of the reasons I decided to conduct my analysis in this way.

It may be tempting to extend the mapping I developed, of the four ethical frames, to other areas beyond community education. There are likely cases in which this would be possible. It has some degree of applicability, I think, to other subfields of education, and perhaps to educational theory more generally. It may even be useful in thinking about culture—in a very broad sense—

in North America. However, the extent to which the mapping will be illuminating depends on the field, and in some cases, it may not be useful at all (e.g., in understanding the work of sophisticated educational theorists, such as R. S. Peters), or may even obscure reality (e.g., it would be anachronistic to apply it to an analysis of, say, medieval culture). Even if we stick to the field of community education, it may be far less relevant to an analysis conducted of organizations outside North America, and definitely the West more generally—though, because of the vigorous spread of Western ideals, it may, for better or worse, become increasingly applicable over time. At least at present, certain ethical frames may be less influential outside of the West—the artist and the naturalist in particular, I think—and other sets of sensibilities and convictions, which I did not even explore, may be much more powerful. My analysis was culturally specific, and explicitly so. In any case, one would have to test it in each new context. I am confident, as a result of my study, that it is useful in the context of community education in North America. Even then, I am under no illusion that I have presented the *only* illuminating map of the ethical environment. There are no doubt alternative ways in which it could be organized and presented, which may be equally insightful. Further studies of the ethical environment of community education, in which alternative maps are developed, could therefore be helpful, as would studies that try to apply my mapping to other areas.

Another limitation of my study is that, because of the nature of my project, I had to sacrifice the depth of the analysis in several places. For example, much has been written about critical thinking—entire dissertations, even whole careers have been focused on this one theme—but I had to touch upon it rather briefly. One of my primary aims was to develop a somewhat comprehensive map and analysis of the ethical environment, which would be useful for organizations in and of itself. In order to develop an adequate map, featuring the four major

ethical frames, I had to cover some questions more briefly than I would have liked. Specialists in certain topics may find my treatment of their speciality somewhat limited, but I hope that they nevertheless find my discussion of other themes insightful, as well as the overall map. I should emphasize, again, that the rationale for my project was primarily practical, arising from the issues and problems faced by real community organizations.

A single dissertation, of course, will have little direct practical impact. I am under no illusions here. Even if this project manages to register within certain academic circles (realistically, it probably will not), the link between theory and practice in the field of education is notoriously poor. And although I hope to promote it more broadly among community organizations themselves—perhaps by publishing it as an accessible book—again, I do not think its reach will be all that significant. Its greatest impact will probably be through my own direct contacts, with whom I collaborate, in the organizations to which I contribute on an ongoing basis. Anecdotally, I have already found that the insights I have generated through this research project have been helpful for community educators working to raise the capacity of youth for community development. That the staff of organizations I have spoken to find the mapping I have created illuminating and my critique of the ethical frames helpful is the kind of practical impact and validation I hoped for. Time will tell if the influence of these ideas moves any further.

What would be particularly interesting, in terms of further research, would be to follow the efforts of an organization that decides to develop or refine an ethical framework to guide its endeavours, inspired in part by my analysis of the ethical environment. This would help get a sense of the practical and conceptual obstacles to the work of elaborating an ethical framework, and would raise many more specific ethical questions that could be analyzed. Beyond this, one

could imagine a variety of action-research efforts that could generate further insight into the issues associated with the four ethical frames and their influence on community organizations. It is a limitation of my study that it was focused on the more theoretical side of this work, essential though it is. But this was, in part, a blessing, since the bulk of my research was carried out during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has made empirical academic research in education far more complex and demanding.

Final remarks

Elaborating an ethical framework to guide the operations of an organization is not a straightforward endeavour. As I have argued, it should be embedded in action, but is also conceptual in nature. Most community organizations may not, at present, have much space to advance this work, given limited time, funding, and human resources. My study underlines the importance of this work, indirectly making a case for the need to grant community organizations resources to this end. Indeed, if they do not pay adequate attention to the task of developing a coherent ethical framework, community organizations will, at best, simply reproduce existing issues in society (e.g., by uncritically promoting skill talk), and, at worst, impede the sound development of young people and their communities (e.g., by striving to boost the self-esteem of youth). Western modernity is a confusing context in which to operate; its ethical environment is full of contradictions, as well as promising ideals. Good intentions are necessary but, in the final analysis, insufficient for achieving youth and community development.

As I have emphasized several times, the work of community education is practical, in the Aristotelian sense: we need to continuously consider the ends towards which it moves, striving to

obtain an ever-clearer perception and articulation of them and their implications. The same goes for social change more broadly. As Iris Murdoch (1997) has eloquently put it:

> It is not true that 'everyone knows what is wrong with our society' and differs only over a simple choice of solutions. What we see as wrong, and our ability to express what is wrong in a profound, subtle and organised way, will influence our conception of a solution as well as providing us with the energy to seek it. (p. 183)

I would add that it is also unclear for now what *kind* of person—with what kinds of capacities and moral purposes—will be able to do this work, to conceive of solutions and implement them. Community organizations therefore have the further task of striving to identify the capacities and moral purposes required by young people if they are to contribute meaningfully to community development. If we believe that young people have a role to play in this process—as I assumed at the outset of my dissertation—we need to see in them the potential for developing the requisite capacities.

In Chapter 1, I offered a set of (I hope legitimate) excuses for my use of elastic terms such as 'social change' and 'community development'. Having reached the end of my dissertation, the reader no doubt has a clearer (though not crystal clear) idea of the kind of social change and community development I have in mind. Again, my aim in utilizing these elastic concepts was to cast the net wide in terms of my potential audience, and to tolerate, at least initially, a rather broad pluralism of the field of community education. By now it will be clear that I am not so enthusiastic about organizations that, for example, focus on boosting the self-esteem of young people as a means to empower them, or merely attend to youth employability. Crucially, the *reasons* for my lack of enthusiasm in this regard should be equally clear by now. And perhaps the reader can now appreciate these reasons, or at least some of them, and may even

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modify their language and practices as a result. In general, having so to speak 'walked together' over the course of eight chapters, perhaps the reader and I now share a relatively more united vision of social change and community development. Or perhaps our differences are more starkly apparent, at least in some areas. Either way, I hope the conversation can continue, since we both have at heart the genuine development of youth and their communities. Community educators must, almost by definition, value these ends, even if they conceptualize them in different ways. It is in the space opened up by the agreement among us on this valuing that fruitful discourse in the field of community education proceeds. As I have emphasized repeatedly, this discourse, if it is to be effective, needs to include thinking about what these terms and their related concepts mean and imply. I hope to have made a modest contribution to this discourse with my dissertation.

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