

Blum, L.A. (1994). *Moral perception and particularity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 273 pp. (Hardcover).

If you are interested in moral theory, read this book. Blum surveys the domain of moral theory and makes the case for the complex nature of moral agency without resorting to impenetrable prose. Of the 11 chapters, nine were published previously as articles or book chapters in the course of the past 14 years. Many have been substantially revised, and all nine appear to have benefited from discussion and criticism. The refinement is reflected not only in the care and clarity of thought but also in the quality of the prose. He is eminently readable. Blum tells us stories of subway trains, office relationships, and lessons to be learned from hailing taxicabs. He describes the actions of his own children, their friends, a cousin, and other youngsters. These tales are always succinct and to the point.

Lawrence Blum's point is to move moral philosophy away from a preoccupation with principle, rationality, impartiality, and universality. His corrective involves focusing on perception, imagination, motivation, and judgment. Blum finds companionship with communitarian theorists such as Michael Sandel and Alisdair McIntyre and with feminist theorists of the morality of care such as Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings. However, just as he finds the principle-based moral theorist position incomplete for its failure to embrace particularity and perception, so he finds many alternative theories reductive, weak, or over-emphatic in their too little integration or consideration of the complex relationships between reason, principle, social context, perception, judgment, and what he refers to as the "care virtues." Simply put, an accurate accounting of moral behavior is a tricky business that leads us into dark tangles of possible, necessary, and only very rarely sufficient conditions. Blum's particular concern is with the necessity of moral perception and particularity. Put simply, "We make choices within the world we see, and what (and how) we see is itself an integral part of the quality of our moral consciousness" (p. 4).

Without moral perception there can be no moral judgment or agency. We must perceive something as potentially falling within the domain of the moral before we can react to it within a moral context. Blum traces the intellectual lineage of the impartialist moral theorists, of whom he selects Lawrence Kohlberg as prototypical, to Kant, a tracing I might extend to Plato and which has as its hallmark the almost exclusive location of morality in reason. Without excluding the role reason may play in moral practice, Blum reminds us that we must first perceive a situation as moral before we can bring moral

reasoning to bear on it. However, moral perception though necessary is not always sufficient for moral judgment or agency. A moral act may involve a sense of obligation or duty; it may reference a rule or principle; or it may be fully and adequately explained by reference to perception. The role of perception varies as to the particularity of the case.

Blum's own intellectual debt is to Iris Murdoch and Aristotle with their emphases on virtues developed in a social context. Blum shares an intellectual lineage with those who have taken an Aristotelian turn in moral theory, a group which includes communitarians. As a result, the development of our perceptions within moral communities, and the function of moral exemplars, plays a prominent role in Blum's thought. This latter point is not trivial for those of us in education. Far too often moral philosophers fail to address the educational component of how we come to be moral beings. While this book does not develop a pedagogy or curriculum for the development of moral beings, it does point us in a fruitful direction for such projects.

While none of the arguments presented in this book are new, they are brought together and presented with a clarity and economy that deserves our attention and our thanks. This volume avoids the if-not-everything-then-nothing approach to moral theory that predominates in both psychology and philosophy. The if-not-everything approach uses a three step rhetorical process. First, a particular theory is shown to fail to account for the whole of moral conception, action, or learning. Second, that theory is then rejected in whole (the reasoning being approximately, that if the theory cannot account for everything, then it accounts for nothing). Third, another theory is then substituted as candidate for status as all-embracing. One result of this tendency toward exclusivity and exhaustivity is a too easy assumption of sufficiency by adherents of this theory or that and a corresponding over-emphasis on sufficiency and neglect of the details of necessity. A second result is that cross-fertilization from those in competing schools is relatively rare. Blum performs a welcome service in offering synthesis and critique in balanced and appropriate measure. Like a bee who pollinates while gathering nectar, Blum brings competing theories to bear on each other while building his own masterful construct. The result is an account that acknowledges the complexity and messiness of our moral universe, while cogently and persuasively arguing for the inclusion of particularity and perception as necessary components of that universe. Along the way Blum treats us to what is probably the clearest and most concise survey of the field of contemporary moral theory. For that alone, Mr. Blum deserves our thanks. But his is not merely a work of survey and summary. As the title indicates, for Blum,

perception and particularity are fundamental components of that which makes us moral. Theories that ignore these aspects are to that extent, if to no other, incomplete.

Thomas Mauhs-Pugh
Department of Education
Dartmouth College
Hanover, New Hampshire, U.S.A.

Meadows, S. (1993). *The child as thinker: The development and acquisition of cognition in childhood*. New York: Routledge, 473 pp. (Softcover).

In her recent book, *The Child as Thinker: The Development and Acquisition of Cognition in Childhood*, Sara Meadows provides both a review of current research on children's cognitive development, and a discussion of the panoply of factors which may influence growth in thinking. In so doing, the book covers the two central tasks of any science, description and explanation, in a more balanced way than many previous efforts. Particularly welcome on the explanation side was her care in considering both biological and environmental streams of influence, and discussing their roles in supporting development in a detailed and thoughtful fashion. The book is distinctive in its strong orientation toward educational implications of the developmental evidence as well. And finally, Meadows devotes considerable attention throughout to issues of individual variation in cognitive development, an important and seriously neglected topic in many contemporary volumes on the growth of children's thinking.

Obviously, the preceding agenda is a full one, and requires a substantial effort to carry it through. This is no slight volume. With nearly 400 pages of text and well over 1500 references, the book is detailed and comprehensive in coverage. Nor is it the easiest read; for example, my introductory graduate level class found the chapter on theories of cognitive development a bit heavy going (though admittedly I assigned it to them "cold" after the first week of class!). Nevertheless, serious attention to what Meadows has to say will be rewarding for the advanced-level student, and for the researcher, both because of the inclusion of relatively novel topics, and for her thoughtful, but no-nonsense approach to reflecting on the broader implications of