Sikes, P., Nixon, J. & Carr, W. (eds.) (2003). **The Moral Foundations of Educational Research: Knowledge, Inquiry and Values**. Maidenhead: open University Press (141 p.)

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This book contains eight engaging, challenging and instructive essays. For that reason alone I can recommend it. Unfortunately, the essays are also quite uneven and heterogeneous. It is difficult to see what holds them together, and they vary in terms of themes and methods to an extent that makes the reading a difficult affair. Reading the book is like reading an entire issue of a journal, say, the *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, where the articles naturally have something in common, since they appear in the same journal, but it is hard to see that this justifies collecting them into a book.

The book title – *The Moral Foundations of Educational Research* – is appealing to someone like me, who is interested in the moral foundations of the social sciences. In the five-page introduction, two of the editors (Nixon & Sikes) explain how the book originated. It emerged as "a direct response to the changing pattern of doctoral research within which 'research training' is now seen as an essential component." (p. 1). The editors note that there has been a significant expansion in the publications of books on methodology within social science, and education in particular. However, they lament the fact that there are too few books that address the question concerning the distinctiveness of educational research. What *is* educational research? They give a very fruitful answer to this question that justifies the making of this book: "Educational research is grounded, epistemologically, in the moral foundations of educational practice." (p. 2).

So far so good. But then the introduction ends, and the eight individual chapters begin, and the reader (me, in this case) is left wondering what the moral foundations of educational practice are. No answer to this question is given, and although the chapters that follow are all interesting in their own right, they do not specifically address this question. Instead they wander off in many different (but often very interesting) directions without a common theme to hold them together. One of the chapters, "Against objectivism: the reality of the social fiction", written by the noted French sociologist **Pierre Bourdieu** (who died when this collection of essays was being prepared), is even taken from a text that has already been published (*Pascalian Meditations*, Polity Press, 2000), and which hardly addresses educational issues at all. It is more of a general introduction to Bourdieu's central concepts, such as *habitus* and *symbolic capital*, and a passionate argument against objectivism in social science.

Most of the other chapters are written by educational researchers based at the University of Sheffield (with the exceptions of Goodson, Paechter and Pring). These other chapters are (in order of appearance): **Wilfred Carr**'s "Educational research and its histories", which gives an outline of two different approaches to the history of educational research: One kind of history ("Whig history") reads the past in terms of the present, while another kind ("Hegelian history") reads the present in terms of the past. These are suggestive distinctions, and Carr argues that we cannot, if we

confine ourselves to the first kind of history, retrieve the necessary (according to Carr) idea that educational research is a species of practical philosophy. This idea is found in Aristotle and Dewey, for example, but according to Whig history writing, it appears archaic and outmoded. Only by taking the other Hegelian perspective can we begin to understand "how the modern transformation of education into schooling has so removed education from the sphere of *praxis* as to virtually eliminate ethical categories from the legitimate field of educational enquiry and research." (p. 15). According to Carr, education has come to be conducted for utilitarian and economic purposes rather than being an ethical activity with the goal of cultivating moral beings. I believe this is very true. But unfortunately we hear little explicitly about Carr's alternative in the book. The authors all agree that this alternative that grounds educational theory in moral *praxis* is necessary, but I would like to get a hint as to how it would look in practice.

Gary McCulloch's "Towards a social history of educational research" follows up on the historical issues, and argues for the relevance of historical studies in educational research. The chapter outlines a tension between "educational research" (a scientific discourse) and "educational studies" (a discourse aligned with the humanities and cultural studies). **Pat Sikes** and **Ivor Goodson** then write about "Living research: thoughts on educational research as moral practice", which mainly consists of personal, biographical accounts of the authors' own professional trajectories, but little thought is given to the explicit moral dimensions of educational research in this regard. They also advocate (what I think is) a facile subjectivism, which they ascribe to Thomas Kuhn: "As Kuhn (1962) argued, there is no way to distinguish between what is subjective and perceived and in people's heads, and what is out there in the world." (p. 34). I don't know if Sikes and Goodson intend such a statement to provide legitimization of their lengthy, personal narratives about "what is in their own heads", but I do know that Kuhn has said no such thing. Paradigms and worldviews were not conceived, by Kuhn, to refer to things in people's heads, but rather to ways of investigating and coping with the world through equipments, techniques and practices.

Richard Pring's chapter is about "The virtues and vices of an educational researcher". This chapter is probably the one that most directly addresses the moral issues that I miss in the book. Pring tries to go beyond ethical rules and principles in educational research, and argues that all such rules and principles have to be *applied* in concrete cases. In this regard, we need to focus on the virtues (and vices) of the researcher herself rather than on abstract rules. Furthermore, Pring finds that virtues are fostered within social contexts, which is why he expands his moral scope to include what he calls "the virtuous research community" (p. 65). **Jon Nixon**, **Melanie Walker** and **Peter Clough** write about "Research as thoughtful practice". This chapter gives an outline of Hannah Arendt's conception of thinking, and they raise the intriguing question: "How do we realize practices of public deliberation without putting scholarship at the explicit service of politics?" (p. 91). Subsequently, they present three examples of what they consider "thoughtful research". These examples are all instructive, and one of them is Bourdieu's *The Weight of the World* about the new forms of social suffering in contemporary societies. Again, interesting and thought-provoking to read, but little about the moral foundations of *educational* research.

Carrie Paechter's chapter is entitled "On goodness and utility in educational research". The message of this chapter is that the often-heard call that educational research should be *useful* is not

the best way to achieve good research. According to Paechter, it is impossible to determine in advance what kind of research that will be useful, and the example of Valerie Walkerdine's deconstructive research on girls and mathematics is cited as an example of research that did not seem useful when it was first published, but which has subsequently proved to be useful both to researchers in gender and education *and* mathematics. **Fred Inglis**, who is professor of cultural studies (at Sheffield) and a noted authority on Raymond Williams, Clifford Geertz, and the culture of consumerism, ends the book with his chapter "Method and morality: practical politics and the science of human affairs". Apart from confusion in the use of the Kantian terms 'synthetic' and 'analytic' propositions (p. 124), Inglis' chapter is a spirited blend of ideas from Collingwood, Wittgenstein, Rorty and Geertz that presents his view of social inquiry summed up in the concepts: structure, performance, history, values.

What I like about the book is first and foremost the whole idea of putting it together. Such a book is necessary, for many commentators are beginning to get a sense that social science (and educational research in particular) cannot be modelled on the natural sciences, but has more in common with the kind of moral knowledge that Aristotle described as *phronesis*. The idea of presenting this conception in a book is excellent. Secondly, I like most of the chapters as independent contributions to the philosophy of education. What I don't like, however, is the lack of integration in the book. The introduction is too short to provide such integration, and there could have been some concluding comments from the editors as an attempt to return to the main issue that is never really adequately dealt with in the book: The moral foundations of educational research. So all in all, the book title promises more than the chapters actually deliver, but still, many chapters are worth reading for their own sake.