## Is All Formative Influence Immoral?

## Introduction

Schools aim to exert influence over their pupils in at least two notionally distinct respects: to wit, schools aim to exert influence over their pupils’ actions, and, to a first approximation, to exert influence over their pupils in respect of the kind of person that they are. Call the first sort, ‘behavioural influence’, and the second, ‘formative influence’. This is no accident. It seems that the *very point* of schooling is to exert formative influence, and to expedite this process, it is necessary to exert influence over pupils’ actions. Whereas behavioural influences make a difference to what people do, formative influences make a difference to those of their characteristics in virtue of which they are what they are and do what they do: their beliefs and desires for instance, or, more generally, their dispositions. Others may like to say that these dispositions constitute our character, our identity, or *who* we are.

When we influence something, we make a difference to that thing; for instance, we might perpetuate a state of that thing that would otherwise cease, as when watering a house plant, or we might bring about change in that thing’s state. We often think of children as being impressionable, and of our childhood comprising our ‘formative years’ in which we acquire dispositions which are hard to countermand. A formative influence is one which affects our formation, and, usually, we have in mind an influence undergone in childhood. I will use the term to capture an effect on our formation, without locating this purely in our childhood. Indeed, one might hope to reform a person later in their life and this should be considered as a hope to wield a formative influence, since reformation is a subset of formation.

However formative influence is to be defined in detail, I want to ask how defensible is the idea that all formative influence is unethical or at least regrettable, as such, and that we ought not to seek to exercise formative influence over children (and indeed anyone at all)? It is readily admitted by all sides that there are bad or at least regrettable means of wielding influence. These include indoctrination (at least on process understandings of the concepts, rather than outcomes, or intentions interpretations), bullshitting, lying, deception and manipulation. The defensibility of seeking to exercise formative influence presumably turns on the same thing that John Wilson saw the defensibility of Education as an enterprise turning on, namely:

whether we are to see the human condition as (1) basically all right and naturally sound or healthy, liable no doubt to dangers and difﬁculties but not of its essence corrupted or systematically disordered, or as (2) essentially problematic or liable to error, not naturally healthy or straight-forward in the way that the lives of animals are straightforward. (Wilson 2002, 336)

The first description will call to mind the views of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the second, the views of John Wesley. For Rousseau, “Everything is good as it comes from the hands of the Maker of the world but degenerates once it gets into the hands of man” (Rousseau 1965, 11). For Wesley, by contrast, “The bias of nature is set the wrong way: education is designed to set it right” (Wesley quoted at Body 1936, 56). As Darling makes clear, on views such as Rousseau’s, the “teacher is not responsible for creating an end-product. Rather he accepts the nature of the child, and assists and enriches development that takes place independently of the teacher’s endeavours.”

This philosophy of teaching is fortified first by an optimistic view of human nature (manifest, for example, in Rousseau’s opposition to the doctrine of original sin), and second by the equally optimistic view that free development will be for the best. (Darling 1982, 174)

Balanced against this caution about undue optimism is the suspicion that many have about the permissibility of the concerted cultivation of children, and of directing them and fashioning them in our preferred style. The suspicion emerges from the defencelessness of children and their capacity to be moulded in our own image. There are more or less defensible versions of the doctrine that formative influence, as such, is immoral, and we shall attempt to follow some of the strands of argument that lead to this conclusion.[[1]](#endnote-1)

It seems that in maintaining that all formative influence is immoral, one is committed to the notion that children have an innate teleology, that these may be frustrated, and that to frustrate the child’s innate teleology would be to wrong them. It is such views that we shall begin our discussion by focusing on. However, even those, such as Plato, who favour a strong view of innate teleology, can endorse education as a process which leads people to recollect the forms, and live in their light, and we shall discuss his views next. Another (fairly weak) version of the idea that all formative influence is immoral might be that we ought to broaden the possibilities available to those that we formatively influence, and not to narrow them. The objective would be to inform decisions without commending any. We shall consider this strategy in connection with the views of Michael Hand. This seems too permissive a strategy, however, as we shall see. Finally Foss and Griffin’s worry that desires for control and domination are embedded in persuasion is explored together with their proposed alternative strategy of ‘invitational rhetoric’. Ultimately, this paper argues that we often have good reason to encourage certain formative outcomes and discourage others. First though, we will consider whether a policy of non-intervention is coherent, which some doubt it to be.

### Is a Policy of Non-Influence Conceivable?

I do not think that it is at all facetious (as some might) to complain that it is not clear what a policy of non-influence would look like. It is fair to say that I, in particular, have had no formative influence on Alexander the Great (although notionally, the concept of how subsequent generations might perceive him likely did influence him). The people we can claim most safely that we have had, and risked no formative influence upon, are those we have had no possibility of contact with at all (even indirectly). However, we do not want to say, in general, that we ought to sacrifice contact with one another in order to avoid influencing one another. We may want to say this about some specific cases. For instance, some parents might rightly think it best to keep their children from having contact with certain people precisely so that they cannot wield any formative influence over their children. Indeed, children would not grow up at all were it not for their being raised by adults; at best they would be feral, and at worst they would be dead. Whatever points those who oppose influence want to make, they must certainly bear in mind these truisms. However, insofar as it is not possible to avoid formative influence altogether, it need not entail that there could or should be no ethical prohibitions on formative influential activities as such: it might be that we ought to follow the path of minimal influence, for instance. Alternatively, it might be that we ought never act so as to formatively influence others, but only allow that this is an unfortunate by-product to be tolerated where we act for other reasons.

### Innate Teleologies

It seems that in maintaining that formative influence is immoral, one is committed to the notion that children have an innate teleology, and that these may be frustrated. To frustrate the child’s innate teleology would be to wrong them. By way of comparison, consider how a seed will grow into a tree if allowed to follow its natural path, but how that innate teleology can be frustrated, for instance, by falling on a road in the baking sun. Indeed, that innate teleology might equally be helped on its path: a seed that falls on a road in the baking sun might be moved to more hospitable surroundings and so be helped to achieve its natural ends.

Let us call the idea that we have within us a perfect way that we could be, Innate Perfectionism. There are two versions of innate perfection, one which allows for influence and one that does not. On the first let us say that a designer made each of us with a perfect form in mind, and left to unfold without interference, thus allowing us to fulfil our purpose. Any interference can only pervert the course of reaching our innate perfection. On the second, let us say that a designer made each of us with a form in mind, but that we can be helped to reach that perfection, we can facilitate and cultivate one another’s perfect form, and indeed, we can frustrate our own fulfilment. Many people would dissent from the above stories since they do not believe that human beings were designed at all. However, it might be that one can understand the idea of an innate teleology without positing a designer. Indeed, one may wonder what the best way that they themselves could be is: the strongest, smartest, fastest, most caring, and so on. Still others might dissent from the first view since they want to emphasize free will, so that while we might have an innate perfection to fulfil, we will not simply fulfil it if left to get on with it; we may make bad decisions which prevent the fulfilling of our perfect nature. It seems that the second of these ideas is the more plausible, but it already makes room for positive influence. Let us now consider whether the idea of an innate teleology is coherent at all. We begin our next discussion with a poem of the sculptor, Michelangelo which speaks to innate teleologies.

### Can we Make Sense of the Idea of an Innate Teleology?

### The best of artists has that thought alone

Which is contained within the marble shell;

The sculptor's hand can only break the spell

To free the figures slumbering in the stone

(Michelangelo quoted at Dubos1972, 10-11)

Michelangelo’s poem expresses the idea that he did not create his sculptures. Instead, they resided within the block of marble all along, leaving to him the workman’s task of chipping away the marble which obscured them. The thought might bespeak false modesty, since there were likely very many other statues equally contained in the blocks that he worked; many other ways that they could have been chipped away at to produce a quite different statues. Of a less creative activity, one might say, ‘I did not complete the Sudoku; the Sudoku was complete all along. I just filled in the missing numbers’. Here, the determination of the correct result does nothing to undermine the fact that a process is required to realise it. Even if there were veins running through a block of marble such that no other statue could be produced from that block, but only the David, say, or a broken David, then it would still take serious skill, insight and effort to bring out the complete and undamaged David. The question here would be: are children somewhat like the David, or the Sudoku, with an innate perfection, that is to be revealed? (Here we will take it as read that the undamaged David is better than any of the (purportedly) damaged Davids; that the innate teleology does indeed trump its perversions).

We should be wary of vacuity in the innate/ acquired distinction, for if we set the definition too loose, then, granted felicitous circumstance, every feat or trait a person might accomplish or develop would count as innate. For his use of the term, Dylan Evans adds the condition of requiring few special circumstances for a person to develop some skill or trait. Under this use, first-language acquisition counts as innate:

When I say a trait is ‘innate’, I mean that it needs very few special conditions for it to develop. In other words, so long as you give a child the basic things it needs to survive such as food, shelter and company, that child will develop all the traits that are innate to humans. Language is innate in this sense; you do not need to provide lots of special instruction materials for a child to acquire a language. All you need to do is bring the child up in a group of other humans who can speak. (Evans 2003, 13)

Evans suggests that on this model, innateness should be conceived on a continuum:

Innateness is not an all-or-nothing thing, but a question of degree. When investigating emotions or any other biological or psychological trait, we should not really ask whether it is innate or not, but rather *how* innate it is. The more ‘special conditions’ over and above the basic necessities of survival that are required for the development of a trait, the less innate it is. Learning language is less innate than growing legs, since growing legs requires only a normal genome, basic nutrition, and the luck to escape nasty accidents, whereas learning a language requires all these things *plus* interaction with other speaking humans. (Ibid, 15)

We should contrast suppressing or not suppressing aspects of children on the one hand, and encouraging or not encouraging aspects of children on the other. Some characteristics might develop with encouragement, and atrophy without it, others might develop without encouragement or discouragement, but atrophy with discouragement. Some people might think that how a child grows without either encouragement or discouragement is a way to understand the natural growth path of the child. However, it is not clear that such a path of growth is desirable. Ken Robinson has done well to point out that children have a natural ability to become good pickpockets, but that rather than being something that we ought to encourage, or ignore, it ought to be discouraged. Indeed, natural things are not thereby good things. All sorts of things are natural, but not good and ought to be discouraged: it may be more natural to feel jealous of another person’s success rather than to take pleasure in it.[[2]](#endnote-2)

While Plato’s views shifted throughout his life and are not entirely clear given his tendency to write in dialogue form, in one of his moods, Plato held that acquiring knowledge was a matter or recalling a world which one had previously inhabited, but that recollection (or anamnesis) could be brought out through guidance and facilitation (such as Socrates’ provocations), as well as through private contemplation. While it is surely wrong to speak of *the* Platonic conception of knowledge, we may construct something we could reasonably call a Platonic conception of the person, and their accumulation of knowledge. We could draw on *The Republic*, particularly the analogy of the Cave, the *Phaedo*, and on the *Meno*. We would see that soul once inhabits a world of forms, which it is taken from to be embodied on earth. Knowledge on earth consists in the recollection of forms. Here, knowledge is transcendentally empirical, since we learnt about the forms through direct acquaintance as souls, but it is present in us from birth in human form and so also innate. In the *Meno*, Socrates leads a slave boy to demonstrate Pythagoras’ theorem by asking a series of questions to tease it out of him, and indeed, Socrates thought of himself as a midwife, teasing knowledge out of other people, and this would be a paradigmatic example of him doing so.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Certain sorts of true beliefs do not fit this form so well; the fact that I am an embodied person does not seem as good an example of a form as say, the shape of a triangle. However, it is undeniably a fact, and no more illusory than the shape of the perfect triangle, and arguably less so. It could have been a form perhaps, but then human history would appear to exist predetermined in the realm of the forms. Perhaps we could say that the realm of the forms consists of all truths from all time, simultaneously, and perhaps that is a coherent idea, but it is a huge departure from common sense and under-motivated as a departure from simplicity. Indeed, it seems simpler to suggest that human beings perceive their existence, rather than recall it. To the extent that Plato insisted knowledge to be only about that which was changeless, such as mathematical truths, we may caution that this was also unmotivated. Facts may *be* states of affairs, or true statements *about* states of affairs. States of affairs themselves can come into existence, and make certain statements about them true. Those states of affairs that come into existence may be contingent, and so too may be the truth of propositions about them, and they may only be true once they have, materialized (if irreversibly so). For instance, it may not be true today that Arsenal football club will win tomorrow, even if come tomorrow Arsenal really do win. Mathematical ideas are among those about which Platonism is most plausible.

Let us accept this for the sake of argument that mathematical advances take place by recollection, rather than by discovery. This would be an example of innate perfectionism. It does not follow that mathematics is best pursued in isolation. Without interventions, people may miss-remember and instead they may be able to help each other remember. While one might worry that they will recall a false story between them, falsely believing themselves to have remembered something when reminded by someone else, it is not quite like this in the case of mathematics, since the beliefs, such as 2 + 2 = 4, are supposed to be self-evident. It cannot but be true, and one cannot understand that at the same time as not believing it, to entertain it is to be convinced of its truth. Indeed, Plato favoured education, as a process which leads people to recollect the forms, and live in their light. Let us now consider the case that valuing ‘independent mindedness’ conflicts with the exercise of formative influence.

### Independent Mindedness as a Virtue

There is a virtue of independent mindedness which is contrasted with being sheep-like, following the crowd, and with deference to an authority. Similarly, people are chastised for being gullible. At the same time, we should remind ourselves that we do not praise people for recalcitrance or excessive scepticism (to believe as little as possible is not the best policy); indeed we praise open-mindedness and chastise closed-mindedness. The comic, Tim Minchin qualifies this with the warning, ‘if you open your mind too much, your brain will fall out’ (Minchin). The closed minded person will not admit (even to themselves) that they are wrong; they are dyed in the wool and intransigent. The open-minded person can entertain doubts, they can assume things for the sake of argument, they can be taught new ideas, and let go of old ideas.

Michael Hand has observed that rationality and heteronomy are not proper contrasts. Whereas autonomy contrasts with heteronomy, rationality contrasts with irrationality.[[4]](#endnote-4) Autonomy means doing what one thinks is best or believing what one would estimate to be true, heteronomy means deferring to some other in this respect. Hand points out that, in some circumstances, we might judge something to be best, or true, but be in such a weak position to judge, and rationally ought to defer to those better placed to judge; for instance, the claims of qualified doctors are often better than those of those without medical training. By way of hesitation, we may consider the following entreatment from Michael Mann’s film of the eponymous novel, *The Last of the Mohicans*:

Well, then, Cora. In my heart I know, once we're joined [...] we'll be the most marvellous couple in London. I'm certain of that. So why not let those whom you trust, your father, help settle what's best for you? In view of your indecision, you should rely on their judgment. And mine. Will you consider that? Please consider that. (Dir. Mann, 1992)

The theme of his film and the novel is that Cora ought to have followed her heart rather than the reasonable-sounding supplications of someone of whom she was fond, but about whom she was not impassioned. It is perhaps not always obvious as to when deference or insistence is most rational.

### Impartial Surveys of Possibilities

One (fairly weak) version of the idea that all formative influence is immoral might be the following; that we ought to broaden the possibilities available to those that we formatively influence, and not to narrow them. On this understanding, it is acceptable to tell people about a range of competing conceptions of the true and good, but never to promote anything in particular as true or good. Such an endeavour might be an example of what Michael Hand calls ‘non-directive’ education. An advocate of such a conception of education might deny that directive education is ever acceptable, although they must accept that some formative influence is being sought: at least one’s understanding is being adjusted (and some beliefs) in broadening the range of possibilities that one has available. Thus, one is brought to understand a proposition, if not to believe or disbelieve or suspend judgement over its truth value. Or, one is brought to understand, and be capable of an action, practice, or way of life, if not fully initiated into it or encouraged to identify with it. The objective would be to inform decisions without commending any.

It seems that some values will be in evidence (modelled, and thereby potentially transmitted) in what one frames as being a domain of options, and what one offers as being a consideration in its favour. Indeed, one might argue that employing the policy of global non-direction, amounts to directively recommending it. Where the question of how education ought to proceed is discussed (perhaps in teacher training colleges), the lecturer might take a non-directive approach again, allowing general directivity to be a reasonable option, but in so far as they do not take directivity, one might suggest, again, that in employing non-directivity, they are taking a directive attitude about it. This seems false. There seems to be scope for commitment without advocacy, even if one’s commitment is manifest.

The problem with taking a permissive attitude is not incoherence, but undue reticence. Some might accept the theory of formative influence advocated earlier, but claim that nothing is so well justified as to be deserving of directive teaching. However, this seems much too sceptical. Students ought to be taught directively, because the history of free enquiry has accumulated a wealth of wisdom. It seems unduly sceptical that school students should start from scratch; that they should have to reinvent wheels, re-falsify dead theories, or worse, remain captured by them (one recalls the words of Newton ‘If I have seen further than others, it is because I was standing on the shoulders of giants’). It seems unduly sceptical that the four humours theory should be considered as equally credible as modern medicine in a science classroom.

### Thiessen on Foss and Griffin

By way of defending the possibility of religious evangelism being an ethical endeavour, Elmer Thiessen critiques Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin’s 1995 paper, ‘Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for Invitational Rhetoric’, in which it is lamented that ‘most traditional rhetorical theories reflect a patriarchal bias in the positive value they accord to changing and thus dominating others’ (Ibid 1). Foss and Griffin worry that ‘embedded in efforts to change others is a desire for control and domination, for the act of changing another establishes the power of the change agent over that other’ which simultaneously ‘devalues the lives and perspectives of these others’ (Ibid 2). Thiessen neglects to allow that Foss and Griffin do not rule out the use of persuasion entirely. In their own words, ‘we believe that persuasion is often necessary’ (Ibid 5). Instead, they argue that ‘an alternative exists that may be used in instances when changing and controlling others is not the rhetor’s goal,’ calling this an ‘invitational rhetoric’ (Ibid). They conclude that ‘invitational rhetoric is one of many useful and legitimate rhetorics, including persuasion, in which rhetors will want to be skilled’ (Ibid 16). Here, rhetors will ‘recognize situations in which they seek not to persuade others but simply to create an environment that facilitates understanding, accords value an respects to others’ perspectives, and contributes to the development of relationship of equality’ (Ibid).

It seems that Foss and Griffin provide us with reasons to reject persuasion wholesale, and no reason to entertain it as a reasonable endeavour for rhetors. One wonders what it is that might ‘necessitate’ persuasion, if it is merely an expression of a will to dominate. It is not clear how the will to dominate can legitimate a form of rhetoric; it might be desirable by some, but it does not seem to be justified. However, it does not seem at all fair to say that the will to persuade is thereby a will to dominate. Indeed, it is not just changing others for its own sake that is usually desired, but changing others in desirable ways. Indeed, by the same token, those that wield formative influence ought to accept that they too might be improved or benefitted and thereby be open to the prospect without shame. Thiessen offers examples of morally unexceptionable persuasion ‘a mother persuades her child to tie her shoe laces. A father his teenage daughter to consider attending college’ (Thiessen 2011, 56). How about a negotiator persuading a suicidal person not to jump, or a terrorist to release the hostages? Thiessen’s cases seem unobjectionable, and in the cases that I suggest it seems incumbent on the negotiator to exercise persuasion.

Thiessen objects further that ‘none of us are quite as independent as we would like to think we are,’ in particular, many of our beliefs and values are acquired from those around us, ‘most (maybe even 95%) of the beliefs that we hold are a result of persuasion’ (Ibid). Thiessen emphasizes ‘an inescapable degree of human interdependence’ (Ibid 57). This might be so, but as we have observed earlier, it might be that we ought to follow the path of minimal formative influence. It might be that we ought never act so as to formatively influence others, but only allow that this is an unfortunate by-product to be tolerated. Foss and Griffin can reasonably complain that we live in a poor moral climate. Similar responses can be made to Thiessen’s complaint that ‘the purpose of argumentation, scholarship, and indeed the educational enterprise generally, is precisely to persuade and alter beliefs,’ since it is not as though this is essential to scholarship: one can assert one’s beliefs, and the reasons for them without trying to persuade (Ibid 58). Thiessen might then observe believing testimony is desirable, for without it, our knowledge base would be much smaller. Foss and Griffin can agree with this, however, and advise that we ought not to persuade, but merely share what we take to be the case, and often we will do well to learn from one another in doing so.

Thiessen might suggest that Foss and Griffin’s writing amounts to a performative contradiction: ‘but look,’ he might say, ‘you yourself are writing to persuade.’ And if indeed they are, they are doing wrong on their own account, but that does not mean that what they are doing is not wrong.[[5]](#endnote-5) A more compelling objection seems to be that Foss and Griffin do not seem to be providing an alternative to persuasion in the form of invitational rhetoric. It seems as if they are trying to soften persuasion by calling it ‘invitational rhetoric,’ but ‘a rose by any other name is still a rose’, as Thiessen says. Does Foss and Griffin’s thesis amount to, in David Lewis’ memorable dismissal of rebranding materialism and ‘physicalism’ (Lewis, 1994, 41), ‘a *tacky marketing ploy*, akin to *British Rail's* decree that *second class* passengers shall now be called “standard class passengers”’? Understanding ought not to be the preserve of those who communicate for purpose other than persuasion. It seems that persuasion is justified only where one understands the position that they are recommending, and the position they are criticizing. Indeed, it seems that one ought always to be open to the possibility of being proven wrong, if believing the truth, and doing the good really are what one is concerned with. One might suggest that the difference turns on the difference between invitation and insistence. But Thiessen does not advocate for insistence in evangelism; ‘the requirement that there needs to be an invitation to persuade is too strong […] It is when permission to persuade is denied […] that it is immoral to continue to try to persuade’ (Thiessen 59). However, they might perhaps claim that they are not writing to persuade, but merely to record their thoughts. In doing so they would be saying: I think the following, because x, y and z – I might be wrong. In doing so, one wonders where the meaningful difference lies between this and persuasion. Perhaps it just amounts to fallibilistic, open minded, rational persuasion. It might also simply amount to a difference of intention, of whether one speaks in order to persuade, or speaks in order to report one’s thought, or perhaps to invite criticism.

Notwithstanding Thiessen’s hesitancy, there are perhaps occasions where insistence might be warranted, with the only misgiving being its practicability; intransigence is not likely to be swayed with insistence (One may worry that insistence is a symptom of intransigence, but it need not be). We might find persuasive consequentialist arguments to favour bypassing rationality on some occasions. Consider whether there are any conditions under which one ought to slip another human being a conversion pill, a pill which will instantaneously change their beliefs, attitudes and projects to what one desires. A plausible example might be that the British Special Operations Executive would have been justified in slipping such pills to leading Nazis, so as to avert the Holocaust or Second World War (Tillson 2013, 248).

### Not All Formative Influence is Immoral

In sum, Foss and Griffin’s alternative to persuasion seems doubtfully genuine, and their arguments against persuasion rather weak, too. Bryan R. Warnick recounts Isocrates’ letter to King Phillip of Macedonia, ‘all who are blessed with understanding ought to set before themselves the greatest men as their model, and strive to become like him’ (Warnick 2009, 16). As Warnick observes, ‘for Isocrates, the imitation of exemplars is not opposed to living with intelligence; instead, imitating noble exemplars *is* intelligent living’ (Ibid). Locke qualifies this thought somewhat, remarking that where some students ‘*affectation* of all kinds, whencesoever it proceeds, is always offensive; because we naturally hate whatever is counterfeit, and condemn those who have nothing better to recommend themselves by’ (Locke, §66, §99). That is to say, one may properly model oneself on models that befit one. This point seems more aesthetic, or rooted in etiquette, than anything else, in Locke’s formulation. On the other hand, it can be given a more statused and a more ability-based interpretation. Imagine for instance, an underling carrying oneself with the pomp and self-importance over a strong and courageous leader. Or imagine someone carrying themselves in imitation of Einstein when they are not capable of simple arithmetic. These points carry some individual-sensitive constraints on the selection of proper role models.

However, children’s ideal futures are under-determined by their genetic endowment: one cannot read off from their genome, how things ought to go for them ideally. There is no one goal towards which we should bring children which is their fullest and most ideal development; certainly we could not easily imagine what that would be. Thus, different upbringings and different goals can be of equal worth within this conception. Furthermore, even if there were some latent perfection, it is far from obvious that scrupulously avoiding both encouragement and discouragement of those things which we admire and disapprove respectively is apt to lead them there. It seems that we often have good reason to encourage certain formative outcomes and discourage others.

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1. The title of this section is taken from a celebrated monologue in Oscar Wilde’s, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (2012). Lord Henry Wotton, reflects that there must be ‘something terribly enthralling in the exercise of influence’ (p. 51) and undertakes to exercise such an influence over Gray, all the while himself denouncing influence as an intrinsic evil. Arguably however, it is not influence *per se* that is on trial as corruptive, but instead hedonism as a form of influence. Consider for instance how Gray’s adoption of Wotton’s hedonism lead to his ultimate undoing. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. On the other hand, and to some extant undercutting even this argument, it is hard to see what the word ‘natural’ covers (even once the words ‘unnatural’, and ‘supernatural’ are on the table since they are parasitic on the word ‘natural’), since everything seems to occur within nature. Some may want to say that cities, and pollution are unnatural, but the modern world developed by human kind’s activity on top of the pre-human world, and alongside the contemporary non-human world, and so are as much a part of nature as are the dams of beavers. We may want to say that the human world is changing the world for the worse, but that does not mean it is unnatural, it just means that nature contains conflict, and that some expressions of nature are ultimately self-destructive, as human-kind may well prove to be. I conclude that ‘the natural learning process’ is a curiously vacuous expression. ‘Unnatural learning processes’ might at best signify processes through which one doesn’t learn at all: human beings do not learn maths by eating chalk, qua eating chalk. That would be an unnatural learning process, which is just to say: not a learning process. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. That said, often (as in the *Euthyphro*) Socrates shows people to be ignorant of what they had taken themselves to know about, and does more by way of demolition than discovery. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Michael Hand, ‘Against Autonomy as an Educational Aim,’ *Oxford Review of Education* 32(4) (2006), pp. 535-550. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. One wants to say that that anti-persuasion positions stand to pro-persuasion principles as democracy stands to autocracy. Just as Democracy is vulnerable to becoming an autocracy through democratic process in a way that autocracy is not vulnerable to becoming a democracy through autocratic process (not in practice- dictators don’t decide to relinquish power in favour of democracy unforced), so anti-persuaders are vulnerable to persuaders, as persuaders are not vulnerable to anti-persuaders (at least not to ones who are live up to their ideals). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)