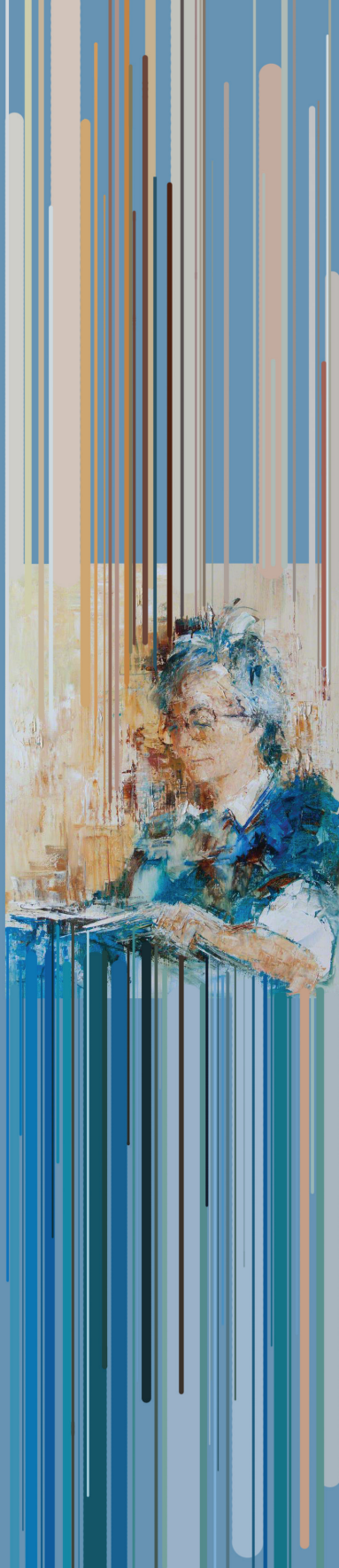


MARY WARNOCK

Ethics, Education
and Public Policy
in Post-War
Britain

PHILIP GRAHAM





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1. Changing Times for Women (1950–2000)

Two Views from the Top

Two undergraduates, young women born eighteen months apart, studied at the University of Oxford during and immediately after World War Two. Though they both sang in the University Bach Choir, they probably never exchanged a word for they attended different women's colleges and, while one was reading 'Greats' or classical history, literature and philosophy, the other was studying Chemistry. Mary Warnock and Margaret Thatcher were both 'top women' who began their careers in the late 1940s when it was unusual for women to be successful in a man's world. After graduation, their careers diverged. Margaret Thatcher worked briefly as a chemist in industry but rapidly moved on to a stellar career in politics, making a massive impact both nationally and internationally and winning three general elections as Britain's first woman Prime Minister.

In the late 1940s, Mary, the subject of this biography, was appointed a philosophy don, a fellow of St. Hugh's College, Oxford. She spent the next sixteen years, while bringing up her five children, teaching philosophy to undergraduates and postgraduates as well as writing books and articles on philosophical topics. In 1966, she left university teaching on her appointment as headmistress of Oxford High School, an independent school for girls, remaining in this post for six years. In 1984, after a long period without a full-time job during which she chaired two important and highly influential government committees, she was appointed Mistress of Girton College, Cambridge, her last paid employment. Both while in full-time work and between the times when

she was holding these posts, Mary continued to publish philosophical books and articles on philosophical topics.

Her first book, *Ethics since 1900*, published first in 1960 but going into several editions, was a historical review of philosophical approaches to ethics.¹ The last chapter of this book discussed existentialism, a topic then largely ignored by the best-known British philosophers who were preoccupied with the analysis of language. Mary became the British authority on existentialist ethics and during the late 1960s and early 1970s authored three books on existentialism and edited another.² After she left the Oxford High School in 1972, she wrote *Imagination*, which might be regarded as the first of her books which went beyond a historical approach and expressed her own views on a subject.³ Her experiences in both higher and secondary education then led her to write *Schools of Thought*, a series of reflections on the way education should enable students to lead what she herself regarded as a 'good life.'⁴ In 1986, while at Girton, she wrote and published *Memory*,⁵ in a sense a companion volume to *Imagination*, in which she explored the relationship between our imaginations and the way we recollect the past. She brought her thoughts on imagination and memory together in another book, *Imagination and Time*, published in 1994.⁶ In 1999, she returned to the subject of her first book with *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Ethics*, this time drawing heavily on her experiences as a medical ethicist.⁷ After the distressing death of her husband, Geoffrey, Mary developed radical ideas around euthanasia, and, jointly with an oncologist, wrote *Easeful Death* to which she contributed the philosophical chapters.⁸ Finally, when just over ninety, she wrote *Critical Reflections on Ownership*, in which she discussed the way our sense of possession affects the way we regard both our own personal environment and the wider world.⁹

While, as we shall see, Mary Warnock did not regard herself as capable of generating truly original philosophical ideas, in 2003 she was described as 'probably the most famous philosopher in Britain.'¹⁰ This judgement was based partly on her considerable published philosophical work for she published a number of other books as well as those listed above, but more because she brought the clarity of thought of a trained philosopher to the development of government policy in a number of different areas of public life. Further, as what is now known as a 'public intellectual,' she commented influentially throughout her

life in the media on a very wide range of subjects, mostly but by no means only of educational interest.

* * *

The fifty years of the most active period of Mary's life, the whole of the second half of the twentieth century, were, as it happened, notable for considerable social, economic and political changes. Of these, the improvement in virtually all aspects of the lives of women, particularly middle-class women, stands out as one of the most striking. By the end of the twentieth century, women had by no means achieved parity. Indeed, at the time of writing in the early 2020s, not only do male Members of Parliament outnumber female MPs by two to one, but a number of prominent women have left politics because they have been exposed to intolerable abuse on social media. All the same, a brief description of the changing context of women's lives during Mary's active adult life helps us to understand her life, the contributions she made to British society and her own attitudes to feminism.

After the end of World War Two in 1945, when Mary was still an undergraduate, the raising of the school leaving age from fourteen to fifteen in 1947, followed a little later by the increases in the number of children as a result of the rising number of post-war births, meant there was an immediate need for many more schoolteachers. The gap was largely filled by young women. The 1944 Education Act abolished the ban on married women teachers opening the door for many more women, both married and unmarried, to enter the profession. Then, in the 1960s a number of new universities were founded. In contrast to the older universities, women filled much larger numbers of the undergraduate places that became available and were then more often appointed to the academic staff to posts previously filled almost entirely by men. In 1950, a tiny fraction of the female population graduated from English and Welsh universities, with very few going on to postgraduate study. By 2000, there had been a thirty-fold increase in the number of women graduating from university and tens of thousands studied for higher degrees.¹¹ Thus by the end of the century a very large number of mainly middle-class girls and young women were studying up to degree level. This meant that over this period, the numbers of educated women well-qualified to work in the professions and in other forms of middle-class employment greatly increased.

These changes were reflected in the gender balance in all the professions and other middle-class occupations. The marriage bar for entry into the civil service was lifted in 1946 though it was not until 1973 that women could enter the Foreign Service. By the early 2000s, around half of UK civil servants were women. There were more women than men working as administrative officers or assistants, but fewer as senior civil servants: the number of senior civil servants who were women increased from a tiny number in 1950 to one in five in 2000.¹² In the legal profession, only two women barristers had achieved the seniority of KCs (King's Counsel) in 1949 and the first woman judge was not appointed until 1956. Subsequently, however, there was a gradual rise in the number of women barristers so that by 2015, over a third of barristers were women.¹³ In national politics, in the 1945 Parliament, only twenty-four Members of Parliament were women. In the late 1950s, though clearly a politician with outstanding potential for a successful parliamentary career, Margaret Thatcher was unsuccessful in several attempts to secure adoption as a candidate by a Conservative constituency.¹⁴ By 1997 the proportion of women MPs had risen to about 20%. In medicine, in the 1950s about one in four medical students were women. By the end of the century, there were more female medical students than male. Many more women became consultants, but at the most competitive level in this field, clinical academic medicine, only one in ten of the posts were held by women and there were even fewer female professors.¹⁵ In the Anglican Church, women have only been ordained as priests since 1994, and the first woman bishop was appointed in 2014. Many more women were employed in the media, but it was not until 1995 that the first woman editor of a national newspaper was appointed. Progress has been slower in the higher echelons of business. Women were only allowed to be members of the London Stock Exchange in 1973 and the first CEO of a FTSE 100 company was not appointed until 1997.

The second half of the twentieth century saw smaller but also remarkable changes in the lives of working-class women. Labour-saving inventions such as dishwashers and washing machines meant that less of their time was spent at the kitchen sink. Their marriages changed to become more companionate. The substantial rise in female employment meant that more women gained control of their own income and expenditure. For all social classes, the possibility of foreign travel greatly

increased. But these positive changes were clouded by the persistence of class inequalities in virtually all areas of life. Most strikingly, by the end of the century, the expectation of life was seven years less for women in the lowest income decile compared to the highest.

How did this reduction in gender inequality come about? As well as the increasing numbers of highly educated women there were other reasons. Among the most important was the increasing degree to which women could take control of their own fertility. The birth rate reached a peak in around 1961 when the average number of births per fertile woman was around 3.0. But following the availability of the contraceptive pill in the early 1960s, by 1971 it had fallen below 2.0. From then onwards, women spent many fewer years bringing up children and were more often looking for employment. What did not change or changed only to an insignificant degree was the career disadvantage experienced by women because of their need to take time off while their children were young. This did not affect women like Mary Warnock and Margaret Thatcher who were able to afford childcare but there were very large numbers of women who were not in this fortunate position and the state did not step up to help them financially.

Whatever the cause of the difference in the position of women in the two halves of the twentieth century, there can be no doubt of its size. In 1995 Margaret Forster described the way the lives of a number of women who had lived in the first half of that century had been constricted. She concludes her book *Hidden Lives* with the words:

Let no one say that nothing has changed, that women have it as bad as ever. They do not [...] I am glad, glad not to have been born a working-class girl in 1869 or 1901. Everything for a woman is better now even if it is still not as good as it should be. To forget or deny that is an insult to the women who have gone before.¹⁶

A highly significant feature of the second half of the twentieth century was the resurgence of feminism as a political movement to promote the rights of women. This occurred first in the mid-1960s in the United States and then, by the end of the decade in the UK. Feminism as a political movement had been relatively quiescent from the end of the First World War when women over thirty were given the vote until the mid- to late 1960s. Second Wave feminism, so-called to distinguish it from First Wave (late Victorian and Edwardian) feminism which focussed especially on

votes for women, is usually seen to have had its starting point with the publication in 1963 of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*¹⁷ and then in Britain in 1970 with Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch*.¹⁸ Mary played no part in this new radical movement, but by the mid-1980s she had articulated a set of positions in relation to it. These views, which she expressed clearly in her memoir, published in 2000, were similar to those of many, perhaps most women of her generation.¹⁹ These women, who constituted what might be regarded as a silent majority, saw no reason to rewrite history or philosophy or other academic subjects with a gendered perspective, but nevertheless felt strongly that women were unfairly treated in many areas of life and that legal reforms were needed to remove such unfairness.

Interviewed for *The Sunday Telegraph* in June 1984, Mary described herself as a 'conservative feminist'.²⁰ She expanded on this term two years later in an article in *St. Hugh's: One Hundred Years of Women's Education in Oxford* (1986)²¹ marking the centenary of the foundation of St. Hugh's, the Oxford college to which she had been appointed as a research fellow in 1949 and where she was still an Honorary Fellow. She asked herself what the next hundred years would bring for the position of women in society. She saw the central message of Second Wave feminism or what she called radical feminism as the separateness of women from men. She wrote: 'The radical feminist argues that, once the consciousness of women in general is raised, they will see not only that they are exploited and used by men, but that the standards of success and failure, the criteria of what is and what is not worth doing, are all of them established by men.'²² Any suggestion that the standards of success in subjects such as biology and mathematics are absolute is countered by radical feminists with the unanswerable objection that such standards are always set by men. If and when such standards are set by women, these subjects will be transformed, and new insights will emerge.²³

Mary points out that while in the late-nineteenth century women had fought to be allowed to study the same subjects and take the same examinations as men, that battle had long ago been won. Now, she suggests, the claims of radical feminists that women had a separate contribution to make in advancing knowledge put in jeopardy the success of those who had won equal university rights for women.

The proposals that universities should run Women's Studies courses, for example, risked fighting old battles quite unnecessarily. She notes that, where these courses exist, they are mainly historical in content, exploring the role of women in the past when they had been overlooked. The danger is that the very name, 'Women's Studies' suggests these courses are mainly not about women, but *for* women. She sees this as the thin edge of a wedge leading on to Women's Physics, Women's Philosophy separate from 'proper' Physics and Philosophy.²⁴ She quotes from a then recently published book by Dale Spender, *Invisible Women* (1982) which proposed that every true proposition should be seen as relative to the gender of the person who utters it. This might seem a fantastic suggestion, but Mary thought it followed logically from the current idea that women have their own gendered way of thinking which is different from that of men. Such ideas present women with an impossible dilemma. If they resist separatism, they are betraying one another; if they support separatism, they are betraying the standards of scholarship. Mary hoped that this form of radical feminism would be rejected.²⁵

She characterised the 'conservative feminism' of the type she herself espoused as embodying a very simple principle. It holds that no one should be at an educational disadvantage. 'Women are human; and if higher education is among those good things from which humans benefit, and to which they may even be thought entitled, then women should have as much of it as men.'²⁶ At the time she was writing, Mary saw the goal of genuine justice for girls and women in education as still some way from being achieved. Particularly at secondary schools there was still pressure on girls, encouraged by magazines and television, to have as their main aim to be attractive. They should make sure they seldom spoke in class as, by definition, a clever girl was unattractive and the lowest in the hierarchy of popularity. This had led to many girls giving up all academic aspirations. Mary saw one of the positive outcomes of feminism, whatever its type, as the undermining of the widely spread idea, popularised in comics for girls and in women's magazines, that a girl should think of little else but making herself desirable to the male sex. Girls must make sure they never answered up in class as, by definition, a clever girl was unattractive.²⁷ As we shall see, Mary loved clothes but their attractiveness to men was never important to her.

Instead, she thought what was needed was a societal change in women's beliefs about themselves and in their ability to master and control the physical universe.²⁸ Conservative feminists begin by affirming that true education and learning is a common ideal. Truths may be discovered by any student. 'The female ghetto of the radical feminists runs wholly counter to the spirit of a common learning.'²⁹

Increasingly, Mary thought, girls should be thinking of themselves as educational equals to boys, whatever subject they were reading, and she was worried by the tendency for girls to choose the 'soft' subjects such as English or a foreign language. Such tendencies must be resisted, especially while the then recently established polytechnics were increasingly offering subjects such as biotechnology and information technology. Universities should be proactive in encouraging schools to ensure girls are as well prepared for these subjects as boys. She looked at the future world of employment and presciently saw that there was going to be more part-time employment with more opportunities for leisure. 'Women,' she thought, 'were peculiarly well-fitted to open the eyes of politicians and educationists to the new world of mixed employment.'³⁰ Given that the demands of child-bearing and raising continue inevitably to bear most heavily on women, they would be well placed to lead the way in the increasing demand for adult or later-life education. Thus the conservative feminist would have several roles to play in the future of education.

The dichotomy between radical and conservative feminism that Mary proposed in this article has to be seen in the context of the state of the feminist movement at the time she was writing in the mid-1980s. It had moved on. After twenty years, feminism was in no way losing momentum but the focus of political activity had changed. In Britain, so-called radical feminists were more likely by the 1980s to be engaged in left-wing political activism such as support for the miners' strike and protests against the existence of American nuclear weapons at RAF Greenham Common than in staking out a claim for the exclusivity of women's role in education.³¹ In university education, the field of women's studies had been at least partly replaced by 'gender studies' which gave greater weight to relationships between the sexes and societal pressures on men. To some degree therefore, Mary's conservative feminist position had already achieved dominance in debates on education. All

the same, conservative feminists, as Mary pointed out, still had many gross injustices to women to overcome.

True to her view that there was no specifically gendered approach to scholarship, when Mary was asked to edit a selection of writings by women philosophers, she specifically refuted the idea that women had a special contribution to make to her own subject. She concludes her introduction to the book, *Women Philosophers*, with the observation:

In the end, I have not found any clear ‘voice’ shared by women philosophers. I have enjoyed reading their works, some more than others, and I have been filled with admiration for the leisured women who, before they had access to any university, took up philosophy as a hobby and became so relatively expert. But it would have been very unrealistic to find, among such determined and individualistic women, anything shared except these qualities of character. As for the professionals, they turn out, unsurprisingly, to be as various as their male colleagues. I believe this to be a matter not for disappointment, but for pride.³²

There is a sense in which radical feminists, as Mary described them, were the natural heirs to the late Victorian and Edwardian suffragettes, the militant women who had taken violent action to advance the cause of votes for women. Conservative feminists such as Mary were in the tradition of the suffragists who had aimed to achieve the vote by traditional, constitutionally acceptable political activity. Who should take credit for the outcome? Writer and historian of the early feminist movement in Britain, Katherine Connelly argues ‘the suffragettes were inspired by the suffragists, but (that) ultimately both movements played their part in winning the vote by organising women *en masse* in so many different ways.’³³ Similarly, both conservative and radical feminists can take credit for the significant advances made by women in the second half of the twentieth century. Mary was in no doubt where her allegiance lay. In a review written in 1983 of Barbara Taylor’s *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, she wrote that feminists had two choices: ‘Do we try within the framework of existing institutions to improve piecemeal the chances of women genuinely to compete with men on equal terms or march to revolution? [...] my own belief is that the first way, though slow is both possible and practical.’³⁴ She thought this process should begin with primary school reading books in which boys and girls should

be seen as having similar careers ahead of them and in secondary school classrooms which should all be mixed.³⁵

Mary's position as a 'conservative feminist' did not change as she got older. If anything, her hostility to 'radical feminism' hardened. In an interview she gave shortly before her death, she expressed her loathing for the #MeToo movement, a surely not very radical response to well-validated reports of the sexual abuse of celebrities.³⁶ As we shall see, as an undergraduate, Mary had herself been sexually harassed by one of her Oxford teachers, a man some thirty years older than herself. Her diary entries reveal she had been deeply distressed by this at the time but had come to view her experience as trivial in comparison with the brilliant teaching she had had from the man in question.

How do Mary's views on feminism compare with those of her Oxford contemporary, Margaret Thatcher? Thatcher shared with Mary the distinction of being a woman at the top of her profession and the two were very similar in their expressed views about the role of women in society. A previous comparison of the two women points to similarities in that both were supremely successful in their respective fields but were pariahs among some feminists because of their rejection of radical feminism.³⁷ Margaret Thatcher would have had no problem with being labelled a 'conservative feminist.' When in 1982, she gave the first Pankhurst Lecture to the 300 Group (an organisation aiming to achieve 300 women Members of Parliament),³⁸ she pointed to the special talents and experiences that women brought to public life.³⁹ This was a different form of conservative feminism from that of Mary Warnock who saw women as bringing identical gifts to scholarship as did men. More significantly, the two women differed greatly in their behaviour towards other women. Margaret Thatcher, despite her powerful position, did nothing to promote the careers of women in politics. Of the fifty-eight members who served in her cabinets during her eleven-year prime ministership, only one was a woman and she served for a very short time.⁴⁰ There was one undeniable way in which her prime ministership advanced the cause of women: for the very first time in the history of Britain, ambitious girls and young women could see that the sky was the limit for the achievement of a successful career for a woman. In this respect, she was a very significant role model.

Mary Warnock was a very different role model. As a young, married woman with a family, she was seen by undergraduates as having a lifestyle they could emulate. As headmistress of a girls' secondary school, she strongly supported sixth-form girls to aim high academically and think in terms of careers in science and business, as well as in the professions. Disarmingly, in her memoir, she admits to loving being 'the only woman' when, for example, she appeared in the media,⁴¹ but, throughout her life, she befriended, encouraged and helped women in their careers whenever she could.

There were more fundamental differences between the two women in the values they held important. Mary devotes a chapter in her memoir to a critique of Thatcherite policies and of Margaret Thatcher herself.⁴² After strongly criticising Thatcherite policies towards both school and university education on grounds discussed later in this book, she goes on to make a much broader attack:

Education is only one field in which the Thatcherite values became predominant. Any government must attempt as far as possible to eliminate the waste of resources, spending, as we are frequently told, taxpayers' money on things that do them no good. But perhaps of all the legacies of Margaret Thatcher, the most pervasive was the assumption that nothing matters except the non-squandering of money, and that no positive value exists except to save and prosper. The worst effect of such a scale of values was that people began to adopt it not simply with regard to the state, but with regard to themselves as individuals [...] If personal wealth is generally seen as the highest value, then the means to attain it may gradually become a matter of indifference [...] The idea of the common good, which genuinely lay behind the welfarism of the 1940s and 1950s, has simply got lost.

Mary goes on to suggest that out of Margaret Thatcher's 'character and taste arose a kind of generalised selfishness hard to reconcile with a truly civilised society.'⁴³ It cannot have helped that Margaret Thatcher frequently attributed her preoccupation with getting good value for money to her experience as a woman and a housewife buying groceries for her family.

Mary's personal dislike of Margaret Thatcher is strongly reflected in the chapter in her memoir devoted to her. She prefaces it with what she calls a 'skipping rhyme.'

Missis Thatcher
 Stick her in the bin
 Put the lid on
 Sellotape her in.⁴⁴

The rhyme sets the tone for the rest of the chapter. Mary had not always shown such deep hostility. At times, she had been prepared to defend Thatcher. In 1984, in an interview with Anthea Hall, Mary had criticised radical feminists for treating Margaret Thatcher as if she were 'the symbol of all that is evil because she has climbed to the top of a male-dominated profession, whereas I think she has done very well.'⁴⁵ Further, when Margaret Thatcher's name was put forward unsuccessfully for the award of an honorary degree in the University of Oxford, both Mary and her husband tried to canvass support for her.⁴⁶

The two women encountered each other on rather few occasions. They met very briefly in 1977, while Mary was chairing a government committee on special education, a position to which Thatcher, as Secretary of State for Education, had appointed her. Their next encounter was in December 1980 on the occasion of a lunch meeting at the offices of the Independent Broadcasting Association (IBA) which was responsible for commercial television and radio. Mary was a member. Usually, these lunches were enjoyably informal and the time when Margaret Thatcher, by then Prime Minister, attended was the only such occasion which was thoroughly unpleasant. Mary's description is worth quoting:

[Margaret Thatcher] spoke loudly, in a high-pitched and furious voice, and without drawing breath (or so it seemed, though she was able swiftly to eat up her lunch at the same time). Her theme was the appalling left-wing, anti-government bias of the independent television companies, and of the Authority itself. She spent a lot of time inveighing especially against Panorama, and there was no time, nor did it seem much to the purpose, to point out that this was a programme made and broadcast by the BBC. Indeed, all the specific programmes she mentioned were BBC programmes, but it was possible, we judged afterwards, that she never watched anything but the BBC, and in any case, we were perfectly used to people who never noticed who made a programme, or on what channel it was shown. Her new plan, she stated, was to curb the media, and compel them to present news and current affairs in accordance with government wishes.

Brian Young (the Director of the IBA)

managed to say that perhaps such a policy would be damaging to the freedom of the press. It was the first time that any of us had spoken, and it sounded, and was, banal. In any case, she swept it aside, and declared that the People were not interested in the freedom of the press, but only in having Choice (it was the first time I had heard this formula) and choice meant having available a variety of channels, all of which were truthful and encouraging. Nobody mentioned Stalin, but he was in everyone's mind...⁴⁷

Geoffrey, Mary's husband, met Margaret Thatcher when, in 1981, he was elected Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford. Within a year of his appointment, he attended a meeting of Vice-Chancellors in London, which was addressed by the Prime Minister. Almost as soon as she arrived, she 'began to rant against the universities, their arrogance, elitism, remoteness from the People, their indifference to the economy, their insistence on wasting time and public money on such subjects as history, philosophy and classics. Again, she did not stop for two hours...'⁴⁸

A more unfortunate episode involving the two women occurred in 1988, when Mary and her husband gave a lunch party to which they had invited a journalist, Graham Turner. Conversation, initiated by the US columnist George Will (a former pupil of Geoffrey's), turned to why Thatcher could be so revered in the US and so despised at home. The Warnocks were unwisely free with their views on Thatcher's personality and appearance. Turner reported their remarks, which they thought they had made in confidence, in an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* in which he quoted them and members of what might be called the metropolitan elite, including the opera and theatre director, Jonathan Miller. Mary was quoted as referring to Thatcher's 'patronising elocution voice',⁴⁹ her rudeness and her choice of clothes. In her memoir she wrote that both she and Geoffrey 'spoke with eloquence on the subject of her appalling rudeness. We expanded this into a discussion of her style and taste (as shown in her gaudy clothes and her now rampant hairdressing, and I ended by saying, I think, that she simply did not know how to behave and was in some way LOW.'⁵⁰ There was something 'unladylike' about her behaviour.⁵¹ Clothes, Mary claimed, reflect personality and Mrs. Thatcher's electric blue suit with fitted jacket, metal buttons and big

lapels, expressed 'the crudity, philistinism, and aggression' that made up her personality.⁵² In Graham Turner's article, she was quoted as saying that 'Mrs. Thatcher wouldn't lose a wink of sleep if Oxford and Cambridge were sold off to ICI, so long as they fetched a good price.'⁵³ Not unnaturally, this article provoked much unfavourable comment about the snobbishness of the privileged classes towards the grocer's daughter who had dared to confront their values, but there was no mention of the possibility that Mary's dislike of Mrs. Thatcher was secondary to her objection to her policies. It should be added that some of the criticism of Margaret Thatcher was unfair. For example, she had a reputation for lacking generosity of spirit and harbouring grudges. In fact, she was immensely caring towards her personal staff. Her close friend, Carla Powell, reported 'She bestowed and received loyalty. She gave everyone love.'⁵⁴ Further it is notable that one month after Oxford dons voted in January 1985 to reject a proposal for Margaret Thatcher to be awarded an honorary degree, Mary was made a life peer and a year later her husband, Geoffrey was knighted.

Mary's stories about Margaret Thatcher reflect another important difference between the two women. Margaret Thatcher never really listened to those who took an opposing view to her. Mary took particular interest and listened most carefully when she was exposed to views that did not accord with her own. Indeed, sometimes listening to opposing views led her to change her mind, possibly, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, unnecessarily.

Mary's dislike of Margaret Thatcher was, at least to some degree, reciprocated. The author himself had a brief insight into her lack of ability to listen when, in April 1987, he was one of a group of about a dozen academics, administrators and educational and health professionals who formed a delegation invited to meet Margaret Thatcher. We were there to protest about the lack of coordination between government departments in the development of policies concerning children. We were each given about three minutes to say our pieces and then Tony Newton, a junior minister in the Department of Health and Social Security who had been asked to attend, was asked to comment. He, as doubtless briefed, denied there was a problem. The Prime Minister then lectured us for about an hour attacking first primary school teachers and then scientists for reasons that did not seem in any way relevant

to the issue we had come to discuss. She then indicated the meeting was over. I said at this point: 'Well, Prime Minister, my colleagues here are really knowledgeable, experienced people and they think there *is* a problem.' I then quoted in support of our position some observation Mary Warnock had made to me. Mrs. Thatcher responded, with heavy sarcasm. 'Lady Warnock is a *very* clever woman. But she doesn't always get everything right.' She went on: 'Well, we've talked for quite a long time about this and I've other things to do. (Pause). Professor Graham, I'm sure your patients are missing you. So, I think we'll call it a day now.' I said: 'I think if my patients knew where I was (in the cabinet room of 10, Downing Street) they would be happy to wait a little longer.' But the meeting ended shortly afterwards. The Prime Minister said we would meet again after the forthcoming election, but of course, we never did. Lack of communication between government departments on policies concerning children remains an issue of concern.

* * *

In 2013, Margaret Thatcher died of a stroke, aged eighty-seven, in the Ritz Hotel, London. She was internationally famous. She had been suffering from dementia for nearly ten years. Had she not been demented she would have known that her name, in the words of one of her successors as prime minister, Boris Johnson, writing in 2009, had become 'a boo-word in British politics, a shorthand for selfishness and me-first-ism, and devil-take-the-hindmost and grinding the faces of the poor.'⁵⁵ Johnson lamented this decline in Thatcher's reputation which he saw as undeserved. Nevertheless, the foremost British authorities on inequality claim that 'Margaret Thatcher's most important long-term legacy is likely to be the huge rise in inequality that she caused. The widening of income differences between rich and poor that took place during the 1980s (particularly from 1985) is the most rapid ever recorded.'⁵⁶ Her policies led to immense suffering in large sections of the United Kingdom, particularly, but not only, in the industrial heartlands of the North of England and Scotland. Though the inept leadership of the National Union of Miners was significantly responsible, the heart-breaking stories of the suffering of the wives and children of striking miners during the 1984–85 strike are testament to the distress caused to women by Thatcherite policies. It was a failure of imagination which

meant that she did not foresee such suffering was inevitable unless other measures were taken.

Others of her policies similarly reflected her lack of imagination. Giving council tenants the right to buy the properties they were renting indirectly led to the dysfunctional housing market of the 2000s. The proposal to levy a poll tax though happily never implemented was perhaps the most striking example of an imaginative failure. The deregulating monetary policies of her governments, which ultimately allowed apparently unlimited credit to be given to consumers, led indirectly to the financial crash of 2007–08 that again, Thatcher's imaginative capacities did not allow her to predict. Her support was key to the growing hostility to the feeling against the EU which eventually led in due course to the decision to hold a referendum on British membership of the European Union.⁵⁷ Further, though doubtless other factors, such as the failure of the Blair Government either to curb immigration or to address the impact of deindustrialisation were also of great importance, yet her policies of deindustrialisation in the Midlands, the North of England and Scotland are widely seen as leading indirectly to the success of the Brexit campaign and an economic break with continental Europe just over twenty-five years after she had left office.

When Mary Warnock died in 2019 aged ninety-four, in the modest flat in south-east London where she lived, she had the satisfaction of knowing that the two reports she had written on widely different topics (special education and services for childless couples) had had an enduring positive impact both nationally and internationally. They had helped to create a more decent society. In her prolific contributions to educational policy, she had repeatedly stressed that the primary goal of education must be to promote the development of the imagination. In education, she wrote, 'we have a duty to educate the imagination above all else,'⁵⁸ and again, 'Human beings are linked to one another (much more widely) by sympathy, an imaginative understanding of other members of their species, based on what they have in common.'⁵⁹ In support of her belief in the importance of the imagination, she quoted the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre. Though she had serious reservations about some aspects of Sartre's philosophical thought, she repeatedly returned to his definition of imagination as the faculty that enables us to envisage what is not. It was this faculty, leading to

imaginative understanding, that Margaret Thatcher lacked with such disastrous results. As we shall see, Mary wrote in the tradition of British and continental European philosophers who, over the centuries, especially during the Enlightenment and in the mid-twentieth century, have drawn from each other's work to enrich their own. Fortunately, ideas know no borders and whatever effects the economic break with Europe may have in the 2020s, ideas will continue to flow unimpeded in both directions across the English Channel.

Margaret Thatcher's life has been chronicled in several voluminous biographies and two works of autobiography.⁶⁰ This is not surprising as she was internationally famous. In contrast, Mary Warnock's notable life and achievements are so far unrecorded except in the memoirs she wrote herself. This biography aims to repair an important omission.

Notes

- 1 Mary Warnock, 1960.
- 2 Mary Warnock, 1965; Mary Warnock, 1967; Mary Warnock, 1970; Mary Warnock, 1971.
- 3 Mary Warnock, 1976.
- 4 Mary Warnock, 1977.
- 5 Mary Warnock, 1987.
- 6 Mary Warnock, 1994.
- 7 Mary Warnock, 1999.
- 8 Mary Warnock and Elisabeth Macdonald, 2008.
- 9 Mary Warnock, 2015.
- 10 Baggini and Stangroom, p. 152.
- 11 Bolton, 2012, Table 8.
- 12 Institute of Government, 2019.
- 13 Richard Nicholson, 2005.
- 14 Moore, 2013, p. 133.
- 15 Jefferson et al., 2015.
- 16 Margaret Forster, 1995.

- 17 Betty Friedan, 1963.
- 18 Germaine Greer, 1970.
- 19 Mary Warnock, 2000, pp. 21–22.
- 20 Anthea Hall, 1984.
- 21 Mary Warnock, 1986.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 285.
- 23 *Ibid.*
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 287.
- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 287–288.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 290.
- 27 *Ibid.*, pp. 291–292.
- 28 *Ibid.*, pp. 292–293.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 293.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 297.
- 31 Sheila Rowbotham, 1997, pp. 480–482.
- 32 Mary Warnock, 1996, p. xlvii.
- 33 Katherine Connelly, 2018.
- 34 Mary Warnock, Girton Archive, 1/16/2/7.
- 35 Mary Warnock. Broadcast, Personal view, 29 April 1972, Girton Archive, 1/16/2/2.
- 36 Interview with Giles Fraser, *Confessions*, 9 February 2019.
- 37 Baggini and Stangroom, p. 153.
- 38 Pankhurst Lecture to the 300 Group, 18 July 1990, Margaret Thatcher Foundation.
- 39 Margaret Thatcher, 1982.
- 40 Baroness Janet Young, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, 1981–83.
- 41 Mary Warnock, 2000, p. 21.
- 42 *Ibid.*, pp. 169–196.
- 43 *Ibid.*, pp. 195–196.
- 44 *Ibid.*, p. 169.

- 45 Anthea Hall, 1984.
- 46 Moore, 2015, 657n.
- 47 Mary Warnock, 2000, pp. 172–173.
- 48 Ibid., p. 174.
- 49 Graham Turner, *Sunday Telegraph*, 10 January 1988.
- 50 Mary Warnock, 2000, p. 176.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid., p. 180.
- 53 Graham Turner, 1988.
- 54 Charles Moore, 2013, p. 665.
- 55 Jonathan Freedland, 2013.
- 56 Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, 2013.
- 57 Charles Moore, 2019, p. 803.
- 58 Warnock, 1976, p. 10.
- 59 Warnock, 1999, p. 86.
- 60 Hugo Young, 1991; Charles Moore, 2013; Moore, 2015; Moore, 2019; Margaret Thatcher, 2011.

