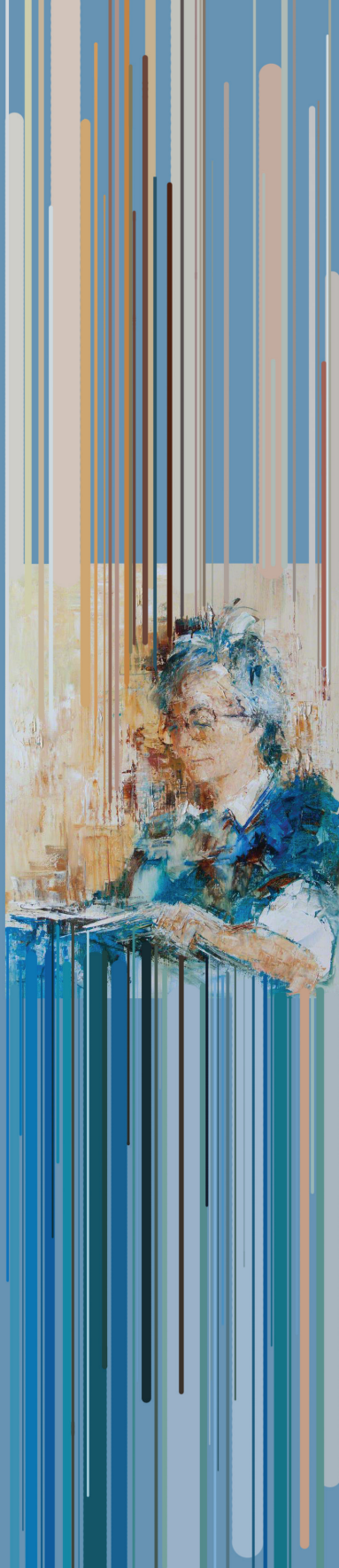


MARY WARNOCK

Ethics, Education
and Public Policy
in Post-War
Britain

PHILIP GRAHAM





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7. All Change for Special Education

After Mary resigned from her post as headmistress of the Oxford High School for Girls in the summer of 1972, she turned her energies to supporting Geoffrey in his new position of Principal of Hertford College. She was involved in his social duties, in improving the college buildings and college arrangements, and in bringing up her younger children, now in their teens, in the Principal's lodgings. She also continued to tutor undergraduates and write philosophical works such as *Imagination* (1976), discussed in a later chapter. In fact, she later gave her wish to spend time on this book as one of her reasons for leaving the High School. In addition, she was sometimes requested to chair or sit on government committees.

In early 1974, she was approached by the then Secretary of State for Education and Science, Margaret Thatcher, to chair a committee of enquiry into the education of handicapped children and young people. The committee met first in September 1974 and presented its report in March 1978.¹ Surprisingly during the three and a half years the committee sat, Mary was only to have one very brief exchange with Margaret Thatcher about its progress and that was a somewhat accidental encounter. In March 1977, she was introduced to Thatcher, by now Leader of the Opposition, at a pre-lunch party in Oxford. Thatcher asked how the committee was going and, without waiting for a reply, said: 'SO important, I always think,' and moved on. Mary added 'I had the chance to notice what I thought was a total absence of warmth, and also that the back of her stiffly bouffant hair (nevertheless not as startling then as it later became) was less impressive than the front, indeed quite ragged.'²

The history of the education of children with handicaps is complicated.³ The earliest efforts, for deaf children in the 1760s, blind children in 1791, and physically and mentally handicapped in the mid-nineteenth century, aimed at training young people for employment rather than educating them. Compulsory elementary schooling for the general population was introduced in Britain in 1870, and in the following years it was gradually recognised that many handicapped children should and could receive education as well as training. Local education authorities began to provide this, sometimes in special schools, sometimes within or attached to ordinary schools. This provision became a statutory duty following the recommendations of a progressive committee investigating the education of mentally and physically handicapped people which reported in 1898. Behavioural difficulties began to be recognised and addressed as a category of handicap at around the same time. In the 1920s, a principle emerged that established that education for the handicapped should be considered as part of overall education provision and should, as far as possible, be provided within mainstream schools.

The next big milestone was the Education Act 1944, the so-called Butler Act, best known for introducing selection of children at the age of eleven to enter grammar, secondary modern or technical schools. The act confirmed the principle that education of the handicapped should be part of the overall provision of education and the responsibility of local education authorities. These could meet such needs by establishing special day or boarding schools, education within ordinary schools, or support for pupils in private institutions, as they chose.⁴ Children who were thought to be 'ineducable' were to be reported to the local authority so that provision could be made for them outside the education system.⁵ In 1946, guidance from the Ministry of Education defined eleven categories of disability.⁶ To be eligible for special education a child had to be diagnosed as having one of these—epilepsy, blindness, deafness etc. Guidance was given as to where each category should be educated. All children with physical handicap should be educated at a special school. So-called educationally subnormal children should be educated partly in special and partly in maintained schools.⁷ The government estimated the number of children with different types of disability who would need some sort of special provision as between 14% and 17% of

the total school population (very close to the estimate thirty years later in the Warnock Report).

Over the next thirty years some physical disabilities fell in number as improved social conditions, immunisation and medical treatments virtually eradicated tuberculosis, post-rheumatic fever and post-poliomyelitis conditions.⁸ In contrast, there was increased awareness of the degree to which emotional and behavioural disorders or 'maladjustment,' as it was then called, affected school performance, and larger numbers of children were being seen by the rapidly expanding child guidance service.⁹ Contrary to the intentions of the 1944 Act, new special schools were established more frequently than new classes within ordinary schools: this was partly due to the lack of buildings and resources in ordinary schools after the war, and the fact that big country houses, suitable for small educational establishments, were easy to find and relatively inexpensive to buy. Large numbers of children were still deemed 'ineducable.' As late as 1970 there were 24,000 children in Junior Training Centres, receiving instruction from untrained teachers, as well as 8,000 children in hospitals for the mentally subnormal.¹⁰ The Brooklands experiment in the 1960s studied severely mentally handicapped children living in an austere, impoverished mental subnormality hospital. Removed to a small country house and given a nursery-school type of programme with much outdoor activity and play, these children made significant progress especially in their language ability compared to children who did not have this experience.¹¹ The findings from this study transformed views regarding the educability of even profoundly mentally retarded children.

In 1967, a group led by Dame Eileen Younghusband was set up to make recommendations to improve the situation of disabled children and young people. It recommended that there should be equality of opportunity for all children and better help to support them and to help them lead independent lives.¹² The 1970 Education (Handicapped Children) Act deemed that all children were now to be regarded as educable and become the responsibility of local authority education departments. In the same year the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act required local authorities to provide education for deaf-blind, autistic and dyslexic children in maintained or assisted schools. These reports and new legislation combined with strong pressure from

the voluntary sector, led by Stanley Segal, a passionate advocate for the education of disabled children and author of an influential book *No Child is Ineducable*,¹³ persuaded the government to set up a new enquiry into the subject.

On 22 November 1973, the Advisory Committee for Handicapped Children that existed to advise the Secretary of State for Education on these matters had one of its routine all-day meetings. The committee, of which I was a member, was chaired by Professor Jack Tizard, the psychologist who had carried out the Brooklands experiment. At the end of the morning session, instead of the usual stale sandwiches, we were given an unusually delicious lunch at which, again unusually, wine was served. Immediately after lunch, when we had assembled for the afternoon's session, we were addressed by a civil servant who told us that our committee had been abolished. We were immediately shown out of the building. Later that afternoon, Margaret Thatcher, then Secretary of State for Education and Science, announced in the House of Commons that she proposed to set up a committee to review provision for handicapped children and young people. Thus was the Warnock Committee born.

I was the only member of the previous committee to be appointed to this new one. The first meeting was held on 17 September 1974. Based on her diaries, Mary wrote an account of the deliberations of the committee that was published in 2003.¹⁴ The following account is partly based on her description and partly on my own recollections, not always identical with hers. It has to be said first, that Mary had virtually no experience in the field of special education. As headmistress of an independent girl's school, she had doubtless been faced from time to time with girls with health problems, but these gave her little idea of the range of physical and mental health problems as well as learning difficulties of all levels of severity which were the concern of the committee she was to chair. In fact, she thought this was probably one of the reasons she was chosen for the role of Chair. She had no preconceptions or vested interests. As we shall see, she was a rapid learner.

She took no part in choosing the members of the committee and was shocked to discover that there were twenty-six of us. The civil servants had perhaps been over-zealous in ensuring every interest was represented, though even so there were omissions. When Mary gazed round the room at the first meeting, she felt depressed at the thought that

she would 'never learn the difference between one person and another' nor remember everybody's name, let alone why they were supposed to be there.¹⁵ Her diary entry after that meeting read 'not a nice committee: too big, dowdy and full of vested interests. I hate it and probably always shall.'¹⁶ This first meeting was indeed a 'getting to know each other' occasion with not much else discussed. Mary had a better opportunity of getting to know one member whom she met by chance on her return journey by tube and train to Oxford. This was Winifred Tumim, selected to serve because she had two profoundly deaf daughters. She had been highly active in achieving a better education for them and indeed for other deaf children. Winifred was a tall, statuesque, uninhibited Oxford graduate, whose first remark to Mary about the other members of the committee when she bumped into her after the first meeting was 'Well, no lovers for us, I fear.'¹⁷ She and Mary found many other matters to talk about on their journey. Delighted to have found a friend among the members of the committee, Mary faced subsequent meetings more cheerfully.

In her account of the committee members, apart from Winifred, there was one other person who was given an extended description—myself. She described me as 'by far the cleverest member of the committee.'¹⁸ This was flattering but certainly inaccurate. Besides Mary herself, doubtless the cleverest among us, there were several other members who would be considered 'clever' (whatever that might mean). They included the Vice-Chairman, George Cooke, County Education Officer for Lincolnshire; Moya Tyson, an educational psychologist from Hounslow; Sir Edward Britton, the General Secretary of the National Union of Teachers and many others. Sadly, Mary's view of the majority of the members of the committee as expressed in her recollections reflects an undeserved lack of respect for them. Most likely, the reason Mary saw me as 'clever' was because we found ourselves in agreement on nearly all the important points where there was disagreement among the members. Another reason was that we were both fascinated by the underlying philosophical questions raised by the committee's deliberations. For example, 'Is the purpose of educating children with special needs any different from the purpose of educating all children?' and 'What are the criteria by which to judge the quality of educational provision?' Most other members of the committee were, very appropriately, much more concerned with nitty-gritty practical issues.

Mary was disappointed that most of the members were preoccupied with the roles and status of their own professions or disciplines.¹⁹ She thought that the doctors were dismissive of the social workers and uninterested in the social needs of their patients. The social workers were taken up with fighting the medicalisation of disabilities to the exclusion of concern about the reasons why, for example, children had learning difficulties or behaviour problems. The teachers, understandably, wanted to make sure that children with special needs were taught by teachers as well qualified as those teaching 'normal' children. At one point, the paediatrician on the committee became furious at the thought that he was going to be encouraged to pass on clinical details of babies who might be in need of special education to community doctors and local authorities. His concern for medical confidentiality blinded him to the need to ensure children with special needs received well-informed early intervention by educationists.²⁰

Winifred Tumim and I were, I felt at the time, in a sense 'teacher's pets' and Mary always listened to us with obvious respect. But there was another committee member she could not stand. This became so obvious I felt I had to intervene. Mary describes my intervention thus:

There was a day when we were travelling somewhere on a visit and [Philip] came and sat by me in the carriage, saying 'there is something I must say to you.'²¹ My heart sank. It reminded me of when my mother used to say: 'I must speak to you.' (It is amazing what emotive force words like 'say' and 'speak' can have in certain contexts.) Anyway, what he had to say was indeed a reproach. He had noticed that I called all the other members of the committee by their Christian names except one person whom, he said, I manifestly disliked. I did, it is true, find her awkward, reopening a topic when I thought I had wrapped it up, with the words 'One last point....' (How did she know it would be the last point?) Anyway, I said humbly that I didn't even know what her Christian name was, and he told me. I think I managed to use her Christian name once, but no more.²²

This preference for some members over others did not affect Mary's capacity to take all views into account.

Looking back at the composition of the committee, large though it was, by today's standards there were several omissions. First, there were no members from any of the ethnic minorities, even though, as far as some physical conditions and behaviour disorders were concerned,

minorities were over-represented in the disabled population. Second, there were no members who had physical or mental conditions themselves. We had parents of children with disabilities, but no adults who had lived through the 'disability experience' with its frequent risk of painful stigmatising. It was not that we lacked the opportunity of meeting children with disabilities on the numerous visits we made to special and maintained schools. For example, I remember meeting two teenage boys in a special school for the 'maladjusted' who explained to me how it was normal and indeed healthy to be maladjusted to a world that was itself so crazy. We were, however, disadvantaged by not having people with direct experience of disability during their education on the main committee. Finally, and this omission was noted by critics of the report not long after it had been published, we did not include a sociologist among our number.²³ This might not have mattered, for it is not only sociologists who can contribute a sociological perspective to discussions. But, as it turned out, the part that society plays in defining handicap and the importance of the school ethos relating to children in need of special help in creating an inclusive environment were issues neglected in the report.

Committee members made many visits to both special and mainstream schools, hospital units and local authorities. Mary found these visits enormously enjoyable, if sometimes alarming. On a visit to a special school in Liverpool, she was approached and hugged 'by a black boy, about six-foot tall and very strong, who asked, in urgent tones, "Are you Liverpool or Everton?"' I felt as if my life might literally depend on my answer, so I managed to breathe out that I was a supporter of Leeds United, and he let me go.²⁴

Some visits were made abroad to see how other countries provided education for children with disabilities. In January 1977, Mary travelled to the East Coast of the United States with one of Her Majesty's Inspectors (an HMI), a Scottish educational psychologist and me.²⁵ The HMI and the psychologist went their own way, which left Mary and me to visit special schools and classes separately. One of these visits was particularly memorable. Virginia Wilking, a child psychiatrist based in New York, had previously visited my department in London on several occasions with her husband, Leo, a paediatrician. I contacted her and she invited Mary and me to visit her hospital day units sited in Harlem

Hospital. The hospital was in a predominantly African American part of the city, but largely staffed with white physicians. (That is not the case now.) Guided by Virginia, we saw how behaviour and emotional disorders of varying degrees of severity were managed in this setting. Mary was impressed by her 'humanity, optimism and efficiency.'²⁶

We had gone to the hospital by taxi but decided to take the subway back and had to walk a few hundred yards to the station. This was a frightening experience. We walked past several apartment blocks with what seemed to us like threatening groups of African American men standing on the steps of the buildings in the freezing cold weather. As we passed, they stared at us, sometimes moving as if to follow us or, it seemed to us, calling to the next group of men along to stop us. Apparently, Mary found my presence reassuring but in truth I was as frightened as she was. We were told afterwards that our relatively brief walk had been risky and dangerous, though this was, in fact, very probably not the case and, much more likely arose from the racial stereotyping of the people we subsequently met as well as, I regret to say, ourselves.²⁷

As it happened, our visit was made at a particularly interesting time in the delivery of education to American children with disabilities. Congress had a couple of years previously passed Public Law 94/142 which had laid down that all public schools accepting federal funds should provide equal access to education and one free meal a day. Schools were required to evaluate children with disabilities and create, with parental input, an educational plan as close as possible to the educational experience of non-disabled students. Visits to schools in Boston made us realise how deceptive the term 'integration' might be. Students who were said to be integrated because they were attending mainstream schools might well be taught in completely separate classes and be let out to have their breaks at different times from other children, so that in reality there was no contact at all between the disabled and the non-disabled.

I had decided that I would like to recapture the experience of immigrants to the United States as they arrived in New York by boat in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Mary was enthusiastic about this idea and agreed to come along. As our days were fully taken up with visits, we had to make our expedition one early January morning.²⁸ We got up at five thirty a.m. During our walk to the subway

station, although we were well wrapped up, it was so cold it felt as if the exposed part of my face had stiffened with ice. We took the ferry to Staten Island where we had a huge breakfast. During the return journey, accompanied by a boat load of commuters, we passed the Statue of Liberty and indeed, though of course we did not have to go through the anxiety-provoking procedure of immigration controls on Ellis Island, we were able, as I had hoped, to re-live at least partly the immigrant arrival experience. We returned to our hotel in New York well in time for our first meeting.

Most of Mary's visits in the UK were made with John Hedger, the Department of Education and Science civil servant assigned to be Secretary to the Committee. She found him congenial company. He had had virtually no previous experience of special education but rapidly warmed to the task in hand. With young children of his own he was able to relate rapidly to the children and young people they met together on their visits.²⁹ He also had a sense of humour. I remember him describing to us how he had accompanied an Anglican bishop on a visit to a Church of England village primary school in his diocese. The two of them were asked to sit in a biology class for seven-year-olds. The bishop looked out of the window and saw a small furry animal in the school playground. He beckoned to a boy to come over and look at it. 'What do you think that is?' asked the bishop. 'I think I'm supposed to say "Jesus Christ",' said the boy, 'But it looks awfully like a squirrel.'

Unfortunately, John was removed from us, Mary thought cynically because he was getting more involved in the topics we discussed than a civil servant should be. He was replaced by a young woman Mary found much less congenial. She could not cope with working long hours and so was put out by Mary's wish to work well into the evening. She also had a bad back so when they went on visits together, luckily not a frequent occurrence, Mary had to carry her bags for her. On one occasion Mary had to swap rooms with her as she was intolerant of noise and her room was much noisier than Mary's.

Most of the meetings were held in a room in the Department of Education building, York House, close to Waterloo Station that was too small for the numbers of people on the committee. In the summer it was unbearably hot, so we had to have the windows open, which meant our discussions were interrupted by the station announcer informing us, for example, of the imminent departure of trains to Basingstoke,

Winchester and Southampton.³⁰ On two or three occasions, however, we spent weekends away in hotels or conference centres. It was at such an away meeting, in the Llandaff College of Education in Cardiff, that there was a breakthrough in the committee's thinking. Up to this point, discussions at the meetings had been on specific topics—under-fives, teacher training, assessment etc. A number of members of the committee now requested we should determine the whole structure of the final report so that, when we discussed a topic, we would know how it was going to fit in to the rest. The civil servants resisted, but Mary was with the rebels. Tackling the final structure meant that we had to reflect on the underlying principles involved in providing special as distinct from mainstream education.³¹ This was a fruitful exercise.

The discussion began with a statement by Sir Edward (Ted) Britten that our aim should be the abolition of all special schools, with the placement of all children, however handicapped they might be, in mainstream schools. He was particularly opposed to boarding schools. He accused Mary and me of favouring residential placements because of our own boarding school experience. He saw us and Winifred Tumim as being elitist, and referred to Mary as a 'boarding school product.'³² It is probably true that the three of us were the only members of the committee who had been both to public schools as boarders and to Oxford or Cambridge. However, this did not mean we were in favour of boarding schools. As Mary pointed out to him, all my children attended day schools. As the argument threatened to become acrimonious, Winifred Tumim intervened to distract us by claiming that many people saw children with severe learning difficulties as little more than 'vegetables.'³³ Why should large sums of money be spent on them?

This led to general agreement that education was a 'good' to which *everyone* was entitled. Ted Britten was inspired by this, according to Mary, to frame an unoriginal but truthful dictum. He drew a line on a blackboard representing a continuum of special educational needs, extending from those children who had no such needs to those whose needs were extremely special.³⁴ Mary transformed this image into one involving the pursuit of several educational goals which she named Knowledge, Experience, Imaginative Understanding and Pleasure.³⁵ The civil servants balked at the idea that the taxpayer should be expected to fund the pursuit of pleasure, and there was no mention

of pleasure in the final report. (Perhaps today she would have used the concept of 'quality of life' but this was only starting to come into use in the 1970s). The committee was generally in favour of such a conceptualisation, agreeing that the report should appear under the title of 'special educational needs' with no reference to handicap or disability. This approach led logically to the abandonment of medical categories to decide what sort of education children needed. Another logical conclusion was that the sharp distinction between special and ordinary education was unsustainable and that teachers in mainstream schools should be trained to recognise children with special educational needs and to meet those needs unless they were so great as to require separate educational facilities.³⁶

Such an approach, though widely accepted today, was controversial at that time. Teacher trainers and the teaching unions obstinately stuck to the view that special and mainstream education should remain distinct. There were some on the committee who argued passionately for this view, while others, such as myself, were strongly opposed to it. Some years later, Mary wrote that her face 'creaked and ached with the effort to smile and look pleasant when involved in these apparently endless disputes.' 'Some members of the Committee' she reported, 'congratulated me on my patience, after an especially long drawn-out and irritating meeting.' She added that I had interrupted at this point to observe that 'my patience was the "thinnest veneer" he had ever seen.'³⁷

The department officials were happy with the abandonment of medical categories probably for the territorial reason that removing them reduced the importance of a health service input into educational decisions. They were distinctly less happy with the argument of some members of the committee that we were in danger of omitting two important issues. There was to be no mention of dyslexia. This offended the powerful dyslexia lobby, but in practice it made little difference as the 'needs' approach meant that, if children needed special help with reading, we were agreed they should receive it regardless of whether or not they were labelled as 'dyslexic.'³⁸ The second area which Mary and some members of the committee regarded as important was social deprivation. Mary and others, including myself, argued that it was impossible to deny that social disadvantage and deprivation had damaging effects on educational progress. The report should emphasise

this fact and discuss what should be done about it. Both social service representatives on the committee and the department officials were deeply unhappy about confusing the roles of different government departments.³⁹ The final report contained only passing reference to these issues.

The report was published on time in March 1978. It was titled, as agreed at Llandaff, 'Special Educational Needs.' It opened with a consideration of the scope of special education. Noting that as many as one in six children at any one time and one in five at some time will need some form of special education, it conceived of disability as a continuum, ranging from mild and sometimes short-term disabilities to longer-lasting, more complex or multiple and more disabling conditions. The term 'educationally subnormal' should be replaced with the term 'learning difficulties.' The categorisation of handicapped pupils by their type of disability should be abolished and replaced by a focus on each child's educational needs.



Fig. 7 Photograph of the Warnock Committee, taken in Gunnersbury Park, London, 20 March 1978, unknown photographer. Mary Warnock is at the centre front, and the author is in the back row, seventh from the right.

The recommendations were strongly in favour of children with disabilities being educated within mainstream schools wherever possible, with an agreed education plan for each disabled pupil entering a mainstream school and a single teacher within the school given overall responsibility for its being followed. Recognising that for children with some types of disability or particularly severe or complex disabilities, education within mainstream schools would not be feasible, the report emphasised that some separate special schools, including some boarding schools, would continue to be needed. To identify which pupils would need to attend these separate schools, the report proposed a system of multi-professional assessment and recording of these children's needs.⁴⁰ (The term 'statement' later replaced the 'record,' so that the ugly term 'statementing' replaced 'recording' to describe the process).⁴¹ Such assessment should take into account the child's cultural and ethnic background. It was noted that there had been concern that 'a disproportionate number of children from West Indian families' had been placed in Educationally Subnormal (Moderate) (ESN (M)) schools.⁴² Any assessment would be incomplete without reference to the child's cultural background or what would now be called ethnicity.

The report recommended a greater role for parents, who should be treated as partners throughout the educational process. Parents should be involved in multi-professional assessment; they rather than teachers should be seen as the main educators of children under five, and there should generally be more support for parents, especially for those with children with severe disabilities. One person, usually the health visitor, should be designated as a point of contact for parents to help them navigate around different services. The report also proposed a greater role for nursery education. Nursery education should be substantially increased to cover a greater part of the whole pre-school population. Playgroups and day nurseries should provide facilities for young children with special educational needs, while special nursery classes should be established for children with complex, severe disabilities.

Other recommendations were that *all* teacher training should include learning about children with special needs. More academic posts should be created and university departments should carry out not just teaching but also research in special education. Both ordinary and special schools should provide support for children with special needs at the transition

from school to adult life, and continuing education should be available after school leaving in the settings to which children with special needs transfer.

The immediate response to the report both from the broadsheets and from the educational press was very positive. John Vaizey, writing in the *Times Educational Supplement*, called the report 'magnificent and important.'⁴³ Particularly well received were the recommendations involving multi-professional assessment, the increased role for parents and the idea of parents as partners, the abolition of medical categories and the need for all teachers to be trained in the identification and education of children with special needs. Legislation in this area had continued to be enacted even while the Warnock Committee was deliberating. In 1975 a guidance circular recommended multi-professional assessment for children with special educational needs.⁴⁴ The 1976 Education Act made further attempts to insist that local authorities gave special education in county and voluntary schools unless this was incompatible with efficient instruction or unreasonably expensive.

It is uncommon for the recommendations of a committee set up by government to command such universal support. Indeed, the setting up of a committee of enquiry is not infrequently a device (widely known as 'kicking into the long grass') governments use to avoid taking a decision on a controversial matter. Not only were the Warnock recommendations translated into legislation remarkably quickly, but, at the time, everyone seemed to agree with them. For this, Mary Warnock herself should take most of the credit. From the moment I walked into the first meeting in September 1974 and heard her bring the meeting to order so that we could begin, it was clear she was going to be a leader in every sense. The other committee members, like myself, were basically foot soldiers in Warnock's army. She certainly listened to the views of others, but it was she who formulated the key principles and she who achieved consensus when disagreements between committee members threatened to be irreconcilable. She had remarkable energy combined with formidable critical powers of analysis. In her own account of the meetings, she records that I never minded 'ticking her off.' For example, she had insisted on wine being served at lunch and reported that I thought she 'drank too much at lunch and then went to sleep, though he was admiring of how I managed to intervene, usually rather sharply, while

apparently in this torpid condition.⁴⁵ I have no memory at all of Mary going to sleep after lunch and suspect she put in this detail more for effect than anything else.

Now, in 1978, government ministers took an immediate interest in the possibility of legislation to implement the recommendations of the Warnock Committee. Civil servants were set the task of drafting a bill. The first meeting of an inter-departmental steering committee to consider the policy implications of the report was held on 18 May 1978, only two months after the report was published.⁴⁶ A draft bill was brought to the House of Commons for a second reading on 2 February 1981, less than three years after the publication of the report.

The Education Act 1981 defined the circumstances in which children should be regarded as having special educational needs. It required local authorities to arrange a multi-professional assessment when a child fell into this category and laid down that parents should be involved in the assessment. It made clear that any child under five years who was probably going to need special education later in his school career should be assessed as soon as possible. A formal statement should be made for any child requiring special education giving details of the provision thought to be necessary to meet the child's needs. Parents should have the right of appeal against an authority's decision to make or not to make such a statement.

In introducing the bill, the Secretary of State for Education and Science, Mark Carlisle, acknowledged 'the indebtedness of us all to Mrs. Warnock and the committee for the report. Its observations and the enormous task of gathering evidence that the committee undertook resulted in over 200 recommendations for improvements and a wider dissemination of good practice in all aspects of special education. It has in the report provided what in many ways is a guidebook for the future. It falls to us as legislators to give statutory form to some of the proposals.'⁴⁷ In general, there was very little criticism of the content of the bill, except in one crucial respect. Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Education, Neil Kinnock, having echoed the warm thanks to Mary Warnock and her committee, pointed to the fact that no new resources were to be made available to implement the provisions of the proposed act.⁴⁸ Many Labour MPs expressed similar views, perhaps most forcefully Frank Field, who said

What an opportunity was offered by the Warnock report and the Bill—an opportunity of ending the system of educational apartheid between those classified as handicapped and those who are not. What an opportunity lost because, if the resources had been willed, the Bill would have ranked in this century second only to the Education Act 1944. Instead of bringing forward a Bill like a roaring lion, we have a mouse—and a dead mouse at that.⁴⁹

But the Thatcher Government, while supporting legislation, made it clear that no new resources would be found to make the recommendations happen.

Members of the committee themselves had been well aware of the resource implications of implementing the recommendations. Multi-professional assessments are costly in terms of professional time. The production of statements recording the needs of children who require special education inevitably means bureaucratic expense. Training teachers in areas in which previously they have been ignorant cannot be done for nothing. Civil servants advising ministers also pointed out, in an early working paper: 'Since the cost of the full programme of measures advocated by the Warnock Committee would be very heavy, it will be important to determine priorities [...].'⁵⁰ In the event, no extra resources were found even for those recommendations with the highest priority. In due course this lack of resources created, inevitably, barriers to implementation, some of which, such as delays in statementing, were seriously frustrating for health professionals, teachers and, above all, parents.

A second government policy that acted later against children with special needs was the 1988 Education Reform Act. This act laid down for the first time that there should be a national curriculum that all schools would be expected to follow. It gave schools more independence from local authority control. The examination (SATs, GCSEs etc.) results obtained by all schools would be published in the form of league tables which would enable parents to choose the most successful among them. This meant that schools with large numbers of poorly performing children whose performance was poor were disadvantaged. Thus the 1988 Act unintentionally gave schools both an incentive not to admit children with special needs and, with increased independence from local authorities the means not to admit them as well as more easily

exclude them. Attempts were made to avoid this, but there is evidence that such motivation continues to influence individual school policies towards children with special needs. While this act was going through Parliament, Kenneth Baker, then Secretary of State for Education and Science, was proposing that children with special needs should be exempted from following the National Curriculum which would have meant their performance in examinations would not have counted to a school's disadvantage. But it would also have meant the exclusion of such children from significant learning experiences. The voluntary sector was strongly opposed to such exclusion and successfully resisted Baker's proposal.⁵¹

Over the decades following the passing of the 1981 Education Act the field of special education gradually changed along the lines it laid down. It became accepted that there should be more integration of children with special needs into mainstream education. The number of special schools, especially those catering for children with mild and moderate learning difficulties was gradually reduced but there remained a substantial number. The term 'educationally subnormal children' was replaced by 'children with learning difficulties.' Statements of special educational need based on a multidisciplinary assessment were now required before a child could be placed in a special school. Children's problems no longer needed to be medically categorised before they could be placed. Communication from paediatricians, especially community paediatricians, to local education authorities about children who might need special education improved. Nursery education places for children with special needs gradually increased. The assessment process ensured that parents became more involved in educational decisions affecting their children and many remained involved after their children had been placed. The number of university departments of special education increased. Though progress in this direction was slow, teacher training now more often included information about children with special needs.

The greatest difficulties in implementing the report's recommendations arose in the so-called statementing process and the delays this frequently involved. Teachers had to trigger the process and, even in the presence of quite obvious need for special education, were often slow to request an assessment by an educational psychologist.

Because of resource limitations there were many fewer psychologists than there should have been. This meant there was a waiting time before the assessment took place; this could be a year or more. The assessment might reveal the need for resources that could be found within the child's existing school but if this was not the case and intervention not available in a mainstream school was required, the educational psychologist then took responsibility for the preparation of the statement. This required input first from the health service, usually from a community paediatrician, from the child's school and from the parents. The educational psychologist then had to summarise and make clear how the child's needs should be met. Finally, the local authority had to agree to provide the necessary resources and its decision could be appealed leading to yet further delay.

Mary was lobbied by parents unhappy with the statementing process. In 2005 she wrote a booklet *Special Educational Needs: A New Look* which expressed strong criticism of this process and regretted that the report had recommended them.⁵² She described statements as 'wasteful and bureaucratic,' attacking them on several grounds.⁵³ First, in line with her objections to labelling, they merely produced an unnecessary dichotomy between 'statemented' and 'non-statemented' children. (At one point it became clear that Mary thought that 20% of children were receiving statements, the total number thought to have special needs.⁵⁴ She had to apologise for this, for the fact was that, at the time she wrote, the numbers of children receiving statements had never exceeded 4%.)⁵⁵ Then there was the expensive bureaucracy that was built up around the formulation of statements. Thirdly, there was the unhappiness of parents of children with special needs, many of whom felt their children had been wrongly refused a statement and would thus not be eligible for the separate special education they wanted. Such unhappiness was often compounded when the additionally expensive appeals process produced the same result. To some degree, such distress was made inevitable by the fact that the criteria for being in receipt of a statement had never been very precisely formulated.⁵⁶ They were meant to be for children with complex, severe and persistent disabilities, but who was to decide what counted as severe and complex? Indeed, it became clear in the first few years after the report was published, that the statement was as much an indication

of how much the local authority thought it could afford to spend as a genuine account of what the child in question really needed.⁵⁷

These criticisms were largely rejected by those responsible for statementing policy. It has, to this day, remained widely accepted throughout the education world that some form of multidisciplinary assessment should precede any decisions about a child's educational future. Indeed in 2014 the Children and Families Act extended the scope of the assessment by including the child's care needs and renamed statements as 'education, health and care plans.'

Another issue about which Mary was heavily lobbied and which she discussed in her 2005 booklet was the role and number of special schools. At this time, as a result of financial cuts, a number of local authorities were trying to close some of their special schools. In justifying such cuts, some local authorities cited the 1978 Warnock Report as calling for a reduction in special schools. Further support even for the total abolition of special schools came from bodies such as the Alliance for Inclusive Education which, largely on sociological grounds, campaigned for all children, no matter how disabled they might be, to be educated in mainstream schools.

Mary saw inclusion as a problematic concept, the problem arising from a well-recognised conflict between two sets of good intentions. The first good intention was to ensure that there was protected provision for children who have special needs. The second was to avoid children with special needs and their parents being made to feel different, to be 'labelled' as different from others with the not inconsiderable risk of stigmatisation. The intention of the committee had been, she said, to reduce 'labelling' by abolishing medical categories. However, as Mary pointed out, the recommendations merely replaced one set of labels with another. For example, as we have seen, the term 'educationally subnormal' (ESN) had been substituted by the doubtless less offensive, but nevertheless labelling term 'learning difficulties'.⁵⁸ Further, she alleged, using the language of need rather than the language of medical pathology resulted in a failure to distinguish between different sorts of need, so that all children, despite their very different needs, were treated similarly.⁵⁹ Medical categories also had the advantage that they could lead to specified funding. They could, in addition, be a source of pride as well as a target of negative discrimination. There was another

sense in which the term 'inclusion' was sometimes used which Mary also disliked. In this sense 'inclusion' was understood to mean that all children, whatever the nature of their disabilities, should be educated (included) in mainstream schools. This was a view espoused by some campaigning bodies such as the Alliance for Inclusive Education with which Mary profoundly disagreed. She preferred the view of the National Association of Head Teachers, which referred to the need for pupils to be educated 'in the most appropriate setting' which, of course, might be a special school.⁶⁰

Twenty-five years on from the report, the complex issues, some ideological, some practical, surrounding provision for children with special needs remained hotly debated amongst education professionals and parents. The debate centred mainly on current practices so perhaps it should not be surprising that references to the original recommendations were rare. Whatever the reason, the Warnock Report had come to be associated in the public mind with the abolition of all special schools, and it is unfortunate that Mary, when reflecting critically on her own report, missed the opportunity to correct this common misconception. An extreme, and very disagreeable example of the misconception that the report advocated such abolition was provided by the journalist Melanie Phillips who launched a savage tirade against Mary in the *Daily Mail* for, as she put it, 'first having ruined the educational chances of children with disabilities by insisting they be integrated in mainstream schools and then for blithely changing her mind after the damage had been done.'⁶¹ In a vicious article headed 'A Monstrous Ego Who Has Destroyed So Much of Our Moral and Social Heritage,' Phillips accused Mary of creating a 'classroom revolution, one which has caused chaos and misery for countless thousands of children and their teachers and made many schools all but ungovernable.'⁶²

In fact, though there were indeed one or two members of the committee like Sir Edward Britton who did at one point take the abolitionist view, there was a definite statement in the unanimously agreed 1978 Report that there should continue to be special schools. The wording could hardly have been clearer on this matter. It stated 'We are in no doubt whatever that special schools will continue to feature prominently in the range of provision for children with special educational needs.'⁶³ Now, in 2005, Mary not only agreed with this

view but thought there should be more special schools, particularly small schools which she saw as much better able to deal with the bullying to which some children with special needs were exposed in large mainstream schools. Mary's approach was defended by Ruth Cigman who attacked what she called the 'universalist' approach to special education. This proposed, on ideological grounds that failed to respect the wishes of parents and children themselves, that all children regardless of their needs and level of disability, should be educated in mainstream schools.⁶⁴

In 2010, the booklet Mary had written in 2005 was reprinted, this time with a commentary by Brahm Norwich, Professor of Educational Psychology and Special Educational Needs. Norwich took issue with Mary on most of the points she had made. In particular, he pointed to the fact that the concept of 'inclusion' had not existed at the time the 1978 Report had been written when all discussion was around 'integration.' The concept of inclusion was multidimensional.⁶⁵ It was important, he wrote, to distinguish between a geographical definition (all under the same roof), with a curriculum definition (following the same learning path). He considered Mary's criticism of statements and the statementing procedure to have some validity but noted her inability to suggest an alternative system of assessing suitability for different forms of provision. He then dealt with other aspects of her negative view of 'inclusion.' He rejected her view that bullying in maintained schools must mean more special schools. There are many other effective ways of dealing with bullying.⁶⁶

Mary wrote a response to Norwich's arguments, but it cannot be said that she did much beyond repeating the arguments she had already made. Nevertheless, she retained her interest in special education until the last months of her life. In July 2018, only nine months before she died, Mary gave evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. She pointed to the devastating effect the lack of resources put into special education was having on its quality. In its highly critical report, published in October 2019, the select committee echoed her concerns.⁶⁷

These considerations apart, when considering the impact of the 1981 Act on the educational experience of children with special needs, the verdict has to be overwhelmingly positive. It worked extremely well for

many individuals. The following is an example with some minor details changed to preserve anonymity:

Peter X. was born in 1980 and is now, in 2020, forty years old. The younger of two children, his father worked in a car factory, north-east of London, and his mother was a shop assistant. His mother had an amniocentesis which revealed that the baby had Down's syndrome, but the parents opted to continue with the pregnancy. After he was born, Peter's motor milestones were passed normally and he was walking by eighteen months, but he was slow to speak. By four years he only had a few words, was very clumsy in his movements and was just starting to feed himself. His development was that of a child a little over half his age.

In addition to the Down's syndrome, Peter had a mild hearing loss partly responsible for the delay in his speech and language skills. He began his education in a mainstream local authority nursery school. He was assessed there by an educational psychologist and a community paediatrician. His nursery teacher provided a report on his development and behaviour and his parents were actively involved in his assessment and planning for his future education. Peter's educational needs were recorded in a 'statement of special educational needs' and the assessment concluded that Peter's needs for support could best be met in a local authority special school. His parents were initially very unhappy with the decision. Although recognising that Peter would need extra support, they had always hoped that he could progress to his local primary school alongside his older brother. However, having visited both the mainstream and the special school, the parents agreed that Peter was likely to do better in the special school, with smaller classes and additional support available on-site for his hearing and speech and language difficulties.

The special school where Peter was placed was three miles from his family home. A school bus picked him up in the morning and delivered him home in the afternoon. The school was in the grounds of a mainstream primary school and the two schools shared some classes and activities. Peter was able to join several school clubs, including music and drama, which he particularly enjoyed. When Peter was ten, his parents decided to relocate to the North of England, primarily

because his mother wished to be closer to her own mother, who had become very frail and in need of additional support. Peter's statement of special educational needs meant that the new local authority had a duty to find him a suitable school place and he moved without problems to another school for children with severe learning difficulties.

When Peter was fourteen, his parents and the school began to discuss his 'transition plan' as he moved into adult life. Although Peter had made considerable progress in managing his own personal care and in improving his communication skills, it was clear that he would continue to need support after leaving school and his parents were worried about his longer-term future. Statements of special educational needs covered education up to nineteen and it was clear that Peter would still need and benefit from support with learning after that date. He was fortunate that the Children and Families Act 2014 had replaced statements of special educational needs with 'education, health and care plans' (EHCPs) which could continue to provide education and support up to twenty-five, subject to assessment.

Peter was keen to improve his literacy and to continue to study art, drama and music and he attended classes at the local further education college and also at a community art project. The Children and Families Act 2014 had introduced personal budgets for young people with EHCPs and Peter was able to use his personal budget to support his art classes and pay for membership of a local drama group and join special classes at his local leisure centre to improve his mobility and to lose weight. During his early twenties, Peter, his parents and his social worker discussed where he wanted to live and how he wanted to spend his life. He wanted to move away from home but recognised that he was not independent enough to live on his own. Peter had a comprehensive assessment, as set out in the Care Act 2014, and now has a personal care plan which sets out Peter's wishes, his assessed needs and the arrangements and funding available from the local authority to meet them. It was mutually agreed that Peter should move into a supported living arrangement (a shared flat) with regular support and practical help with daily living. Peter has now made the transition out of the family home, though he has frequent contact with his parents and regularly enjoys home visits. His parents were very nervous about the

move to a shared flat, but their own health is now deteriorating, and they are very relieved that Peter is building a life of his own. Peter will have regular annual reviews and notwithstanding his need for support, he thinks, in his own words, that *'life is great.'* His mother, looking back, comments that

we were upset that Peter couldn't go to the same school as his brother. But now we are pleased that he went to schools which could give him the skills for everyday life. He's been able to make choices, to get a home of his own and when he walks down the street, he seems to know more people than we do! He is really part of his local community and he has got a life.

Since the publication of the Warnock Report there has been an increasing tendency for special and ordinary schools to come closer together, both in geographical and in curriculum terms. What follows is an example of co-location giving opportunities for many shared and integrated academic, but more particularly social activities.

Riverside and Woodside Schools (at both of which the author has served as a school governor) are situated on the same campus in Tottenham, a socially deprived area in the London Borough of Haringey. Riverside is a local authority school for children with special needs, rated 'Good' by OFSTED.⁶⁸ It caters for about 140 students with moderate learning difficulties (MLD), profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), and communication and interaction needs: speech and language disorders and autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Currently, over half the students have ASD, with the great majority of these having learning difficulties as well. Over recent years, increasing attention has been paid to monitoring the academic progress of students.

There is active engagement with Woodside High School. The headteacher of Riverside attends Woodside governing body meetings and vice versa. Although this is unusual, where Riverside students have the potential to take public examinations, they join classes at Woodside. Riverside students are taken on tours of Woodside and vice versa. Students from Riverside who set up a breakfast club joined Woodside students in the Woodside canteen. Riverside/Woodside ran a joint Red Nose Day with shared activities. Riverside's after-school club visited Woodside's open-air Windrush anniversary celebration. Riverside

partnered with Woodside in completing the Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award. Students from the two schools worked together to support one another hike and navigate through the planned route. They socialised and played rounders together during the evening times.

Woodside High School is a single school academy rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. It has about 1,000 students aged eleven to sixteen years, most of whom are socially disadvantaged. They come from a variety of backgrounds, with 70% not having English as their first language. Their statement of values begins: 'We welcome difference and diversity: learning from and about diversity strengthens our community.' The statement concludes: 'Our starting point is a whole-school approach to making provision for students with SEN/D: we make sure that all staff have the knowledge and skills to support all students with SEN/D (Special educational needs/Disability) in our school.' The school makes provision for a wide variety of students with special cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural, physical and sensory needs. About 3.5% have Education, Health, Care Plans (EHCPs), as statements are now called.

The SEN/D team visits primary schools to assess children with special needs before they are transferred. Subsequently, the progress of students with special needs is regularly assessed. Where there are difficulties, a variety of types of provision is available within the school. Outside agencies are consulted for advice where necessary. The SENDCo is an experienced, qualified teacher, who has undertaken the National SENDCo award training. The Inclusion Department also has three Lead Teaching Assistants with specialisms in autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), literacy and social, emotional and mental health. SEN/D students participate in all lessons, trips, clubs and activities. Students with SEN/D are socially engaged with other students and where possible are involved in the School Council.

* * *

The fortieth anniversary in 2018 of the publication of the Warnock Report was a time not only for reflection, but also, for many, for celebration. The international journal *Frontiers in Education* marked the occasion by commissioning fifteen research papers on issues relevant to special

education. These were introduced with a remarkable tribute to the report and the chairman of the committee which produced it.⁶⁹ It read:

Although there had been reports on some disabilities before then, the Warnock Report was the result of the first comprehensive review of the whole range of children with special educational needs. Despite its subtitle echoing previous history, namely *Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People*, its main title proposed a new dawn: *Special Educational Needs*. Chaired by Mary Warnock, the Committee produced a review and made a wide range of recommendations that were truly ground-breaking.

This was not just about terminology. Rather, the Warnock Report was responsible for changing the conceptualisation and legislative framework in England, and the Education Act 1981 that followed the report had a totally new system for assessment and determining provision. Also, the Warnock Report recommended elements that in many countries we now take for granted—but at that time were highly original. For example, the meaningful engagement of parents, including their being central *partners* in the assessment of SEN and in making decisions on the appropriate needs, including SEN, of individual children and young people; a greatly updated process of assessment; the inclusion of a chapter on children under five years; the role of special schools; the curriculum; the transition from school to adult life; teacher education; the roles of professionals; the health and social services and voluntary organisations; and—last but not least—research.

The impact of the Warnock Report 1978 for England in particular was substantial. Impact has also been seen internationally, as professional practice and state legislation have developed, not least the policy development towards *integration*, or as we now generally refer, *inclusion*.'

Mary did not live to read this tribute and, if she had, she would doubtless have expressed serious reservations about it. She would have been mistaken; her report had a remarkably positive influence on the education of children with special needs. The recognition she received late in life strongly suggests it may well have been her most important contribution to public life. When she was made a member of the Order of the Companions of Honour (CH) in the 2017 New Year Honours, it was specifically for services to charity and to children with special educational needs. Similarly, when, in 2018, she was named by the *Times Educational Supplement* as one of the ten most influential people in education, this was explicitly in recognition of her work on special educational needs.

Notes

- 1 Department for Education and Science, 1978.
- 2 Mary Warnock, 2000, p. 170.
- 3 J. S. Hurt, 1988.
- 4 Ibid., pp. 171–172.
- 5 Department for Education and Science, 1978, p. 19.
- 6 Ibid., p. 20.
- 7 Ibid., p. 21.
- 8 Hurt, pp. 172–173.
- 9 Hurt, pp. 176–178.
- 10 Ibid., p. 183.
- 11 Jack Tizard, 1964.
- 12 National Bureau for Cooperation in Child Care, 1970.
- 13 Segal, 1966.
- 14 Warnock, 2003.
- 15 Ibid., p. 37.
- 16 Ibid., p. 40.
- 17 Ibid., p. 39.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Ibid., p. 56.
- 20 Ibid., p. 60.
- 21 Ibid., pp. 40–41.
- 22 Ibid., p. 41.
- 23 Lewis and Vulliamy, 1980.
- 24 Warnock, 2003, p. 45.
- 25 Ibid., p. 41.
- 26 Ibid., p. 42.
- 27 Ibid., pp. 42–43.
- 28 Ibid., p. 42.

- 29 Ibid., p. 45.
- 30 Ibid., pp. 37–38.
- 31 Ibid., p. 47.
- 32 Ibid., p. 48.
- 33 Ibid., p. 49.
- 34 Ibid.
- 35 Ibid., p. 50.
- 36 Ibid., p. 54.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Ibid., p. 57.
- 39 Ibid., pp. 57–58.
- 40 Ibid., p. 55.
- 41 Department of Education and Science, 1978, p. 338.
- 42 Ibid., 4.52, p. 64.
- 43 Vaizey, 1978.
- 44 Department of Education and Science, 1975.
- 45 Warnock, 2003, p. 40.
- 46 National Archive, ED 285/27.
- 47 Hansard, 1981.
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 National Archive, WSC (78) 09: Warnock Report: 'A Common Framework for Policy Analysis'.
- 51 Philippa Russell, personal communication.
- 52 Mary Warnock, 2005.
- 53 Ibid., p. 55.
- 54 Ibid., p. 13.
- 55 Mary Warnock and Brahm Norwich, 2010, pp. 118–119.
- 56 Mary Warnock, 2005, p. 30.
- 57 Martin Doyle, personal communication.

- 58 Warnock and Norwich, pp. 125–126.
- 59 Ibid., p. 19.
- 60 Warnock and Norwich, 2010, p. 34.
- 61 Melanie Phillips, *Mail Online*, 9 June 2005.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 Department of Education and Science, 1978, p. 121.
- 64 Cigman, 2007.
- 65 Brahm Norwich, personal communication.
- 66 Warnock and Norwich, p. 80.
- 67 House of Commons Select Committee Report, October 2019.
- 68 Doyle, personal communication.
- 69 *Frontiers in Education*, May 2019.



Fig. 8 Portrait of Mary Warnock in her study, unknown photographer (c. 1980), by kind permission of the Principal and Fellows of St. Hugh's College, Oxford, CC BY-NC.