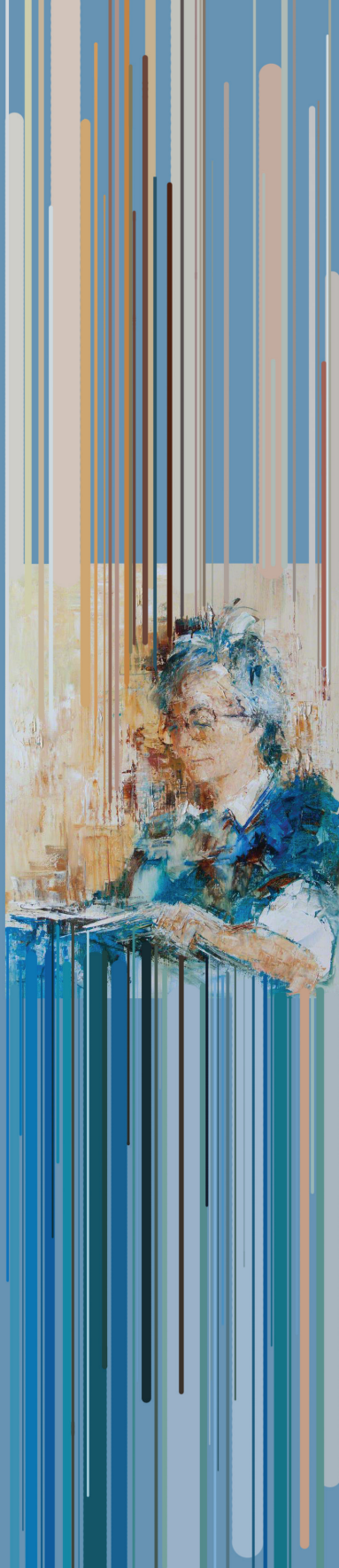


MARY WARNOCK

Ethics, Education
and Public Policy
in Post-War
Britain

PHILIP GRAHAM





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10. Art and Nature

In the Introduction to her recollections of her public life, Mary listed the issues that had been particularly important to her: education, art and nature.¹ Her contribution to thinking about education has been discussed in previous chapters. Her involvement in the other two stemmed from intense childhood experiences, which shaped her later thinking and many of her contributions to the making of public policy. She believed that such experiences, and the almost equally intense recollections of them later, were fundamental not only to an individual's sense of identity but also to the capacity to imagine and hence to create, understand and empathise. She often cited Wordsworth, in whose poetry this is one of the central ideas—for example, in his 1798 poem, 'The Pedlar,' later published in Book 1 of *The Excursion* (1814).

While yet a child, and long before his time
Had he perceived the presence and the power
Of greatness; and deep feelings had impressed
So vividly great objects they lay
Upon his mind like substances, whose presence
Perplexed the bodily sense. He had received
A precious gift, for as he grew in years
With these impressions would he still compare
All his remembrances, thoughts, shapes and forms;
And, being still unsatisfied with aught
Of dimmer character, he thence attained
An active power to fasten images
Upon his brain....²

For Mary, a child's exposure to and participation in art (in her own case, mostly music and poetry) and opportunity to enjoy nature were key elements of a rounded education. This idea underlay much of her thinking and writing about education as well as being expounded

in philosophical writings, particularly *Imagination*,³ *Memory*,⁴ and *Imagination and Time*.⁵

Mary was surrounded by music at home as a child and responded to it intensely—as she did throughout her life. Her nanny was ‘always singing; she had an instant and encyclopaedic memory for music, having to hear a song only once to remember it. Her conversation was constantly interspersed with snatches of song, hymns, music hall hits, Gilbert and Sullivan and sad, mysterious songs like ‘All the darkies are a-weeping...’⁶ In the holidays when Stephana was home from boarding school, she and Mary used to climb onto the bicycle shed roof to sing through the songs, especially hymns, that Stephana had learned at school. They had a nursery collection of records, and cast-offs from their older brother, Duncan.⁷ When he was at home, he used to play the piano for hours on end. Mary remembered she enjoyed most a piano version of *Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring* and Mozart’s Piano Concerto in F Major K132. In her mid-seventies she wrote that ‘even writing the names of these pieces of music sends shivers down my spine.’⁸

Her grandfather, as we saw in Chapter Two, was also a very good pianist. Mary describes how, on holidays at his house in Sussex, in the mornings, she and Stephana

sometimes had to go down to the library where two grand pianos were housed. Poor Stephana had to play her pieces to Grandpapa. I was mercifully thought too young and incompetent to face such an ordeal. I remember one time when she played a hornpipe by Purcell (very well, as I thought) and his response was ‘there are only three composers to play: Bach, Beethoven and Brahms. He then played us a Beethoven sonata (opus 31, no. 2) which I still hear him playing every time I hear it, and I was overcome with emotion when, years later, my son Felix was given it to learn when he was at school.’⁹

She describes her grandfather as ‘a powerful and extremely expressive, melancholy pianist, tragedy in every line of his face, every gesture of his shoulders.’¹⁰

While she was at St. Swithun’s School, the opportunities for playing music were very limited and, in Mary’s view, the teaching of music was poor. She started to learn piano and flute at home, and played with Stephana, but didn’t experience playing with other people until she was fifteen. Then, on holiday in Lymington in the New Forest, she and

Stephana signed up to an orchestral course which they discovered at a nearby school. It was the first time Mary had played in an orchestra and she found 'the pleasure of playing proper symphonies with a proper conductor was extreme.'¹¹ At Prior's Field the following year, she joined the school choir and had a wonderful piano teacher she remembered all her life. Occasionally, there were opportunities to hear top-class pianists play in nearby Guildford. She heard Myra Hess playing César Franck's *Symphonic Variations*, which were 'heavenly and stirring,' as well as 'the peculiar, not very good orchestra playing the Vaughan Williams *Pastoral Symphony*, FOUR slow movements, deadly' (26 June 1941). On another occasion (18 October 1941), she heard the Russian-born British pianist, Moiseiwitsch there: 'marvellous. By far the best pianist I've ever heard. Tremendous energy and passion. Too much Chopin for my taste, some making one nostalgic for the ballet. But the Brahms *Paganini Variations* utterly superb.' Later that year (22 November 1941) she went with a friend to the Albert Hall, where she once again heard Moiseiwitsch this time play Rachmaninov 'simply heavenly (except for the acoustics).'

It was also at the Albert Hall that she first heard Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, a work that inspired her throughout her life. On hearing it again two years later, she wrote in her diary:

I wonder if I shall dare to (listen) to the *St. Matthew Passion* again after today. There were moments in it no words could reach. I suppose the sublime melting, for instance, into a chorale, the different harmonies in the chorales, the tenor and soprano, solos, Leon Goossens, the last chorus. It was I who should have born (sic) the burden, it was I who crucified Christ, I never realised how urgently that was said in this particular work before.

Nearly seventy years later, in her book *Dishonest to God* (2010), in which she castigated church leaders for interfering in politics, she discussed the meaning of the *St. Matthew Passion* in terms not just of the betrayal of a friend, but the betrayal of the son of God and claims that 'however sceptical or atheistical one may be,' (and by this time Mary herself had become an atheist) 'one cannot understand the story or the music without understanding that this conviction was what the Gospel writer, looking back, was striving to convey.'¹²

During her first two years at Oxford, as we have seen, she joined the Bach Choir,¹³ and while she was teaching at Sherborne between her two

spells as an undergraduate (see Chapter Three), she met Rachel Drever Smith, the witty Scot who became a lifelong friend and they played flute and piano sonatas together, 'practising with great conscientiousness.'¹⁴

Once professional and married life began, Mary's own performance of music was limited to nursery rhymes for the children and other family musical activities such as singing rounds during long car journeys, and mini-orchestras, usually organised by Stephana, when the two families met. Later, following her appointment as a life peer, she took great pleasure in active membership of the Parliament Choir. But she was always a keen listener, sharing Geoffrey's love of opera, and very actively fostered her children's musical education and experiences. Two of her children, Felix and Fanny, went on to train as professional musicians. Throughout her life she found opportunities to encourage other people's music making. Her first public policy role in the early 1960s was as Chair of the Music Sub-Committee of the Oxfordshire Education Authority and at the Oxford High School the integration of music into the curriculum was a priority.

Mary's introduction to the natural world came, as did many of the good things in her early life, from her nanny. The family home, Kelso House, was in the outskirts of Winchester. It was close to Weeke Down, part of the South Downs, beautiful hilly country with many paths and bridleways. Nearly every day, Mary and Stephana would go for a walk with Nan, who talked all the time and 'pointed out all kinds of objects for us to look at or exclaim about.'¹⁵ They learned about flowers, birds and bird song. Mary had nightmares about Nan falling over a cliff along a path that was on one of their walks. She became so terrified of this path that she refused to go on it but there were plenty of others. From the age of seven or eight, she and Stephana were given a great deal of freedom to explore by themselves for hours at a time. They used to enjoy themselves climbing trees and bird nesting for eggs, forbidden now, but acceptable then.¹⁶

For the Easter holidays, their mother used to rent a house in Woolacombe on the North Devon coast. Years later, Mary remembered 'rock-climbing, the sea, food, the smell of gorse and primroses' but best of all was horse riding with Stephana at a local riding school.¹⁷ An hour's ride took them along the Marine Drive, between banks of gorse and back along the sands. A two-hour ride took them further into the

country. Later they went, 'terrifyingly,' drag-hunting, (hunting the trail of an artificially laid scent), along precipitous North Devon valleys, with banks to jump and trees that 'threatened to knock one out of the saddle.'¹⁸ They spent hours at the stables, grooming, mucking out, helping to get the ponies ready for the next ride or bringing them in, giving them water, cleaning the tack. It was at Woolacombe that Mary first became aware of what she later called a Wordsworthian passion for certain aspects of the countryside. She asked herself: 'why did I feel such a desperate, frightening longing, a kind of thirst, looking at the sea from Baggy Point? Why did I so much adore the tactile properties of the smooth, slate rock, interspersed among the shell-encrusted rocks that were so hard on one's hands and knees?'¹⁹ She describes how she began dimly to get a sense of what she later thought of as 'natural symbols, aspects of the world with a meaning beyond themselves.'²⁰

A fortnight of the summer holidays was spent at Verdley, her grandfather's estate in West Sussex. The tone was set by the style of their journey to Verdley from Winchester. Newman, the Schusters' chauffeur, would arrive at Kelso House in the 'new Rolls' to drive Mary, Stephana and their Nan to their destination. Mary hated the rough covering of the seats and the smell of stale cigars and was regularly sick shortly before they arrived.²¹ She described the house itself as 'an extraordinary architectural monstrosity of Victorian origin, with turrets and castellations and mock-Gothic windows....'²² The two sisters lived with Nan in the nursery suite, their meals being brought up by a maid. The food was delicious. Mary describes 'age-old crab-apple jelly, yellow cream in brown jugs from the farm, and a marvellous pudding called mushroom meringues, small meringues with a pinkish filling and marzipan stalks growing out of an earth-bed of chocolate cream.'²³ The sisters' walks often took them to the farms on the estate,²⁴ possibly giving them a rare insight into the living conditions of children less fortunate than themselves.

It was at Verdley that Mary and Stephana began to invent together a game called Talk-talking—a long-continuing serial of stories about a school that had as pupils and staff all the ponies and horses they had ever ridden. The headmistress was a mare. According to Mary, 'many terrible dramas took place in this school: fires, floods, burglaries, epidemics, ponies running away, police searches for escaped prisoners,

the poisoning of the water supply and there were, of course, never any holidays.²⁵ Gradually it became less important to the sisters that the characters were horses—they were humans who just bore the names and had the characters of the horses they knew. Talk-talking continued until well into their teens when it became transformed into new productions of operas, with important decisions to be made about casting and plot. Years later, when Mary was headmistress of the Oxford High School and Stephana was Director of Music at the Ripon Cathedral Choir School, they realised that what for years they had been doing in fantasy, they were now acting out in real life.²⁶

From 1934, Mary, Stephana, their mother and Nan would often travel to Elie, in Fife, for part of the summer holidays, when they rented a cottage near the harbour. The countryside around Elie is featureless and somewhat dull, but Mary and Stephana found plenty to do, sometimes taking a rowing boat into the harbour or going with their mother on longer fishing expeditions. The two elderly women who kept house for them taught Mary how to cook. She acquired a cookery book full of recipes from the Scottish Women's Institute, full of wonderful cakes and gingerbreads which she used for many years afterwards. Much of the time, however, they played golf, having their first golfing lessons. Mary became a competent golfer, leaving Elie in triumph on the last occasion, having come second in the under-fourteens competition.²⁷

Stephana was given a pony when she was fifteen and a year later, Mary also acquired one. Stephana's was a 'beautiful grey called Charles Aloysius Gull or Charlie Gull for short.' Mary's was called Daniel.²⁸ The ponies were stabled at Headbourne Worthy, on the outskirts of Winchester and Mary continued to ride in the country with Dan until well into her Oxford undergraduate days. Just before she went up to Oxford for the first time, she records in her diary entry for 14 August 1942 having ridden Stephana's horse, Gull, while she was away. Then, on 17 August, she describes a 'very hot and lovely ride. Went a short way only. Dan superb.' Nearly a year later she records on 20 July 1943 chasing Dan who had got out through a gate with another horse, eventually catching them both and having a 'lovely ride' on Charlie until his feet got too sore. Regular riding was an interest that did not survive graduation, academic responsibilities, marriage and bringing up a family, but her

feeling for and knowledge of horses, particularly the importance she attached to their intelligence and character, strongly resonated in some of her later public policy work.



Fig. 9 Stephana (left) and Mary (right) in Achiltibuie, unknown photographer (2002), provided by the Warnock family, CC BY-NC.

Mary continued to draw sustenance from nature all her life, on holidays and from the Wiltshire downland country where she lived for over twenty years. She took her young children for holidays in Woolacombe, the scene of her earliest experiences of the power of nature, and then for years to the coast of Yorkshire, which was in many ways similar. After Geoffrey died, she made frequent visits to Scotland to stay with Stephana in her house on the island of Mull or to revisit places she had loved in her teenage years. With Stephana or with her life-long friend, Imogen, she continued to take quite challenging walks: to celebrate Stephana's eightieth birthday, they walked up Stac Pollaidh near Achiltibuie, in north-west Scotland. Stiffness and failing eyesight eventually made such walks impossible and in 2010 she moved to live in London near her daughters and began to get her nature 'fix' from gardens. She enjoyed gardening and was knowledgeable about garden plants. Now she made visits to large gardens open to the public, accompanied by her daughter, Kitty, and sometimes by a friend of Kitty's, Hilary Maxwell-Hyslop, who had known Mary since she was a pupil at the Oxford High School.

According to Hilary, Mary

brought an extraordinary energy to her passion for garden visiting. She appreciated all aspects of gardens: the planting, the scents, the varieties of shrubs, the design of a bed, the direction of a path. Her enthusiasm was infectious, and we would often return home with plants that we could not wait to install in our respective gardens crammed into the car alongside us. I remember walking for most of a day around Petersham in south-west London, visiting a number of private gardens open to the public. It was hot and crowded but, as always, she was determined to see as much as possible. We went to Wisley (a Royal Horticultural Society garden) only a few weeks before she died. It was a cold day in February, but she seemed impervious to the weather. She had done her research and wanted to visit parts of the garden that happened to be furthest from the car park so off we went in the chill spring wind—slowing only so that she could stop and examine a particular snowdrop variety, or marvel at the myriad crocus colours. Looking back what I remember was the fun we had. I loved our excursions and learned a great deal about gardening from her.²⁹

* * *

Mary's experiences and responses to music and to nature were unusually intense, and, particularly in the case of music, well-informed, but of course it was not as an expert or practitioner in these fields that she was asked to contribute to and often to chair public committees and commissions of enquiry. It was as a philosopher, able to bring an analytical mind and powers of clear explanation to ethical questions in public policy. Her common-sense approach and her skill in bringing resolution to often difficult and emotive debates meant she was often in demand.

In 1973, after resigning from the Oxford High School, she was invited by Brian Young, the Director-General, to become a member of the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA).³⁰ She knew Young through his connection with her old school, Prior's Field, of which she was a governor. She joined the IBA in December 1973 and remained a member until December 1981.³¹ The IBA had been formed in 1972 when the existing Independent Television Authority took over responsibility for independent radio, becoming the regulatory body for all commercial television and radio in the UK. Its powers included awarding licences to television and radio companies and directing programme contractors

over schedules. Brian Young, a former headmaster of Charterhouse School, was trying to move independent broadcasting away from what he saw as its predominantly entertainment function towards a more educational role. Mary joined a group of forceful members, chaired by Lady Plowden, who had previously chaired an influential government committee on primary education.

Mary described her appointment as 'absurd' as 'I hardly ever watched television and had not listened to commercial radio since the days of Radio Luxembourg in the nursery.'³² But, she continued, it was 'by far the most enjoyable job I ever did on the side, and I found for the first time what fun it is to learn new things in an environment of work, with knowledgeable people to teach one.'³³ Mary recalled with great pleasure lunches that were held every other Thursday to which distinguished guests were invited. Halfway through the meal the Director-General would introduce a topic and the lunch turned into an informative seminar.³⁴ The only occasion when this event was singularly unpleasant, described in Chapter One, was when Margaret Thatcher, then Prime Minister, was a guest at the lunch.

Later, Mary took the view that she had made virtually no impact on the IBA. This is not the view of Kenneth Blyth, the Secretary to the IBA and the Director-General's chief assistant.³⁵ When Mary was appointed, Brian Young described her to Blyth as 'extremely intelligent, highly academic and surprisingly emotional.'³⁶ Blyth recalled her as having talked a lot, and 'when she talked, people listened.'³⁷ She was prepared to enter into discussion on any topic regardless of her level of knowledge in it. The staff of the IBA regarded her as a definite asset because of her willingness to speak her mind.³⁸ Kenneth Blyth acknowledged her clear, philosophical approach by asking her to write a paper drawing a distinction between the IBA's accountability and its responsibility. This paper was soon found valuable by the Annan Committee on The Future of Broadcasting, which quoted it at some length in its report.³⁹

Towards the end of her tenure as a member of the IBA, Mary was involved in the establishment of two new channels. One was Channel Four: the IBA set up a board that chose Jeremy Isaacs to be the channel's Chief Executive. The other was to be a breakfast-time television channel and for this the IBA needed to select a company to run it. Applications were received from eight consortia.⁴⁰ One was TV-AM, headed by Peter

Jay, an economics journalist and former British Ambassador to the United States, who, according to Mary, had been her brightest pupil when he was an undergraduate at Oxford.⁴¹ Mary supported another consortium, but was happy to go along with the majority view that the contract should go to TV-AM. This turned out to be a bad decision because the organisational structure of the company was inadequate—as the IBA staff had warned IBA members to expect. Eventually TV-AM had to be rescued by an Australian, Kerry Packer, to whom the IBA would never have awarded the contract if he had been an initial bidder.⁴²

After Mary left, having served three terms as a member of the IBA, she wrote little about the media, but in 1985, she gave the Eleanor Rathbone Memorial Lecture (a lecture given annually since 1949 in memory of Eleanor Rathbone, an early twentieth-century MP and campaigner for women's equality) with the title 'Social Responsibility of the Broadcasting Media.'⁴³ She begins by considering the educational function of the media, noting that both the BBC and the IBA are charged with ensuring that broadcast programmes inform, entertain and educate. She suggests that it is widely assumed that programmes fail in their duty to enhance public morality and are often positively harmful in their effects, a concern that persists to this day. The most pressing question was whether screen violence facilitated violence in real life. With so many variables to take into account, Mary claims, it would never be possible to use the methods of social science to answer this question.⁴⁴

More generally, Mary writes, children learn by seeing and hearing stories, affirming the importance of story-telling in the encouragement of moral behaviour. She suggests that teachers could increase awareness of moral issues by showing footage from contemporary television dramas and then initiating discussions about the moral issues they raised.⁴⁵ She can think of no better form of moral education than 'to analyse and discuss the motives of those who watch and take part in the competition programmes, those who hope to flog their old aunt's teapot, and indeed those who would sell gossip or secrets to the media, newspapers or TV. I do not think that teachers should regard such material as beneath them.'⁴⁶

Though she dismisses concerns that some television programmes encourage greed for material possessions, (pointing out that greed has always been part of human nature), she has serious worries about the

way television influences attitudes towards women. 'Many television programmes,' she writes, 'to say nothing of most advertisements, still convey a view of women that is stereotyped, derogatory and conservative.'⁴⁷ Her response is to encourage the idea that we should all, but particularly teachers, 'be our own radio and television critics, alert to presuppositions and unexamined assumptions in the programmes of which we are the audience, ready to complain and argue if need be.'⁴⁸

In 1987, while she was at Girton, the trustees or 'syndics' of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge were unhappy with the way the director, Michael Jaffé, was running the museum and Mary was asked to chair an internal enquiry.⁴⁹ According to Mary, Jaffé's exasperating and domineering manner made it virtually impossible for the committee to carry out its work efficiently. A report was written, but, as it happened, Michael Jaffé became ill and resigned so that its recommendations were never properly examined. Besides, wider considerations, especially cuts to university finance, came into play, which led to other reforms being instituted.⁵⁰ In the event, since then, the Fitzwilliam has thrived.

In December 1988, when she was sixty-four, Mary was featured in *Desert Island Discs* on Radio 4. This programme, broadcast continuously since 1942, was rated 'the greatest radio programme of all time' in 2019 by a panel of broadcasting experts. At the time Mary took part it had around two million listeners, surely the largest audience she ever had. In *Desert Island Discs* well-known public figures are interviewed. Each week's guest is led through a review of her life and achievements, interspersed with short excerpts from the eight recordings which she would like to have with her in the highly improbable event that she was 'cast away' on a desert island with the means to play CDs.⁵¹

The interviewer, Sue Lawley, began by summarising Mary's career and then asked her if she could be described when she was a teenager and young woman as a bluestocking. 'Not entirely,' replied Mary, citing listening to Radio Luxembourg and her love of riding horses as non-academic pursuits. Radio Luxembourg was a commercial channel beaming popular music to Britain from the mid-1930s onwards and she probably only listened to it with her children in the late 1950s and early 1960s though certainly she adored horses during her adolescence and early adult life. Mary was then asked about her reputation for being a smart dresser and happily acquiesced though she claimed she was now

too old to wear floppy hats. Having established that she had a 'normal' adolescence, which, of course, in most respects, she certainly had not, Mary's first choice of music is the Albion Ensemble playing a Mozart serenade.⁵² She gives her reason for this piece of music as the fact that her son, Felix, is one of the players. It was altogether appropriate that her first choice should relate to her family, so central to the whole of her life.

Mary goes on to describe to Sue Lawley her pleasure in being a philosopher as it involves finding out about other people's fields, something she finds immensely rewarding. Her second piece of music is from Brahms's Requiem, *Alles fleisch*, which she says she has chosen because she constantly needs to be reminded of her own mortality. Certainly, the words of this part of the Requiem are chilling—'alles fleisch es ist wie gras' or 'all flesh is as grass' and goes on 'and all the glory of man as the flower of grass.' The choice confirms Mary's view of music as a source of transcendental reflection.

Most of the interviewees on *Desert Island Discs*, however solidly classical their musical taste, manage to insert one example of popular music and Mary was no exception. She chose *Bye Bye Love*, sung by the Everly Brothers, the country-influenced rock and roll duo. Mary claims she listened to a lot of pop music and bought a lot of singles earlier in her life. Now the Everly Brothers had their first hit single in 1957, when she was thirty-three years old. This selection probably reflects both her own children's choice of music as well as the fact that she and Geoffrey were part of a social group which found relaxation from intensely serious academic work in cinema and dancing in each other's homes (see Chapter Five). It was at this point too, or only a little later, that Mary's children started to experience the sort of adolescence Mary had missed and popular culture pervaded the Warnock home. Before their adolescence, Mary had bought pop records for their nursery collection and some of these songs became great favourites of hers.

The record that Mary said she would choose above all the others she had selected to take with her to a desert island was Henry Purcell's *My Beloved Spake*,⁵³ the words of which are drawn from the *Song of Solomon*. Her other choices were all solidly classical, works by Schubert, Handel and other baroque composers and, of course, Bach, though surprisingly she chose a Bach cantata rather than a section of the *St. Matthew Passion*.

Her capacity for combining the secular with the sacred was well reflected throughout and this was also the case when she came to choose the book she would take with her. *The Chronicles of Barset* by Anthony Trollope is a series of six novels permeated with the politics of the Anglican Church. Mary's choice of luxury was 'a lot of biros and a lot of paper'⁵⁴ reflecting just how central to her life her writing was to her.

Her next task was presented to her in October 1990, a few months before she left Girton. She was asked to chair an Arts Council working party to enquire into the management and financing of the Royal Opera House (ROH).⁵⁵ The Arts Council is the main conduit for government funding of the arts. Mary was not a member of the council but was brought in as an independent voice to deal with the difficult situation that had arisen over its grant to the ROH. Under its General Director, Jeremy Isaacs, who had then been in post for two years, it had become increasingly demanding of financial support. Jeremy put in a wider repertoire of opera and ballet with more experimental productions than had his predecessor, Sir John Tooley. This was expensive. Annual losses were mounting, and the Arts Council and its staff were unhappy at the new direction the ROH was taking. Hence the invitation to Mary to sort things out.⁵⁶

By any standards, the financial situation of the ROH was dire. It had four sources of income: ticket sales, donations from wealthy opera-lovers, corporate sponsorship and government funding. Ticket sales were substantial and remained reasonably secure providing the repertoire was confined to popular operas and ballets, but Isaacs's policy was to venture beyond the familiar and audiences did not always follow him. Income from donations and sponsorship was also at risk from over-ambitious programming. As for the Arts Council, its grant to the ROH was already much larger than to any other national company and it could not meet ever-growing annual shortfalls; indeed, there was already criticism that the council's funding was excessively focussed on London and growing political pressure to re-balance its support in favour of the regions.

Another looming crisis was the dilapidated state of the ROH building. The plan was to close it in 1993 for rebuilding, but it was unclear how the money would be found for the construction, an issue made more difficult by the need to make up for the lack of ticket sales

during the two-year closure. One idea was that the necessary income would come from the commercial development of a neighbouring site belonging to the ROH. However, the local authority and various community groups were opposed to this scheme and it was far from certain to materialise.⁵⁷

Mary liked and admired Jeremy Isaacs. He had a brilliant track record, first as the producer of inquisitorial television documentaries for the BBC's *Panorama* programme and then as the founding director of Channel Four which had been an outstanding success. But he had an uncompromising style of leadership and left-wing views, which meant that, after twelve years of a Conservative administration, he had few friends in high places.⁵⁸ In particular, David Mellor, the Secretary of State for the National Heritage and hence the Arts Minister, made it clear to the Chairman of the Board of the ROH that there would be no additional government money while Isaacs was General Director.⁵⁹

Mary's admiration for Jeremy was only partly reciprocated. He described her as having a 'keen mind and a spry, tough persona.'⁶⁰ But, he added, 'she knew nothing of opera or ballet.' This was irrelevant and, in any case, he under-estimated her on three counts. First, though she was not a great opera-goer, she was, as we have seen, intensely musical and capable of an informed view of musical performance of any type, though generally she abhorred modern-dress productions. Indeed, in July 1991, she attended an ROH performance of *Orfeo ed Eurydice* which she described as 'pretty dire, with the chorus on their last legs.'⁶¹ Though she did not record this, it is likely that she was unsympathetic to the production of this eighteenth-century work with the countertenor playing the title role dressed in leather jacket and jeans and carrying around an electric guitar. Second, she was a rapid learner. Finally, as Mistress of Girton, she had been responsible for running a large organisation within a budget and was fully aware of the vagaries of reliance on rich donors. Mary was well-supported by other members of her working party. Among them were Dennis Stevenson, a businessman with arts management expertise, and Hans Landesmann, Commercial and Arts Director of the Salzburg Festival.⁶²

She and the other members of the working party spent June and July 1991 interviewing members of the ROH staff, ballet as well as opera, meeting nearly every day, writing their report in August, and

presenting it in September. According to Mary, they interviewed people from all sides of the business and all the senior staff more than once. They were seriously unimpressed. Mary later wrote: 'Nobody we spoke to seemed to know how many people were employed on the premises, or how long they had been there or what was in their contracts—if they had contracts.'⁶³ Members of the orchestra, which had recently been on strike, were the most discontented. They complained they were paid less than other orchestral players and could not earn extra money on the side. Members of the chorus complained they had the worst time and hated many aspects of their work. There seemed to be no retiring age and the working party members met people painting scenery apparently well into their eighties. They were disappointed with the Director of Opera, who 'seemed to have limitless powers' to commission new productions without thought for their cost.⁶⁴ According to Mary, Isaacs seemed to have nothing to express other than an uncompromising demand for more government money. She wrote 'There was one day, in July, when we saw Jeremy Isaacs for three hours. We could not stop him; he simply ranted on about how government must produce more money.'⁶⁵

The report recommended that fewer new productions should be commissioned. The building should be closed sooner rather than later as it was manifestly unsafe, but the idea of a complete rebuild should be dropped as there was no way it could be financed. A comprehensive refurbishment would have to suffice. There was criticism of the personnel management such as the absence of job descriptions and performance reviews, and union agreements needed to be renegotiated. The report was critical of the ROH management, but it was more critical of the board members who had not exercised financial scrutiny as they should, nor taken their other oversight responsibilities seriously enough.⁶⁶

The report, which was unanimous, was presented to the members of the Arts Council one morning in late September. The meeting went off reasonably well, with no serious objections raised to the recommendations. Unexpectedly, however, Mary was asked to stay for the afternoon to present the report to the ROH Board. She was told this would take about fifteen minutes. This turned out to be an extremely unpleasant occasion.

After Mary had briefly presented her report, the Chairman asked each of the directors in turn to ask questions. These fell into two categories and were uniformly hostile. Why had the report failed to acknowledge the quality of the productions over the previous years? And what was the evidence for the damning comments made? To the first, Mary had to reply that the working party had been set up to appraise the management and finances, not to make aesthetic judgements. To the second, she merely referred to the pages of the report which provided ample backup for the statements made. It was not surprising that the members of the board were angry. They had indeed failed in their responsibilities as trustees. Further, many of them had been appointed to the board because of the generosity of their donations and it must have been unpleasant to be told that their money had been inefficiently spent. After two and a half hours' grilling, Mary was allowed to leave. She wrote afterwards that she was left 'feeling a complete idiot and [...] should not have been subjected to such bullying without warning.'⁶⁷

The outcome of the financial mess in which the ROH found itself was a great deal better than might have been predicted. The ROH Board had commissioned its own report from the accountants, Price Waterhouse, concurrently with the Warnock working party. Much preferred by Jeremy Isaacs, this came up with very similar conclusions, although couched in more palatable terms and with one or two more constructive suggestions such as the abolition of overtime. In fact, over the next two years, most of the recommendations of both committees were implemented. The Director of Opera and the Director of Administration responsible for personnel left and were replaced. Employment contracts were introduced, and some redundancies were made. Rehearsals were reduced to save money. Despite these cuts, quality was maintained. Indeed in 1993, the ROH won all eight Lawrence Olivier Opera Awards, four for outstanding achievement in opera and four for best new opera productions.⁶⁸

In his recollections, Jeremy Isaacs claimed that the Warnock Report was 'a dead letter' because it had preferred refurbishment of the opera house to a complete rebuild.⁶⁹ Hindsight is a wonderful thing. In 1991, there was no realistic plan as to how rebuilding could be financed. Fortunately for the ROH, the Major Government instituted the National Lottery in 1993 and two years later, £78.5 million was awarded for the

rebuilding from Lottery funds.⁷⁰ *Deus ex machina* indeed. The ROH closed for rebuilding from July 1997 to December 1999. Isaacs had left in January 1997 with thoroughly deserved plaudits for the quality of the productions he oversaw, but some questions over his management. More than twenty years later, he admitted, 'Of course, Mary was absolutely right. We didn't have the right structures in place to make sure the place was run efficiently.'⁷¹

In many fields of social and cultural activity, there was a feeling in 1999 that the arrival of the new millennium required an appraisal of past achievements and failures and a need for new directions. PEER, a voluntary organisation dedicated to embedding visual arts into everyday life, decided this was the time for a new look at the relationship between artists and public policy-making and funding for the arts. It made a nationwide call for submissions from both artists and people involved in the arts in other ways, such as curators, critics, politicians and art teachers, to contribute to a debate on the subject. They invited Mary, as a philosopher, and the sculptor and conceptual artist Mark Wallinger to edit a book bringing together the most interesting submissions. The result was *Art for All? Their Policies and Our Culture* (2000).⁷²

Mary invited Mark Wallinger, PEER trustee Andrew Brighton and its Director, Ingrid Swenson, to a preliminary meeting in the House of Lords, after which she and Mark met frequently to select from the hundreds of submissions.⁷³ Mark found the experience enormously enjoyable. He was reassured to be working with a co-editor who spoke with such ethical authority.⁷⁴ When the book was finished, Mary invited Wallinger and three members of PEER to her house in Wiltshire. Greatly impressed by her array of 'quart' bottles of gin, he went for a walk with her and found her wonderful company. They shared an enthusiasm for horses, Mark having on one occasion submitted a horse as an exhibit.⁷⁵ Twenty years later, Mark talked of Mary with great fondness—'it just makes me happy thinking of her,' he said.⁷⁶

The book that emerged, as well as being of considerable historical and political interest, is also informative, occasionally sad and extremely funny. The editors wrote thoughtful introductions. Mary wrote about the impossibility of combining so-called accessibility with high quality. Wallinger derided the recent appearance of 'a new apolitical orthodoxy [which] gave the opportunity of power and influence to a swill of artists/curators who might previously have found employment in PR.'⁷⁷

Mary had insisted on the inclusion of historically important statements such as that by Maynard Keynes, the founder of the Arts Council, at the time of its inception in 1945. Artists Bob and Roberta Smith submitted a postcard which concluded 'What on Earth does Baroness Warnock know?' Janette Parris sent in a rejection letter from the Arts Council with photocopies of unpaid bills from British Telecom, London Electricity and British Gas. A lecture given to the Royal Society of Arts by Chris Smith, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, described the first challenge for policy-makers as 'to demonstrate very clearly how art and artistic activity can transform the lives and hopes of those who are socially excluded or marginalised.' This lecture concluded with a poem written by James Oppenheimer who had been moved by seeing banners carried by striking American women millworkers:

Smart art and love and beauty their drudging spirits knew
Yes, it is bread we fight for, but we fight for roses too!⁷⁸

Art for All? retains considerable contemporary significance. A number of contributors had raised the dangers of what they called 'elitism.' Mary elaborated on her views on the word 'elitism' which she called 'the most noxious' in the political vocabulary. She wrote 'The aim of 'accessibility' ought to come second, subordinate to the aim of high standards, whether in the academic or artistic worlds.'⁷⁹ She responded to the question 'Who are you to set up a standard of taste?' by claiming that education can teach you to hear or see excellence. There is a second, more primitive way, she asserts, 'it is the shiver that goes down your spine (or in my case, my legs) when I read something that is really poetry.'⁸⁰ Other than education, she does not explain how to arrive at a judgement of quality in the absence of such shivers but nor, arguably, has any other philosopher, and many might agree that, given the intractability of the concept of taste, Mary's thoughts were refreshing and insightful.

The year 2000 saw Mary become a member of the Spoliation Advisory Panel, a body set up to consider claims to ownership of cultural objects during the Nazi regime and now held in a UK institution, and to advise the claimant and the institution on the appropriate action to take in response to such claims.⁸¹ The panel was chaired by David Hirst, a

former Lord Justice of Appeal, and included Richard Evans, a historian, Terry Heiser, a retired Permanent Secretary, Martin Levy, a specialist in antique furniture and works of art, and Peter Oppenheimer, an economist. All the members of the panel were highly distinguished in their own fields. While the panel had no power to order restitution of a work of art to its original owner, its recommendations in this respect carried great moral authority. According to Martin Levy, Mary was sparing in her contributions to the discussions, but when she spoke, her views were always crystal clear and commanded the room.⁸² She was also, he says, very good company when, periodically, the panel lunched together to discuss matters of mutual interest.⁸³

Its reports reflect the care the panel took in considering each claimant's case as well as the complexity of the issues. It was often difficult to know what had happened to the object in question after it had ceased to be the property of the original owner. In addition, and it is here that Mary's clarity of thought and philosophical training were relevant, there were moral questions to be considered. For example, to what extent was a claim enhanced if the original owner had sold the object under duress at below the market price? Or, where the original owner had died, was the moral strength of the descendants' claim weakened by their delay in making it? What was the moral obligation of the institution that now owned the object? Had it taken sufficient care to investigate its provenance? The panel considered such questions before making recommendations about whether there needed to be restitution or compensation and, if so, what form this should take. Mary found this panel very interesting and only resigned from it in 2014 when she was ninety years old and her hearing loss made participation difficult.⁸⁴ It was to be the last public position she held.

Before this point there had been many other smaller-scale public activities—judging essay competitions, for instance, or speaking at school prize-giving ceremonies. In 2005, she chaired a panel of judges set up to make the Sandford St. Martin Trust Award for the best religious programme of the year. The awards organiser, Michael Barton, formerly Controller of BBC Local Radio, recalls that the first meeting was held in Lambeth Palace, the official home and workplace of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

[Mary] had driven up from Oxford in an elderly car—every seat covered in loose papers, carrier bags, reference books and a scattering of DVDs which were the entries. A brilliant Chair, she never led the conversation and always got full value out of her panel of judges. Few could match the clarity of her summing up—leading to a decision.⁸⁵

The main award was given to a documentary on the bombing of the World Trade Centre made by a small production company, the Centre for Television Communication (CTVC). She presented the awards at a ceremony in Bristol ‘with shrewd observations about each entry, laced with good humour.’ At the end of it all, Michael Barton concluded, ‘Mary had to dash away for another engagement in Oxford, thanked me profusely, grabbed me in both arms and gave me a long “full on” embrace. Why wouldn’t I remember that for the rest of my life?’⁸⁶

* * *

Throughout her life, Mary derived as much pleasure and interest from nature as she did from music and other arts. Her enjoyment of nature, and her belief that enjoyment of nature was a fundamental part of a full human life, informed her various roles in public policy-making. In 1978, she joined a Home Office committee to consider a test, LD50, that was used on animals to ascertain if a particular substance, perhaps a drug or a new cosmetic, was safe for human use.⁸⁷ The purpose of this test was to determine what dose of the substance was required to kill 50% of the animals, usually mice or rats, on which it was tested. The test usually required sixty to eighty animals and there was no upper limit on the dose to be used. Many of the animals suffered a painful death and the committee eventually recommended that the LD50 test was inappropriate on both scientific and cruelty grounds. An alternative, the so-called ‘fixed dose procedure’ (FDP), required that only ten animals should be used instead. The dose administered was determined beforehand on the basis of available knowledge and the experiment was terminated as soon as an animal showed signs of toxicity. The Home Office quietly dropped the LD50 test and over the next few years, the FDP became the internationally recognised standard procedure for assessing toxicity.⁸⁸

When Mary joined the advisory committee, there was almost no statutory regulation of the laboratory use of animals. The relevant law

was the 1876 Cruelty to Animals Act which concerned the maltreatment of animals by the general population and did not cover laboratory-based research. A private members' bill had been debated in Parliament without reaching the statute book, but there was a consensus that existing provisions were no longer adequate. In 1979, the Chairman resigned and Mary took on the chairing of a reconstituted committee with an extended brief to make recommendations for new legislation.⁸⁹

Public opinion clearly favoured the continued use of animal testing before new drugs were introduced for human use, but the case for better regulation was overwhelming. Only licensed research should be permitted and licenses should be granted only when strict criteria were met, limiting pain and suffering, ensuring appropriate use of anaesthetics and eliminating long-term suffering arising from the experiment.⁹⁰ The question of the number of animals that might be used proved more difficult to decide. Most members of the committee took the view that the legislation should stipulate that as few animals as possible compatible with a scientifically acceptable result should be used. Mary herself thought that the priority should be the optimum scientific outcome and this should determine the number of animals used but she was over-ruled. A majority of the committee, and Mary was amongst them on this issue, felt that public opinion would demand that the licensing procedures should place a heavy burden on applicants to justify their work. However, a lighter, less bureaucratic touch was eventually recommended.⁹¹

Mary found the other members of the committee well-informed and supportive. Richard Adrian, the Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge, a laboratory scientist who had held a licence in the past, became Vice-Chairman and was particularly helpful. Some difficulties were caused by the RSPCA representative, who had a tendency (convenient for herself but inconvenient for everyone else) to 'pass out in a faint whenever she was losing an argument.' This caused 'such a distraction that by the time she had come round and we had all settled down again, it seemed impossible to go back to where we had left the debate, and we moved on to the next point.'⁹² A daunting feature of the committee meetings was the presence of a phalanx of Home Office inspectors at the back of the room who seemed deeply suspicious of any new safeguards that were proposed. Mary understood this better when

one of them pointed out to her that they felt that the need for safeguards reflected or implied criticism of the way they had carried out their work hitherto.⁹³ The committee produced its report in 1982, but it was not until 1986 that the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Bill, incorporating most of its recommendations, was passed into law.⁹⁴

Over the next fifteen years, the legislation seemed to work reasonably well. However, the animal rights movement, founded in the 1960s, was becoming increasingly violent. For example, Colin Blakemore, the Oxford Professor of Physiology, who had previously carried out experiments with kittens resulting in improvements to the care of people with visual impairment, was seriously attacked. His wife and children were also threatened. They received envelopes with razor blades in them, fake bombs, even real bombs. His car tyres were slashed and his car had paint thrown over it.⁹⁵ The issue of animal rights had gradually risen up the political agenda and in 2001 Mary became a member of the House of Lords committee set up to review the provisions of the 1986 Act.⁹⁶ The committee reported in 2002, its main recommendation being that there was a continued need for animal experiments in applied and non-applied research, but that higher priority should be given to non-animal research.⁹⁷ The framework that Mary's committee had recommended in 1982 remained unaltered.

At the heart of all these issues was a series of philosophical questions which Mary discussed in some detail, both in her account of the meetings and in other books, notably in a chapter titled *Man and Other Animals* in *The Uses of Philosophy* (1992)⁹⁸ and in a chapter titled 'Rights' in *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Ethics* (1999).⁹⁹ The fundamental question was whether it was ethically justifiable to treat non-human animals differently from human animals. As Mary pointed out, the theory of evolution had radically changed the way animals were considered. Before Darwin there was an automatic assumption that animals were qualitatively different from us.¹⁰⁰ But Darwin's discovery of the close biological affinity of animals to humans, an affinity that has been amply confirmed by DNA studies showing the high percentage of shared DNA, suggested such a qualitative difference could not be taken for granted. Though others, such as Mary Midgley, Mary Warnock's Oxford contemporary, had earlier expressed similar views in *Beast and Man* (1979),¹⁰¹ it was Peter Singer, an Australian philosopher, whose radical

ideas in this field gained greatest publicity. Mary and members of her committee interviewed him in the United States where he was then working.¹⁰²

Singer accused the non-vegetarian general public and especially scientists who experimented on animals of what he called speciesism. He claimed 'There is no ethical basis for elevating membership of our particular species into a morally crucial characteristic. From an ethical point of view, we all stand on an equal footing, whether we stand on two feet or four or none at all.'¹⁰³ To argue against this view, Singer claimed, was 'speciesism, pure and simple, and it is as indefensible as the most blatant racism.' Singer justified his views on the grounds that there are no characteristics to which we can point that would mark off humans from other animals. In conversation with members of Mary's committee he was less radical. He conceded that one could draw a distinction between 'persons' and 'non-persons.' Persons were those 'who take a conscious pleasure in their lives and therefore should not be prematurely deprived of life.'¹⁰⁴ But he shocked many people by the rigour with which he applied this logic: he excluded new-born babies and the severely mentally incompetent from the category of persons with a right to life, while including chimpanzees, dolphins and possibly pigs. To Mary's puzzlement he excluded horses, although she knew from her own experience that horses had personalities and often 'when fox-hunting or racing, appear to enjoy themselves.'

In response to Singer's views, Mary drew what she regarded as a crucial distinction between two sorts of objection to the eating of meat and the use of animals for experimental purposes. For some, the main issue is the avoidance of suffering. It does not matter if the animal dies, providing death is not painful. Mary saw this position as 'animal welfarism.' The second kind of objection, closer to Singer's views, holds that the premature death of any animal is a cost always to be taken into account regardless of any suffering caused. Mary contended that 'we simply do think of ourselves as importantly different from other animals.'¹⁰⁵ In the case of animals, we assume that if one dies, it can easily be replaced with another. But in the case of humans, we do not, for one moment, think that one can replace another. She argues that speciesism is

not the name of a prejudice we should try to wipe out. It is not a kind of injustice. It is a natural consequence of the way we and our ancestors have established the institution of society within which the concepts of right and wrong, and the law have their meaning. The myth of Creation, with man as the dominant species in charge of the rest, did not form our attitudes. It is rather a storybook expression of existing attitudes, as is the way with myths.¹⁰⁶

Similarly, she has little time for the concept of 'animal rights.' In line with her view on other 'rights' claims, she sees those who advocate for the rights of animals as pointing to acts of *injustice*. Clearly there should be legislation to deal with cruelty to animals, but where more extensive rights are claimed for animals, these are likely to remain aspirational. She points to the inconsistency of those animal rights activists who claim that no animal should be hunted, when it is obvious that, in the wild, animals hunt other animals with no thought to the rights of those they hunt.¹⁰⁷ We instinctively assume, rightly in Mary's view, that our domestic animals do not have the same rights we do.

I may give my cat the right to come and go as he pleases by putting in a cat-flap; but I do not extend his freedom much beyond this. I am just as ruthless as before in throwing out the half-dead mice and birds that he may choose to bring into the kitchen, and I never even wonder whether I am infringing a right. We live on my terms. He is my property. If I get too poor to keep him, I give him away or put him to death.¹⁰⁸

At the same time as she was chairing the Home Office Committee on Animal Experimentation, Mary was also, from 1979 to 1986, a member of the standing Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution.¹⁰⁹ The task of this commission was to identify and investigate issues of environmental concern and make recommendations to government. During Mary's tenure, one such issue was the effect of lead emission from petrol on the learning and behaviour of children. In 1983, the commission published a report, 'Lead in the Environment,' which recommended a gradual reduction and then elimination of lead from petrol. The following year's report, 'Tackling Pollution: Experience and Prospects,' is notable for drawing attention very early on to the greenhouse effect caused by CO₂ emissions. The report stated unequivocally that CO₂ concentrations were increasing and that one could be 'fairly confident that this will result in a warming of the

earth's atmosphere' but it was unclear how serious the implications were at that stage.¹¹⁰ It recommended that 'all necessary steps should be taken to ensure that there is the best chance of an early resolution of the uncertainties surrounding the effects of increasing concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.'¹¹¹ Mary was a signatory to both these reports.

The other members of the commission were mostly eminent scientists but there were also a few 'lay' members: an economist, a public health academic, a lawyer and herself, a philosopher. Mary found the meetings of the commission 'immensely enjoyable' and describes them as like the best sort of Oxford or Cambridge college dinner-table discussions but with the advantage that there was a marked absence of local politics, grudges and antipathies that marred real college high table talk.¹¹²

She also enjoyed what she learned on the research visits. Oil pollution interested her particularly and this involved travelling to the Shetlands and landing on an oil rig in thick fog. Now in her late fifties, she had to try to conceal her terror 'at climbing up and down slippery ladders out over the sea, where falling would have meant certain death,'¹¹³ (sic) but she gained more from these visits than passing fear or pleasure: she recorded that participation in this commission made her for the first time seriously consider 'whether "the environment" or "nature" is valued intrinsically, for its own sake, or for the sake of some other more obviously human value, as a "utility", or for its contribution to human well-being.'¹¹⁴ Why indeed did we value a clean coastline with its marine and offshore fauna so highly?

The economist on the commission argued that a clean coastline was an 'amenity' to which a precise economic value could be attached on the basis of a cost-benefit calculation. Based on such a calculation, he considered that cleaning up the Shetlands was too expensive to be justified.¹¹⁵ Mary objected to the notion that an area of such great natural beauty could be treated as an 'amenity,' especially if that meant taming it and making it universally accessible. For her, in the tradition of the Romantics, part of the value of nature is what we can experience of its wildness and sublimity. She recognised however that there was some truth in the accusation of 'a kind of snobbishness' in the view that she did not want *her* countryside experiences to be spoiled by 'a lot of rambles' with the 'right to roam' trampling up her mountain path 'especially if

they demand a car park and a lavatory and a seat for Granny in the Picnic Area.¹¹⁶ One had to understand, she thought, that what might be in the interests of ramblers and industrial farmers might conflict with the interests of the natural world.

On the other hand, she was not opposed to human interventions in nature *per se*. Some people object to genetic modification of crops, for instance, on the grounds that it is 'against nature.' Mary pointed out that medical interventions are also generally against nature, but people do not object to them if they save lives.¹¹⁷ But there are limits: one area of biotechnology to which she strongly objected was the effort to prevent ageing and prolong human life indefinitely. What gives significance to our lives, she thought, was the contrast, indeed

sometimes a conflict between what, being mortal and having a more or less precarious hold on life, we can actually do, and what we can aspire to or imagine. The creative imagination it seems to me, feeds on this contrast, allowing us to grasp, or partly grasp, what is beautiful or what is tragic, or what is in some other way, inspirational. Being mortal, we know that there is an urgency in our lives.¹¹⁸

Mary developed her thinking on the complex and often contradictory tangle of reasons for valuing nature in the last book she published: *Critical Reflections on Ownership* (2015).¹¹⁹ Part of a series of reflections on human rights and the environment, this appeared in her ninety-first year. Characteristically, the book brings together philosophy and her personal experience. In the words of the series editors, it is 'refreshingly intimate [...] lyrical [...] insightful.'¹²⁰ She had decided that this would be her final book, and it is a fitting summation of many aspects of her life. The aim of her reflections is to explore whether and how the feelings of love, pride and responsibility people usually have for a piece of land they own, even if it is just a small garden, might extend to cover the globe and thus form a basis for commitment to protect and conserve the environment.

She begins by showing that private ownership of land and things is natural to humans. Although property ownership is nowadays extensively regulated by law, Mary describes the 'habit of property ownership' as natural because it is a behaviour shared by other animals, for example by birds building and defending their own nests. She traces the history of philosophers' treatment of property focusing particularly

on Hume in the eighteenth century and noting that it was he who recognised that the relations between men and their world were not only governed by reason but also by the passions or emotions. Pride is perhaps the passion most commonly aroused in us by our possessions.¹²¹ She tells the story of her own relationship with the gardens she has owned, loved and tended, from the tarmacked playground of a converted schoolhouse she and Geoffrey bought when they were in their early fifties, through several moves, and finally to the back and front gardens of the small house on a 1930s housing estate in south London where she was living as she wrote this. Her purpose in relating this personal history is to suggest that people generally take pride in making their gardens better than they were when they took them over; this she sees as the essence of ownership.¹²² In contrast with the care people give their gardens, she says, land which has no owner has no one responsible for it and is open to neglect and exploitation.

Next, she considers the history of proposals and practical experiments with common ownership, of which there have been many, particularly in the wake of the French Revolution. She recognises that these can succeed on a small scale, citing the early years of the Kibbutz movement in Israel as one example, and the John Lewis Partnership as another. But it seems that if a collective grows beyond a certain size, individuals' sense of emotional attachment to it declines.

There is however a paradox: despite our natural urge to cultivate and improve, at the same time what we think we most love is wild nature, nature that is not interfered with by man. From Rousseau in the eighteenth century down to today, there is a rich literary tradition celebrating the wildness of the natural world. Poets and philosophers have sought to understand our emotional responses to nature's beauty and power in terms of our smallness in the face of nature, a sense of ourselves as conscious moral beings, awe and simply fear. For Mary it was above all Wordsworth who captured and gave expression to experiences of the sublime inspired by nature.

The final third of the book is devoted to a discussion of philosophical considerations and practical steps concerning ways that the environment can be protected from commercial exploitation. She considers that treaties between states can only have very limited success because states have obligations to their citizens which produce competing

national interests. But she finds hope in a number of changes that occurred after World War Two when, countering the logical positivists, it once again became possible to take 'values' into account. No longer was it assumed that profit and loss, as determined by economists, should alone govern public policy.¹²³ Another important shift is in our knowledge, in education and in awareness of the environment and how we fit into it. Increasingly, people see themselves as part of nature, interconnected with it and with other people: a real sense of common responsibility for the globe is becoming possible. In case the hope that people will simply learn to behave better is thought too optimistic, Mary claims a possible positive role for what she calls Promethean fear. In the Greek myth, Prometheus was chained to a rock to be tormented for ever by Zeus in the form of an eagle as a punishment for stealing fire and thus introducing technology, skill and thence all civilisation to mankind. Like the fifth-century BC Athenians, we too should be afraid of what, with our technologies and civilisation, we are doing to the natural world.

The critical reception of this book was highly positive. Ceri Warnock (no relation) wrote in the *Commonwealth Law Bulletin* that there are

not too many books on property theory that you read eagerly from cover to cover; that bring fresh insights and that make you pause for thought, but also make you laugh. This book is stimulating and enjoyable, but it also has a depth and *gravitas* that belies its brevity, posing and attempting to answer one of the most pressing questions of the time.

She thought it would be of particular interest to scholars and students in the fields of law, politics and philosophy, especially those interested in differing conceptions of property and those seeking philosophical underpinnings for environmental law.¹²⁴

Markku Oksanen, writing in *Environmental Values*, saw the book as unusual, comprising personal memoirs and anecdotes and depersonalised analysis of concepts, the history of ideas and current policies. He was impressed by Mary's capacity to move fluently from enduring philosophical problems to current disputes and back but thought the absence of the mention of the environment in some chapters was a weakness.¹²⁵

During the last twenty years of her life, Mary continued to make frequent appearances in the media, especially radio. She

was interviewed by Melvyn Bragg on education, took part in the programme, *A Good Read*, talked on surrogate pregnancies on *Woman's Hour*, and reminisced about her early life in programmes called *Meeting Myself Coming Back* and *The House I Grew Up In*. Sometimes the interviews arose from a recent publication, so she did an extended interview with Laurie Taylor on why religion and politics don't mix after the publication of *Dishonest to God* (see the following chapter). She was frequently interviewed by journalists for *The Guardian*, *The Observer* and occasionally other newspapers. In 2003, Andrew Brown of *The Guardian* carried out a particularly revealing interview. He later referred to her as 'the philosophical plumber to the establishment. Whenever some tricky problem arose, she could be trusted to get things flowing again.'

In August 2015, she took part in the Radio 4 series 'Fantasy Festival.' Interviewees were asked to design their own dream Glastonbury Festival. Mary opted to hold her fantasy festival on Tanera Mor, an uninhabited island in the Summer Isles off the West Coast of Scotland, the place she had visited in youth and again in old age. The theme of the festival would be the Romantic experience of the sublime inspired by nature (she was working on her book about the environment, *Critical Reflections on Ownership*, at the time). There would be no more than fifty participants to ensure good discussion. Formal invitations would be issued to Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, the pianist Alfred Brendel and her own children. The remaining places would be filled by advertisement. The days would be spent walking in the surrounding countryside and the evenings in discussion and in listening to music. Brendel would play Schubert's Impromptus. A small amateur orchestra whose players would also enter into the discussions would play Haydn's Symphony No. 44 in E minor, the piece inspired by the death of his mother that the composer wished to be played at his own funeral. Vaughan Williams' 'The Lark Ascending' would remind the participants of the decline in bird song. They would be asked to reflect on the way civilisation had destroyed much of the natural world and hopefully, on leaving the festival, would continue to think about how the progress of civilisation might be combined with the preservation, indeed, the recapture of the natural world we had lost. 'Yes,' Mary agreed with the Fantasy Festival interviewer firmly, 'I am a romantic.'¹²⁶

Notes

- 1 Mary Warnock, 2003, p. 28.
- 2 William Wordsworth, *Collected Poems*, p. 899.
- 3 Mary Warnock, 1976.
- 4 Mary Warnock, 1987.
- 5 Mary Warnock, 1994.
- 6 UA, 1, p. 9.
- 7 Ibid., p. 20.
- 8 Mary Warnock, 2000, p. 200.
- 9 UA, 1, p. 6.
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