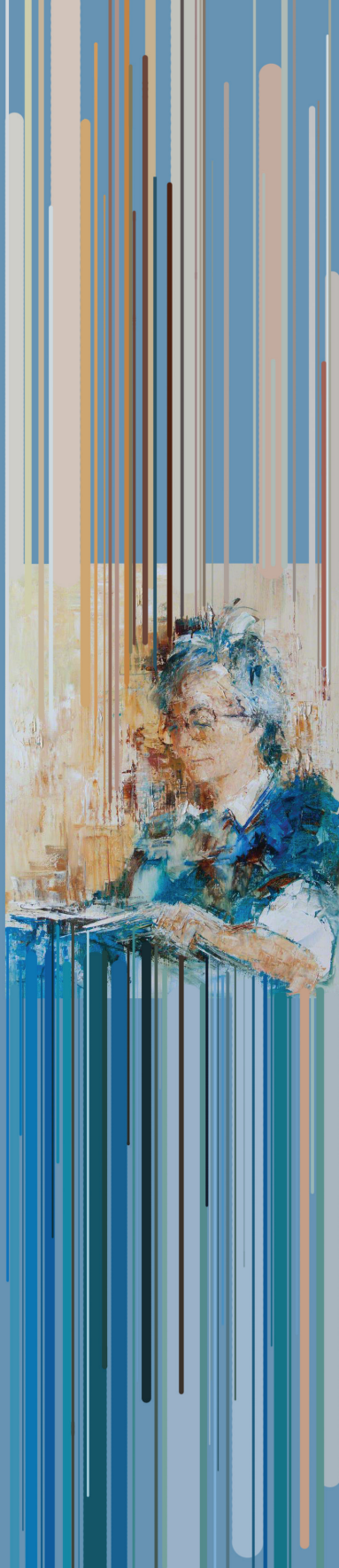


# MARY WARNOCK

Ethics, Education  
and Public Policy  
in Post-War  
Britain

PHILIP GRAHAM





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Philip Graham, *Mary Warnock: Ethics, Education and Public Policy in Post-War Britain*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0278>

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ISBN Paperback: 9781800643383

ISBN Hardback: 9781800643390

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800643406

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800643413

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 9781800643420

ISBN XML: 9781800643437

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0278

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Cover design by Anna Gatti.

# Preface

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‘Order! Order!’ These were the first words I heard Mary Warnock utter. They could not have been more appropriate. For the next twenty-five years, in one field after another, she was to bring order into the too often disordered thinking that had resulted in confused and uncertain public policy. The occasion of this first encounter in September 1974 was the first meeting of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People. I was sitting with the other twenty-five members of the Committee, most of whom had not met each other before. There was a hubbub of noise as people round the large table introduced themselves to their neighbours, realised they had friends and colleagues in common and began to chat about them. Then came the call for silence. I noticed for the first time the slight, thickly bespectacled woman at one end of the table who, in her no-nonsense, North Oxford accent, had spoken. It was a voice that was already familiar and would become more so to listeners to BBC Radio Four discussion programmes.

The Committee presented its Report in March 1978. During the meetings, Mary and I realised we thought similarly on many issues. During a visit that a small sub-group of the Committee made to look at special educational units and schools in New York and Boston, we got to know each other better. After the Report was published, we became friends, corresponded and occasionally lunched together. As Mary, in her own account of our lunches, wrote some twenty-five years later, there was always ‘an immense amount to talk about.’

Over those twenty-five years, bringing the clarity of thought with which her training as a moral philosopher had brought her, Mary contributed to the framing of public policy in an astonishing variety of fields. She is probably best known for chairing the government committee on Human Fertilisation and Embryology, whose Report was to guide public policy on the clinical care of infertility and experimentation on

embryos until the present day. It is less well known that, as well as the Committee of Enquiry into Children with Special Needs, she chaired a Home Office Committee on Animal Experimentation, was a member of the Independent Broadcasting Authority and of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution, chaired an Arts Council working party on the administration of the Royal Opera House and was an articulate member of the House of Lords. In the meantime, she wrote twenty books, some purely philosophical in content, but mostly relating to public policy in education and other fields.

Five months after Mary died in March 2019, I approached her executors, her two older children, Kitty and Felix Warnock, to ask if I might write her biography. They were not only kind enough to agree but have been most generous with their time in helping me along the way, not least with their editing skills. I should also like to thank for their assistance in many different ways: Michael Barton, Gillian Beer, Kenneth Blyth, Virginia Bottomley, Alan Budd, Susan Budd, Juliet Campbell, Robert Cassen, Tim Chambers, Ruth Cigman, Maggie Cohen, Sarah Curtis, David Davies, Bernard Donoughue, Martin Doyle, Juliet Dusinberre, Paul Ennals, Martin Ennis, Edmund Fawcett, Anne Fernihough, Sarah Franklin, Susan Golombok, Sara Graham, Judy Hague, Jeremy Isaacs, Gillian Jondorf, Nancy Lee-Perham, Robin Lovell-Badge, Martin Levy, Julia Lloyd, Nick Maurice, Hilary Maxwell-Hyslop, Molly Meacher, Jeremy Metters, Alison Murdoch, Elaine Murphy, Brahm Norwich, Caroline Raby, Jane Ridley, Gerry Robinson, Philippa Russell, Lucy Rutherford, Liz Sayce, Norma Scott, Lisa Sears, Jean Smith, Sarah Smith, Michelle Stanley, Andrew Steptoe, Ann Strawson, Gill Sutherland, Mark Wallinger, James Warnock, Maria Warnock, Hannah Westall, Sam Weisselberg, David Wiggins, Lucy Wood, Susan Wood and Susan Woollacott.

Finally, I should like to thank the extremely helpful editorial staff of Open Book Publishers.