Researching with integrity: the ethics of academic enquiry, by Bruce Macfarlane, New York and London, Routledge, 2009, 190 pp., £22.99 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-415-42904-7

The third in a trilogy on the role of ethics in academic practice, this book focuses on research and researchers. Whereas Bruce Macfarlane's earlier books on teaching with integrity and academic citizenship were launched into a relative dearth in the literature, his latest book takes its place in an already crowded field that includes biomedical ethics. The first part of the book picks its way through some of the most salient arguments and taken for granted assumptions in the field and argues for an Aristotelian approach to ethics that is based on virtue theory rather than 'principalism'. A historical analysis demonstrates how current approaches to research ethics have been unduly guided by a number of notorious incidents within medical research. He argues that 'principalism' ought to be rejected first because it is internally contradictory (drawing simultaneously on Kantian ethics and utilitarianism) and, second, because it derives from biomedical research and is not suitable to all sciences, social sciences in particular and arts. The first argument is convincing though may be qualified with reference to forms of utilitarianism which are reconcilable with fixed standards of action, that is, rule utilitarianism. The idea that practices invented for biomedical research ought not to be applied indiscriminately to all other disciplines seems incontrovertible. However, the author does not establish why virtues theory and the exclusion of 'principalism' would particularly suit biomedical research.

The second, and most substantial part of the book, takes six virtues and elaborates both what they might look like in practice and the potential hazards to their fulfilment. Courage, respectfulness, resoluteness, sincerity, humility and reflexivity are conceived as moderate values bounded by extreme vices: for example, too little humility gives rise to boastfulness while too much results in timidity. A chapter is devoted to each of the virtues and each chapter contains a number of narrative case studies, contributed by researchers from a wide range of disciplines. These narratives are somewhat unevenly spread (respectfulness has five narratives, while courage has only one) and their function seems to vary. In some cases they demonstrate fairly mundane or minor points (e.g., resoluteness through slow progress) and in others they encapsulate a bundle of complex negotiations (e.g., reflecting on the politics of being part of an international research team). Many of the narratives are rich with implications and potentially serve as useful material for discussion among beginning researchers. A process of research, conceived as a cycle of framing, negotiating, gathering, creating, disseminating, reflecting and re-framing (41) underlies the analysis of the virtues in practice. This part of the book is therefore a useful resource to help beginning researchers to explore ethics as an integral part of their lives as researchers.

The discussion of each virtue is a mix of hypothetical ethical questions that may arise in a particular part of the research process, and references to empirical research of the nature of ethical reasoning in researchers' practice. The book is at its best when re-enforcing the former with an examination of the latter. Among the most thought-provoking sections were those on 'degrees of knowing', 'intellectual debts' and 'boastfulness' (111–20) which covered, among other things, the vagaries of citation, what it means to be appropriately tentative, and the potential for corruption in the peer review process.

Part 3, in less than 30 pages, addresses three crucial questions: how these virtues fit into the broader societal framework within which researchers operate; how these virtues may be learnt in the context of research training and informal learning; and how researching with integrity fits in with teaching and serving (society as a whole) with integrity. A chapter is devoted to each of these questions. However, the process of contextualisation does start earlier in the book in relation to each of the six virtues: for example, there is a discussion of completion rates and the pressures exerted by funding councils in relation to resoluteness.

The broader societal framework is explored in a chapter on 'The performative culture', a concept widely written about in all sectors of education and within a range of disciplines (see Ball 2003; Strathern 2000). The present chapter focuses on a critique of metrics, which at the time of writing will have seemed pertinent. What I hoped the chapter would do is explore the interplay between a virtues approach and performativity and it did begin to do so (146–7) but stopped short of examining this in any depth. For example, there was no discussion of the internalisation of performativity and its connection with the virtues earlier described.

The chapter on 'Learning about virtue' argues that ethics should be taught by anyone who teaches research methodology as an integral part of their course, and goes on to critique the most common approaches to the subject in such courses. Those setting out to teach research methodology or wishing to review how they teach ethics would find this chapter an excellent starting point for discussion – either with peers or indeed with research students. The final chapter 'The good professor' links the book with Macfarlane's other works and explores the overlaps and consistencies between the virtues he has identified and associated with research, teaching and service/academic citizenship. It also touches on debates surrounding the research-teaching nexus and to a limited extent other writing on academic identity.

In conclusion, this is a useful starting point for beginning researchers, supervisors of research students and those teaching research methodology courses. Despite its claims to be not specific to any discipline, it is unlikely to appeal to biomedical researchers whose horizon is bound to be already crowded with other possibilities and the case for virtues theory has not really been made with respect to their context. For social scientists and arts researchers, especially those with minimal grounding in philosophy and ethics, this book is an excellent introduction and an encouraging prompt to think about and critically respond to the institutional ethics guidance with which we are required to comply.

References

Ball, S.J. 2003. The teacher's soul and the terrors of performativity. *Journal of Education Policy* 18, no. 2: 215–28.
Strathern, M. 2000. *Audit cultures: Anthopological studies in accountability, ethics and the academy.* London: Routledge.

Duna Sabri
King's College, London, UK
duna.sabri@kcl.ac.uk

European universities in transition: issues, models and cases, edited by Carmelo Mazza, Paolo Quattrone, Angelo Riccaboni and Richard M. Goodwin, Cheltenham, Edward Elgar, 2008, 304 pp., £69.95 (hbk), ISBN 978-1-84720-748-7

It is difficult to identify the target readership for this book. The book itself is the outcome of a conference held at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice to discuss the need for reform in Italian higher education. The chapters, however, represent a random set of contributions very few of which actually address Italian higher education issues. A high proportion of the contributors are from business schools and not all are higher education specialists. Like the curate's egg, some of the contributions are of high quality but the overall impact is diffuse and lacking in direction.