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Addressing the elephant in the room: Ethics as an organizing concept in history education

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ABSTRACT

Ethics is the proverbial 'elephant in the room' in history education in settler-colonial nations. It is foundational to teaching and learning history and engaging with the ongoing effects of the past in the present. Yet its place in history curricula and teaching continues to be ignored, understated, confused, and challenged. This article illustrates how ethical judgment is central to four commonly identified rationales for teaching history in schools: citizenship education, historical consciousness, historical thinking, and difficult histories. The article urges more explicit attention to ethics as an organizing concept in history education to enable students to appreciate the complex lived realities that constitute history and to explore the diverse perspectives that have contributed to sometimes-difficult decisions. We argue that ethics can humanize history, enrich students' historical understandings, and offer a usable past. However, given the varied approaches to ethical judgment across the four orientations to teaching history, we stress the need for the mindful deployment of ethical judgment in curriculum design. Using an example from the 2021 draft Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories curriculum, we demonstrate what "ethical judgment" could be called upon to do, and the impoverished approach to history education that would exist without it.

KEYWORDS

Ethics; ethical judgment; history education; social studies education; citizenship education; historical thinking; historical consciousness; difficult history

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Introduction

Although there is growing scholarly interest in the contributions that ethics can make to teaching and learning history (Ammert et al., 2017, 2020; Edling et al., 2020; Gibson, 2018; Milligan et al., 2018), ethics remains an under-acknowledged, under-emphasized, misunderstood, and contested aspect of history education (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Peterson, 2011, 2017). Ethics is rarely included as a goal or purpose in history curricula or as an organizing concept. When it is included, it is vaguely described, given less priority than other concepts, or its inclusion is controversial. In Fogo's (2014) US Delphi study, ethical judgments, defined as "how people judge the actions of historical actors and how historical interpretations reflect contemporary moral frames" (p. 178), were not included in 11 expert high school teachers' and 16 history educators' final list of core history teaching practices. In Canada, although the K–12 social studies and history curricula in Ontario drew on Seixas' (2006) conception of historical thinking as an organizing framework (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b, 2013a, 2015), ethical judgment was not included as a key historical thinking concept in the curriculum. In Australia and New Zealand, the ethical dimension is identified as a cross-curricular expectation (Australia Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, n.d.; New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007). However, the expectations are poorly elaborated within the humanities and social sciences learning areas, and in the case of Australia, the linkages between the ethical understanding capability and the history curriculum enervate the contribution ethics can make. In both countries there is insufficient clarity about and distinction between ethics and a host of cognate terms (Milligan & Reynolds, 2015).

The previous examples appear emblematic of a broader issue in settler colonial nations and other countries, in which ethics is the proverbial 'elephant in the room' in history and social studies education. Ethics is foundational to different conceptions of teaching and learning history, and central to engaging with the ongoing effects of the past, yet its place in history curricula and teaching continues to be ignored, understated, confused, and challenged. In this article, we illustrate how ethical judgment is central to four commonly identified rationales for teaching history in schools: citizenship education, historical consciousness, historical thinking, and difficult histories. We urge more explicit attention to ethics as an organizing concept in history education because of its potential to enrich historical understandings and offer a usable past to students. However, in light of the varying approaches to ethical judgment across the four orientations to teaching history, we stress the need for the mindful deployment of ethical judgment in curriculum design. Using a recent example of the draft *Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories* curriculum (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2021), we demonstrate what "ethical judgment" could be called upon to do and, concomitantly, the impoverished approach to history education that would exist without it. This example is particularly relevant to curriculum design in countries reworking history education in response to the continued effects of colonization, injustices, and calls to honour Indigenous worldviews.

Conceptual background: Ethics and ethical judgements

Ethics is the branch of philosophy concerned with the systematic study of "what is right, fair, just or good; about what we ought to do, not just what is the case or what is the most acceptable or expedient" (Preston, 2007, p. 16). Ethics focuses on understanding what individuals or communities take to be right/wrong or good/bad, how those decisions are arrived at, and the ongoing contemplation of what we could or should do. Philosophers of ethics do so through deliberation, judgment, and reasoning (Burgh et al., 2006). We view ethical judgments – whether made about present or past actions – as a complex process of coming to an understanding of, and reflecting upon, a range of perspectives about social action. Ethics may therefore be seen as a verb, that is, a practice rather than a set of conclusions (Milligan et al., 2018). Few philosophers would suggest that ethics provides a single right answer to dilemmas and controversial issues, but ethics can provide several, perhaps least-worst, answers that assist in the ongoing (re)negotiation of the past and present. Furthermore, and as we stress later in this article, ethical lives are not simply a matter of rationality; they are relational, embodied, situated, and involve different voices and experiences.

In history education, ethical judgments involve assessments of past actions that consider historical and contemporary ethical standards and perspectives (Stipp et al., 2017). Ethical judgments can focus on how past actions and decisions were justified, which people or groups are ethically responsible for past actions, what ethical lessons can be drawn from the past and inform the present, and what obligations those in the present owe to victims, heroes, and others whose actions continue to impact the present (Gibson, 2020). Making historical ethical judgments is complex because it requires extensive historical contextualization to understand what occurred before, during, and after the historical event; the social, political, cultural, and ethical norms that existed at the time; the circumstances, constraints, options, and motivations that initiated or limited historical people's actions; and the values, beliefs, attitudes, and intellectual frameworks that different people held about what was considered ethical (Milligan et al., 2018). It also includes an understanding of the excruciating choices, including between equally defensible "right" courses of action, and the constraints to agency and free will experienced by historical actors. Such an understanding tempers ethical judgments as binaries of admiration or condemnation and introduces considerably more nuance in appreciating historical and contemporary ethical lives.

The inescapable presence of ethics in history education

In this section, we outline the centrality of ethical judgments in four conceptions of history education.

Ethical judgements, history education, and citizenship education

History education has always played a role in citizenship development and, more recently, in supporting students to respond to controversial issues and take justified positions. Ethical judgment is a nexus between history and citizenship education and is central to decisions about the particular kinds of citizens to be developed, past and present societies which children and young people are invited to examine, and the ethical tensions involved in teaching citizenship.

The relationship between history and citizenship education has been established since history was first included in school curricula in democratic countries at the end of the nineteenth century. History was perceived to strengthen moral training of newly enfranchised citizens and recently arrived immigrants and contribute to the transmission of a sense of national heritage and citizenship (Arthur & Phillips, 2002; Ward, 1975). Anything that contributed to the building of the nation was described as good, anything that did not was either condemned or ignored as irrelevant (Osborne, 2008). Ethical judgments were presented to students in the form of authoritative narratives established by experts and there was little room

for interpretation. Students were expected to both learn the story and learn from the story (Low-Beer, 1967).

In the 1960s and 1970s many historians, teachers, and curriculum developers questioned the patriotic and moralistic uses of history as unjustifiable modes of indoctrination (Partington, 1979, 1980). In its place they offered a vision of history and social studies education that promoted participatory, activist, and democratic citizenship and the development of engaged, knowledgeable, ethical, and critical citizens. This conception of citizenship defines ideal citizens as those who are,

> knowledgeable about contemporary society and the issues it faces; disposed to work toward the common good; supportive of pluralism; and skilled at taking action to make their communities, nation, and the world a better place. (Sears, 2011, p. 353)

Barton and Levstik (2004) argue that historical ethical judgments are central to conceptions of participatory, pluralist, and deliberative democracies "because the decisions we make in the public sphere are invariably about our vision of the common good, and about what we hope to achieve together as a society" (p. 92). Making the possible influences of past actions on contemporary society explicit, and engaging young people in considering how they should respond to the past in the present and future, contributes to one of the central expectations of contemporary history and social studies curricula—that students participate in debates about controversial issues and learn to take justified positions in relation to these issues. Two points are central here. First, societal issues are controversial because different ethical perspectives have been and continue to be in play (Noddings & Brooks, 2017). Second, deliberative approaches to teaching controversial issues emphasize critical thinking and affiliation to democratic values, ethical stances in and of themselves. For example, Ammert et al., (2017), hold that the study of ethical injustices in history can teach students to create "ethical relationships for themselves," (p. 3) and enhance their commitment to democratic values and human rights, which is important for preventing future injustices. Helping students establish their personal identity is an important part of the participatory approach to citizenship, which includes helping students see themselves as individuals with a personal past shaped by the society and communities they are part of, the development of their values, opinions, and beliefs, and an expanded view of humanity (Van Straaten et al., 2016).

Evidence from civics and social studies education research suggests that an open classroom climate where students are encouraged to express their views, examine issues from multiple perspectives, and make ethical judgments about historical topics have several benefits. These include increased engagement and discussion, improved knowledge of and engagement in social and political issues, increased student confidence and ability to engage in democratic civil discourse with opposing viewpoints, and improved argumentation and reasoning ability (Barton, 2009; Goldberg & Savenije, 2018; Ho et al., 2017; Kahne et al., 2013; McAvoy & Hess, 2014; Torney-Purta & Amadeo, 2013). Nevertheless, research on controversial issues has found that many teachers are reluctant to teach about controversial issues because of a

> complex terrain of institutional and curricular constraints; societal discourse and expectations; national, group, and individual histories; local, state, and national policies; personal beliefs; and multiple and overlapping identities involving ethnicity and religion. (Ho et al., 2017, p. 323)

Teaching controversial issues in history education is, therefore, arguably worthwhile but tricky ethical terrain.

Ethical judgements and historical consciousness

Ethics is central to two influential ideas in the theory and practice of history education: historical consciousness and historical thinking. Although the terms are often used interchangeably, they

are different, but interrelated. In this section we discuss the relationship between ethical judgments and historical consciousness, and in the following section we do the same for ethical judgments and historical thinking.

Historical consciousness is defined as the "complex interaction of interpretations of the past, perceptions of the present, and expectations towards the future" (Bracke et al., 2014, p. 23), and can be conceptualized in terms of three interrelated aspects. First, it focuses on the practical relationship between historians' interpretations of the past and how these interpretations are used by the larger culture to reshape thinking about both the past and contemporary issues (Megill, 1994). Second, historical consciousness focuses on a person's orientation in time, the mental operations used to make sense of temporal changes, orient practical life, and guide ethical decision-making (Rüsen, 2004). Third, historical consciousness is expressed through narratives that are shared in various forms of historical culture including schools, historical scholarship, public history, media, family and community histories, heritage, and museums (Ahonen, 2005). These narratives play a central role in making sense of the past and its relationship to the present, providing a sense of orientation in time, and constructing identity and a sense of belonging in distinct communities (A. Clark & Peck, 2019; P. Clark, 2018; Rüsen, 2002).

Schools are complex sites of historical consciousness where public expectations about what is important to learn, memory practices, personal narratives, and the historical discipline all collide (A. Clark & Grever, 2018). Although historical consciousness is shaped by various forms of historical culture, scholars are unequivocal in their belief that school history can play an important role in shaping the development of students' historical consciousness over time (Kölbl & Konrad, 2015; Körber & Meyer-Hamme, 2015; Rüsen, 2004).

Enhancing students' historical consciousness has been identified as a goal for school history curricula in Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands. According to Körber (2011), the central goal of historical consciousness in school curricula is to enable students "to take part in the historical and memorial culture of their (pluralist) societies" (p. 147). Rather than see historical consciousness as simply a state of mind, Körber (2015) conceptualizes historical consciousness in terms of competencies—capabilities, dispositions and skills needed to use historical information to orientate "independent actions as an emancipated member of society" (p. 4).

Making ethical judgments about the past, deciding what should be memorialized, celebrated, or remembered, judging how to respond to the past in the present, and connecting past, present, and future, are central to the notion of historical consciousness. Historical consciousness is communicated through historical narratives that reveal the moral orientation of the person who created the narrative. Narratives communicate principles, guidelines for behaviour, key ideas, and perspectives that suggest how we should behave and act in situations where various options exist (Edling et al., 2020). In this sense all historical narratives present ethical stances interpreted through the lens of present-day values and norms (Ammert et al., 2017). Exploring ethical judgments further underscores the relationship between past, present, and future by inviting reflection about why ethical codes, behaviours, and values enmeshed in historical narratives may differ throughout time. Furthermore, Seixas and Morton (2013) argue that learning to think critically about the injustices, horrors and heroism of the past helps students see the links between past, present, and future, and become more capable of negotiating the ethical dilemmas they encounter in their lives. Thus, ethical judgments have the potential to help students make sense of who they are, where they stand, and what they can do—as individuals, as members of multiple, intersecting groups, and as citizens with roles and responsibilities in a complex, conflict-ridden, and rapidly changing world.

Ethical judgements and historical thinking

In the last fifty years historical thinking became a standard in the theory and practice of history education in Western Europe and North America before spreading globally (Berg & Christou, 2020; Harris & Metzger, 2018). If the past is everything that has ever happened, and history is

comprised of narratives that are told about the past, then historical thinking is the process of interpreting and assessing historical evidence to understand, evaluate, and construct narrative accounts about the past (Gibson & Seixas, in press). The discipline of history provides a guiding framework, but there is an immense gap to be navigated between the practices of the academic discipline and what is possible or desirable in the school classroom.

Lee and Ashby (2000) conceptualized the structure and form of historical thinking by distinguishing between first-order substantive knowledge, "what history is about" (for example, enslavement, freedom, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Underground Railroad) and second-order disciplinary knowledge (for example, evidence, cause, consequence, perspective taking, historical significance, continuity and change) that shape "the way we go about doing history" (p. 199). Rather than measuring students' accumulation of substantive knowledge, students' increasingly sophisticated ability to apply their disciplinary understanding of second-order concepts like change, significance, evidence, consequence, and ethical judgments to historical content defines their progress in learning history (Seixas, 2017). Although second-order disciplinary concepts shape history as a form of knowledge, they also function as generative problems, tensions, or difficulties inherent in doing history that require "comprehension, negotiation, and, ultimately, an accommodation that is never a complete solution" (Seixas, 2017, p. 597).

Prior to the conceptualization of historical thinking in the 1960s, ethical judgments were often presented as authoritative conclusions established by experts, shared by teachers, and passively accepted by students (Diorio, 1985; Low-Beer, 1967; Osborne, 2011). The orthodox view among historians and philosophers of history was that making ethical judgments was neither permissible nor desirable in the discipline of history because they are too subjective and irrational, irrelevant to the purpose of history, lie outside historians' expertise and responsibility, and are inherently presentist in that contemporary ethical frameworks are used to assess the past. Cracraft (2004) argues that historians' long-standing aspiration for scientific objectivity is at the root of their objections to ethical judgments, and acknowledging ethical judgments as inescapable undermines history's orientation towards objectivity, denies the academic character of the historical discipline, and reduces historians' authority, credibility, and respectability (p. 37).

Inspired by the social, cultural, and postcolonial turns in the discipline of history, historians and philosophers challenged the possibility of objectivity in history by arguing that ethical judgments are unavoidable when researching, writing, and teaching history; ethical judgments are the end results of historical inquiry, and that historians are capable of avoiding presentism and making reasoned ethical judgments (Bedarida, 2000; Boobbyer, 2002; Gaddis, 2002; Megill, 2004). Rather than avoid responsibility, Vann (2004) maintains that historians should embrace the role of ethical commentators because when they evaluate what the dead have done, they are not passing final judgment, they are communicating their ethical opinions to their readers and inviting them to enter into a dialogue about the past actions of the dead. Cotkin (2008) claims that since the beginning of the 21st century, historical scholarship has undergone a "moral turn" and "historians are presently treading upon a landscape full of moral topics" focused on questions of justice and injustice and right and wrong (p. 312).

Few historical thinking models and frameworks include ethical judgments as a key concept except for Barton and Levstik (2004) and Seixas (1996, 2006). Seixas and Morton (2013) argue that ethical judgments imbue the study of history with meaning and help students learn from past wrongdoings, judge the past more fairly, and deal more effectively with present-day ethical dilemmas. These approaches encourage considerably more depth in students' ethical judgments because they ask students to understand the historical context, distinguish between the values and climate of moral opinion in the past and present, and weigh individual agency against structural factors, including social contexts, environment, and social conditions. Furthermore, asking students to make informed ethical judgments requires them to draw upon their knowledge of substantive content and second-order disciplinary concepts like continuity and change, cause and consequence, and historical perspectives to make reasoned decisions about

how to respond in the present (Van Straaten et al., 2016). Several scholars have illustrated how an understanding of historical perspectives supports students to avoid presentist ethical judgments, that is, imposing contemporary ethical norms on the past without considering norms of the time period under investigation (Gibson, 2014; Seixas & Ercikan, 2011; Seixas & Morton, 2013; Selman & Barr, 2009). This does not mean that students must be adept at taking historical perspectives before making an ethical judgment, only that explicit teaching about historical perspectives should accompany any focus on ethical judgments (Bellino & Selman, 2011, 2012).

Several scholars have criticized historical thinking approaches to ethical judgment for being rooted in Western, European traditions of Enlightenment philosophical thought that restricts "what counts as knowledge and what counts as valid ways of assessing that knowledge" (McGregor, 2017, p. 12). Lévesque and Clark (2018) ask whether it is possible for historical thinking approaches drawn from Western intellectual traditions to accommodate other ways of understanding the past. In this view, the explicit or implicit normalization of European philosophical frameworks to define universal ethical codes is yet another example of colonial imposition on cultures that have their own forms of temporal orientation, different ways of understanding the relationship between the past, present, and future, and different standards and methods for assessing knowledge claims and ethical decisions and actions. The unfortunate upshot is that Indigenous traditions of engaging with the past are often measured against Eurocentric ethical procedures and standards.

Ethical judgements and difficult histories

In history classrooms around the world, students regularly learn about historical injustices including genocides, war crimes, enslavement, torture, forced conversions, and mass expulsions of people. Scholars use a variety of terms to describe these historical injustices including difficult knowledge (Britzman, 2000), the violent past (Cole, 2007), the sensitive past (van Boxtel et al., 2016), traumatic pasts (Psaltis et al., 2017), and difficult history (Epstein & Peck, 2018; Gross & Terra, 2018). Epstein and Peck (2018) define difficult history as "historical narratives and other forms (learning standards, curricular frameworks) that incorporate contested, painful and/or violent events into regional, national or global accounts of the past" (p. 1). Gross and Terra (2018) expand on this definition and identify five characteristics of difficult histories. They are central to a nation's history; refute broadly accepted versions of the past or stated national values; connect with questions or problems facing us in the present; involve collective or state sanctioned violence; and as the result of the other four conditions, create disequilibria that challenge existing historical understandings. Difficult histories highlight the relationship between ethical judgments and the complex web of power relations that influence what historical narratives are legitimated, and how they are constructed, appropriated, contested, and shared in schools and societies (Epstein & Peck, 2018).

Ethics is integral to the various rationales for teaching and learning about difficult histories that have been theorized and conceptualized including increased ethical/moral reasoning and thinking, commitment to social justice, and civic engagement (Barr et al., 2014; Schweber, 2004). It is commonly accepted that learning about difficult histories helps students become "ethical subjects" and "ethical agents" who make decisions about how to act ethically in the present and future (Levy & Sheppard, 2018, p. 368). The aim is for students to learn ethical and moral lessons from the past and transform their understanding into action in the present and future. For example, one of the goals of Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies in Jerusalem is that students' "encounter with the past and with its ethical dilemmas will be internalized over the years and will contribute to the construction of his or her own identity and personal ethics" (Imber, n.d.).

Ethical judgments are central in engaging students in learning about difficult histories and deepening their understanding of present obligations that arise from these events. The Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) urged making curriculum about Indian Residential Schools part of a broader history education that integrates First Nations, Inuit, and Métis voices,

perspectives, and experiences; builds common ground between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; rejects the racism embedded in colonial systems of education; and treats Indigenous and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems with equal respect (p. 239). The TRC's articulation of the ethical dimension of history in its final report closely mirrors Seixas and Morton's (2013) guideposts for generating powerful understandings of the ethical dimension:

> Students must be able to make ethical judgments about the actions of their ancestors while recognizing that the moral sensibilities of the past may be quite different from their own in present times. They must be able to make informed decisions about what responsibility today's society has to address historical injustices (p. 241).

Scholars have emphasized the significant impact that emotions have on students' understandings and responses to difficult histories and warned against a purely rational cognitive-disciplinary approach to learning about difficult histories (Ammert et al., 2017; Endacott & Brooks, 2013; Garrett, 2014; Simon, 2011; Zembylas, 2014). Barton (2009) claims that ignoring emotive and identity-relevant issues sterilizes history teaching, leaves student needs unanswered, and decreases motivation to learn. Furthermore, Barton and McCully (2012) found that in societies divided by ethnicity, religion, language, or other social identities, emotive responses are often an essential step towards more rational engagement. Encountering difficult histories can disrupt the meaning students make of events, and provoke negative emotions including anger, shame, grief, and disgust, but it can also evoke new thoughts and deeper understandings (Levy & Sheppard, 2018). LaCapra (2001) argues that the purpose of studying difficult histories is not just to be affected by their suffering, or document what happened, but to be transformed in the pursuit of meaningful questions regarding what it means to be human and to live together in this world.

There is limited empirical research that demonstrates that learning about difficult histories leads to the development of moral reasoning, ethical thinking, commitments to social justice, or civic engagement (Barr et al., 2014; Levy & Sheppard, 2018; Schweber, 2004). This does not mean that current approaches to teaching about difficult histories are ineffective and should be rejected, but it underscores the need for research that considers the complexities of teaching about difficult histories that often evoke emotional responses that can resist and deflect intended learning outcomes and understandings. Like Zembylas and Kambani (2012), we believe that when inviting students to ethically respond to difficult histories, teachers need to attend to students' cognitive, ethical, social, political, and emotional selves. To do this, teachers need support in considering the role that place, identity, temporality, and other contextual factors play in shaping students' understanding of difficult histories, and how to create pedagogical strategies that support emotional engagement, critical analysis, and transformative action.

Ethics as an organising concept in history curriculum design

We have argued so far that ethics is central to four common conceptions of history education. An examination of any orientation to history education, and indeed any approach to social education, would reveal not simply matters of pedagogical preference but of differing conceptions of the relationship between learning and society. As Evans (2004) has pointed out, the perennial debates over the purposes of social studies in North America are intrinsically ethical controversies, representing "competing visions of the good society" (p. 32). Ethics is a central, integrative feature of history education curricula; it persists no matter which approach, organising principles, or combination thereof predominates. In other words, ethics has an inescapable presence precisely because we may argue about the proper purposes of the subject. Even the most descriptive orientations to history education cannot be separated from decisions about what should constitute a good society. Conversely, "normative theory itself must be based

on some descriptive theory of how the world works; and, of course, normative theories influence the formation of policy and the construction of institutions" (Frazer, 2008, p. 282).

On this basis alone, ethical judgments are worthy of greater consideration as an organizing concept in history curricula. However, as we have identified, how the concept is conceptualized in curricula depends on the purposes of history education selected. Additionally, ethical commitments and conceptions of ethics can also vary within orientations to teaching history (Edling et al., 2020). To the extent that commensurability exists across the orientations we have discussed in this paper, the varying conceptions of ethical life and ethical judgment embedded in each cognize something more than rationality. A sense of embodied corporeality infuses the notion of "difficult" histories or "the contributions, sacrifices, and injustices of the past" (Seixas & Morton, 2013. p. 11). Critical thinking and deliberation can certainly support an understanding of how alternative visions for society have been weighed and which have predominated, as well as the consideration of actions that could now be taken. We have argued previously that approaches to teaching ethical judgment as a historical thinking concept warrants a stronger engagement with the philosophy of ethics (Milligan et al., 2018). However, as we and numerous others - including philosophers of ethics - have also stressed (See for example, Chinnery, 2013; Edling et al., 2020) ethical judgment is not simply reducible to a reasoning exercise. A more expansive and encompassing notion recognises that emotion, experience and intuition, for example, also guide ethical judgments, invigorate the participatory dimensions of history education, and feed the sense that there are pressing, complex societal issues at hand. Ethical decision-making and action are a central dimension of being *in* society, that is, what children and young people do with historical thinking, historical consciousness and/or difficult histories to navigate their daily lives and complex, plural societies.

Careful attention is needed to the constructions of ethical judgments that are imported into the pages of curriculum documents and, in particular, the ways of knowing, doing and being that are privileged. In Canada, scholars have theorized diverse types of Indigenous historical consciousness and ways of knowing the past (Brownlie, 2009; Carlson, 2010; Marker, 2011, 2019), and have debated the degree to which historical thinking can accommodate Indigenous ways of knowing (Cutrara, 2018; Gibson & Case, 2019; McGregor, 2017; Seixas, 2012). Similarly, it is an open question about the extent that Western philosophies of ethics can and should accommodate other ways of determining what living a worthwhile life consists of. Yet, it would seem to us that if ethical judgment is to mean anything at all in understanding historical actors and interpretations, then it must invoke as full an appreciation as possible of whose ethical voices have guided curriculum choices, or been silenced or fallen by the wayside. In this respect, ethical judgment may be called upon to do a great deal of heavy lifting.

The recent draft *Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories* curriculum (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2021) provides an example of why such heavy lifting is nonetheless important in settler colonial societies. The curriculum, which will form part of the social sciences learning area, identifies "interpreting past decisions and actions" as one of three inquiry practices. The document states that students should "take account of the attitudes and values of the time and people's predicaments and points of view. By acknowledging the benefits of hindsight and reflecting on our own values, we can make ethical judgments concerning right and wrong" (p. 2). The inclusion of ethics in the proposed curriculum has been controversial. In their response to the draft curriculum, an Expert Advisory Panel objected to "ethical judgments concerning right and wrong" being the ultimate stage in the interpretation of historical events (Royal Society Te Apārangi, 2021, p. 14). Rather than directing students to judge the past and leading them "down a sequence where there is only one conclusion and/or where the outcome is predetermined," the panel argued that students should be encouraged "to ask questions, explore, and find out what that past was" (p. 14).

It remains to be seen whether ethics will occupy a more overt place within New Zealand's new social sciences curriculum and what "ethical judgment" would be taken to mean. In its draft form, the *Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories* curriculum takes a more explicit ethical stance with regards to colonisation and injustice than its predecessor (New Zealand Ministry of Education,

2007). The draft now recognises Māori history as the foundational and continuous history of Aotearoa New Zealand, the ongoing legacy of colonisation as a "complex, contested process, experienced and negotiated differently in different parts of Aotearoa New Zealand over time", (p. 2) and the exercise and effects of power, including resistance that is central to expressions of Māori self-determination, rights, and identity. The document also reinforces previous guidance for teaching Māori history and the need for a strong articulation between Indigenous and Western knowledges (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2013). The positioning of *Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories* within the wider social sciences curriculum is likely to permit a more expansive focus on citizenship education and, with that, perhaps, greater opportunities for learners to explore ethical decisions and commitments in the present.

The articulation of ethical judgment as a key aspect of Aotearoa New Zealand history education is, in our view, a welcome opportunity to enhance learners' nuanced understandings of the past and commitment to societal change. Taking this seriously would, for example, include understanding that, for Māori, significant ethical knowledge is grounded in place and flows from being Māori (Penetito, 2008). It would involve understanding that ethical decisions in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand society are grounded in the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and expressions of the rights of Māori to self-determination (Watene & Yap, 2015). Meeting the principles of New Zealand's curriculum in history education, including Te Tiriti o Waitangi, inclusion, and cultural diversity (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2007) would mean honouring Māori perspectives of ethical concepts such as justice (Watene, 2016) and ways of enacting cultural forms of reason (Harrison et al., 2020). This would challenge the notion that there is a universal process and criteria for ethical judgment and create room for considering what counts as a more ethical encounter with the past through Māori knowledges and worldviews. This would require students to reject universalised notions of ethical "judgers" and instead to notice different and silenced ethical voices, question motivations, privilege and power, and attend to their own positioning in relation to colonial logic (Sabzalian, 2019). Developing a nuanced appreciation of ethical judgments in relation to colonialism, race, and injustices would also necessarily require an emotional commitment to engage with painful conditions and consequences of ethical judgments (e.g. Bell & Russell, 2021; MacDonald & Kidman, 2021)

Of the four conceptions of history education discussed above, the approach to ethical judgment in the *Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories draft* curriculum appears to be largely framed by an historical thinking approach. The three inquiry practices named in the document (identifying and using sequence; identifying and critiquing sources and perspectives; interpreting past decisions and actions) closely resemble second-order concepts conceptualized in well-known historical thinking frameworks. One open question is how the notion of ethical judgment will be interpreted and implemented by teachers, who have their own ethical stances and approaches to ethical reasoning and judgement? If the curriculum *is* going to incorporate ethical judgements more explicitly, then a crucial next step will be to engage teachers in reflective practice about how and why they are going to take up (or not) this curricular mandate, and in what fashion. For this reason, we remain concerned that, without further explication, the promise and potential of ethics' presence within New Zealand's social sciences curriculum could be undermined. The expectation that learners are to "make ethical judgments concerning right and wrong" overemphasizes the end results of ethical judgments and risks taking an overly cognitive or procedural approach to the complex process of making ethical judgments. This narrowing of ethical judgments would discourage a more expansive understanding of ethics in the wider social sciences curriculum. Furthermore, such a 'thin' reading of ethical judgments could, for example, diminish opportunities for embodied and emotional engagement with ethical issues, shrink the range of ethical questions that might be considered, fail to contextualize ethics and its relationship to people and place, restrict students' understanding of the interplay between power and privilege, and ignore the outcomes of ethical judgments and who such judgments serve. It also risks overlooking what can and should be done with ethical judgments about the past, including how the process of making ethical judgments can inform ethical life and commitments in the present and future.

We recognize that, in the absence of a finalized curriculum and further curricular guidance, such considerations are speculative but not exhaustive. The example does, however, highlight how curriculum formation is in itself an exercise of ethical judgment and illustrates the communicative and interpretive challenges of curriculum design. Furthermore, as a vital part of the inquiry processes invite students to explore history for themselves, a "thick" conception of ethical judgment—that entwines felt difficulties, power relationships, and differing worldviews—is crucial for children and young people to engage with the complexities of assessing past actions in light of constantly evolving present day concerns (A. Clark, 2018; Rudolph & Hogarth, 2020; Tinkham, 2018; Tupper, 2012). What we are suggesting, therefore, is the need for further consideration about the declarative and procedural knowledge that students might need to make ethical judgements and whether these are sufficient to make sense of past and present ethical concerns.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have highlighted the ways that ethical judgment is inescapably present in four orientations to teaching history. Ethical judgment is worthy of greater attention in history curricula not simply because it is an important dimension of understanding past societies or because it already occupies an albeit ghost-like and beleaguered place in history education. Its potential as an organising concept warrants consideration for at least two related reasons. Firstly, together with contextualisation, the ethical dimension enriches historical understanding in each of the four orientations we have outlined because it enables children and young people to appreciate the complex lived realities and subjective experiences that constitute history, and the diverse ethical perspectives that contributed to the sometimes-difficult decisions that were made. A more-than-cognitive interpretation of ethical judgment recognises the multiple, fluid, and contradictory nature of ethical life and that judgment does not solely proceed in a rational and orderly manner. Missed opportunities for embodied and emotional engagement has the potential to limit students' understanding of why other people reach different, yet equally plausible ethical judgments, their empathy and care for other people's humanity, and the ongoing impact the past has had and continues to have on others. In this sense, the ethical dimension humanizes history.

Secondly, ethics is vitally constitutive of a usable past, that is, to *do* anything with history as a form of knowledge necessarily involves ethical judgment. When children and young people notice ethical judgments in past and present controversies, engage with alternative worldviews and ethical concepts, orient themselves in history, or question assumptions and silences, they do so not simply in the expectation of gaining deeper and more robust knowledge of the past, but also in expectation of navigating their present and future lives. Such navigation necessarily involves contemplating decisions and actions that contribute to a worthwhile life for themselves and others, that is, making ethical judgments.

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