



Moral Development: *Promise and Peril*¹

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The concern for values is common today. In one way or another, almost everyone talks about what is happening in these times as a reflection of shifts in values; few seem very optimistic. The development of values among the young, and the function of schooling in transmitting and modifying society's values are common concerns of parents, religious leaders, political persons, and to a degree rarely noted in history, of the "person on the street."

The Educator's Stake in Values Development

Educators are especially caught up in this concern about values development. A long tradition within the philosophy of education assures that educators are aware that all education is value-laden. Only the naive and the manipulators argue for a value-free curriculum. But it is becoming harder to know just what to do and just how far to go in the deliberate process of inculcating or critiquing values.

Historical awareness is necessary if one is to deal rightly with the mistaken notion that educators had never paid much attention to values until the last several years. Quite a different set of causes lie behind the recently dominant focus on values education.

Interest has been building during the Twentieth Century because of the paradoxes which have forced introspection. While locked in bitter ideological conflict and warfare, how can opposing nations claim the blessings of the same God? Perhaps the paradoxes evidenced in the two World Wars rekindled for Americans the emotional embers and values chaos of the American Civil War. In any case, as the social role of the school expanded and the role of church and family have shrunk, the value-conflicts of an increasingly pluralistic society have raised profound challenges to educational policy. In the most recent times, some date it from Watergate and the Vietnam War era, the mounting pressure has broken over into an almost frenzied compulsion to intervene more explicitly in the processes of moral maturation and values acquisition. It is not enough to provide scholastic experiences in which truth is respected and the academic community maintained. What is needed now, this widely held view holds, is a deliberate sort of moral education which will assure the perpetuation of the "values which have made the nation strong."

The Motivation to Provide Moral Education

The reasons for this motivation are many; a thorough review would more than consume the space and time allotted to this paper, but a brief reflection on several of the more prominent conditions that have stimulated interest in values education may help to provide a background for the review of research in this field.

Without doubt, the national malaise after the collapse of the "fat fifties" has had much to do with it. In general, education is more responsive to alarm bells than to spiritual mandates. The fact that much

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of formal education represented the dominant values of the mercantile middle-class stimulated the pressure for change. As minorities found their voices and as more of the commonplace values were challenged, educators were hard-pressed to find ways to deal with issues heretofore not seen as appropriate for the academic environments of the young.

1. *To do something.* Conventional wisdom sees the lack of emphasis on moral values in the schools as a consequence of resistance or even rejection of this responsibility by the leadership of public institutions. The contemporary confusion and dearth of deliberate values education in public education has arisen out of the competitions among conflicting value systems in this pluralistic society. The inevitable use of the Constitutional guarantees against religious impositions has come to fulfillment in our time: the product is less a matter of liberty than of anxious defensivism. It is very hard to deal openly with moral and ethical values in school curriculum.

2. *To do something secular.* Teachers in public education are finding themselves more and more vulnerable to attack over the issue of separation of church and state. Because of the common association of *moral* with *spiritual*, and perhaps for even better reasons, the very phrase “moral and spiritual” seems to put the matter of values development into the camp of religion, thus making it less likely that the public education sector will be willing to deal with it. Ever since the use of platitudes and moral aphorisms went out of style and McGuffey’s reader was recognized to have a Christian bias, public educators have become increasingly uneasy. (If only there were such a thing as a value-free curriculum we could forget about the whole thing.) But the level heads have prevailed: the schools must deal with the matter of moral development, but do so with a minimum of explicit religious foundation showing through. What would seem to be needed is a completely humanistic-without-religious-roots instructional methodology.

More than any other source, the works of Louis Rath, especially as popularized by his student and colleague, Sidney Simon, have captured the imagination of educators who want to do something about values education but do not feel that it is their right to advocate particular values. The special appeal of the Rath-Simon orientation to values education can be traced to its moral relativism and its methodological simplicity. In short, given what it claims to do, Values Clarification, does well what it claims to do. In general, its strategy is to encourage exposure and dialogue about matters of moral and ethical choice in order that students can become more explicitly aware of the positions they hold and how these positions compare with those of their peers (Rath, Harmin, Simon, 1966).

Hundreds of educational resources have sprung from the seminal contributions in this post-World War II tradition. Most are highly experiential and virtually devoid of theory—at least devoid of any conventional theory from the classical disciplines of philosophy or the emergent traditions of social scientists in the field (Stewart, 1963).

A presumed “advantage” of the Rath-Simon procedure (Values Clarification) is its essentially amoral stance. Perhaps it would be better to call it a “coincidental morality” in which the transcendent value is relativism. In Values Clarification, when following the prescribed procedures without violating the boundary-line of “imposing” a value from some source outside the group, or especially, from the religious perspective, there is little ground for complaint that the teacher is advocating any particular values. This method is about as close as teachers can ever hope to get to feeling that they are “doing something” about values education without running the risk of being found out. Having to admit or demonstrate that they themselves have values has become a frightening prospect for many American teachers today.

3. *To be knowledgeable about whatever is done.* The pressure to *do* something is, in many respects like throwing something on a fire. If one is sufficiently frightened, almost any nearby object may be thrown on the blaze in a misguided effort to smother it. In such a sensitive and complex matter as human valuing, the best possible interventions will be based on understanding and will be applied with due respect and caution. The lack of a research base upon which to construct knowledgeable efforts has been a significant hindrance. For this need, too, there has been recent fulfillment. Drawing upon the model-building techniques of developmental psychology, and especially extending the seminal work of Jean Piaget, the Swiss developmentalist, one graduate student at the University of Chicago virtually ushered in a new era (Kohlberg, 1958 and 1984). Through his doctoral dissertation and the line of inquiry it has inspired, a substantial and worldwide series of developmental studies of the stages of moral reasoning has emerged. In his professorship at Harvard University, this researcher, Lawrence Kohlberg, has become one of the most widely quoted of contemporary social scientists and, more recently, has become the target of the predictable back-pressure of second-thoughts, deeper probing, and revisionism. Kohlberg himself has revised his model, from six stages to seven to six again and, recently, to five. He has conceded the arguments that the mode of interpretation—if not the data themselves—are culturally biased. These and other criticisms he has endured with patience, remaining indisputably the father of a new era in the scientific study of moral and ethical decision-making.

Practitioners have embraced Kohlberg's model with unguarded eagerness. Why? A majority of American teachers, elementary school teachers in particular, appreciate developmental views of learning. The emphases within typical teacher education heighten the awareness that every human being is in many ways different from every other person. Teachers like to believe that they "respect individual differences." The very idea of uniqueness helps to reduce the specificity of expectations and to create in the teacher a wide variability in the tolerance of behavior and academic performance. This characteristic, of course, is in sharp contrast with the typical expectation of teachers in countries where education is highly standardized, and leads one to wonder if such extreme latitude and breadth of expectations among and within American teachers is really a sound approach to curriculum. It may even be at the root of some of the ambiguities and frustrations of the teaching career in this country.

In a most intriguing way, the regularity and predictability of stage-oriented models of development, as created by Jean Piaget and others of the structural-developmental school, offer great appeal for American teachers. In contrast with the vague and generalized expectations which are the common stuff of the American curriculum, the very idea that there are predictable stages of growth with plateaus and times of particularly intensive transitions comes as an intriguing reassurance that there is order underlying the chaos. While on the one hand teachers tend to be quick to note that not all children reach the particular stages of growth at the same time, their intense curiosity about what the norms suggest about sequence and even the timing of the stages often leads to a virtual prescriptive mentality. Clearly, they want to know what to expect; the tendency to classify children on the basis of inadequate data follows. Many teachers talk in terms of children being "at such-and-such a stage. The idea of variability and uniqueness becomes eclipsed by the neatness of the systems of stages.

So it has been with teachers' fascination with the Kohlberg 6-stage model of the development of moral reasoning. There are just enough stages to remember and accompanying characteristics to memorize to make the model mildly challenging, and yet the model has the sort of rudimentary simplicity that makes it seem to be within reach without heavy intellectual effort. In general, American teachers are not taught highly complex propositions about human development and learning--nor about teaching; thus they crave details, but seem unable or unwilling to embrace large or demanding

theoretical constructs.

The research traditions relating to moral development range from theology to psychology, touching bases with philosophy, sociology, and home gardening in between. Most of the empirical research lies in the disciplines most concerned with development and mental processes. Within these fields there are three clusters of contrasting presuppositions and approaches to the inquiry into moral valuing: the cognitive-perceptual, sometimes called the developmental; the behavior theory school, still defending the stimulus-response view of human behavior as the product of environmental conditioning; and the psychoanalytic theory school, presupposing a complex and essentially idiosyncratic structure of internal reflections of experience. Of these three, the first has been the most active in recent years in matters of moral development. Thus the emphasis in this paper tends to neglect the other two, which have their own claims to the field as well.

Defining the Domains of Moral Judgment and Moral Behavior

Defining the moral realm has kept philosophers busy for centuries. Refining definitions, especially if the accepted understandings of words and ideas are not seriously flawed, adds little good to the practical realities of the condition of humankind. Thus the decision not to include the philosophical domains of research in this review is based on the view that the more significant contributions to understanding in recent years have come from empirical work in social science.

Nonetheless, a working definition of *moral judgment* is needed. “Moral,” in the context of “moral judgment” and “moral action” refers to the domain of choices and behaviors in which the well-being of one or more human beings is affected. Thus to prefer, to choose, or to value in the aesthetic realm would not affect the well-being of a person in any profound way; thus issues in the aesthetic realm are rarely matters of moral choice. But to steal, to lie, to injure, to defame another person, or even to harm oneself deliberately, these matters are moral concerns.

Values are the basic essence of the motivating structures of a person’s life. Values are expressed in behavior, revealed in attitudes, and rationalized in beliefs. Interaction among the several levels of abstraction from experience does take place; for example, attitudes emerge from experience and, in turn, attitudes regulate choices of and reactions to subsequent experience. Thus attitudes are both a product of and a determinant of one’s actions.

Milton Rokeach: Naming Values

The dean of values research among the psychologists is still Milton Rokeach. His work has been central to the research on human values for many years. Newcomers to the field, recruited as they often are today through the influences of the Kohlberg disciples, tend to overlook Rokeach or, at best, to regard him as a relic of a more old-fashioned approach to the nomothetics of values acquisition. Indeed, one of Rokeach’s greatest contributions is the establishing of an orderly vocabulary for the field. Because of Rokeach (1960), for example, there is a useful distinction to be drawn between “instrumental” and “terminal” values. Thus holding rationality as a means, value can be seen as instrumental to achieving justice as an end value. Through Rokeach a clearer picture of the American value system has emerged. He has looked at what people claim as their values and has compared such assertions at several levels of conviction and behavior. For these efforts he has earned something of the respect of avoidance by religionists and mystics who see his “I’m from Missouri” attitude as a threat to their presuppositions and optimistic assertions about the effects of religious experience on the morality of one’s lifestyle.

Lawrence Kohlberg: Moral Content, Moral Structure

Of the contributions that Kohlberg has made to the understanding of moral judgment none is more significant than the distinction between *content* and *structure*. This distinction is essentially an extension of the theoretical model of cognitive development refined by Piaget (1969). It holds that the *structure* of the person's judgment develops across time, whether or not the *contents* of the person's moral code are undergoing substantial alteration or expansion. Thus the emphasis of most moral education efforts of the past can be seen as preoccupied with the person's particular moral contents—propositions, moralisms, and ethical positions—and typically has given relatively little attention to how the child (or adult) rationalized these contents into place within his or her moral system.

The awakening of concern for the development of structure has created an educational perspective that has little in common with earlier didactic approaches to moral education. Its central focus is on the development of the structure, in the sense of the rationale to do moral reasoning. The much-discussed stages of moral development, for example, are not sets of moral contents which are accepted stage by stage in life; instead, they are distinctly different ways of rationalizing the contents that one already has accepted and incorporated into one's moral code.

The essence of Kohlberg's contribution is wrapped up in three propositions:

1. Moral judgment is a matter of decision-making and can be studied through interviews focused on the rationales a person uses in resolving moral dilemmas.
2. The capacity to make judgments of right and wrong emerges early in life and undergoes a series of substantial transformations which can be represented by three gross categorical levels, called *Preconventional*, *Conventional*, and *Postconventional*. For each of these levels there is a somewhat distinct early form in contrast with a late form; these six forms are called stages.
3. In virtually all persons, moral reasoning goes through the same sequence of stages of development. The possibility of not coping effectively with the transitions and thus becoming stalemated in a given stage accounts for the observation that the majority of adults have not progressed into the upper stages of development but are retained in the middle of the three levels.

The indebtedness of Kohlberg's interpretations to Piaget's orientation is acknowledged. Kohlberg now receives the criticisms formerly reserved for Piaget. For example, Piaget's view (1932) that, given enough social interchange to stimulate the mind to develop, virtually all children will develop from the earlier stage to the later stage of moral reasoning makes both researchers and philosophers uneasy. The earlier stage, *morality of constraint* (duty as obedience to authority, absolutism of moral perspective, objective responsibility in judging blame) is said to give way to a *morality of cooperation*; this claim puts a great deal of faith in a more mature mental capability's coming to dominate a less mature and well established earlier mode.

The latest form of pseudo-sophistication in the field of moral education is the offering of "post-Kohlberg" or "alternative-to-Kohlberg" analyses. Kohlberg's contributions are momentous and will not soon be forgotten. Most important, he clearly established the matter of moral reasoning among the facets of human development. By doing so, he opened the floodgate to a substantial contingent of researchers whose concern for moral and ethical factors had previously been confined to descriptive and evaluative studies of the acquisition of nominal values. Since Kohlberg's seminal work on moral reasoning, it is fashionable to look at the underlying reasons for holding particular values, and indeed,

the reasoning behind valuing itself.

Carol Gilligan: Feminist Contributions

What Kohlberg sees as the development of moral reasoning Carol Gilligan (1982) sees as the development of moral compassion. Gilligan has demonstrated the crucial roles of perspectives and presuppositions in the conceptualizing of research problems and the interpretation of data in social science. Instead of inferring from the dilemma-rationale interviews the stages of reasoned decision-making, as Kohlberg does, Gilligan infers a progression of stages of relational caring. Thus Kohlberg's widely recognized male-oriented six stages become feminized, essentially as follows:

	Kohlberg	Gilligan
PRECONVENTIONAL	obedience simple exchanges	needs simple exchanges
CONVENTIONAL	“friendship” codes law and duty	relationships community
POSTCONVENTIONAL	due process ideals	responsibility wisdom

(based on Kellerman, 1984, pp. 14,15)

If there is a besetting flaw in the new educational perspective, it would seem to be the inadequacy of its answer to the source-and-truth question: Where does moral content come from and what makes it qualitatively right?

Scientists are usually able to avoid the question of moral source, leaving it for the philosophers and theologians. Common people don't so easily separate the domains. In general, people are concerned about what values are being taught—especially to their own children—and how they are being taught and why. They want something done so that their children will be more able to withstand the temptations that common sense calls corrupting influences—whether peer or from their elders. But people in American communities often have difficulty getting their positions unified. They want moral education for their children, but they have learned that the matter of values education is “loaded.” As a consequence, there is great ambivalence and schools are “hanged if they do” and “hanged if they don't.”

Thus all is not well in the matter of public teaching of values. In a number of states and even in Alberta, Canada, conservative outcry against the relativisms of Values Clarification materials and methodology has caused the public schools again to back off, preferring to do nothing rather than to be castigated for the limited approaches which would seem to pass the other set of critics: the watchdogs against religion in the schools.

Especially after the disappointments with “value-free” curriculum and the frustrations over “discovery” methodologies which deny or avoid sources of moral truth, one would think that the educational marketplace might be willing to return to more prescriptive and didactic approaches. Indeed, this does seem to be the case. A search is underway for a new academic moralism that can qualify both in terms of explicit representation of the values and virtues of a democratic society, and in terms of the constraints of those who inveigh against religious influences in the public sector. Although pleasing both the supporters and detractors of religious foundations in moral education may

be difficult at best and futile at worst, hope springs eternal!

Revisiting McGuffey's Moralism

One program which has been well received in both rural and urban public schools in a variety of states is the QUEST program.² If any private non-profit group is ever to make inroads toward a truly defensible moral education in the public schools, it is apt to be QUEST or something very much like QUEST. Conceived largely by one young man during his own years of collegiate transition, QUEST has emerged as an emphasis on overtly moral precepts couched in the frankly shared experiences of public figures in sports, the arts and entertainment. Through the use of carefully designed books and appropriate adjunct experiences built along the lines of values clarification—the strategies, not the dogmas of relativism—QUEST has received high praise from school boards and substantial cooperation from teachers and administrators.

Many Kohlberg-influenced educational programs have arisen, predictably emphasizing the structure of judgment. Some of these programs are, ironically, behavioristic in their methodology though they claim to share Kohlberg's developmental bias. In most of the educational strategies used, there is a heavy emphasis on inducing or stimulating "improvement" in the structural sense—which inevitably means a concern for measurable raising of the classification level of the kind of moral judgment being used. In other words, education becomes more a matter of raising scores on one of the less-than-satisfactory measures of moral judgment than for development, itself. Piaget once called this tendency to want children to be someplace "higher" on a scale of development as the "American obsession." In the contemporary compulsion for excellence" which dominates the logic of much American education, one must wonder whatever happened to the important matter of using the skills and understandings that one has achieved—instead, the pressure is applied to get somewhere else.

Based on his evaluative review of 55 educational programs which promised some sort of structural change in their participants, Stephen Thoma concludes:

Our results leave little doubt that moral education programs are effective in promoting moral judgment development particularly if the treatment is of moderate duration (four to twelve weeks), and designed around either dilemma discussion or what we have labeled personality development programs. (1984, p. 22)

So far, so good; but one must raise the skeptical question: If structures of moral judgment are so predictably changed in such relatively short time, are we sure that we aren't measuring the learning of how to respond to testing procedures? Real development is slow and stubborn stuff.

Four Teaching Strategies

One of the favorite research activities of educators in the field of moral education is classifying the approaches to teaching moral education. Many efforts are reported in the literature.

To add a touch of originality, this paper will contribute a parsimonious classification system, identifying no fewer than four distinctly different approaches. No historical sequence is implied, though the first of these is the earliest to be documented in human history; each has its ancient and current versions.

² QUEST National Center, Inc., 6655 Sharon Woods Blvd., Columbus, Ohio 43229.

1. *Propositional teaching.* Whether the approach is purely didactic, catechetical, or elaborations of moralisms in the form of allegorical fables and literature, propositional teaching is a dominant model of moral education. The entrance of modern social science research into the matter of moral development can be dated from the pioneering work of Hartshorne and May (1928), Hartshorne, May, and Maller (1929), and Hartshorne, May, and Shuttlesworth (1930). Their study utilized scientific techniques to put to the test an observation common to the historic experience of humankind—that people quite often do not behave consistently with their moral claims. Hartshorne and May’s findings also gave credence to another not-so-kind generalization about people—that virtually everyone has a price. Put more politely, their experiments with academic cheating showed that the extent of a person’s integrity depends a great deal on the intensity of the temptation. The studies of people’s values have respected the precedents set by these pioneers, especially in respect to the important distinction between what a person says and does.

2. *The bridge from knowledge to behavior.* Knowing the right is not enough. Honest reflection on one’s own life and experiences argues persuasively that while the head may be full of high-sounding moralisms, one’s behavior can deny them persistently. Nevertheless, the importance of moral knowledge should not be under— emphasized. Even as it can be said that *knowing* the moral good is not the same as *doing* the moral good, it is similarly logical to assert that unless one knows moral truth and holds certain particulars of moral content in mind, moral behavior is unthinkable. Accidental, coincidental, or unthinking behavior which happens to be morally acceptable and right does not qualify as a moral behavior. (Without a moral judgment there is no essentially moral behavior.)

After the moral knowledge comes the *moral judgment*. This function begins with the recognition of the particular moral issue at stake in a given choice or decision. Based on the recognition, a reasoned conclusion must be reached. It is the importance of the mental process in this part of the knowing-to-doing bridge that has recently fascinated social psychologists and educators.

3. *The third function in the bridge is the human will.* Assuming that one knows the right thing to do and has reasoned clearly enough about the moral implications of the situation at hand, there must be a will to act in a moral manner. Breakdowns in the moral process at just this point are common. Whether it is a matter of some counter-force tempting one away from the truly moral action or whether it is simply a matter of shallow conviction (yes, it’s important, but not *that* important!), the will to behave morally can be compromised and the moral process breaks down.

4. *The fourth function of the moral process is the least well defined in the scientific literature.* Only in more literary forms can *strength* be found, and usually it is accompanied by another non-scientific word, character. The literary and vernacular idea, “strength of character” has no clear scientific equivalent.

One can hope that the time will soon come when appropriate ways will be created that will allow empirical investigation of the whole of this bridge between knowing and doing. To date, even the most intensive research efforts focus only on pieces and parts of the whole.

What Is Conscience?

Much remains to be learned about the conscience. Long treated as a metaphysical aspect of human character, the conscience has come into its own as a subject of empirical phenomenology. The major issue is whether or not the conscience is anything more than an accumulation of learned responses to morally demanding situations. The behaviorist and humanist, a philosophically odd couple, join hands to explain the human conscience as an acquired consequence of social interaction. While not denying

the influence of interpersonal experience in the shaping and sensitizing of conscience, religionists and developmentalists find themselves standing together, agreeing that there is something innate about the human conscience, thus psycho-genetically basic to humankind. Some among this latter set hold that the conscience is uniquely human, reflecting a moral consciousness and tendency to judge right and wrong as an essential attribute of humanness.

The implications of this issue are enormous. Now that the idea of transitions and transformations within the maturing moral judgment process have become widely accepted, it would seem only one more step to accept the idea of conscience as a defining criterion of being human. The case for conscience as the image of creation by a moral God will be firmly put, against the argument of conscience as but one more evolutionary consequence of the building of a high-form animal society. It would seem, in this case above all such debates in the past, that the weight of reason will foster a view of human conscience as reflecting moral origins of the universe.

Disentangling “Moral” and “Spiritual”

The belief that the human being is an integrated unit is not well served when, in the cause of scholarship or even religion, the idea of the human person is dichotomized, compartmentalized, and classified into presumably separable parts, such as body and spirit, mind and soul, physical and spiritual. Nor is it helpful to combine the descriptors of distinctive facets of the person as if any one facet or empirical aspect is equivalent to any other. Inquiry into the development of moral judgment--conscience, one might say--has been retarded by the linguistic habit of saying “moral and spiritual.” In many uses of this combination of terms the result has been to make any matter of moral judgment appear to be inseparable from religious values. Thus the domain of moral judgment must be contended. How much better it would be if the various facets were examined simultaneously and cooperatively by responsible scholars from the several relevant domains.

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