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ABSTRACT

Current trends in ethical/moral instruction are placed in context by tracing educational and social change from the 19th century to the present. The focus on religion for salvation and on good behavior lasted in modified form well into the 19th century. In the late 19th century curriculum in the schools changed due to immigration, industrialism, urbanization, and modernization. In colleges, the moral philosophy course faded as Freudian psychology, behaviorism, and the social sciences replaced ethics courses. The ethical/moral atmosphere in the public school also declined. Both the Depression and World War II shocked educators into a renewed search for curriculum unity and moral uplift. Major curriculum revision in the natural and social sciences occurred after Sputnik in 1957. The 1960's and early 1970's saw modern anxiety manifested in protests, crime, drug use, and divorce. Resources were limited, inflation soared, the work ethic declined, and the women's movement became strong. These events influenced the focus on humanism, values clarification, moral development, and moral reasoning in education, particularly in higher education, where ethics courses have multiplied since the 1960's. These approaches contrast greatly with Soviet education, for example, which openly indoctrinates its students in loyalty to the mother country. (KC)

Moral Education USA: Background and Trends

By Franklin Parker

ABSTRACT

Dr. Parker traces the religious/moral atmosphere in colonial schools, the First Amendment separation of church and state, and the post-national growth of secular public schools. He describes the Protestant moral atmosphere in small town and rural American schools, fostered by early public school founders and exemplified by the McGuffey Readers. He describes how the 19th century college Moral Philosophy course gave way as science, social science, and humanities courses expanded under the elective system; and how moral/ethical content dissipated amid pressures from immigration, industrialization, urbanization, and modernization.

Traced, too, are the influences of Freudian and behaviorist psychology, progressivism in schools, the effects of the Depression and World War II, the search for curriculum unity through the social studies and general education plans, and the changes since the 1950s by blacks, students protesting the Vietnam War, and women's liberation.

After analyzing recent dislocations including the Watergate scandals, Dr. Parker examines reasons behind rising crime and drug use. He ends with an examination of the recent resurgence of moral/ethical concerns in such approaches as moral reasoning (Kohlberg), values clarification, humanistic education, and particularly the rise of ethics courses in professional schools of medicine, law, engineering, and business.

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Early Schools and Moral Improvement

America began as a country in search of religious freedom. Religion for salvation and good behavior begun in colonial schools lasted in modified form well into the 19th century. This influence continued beyond the American Revolution, fought in principle against the state church of England as well as against arbitrary British political rule. Fear of a single dominant religion led to adoption of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution separating church and state. Yet Horace Mann and other public school founders after 1837 favored and promoted the general Protestant moral ethic that pervaded ← American schools. The popular McGuffey Readers--stressing character, work, thrift, family, patriotism, respect for learning, reverence for tradition, struggle for union, Manifest Destiny--reflected a common moral/ethical frame of reference.[1]

Moral Philosophy Course

In a college curriculum dominated by Latin classics, theology, and some mathematics, the Moral Philosophy course taught by the president to seniors was the unifying capstone, stressing character in those soon to be leaders. This Moral Philosophy course, which had been important in English and Scottish universities and which had originated in the medieval university's seven liberal arts, was the incubator of subjects soon to spring from it and replace it: the social, natural, and physical sciences.[2]

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From Farm to Industrial City

Many changes led to the lessening of this strong moralistic atmosphere, particularly by the 1890s, a decade historians say marked the nation's shift from rural-agrarian simplicity to urban-industrial complexity. Immigration, industrialization, urbanization, and modernization came rapidly to a diverse frontier country undergoing change and advances. Sectarian religious battles, fueled in part by new immigrants' religious beliefs or lack of them, tended to reduce religion-based ethics in lower and higher schools. Science, with its reliance on testable facts, began to raise questions about and thus challenge ethical beliefs and value judgments.

College Electives

As knowledge grew and subjects expanded, Harvard President Charles W. Eliot in 1869 helped break up the prescribed liberal arts curriculum by encouraging electives. One Harvard student is said to have vowed he would graduate by taking only freshman-level elective courses, and he did.

Electives, first used at the University of Virginia (1825), were inevitable as enrollments grew and the curriculum expanded. Rensselaer (1824) and other engineering and scientific schools were aided by post-Civil War technolgoical advances. The federal Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 and the resulting growth of land-grant colleges further expanded practical science and popularized the arts and humanities.3

New Subjects

The Moral Philosophy course faded and higher education unity was fragmented under the onslaught of (1) new subjects, (2) electives, (3) subject department dominance, and (4) undergraduate and graduate specialization. What declined was idealism, introspection, intuition, unity, and

undergraduate ethical/moral concern. Scholars in new subjects, wanting to imitate science, embraced its methods, tried to make new discoveries, and so enhance their reputations. Edward L. Thorndike said in 1918 that whatever exists exists in some amount and can be measured, thus expressing the empirical, quantitative, measurable, predictable characteristic of the new learning.[4]

Psychology, Sociology

Freudian psychology, attributing behavior to unconscious sexual drives, helped minimize Judeo-Christian ideas of sin and punishment as a deterrent. Behaviorist John B. Watson discarded individual purpose and ethics in his writings and said: given control of the environment, he could turn newborn babies into merchants, doctors, lawyers, beggars, or thieves. Other behaviorists down to B. F. Skinner clothed in the garb of science their belief that behavior, good and bad, results from environmentally conditioned responses. Psychological adjustment thus tended to replace ethical choice.

That social scientists saw their disciplines as ethically neutral was symbolized by William F. Ogburn's presidential address to the American Sociological Society:

> Sociology as a science is not interested in making the world a better place in which to live, in encouraging beliefs,...in setting forth impressions of life, in leading the multitudes, or in guiding the ship of state. Science is interested directly in one thing..., discovering new knowledge.[5]

Public School Restructure

Curriculum unity and the ethical/moral atmosphere it fostered also declined in the lower schools, swamped at the turn of the century

by numbers, duties, and courses. Prompted by the efficiency movement in factory management, the new breed of school administrators found psychological and philosophical justification in G. Stanley Hall's book Adolescence (1904)[6] to restructure the 8-year elementary, 4-year high school. The resulting psychological peer-group 6-year elementary, 3-year junior high, and 3-year senior high school may have helped house better and hold mass enrollments, but by isolating younger from older students it lessened older children's ethical influence.

Progressive Education

Besides restructuring, a new philosophy of adjustment entered public schools--pragmatic, progressive, experimental, child-centered, activity oriented. Its spokesman was John Dewey, born (1859) the year Charles Darwin's Origin of Species appeared and oil was discovered in Pennsylvania. Dewey, who came to embrace Darwinian change and adjustment to change and whose experimental University of Chicago laboratory school was made possible by John D. Rockefeller's oil money, found himself in a city of one million people, two-thirds of them exploited immigrants or children of immigrants. There in Chicago, where reformers Jane Addams of Hull House and Francis Wayland Parker at Cook County Normal School were already at work, Dewey hammered out his progressive education ideas.

What made the Dewey school different was his effort to defend in speeches and books why he had movable furniture to encourage small- and large-group work, replacing convential fixed seats and silent children; why, instead of teacher-dominated drill on set lessons from prescribed textbooks, he encouraged discussion, questions, and activities by children who shared toys, materials, and books.

Observers did not at first grasp his concern to integrate and reconcile what educationally had always been kept separate: interest and effort, school and society, individualism and the group, the child and the curriculum.[7]

Social Studies

Progressive methods added to the new tasks imposed on public schools, already Americanizing immigrants' children, socializing the young, caring for their health, and equipping them for work. The progressive movement also changed course content. Civics and American history gave way to broader based social studies, blending history, civics, sociology, and geography. Amid this burden of duties and courses, some criticized progressive education for fostering broader social ethics at the expense of individual ethics. Inevitably weakened was the ethical content of the old courses and the moral atmosphere of the old schools.

General Education

The Great Depression, with its shock of bread lines and Hoovervilles, led higher educators to try to recapture the ethical unity of the old Moral Philosophy course by reviving the liberal arts. The 1920s and '30s saw much experimenting with general education, a new name for the liberal arts. Bennington, Sarah Lawrence, Reed College, and the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin under Alexander Meikeljohn strove to unify the curriculum and so restore its value and character-building attributes.

Great Books Program

Worth noting in this milieu is the Hutchins-Adler Great Books experiment. It began with Columbia University English Professor John

Erskine on leave during World War I lecturing to American soldiers in France. Uprooted and facing death, they were enthralled with Erskine's great literature discussions on the meaning of life, freedom, dignity, destiny, and God. Erskine returned to teach a great books honors course to Columbia undergraduates. There his graduate assistant was Mortimer Adler. Visiting Yale, Philosophy Professor Adler impressed the bright young Law School Dean, Robert M. Hutchins, soon to be the nation's youngest university president at the University of Chicago. Hutchins brought Adler to Chicago and introduced the Great Books program. But academic department diehards at Chicago reduced its influence. In 1937 Hutchins and Adler had Great Books curriculum adopted at St. John's College, Annapolis, Maryland, where it still flourishes. Hutchins went on to promote a national Socratic dialogue on world problems at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Santa Barbara, California. Adler helped publish the Great Books Encyclopedia and remains active at the Aspen Institute in Colorado.[8]

Harvard Report, 1945

World War II, as did the Depression, shocked educators into a renewed search for curriculum unity and moral uplift. Worth noting is the 1945 Harvard Report, General Education in a Free Society.[9] An academic friend told Pres. James B. Conant, former Harvard chemistry professor, that if he really wanted to salvage the liberal arts, he would do as much for his general education investigating committee as he would do for a science research project. Stung by this challenge, Conant assured wide distribution of the committee report. Its recommendations--that up to 75 percent of high school education be general and that colleges require at least six general

courses in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and physical sciences--were unfortunately adversely affected by Cold War demands.

Cold War Challenge

Sputnik in 1957 shocked Americans into vast curriculum revision for bright students: the new math, physics, biology, chemistry, social studies. The National Defense Education Act, 1958, to improve science, math, and foreign languages, helped tilt the academic scene even more toward the gifted, further isolating the average and below average student. Cracks had already appeared among that student generation, part of the post World War II baby boom, raised often under the easy rules of Dr. Benjamin Spock's baby book,[10] frequently educated in suburban progressive schools, their parents often fitting descriptions in William H. Whyte's Organization Man[11] and David Riesman's The Lonely Crowd.[12]

Troubled Youth

Writers and artists had already tried to mirror the somber mood of troubled youth. J. D. Salinger's adolescent hero, Holden Caulfield, in Catcher in the Rye, 1951,[13] looked for authenticity in life and the family but discovered only "phoniness" and betrayal. The book and film Giant (1956) depicted a Texas family divided as much over ethnic tension as over cattle and oil. James Dean, the grownup delinquent in Giant, had the year before in East of Eden portrayed a son tormented by generational conflict.[14] In Rebel Without a Cause he portrayed the anguish and destruction of young people living in a world they did not make.

This modern anxiety came to a boil in the social turmoil of the 1960s and early '70s--civil rights, freedom riders, free speech,

student protests, Vietnam, Watergate, women's liberation, energy crunch--all aggravated by the early 1980s recession and job loss.

Crime[15]

These dislocations plus rising crime and drug use showed a discontent, anger, and drive for self destruction that are still incomprehensible. The FBI reported a 9.4% increase in serious crimes in 1980 over 1979, with violent crime up 11.1% and robbery up 17.5%. The 1979 crime rate was 38% more than in 1970 and 93% more than in 1960. A 1982 poll found 35% of those asked saying they were more concerned about crime now than they were five years before.

In 1979 the U.S. Justice Department reported convictions of 284 corrupt federal, state, and local officials. In 1981 the FBI "abscam" operation led to bribery indictments of 7 Congressmen plus 13 other public officials and businessmen. Former Vice Pres. Spiro Agnew resigned in 1973 because of income tax evasion and other crimes. Scandalous Watergate, low point in U.S. leadership morals, brought many convictions and the forced resignation of a U.S. President under threat of impeachment.

TV Violence

Violent acts are TV events shown daily: hijackings, the 1981 murder of Egypt's Pres. Anwar Sadat, the shooting of Pope John Paul II, to mention a few. TV violence in fact and fiction shows people dismembered, impaled, incinerated, blown up, machine gunned, or otherwise annihilated with numbing regularity. John Hinckley, who shot Pres. Reagan, modeled his act on a similar shooting in the 1976 film Taxi Driver. Atlanta in 1981 saw the spectre of a manhunt for the killer of 29 black children.

Drugs

One out of 3 Americans over age 12 has tried illicit drugs and one high school senior in 16 uses marijuana daily (marijuana use was 1 in 10 in 1978). LSD and similar drugs were used by 4% of young Americans in 1978. Cocaine is used by 29% of the 18-25 year olds. A 1983 study reported American drug use as the highest in any industrialized nation.[16]

Divorce

To rising crime and drug use add a 50% divorce rate. Add the pain, anger, guilt, and confusion of child custody fights and property division. Add the new crime of divorced-parent child snatching. Add the many one-parent homes, latchkey children, runaway children, and so on. One is hard put to explain the profound and sudden shift in American mores and to account for the drive for self destruction among so many young Americans.

Yankelovich: New Rules

One explanation is by pollster Daniel Yankelovich in his 1981 book, New Rules: Searching for Self-Fulfillment in a World Turned Upside Down.[17] He says we experienced three cultural stages of rapid change and dislocation after World War II:

1. A puritanical stage that lasted through the 1950s, when work and family mattered and when we put more into the system than we took out.
2. During the affluent 1960s and '70s we were able at last to buy and own things. Many Americans became skeptical of self-sacrifice, re-thought their values, moved to the suburbs, pursued sensual delights, and assumed that abundance would

last forever. After all, we had been the arsenal of democracy, the post-World War II world leader, the Marshall aid giver to restore Europe, and the cold warrior to halt Soviet expansion. After all, as late as 1960 our workers outproduced the Japanese four times and doubled the French and German output. In this euphoria we spent and enjoyed as though it would never end.

3. The turnabout came soon after the 1973 oil embargo. Vast energy sources we thought we owned or controlled were suddenly limited and the spigot was controlled by a rising Arab nationalism. Inflation rose and defense spending and entitlement programs soared. Medicare alone in 1979 cost 3 times the once projected 1990 cost, with similar rises in medicaid, social security, employment insurance, veterans' benefits, and the like. We had to pay more for needed imports just when industrial efficiency fell, income declined, national debt grew, plants closed, jobs were lost, unemployment benefits rose, and Depression-like fear and frustration returned.

Yankelovich concludes that this trauma has put us in a new stage, seeking community, commitment, connectedness, and restored ethical and moral anchors.

Harris: America Now

Another partial explanation is by anthropologist Marvin Harris in his 1981 book, America Now: The Anthropology of a Changing Culture.[18] Harris points out that women needed jobs because their husbands' pay after 1960 could not keep up with the rising needs of the baby boom

and later inflation. Employers wanted women to work because they could be paid less, many were part time, temporary, non-unionized, and yet well educated. As more women entered the labor force and their second income became essential to the family, physical and psychological strains developed in their triple role as housewife, mother, and wage earner.

Harris mentions Betty Friedan's 1963 The Feminine Mystique[19] which, protesting this exploitation, spurred the women's liberation movement. Traditional sex roles began to peel away. Down came the number of children and first marriages. Up went delayed marriages, childless and one-child families, divorce, use of the birth control pill, living together without marriage, births out of wedlock, and abortion. Young people accepted sex for pleasure and not procreation. Pornography and same sex relations rose.

Harris blames the declining work ethic on the labor force shift from production to services and information. At the same time a bureaucratic growth occurred in big corporations, labor unions, and government at all levels. This bureaucracy has produced a large number of featherbedding, surly, little-caring clerks and department head despots, spinning endless red tape to protect their jobs. These rule makers and paper shufflers have all but smothered initiative and the new ideas once characteristic of free enterprise. Harris suggests that bureaucratic ineptitude has inevitably led to lowered worker output and shoddy workmanship, threatening the loss of our world industrial leadership. If correct, Harris' analysis helps explain some of our present dislocations and lowered moral/ethical attitudes.

Moral Revival, Lower Schools[20]

An overview of the moral education revival in lower schools includes:

1. Released time (since 1913) sent public school children to nearby churches and synagogues for religious instruction or offered such instruction near or in public schools. In 1947 two million children were so taught. In 1948 the U.S. Supreme Court declared such instruction unconstitutional when given on school grounds during school time[21] (in 1952 it approved such instruction off school grounds).[22] Released time has since dwindled because of First Amendment challenges.
2. Prayer in public schools, also declared unconstitutional in 1961 by the U.S. Supreme Court,[23] is often chellenged--as in Alabama in 1983. Despite a constitutional amendment move to permit school prayer, the 1961 ruling seems likely to stand.
3. Humanistic education (since the early 1960s), including affective learning, emphasized concern for others, valuing interpersonal and human relations, stressing feeling, sympathy, altruism, helpfulness. Some adherents were open education neo-preogressives (1965-75). Others followed psychologist Abraham H. Maslow's (1908-70) concern with stages through which a creative person reaches self-fulfillment. Humanistic education has a growing literature but few formal programs.
4. Values clarification (since 1966) is more controversial. Parents and others object to students' frank discussion of their own, friends, and family moral dilemmas. The idea is to clarify dilemmas from a subjective point of view, choose from alternatives,

and act on that choice. Said to be popular in classrooms and successful in book sales, values clarification has also been called superficial, ineffective, and possibly dangerous because of its public disclosures, subjectivity, and moral relativism.[24]

5. Moral development or moral reasoning has a large following, literature, measuring scales, curricular programs, and prestigious leaders. Jean Piaget (1896-1980) in 1932 identified four states of moral development from observing the way children used rules of games they played. Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg's well known stages may be summarized thus: children first think and act out of fear of punishment, desire for reward, or exchange of favors. They then act according to expectations set by authorities to maintain good order. Finally, they act and think on the oasis of moral principles genuinely accepted (stage 5 is at the level of human rights; stage six is at the level of universal ethical principles of liberty, equality, and justice).

Kohlberg's analysis and measuring scales have been applied in school programs in Cambridge and Brookline, Mass.; in Pittsburgh schools under Carnegie-Mellon University Professor Edwin Fenton. The movement seems promising.[25]

The California legislature and state board of education a few years ago did recommend moral education for kindergarten through grade 12. Yet one surveyor of California public high schools found that:

-nearly 50% of the high schools did not have moral education syllabus, course, or program;

-80% of high schools did not have a list of moral education materials available for their teachers; and

-over 80% of schools reported very little school district urging for moral education.

The investigator pointed out correctly that moral education must first be taught to future teachers before it can be effective in schools and that as yet California teacher education institutions have shown little interest in moral education.[26]

6. Private Christian academies spread rapidly in the last decade. They emphasize religion, morality, and basic skills. Many began in the South and elsewhere to circumvent racial integration. Though many have small enrollments and do not survive, they reflect a strong national concern for moral education and are backed by the new evangelical right and by President Reagan.[27]

Ethics Revival, Higher Education

But it is in higher education that ethics courses have really grown. New ethics journals, books, and conferences attest to this remarkable growth. A 1977-78 survey by the Hastings Center in New York State shows that:

-623 out of 2,270 higher education catalogs list 2,757 ethics courses.

-50% of these courses were applied ethics; i.e., bioethics, business ethics, secretarial ethics, legal ethics, medical ethics, etc.

-The surveyors estimate that up to 12,000 courses are now offered in U.S. undergraduate colleges; most of them begun in the last 10 years; most of them tending to be interdisciplinary, elective, and oriented to such specific issues as euthanasia, bribery, atomic power, whistleblowing (i.e., reporting misdeeds), etc.

The survey identified these concerns: ethics teachers' qualifications; what department should administer ethics courses; disputes over course goals, methods, content, student evaluation; and whether ethics should be a course on its own or part of other courses. Surveyors found ethics teachers feeling somewhat isolated from their colleagues and fearful that the ethics phenomenon is a fad rather than of lasting interest.[28]

Soviet Moral Education

Do Soviet schools teach moral values any better than we do? There, where everything is political, schools follow the moral education ideas pioneered by Anton S. Makarenko (1888-1939) who, from 1920, successfully salvaged war orphaned delinquents by appealing to their group spirit, cooperativeness, and loyalties. He wrote in 1937:

> In the Soviet Union, no individual can live outside the collective and there can be, therefore, no separate personal destiny, no personal course, and no personal happiness that is opposed to the destiny and happiness of the collective...
>
> We must send out from our schools energetic members of the socialist society devoted to the collective idea, and capable resolutely at all times of finding at every moment of their life the right standard for their personal actions, and of demanding at the same time the right conduct from others.[29]

Soviet schools have a room dedicated to former students who served in the Great Patriotic War of 1940-45 (deliberately so named) where their pictures, exercise books, records, trophies, and military dress and equipment are displayed. Schools also have a Lenin Room, with posters, photos, and descriptions of Lenin, the current premier (Andropov), other leaders, astronauts, and other national worker-heroes.

Attitudes are shaped by exhortation, banners, posters, textbooks, teachers, and quotations from Lenin, Makarenko, and others. Children

are exposed to exemplary models of revolutionary heroes, workers, peasants, soldiers--all showing courage, effort, and victory in adversity.

Soviet youth groups are well organized, staffed, and financed: the Young Octobrists to age 10, Young Pioneers aged 10-15, and Komsomols aged 15-24, the last deliberately merging school adolescents, new young workers, and those in the armed forces. Each have their own entrance requirements, loyalty oaths, community service projects, national daily newspapers, museums, centers, camps, and Pioneer Palaces where after-school, out-of-school cultural recreation reinforces in-school learning, political ideology, and group values. In their initiation Young Pioneers must affirm:

> I, a Young Pioneer of the Soviet Union, in the presence of my comrades, solemnly promise to love my Soviet Motherland passionately and to live, learn, and struggle as the Great Lenin bade us and as the Communist Party teaches us.[30]

The eleven Pioneer rules include:

> A Pioneer loves his Motherland and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union..., honors the memory of those who gave their lives in the struggle for freedom and for the prosperity of the Soviet Motherland,...is polite and well disciplined,... is a good comrade; he cares for the young and helps the old,... is brave and unafraid of difficulties,...is honorable and values the honor of his detachment.[31]

The Soviets thus openly indoctrinate, a method most Americans abhor. While comparable statistics may not be available, observers say that Soviet crime, juvenile delinquency, alcoholism, divorce, and other evidence of immorality are not negligible.

In conclusion then, change and dislocation have been the pattern of our time. In consequence, blows have fallen on family, home, marriage, children, church, state, school, and nation. Yet each persists and is resilient. School especially needs to be a place set aside to transmit and improve the culture. If, as most Americans believe, moral education and ethics courses have healing power, if they help our better natures and highest hopes, then we ought to support and nurture them.

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