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AUTHOR Bruening, William H.
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ABSTRACT

The paper is a philosophical examination of values education. It is presented in three major sections. First, there is a discussion of the role that value education has played in the American educational system. A historical review of four documents published by national educational groups and the government indicates that moral education has been advocated throughout the 20th century and that the American educational community has fairly specific ideas about which values are important. Section two of the paper explores which values ought to be taught in moral education programs. The author observes that values can be taught in contexts other than the schools and that it is virtually impossible to have total consensus among educators, parents, and community members on which values are to be taught. However, for the sake of argument, he accepts the basic values identified in one of the documents summarized in section one. The third section asks what teaching model would be consistent with the values accepted in part two. Analysis of literature by psychologists and philosophers reveals that individual responsibility (and values) cannot be taught--it must be acquired indirectly and through the learner's own experience. Thus, the author concludes that no specific program or teaching model can be specified for values education. Students will best learn values by observing the behavior of ethical people in general. (AV)

CAN VALUES BE TAUGHT?

By William H. Bruening

Motto: "Example is notoriously more potent than precept."
(Dewey, Democracy and Education)

The often heated controversy concerning the use of various textbooks in public schools needs to be reflected on in a philosophical manner. The controversy presupposes that children of public school age are able to be caught certain values and that textbooks (and, of course, teachers) are a prime requisite to this teaching. Two questions that need to be asked in the area of value education are: 1) what do you mean by "values"? and 2) what do you mean by "teaching"? I contend that these two questions are valid and therefore the whole issue concerning the use of the controversial textbooks in public schools is misplaced.

Aristotle recognized the difficulties in discussing values. In Book I, Chapter 3, The Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle makes the following observation:

> Now each man judges well the things he knows, and of these he is a good judge. And so the man who has been educated in a subject is a good judge of that subject, and the man who has received an all-round education is a good judge in general. Hence a young man is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science; for he is inexperienced in the actions that occur in life, but its discussions start from these and are about these; and, further, since he tends to follow his passions, his study will be vain and unprofitable, because the end aimed at is not knowledge but action. And it makes no difference whether he is young in years or youthful in character; the defect does not depend on time, but on his living, and pursuing each successive object, as passion directs. For to such persons, as to the incontinent, knowledge brings no profit; but to those who desire and act in accordance with a rational principle knowledge about such matters will be of great benefit.[1]

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Aristotle claims that the audience for what he calls lectures on political science, must have certain dispositions in order to profit from the lectures. This paper raises an analogous question concerning the logical and existential possibilities of teaching values and, in particular, moral values. The paper falls to several distinct parts. First, there is a discussion of the role that value education has played in the American educational system. This discussion will focus primarily on a brief historical survey of certain central documents stating the relevance of value education. The second part of the paper will address itself to the question, if there is going to value education, which values are going to be held up as desirable values to students? This second question presupposes two things: it presupposes that value education has some intrinsic worth and, secondly, it presupposes that value education is possible. A third part of the paper addresses itself to the question, what teaching model, or models, would be consistent with the values which are determined as desirable in relationship to the second part of the paper as previously mentioned. The thesis of this paper is that the only viable principle for value education is that values cannot be taught, therefore, the question which values are to be taught becomes logical nonsense, and the stress in American education on value education is somewhat misplaced.

In the early 1900's, National Education Association released a report entitled, Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education. This report suggested that one of the goals that is appropriate for secondary education is the development of ethical character. Included in this goal, or

objective, was the following: the education of ethical character should develop a student's sense of personal responsibility, a student's sense of initiative, in the student's spirit of service, and a commitment to the principles of true democracy. In fact, the report suggests that the development of ethical character was the single most important objective of secondary education, and that none of the other objectives it proposed could be developed independently of the students possessing ethical character.[2]

In the late 1930's, another document came forward entitled, The Purposes of Education in American Democracy. This document suggested four basic objectives: 1) self-realization, 2) human relationship, 3) economic efficiency, and 4) civic responsibility. Among the many sub-objectives listed under these four main titles, are the following: an educated person directs his life in a responsible manner; human relationships are of prime importance for an educated person; an educated person manifests sensitivity to the disparities of human circumstances; an educated person seeks to correct unsatisfactory conditions; an educated person respects honest differences of opinion. All of these sub-objectives could conceivably fall under the general category of moral or value education.[3]

In the middle 1940's, another statement was published entitled, The Imperative Needs of Youth of Secondary School Age. Among the many needs listed in this report, are the following: all youth need to understand the rights and duties of the citizens of a democratic society, and to be diligent and competent in the performance of their obligations

as members of the community and citizens of the state and nation, to have an understanding of the nations and peoples of the world. Also, all youth need to develop respect for other persons; to grow into their insight into ethical values and principles, and to be able to live and work cooperatively with others and to grow in the moral and spiritual values of life.[4] Again, both of these needs would fall under the general category of value or moral education.

The last document which will be referred to in this paper, appeared in the very early 1950's. It was titled, "Moral and Spiritual Values in the Public Schools." This essay is perhaps the best summary of the kinds of values that have historically been founded to be of importance in secondary schools.

> The basic moral and spiritual value in American life is of supreme importance in the individual personality. 1) each person should feel responsible for the consequences of his own conduct, 2) institutional arrangements are the servants of mankind, 3) mutual consent is better than violence, 4) the human mind should be liberated by access to information and opinion, 5) excellence in mind, character, and creative ability should be fostered, 6) all persons should be judged by the same moral standards, 7) the concept of brotherhood should take precedence over selfish interest, 8) each person should have the greatest possible opportunity for the pursuit of happiness, provided only that such activities do not substantially interfere with the similar opportunities of others, 9) each person should be offered the emotional and spiritual experience which transcend the material aspects of life.[5]

This brief survey of certain historically important documents in the development of American education, clearly indicates at least two things. The first is that value or moral education is clearly not something new in American education brought on by recent scandals such as Watergate. The second thing that is indicated in this brief survey is

that the American educational community has some fairly specific ideas as to which values are important. Unfortunately, there may well be a gap between the values which are stated in the reports and the values which are actually learned in the schools.

It should be pointed out here that the documents referred to in the preceding few paragraphs are focused primarily on secondary schools. The fact that this is so should not be interpreted to mean that value or moral education should be focused primarily on secondary schools. The intent of the references to the documents is to show that value education has been discussed in some great detail over at least the past 75 years. It is conceivable that value education might spread to the elementary schools as well as to the post-secondary educational institutions. In fact, one could argue very strongly on psychological grounds that moral education takes place and ought to take place long before secondary schools.[6]

Earlier we mentioned that one of the questions that must be addressed in discussing moral education, is which values might be proposed as values to be taught. The reason why this question is important is that it is conceivable and, in fact, quite likely, that there will not be a consensus on the whole range of values that a program in moral education might want to foster. Because of the likelihood of disagreement about which values ought to be stressed or which ones ought not to be discussed, becomes very difficult in translating the general claims made in the documents referred to above to a specific curriculum for a school. In fact, there is even some disagreement as to whether schools should be

concerned with teaching values. The reader is reminded that the general question this paper is addressed to is, can values be taught? Specifically, we are addressing ourself to this question in light of certain documents that have become historically important in the American educational system, and we are also discussing this question in the context of school, but it is not the case that the school is the only conceivable place in which values might be taught. Values can surely be taught in a religious context, in a context of the student's home, or in the context of various groups and organisations that students might be involved in. In fact, it is conceivable that values can be taught in a situation in which people being taught are not in any strict sense, students. It is important, then, to remember that the general question is, can values be taught, and if so, how and in what context? Let us suppose, then, that we have gotten around the problem of getting a consensus, that we have in fact reached some kind of an agreement as to which values are to be taught. And let us suppose at least for the sake of this discussion, that the values to be taught are closely analogous to, if not identical with, the nine statements from "Moral and Spiritual Values in the Public Schools."

The practical question, then, is let us suppose knowing which values we want to teach that we are faced with the practical question of outlining a specific course to be included in the curriculum of the public schools called, Moral Education. Given that we know what we want to teach, one question that must be addressed is how are we going to teach it. I am not talking here about a course in teaching methods for moral education; what I am talking about is the form in which the values are

presented. I am making a distinction between form, content, and methodology. We have already addressed ourselves to the question of content and, have assumed for the sake of the paper, that we know the content. We are also claiming that a course might be developed called Teaching Methods for Moral Education. What we mean by form is something different.

One way of coming to grips with the question of form is to look at the claim made by Soren Kierkegaard writing under the pseudonymoof Johannes Climacus, in his Concluding Unscientific Postscript:

> When the question of truth is raised in an objective manner, reflection is directed objectively to the truth, as an object to which the knower is related. Reflection is not focused upon the relationship, however, but upon the question of whether it is the truth to which the knower is related. If only the object to which he is related is the truth, the subject is accounted to be in the truth. When the question of the truth is raised subjectively, reflection is directed subjectively to the nature of the individual's relationship; if only the mode of this relationship is in the truth, the individual is in the truth even if he should happen to be thus related to what is not true.[7]

A few pages later, Kierkegaard says: "The objective accent falls on WHAT is said, the subjective accent on HOW it is said."[8] The quotes from Kierkegaard focus quite clearly on the specific issue of form. Charles Silverman notes:

> Children are taught a lot of lessons about values, ethics, morality, character, and conduct every day of the week, less by the content of the curriculum than by the way schools are organized, the way teachers and parents behave, the way they talk to children and to each other, the kinds of behavior they approve or reward, and the kinds they disapprove or punish. These lessons are far more powerful than the verbalizations that accompany them and that they frequently controvert.[9]

To put this in a somewhat different context but with the same point, Gordon Allport suggests "Prejudice was not taught by the parent, but was

caught by the child from an infected atmosphere."[10] In reference, then, to the question of form, it becomes obvious that even if we knew which values were important to teach, and efen if we had the appropriate methodology for teaching these values, the possession of these two qualities would not necessarily lead to a successful program in moral education. In fact, possession of these two qualities with an improper form would destroy a program in moral education. The destruction would occur because an improper form would stress the WHAT, and improper form would teach values and ignore the catching of values.

What, then, might be a proper form for moral education assuming that content and methodological issues have been solved? One view as to what might be the proper form for teaching not only moral values, but teaching anything in general, is manifested in the following comment from Gibran's Prophet:

> Then said a teacher, Speak to us of Teaching.
> And he said:
> No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge.
> The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness.
> If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wosdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind.
> The astronomer may speak to you of his understanding of space, but he cannot give you his understanding.
> The musician may sing to you of the rhythm which is in all space, but he cannot give you the ear which arrests the rhythm nor the voice that echoes it.
> And he who is versed in the science of numbers can tell of the regions of weight and measure, but he cannot conduct you thither.
> For the vision of one man lends not its wings to another man.
> And even as each one of you stands alone in God's knowledge, so must each one of you be alone in his knowledge of God and in his understanding of the earth.[11]

If the form indicated by the references to Kierkegaard and Gibran are correct, then how does one teach a course in moral education? The answer is that one does not. If, for instance, one of the values that is to be learned by students is "each person should feel responsible for the consequences of his own conduct," then the form of the instruction should be consistent with this particular content. The form, then, must allow the students to freely choose his/her values and accept the consequences for the choices. If this is the correct form, then no teacher can force any values on the student. In fact, the teacher cannot help the student to directly learn (in the sense of accepting as one's own) any values.

The teachers of courses in moral education must then be viable role models for the students and the appropriate form for "instruction" must be indirect communication. Is there then any reason to include such courses in a curriculum and what kind of instruction might go on in such a course? Max Weber gives a very clear answer to both of these questions:

> Thus, the discussion of value-judgments can have only the following functions:
> a) The elaboration and explication of the ultimate, internally "consistent" value-axioms, from which the divergent attitudes are derived. People are often in error, not only about their opponent's evaluations, but also about their own. This procedure is essentially an operation which begins with concrete particular evaluations and analyzes their meanings and then moves to the more general level of irreducible evaluations. It does not use the techniques of an empirical discipline and it produces no new knowledge of facts. Its "validity" is similar to that of logic.
> b) The deduction of "implications" (for those accepting certain value-judgments) which follow from certain irreducible value-axioms, when the practical evaluation of factual situations is based on these axioms alone. This deduction depends on one hand, on logic, and on the other, on empirical observations for the completest possible casuistic analyses of all such empirical situations as are in principle subject to practical evaluation.
> c) The determination of the factual consequences which the realization of a certain practical evaluation must have:

> (1) in consequence of being bound to certain indispensable means, (2) in consequence of the inevitability of certain, not directly desired repercussions. These purely empirical observations may lead us to the conclusion that (a) it is absolutely impossible to realize the object of the preference, even in a remotely approximate way, because no means of carrying it out can be discovered; (b) the more or less considerable improbability of its complete or even approximate realization, either for the same reason or because of the probable appearance of undesired repercussions which might directly or indirectly render the realization undesirable; (c) the necessity of taking into account such means or such repercussions as the proponent of the practical postulate in question did not consider, so that his evaluation of end, means, and repercussions becomes a new problem for him. Finally: d) the uncovering of new axioms (and the postulates to be drawn from them) which the proponent of a practical postulate did not take into consideration. Since he was unaware of those axioms, he did not formulate an attitude towards them although the execution of his own postulate conflicts with the others either (1) in principle or (2) as a result of the practical consequences, (i.e., logically or actually). In (1) it is a matter in further discussion of problems of type (a); in (2), of type (c).13 → 12

This reference to Weber needs some explanation. Weber is claiming that one function of discussion what he calls value-judgments is to work out various logical connections between a number of value-judgments both in terms of what the judgments presuppose and what logically follows from the judgments. Weber is suggesting that one goal of the discussion of value-judgments is that the discussant ought to have a more consistent and well thought out system of values. The implication of various value-judgments can be determined both on logical and empirical grounds, the logical implication are discussed both in a) and b) of the reference and the empirical side is discussed in b). Also such discussions of value-judgments has as a goal the discussion of the connection between means and ends, and the means may be both logical and/or empirical. Such discussion of the means-end relationship might have a variety of consequences.

It may be that no satisfactory means can be found to reach a desired end. The failure to find such a means may mean that there is no moral means to be found (the morality of the means presumably being determined by various logical considerations relative to the system of value-axioms) or it may mean that no empirical means can be thought of to accomplish the desired end. It might also mean that a means can be found that is both morally acceptable and empirically possible but which has as a consequence certain undesirable effects such that the means becomes unacceptable. Also the discussion of value-judgments may have as a consequence the discovery of new value-axioms and this discovery might force the rejection of formerly held axioms or it may force the reordering of value-axioms.

The instructor then should refrain from making his/her value-judgments a focal point of the course. The goal of the course should be to have the students develop their own value system. The instructor facilitates this development. This does not mean that the instructor has no right to his/her value system; it means that the instructor's personal values are more appropriately communicated to the students in an indirect way and by example rather than by overt discussion.

The discussion then, to this point, as to the initial question can values be taught, leads us to the conclusion that it is appropriate to answer the question, no, values cannot be taught. However, this answer does not mean that moral education is not important. Nor does it mean that schools should not concern themselves with value questions or even with courses concerning value questions. The answer does mean that there is no logical connection between this concern and those courses, and

between this concern and results in terms of student behavior. The value of these concerns and of these courses can only be realized if, in fact, those who have the responsibility for instruction in these courses (I prefer to use the word facilitators here) are, in fact, viable role models for ethical behavior. In fact, it is conceivable, in fact, perhaps quite likely, that the best role models for moral behavior are not necessarily those who would be qualified by some professional training to teach courses in moral education. It may well be that a math teacher, or a chemistry teacher, or a shop teacher, or a business teacher, is a more viable role model of ethical behavior than the person who has the responsibility for teaching a course in moral values.

Another way to phrase the problem of the form being consistent with the content, is to look at certain passages in Wittgenstein's Tractatus. If it is fair to say that the whole issue of moral education is concerned with finding some viable meaning to life, then there is some question as to how one expresses that meaning. Wittgenstein says:

> The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of the problem. Is not this the reason why those who have found after a long period of doubt that the sense of life became clear to them, have been unable to say what constituted that sense. There are indeed things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest.[13]

Or, again, Wittgenstein says: "What can be shown cannot be said."[14]

What Wittgenstein is saying then is that values are manifested by showing, that is, by behavior and not by saying, that is, by verbalizing such values. What this means, then, in terms of the issue of moral education, is that the prime requisite for any type of moral education is

specifically moral people. Referring back again to Aristotle, he contends that the best way to find out what is right and wrong is to look at the behavior of a moral person. The fact that there is such an urgent demand for moral education, particularly in light of recent political events, may in fact indicate by lack of role models of moral behavior in our society.

In summary, then, if moral education is important, then it cannot be taught. And it cannot be taught for both logical and existential reasons. And if it cannot be taught, then there is no need in discussing the methodology of such teaching, nor is there any need in discussing the content of such teaching. What can be done is what Weber has suggested in the statements mentioned above. If moral education would proceed along the lines suggested by Weber, then it would be both logically and existentially possible. If it proceeded in a way radically different from what Weber suggested, moral education is logically and existentially impossible.

NOTES

[1]Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics, trans. by W. D. Ross in The Basic Works of Aristotle, edited by Richard McKeon (Random House: New York, 1941), p. 936-937, 1094b29-1095a11.

[2]Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education, Bureau of Education, Bulletin no. 35 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918).

[3]Educational Policies Commission, The Purposes of Education in American Democracy (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1938), pp. 50, 72, 90, 108.

[4]National Association of Secondary School Principals, The Imperative Needs of Youth of Secondary School Age, Bulletin no. 145 (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1947).

[5]Education Policies Commission, Moral and Spiritual Values in the Public Schools (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1951), pp. 18-38.

[6]The literature on moral development is monumental. A good book to read on this subject is Jean Piget's The Moral Judgment of the Child (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1965).

[7]Soren Kierkegaard, Concluding Unscientific Postscript, trans. by David Swensen and Walter Lourie (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1941), p. 178.

[8]Ibid., p. 181.

[9]Charles Silberman, Crisis in the Classroom (New York: Random House, 1970), p. 9.

[10]Gordon Allport, The Nature of Prejudice (Anchor Books; Garden City, 1958), p. 285.

[11]Kahil Bibran, The Prophet (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1973), p. 56-57.

[12]Max Weber, The Methodology of the Social Sciences, trans. and edited by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (The Free Press: New York, 1969), pp. 20-21.

[13]Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, trans. by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (The Humanities Press, 1963), 6.521.

[14]Ibid., 4.1212.