

Education

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TEACHING JOHNNY TO BE GOOD

'A whole generation has grown up in a moral vacuum,' a teacher says. The character education movement is working to fill the gap.

BY ROGER ROSENBLATT

WENTY-TWO WHEATIES-BOX SIXTH GRADERS SIT IN

a circle in the Lansing Middle School in Lansing, a white-bread town of 10,000 in the center of New York State. Its sights are silos, old barns, cow-crossing signs, paint-peeling houses with collapsing porches and neat, new frame houses, mostly one story, strung out on the black roads that run among the hills. A 20-minute commute from Ithaca, Lansing is home to professors' kids as well as those of merchants and farmers. The 11-year-olds look scrubbed and alert on this recent Monday morning. All wear jeans and the elaborate sneakers of the times. All are intent on the teacher, Phyllis Smith-Hansen, who is

46 years old, has a broad Scandinavian face, wheat-blond hair and blue slits for eyes and whose chair in the circle is closest to the blackboard. She has posted a quotation of H. Jackson Brown Jr., the inspirational-book author, "Let people know what you stand for — and what you won't stand for," along with a slightly amended quotation from Edmund Burke, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men (and women) to do nothing."

Smith-Hansen is about to teach a class in character education, a subject unheard of a generation ago, but today taught to millions of American children in the nation's public schools. She is a devoted student, if not a disciple, of Thomas Lickona, a developmental psychologist and a professor of education at the State University of New York at nearby Cortland. Lickona is an acknowledged leader of the burgeoning character education movement. He has recently established the Center for the 4th and 5th R's (Respect and Responsibility) at SUNY-Cortland, which is becoming something of a national center for the study and development of character education curricula.

Character education represents an effort to teach moral behavior to primary- and secondary-school students in a time perceived to be morally rudderless and to be without such teaching in local communities or in the

home. Across the country, teachers are confronting children with moral dilemmas and asking them to think and talk. The felt need for this kind of education is so deep and widespread that it has spurred a movement that has attracted as many former activists of the 1960's — Lickona is one — as it has conservative thinkers and politicians of the 1980's. (Supporters include Barbara Jordan, Barbara Bush, Marian Wright Edelman, Jesse Jackson, Tom Selleck and Nathan Glazer.)

It is a quiet movement, and a rather disparate one, encompassing not only Lickona's methods but also other approaches to the teaching of basic values and moral reasoning. Its goal is simple and vast: to fix a broken America, an America whose children no longer seem to know right from wrong. Last year, the Mississippi Board of Education voted unanimously to develop a plan for "the teaching of values." The New Hampshire Department of Education recently announced that a like-minded program would be set up in that state. The New Jersey Department of Education has endorsed a set of "core values" for school education and set up a council to define commonly accepted values. Similar efforts are in progress at the local level — in big cities like St. Louis, Seattle, Chicago and San Antonio and in smaller places like Frankfort, Ky. Classes in character education are held in rural and suburban schools, like those around Lansing, and in inner-city schools, like Theodore Roosevelt High School in the Bronx.

Roger Rosenblatt is a contributing writer for the Magazine.



"Loyalty to your friend is a good thing, right?" Jill asked.

"Right," Nancy said.

"And you help your friends."

"Who else're you going to help?"

"And so if my friend doesn't know the answer to a question on the math quiz, it's not really so bad to give it to her?"

There already has been one White House Conference on Character Building for a Democratic, Civil Society and a second conference is in the planning. President Clinton and Congress have declared Oct. 16-22 as National Character Counts Week. That one could devise such a name without embarrassment suggests how seriously people take the movement.

Beside Lickona's center at Cortland, there is the Josephson Institute of Ethics in Los Angeles, which supports a Character Counts Coalition. Amitai Etzioni, a leader of the Communitarian movement, has devoted the energy of his Communitarian Network to advance the cause. Boston University has established the Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character specifically to develop character education. All this is in addition to the work of individual schoolteachers and educators at the university level who are turning the idea that values can be formally taught into a field of study — Kevin Ryan at Boston University; Kevin Walsh at the University of Alabama; William Damon at Brown University, and others. Kevin Ryan says: "We've had 10 years of talking about school reform. This issue is at the heart of school

reform." For Kevin Walsh, the ultimate purpose of character education is nothing less than "to prepare the next generation to inherit society."

Phyllis Smith-Hansen has just finished showing some members of the next generation a film on the Nazi persecution of the Jews. She now writes the following words in a vertical row on the board behind her: "stereotype, prejudice, cliques, Holocaust." Beside that row, she writes "conscience." She asks the class: "Can you relate any of the first row of words?"

A girl in a Notre Dame sweatshirt: "The Nazis didn't like the Jews because they thought only *they* were the best. They had their own special group."

Smith-Hansen: "So a clique is an excluding group of people. How would stereotypes fit into what a clique is?"

A boy in a backward baseball cap: "Well, like the rumor was that if you had dark hair and dark eyes, then you're automatically a Jew and you're not a perfect Christian, so you're evil or bad or something and you should be put to death."

Smith-Hansen: "So you're saying that a stereotype is a belief about a group



THE TEACHER

"My job," says Phyllis Smith-Hansen, "is to continually define moral issues — naming, naming, naming."

of people based on some outside part of them. Is that what you're saying?" The boy says "Yeah." Smith-Hansen looks about the room. "Any other ideas about cliques, and how these words go together?"

A girl: "If you believe the prejudices, you try to exterminate the Jews."

A boy: "And they think they're purifying the country."

A boy named Nate: "But where does originality fit in? If they were born as Jews, what does that have to do with who they are as people? Like big deal if I had brown hair and brown eyes. Like if you had blond hair and blue eyes, would that mean you'd do nothing wrong?"

Smith-Hansen shows a smile. "But looks were not the most important part of it, were they?" she asks. "Wasn't it religion itself?" The heads nod solemnly. "It was being Jewish that the Germans said was not O.K., right?"

Boy: "Wasn't Hitler partly Jewish?" Five or six kids chip in at once and make a confused noise.

Smith-Hansen: "I heard one of you say something about Hitler being a leader. Tell me about cliques in terms of leaders. How did Hitler lead his clique? Nate?"

Nate: "He started out as one person. And then he convinced his friends that Jews were bad, for whatever reason. Then his friends convinced other people. And like, before you knew it, it spread around."

The talk about Hitler and the Jews continues for a while longer among the students. Then Smith-Hansen shifts things a bit: "O.K. Now I want you to put this together — what we've said so far. Remember, I talked a couple of weeks ago about how a seed exists in all of us. Even in Lansing, N.Y., in the sixth grade, there's a seed. Can you explain that seed and its growth, using some of today's words?"

Nate: "Well, I was wondering why didn't someone just say: 'Hey, who does this guy Hitler think he is? Why is he killing off our population? Does he think that if I don't like Jacob [he indicates the boy sitting to his right], I'm going to kill him?'" Jacob looks a bit concerned. Many voices overlap.

Smith-Hansen reads aloud the Burke quotation about evil's triumph and then says: "Nate, you're absolutely on track."

Girl: "Yeah! Why didn't somebody stop him?"

Smith-Hansen: "I'm going to ask you that."

Nate begins slowly: "Because if you're, like, prejudiced, you start a gang, which would be other people who are prejudiced, too. Then you get a clique." He pauses. "And the Holocaust."

Smith-Hansen: "And the Holocaust, then, is the fruit of the seed that can be born inside us. So what's the job of people, even people in the Lansing sixth grade? If that seed of prejudice is part of us as human beings, what do we have to do about it?"

Boy: "Don't let it grow."

Girl: "Don't water it."

Boy: "Don't give it Miracle-Gro." Laughter.

Smith-Hansen: "Good. But how would we water that seed?"

A girl with braids: "You start by joining people you like. Now they tell you that some people aren't as good as you, which is prejudice. And then they think that they are better and that others are worse — which is stereotypes. Like I don't get a good grade in math. And the math teacher wears glasses. And I say that all teachers who wear glasses are bad. And I make a clique against teachers who wear glasses."

Smith-Hansen: "Good. Good thinking, Susie."

Another girl starts to raise her hand, then lowers it. She hasn't spoken till now and Smith-Hansen encourages her to join in. The girl finally says: "What about your own family?"

Smith-Hansen: "What do you mean?"

Girl: "Like last night, we were watching TV and there were some African-American men in the show and I heard my grandfather say something about 'the niggers.' And I told him to use the term 'African-American.' And he looked at me like I was crazy. And so did my dad."

SMITH-HANSEN'S CLASS HAS ARRIVED AT A POINT THAT SUGGESTS how complicated character education can be. One would assume that the girl was emboldened to speak up at home by previous classroom discussions and, further, that Smith-Hansen supports her in her expression of dismay at her family's use of racial epithets. But character education also teaches that respect for one's parents is an important value. What happens when two moral rights collide? A teacher might well begin complicating things, talking of exceptions and degrees, but a teacher also wants to avoid sliding into moral relativism, since one of the tenets of the character education movement is that moral relativism created the mess that character educators are trying to fix. The two new R's, respect and responsibility, are not the stuff of multiplication tables, however basic the values that are trying to be taught.

It was thus with a good deal of care that Lickona, back in the early 1970's, began developing a course of study at Cortland that eventually attracted people like Smith-Hansen. Little by little, his students have brought the program into the classrooms. The movement progressed, as it does today, from a teacher of teachers, to a teacher of children, to the children themselves.

The process begins with Lickona, whose life seems to have followed the dual paths of 1960's activism and his traditional Catholic faith until they converged in a passion for moral education. After growing up in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., he got his undergraduate degree at Siena College, a small Franciscan school outside Albany. He earned a master's in English at Ohio University, then switched disciplines to psychology and received his doctorate at the SUNY-Albany.

Deciding to do his dissertation on children's moral thinking, he was drawn to Jean Piaget, the influential Swiss child psychologist, and to Lawrence Kohlberg of Harvard, a major figure in the late 1960's on the subject of moral reasoning. Kohlberg argued with the anthropologists and sociologists who claimed that morality was a function of class or culture. It was his contention that social science cannot instill moral philosophy; its methods are too empirical and descriptive. One has to read Plato and Aristotle, Kohlberg maintained, to be able to answer moral questions. He developed his "stages of moral reasoning" from Plato's concept of ideal justice.



Harold said, "If somebody wears really uncool clothes because they're poor, it's different than if they wear uncool clothes because they're uncool."

"But some poor people have cool clothes," Bob said.

"A lot of poor people don't get the choice," Harold said.

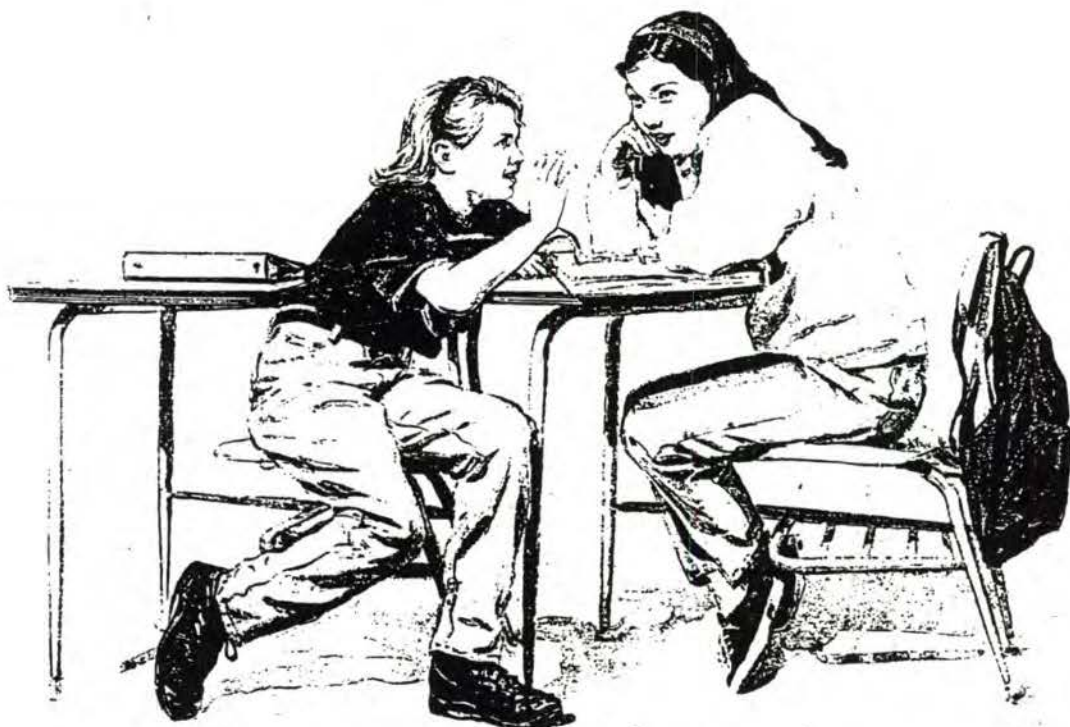
Then Nick joined in: "So you're saying, don't judge people by what they wear. I guess. But I still don't know if I want to hang out with somebody who doesn't dress cool."

Lickona is all for having students read and reflect on literature, history and philosophy, but he believes that character education must involve more than books if students are to get a grounding in basic values. He instructs teachers to use all aspects of school life: "the teacher's moral example; building a caring classroom community; handling discipline so as to develop self-discipline; having high academic standards; conflict resolution; the schoolwide ethos; school and community service, and parent and community support."

This is the program carried into the schools by teachers like Smith-Hansen. Typically, an individual teacher will bring aspects of character education into a regular class, like English or history. Sometimes, as in Smith-Hansen's case, a teacher interested in character education will get a school board to release her from regular classroom teaching to teach a separate course in the subject.

"Ten years ago, I asked them to consider the possibility of making character education a special class like art, music and gym," Smith-Hansen recalls. She had been teaching language arts and using selections from literary works to engage her classes in moral reasoning of the sort Lickona encourages, but she didn't think this was enough. "I believed that the students would take it more seriously, that the district would be making a statement of the importance of learning life skills and that it was more educationally sound than taking time from an academic strand. The board agreed."

In general, people in the Cortland area have been receptive, even enthusiastic, about Lickona's center and about the kind of teaching that Smith-Hansen and other students of Lickona are bringing to the area's schools. Jeffrey Holden, the father of Nate in Smith-Hansen's sixth-grade class, who is the



"I love Cindy," Judy said.

"Me too," Suzie agreed.

"And one of the reasons," Judy said, "is that she cares — like when she lectured me how Scott was wrong for me, and she was right."

"Totally."

"But I also don't want to hurt her. You don't do that to somebody you care about."

"Uh-huh."

"So what about the way her boyfriend keeps hitting on me?"

supervisor of a local electric power plant, talked over the subject matter with Smith-Hansen before Nate took the course. He walked away, he said, with "no reservations at all." He calls character education "a great hope for our future."

The reason Smith-Hansen's class is especially valuable, he says, "is that it encourages kids to discuss the issues with their parents at home."

I asked him: "But what if home doesn't want to hear such talk?"

"Then," Holden replied, "those are the kids who need the class most."

Over the years, Smith-Hansen has been challenged by parents who were afraid that her course would contradict their religious beliefs. "I respect the religious traditions of any family," she says, "and I know that what I teach would survive inspection by any religion." Yet she has been willing to

compromise. One of her students this year is a Christian Scientist. By agreement with the parents, that student will be absent when Smith-Hansen teaches about AIDS prevention, since such a discussion involves viruses as a cause of illness and death.

The reality is that Smith-Hansen will not know where parental opposition lies, because it's usually hidden. "I encourage understanding that precludes racial hatred, violence in personal conflicts, stereotyping and other such attitudes. Of course, this teaching will clash with the attitudes of some parents. It's far more likely that they will trash me at the dinner table." A child once reported that his father ran an illegal cockfight in their basement. "We had to confront that."

She has "lost" only one student. The mother used drugs, Smith-Hansen

says, and "she believed that using drugs was a personal right. She told me she didn't want her child to develop negative attitudes toward her or her friends. I was pretty speechless." The child, Smith-Hansen added, developed a drug problem of her own.

THE CORTLAND-LANSING-ITHACA AREA IS BY AND LARGE LIBERAL politically and culturally, and it is not surprising that Lickona's teaching has taken hold. I did speak with one local skeptic. Richard Baer Jr., a professor of natural resources in the school of agriculture at Cornell, has found fault with the content of some courses ("bland pabulum") and he complained to me that there is no empirical evidence that character education actually improves character. But Baer's main concern is that the public schools will become centers of a cultural war between those on the right who believe that character education must incorporate religion and those on the left who do not want religious teaching included at all.

Educators and parents around the country share this concern of Baer's about the intrusion of religion. The American Civil Liberties Union is leery of character education, on the grounds that it will provide opportunities for people to impose religious views. Nadine Strossen, the A.C.L.U.'s president, argues that "it's very hard to sort out subtle indoctrination or abuse. The students may not realize what's going on." On the right, meanwhile, organizations like Concerned Women of America and Citizens for Excellence in Education are hostile to character education because they believe that public education cannot be trusted with moral issues — that in its insistent secularism it will wind up being antichurch.

Charles Haynes of the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center at Vanderbilt University says that the now widely used "outcomes based" curriculum, which requires a demonstration that an education show concrete results, has scared some conservatives off character education. "They're asking: 'Will students have to prove themselves tolerant? If that's the outcome, will our religion be labeled intolerant?'" Thus, while few religious organizations have a formal stand on character education, most are opposed in general to the notion of schools getting involved in what has traditionally been the province of church and family. As the character education movement grows, religious leaders are likely to become more vocal in opposition to it.

Still, when asked for any examples of abuses in character education classes, neither religious groups nor liberal watchdog organizations like the A.C.L.U. can cite them. Maybe this is because the movement is so young. Or maybe it has to do with the fact that, as Derek Bok, the former president of Harvard, puts it, "There are certain fundamental principles that are not a matter of debate." Or as Charles Haynes, who himself approves of a modest approach to character education, sees it: "We need a civic framework. This country was founded on an understanding that one has to be a good citizen. About character education most people are not asking 'if' but 'how.'"

THE "HOW" QUESTION IS KEY, AND IT BRINGS ONE BACK TO LICKONA, the teacher of those who teach. The question involves not only the personality and methods of the teacher but the values and how they are expressed. The old "whose values" problem remains and, in a way, Lickona both settles the problem and exacerbates it. He is a former antiwar protester and Eugene McCarthy campaigner, and a conservative Catholic as well. Possessed of a self-scrutinizing mind, he is willing to reconsider ideas that he also holds as tenets of faith. In this complicated combination of explorative and authoritarian thinking, he embodies the full range of his movement's possibilities, which may be why he is best qualified to lead it. Yet, intellectual fair play aside, if a teacher of character education truly believes in definite rights and wrongs, especially if they are spiritually or dogmatically based, why would he or she wish to refrain from promoting his or her absolute values?

I put this question to Lickona on a visit to his home in Cortland — a small frame house a short walk to the campus, where he and his wife, Judy, have



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"One of the virtues one teaches," says Thomas Lickona, "is the virtue of striving toward virtue."

reared their two boys. Its atmosphere speaks both for Lickona's scholarship and for his faith. The few places where there are no piles of books and papers, there are religious icons. In the living room, a painting of Jesus hangs above a large plaster statue of the Virgin.

Facing me, he takes the easy chair with the broken cushion springs. We talk in a small wing at the far end of the house. A picture window displays the backyard. The ground is covered with snow from which rises a grotto to the Virgin and a statue of St. Francis — "to protect the birds from the cat," he says. "I have no statue to protect the cat from the dog." His voice, a soothing rumble, sounds a bit like Tom Brokaw's. He is 52 and his face is young, but he surrounds it with an Amish-like beard that gives him a look of the ancients.

I ask him: "How do you discuss the touchier items of moral inquiry and debate without on the one hand asserting a value and on the other stating that all values are equal?"

"Students must be challenged to investigate the best arguments and evidence on both sides of the question," he says. "I think students have more intellectual freedom if the teacher doesn't tip his or her hand on the issue at the outset. But even if the teacher does disclose a personal position on the controversial issue, the teacher must scrupulously refrain from using the classroom as a platform for advocating a personal ideology on a given issue. In dealing with an issue like abortion, the teacher's first job is to make it clear that this is a highly controversial issue and to make available the full range of opinion. The whole debate. To challenge students to read and reflect on opposing views. One should also encourage students to interview their family members about the controversial issue at hand, which tends to build trust between the school and the family.

"But I also think that we should avoid tackling the controversial issues until the character program is firmly established. And then save more difficult inquiry for the secondary level. A lot of people, when they

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think values, they immediately think value conflict. And they know that society is deeply divided on issues of gay rights, euthanasia and capital punishment and they assume that values education is going to mean bringing all these controversies that are tearing our country apart into the schools. Which will, you know, then simply tear our schools apart. So I think it makes a good case that the proper emphasis at the outset is to teach the basics. Teach the basic qualities of honesty and hard work and decency, justice, caring, loyalty, friendship and so on. And to save other issues for later on down the road."

I ask him: "But if one believes, as you do, that abortion is wrong, why not teach that abortion is wrong?"

"Well, the distinction would have to be made between virtues that everyone agrees on and the application of the virtues to a particular problem. Abortion becomes a difficult case because values are in conflict. Life on the one hand and liberty on the other. One can get students to press beyond simply recognizing that there's a conflict to examining the reasons that would underlie one or another position. It's not an easy road for a teacher to take, obviously, because the teacher's own bias will always be a factor. Some people split on this issue and think that the educator, in assuming a neutral position in the classroom, teaches a bad moral lesson — that the hottest fires of hell are reserved for those who seek to preserve moral neutrality in the face of a crisis. And yet there's an issue of accountability. The teacher has to avoid using the classroom to influence either side of the controversial question because there are parents out there and constituencies out there who do not want the classroom used to promote one or another position on certain issues."

"What about sex education?" I ask.

"Sex education sort of

provides a middle case," he says, "because, on the one hand, there is controversy about whether it's right to have sex without marriage. Or whether you're being a responsible person if you use, quotes, 'protection.' On the other hand, there is an increasingly compelling case that teen-age sexual intercourse is harmful to teenagers, harmful to their partners and harmful to the society at large; that sex is not for kids. There is a less widely accepted argument that sex should be reserved for marriage, and marriage only."

"Do you believe that?" I ask.

"Yes."

"So we come to this same question of whether to teach what one believes to be right."

"When I speak to young people, I reason in the following way: I say, when you are engaged in this physical act, you are as physically close to another human being as you can be. You can't get any closer than that. When this is part of marriage, the sexual union is an expression of a larger union. The sexual love is a symbol or a sign of a marriage love. So you're joining your bodies because you've joined your lives. You're giving yourself completely, in the physical sense, because you've given yourself completely in the marriage commitment. So that the sexual union has a meaning of representing something that is much deeper, larger. Is this something that you could as readily do on the first date or after you get to know the person a little bit better? Well, you really should know them a bit better. Would it be as fitting with somebody that you didn't really care about? Well, caring can certainly make it better. And so on."

I ask him: "So, the idea, as in the other examples that you talked about, is that while you can't really say, 'How do you do, I'm Professor Chastity,' you can build the education up to the point where sexual activity, before marriage, is less attractive and less compelling. Is that what you mean?"

"Educating for chastity would stop short of trying to

get kids to that goal, because that turns kids off," he says.

"But you know where you want them to be?" I suggest.

"You know where you want them to go," he says. "And would we have ever reached a point where the institution of marriage, commitment to marriage, the institution of the family as an extension of marriage, was sufficiently re-established in society that educators could educate as forthrightly for chastity as they now do against racism and for honesty and for respect and responsibility? I hope so."

"As long as we're on the thorny subjects," I ask him, "what about prayer in the schools? You firmly believe in God as moral authority. Shouldn't God be part of character education?"

"I believe in a moment of silence," he says. "That's as far as I'll go."

"Yet you would say that moral conscience comes from God?"

"It does," he says. "But God creates us free. And we are free to acknowledge Him or not to acknowledge Him. And, in a way, he sets the educational standard in this regard."

I ask him: "In sum, is it fair to say that the more problematic and complex the moral question, the harder character education is to teach?"

"I think it's misleading to characterize these kinds of problems as lying at the heart of the movement. They do provide challenges at the higher end, but that's all. This is a very difficult enterprise. One of the virtues one teaches, and I hope practices, is the virtue of striving toward virtue. Tenyson said that humility is the mother of the other virtues because it acknowledges the struggle of leading a moral life. We have to recognize that we're often blind to our own moral shortcomings. And that we might be wrong."

OTHER QUESTIONS probably ought to be asked about the movement: What is the quality of the books used or recommended as texts? Should character education be incorporated into ex-

isting curriculums, as Lickona believes, or should it be taught in independent courses like Smith-Hansen's? How effective can it be if the society a child enters appears to offer no disincentives for antisocial behavior? And a question somewhat different from, yet at least as important as, who's values: who should be doing the teaching?

Concerning the issue of books, it is astonishing how much literature is being produced on this subject. Included among the most recent titles are: "Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong"; "Character Building: A Guide for Parents and Teachers"; "Developing Character in Students"; "Moral Classrooms, Moral Children"; "Knowledge Without Goodness Is Dangerous"; and "Hooray for Heroes." Few of these works are especially learned or revealing, except about the troubled public feeling they tap, and almost all raise as many educational problems as they purport to solve.

In "Why Johnny Can't Tell Right from Wrong," William Kilpatrick suggests that the emulation of heroes is a valuable tool for character building, but his "guide to great books for children and teachers" is frequently superficial and misleading. Captain Ahab is characterized as "a good man destroyed by pride." Joseph Conrad's Captain MacWhirr, the "hero" of "Typhoon," is commended for his "bravery and moral responsibility," when he is seen by most readers as pigheaded. An interesting omission from the list is "The Great Gatsby," since Gatsby got to his weird place on earth by strictly following a prescription for character education.

However nuanced Lickona is in his thinking and teaching, in his own popular and influential book, "Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach," he is prone to lapses and offers some skewed interpretations as well. The book names Darwin and Einstein as figures who contributed to a disintegrated view of experience — rather than having expanded knowledge. A

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recommended school curriculum includes Charles Lindbergh as an exemplar of courage without mentioning Lindbergh's pro-German activities in the early years of the Second World War.

Sometimes it appears that any book with words like "morality" or "virtue" in the title is automatically welcomed into the approved canon. A serious study like "The Moral Sense" by James Q. Wilson is placed on the same shelf of authority with William J. Bennett's commercial anthology, "The Book of Virtues," a collection of stories, essays and poems often explained in a simplifying and distorting way. The famous fence-whitewashing passage from "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" is included in Bennett's book to illustrate the virtue of work rather than the cleverness of a con game — which is the lesson Twain explicitly gave it. "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," generally

thought to be the most morally useful novel in American literature, is omitted except for a note that it "deserve[s] to be read."

The matter of where character education is most effectively located gets more problematical the higher one goes in school. Karyn Freshwater, 29, is a former student of Lickona's who teaches kindergarten in Homer, a town near Cortland. Directing 5-year-olds, she needs to make no distinction between an intellectual and a moral curriculum because the requirements of the children are basic.

"I try to teach the whole person," she says. "The little ones come to me with so few social skills. They don't even know how to ask a friend, 'Can I play?' A whole generation has grown up in a vacuum, a valueless kind of teaching that says whatever you think is right. There is so little moral education given in the home — where it rightly should be — that I feel I have to provide a foundation. One of the simplest things I do is just to teach the children to greet each other in the morn-

ing. Just say 'Hello.' Recognizing each other as people.

"I use Tom Lickona's words, 'respect' and 'responsibility,' right from the beginning of the year. Even 5-year-olds can come up with definitions of respect. I ask them, 'What is a friend?' They answer, 'A friend plays with me.' I connect that answer to the idea of respect, but I try not to ask yes or no questions. I ask, 'What does respect look like?' We make books of drawings — what a friend looks like, what a friend does."

Smith-Hansen says: "The age hardly matters. I do the same sort of thing with my sixth graders. We start on a very basic level. Read biographies. Use characters from history. Discuss current events. I feel that my job is to continually define moral issues — naming, naming, naming. A girl had her broken arm in a sling. She wanted to go to a dance, but her parents, fearing she'd be injured, said no. Then they relented, but they told her to keep the sling on during the dance. She brought the problem to the class and

the kids chipped in with everything from 'Obey your parents' to 'Take off the sling; they'll never know.' At each point, I'd stop and say: 'Now, is this honesty? Is this subterfuge? Is this personal strength?' If they give names to the associations they make, they'll know better what they're thinking."

"What did the girl finally do?" I asked.

"She said she'd go back to her parents and try to work out a compromise. Keep the sling on most of the time, but take it off for the slow dances."

But Smith-Hansen has deliberately separated her discussions of moral issues from the other subjects taught in her school. Other former Lickona students — like Ron Schuck, 34, who teaches seventh-grade science at the DeWitt Middle School in Ithaca — have not made that separation.

I VISITED SCHUCK'S SEVENTH-GRADE science class. The students had recently viewed a fictional video about a Neanderthal named Charlie the

Ice man who had lain frozen for 5,000 years and was unearthed alive. The class debate was whether Charlie should be treated like a lab animal so that scientists could study his cell structure for medical research or whether, because of his uniqueness and humanity, he ought to be allowed to remain living. Unlike Smith-Hansen's class in Lansing, Schuck's is a mixture of races and ethnic backgrounds; a variety of points of view was brought to the question. He, too, is a devoted, thoughtful teacher. But in the end, one was still left wondering whether the students would be better off learning more science and less ethics.

The problem of the extent to which character education can be divorced from social sanctions is both real and impossible to assess. This problem has been raised indirectly by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan in a noted essay in *The American Scholar* called "Defining Deviancy Down." Moynihan's point is that deviant behavior that used to be stigmatized by society is now

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tolerated or readily accepted. Teen-age pregnancy has not increased since the 1950's, but 40 years ago a pregnant teenager, reacting to social disapproval, would simply get married to adhere to social norms. If society believes that any behavior goes, what chance does character education have? As soon as character-educated children emerge from their classes, they may be confronted by a wider world that contradicts their learning.

As is true of much in education, eventually everything comes down to the quality of the individual teacher. One can imagine the character education movement in the hands of someone less moderate and self-inspecting than Lickona. Talking with several of Lickona's students, all good and dedicated people, one is reminded of how fragile education is. If this movement is going to make educational sense, much less to have any larger social benefits, it most

likely will depend on people like Smith-Hansen who know what they are doing, teach values at the right age for the students and address the subject in separate contexts of study and not as riders to existing curriculums.

There was a time when it could be assumed that the teaching of values was contained in regular subject matter, but that time may be irretrievable. The advantage of Smith-Hansen's approach is that it teaches character straight-on to a group ready and eager to apprehend it. After a certain age, character education rises into the realm of ethics debates and rational discourse, and except for the character-building that may result from an atmosphere of open inquiry, little seems to be tapped that is applicable to personal behavior.

In Smith-Hansen's class, the kids seem to be learning processes of mind that have a chance of sticking with them, though it would be a mistake to conclude that because these students are young, they are not cognizant of the more

ambiguous problems that await them. And nobody really knows how to teach virtue. In "Language and Silence," George Steiner lamented that teaching the great moral examples of human endeavor can lead anywhere, including to the Holocaust. For the moment, people like Smith-Hansen do what they can.

SMITH-HANSEN ADDRESSES the girl who reported on her grandfather using the word "nigger" and urged on him the use of "African-American": "How did it work out?"

Girl: "Well, my grandfather was angry at me, I think. But my dad said he was sorry and that he'd try not to do that when I'm around."

Boy: "I think — going back to where prejudice comes from — it might be from experience. Like if you were mugged by an Hispanic, you might be bitter to Hispanics your whole life."

Smith-Hansen: "A person could have one negative experience and then generalize about a whole people."

The girl with the braids: "I

think it starts with stereotypes. Like last week we were talking about the words 'nerd' and 'hicks.' Everybody speaks at once again."

Smith-Hansen: "O.K. We began with one of today's quotes. Let's look at the other: 'Let people know what you stand for — and what you won't stand for.' Was that being done in Germany, do you think?"

Boy: "Not by enough people."

A boy with a choppy haircut: "People didn't want to feel left out."

Smith-Hansen: "You're saying that Hitler's power grew because people were embarrassed to say that they didn't like what he was doing?"

Girl: "Not exactly embarrassed, but..."

Boy: "Scared."

Girl with the University of Hawaii sweatshirt: "Maybe they started disbelieving themselves."

Smith-Hansen: "Let's look at this other word on the board. 'Conscience.' What do you know about conscience?"

Boy: "It's like something that tells you something's bad or something's good."

Smith-Hansen: "Are you born with it?"

Girl: "Yeah."

Boy: "No. You develop it."

Smith-Hansen: "Where is it located?"

Girl in the Notre Dame sweatshirt: "In your brain."

Smith-Hansen: "So it has something to do with thought. It's not an organ."

Boy: "But it looks like people can have different kinds of consciences. What explains that? I mean, Hitler must have had a conscience. Only it was a bad conscience."

Smith-Hansen: "How do you develop a conscience?"

Boy: "Parents."

Boy: "TV. Friends."

Boy: "School."

Girl: "But I've seen other teachers in this school who are prejudiced."

Smith-Hansen: "I'm sorry to say that's true. But not most of them. You just have to follow the consequences of your conscience's thinking."

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ing. Isn't that so? Imagine yourself in a situation, Lindsay, where you're with kids at a basketball game and they start using racist words. And you're the only one who feels differently. What do you do?"

Lindsay: "I think I'd tell them that I don't like that. And I'd probably go and sit elsewhere." She hesitates. "And I think I'd also go up to the people they were saying things about and tell them I was sorry for what my friends were saying."

Smith-Hansen: "Would it be easy to do that, to be the only one?"

Lindsay: "No, I mean, you want to be with your friends. But I'd still sit somewhere else."

Boy: "I thought everybody had the same conscience."

Girl: "We do, but we don't all listen to it."

Smith-Hansen: "Any other ideas about conscience?"

Boy: "Well, someone might have a more developed conscience than someone else."

Boy: "Yeah."

Girl: "There you go."

Girl with the braids: "Don't you find your conscience in church?"

Smith-Hansen: "Yes, you can find it in church."

Same girl: "Last Sunday, my priest said that all guys are bad people and that they're going to hell."

Smith-Hansen: "Let's talk about that."

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*The Content of
America's Character:
Recovering Civic Virtue*

Edited by
Don Eberly

To be published, Fall 1995
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Chapter 1

The Content of America's Character

Don E. Eberly

This century has seen a progressive relaxation of many of our standards of behavior and the souring of many commonly held beliefs. Taken one by one, most are of little importance. Taken together, I believe they show that we have lost our way.

Dr. Benjamin Spock¹

People feel like there is nothing they can depend on, there is nothing certain.
Stanley B. Greenberg, President Clinton's Pollster²

There is a great yearning in the country to provide our national life and institutions with a larger moral dimension.

Mortimer B. Zuckerman, Editor-in-Chief, *U.S. News and World Report*³

To have people who are well informed but not constrained by conscience is, conceivably, the most dangerous outcome of education possible. Indeed, it could be argued that ignorance is better than unguided intelligence, for the most dangerous people are those who have knowledge without a moral framework. It is not the lack of technological information that threatens our society; it is the lack of wisdom, and we run the risk today of having our discoveries outdistance our moral compass.

Ernest Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for
the Advancement of Teaching.⁴

Standards of morality matter no less than standards of excellence. We are not automatons. To understand all may indeed be to forgive all, but no civilization can survive when the capacity for understanding is allowed to supersede the capacity for judgment.

Stephen Carter, Author, *Culture of Disbelief*⁵

The real answer to the perils of our time is that we simply must become more civilized. We must pay attention to something that every civilized society has given preeminent importance: instilling in our children certain fundamental traits of character - traits like honesty, compassion, courage, perseverance, altruism, and fidelity to one's commitments.

Former United States Secretary of Education William J. Bennett⁶

INTRODUCTION

The growing interest in character may be one of the most socially significant developments in the latter part of the twentieth century and one of the most telling in what it signifies about America's moral and social condition. If it is true, as is often said, that interest in the study and application of values is inversely tied to the perceived morality of society, the current level of interest suggests the depth of modern morality's descent. Opinion polls have never indicated so deep a state of anxiety about the condition of society, and rarely, in a country with a long history of apocalyptic forebodings, have so many diverse leaders gathered together around the basic proposition that America suffers from a deficit in character. From the fields of academia, business, education, journalism, and politics comes the sound of alarm: our children, our society, and our heritage face a deepening peril.

Joseph Josephson, founder of the Character Counts Coalition, states bluntly, "There is a hole in the moral ozone." William Kirkpatrick, author of *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, charges that our schools have produced a generation of "moral illiterates." Norman Lear, long a critic of religious influence in public life, is now concerned mostly about the impact of secularization. He laments the public banishment of values, blaming it in part on "the sophisticates of our politics, our culture and the media" who are embarrassed to "talk seriously about the life of the spirit."⁷

None of this is unique to the American continent. The moral disintegration now widespread in America is rooted in cultural and philosophical forces that are producing the same corrosive effects throughout the entire Western world. English historian Paul Johnson sees

a common collapse of ethical finalities throughout Western culture as the root cause of the rise of such primitive and irrational behaviors as racism, ethnic triumphalism, xenophobia, and hatred of refugees. Today's students, says Johnson, have become "fitter candidates for a mob than for a citizenry."⁸

Marian Wright Edelman of the Children's Defense Fund describes our nation as courting serious risk because of a weakening conscience. She sees a society witnessing the collapse of "nurturing families and communities," where people are turning to guns and gangs. It is a society that delivers relentless cultural messages "glamorizing violence, sex, possessions, alcohol and tobacco" and comprises "too few adult role models." It is time, says Edelman, "for all parents and adults to stop our hypocrisy and break the code of silence about the breakdown of spiritual values and parental and community responsibility to nurture and protect children."⁹

The conditions which concern these leaders were once confined to the back alleys of society. Now, they seem so close and are creating a palpable fear and visible nervousness in large cities and small towns alike, on the streets, in the schools, and at work. The portrait of American society presented in the images and language of today's popular culture is of a country in retreat from the notion of society. It is a portrait, not of self-governing citizens, but of autonomous, isolated, and self-absorbed individuals governed by an ideology of "me-ism."

America is a society in which both the individual and the state are in constant advance, while the intermediary institutions which preserve a civil and humane society are in retreat.

Political discourse rings, not with the unifying sound of moral vision but with the impoverishing and polarizing demands for either individual entitlement or government dismantlement. The good life is explained almost entirely as the pursuit of pleasure, not purpose. The highest end of life advertised by the economic marketplace is, simply, making a purchase, by credit card if necessary. In schools, children without childhoods pass through metal detectors on their way to instruction in personal safety, conflict resolution, and the avoidance of deadly transmittable diseases. In higher education, learning to think with moral clarity has been traded in for learning to sympathize with new claims of victim status. The field of law beckons the aggrieved to sue for damages, drowning the courts in the most trivial of litigation.

This is a vision not of society, but its negation. The rise of antisocial behavior in recent decades must be explained, not just by the collapse of

private conscience, but by the disintegration of the social institutions that cultivate character. Morality is not simply an abstract set of principles--it is cultivated in a society's seedbeds of virtue: the family and community institutions. Thus, the work of rebuilding character must be fused with the work of rebuilding moral community and reasserting social norms.

The recovery of individual character must be rooted in an understanding not just of the individual but of society. Most of society's most pressing social problems--from teen pregnancy, crime, and violence to the abuse and neglect of children, to our vulgar and violent culture--are just that, they are social. They will not be solved predominantly through public policy reforms--by simply applying better rewards or penalties through our tax, criminal, and welfare codes. Nor will they be solved through great and polarizing campaigns of moral rearmament. They will be solved through society-wide efforts to revitalize the institutions of civil society, to strengthen individual capacity for self-government and to renew a lost ethical order. The extent of society's crisis of character is too universal to think that change will be produced from one sector alone.

FACTS OF A CHARACTER-STARVED CULTURE

Pollster George Gallup, Jr., who has long tracked societal attitudes about values, describes having "a sinking feeling" when he looks over current computer print-outs. A recent Gallup poll showed that large majorities of the American people perceive a world of despair and division. Large majorities believe it is unsafe to visit the nation's largest cities, much less live there. Significantly, more blacks than a generation ago are convinced that America is moving toward two societies, separate and unequal, and that racial problems can not be solved. According to Gallup, "There is a harsh and mean edge to society, a society in which the very notion of a good person is often ridiculed, a society increasingly litigious, in which retribution is the operative word."¹⁰

The greatest signs of erosion can be found among the young. Author and character education expert Tom Lickona has surveyed the ethical conditions of youth and has identified ten troubling trends: rising youth violence; increasing dishonesty (lying, cheating, and stealing); growing disrespect for authority; peer cruelty; a resurgence of bigotry on school campuses, from preschool through higher education; a decline in the work ethic; sexual precocity; a growing self-centeredness and declining civic responsibility; an increase in self-destructive behavior; and ethical illiteracy.¹¹

Lickona's ten troubling trends are more than his own personal observations. They are substantiated through extensive social data and scientific surveys.

1. Since 1965, the juvenile arrest rate for violent crimes tripled, making children the fastest-growing segment of the criminal population.
2. The U.S. homicide rate for 15-to 24-year-old males is 7 times higher than Canada's and 50 times higher than Japan's.
3. The United States has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates, the highest teen abortion rate, and the highest level of drug use among young people in the developed world.¹²
4. The rate of unmarried teenagers becoming pregnant has nearly doubled since 1972, to nearly one out of ten high school girls.
5. Youth suicide has tripled over the past 25 years.
6. A survey of more than 2,000 Rhode Island students, grades six through nine, found that two out of three boys and one out of two girls thought it "acceptable for a man to force sex on a woman" if they had been dating for six months or more.
7. Scholastic Aptitude Test scores dropped 73 points from 1960 to 1993.
8. A survey of 7,000 students conducted in 1993 revealed that 61 percent had cheated on an exam in the past year; 33 percent had stolen something from a store; and 33 percent said they would lie on a resume.¹³
9. Ten percent of all teachers and 25 percent of all students had been the victim of an assault in their schools during the last year. Some type of weapon is regularly taken to school by 20 percent of all high school students.¹⁴

Then there are the press reports of increasingly commonplace tales of horrific crimes:

1. A teenager in Lonoke, Arkansas was shot dead by a friend just because she spoke. Six teenagers were hanging out on the porch of Nina Scott's grandmother's house, when Kevin Barnes told the group that, "I'm going to shoot whoever says the next word." When Nina opened her mouth, Kevin shot her through the forehead. Nina was 14, and Kevin was 18.¹⁵

2. Twelve-year-old Polly Klas was kidnapped from her own bedroom during a slumber party while her parents were in the adjoining room. She was raped and murdered.

3. In Brooklyn, three teenage boys doused sleeping homeless persons with gasoline and set them on fire. At the police station, one of the boys stated that they "just like to harass the bums."¹⁶

4. In 1990, a group of teens beat, raped, and stabbed a woman 132 times and left her for dead in a Boston park. Some of the youths said they were simply bored.

5. A *New York Times* headline story "Where Boys Will Be Boys," tells of teenage boys in Lakewood, California who have been accused of molesting and raping girls as young as ten, all the while keeping score as if the challenge compared to a slam dunk or quarterback sack. "We didn't do nothing wrong, cause it's not illegal to hook up," declares Billy Shehan, who boasts of leading the competition with 66 such "hookups."¹⁷

Finally, there is the corrosive influence of pervasive and seemingly mundane acts of dishonesty, as documented in repeated studies. Here are some of the findings of recent surveys on honesty:

1. The Josephson Institute, a California foundation devoted to the study of personal ethics, has discovered an alarmingly high number of students who steal, lie, and cheat at school, at work, and in their personal relationships. The Institute found that honesty has simply ceased to be a goal for many students. Honesty ranked sixth among high schoolers' list of priorities, behind getting into college, getting a well paying job, and paradoxically, "having trusting relationships," and "being respected for your integrity."¹⁸

2. One-third of all high school students said they were willing to lie on a resume, job application, or during a job interview to get a desired job; one out of eight college students admitted to have engaged in each of the following forms of theft or fraud: lying to an insurance company, inflating expense claims, falsifying financial aid forms, and borrowing money with no intention of paying it back; three out of five high schoolers and one in three college students admitted to cheating on an exam.¹⁹

3. In a different study, 67 percent of American high school seniors said they would happily inflate an expense account, 50 percent would pad an insurance claim, and 66 percent would willingly lie to achieve a business objective.²⁰

Like crime and other more serious offenses, basic dishonesty can be found through all ranks of society. The expectation that dishonesty may be more prevalent among the "down and outers" is contradicted by research indicating that the highest achievers in society frequently set the lowest standards. In a survey of 6,000 graduate students nationwide by Rutgers University Graduate School of Management, 57 percent admitted to cheating to get into graduate school. A 1992 survey by Shearson Lehman Brothers, Inc., a Wall Street stock brokerage firm, found that about 80 percent of people between the ages of 18 to 29 agreed that "corruption was an important factor in getting ahead."²¹ In a survey of high achieving students taken by *Who's Who Among American High School Students*, 80 percent of the students admitted to dishonesty such as copying someone else's homework or cheating on an exam.²²

CHARACTER: A CONCEPT IN RETREAT

Interest in character is anything but new. The pages of history reveal a pattern of character's emergence, its retreat, and then its reemergence out of concern for ethical standards. Character has been a central concern in societies dating back to antiquity, across all civilizations. It was a preeminent interest of America's Founders, and it was part of the defining purpose for public education throughout most of that institution's history; indeed, it was the reason public schools were created.

Throughout most of recorded history, education concerned itself with the ends, not just the means, of human existence. This was especially true during classical antiquity, but also for most of the history of America's education system. Public education had been committed to two equally important goals: helping kids to become smart and helping them to become good. The learning of facts was thought inseparable from the cultivation of habits such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, justice and fairness, civic virtue and citizenship, and caring.

It is not surprising, then, when education professionals rush to point out that the educational enterprise has always been committed to values. This is partly true of course, but it fails to take into account the nature and scale of the retreat that has occurred over the past three decades. Any serious investigation would reveal that, with regard to the ebb and flow of concern for character, American education has clearly been operating in the down cycle.

Why has character been in such retreat? It is tempting to offer simplistic theories for why morality in the latter part of the twentieth

century is at such a low ebb. There are the more obvious and plausible explanations, such as the weakening of the family and the arrival of relativism, as we will see. But there are many more, less obvious but equally consequential factors, including the rise of individualism and consumerism, and their fragmenting impact on community.

One reason values change is because the structure of societies and the patterns of work, family, and social life change. The transitions from agriculture to industrialization to the information age each produced radical differences in social life and values. Many of the sterner virtues of early America endured because they were linked to a way of life filled with unrelenting demands and risk. Most folks were well acquainted with their neighbors and lived in small villages or on the land where self-reliance and restraint toward others was valued and where individual failure or non-conformity imposed a far greater price on the community.

Whereas these older character traits were considered imperative for preparing the individual for an environment that was often harsh and demanding, these character-producing conditions have largely been eliminated by the managed economy and social welfare functions of modern society. Many question whether character can be fully restored without a return to this older way of life. Says David Frum, "If the old American culture and the old American character were rational responses to the riskiness of life, you cannot alleviate that riskiness and expect the old culture to persist."²³

Another variation of this theory is the idea that prosperity itself is destructive to the underlying virtues which brought wealth about in the first place. There appears to be support for this in sociological theory and in surveys of public attitudes over time. Sociologist Daniel Bell speaks of the cultural "contradictions of capitalism," a phenomenon describing the collapse of virtues such as industry and thrift under the softening effects of the prosperity they create. Pollster Daniel Yankelovich has surveyed shifting public attitudes on values and finds an "affluence effect" that exerts a powerful influence on cultural values.

As a basic rule, Yankelovich's "affluence effect" theory holds that people permit their commitment to values to soften when they perceive their economic futures to be relatively secure. The perception of prosperity's durability encourages "new forms of self-expression and individuality" that were thought unthinkable during earlier, less economically stable periods. By contrast, periods of economic contraction generally produce a return to the sterner values of sacrifice, work and saving, and a repudiation of the ethos of unlimited personal expression and choice. The "affluence effect"

cycle completes itself in the return of prosperity and a renewed desire for self-fulfillment, spending, living for the moment, and less conformity and self-sacrifice.²⁴

A final explanation for the collapse of character is the loss of influence by those institutions in society which have traditionally been responsible for inculcating character--parents, churches, and schools--to other cultural influences, particularly the entertainment industry, whose purpose is more tied to commercial success than public purpose. Deep and broad change has come to society, and it would be wrong to single out schools for blame. Even as the world has changed around them, schools have continued to prepare students for participation in a democratic society.

Nevertheless, the commitment to this work, as well as the content of it, was dramatically altered over the past three decades. The values education program conceived by early architects of public education focusing unreservedly on desired moral outcomes lost out to other dominant cultural and intellectual influences in the latter half of the twentieth century. Thomas Lickona identifies several powerful philosophical and cultural forces to which public schools became vulnerable: philosophical Positivism, "personalism," and "pluralism."

The Fact-Value Dichotomy

One powerful intellectual influence was the arrival from Europe of the philosophy of Logical Positivism which sought to establish a radical distinction, in the name of scientific inquiry, between facts and values. While facts existed in the objective world of research and observation, values were relegated to the subjective realm of preferences, feelings, and tastes. Facts were objective; values and notions of truth were entirely relative. As a result, says Lickona, "morality was relativized and privatized--made to seem a matter of personal 'value judgment,' not a subject for public debate and transmission through the schools."²⁵

Schools, like the society they served, steadily turned away from enforcing any common understanding of values, even of the most elementary kind. Relativism produced a paralysis over the fear that moral education involved indoctrination. The result was that schools sought to substitute "situational" ethics for transcendent and universal moral principles. The older form of moral learning involving the telling of stories with tales of courage, discipline, sacrifice, and honor were out; the presentation of ethical ambiguities in which there were no obvious heroes or villains, vice or virtue, was in.

Situational ethics eased the pressures posed by relativism by offering a vague, uncertain, and self-directed approach to morality. With situational ethics, there were endless moral dilemmas, usually involving highly remote circumstances and always weighted down with abstraction and uncertainty; for example, the lifeboat with seven passengers and provisions for only four, or the case of the doctor who considered stealing a drug to save his dying wife, and so on. The right answer was always located somewhere inside the "situation" and the person's own self-understanding. Unlike real life experience in which common standards of right conduct could be asserted in the great majority of cases, most of the situations in situational ethics could be argued either way, and as the determined relativism of the day would have it, never really settled.

The directive approach to moral education that was steadily cast away was hard to sustain because it involved judging right from wrong, good from bad. The practice of judging conduct and the content of character has become, according to ethics professor Jean Bethke Elshtain, "in bad odor. It is equated," she says, "with being punitive, or with insensitivity," or with various "phobias" or "isms," and thus has been replaced with "sensationalistic tales of victimization and equally sensationalistic proclamations of immunity from responsibility."²⁶

The abandonment of rendering judgment in the name of being open-minded and tolerant produces a paradoxical result: a loss of respect for individuals. Elshtain maintains that "judging is a sign, a mark, of our respect for the dignity of others and ourselves. The elimination of the possibility of judgment, the evacuation of the very capacity of judging, would spell the end of the human subject as a self-respecting, accountable being."²⁷

This subjectivism and its privatized concept of social values leads to another costly consequence: it produces a society in which any concept of a common moral vision is nearly impossible to come by. As columnist George Will describes it, "The idea is abroad that there is no moral heritage worth 'imposing' on children, respect for whom requires that their selection of 'values' be regarded as a mere matter of taste."²⁸ Sociologists dating back to Emile Durkheim have warned about societal disintegration resulting from the erosion of shared beliefs and common purpose. Tocqueville worried about excessive individualism and materialism producing an atomistic society. What Tocqueville was describing was not a society at all, but a collection of individuals living in resistance to the notion of enduring common interests, pursuits, traditions, or beliefs that make up a society.

The myth of value neutrality left the public in a baffled sense of drift over what, if anything, could be asserted without making someone uncomfortable. *Newsweek* captured this reflexive non-judgmentalism with its cover story in 1992 entitled "Whose Values?"²⁹

Could the schools not even teach honesty as superior to dishonesty, responsibility as more important than self-indulgence? Apparently not. According to educator William Moloney, the implied message became "Hitler and Gandhi both qualify as philosopher-kings."³⁰

The consequence of relativism is that institutions of learning themselves are now paralyzed under the weight of their own unworkable relativist philosophy. Educators became incapacitated in setting the standards of conduct that make a learning environment even possible. Former Secretary of Education William Bennett reports that in the 1940s teachers identified talking out of turn, chewing gum, making noise, running in the halls, cutting in line, dress code violations, and littering as the primary sources of disruption in school. By the 1990s, teachers identified drug abuse, alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery, and assault as top concerns.³¹

Values as Subjective Self-Expression

A second cultural development eroding character, according to Lickona, and somewhat an extension of the first, was the emergence in the 1960s of "personalism." Whereas relativism simply argued against asserting objective truth out of a desire to be non-judgmental, personalism celebrated the subjective self. Personalism exalted not just the individual over against society, but a concept of the autonomous self that distinguished itself radically from the American tradition of tempered individualism. In personalism, individualism represented a revolution in self-realization that was antagonistic toward the very notion of moral norms. Older substantive notions of character lost out to more superficial categories such as "personality," which concerned itself more with image and style than content.

Modernity has placed the sovereign, autonomous self at the center of all things, and has made moral decision-making strictly contingent upon human choice. If there is no objective basis for truth, perhaps one should simply search for meaning in human will, passion, and imagination. Self-sublimation for the sake of purposes larger than the self are, with the full blessing of this philosophical system, traded in for self-preoccupation. According to social historian Fred Siegel, America has "conducted a 30-

year experiment with desublimation," and the results, he says, have been "a disaster."³²

Another term for personalism is what philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre calls "emotivism," which is a mindset that links morality to feelings, emotions, and therapeutic notions. This morality, according to MacIntyre, holds that "all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling."³³ In other words, morality not only lacks objective grounding, the search for moral meaning within is pursued with self-reverential fascination. The result was the search for values that were "authentically mine," but not necessarily anyone else's.

Personalism was aided by various educational movements that sought to assure the student in his or her self-directed search for moral meaning. One of the primary objectives of the "values clarification" movement, for example, was to show teachers how, when it came to values, to avoid teaching all together. How one "felt" about shoplifting, for example, was frequently presented as though there was no objective standard, moral or legal, against which to judge whether one drew the right conclusion.

Personalism was also fueled by a self-esteem movement which frequently drifted toward narcissistic self-love divorced from any expectation of effort or achievement. The self-esteem movement, according to Boston University professor Steven Tigner, encouraged a "willful blindness to people's shortcomings in inducing them to feel good about themselves." The problem with this, says Tigner, is that a failure to discriminate between a person's excellent work or shoddy performance "is to deprive them of one of the chief incentives to grow, improve, and mature. If I don't distinguish their finer efforts from their failures," says Tigner, "I am not serious about that person."³⁴

Unlike previous concepts of self-respect which entailed respect for others, this is self separated from others, "narcissistic and solipsistic," according to Gertrude Himmelfarb. "The current notions of self-fulfillment, self-expression and self-realization derive from a self that does not have to prove itself by reference to any values, purposes, or persons outside of itself." Esteem is presumed," she says, "to adhere to the individual regardless of how he behaves or what he accomplishes."³⁵

It was inevitable that an ethos of self-fulfillment, advanced often in the name of rejecting social arrangements thought to be oppressive and notions of truth deemed antiquated, had to produce unexpected consequences: a weakening of social commitments, a decline in institutions such as marriage, and a weakening regard for manners and elementary mores.

In a world in which facts and values were assigned to wholly segregated

compartments, and in which personality triumphed over performance, the very notion of objective moral norms had to be forcefully cast off. The unsurprising result of this liberationist ethos was that traditional sources of moral authority were delegitimized. A Louis Harris survey of 5,000 young people asked the question: "What do you take to be the most believable authority in matters of truth?" One to two percent said science or the media. Three to four percent said religion or their parents. Most of the kids said simply "me."³⁶

In a separate poll of adults by the Gallup organization, 63 percent rejected the notion of "moral absolutes." So strong has been the commitment to relativism that even religion, still one of the most powerful forces in society, has become an appendage to subjective self, losing most of its authoritative dimensions. In the Gallup poll, 91 percent identified religion as very important in their lives, but 43 percent said "their own experience" was the most reliable guide to truth.³⁷

Secular Pluralism

The final factor in the erosion of character, according to Lickona, was the combined role of a "rapidly intensifying pluralism" and "the increasing secularization of the public arena." As America became more culturally diverse, public leaders became less, not more, inclined toward asserting a common culture consisting of core values. For schools, this represented a dramatic departure from the original vision and central mission of the public school enterprise: assimilation.

As secularism took on the form of pseudo-religion, public schools, being public and secular, simply assumed that they were forbidden from asserting any values that might be linked to religion, even though the values in question were common to virtually all cultures and religions. The result was a concept of society based on a discordant embrace of our differences, the pursuit of divergence not convergence, and the prizing of non-conformity over conformity.

The problem with this is that nations live by their myths and traditions, and in America's case, the story of America and its ideals may be the only unifying idea. Societies pay dearly when unifying ideas and myths are cast aside. Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. worries that "the historic idea of a unifying American identity is now in peril." He believes the end result will be "the fragmentation, resegregation, and tribalization of American life."³⁸

Learning respect for the accomplishments of a nation's past is necessary

to preserve a society's identity and heritage, and this job falls largely to educators. In an ethnically diverse nation like America, that means honoring the contributions of all, but the contributions of all to America, a land and a nation in which the many somehow become assimilated into the one. Schlesinger maintains that "the militants of ethnicity" now view the main objective of public education, not as assimilation, but "the protection, strengthening, celebration and perpetuation of ethnic origins and identities." But this separatism, he says, "nourishes prejudices, magnifies differences, and stirs antagonisms."³⁹

The rich heritage and contributions of all immigrant groups must be honored, and no group has a monopoly on heroes, a corner on human virtues or a special exemption from human vices. Human heroism and individual accomplishments in science, arts, and enterprise come in all colors and creeds. But in the struggle to build student self-esteem and achievement around ethnic identity, the search for shared values and common democratic interests can be quickly subordinated to more narrow objectives. Ethnic pride is a good thing, but it should not come at the expense of "ethical pride."

CHARACTER RECONSIDERED: BEYOND NEUTRALITY

Debates over values tend to raise deeper questions about social and political agendas that are frequently attached to those debates. Laments over the loss of values in society frequently produce a simple search for a guilty party or an easy theory on how the erosion came about, followed by a comforting call for a return to a lost golden age. An honest approach to restoring character will move beyond these impulses.

The sixties counterculture movement certainly produced excesses, but in many respects it merely supplied fresh impetus to a trend toward relaxing standards of conduct and expression that had been gaining strength since the beginning of the century. Moreover, the cultural revolt, in spite of its obvious excesses, was fueled by an aversion to a strict and stifling regiment of social conformity that had as much to do with power and status as in elevating traditional moral ideals.

Some of the change that came about during and after the cultural convulsions of the 1960s nearly all Americans support and few would reverse. Most acknowledge that the change opened up new horizons of opportunity and individual choice in society, especially for those who had long been denied it. The key to making new advances in individual character may be in accepting that, while the worst excesses of cultural

change must be moderated, the best results are here to stay.

Reconsidering Relativism

If it is true that schools are losing their way on values due to cultural and philosophical forces, the public debate has done little to help. A major detriment has been the tendency of the political debate to repeatedly present the public with false choices. On values, the false choice was either secularism or sectarianism, relativism or absolutism, implying there was no common ground to be found across cultural and religious heritages.

As is frequently the case, however, fragmented debates only open up opportunities for others to enter the process in search of synthesis. The Character Counts movement represents a rare attempt to transcend political and ideological boundaries. Character, as a concept, is neither liberal nor conservative because it is not primarily about political ideology or competing policy programs. It is pre-political. The character movement includes diverse figures ranging from liberal Barbara Jordan to conservative William Bennett. According to Jordan, "there is no ideological tension here." The movement's literature announces a desire simply to replace situation ethics and moral relativism with the advancement of character in "a common language."⁴⁰ This is done by promoting the six pillars of character: trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship.

The coalition reflects what majorities believe. According to polls, substantial majorities believe it is possible to find common agreement on the core principles and values that should be imparted to youth. According to pollster George Gallup, "surprisingly high" agreement can be found on such key tenets as the golden rule and religious tolerance. Two adults in three (69 percent) think it is possible to secure community agreement on the basic values that should be taught. Ninety-seven percent believe honesty should be taught; 93 percent, belief in democracy; 91 percent, caring for family and friends; 91 percent, moral courage; 90 percent, the golden rule; 93 percent, acceptance of people of different races and ethnic backgrounds; 87 percent, acceptance of unpopular political and social views; and 73 percent, teaching sexual abstinence outside of marriage.⁴¹

The project of restoring sound character can be undertaken independent of political debate over issues that divide; indeed, a broad embrace of character throughout society might make those debates more fruitful. Moral and ethical questions need not produce partisan or ideological

responses. As William Bennett said in the introduction to his *Book of Virtues*:

Good people--people of character and moral literacy--can be conservative and good people can be liberal. We must not permit our disputes over thorny political questions to obscure the obligation we have to offer instruction to all our young people in the area in which we have, as a society, reached a consensus: namely, on the importance of good character, and on some of its pervasive particulars.⁴²

Both the Left and Right frequently confuse the quest for ethics with social policy debates: the Left with poverty, injustice, and racism; the Right with abortion, alternative lifestyles, and destruction of the family. These are important public issues which cannot be separated entirely from private moral convictions, but they are public issues, and are no substitute for the pursuit of virtuous individual behavior.

The shortsightedness of this approach is displayed in an experience related by ethics professor Christina Hoff Sommers. A colleague of hers insisted that discussions of ethics focus on such issues as corporate corruption, capital punishment, or Third World transgressions. The concern of ethics, according to this professor, was whether private institutions, the government, or society itself is moral. Discussion of private morals such as honesty, decency, responsibility, or honor were automatically assumed to be of secondary importance, if not avoided altogether. The professor in question was stunned when she discovered that many of her students had cheated on their social justice take-home exams. She conceded that ethics had to include matters of private morality.

The quest for character is not primarily about resolving issues of public or institutional ethics, although it should certainly contribute to improved thinking about these things, as well as more reasonable public debate about them. There is far less disagreement over the core principles of character than there is over divisive social issues. Before aspiring to transform a society along ethical lines, the person of character is encouraged to seek the development of his own integrity and moral wisdom. Professor Andrew Oldenquist says, "Principled behavior is simply more important than reasoning about controversies, though both are important." The inculcation of civilized moral habits, he says, logically precedes the study of social dilemmas if the society in which those controversies are argued is "to be minimally safe and satisfying."⁴³

This confusion of character with either vexing situational ethics or

divisive public policy debates has contributed to the continuing doubt over the nature of moral education; whether it is little more than the imposition of one particular view on others. The question of what is morality, and whether it can be taught, as opposed to caught, is essential. Is the knowledge and practice of morality a function of hearing morality or of habituation into it? Is it mostly about making and enforcing external rules, or is it about making self-regulating people? Is it a result of self-discovery, inculcation, indoctrination, habituation, or a combination thereof?

Efforts to impart morality in youth have followed dramatically different approaches in recent decades. As discussed earlier, there were the movements of situation ethics and values clarification in the 1960s and 1970s. There were new approaches in the 1970s promoted principally by Lawrence Kohlberg involving "rational decision" making, which were less relativistic and more oriented toward the development of moral reasoning skills. Character education, an even more recent development, differs from both the values clarification approach and the Kohlbergian moral development approach. Character programs typically endorse specific content, such as the moral virtues of honesty, courage, and kindness, and they attempt to guide the student toward behaviors consistent with those relevant values. It assumes that certain moral claims are, in fact, legitimate; that all values are not equal.

In effect, character education represents a return to a more classical notion of moral education that bases itself on expected behaviors rooted in values that are universally found in successful societies.

Character's Universality

Because of the confusion over what exactly the enterprise of moral education entails, its advancement is usually impeded by doubts relating to "whose values?" should be taught. The concern is that a system of values cannot be constructed or taught without favoring one religion or culture over another. Yet as C. S. Lewis, himself a devout Christian, pointed out in *The Abolition of Man*, there are certain universal ideas of right and wrong that recur in the writings of ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hebrews, Chinese, Norse, Indians, and Greeks, along with Anglo-Saxon and American writings.

Lewis calls these transcendent principles the *Tao*, a term borrowed from the Chinese which means simply "the way." Rooted in the laws of nature, the *Tao* is a road that leads to the good life, and to harmony with nature

and its maker. This concept bases such moral imperatives as the care for the young and veneration of the old, not on subjective human psychology, but in universal principles of justice that transcend individuals and cultures.

That these core principles emerged around the globe throughout the millennia, independent of one another, on vastly different soil, producing the same successful civilizations, regardless of race or religion, confirms Lewis's suggestion that they are rooted in the natural laws of the universe, not just Christian doctrines of revelation, for example.

The common core virtues that C. S. Lewis identifies are not ethnocentric; they span time, cultures, and religions. To abandon them, says Lewis, is to sap a civilization of its dynamism, creativity, and coherence. When societies abandon the *Tao*, according to Lewis, they produce "men without chests," of whom society then vainly expects "virtue and enterprise." To step outside the *Tao*, according to Lewis, is to have "stepped into the void"—it is socially suicidal.⁴⁴

What was this *Tao* that could not be abandoned?

1. THE LAW OF BENEFICENCE. This rule recognizes the importance of kindness, shared generously for the sake of society. For example, do not murder, oppress, bear false witness, hate; be kind and good; give alms. The Egyptians: "I have not brought misery upon my fellows." The Hindu: "He who is cruel and calumnious has the character of a cat." Chinese: "He whose heart is in the smallest degree set upon goodness will dislike no one."

2. DUTY TO FAMILY. Family is recognized everywhere as deserving of special love and the highest form of loyalty. Children are owed unique care and responsibility by their parents. Marriage involves specific rights as well as responsibilities. According to the ancient Hindu and Jewish traditions, honoring your father and mother is one of life's first duties. Respecting and caring for our aging kin is an unavoidable obligation, according to Jewish and Egyptian traditions. According to the ancient Greek, Epictetus, marrying and begetting children is a great honor and sacred duty because it is upon this foundation that the commonwealth rests.

3. THE LAW OF JUSTICE. This principle establishes standards of right and wrong in the area of human conduct, such as respecting private and common property, treating one another with basic honesty, not offering or taking bribes, and not avenging wrongdoing in violation of the law. The Egyptians encouraged fairmindedness and impartiality before the law: "Regard him whom thou knowest like him whom thou knowest not." Ancient Jewish standards guarded against partiality on the basis of means or social

status: "Do not consider the fact that one party is poor nor the fact that the other is a great man."

4. THE LAW OF GOOD FAITH AND VERACITY. This ancient law issued the sternest warnings against general falsehood: lying, cheating, defrauding. The ancient Chinese admonished: "Be of unwavering good faith." An Anglo-Saxon writer boasted: "I sought no trickery, nor swore false oaths." "The foundation of justice is good faith," said Cicero of ancient Rome. "Anything is better than treachery," said the ancient Norse.

5. THE LAW OF MERCY. This law summons the strong to care for the weak, infirmed, and dying. For example, "give bread to the hungry" (Egyptian); "never strike a woman" (Hindu); "make intercession for the weak" (Babylonian); "take care of widows, orphans and old men" (American Indian).

6. THE LAW OF MAGNANIMITY. This principle encourages the citizen to seek to live a good life of courage and honor. Some things, for many ancients, were worse than death, like treachery, murder, betrayal, and torturing another person. "Death is better for every man than life with shame," said the Anglo-Saxons. "Praise and imitate that man to whom, while life is pleasing, death is not grievous," said Seneca the stoic. "Love learning and if attacked be ready to die for the Good Way," wrote the ancient Chinese.

These universal principles embodied what C. S. Lewis called "a common human law of action which can overarch rulers and ruled alike." Belief in the *Tao* is necessary to "the very idea of a rule which is not tyranny."⁴⁵

Many of the purveyors of these human values on the American continent were originally "white European males," as today's multiculturalists would describe them, owing to the homogeneous makeup of America at the time of the country's founding. Yet, the framers were drawing from a deeper and more diverse well of antiquity than simply European culture. The virtues not only transcend cultures, they predate the Victorian Age and terms like "bourgeois" values by thousands of years.

Ben Franklin's comprehensive list of virtues--temperance, silence, order, resolution, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility--are virtues that humane societies everywhere have sought to keep in wide practice. These were thought to be virtues that nourished human civilization. Only the modern mind would view them skeptically and consider itself wise enough to invent moral principles that are newer and better. The ancient Greeks had a word for this: *hubris*.

CONCLUSION

If there is a basis for optimism in America it is that the nation harbors a unique capacity for self-renewal. Periodically, major social reform movements have come along seeking to address society's basic deficiencies -- community standards gone lax, behavioral norms gone soft, public ideals in retreat.

This volume is offered by its editor and contributing authors as a critical analysis and hopeful guide of the job that now lies ahead for refurbishing the nation's slumping regard for individual character and social values. It examines the theory and origins of character as well as the many practical strategies for renewing character.

It is offered in the hope that many Americans from diverse walks of life will discover a new vision for citizenship based on character and will apply it in their neighborhoods and professional fields of endeavor.

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Chapter 2

Building the Habitat of Character

Don E. Eberly

THE ACQUISITION OF CHARACTER

Being convinced of what character is, and of its need, is not enough. The restoration of character must be guided by sound theories of how it is imparted. Good character, according to Tom Lickona, consists of "knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good."¹

In other words, character has cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. It requires use of the head, the heart, and the hands. The cognitive side supplies the knowledge of right and wrong. The emotional side provides the bridge between personal judgment and responsible action. It includes conscience as well as empathy, which supplies the sense of obligation to do something with what you know. To possess and live out good character, the individual must desire the good, must be aware of specific moral qualities that are expected in a character-centered society, and must be able to apply these qualities to concrete cases through rational, moral decision-making.

THE HABITS OF CHARACTER

Aristotle differentiated between mere learning of facts, which was the function of pedagogy or of intellectual search, and acquiring wisdom. The Aristotelian view suggests that individuals do not come by good character simply through moral instruction, but rather through the repetitious doing

of good and heroic deeds. Character is not compartmentalized in a class: it is caught in the daily routines of ordinary life.

Moral virtues, such as courage or honor, come about as a result of "habit," says Aristotle. We become "just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts."²

Sound character, according to this school, is acquired through the development of sound habit, or through "habituation," to use James Q. Wilson's familiar term. Family habituation in particular, according to Wilson, is "the chief method by which every society induces its members to exercise a modicum of self-control and to assign a reasonable value to the preferences of others."³

Wilson defines the term habituation to mean "the process whereby people acquire a constant, often unconscious, way of doing something, a regular inclination to behave in ways that are either impulsive or reflective, self-indulgent or other-regarding, decent or indecent."⁴

When right actions are regularly, promptly, and consistently followed by approval and rewards and when wrong actions are regularly, promptly, and consistently followed by disapproval and punishments, good behavior becomes more common and bad behavior less so.⁵

At the core of character are the notions of respect and responsibility. To act with responsibility for one's actions, one must be willing to take into account the consequences of one's behavior on others. To act consistently with respect toward others, one must have high regard for their inherent worth, which is acquired predominantly through a complex developmental process in early childhood in which impulsiveness is controlled out of sympathy for others.

Strategies for renewing character must be consistent and comprehensive, which means that certain primary sources such as family and kin are vital. Countless studies confirm the basic conclusion that human bonds--primarily those of the family--are indispensable to achieving emotional and cognitive well-being. In the family individuals develop the capacity for self-control and respect for the worth of others. Many ordinary problems of youth are rooted in the weakness or complete absence of the restraints that are acquired through parental nurturing. The most extreme forms of anti-social behavior, such as ruthless crime, are often explained by the lack of parental competence.

When this direct ordering of moral life is attempted in the schools, some may mistake it as a form of indoctrination. To be introduced to the habits of character, the student must indeed be predisposed toward a certain

conception of the good, and reinforced for pursuing it. It is difficult to imagine how such a process could be avoided in any moral training program. Schools have always operated in accordance with some elementary notion of the good, if for no other reason than preparing citizens for democracy, and this requires imparting the virtues of self-government and respect for the rights of others. Moreover, this aspect of character education is consistent with the responsibility that has fallen to adults for the care and training of children throughout all of history.

While character education seeks to impart a clear moral understanding, it does so by virtue of an approach that develops the student's capacity for moral decision making. The student is taught to think critically and to present justification for his actions. Aristotle himself affirmed the importance of both acquiring moral wisdom as well as for the individual to be granted choice in his actions.

THE HABITAT OF CHARACTER

Character development is not just an individual process, nor is it simply a function of pedagogy. Man does not stand alone in a universe of moral abstractions; he is a social being who comes by his moral development through a process that is social. In a free and democratic society, the individual and the society influence one another. Because free and just societies depend upon virtuous people for their success, they normally take the work of preserving virtue in the people seriously. The root meaning of the Greek word for ethics (*ethikos*) signifies an ethos that is rooted in community and transmitted through customs.

Restoring character, therefore, also requires a sociology of character. The problem with many efforts to guide moral reform, according to communitarian Amitai Etzioni, is that they are "asociological," which is to say that they address moral life as though it is simply a matter of developing individual conscience. In the process, says Etzioni, "many Americans disregard the crucial role of the community in reinforcing the individual's moral commitments."⁶ Individuals are powerfully affected by "the approbation and censure" of others, especially those with whom we have close relations, such as family and neighbors. A society that wishes to preserve character, then, will encourage these voices in the community to speak in "unison and with clarity" in a way that strengthens individual judgments about right and wrong.⁷

Similar to Etzioni is Robert Nisbet's notion of a sociology of virtue, focusing on the protection and nurturing of "the varied groups and

associations which form the building blocks of the social order."⁸ These are the voluntary associations through whom a society nourishes the habits of citizenship, strengthens the ideals of self-improvement, and fortifies the foundations of character. Tocqueville marveled at the force of "voluntary associations" and what he called the "spirit of township" through which the habits of citizenship and generous regard for the public interest flourished. Building character in and through these structures requires building what Harvard professor Robert Putman calls "civic community,"⁹ or what David Green, author of *Reinventing Civil Society*, calls "communal liberalism."¹⁰

This sector is civil society, the realm between the individual and the state in which citizens conduct much of their lives and join together to mediate decisions and conflicts. A well-functioning society depends upon what Burke called "little platoons,"¹¹ Emile Durkheim called "the little aggregations,"¹² and Christopher Dawson called the "interpenetrating orders--political, economic, cultural, and religious."¹³

BUILDING A CULTURE OF CHARACTER

Children learn values from life--from family, from teachers and peers, church, athletics, the media and movies, the library, travel, and a host of other social activities. In decrying the corruption of character in individuals, it is easy to single out for blame the primary shapers of an individual's character, namely parents and teachers, while ignoring the tide of influence coming from sources well beyond their control.

Culture exerts a powerful force over the entire enterprise of character formation. Culture functions as both society's thermometer and thermostat: it shapes and reflects society's deeper values and meaning. Thus, the content of culture can easily overwhelm other functions in society, such as politics and economics, by its force. In fact, a nation's political and economic systems are vessels into which the culture's preeminent values are constantly poured.

A healthy culture is not indifferent to its effect on individual character. Culture either elevates or debases, summons the noble or ignoble, generates public spiritedness or self-absorption. In other words, culture either cultivates or corrupts character. If a society wishes to see character flourish, it must create a culture of character operating throughout all spheres of society--the home, neighborhood, schools and workplace, and the powerful character-shaping institutions of media and entertainment.

Individual resistance to negative cultural influences is a fine and heroic pursuit, but as any parent knows, solitary efforts rarely succeed. Gertrude

Himmelfarb says, "Individuals, families, churches, and communities cannot operate in isolation, cannot long maintain values at odds with those legitimated by the state and popularized by culture. It takes a great effort of will and intellect for the individual to decide for himself that something is immoral and to act on that belief when the law declares it legal and the culture deems it acceptable."¹⁴ Values, she says, require legitimization.

Parents, teachers, and community leaders operating at the bottom of society need a lot of help from the intellectual, journalistic, and entertainment elites operating at the top of culture. George Will suggests that much of the moral corruption of society "comes from the top down." We live, he says, in "a trickle-down culture that begins with the idea that the good life consists of satisfying every impulse." Many cultural leaders, he says, "have helped supplant the moral categories essential to civilized living, replacing them with a thin-gruel vocabulary of "lifestyles" and "values" and "self-esteem."¹⁵

C. S. Lewis maintained moral principles were learned indirectly from others around us--moral exemplars--and that it was difficult to preserve virtuous individuals apart from a virtuous society. Unfortunately, the tendency of culture shapers is often to offend and disturb, as Lionel Trilling said in his famous essays entitled *Beyond Culture*. It is to generate, Trilling says, a "disenchantment of our culture with culture itself."

Michael Josephson particularly blames the "incredibly bad parade of examples" of public figures from sports, business, and politics. He says that, based upon cultural programming, kids "grow up believing that successful people lie and cheat and steal. That's the environment in which they're learning values today."¹⁶

Media/Entertainment

Until very recently, society made a concerted effort to protect childhood as a period of relative innocence from premature negative influences. Children were to be nurtured in an unhurried environment, protected by all adults from the coarse and cruel influences that would come.

That was before the rise of an entertainment and media culture in which the marketplace is king and increasingly exasperated parents struggle to remain moral guardians of their children. No strategy to restore character to American life will be successful unless it includes a plan to raise the level of responsibility within the national media and entertainment for the sake of children.

So dominant is the media in American culture that we are becoming "a society created by the media," according to Henry Johnson.¹⁷ The direction of society is more and more determined by massive media enterprises employing the techniques of mass media and determined, by whatever means necessary, to reach and hold mass audiences. In a society in which the medium is the message, the medium itself dominates, if not completely determines, the conversation over who we are and ought to be. The omnipresence of the media has fundamentally affected all aspects of American life, private and public. It has even radically altered our understanding of the public sphere, and how we view and talk about our public problems. By any measurement, our discourse has become superficial and debased.

From the revolutionary period, through the Civil War and until the recent rise of electronic media, the heart of the American democratic experience was the rhetorical tradition. Through the printed word, colonial Americans read Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* and nineteenth century Americans read George Whitefield's sermons and *McGuffey's Readers*, by the tens of millions. Society celebrated the printed word. According to Neil Postman, when Charles Dickens visited America in 1842, he received the adulation that is reserved today for TV celebrities and football quarterbacks.¹⁸

The records of history suggest that just about everybody read. Under the governance of the printing press, says Postman, discourse in America was "generally coherent, serious, and rational." Under television, he says, it has become "dangerous nonsense...shriveled and absurd." With television, the viewer is ushered into a world of images and emotions in which fact and fiction are blurred. The viewer becomes passive, his mind largely disengaged, his moral sensibilities neutralized. Rational forms of discourse and human exchange are traded in for entertaining fantasy. Even otherwise serious matters--like religion, children's programming, and the evening news--is transformed through television into the same entertaining format. Compared to debates over slavery in which each antagonist was given up to three hours to make his case, complex reality is conveyed via television in 15 second snippets of sights and sounds.

Mortimer Zuckerman, Editor-in-Chief of *U.S. News and World Report*, has said that the nation's moral "redemption" must begin in two areas: education and television. It is hard to imagine moral reform coming to a nation without the help of television executives. Society, says Zuckerman, must find some way for television to have a higher purpose than merely making money.¹⁹

For many kids, television may exert more influence than parents and teachers combined. Children spend more waking hours at school than with their parents, but even more hours annually in front of television than in the classroom. The average teenager spends 1.8 hours a week reading, 5.6 hours a week on homework, and 21 hours a week watching television. Quality time with parents, according to numerous studies, is facing near extinction in many households.

The content that comes from the television tutor is not encouraging. Children are being raised in a social environment drenched in violence. A 1990 study by the American Psychological Association concluded that by his or her 10th birthday, an American child typically witnesses 8,000 simulated murders and more than 100,000 other acts of simulated violence.²⁰ In many distressed neighborhoods, television fiction increasingly blends with reality as poorly socialized kids are raised on a daily desensitizing diet of TV violence which portrays real life crimes previously unthinkable.

Then there is the permeating presence of sexual themes and innuendo. *Time* describes "the saturation of American culture with sexual messages, themes, images, and exhortations." According to the Center for Population Options, teens typically watch five hours of television a day--which in a year means they have seen nearly 14,000 sexual encounters. Whether TV, MTV, Calvin Klein ads, or the heavy-breathing movies of mainstream theater, everywhere kids turn adults seem to be undressing. The results? More than a third of 15-year-old boys and 27 percent of 15-year-old girls have had sex. By the end of teen years, it is 75 percent. One-fourth of teens contract some venereal disease each year. Teens are the fastest growing segment of the population infected with the AIDS (HIV) virus.²¹

This is the media environment in which all countervailing movements, such as teen abstinence, parental responsibility, and the character movement, must operate. Not surprisingly, polls reveal a deep discouragement among parents over the loss of parental control and the demise of childhood. Writing for *Newsweek*, author and playwright Joy Overbeck describes the experience of raising her eight-year-old daughter in a culture in which she is "bathed in the fantasy of bodies and beauty that marinates our entire culture. The result is an insidious form of premature sexual awakening that is stealing our kids' youth." The message of our popular culture for any observant eight-year-old, says Overbeck, is: "sex rules."²²

Character and the Marketplace

America is the world's most successful market economy. Billions of daily marketplace transactions exert a powerful, often unseen, influence over the individuals who participate as producers, workers, and consumers of goods, services, and values. Most adults spend the greater part of their waking hours pursuing some remunerative activity in the marketplace. Business professionals and managers carry a heavy responsibility in determining whether the corporate culture is one that values or devalues character.

For decades, the pursuit of ethics in business received little encouragement from the nation's top business schools. In 1979 the retiring chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission, John Shad, endowed the Harvard Business School with a grant of \$20 million for the purpose of teaching "business ethics." The receipt of this generous contribution was appreciated, but the purpose to which the money had been targeted generated immediate confusion.²³

The money arrived long after the consensus in academia over whether there was such a "discipline" as ethics had collapsed. The suggestion that a classroom enterprise such as this could possibly make men and women moral in the marketplace seemed anachronistic. This work, if it was to be conducted at all, belonged to parents and religious institutions, not scholars engaged in rational pursuits. How can matters of conscience be cultivated in a learning environment, much less applied in any systematic way?

Harvard was not unique. Many universities have long abandoned an interest in morality as inconsistent with the higher calling of scientific inquiry, preferring instead the radically rationalist and oxymoronic term "value free." There are the rigorous scientific fields of biology, geometry, and economics; then there are the unscientific and highly normative fields of moral ethics that were always seen as located adjacent to the religion department. One represents the objective world of fact and rationality, the other allegedly occupies the subjective realm of private opinion and theological speculation.

A decline in business ethics, documented extensively elsewhere, produces in hundreds of measurable ways, declining economic opportunity for those entering the marketplace. An erosion in business ethics supplies government with the rationale to resort to regulation, and forces the private sector on the defensive in countless ways from litigation to regulatory compliance. The general pattern of decline in personal moral responsibility contributes to lower worker well-being as drug and alcohol

use and family stress turns businesses into social agencies.

Business schools have recently shown signs of renewed interest in the pursuit of economic wealth by ethical means. Popular literature emphasizing quality, ethics, and character is proliferating. Steven Covey, for example, promotes the "character ethic," which he says is based upon the basic idea that "there are principles that govern human effectiveness--natural laws in the human dimension that are just as real, just as unchanging and unarguably 'there' as laws such as gravity are in the physical dimension."²⁴ In reviewing 150 years of "success" literature, Covey found the character ethic as the consistent foundation of success--principles such as courage, integrity, justice, industry, and temperance.²⁵

Stories abound about how renewed commitment to ethics translates into quality, more satisfied customers, and improved profits. Visionary leaders who enjoy influence at the top of American business and industry can play a powerful role in guiding the commercial sector back to an embrace of ethics as the key to an economy more self regulated and less fettered by external control.

Character and Public Discourse

Civil society involves the exchange of ideas--even vigorous arguments over competing ideas and values. In no area of public life are society's extremes of individualism more evident than in its public debate. Rarely is there the faintest reference to any concept of the common good. The ancients viewed politics as a means of improving man's capacity to better himself and to practice self-government. Politics was rarely separated from the deeper normative questions regarding the purposes for which citizens lived, individually and corporately. Statecraft meant more than simply advancing individual interests within the realm of government; in large measure it was soulcraft.

Politics, practiced as soulcraft, concerned itself with the condition of a person's mind and soul, his or her habits of industry, moderation, courage, public spiritedness, and capacity for sound democratic judgment--characteristics which republican forms of government were thought to depend upon for survival.

The classical philosophers were concerned about rhetoric and the public discourse. The story of the Roman Empire is the record of one monumental success heaped upon another only to be followed by the internal collapse of civilization into disorder. Disorder was fueled in part by the endless polemics that broke out between warring factions during the

latter stages of the republic, producing bitter and eventually violent recriminations. Historian Lewis Mumford described "a leaching away of meaning and a loss of faith" in the Roman Republic, and a "barbarization from within."²⁶

In other words, public discourse can contribute to, even compound, the erosion of mutual trust and respect. Without acknowledging the other's humanity, debates generate into shrill mutterings, plunging into the "objectivization"²⁷ of human beings. Whoever wins, society loses, and "the barbarian is at the gates of the city."²⁸

Anyone concerned about character in public life will be concerned about character in public discourse. To Thomas Hobbes, author of *Leviathan*, the one irreducible requirement for civil debate was possessing a genuine respect for the rights and dignity of one's fellows. He suggested the establishment of a "golden rule" for public life which held high a basic moral principle: "do not that to another which thou wouldst not have done to thyself."²⁹ He said no practitioner of democracy should "by deed, word, countenance, or gesture declare hatred or contempt for others." The reemergence of the golden rule as a unifying moral principle for children in schools might be preceded by a return to use by adults in public debate.

Policy

The work of moral habituation was once entirely the work of private institutions. But there is no denying that today's government touches about every aspect of life with its countless programs, messages, rewards and penalties, and by so doing either reinforces or undermines individual responsibility.

Public law and policy, like culture, play a critical role in the legitimization of values. The refusal of politicians to reform tort law only encourages litigation. The increasing support of rights to the exclusion of responsibilities in government policy sends a powerful message that society exclusively values the individual, and devalues the community. Unrestrained growth in public debt undoubtedly signals approval for equal levels of private borrowing.

Few would recommend turning the U.S. government into a national nanny. It was not designed for moral reformation and should not be entrusted with it. Still, government is too pervasive for policy-makers to be indifferent to its influence over character and culture. Former Department of Education Undersecretary Chester Finn maintains that the vitality of culture "is a key factor in the success and durability of nations

and peoples," and thus the maintenance of core cultural values is essential for the preservation of a free society and in a nation's long term interest. That society, "including the government," he says, must play an active role in the maintenance of values. All that Finn is recommending is that government policy "send the right messages and teach proper lessons to the whole society, and especially the young, about good behavior, sound habits, and acceptable practices."³⁰

Private institutions are superior by far and will meet less resistance than government in undertaking this function. Where policy-makers could help is in consciously strengthening the role of private value-shaping organizations which frequently suffer from government encroachment. James Q. Wilson urges policy-makers to encourage "local, private efforts that seem to do the best job at reducing drug abuse, inducing young people to marry, persuading parents, especially fathers, to take responsibility for their children, and exercising informal social control over neighborhood streets."³¹

Character and Parenting

No institution is as central to character formation as the home. Even if all other societal institutions were somehow functioning well, and the home was dysfunctional, individuals would be poorly prepared for life and social decline would soon follow. Chicago sociologist James Coleman has long argued that the strength of families is *the* variable that shapes all others. He said, "I believe the causes of the downward trends in youth character lie primarily outside the school--in the changes that have taken place in the American family."³²

Parents are under enormous stress. Not only must the family compete with powerful influences from outside the home, as discussed above, but the families have less time to pursue quality family life inside the home. The combined rise of single-parent households and the growing employment of each parent where both exist, has resulted in a precipitous drop in available time for parenting. Once the primary source of care and instruction at home, upwards of two-thirds of women have some employment outside of the home, leaving far less time for face-to-face communication with children. More instruction is delegated to television, teachers, and other caregivers.

According to Harvard professor Robert Cole, who has studied and observed children for decades, parental busyness is the primary culprit for why "children are no longer being cared for by their parents in the way

they once were." Cole blames the rise of materialism for much of the phenomenon. He says "parents are too busy spending their most precious capital--their time and energy--struggling to keep up with the MasterCard payments. They're depleted." The trade-off is that parents work longer hours so that the kids are left with "Nintendo or a pair of Nikes...big deal."³³

Every effort, including government policy reforms, must be directed at strengthening parental time, financial capacity, and competence in the care of children.

CHARACTER AND THE COMMONWEALTH--THE JOURNEY TOWARD A NEW PUBLIC PHILOSOPHY

As pointed out in the beginning of this section, Americans are in a somber mood about the state of society. Cynicism and fear are combining to erode their confidence in prevailing policies and values as well as their respect for the democratic and cultural institutions responsible for them. As polls confirm, large majorities now feel the consequences of society's decades-long process of weakening regard for character and responsibility.

The preservation of virtue was thought by many of America's Founders to be the central concern of statecraft. Madison thought it chimerical to believe a republican form of government could last without the preservation of republican virtue. As originally designed by America's framers and as observed over the years by visitors such as G. K. Chesterton and Alexis de Tocqueville, citizenship and character were the very centerpiece of what has been called the American creed. The Founders fully expected that self-interest in the pursuit of commercial advantage was a good and natural impulse but that it would be equally matched by concerted efforts to instill civic virtue. Combined, commerce and character would build a civilization rich in opportunity and civil in its manners and mores.

The existence of self-interest as a motivating force was a given; rooted as the Founders saw it, in nature. Neither was there any doubt, given man's natural tendency toward vice and faction, that the nation's leaders would take necessary steps to preserve virtue. The thought that the pursuit of virtue could be abandoned entirely for the pursuit of interests and wealth alone would have been considered inconceivable during the nation's early years.

Yet, with very few exceptions, politics in recent decades has given scant recognition to the republican virtue thought so central to American

success. Current ideologies appear either unwilling or incapable of commanding unselfish devotion to anything that might be defined as the common good; they do not even try. The language of common good, or of commonwealth--a term implying shared ideals--has fallen completely out of use.

The vision of progress that has dominated Western imagination ever since the enlightenment, according to David Walsh, has been one of "unending technological, industrial, social, and political progress."³⁴ But with the persistence of deep and seemingly intractable social problems and the arrival of a post-modernism, a weariness and wariness has set in. According to Walsh, "The age that began with the glory of the Renaissance, the bright expectations of the enlightenment, and the energies of the scientific, industrial, and political revolutions has devolved in the horror, vacuity, and mediocrity of the twentieth century." The search for human progress in the form of technical and material advances has created a society wedded to the pursuit of happiness through power, interest group privilege, litigation, and crass consumerism. The result has been the triumph of the private over the public, the individual over the community, the secular over the sacred, and commerce over character.

This is a vision for progress that assumes that continued improvement can be engineered for society from outside of man through endless economic growth (the political Right) or endless bureaucratic interventions (the political Left). The result of this vision of progress in the twentieth century has been what Peter Drucker calls "salvation by state," an almost messianic zeal for power. The striving for social progress through power was matched in fervor by a self-aggrandizing abandonment of self-governance.

Contrary to expectation, the restless search for human progress through power has done nothing to transfigure human nature. A society that was prepared to place an almost religious faith in reason, technology, and administrative expertise to deliver progress was also one that was prepared to abandon virtue. This is a republic in which the forms of thought are ideological and the mode of public action is self-interest; where the only community is faction, where public discourse consists of "rights talk," and where justice becomes a zero-sum game of gains and losses for groups.

This is a republic not of ideals or of virtue, but of commerce, legal procedure, and bureaucratic fiat. And it is not the nation that Tocqueville observed in the 1830s, which sought to "elevate the mind and teach it to regard the things of this world with generous feelings, to form and nourish strong convictions and keep alive the spirit of honorable devotedness."

This is a republic that, as the late Russell Kirk put it, has "committed taxidermy on moral categories, draining them of their richness and stuffing them full of sawdust talk of 'rights' and 'interests' and 'interstate commerce'."³⁵

This is a politicized society in which every public problem is seen as partisan property, where every public dispute is cast in the language of the tribe: "us versus them." Harvard professor Mary Ann Glendon has compared the recent tendency of our politicized society to assert political hegemony over other spheres of authority to the tendency during the French revolution to destroy all intermediary institutions in society under the slogan "there are no rights except those of individuals and the state."

There is little wonder so many Americans now fear that their public life resembles war. Societies differ in thousands of ways, but cross cultural studies indicate that the decisive characteristic is whether the culture favors and privileges its groups--family, community, corporation, or state--or whether it strictly rewards the individual.

America has always been regarded as a highly individualistic society, and a well moderated individualism is good. It supplies society with enormous energy or achievement resulting in expanding goods and opportunities for the betterment of all. But the individualism of today, coming from both the Left and the Right, celebrates untrammelled freedom from restraint or obligation. The mere mention of favoring the community over the individual, or responsibilities over rights, even if by voluntary means, provokes a fear of statism on the libertarian Right and of reaction on the Left. Efforts to build shared values are dismissed as majoritarianism, collectivism, or worse, fascism, even though the more likely path to any of those destinations is the kind of moral relativism and cultural nihilism that is currently afflicting the entire West.

There is nothing either exalted or noble, says David Walsh, about "a humanity composed of a mass of atomistic individuals, each claiming prerogative of unfettered self-expression and the limitless gratification of desire." The loss he says is respect for man as a moral and spiritual being who possesses freedom and dignity.³⁶ The autonomous person, subscribing to relativized morality, basing all ethical decisions entirely on human choice, is a person in descent.

Reversing the decline of human respect and dignity presents a new challenge for those seeking progress: viewing the challenge as mostly spiritual, psychological, and social. The chief frontiers of the future are not those of science, technology, or administrative improvements, but finding the capacity, as Robert Bellah put it, of uniting the tremendous

possibilities opened up by modern technologies with "a coherent pattern of living together."

The Paradigm of Civil Society

The American debate must move beyond the two competing paradigms of either *laissez-faire* or the welfare state, into the paradigm of a civil and humane society. Born of a growing dissatisfaction with prevailing approaches, a growing number of historians and social critics are turning to a tradition which the late Christopher Lasch described as "republicanism" or "civic humanism," which has historically been a strong competitor of liberal individualism.

The new vision of civic republicanism responds to the refusal of current ideologies to inspire constructive action beyond political organizing. It is a vision for reordering society, not just reforming government. It is a vision for achieving social change, not just ballot box victories aimed at control of Congress. It is a vision for the empowerment, not only of individuals, but of the communities that prepare individuals for citizenship.

Character and the New Localism

As pointed out previously, leaders operating at the top of society bear a heavy responsibility. Still, because of the nature of the work, renewing character will be done, as it must, at the lowest levels of society, and particularly in the non-coercive sector of civil society. This is a decentralized world conceptualized by Robert Bellah, author of *The Good Society*, as a "new localism," what Josiah Royce long ago called "provincialism," or what Lewis Mumford called "settlement."

These are visions for community, not separated from the notion of nation, but joined in local commitment to the nourishment of habits and customs which are the seedbed of character. They offer a bold call to social reformation; they seek to mobilize citizens and leaders from all sectors of society; and unashamedly call for a return to the American creed of character, self-government, and community.

Civic republicanism affirms spiritual dimensions of America's longing for renewal and seeks to confront the power of secular ideologies and intellectual paradigms that crowd out the sacred from community life. It replaces a humanism which is secular with a humanitarianism which embraces the whole man, including his spiritual and social nature.

The relationship between the health of the soul and the well-being of the

commonwealth has long been recognized in Western thought. Society is a spiritual community, said Edmund Burke. It is not an artificial construction; it is a spiritual partnership, not just between those who are living, but "between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are yet born."³⁷

The search for a transcendent foundation for law, politics, economics, and society need not be a sectarian undertaking. Civic republicanism offers a framework for transcending religious and ideological factionalism by reviving a language that is neither secular nor sectarian. It is a language of social fraternity, strengthened neighborhoods, and shared values. It is a public philosophy committed to advancing claims on society through moral means---rooted in Martin Luther King Jr.'s call to avoid the politics of resentment and bitterness. Above all, it places the focus of concern on the strengthening of those institutions which mediate between the individual and state--family, religious, civic, and voluntary associations.

THE JOURNEY OUTWARD: CHARACTER CENTERED SOCIAL CHANGE

Margaret Mead is said to have warned on her deathbed that if civilization is to survive, it will be saved, not by a reformed government, but by citizen volunteer associations "going out and taking social action." Mead was describing the restoration of civil society premised upon the strengthening of character and citizenship.

If Mead is correct, Americans have been led to expect too much change through the ballot box. Public cynicism is rooted both in a government that underperforms while overextending, and a politics that dramatically oversells itself as a source of national renewal. The result: politics asserts greater hegemony over spheres of human life and society which were never before thought to be its proper domain.

As stated by the late Russell Kirk, "A society in which men and women are morally adrift, ignorant of norms, and intent chiefly upon gratification of appetites, will be a bad society--no matter how many people vote and no matter how liberal its formal constitution may be."³⁸

When public life is dominated by the impulse to politicize, the state becomes society's master, not its servant. Greater by far than the cost of government to the taxpayer may be its harm to character-building institutions of civil society, such as the family, church, neighborhood, and other mediating structures that provide individuals meaning and social

solidarity.

As polls indicate, the public is most worried about social regression. As currently defined, politics is presented as the only instrument to change America even though many of America's weaknesses lie in the civic, cultural, and moral realms where government solutions are often deficient and unworkable. It is difficult to imagine significant breakthroughs coming from city hall or state or federal lawmakers to reduce crime, teen pregnancy, family fragmentation, dependence on drugs and alcohol, or the decline in manners and morals.

The restoration of character throughout society will require new social movements which are committed to transcending an exhausted ideological politics that defines all social and cultural problems as the appropriate target for policy agendas, not a renewed civil society, to solve.

There are signs that as the twentieth century draws to a close the century's most destructive scourge, political salvationism, may be in retreat. On the pro-government Left, growing numbers of government officials privately voice exasperation over the limited capacity of even fully funded programs or fully staffed policy departments, social agencies, and prisons to cope with spiraling social problems.

On the *laissez-faire* Right, the idea that government is always the problem and thus the answer is simply getting rid of it appears increasingly naive. There is scant evidence to support the assumption that this action alone, in a time of deepening social disorder, will cause civil society, individual virtue, and strong communities to magically reappear.

What is needed to save families, make neighborhoods friendly and safe, and restore lost virtues are dynamic new social movements centered on the restoration of character such as have come along periodically in American history. What made the difference during earlier periods of American history was the development of voluntary societies and social reform movements which sought to socialize males, curb adolescent crime, and take sterner measures to protect vulnerable children.

There is little evidence from the record of either American history or from other cultures to suggest that a rise in crime, for example, correlates with either weak economies or defective public policies. It is rather the case that the rise of general criminality tends to accompany a softening of social sanctions against radical individualism and its celebration of the release rather than restraint of impulse.

The pattern of the past suggests that change begins when growing numbers of people are appalled enough at disorder to reassert older notions of informal social control against a too dominant libertine subculture.

Values of permissiveness are forced to yield to values emphasizing the mastery of passion out of respect for the good of society.

Until recent decades, the work of moral uplift for the sake of society was thought by cultural elites to be progressive, not reactionary work. A good, progressive, and tolerant society was one that bothered to solicit good character in its citizens. Because preserving morality was not assumed to be coercive or the business of government, it was reinforced predominantly through voluntary means throughout all sectors of society.

During the nineteenth century, for example, Americans created hundreds of voluntary associations and societies aimed at social reform and moral uplift. There were spiritual awakenings, temperance movements, private charity campaigns, and children's aid societies. For the church, there was the Sunday School movement; for the unchurched, there were YMCAs and rigorous character education programs in the public schools.

Works of charity treated the whole man. Temperance cadets took aim at morally reckless youth. Poorly socialized young males were mentored by adult men. Churches did not wait for a change in Congress to rescue neglected and abandoned children. The unemployed were drawn into church-sponsored training programs that developed the habits of self-motivation as well as the skills of industry.

The results of these nineteenth century voluntary social movements to inculcate internal controls were large declines in alcohol consumption, criminality, sexual license, and a host of other social problems.

The true citizen does more than participate in elections. He or she organizes his or her community against crime, develops strategies against teen pregnancy, volunteers at the local soup kitchen, and joins the PTA. The true politician does more than simply attend to the affairs of government; he or she leads movements to strengthen the character-shaping institutions of civil society--family, neighborhood, church and synagogue, and voluntary associations.

Generating social change will require resuscitating an older and richer concept of both citizenship and politics - a tradition rooted in character.

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Chapter 9

A Comprehensive Approach to Character Education

Thomas Lickona

To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.

Theodore Roosevelt

INTRODUCTION

Moral or character education is a universal and age-old concern. In the United States, as in countries around the world, education was from the outset seen as having two great goals: helping people become smart and helping them become good.

In the United States, the 1990s are witnessing renewed attention to character education in the schools. One cause of this is the widespread breakdown of the family. Another is problems in youth character as indicated by these troubling trends:

1. Rising youth violence
2. Increasing dishonesty (lying, cheating, and stealing)
3. Growing disrespect for parents, teachers, and other legitimate authority figures
4. Peer cruelty
5. A rise in bigotry and hate crimes

6. The deterioration of language
7. A decline in the work ethic
8. Declining personal and civic responsibility
9. A rise in self-destructive behaviors such as premature sexual activity, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide
10. Ethical illiteracy, including ignorance of moral knowledge as basic as the Golden Rule and the tendency to engage in behaviors harmful to self or others without thinking it wrong.

A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO CHARACTER EDUCATION

This chapter describes a comprehensive approach to character education. This approach seeks to teach moral values directly and indirectly and to develop the kind of character that puts those values into practice. The following are the "big ideas" that define this approach:

1. "Good" can be defined in terms of moral values that have objective worth--values that affirm our human dignity and promote the good of the individual and society.
2. Two universal values form the core of a public, teachable morality: respect and responsibility.
3. *Respect* means showing regard for the worth of someone or something. It includes respect for self, respect for the rights and dignity of all persons, and respect for the environment that sustains all life. Respect is the restraining side of morality; it keeps us from hurting what we ought to value.

Responsibility is the active side of our morality. It includes taking care of self and others, fulfilling our obligations, working to improve the human condition, and taking responsibility for our actions.

Other moral values can be derived from respect and responsibility. Honesty, civility, and fairness, for example, can be seen as forms of respect. Similarly, caring, cooperation, fulfilling obligations, and moral courage are forms of responsibility.

4. If schools wish to make respect and responsibility operative values in the lives of students, they must educate for *character*.

Good character can be defined as having three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good.

Moral knowing, or cognitive side of character, includes at least six specific moral qualities: *awareness of the moral dimensions of a situation, knowing moral values and what they require of us in concrete cases, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, thoughtful decision-making, and moral self-knowledge.*

The emotional side of character includes at least the following six moral qualities: *conscience* (the felt obligation to do what one judges to be right), *self-respect, empathy, loving the good, self-control, and humility* (a willingness to both recognize and correct our moral failings).

There are times when we know what we should do, feel strongly that we should do it, yet still fail to translate moral judgment and feeling into effective moral behavior. Moral action, the third part of character, draws upon three additional moral qualities: *competence* (moral skills such as being able to solve conflicts), *will* (which mobilizes our moral judgment and feeling), and *moral habit* (which exists when a value becomes a virtue, a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way).

5. If schools wish to maximize their positive impact in the face of powerful negative influences outside the school, and if they wish to develop all three parts of character, they must take a comprehensive approach—one that uses all phases of school life as deliberate opportunities for character development.

My work with teachers and schools over the past 25 years has helped me to develop a model of comprehensive character education that includes 12 strategies, nine for the classroom and three schoolwide strategies. Let me define and briefly illustrate each of these.

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

The Teacher as Caregiver, Moral Model, and Moral Mentor

Students of all ages need to form caring attachments to adults that will motivate them to learn and to want to be good persons. This first strategy calls upon the teacher to foster such attachments by treating students with love and respect. It also calls up the teacher to set a good example, directly teach and encourage moral behavior, and correct disrespectful or irresponsible actions through individual guidance and group discussion.

For example, teacher Molly Angelini makes courtesy an important value in her fifth-grade classroom. She models courtesy in how she speaks to

her students. She requires students to apologize in writing if they call a classmate a name. She teaches them to say, "Pardon me?" instead of "What?" when they wish something repeated. When they go to lunch, she teaches them to greet the cafeteria workers by name and thank them when they put the food on their tray. And she teaches her children that all these behaviors are not mechanical gestures but meaningful ways of respecting other people.

Creating a Moral Community

Students need caring relationships with adults, but they also need caring relationships with each other. When they are part of a caring classroom community, they feel valued as persons. When they are challenged to practice respect and care in their everyday peer relations, these values begin to become part of their characters.

For example, Hal Urban, who teaches history and psychology at Woodside High School, California, does three simple things at the start of each class that take only five minutes but go a long way toward developing a sense of community. First, he asks, "Who has good news?" After the sharing of good news, he asks, "Would anyone like to affirm anyone else?" Students gradually become comfortable doing that. Finally, he asks students to take a seat different from the one they had in the previous class and take a minute to get to know their new neighbor. At the end of the semester, on course evaluations, students say that one thing they will remember about the course ten years from now is the way Mr. Urban began each class.

Moral Discipline

Moral discipline means using the creation and enforcement of rules as opportunities to foster moral reasoning, self-control, voluntary compliance with rules, and a generalized respect for others.

For example, Kim McConnel, on the first day of school, puts her sixth-graders in groups of four. She asks each group to write down, on a large sheet of paper, classroom rules that will help them: get our work done; feel safe; and be glad we're here.

When they are finished, the small groups tape their lists of suggested rules on the blackboard. Drawing from all the lists, the teacher helps the class come up a list that will serve as "our class rules."

Regardless of whether students help to create the rules, the teacher using

moral discipline ensures that students understand the moral basis of the classroom rules. A high school mathematics teacher explains his approach:

I tell my students that I have only two rules: 1) Everybody respects each other; and 2) Come prepared for class every day—which is a form of respect for me, your classmates, and yourself. If you violate one of these rules, I will stop and point out the rule. If you have been disrespectful toward someone, I'll wait for you to apologize.

With moral discipline, consequences for rule-breaking seek to teach a moral lesson (for example, why the offense was wrong;) require the student, whenever possible, to make reparation; and develop the student's self-control and willingness to follow the rule in the future.

Creating a Democratic Classroom Environment

This means involving students, on a regular basis, in shared decision-making that increases their responsibility for making the class a good place to be and to learn. The chief means of creating a democratic classroom is the class meeting. This is a meeting of the whole class emphasizing interactive discussion and problem-solving. The class meeting contributes to character development by providing a forum where students' thoughts are heard and valued and by providing a support structure for understanding, internalizing, and practicing respect and responsibility.

For example, Carl Fospero, a 20-year-old graduate student in education, was called to take over an unruly class (Introductory Spanish) of high school students whose regular teacher had suddenly died. In the month that followed the teacher's death, the students—a low-achieving group with a history of behavior problems—had become uncontrollable. They went through four substitute teachers in four weeks.

When Carl Fospero came into the class, the first thing he did was to ask every student to take out a sheet of paper and write him a letter, responding to two questions: "What are your feelings about the class? How can we make it better?"

Students complained that other substitute teachers had been "throwing worksheets at them"; they could not keep up with the material; they did not understand Spanish; they often felt embarrassed when they did not know an answer, and so on.

Carl Fospero read portions of the students' letters aloud, using them as a springboard for a discussion of how to improve the course. They

decided to slow down the pace of instruction to make sure no one got lost. They decided to make time during each class for cooperative learning--such as conversational Spanish between partners--which students found less threatening. Teacher Fospero said he also wanted to try some new things they had not done before, such as writing a play in Spanish and performing and videotaping it. The class also started to write and publish a class newspaper--in Spanish. They used their class meetings to plan these new projects, assign responsibilities, and monitor progress and problems.

Students' behavior and learning improved dramatically. Teacher Fospero had achieved this by applying a widely known but much-neglected educational principle: Involve students in making decisions about--and sharing responsibility for--the life of the classroom.

Teaching Values Through the Curriculum

There are countless opportunities for teachers to use the ethically rich content of academic subjects--such as literature, history, and science--as a vehicle for teaching values and examining moral questions. Here the teacher's question is, what are the natural intersections between the curriculum I wish to cover and the values I wish to teach?

There are outstanding published programs that illustrate how to do this. One is the Heartwood Ethics Curriculum for Children.¹ This award-winning program uses multicultural children's literature to foster seven character attributes affirmed by cultures around the world: courage, loyalty, justice, respect, hope, honesty, and love.

For each of these seven attributes, the Heartwood program provides six children's books (folk tales, hero stories, legends, and modern classics from different cultures) along with interdisciplinary activities that develop children's understanding of the particular value and how to apply it.

When the class finishes studying a particular character attribute, all the children, at a moment of their own choosing, look in the classroom mirror and ask themselves if they have shown that attribute (for example, "How have I shown courage?"; "How have I been a respectful person?"). Then the child goes to his or her Heartwood Journal and writes a personal answer to that question. This encourages children to act upon the ethical insights emerging from their reading and discussion of the value-laden literature. *Facing History and Ourselves*² is another much-acclaimed curriculum, initially developed for eighth-graders and later adapted to high school and college levels as well. This eight-week social studies

curriculum uses history, films, and guest lectures (including talks by death camp survivors) to investigate the Nazi and Armenian Holocausts. Along the way, it has students look within themselves to examine the universal human tendency toward prejudice and scapegoating.

An experimental study of this curriculum found that *Facing History* students were significantly superior in their understanding of how individuals' decisions are affected by their society and in the complexity of their reasoning about issues such as leadership, exclusion, and conflict resolution.

Cooperative Learning

Whereas curriculum-based values education teaches values and develops character through the subject matter content, cooperative learning does this through the *instructional process*. It says to the teacher: "Take what you would normally teach, teach it through cooperative learning for at least part of every day, and you will be teaching values and academics at the same time."

Cooperative learning, which can be done in pairs or small groups, contributes to character in many ways. It teaches students the value of cooperation; builds community in the classroom (reducing conflict, the research shows, and fostering friendships across racial and ethnic lines); and teaches basic life skills such as communicating and working together.

For example, in a sixth-grade classroom in Montreal, Quebec, a teacher faced the most divisive group she had ever taught. The class was torn apart by racial conflict; blacks and whites exchanged insults and physically assaulted each other during recess and after school.

The school psychologist observed the class and recommended that the teacher set up structured cooperative learning groups. Put together children who have trouble getting along, he said. Give them joint assignments and projects with roles for all members. Monitor them closely. Most important, stick with the groups even if they do not seem to be working in the beginning.

The teacher started having students work together--usually in threes or fours--in all subjects for part of each day. They worked on math problems in groups, researched social studies questions in groups, practiced reading to each other in groups, and so on.

"It took them two months to really make this work," the teacher said, "but they finally got it together. Moreover, their test scores went up." Mastering the skills of cooperative learning is a gradual, developmental

process for both teacher and students, but the academic and character development benefits--documented at all grade levels--justify the effort.

Develop the "Conscience of Craft"

The literature on moral and character education often treats moral learning and academic learning as separate spheres. But academic work and learning have moral meaning for at least three reasons:

1. Learning increases, and ignorance reduces, our ability to make informed moral judgments and participate as citizens in a complex world.
2. Work is one of the most basic ways we affect the lives of others and contribute to the human community.
3. It is a mark of people's character when they take care to perform their jobs and other tasks well. Syracuse University professor Tom Green calls this a "conscience of craft"—the capacity to feel satisfaction at a job well done and to be ashamed of slovenly work. If people lack this kind of conscience, and do not feel obligated to do good work, something basic is missing in their moral make-up.

Specific character development objectives in realm of work include: self-discipline; the ability to delay gratification; persistence in the face of discouragement; a public sense of work as affecting the lives of others; and Green's conscience of craft.

Teachers who develop these character qualities typically combine high expectations and high support. For example, Anne Ritter is the kind of teacher who believes that every child can learn. As a new teacher in her school, she taught a class of first-graders, 85 percent of whom came from families below the poverty line. She astonished fellow teachers by getting 90 percent of her class up to grade level in reading and math. Her comment: "It's the job."

When I visited her classroom, a list of classroom rules was written large and posted in the front. The first rule was: "Always do your best in everything." On the wall was a sign: A PERSON WILL SELF-DESTRUCT WITHOUT A GOAL. The "value of the month," featured on the class bulletin board, was AMBITION, defined as "hard work directed toward a worthwhile goal."

Encouraging Moral Reflection

This strategy focuses on developing the several qualities that make up the cognitive side of character: being morally aware; understanding objectively worthwhile moral values; being able to take the perspective of others; being able to reason morally; being able to make thoughtful moral decisions; and having moral self-knowledge, including the capacity for self-criticism.

Bringing this knowing side of character to maturity is one of the most difficult challenges of character education. It requires clear ethical thinking by the teacher as well as a sophisticated set of teaching skills.

Teachers can foster moral reflection through reading, research, essay writing, journal-keeping, discussion, and debate. At the secondary level, a promising approach to developing moral reflection through controversial issues is called "structured academic controversy." Developed by cooperative learning experts David and Roger Johnson, this approach defines controversies as "problems to be solved rather than win-lose situations."

The teacher assigns students to groups of four, composed of two, two-person "advocacy teams." Within each group, one team is assigned the responsibility of advocating one position (for example, that there should be more government regulation of hazardous waste disposal), the other team the task of arguing the opposite position (that there should be less regulation), both teams using background information supplied by the teacher.

In the course of the week, each team must do a position-switch and argue *for* the position it originally opposed. Finally, the four group members synthesize what they see as the best information and reasoning from both sides into a consensus solution and write and submit a group report. Following that, each student takes an individual test, which holds everyone accountable for learning the information and arguments on both sides of the issue.

Ten years of research on the academic controversy process finds that students:

1. Gain in their perspective-taking abilities;
2. Demonstrate greater mastery of the subject matter than is true with either debate or individualistic learning formats;
3. Show greater liking of other student participants and higher academic self-esteem.³

Some controversial issues--abortion, for example--may not lend themselves to a discussion format which has the goal of arriving at a "consensual solution." In such cases, the more conventional debate format, ensuring full and balanced presentation of both sides, may be preferable.

At my state university, for example, the Collegians for Life group for which I serve as advisor wanted to have the student body and the community consider the claims of what is called the "consistent life ethic" (sometimes known as the "seamless garment ethic"). The consistent life ethic argues that abortion, like economic injustice and unjust war, violates social justice and respect for the value and dignity of every individual life at every stage of development. Groups such as Feminists for Life promote a consistent life ethic.

To present this under-represented perspective on the abortion controversy, we sponsored a two-hour public debate between two women, one a pro-choice feminist, the other a pro-life feminist. The pro-choice feminist argued that a woman has a right of self-determination to control her own body and therefore to abort an unwanted baby. The pro-life feminist argued that the most basic human right--more basic than privacy--is the right not to be killed; that the pregnant woman alone has the power to sustain the life in her womb; and that she therefore has a corresponding moral obligation to protect and nurture it--as well as a claim to far more societal support than women currently receive for childrearing. We sought to enhance the moral education value of this debate format by having the two speakers, after their initial presentations, engage in direct, face-to-face dialogue as well as respond to audience questions.

Teaching Conflict Resolution

Teaching students how to resolve conflicts without force or intimidation is a vitally important part of character education for two reasons: 1) conflicts not settled fairly will prevent or erode a moral community in the classroom; and 2) without conflict resolution skills, students will be morally handicapped in their interpersonal relationships now and later in life, and may end up contributing to violence in school and society.

Growing numbers of schools are training students to serve as official "conflict mediators." For example, in one elementary school a student from each fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade homeroom is chosen to be the conflict mediator for that day. Chosen students wear a hat, a vest, a T-shirt, or a button to identify themselves as official mediators.

If there is a conflict--in a classroom or on the playground--the student

mediator is trained to step between the disputants. (All students, of course, must be coached in advance to prepare them to accept this kind of peer intervention.) The dialogue then unfolds as follows:

Mediator: My name is Sara. I'm a conflict mediator today. Would you like me to help you solve this problem?

Disputants: Okay.

Sara: There are four rules you must agree to: No blaming, no name-calling, no interrupting, and you must agree to try to solve the problem so you both feel okay. Do you agree to these rules?

Disputants: Yes.

Mediator: Okay, each tell your side of the story. Who wants to go first? Remember, no interrupting.

After each person tells his or her side of the story, the mediator paraphrases the account back to that person. She then asks, "Okay, how can you solve this problem in a way that's fair to both of you?" When a solution is arrived at, the mediator concludes, "Congratulations, you've solved your problem!" and asks them to "shake on it."

These behavior patterns have the best chance of becoming part of a child's character when they are learned early and practiced often. But effective training is still possible at the adolescent level, where the stakes are even higher because conflicts more easily explode into deadly violence.

Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Smith, a Harvard professor and physician, has developed a 10-week mini-course that teaches teenagers what causes violent conflict and how to avoid it. Says one 18-year-old who took the course at a Boston high school: "I had my share of fights, and I learned how to avoid them by talking things out. Otherwise I could lose my life over something really stupid like stepping on someone's shoe and not wanting to say, 'Excuse me.'"

SCHOOLWIDE STRATEGIES FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION

The preceding examples demonstrate that it is clearly possible for the individual teacher, acting within the classroom, to contribute to the moral growth of students. But teachers feel more secure, and their efforts are greatly enhanced, if the whole school--and ideally the community as well -

-is working to promulgate, model, teach, celebrate, and enforce high standards of respect and responsibility.

A comprehensive approach therefore calls upon schools to implement three schoolwide strategies. These strategies are:

1. Creating a positive moral culture in the school—developing a total moral environment or schoolwide ethos (through the leadership of the principal, schoolwide discipline, a schoolwide sense of community, meaningful student government, a respectful and cooperative moral community among adults, and making time at all levels to discuss moral concerns) that supports the values taught in classrooms;
2. Fostering caring beyond the classroom—including using positive role models to inspire altruistic behavior and providing opportunities at every grade level to perform acts of school and community service; and
3. Recruiting parents and the community as partners in character education—letting parents know that the school considers them their child's first and most important moral teacher; giving parents specific ways they can support the values the school is trying to teach; and seeking the help of the community (including churches, businesses, local government, and the media) in promoting respect and responsibility.

Let me offer several examples of schoolwide approaches to character education that contain one or more of these three strategies.

"Let's Be Courteous, Let's Be Caring"

Several years ago, Winkelman Elementary School, which serves a diverse community north of Chicago (some children are from welfare families, others come to school in limos), found itself increasingly unhappy with student attitudes and behavior. Fights and put-downs among children were common. Students would frequently "smart-off" ("I don't have to listen to you!") to teachers and other adults in the building.

To address this problem effectively, Winkelman's principal and faculty decided they needed a schoolwide approach. They launched a project called Let's Be Courteous, Let's Be Caring. The project emphasized the values of courtesy and caring at every opportunity: through photo displays in the corridors, discussions in classrooms, one-to-one conversations between teachers and children, school assemblies, citizenship awards, parent-teacher conferences, and service projects in the community.

A giant display inside the school entrance defined "courtesy" as: saying

please, thank you, you're welcome, and excuse me; being a good listener; waiting your turn; acting politely everywhere; and discussing problems.

"Caring" was defined as: sharing; respecting others' feelings; following rules; working cooperatively; and being a good friend.

The moral environment at Winkelman steadily improved. When I visited the school, parents said fights are now very rare; children said that if you forgot your lunch, you could always count on somebody to give you some of theirs; and a veteran teacher who had taught in several other schools said that Winkelman students showed an unusually high level of respect for adults and each other. Three years after beginning its character education project, Winkelman was recognized in a Chicago-area competition for excellence in both academic achievement and character development.

Value of the Month

Carl Campbell is principal at Dry Creek Elementary School in Clovis, California. He explains that the school's mission is to help students develop their potential in five areas: academics, athletics, performing arts, citizenship in the school, and citizenship in the community. And that commitment, he says, goes for *every* student:

Our philosophy is that we do everything we can do while we've got a kid. When he walks through that door, we're responsible for the quality of his experience. We may not be able to control his environment elsewhere, but we can control the environment here.

Dry Creek has a Value of the Month program. For an entire month, the whole school—every teacher at every grade level—focuses on the same value (e.g., honesty, cooperation, self-control, ambition). Teachers talk to their students about the value of the month—making connections, for example, with classroom incidents that arise. They work it into the writing assignments. They do special projects and displays related to the value. Students also bring in books or articles that tell about a person or incident that exemplifies the value.

Teachers take heart from the fact that they are all working together on the same value, something that is becoming part of the shared moral vocabulary that defines the common moral culture of their school.

Principal Campbell spoke about the impact this Value of the Month program had in a previous district where he worked:

Before coming to Clovis, I was principal in a school where stealing was an everyday occurrence when I first arrived. The attitude among students was that it was okay to steal as long as you did not get caught. There was also a problem of kids being intimidated for their lunch money.

I said to the faculty, "How can we change this?" We selected basic values to teach, one each month. We started with honesty. As time went on, kids started turning in money they found on the playground. Intimidation became less and less of a problem. By the end of our second year with the program, stealing was a very rare event at this school.

The lesson here: Even when there is not a positive moral culture outside the school, it is still possible to create one within the school. If teachers at every grade level are simultaneously teaching the same moral value, doing so in different and creative ways, and doing so all school year long, year after year, the school has a cumulative effect with the power to change students' moral behavior.

A Five-Year Plan: A Middle-School Success Story

Vera White is an African-American principal working with an African-American, inner-city community. Principal White came to Washington, D.C.'s Jefferson Junior High School nine years ago. She comments:

Ninety percent of our students come from single-parent homes. When I arrived, parents and the community felt they were losing the children.

We met--administration, faculty, and parents--for a full year to prioritize our goals. We decided we needed a five-year plan. Each year would have a special theme.

Year one of the new effort focused on planning the objectives and strategies of the new character education program. Year two had the theme "Attitude Counts." Principal White explains: "We wanted students to have the idea that wherever you are--in school, at home, at the mall--your attitude makes a difference."

Year three focused on conflict resolution training. Year four's theme was community service. "Our kids had been destroying the high-rise projects," Principal White says. "Now every student does community service."

Our overall theme has been 'how to be responsible.' We stress and teach

responsibility throughout the day. For example, our students have to have assignment notebooks and use them in *every* class.

We also set high expectations for our parents. Our parents *must* come to school for Back to School Night and for teacher-parent conferences during the year.

Jefferson Junior High School now has a waiting list of 400 to 500 students. It has won two U.S. Department of Education awards. In the city of Washington, D.C., it has been recognized for having the highest student academic achievement, the greatest academic improvement, and the highest attendance rate (its attendance rate used to be one of the worst). There have been no student pregnancies during the past five years.

The No Putdowns Project

The No Putdowns Project, based in Syracuse, New York, is a response to rising school violence and racial and ethnic intolerance. It has three goals: to create a school and home environment that recognizes the destructive effects of putdowns; to reject the use of putdowns in all interpersonal interactions; and to replace putdowns with healthy communication skills.

A five-week curriculum, developed by classroom teachers, uses videos, posters, contests, role-playing, and other activities to achieve these goals. The curriculum is reinforced throughout the school year.

One participating parent commented: "I see a noticeable difference in how much my child enjoys school." Other parents report that family members now catch each other ("Hey, Mom, that's a putdown!") when they slip.

Twenty-five elementary and middle schools in central New York are now implementing the No Putdowns Project. Several have already reported that discipline referrals and student fights are down for the first time in many years.

Participatory School Democracy

Another schoolwide character development strategy, greatly under-used, challenges students to help govern the life of their school.

One of my favorite examples of this strategy comes from a school action project carried out by teacher Mary Ann Taylor when she took my graduate course, Teaching Moral Values. With some trepidation, she

tackled the problem of her school cafeteria. She described it as "a war zone" where teacher aides yelled at children, students yelled at each other, food fights were common, and the place was a mess when students left.

Teacher Taylor set up a Cafeteria Council with elected student delegates from each classroom. Being an elected delegate meant you had to *represent* your constituency's ideas, as expressed in class meetings.

At every grade level, classes held discussions: What are the characteristics of an ideal cafeteria? What should be rules for cafeteria manners? Delegates carried their classrooms' views into the Cafeteria Council's weekly meetings, where they discussed these ideas with teacher Taylor and the school's principal and shaped them into action proposals.

The Council also conducted a survey of all students, staff, and parents on how to improve the cafeteria. It solicited everyone's ideas through a suggestion box. It published a monthly newsletter reporting progress.

The positive outcomes of all this effort were many: student cafeteria behavior improved greatly; students were enthusiastic about improvements in the cafeteria; parent feedback was positive; a recycling project was begun; and, most important, the school decided to keep its new delegate system of democratic student government as a way to deal with other problems in the school environment.

Similar student government efforts have been carried out at the high school level to bring students into a larger role of responsibility for solving school problems. In the process, students are provided with the kind of opportunities for real-life moral action that develop the action side of character. The just-published book, *Preparing for Citizenship: Teaching Youth to Live Democratically* by Ralph Mosher, Robert Kenney, and Andrew Garrod, tells the story of several high schools that have effectively used participatory school democracy to foster their students' political and moral development.⁴

A High School That Turned Around

St. Benedict's is a Catholic urban school, located in downtown Newark, New Jersey, that serves poor black and Hispanic teenage boys. It produces exceptional results, breaking for many of its students the vicious cycle of poverty into which they were born. It has a waiting list, with many students from the affluent suburbs seeking admission.

It was not always so. Twenty years ago St. Benedict's was on the verge of closing. Enrollment was steadily declining, student achievement discouragingly low.

St. Benedict's achieved this turn-around through high moral and academic expectations. The school insists on good manners and restrained behavior. Noise, bad language, and rowdiness are not tolerated. The halls are safe and free of graffiti. Strict standards of discipline and responsibility are reinforced in the classroom. Students are taught how to take notes and use their notebooks in all classes.

Strenuous athletic and extracurricular activity is also encouraged. A high level of peer support is encouraged in all areas of school life. During the early and continuing initiation into the school's curriculum and code of conduct, each student is assisted by fellow students who have mastered the school's standards and who help younger boys succeed.

A CHARACTER-BASED APPROACH TO SEX EDUCATION

No discussion of moral and character education can exclude sex education. More young people, I believe, are at risk from the destructive consequences of premature, uncommitted sex than from any other single threat to their healthy physical, emotional, and moral development.

To consider just one dimension of the physical dangers: In the United States, according to the Medical Institute for Sexual Health, about a third of sexually active teenage girls are now infected with human papilloma virus (the leading cause of cervical cancer) and/or chlamydia (the leading cause of infertility).⁵ Recent medical studies show that condoms provide virtually no protection against either human papilloma virus or chlamydia, both of which can be transmitted by skin-to-skin contact in the entire genital region, only a small part of which is covered by the condom.

Unfortunately, young persons are growing up in what Boston University's Kevin Ryan calls a "sexually toxic" environment. This environment trivializes and debases sex and leads them into a pattern of short-lived sexual relationships that undermine self-respect and corrupt character.

There is fortunately now a growing effort to bring sex education into line with the principles of good character education.⁶ That means adopting an approach to sex education that develops character traits of good judgment and self-control, and guides young people toward morally sound conclusions about how to apply the values of respect and responsibility to sexual behavior. And this means helping students understand all the reasons why sexual abstinence is the *only* medically safe and morally responsible choice for an unmarried teenager.

An exemplary character-based program in sex education is *Decision-*

Making: Keys to Total Success, developed by the San Marcos, California school district. San Marcos faced a serious teen pregnancy problem--147 high school girls known to be pregnant during the 1984-85 school year. Its program included the following elements: daily ten minute lessons for junior high school students on "how to be successful" (using materials from the Jefferson Center for Character Education⁷); a six-week course for seventh graders on self-esteem and positive moral values; and a six-week pro-abstinence course for eighth graders, "Sexuality, Commitment, and the Family."

The "Sexuality, Commitment, and the Family" course, created by Teen Aid, conveys the message that the only truly safe sex is having sex *only* with your marriage partner who is having sex *only* with you. Teen Aid's program also sends summaries of all lessons to parents and holds a workshop for parents on how to talk to teens about sex.

San Marcos reports that two years after implementing its Keys To Total Success program, known pregnancies in the school dropped from 147 to only 20--and have continued to remain far lower than they were before the program. There were other positive outcomes as well: drug referrals, grade point averages, standardized test scores, and attendance rates also showed marked improvement. The San Marcos character-building program won a California state award for excellence in education.

THE EVALUATION OF CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

As the character education movement gains momentum, questions of evaluation loom larger. In thinking about evaluation, it is helpful to identify three kinds of results schools hope for when they undertake character education.

Documented Improvements Within the School Environment

Schools often begin character education programs because they hope to make the school a better place by effecting a positive change in student attitudes and behavior. Evaluation in this area asks questions such as: Has student attendance gone up? Fights and suspensions gone down? Vandalism declined? Drug incidents diminished? Attitudes toward cheating, and self-reported frequency of cheating, improved? One can assess such before-and-after-the-program differences by keeping records of observable behavior and by anonymous questionnaires that measure student moral judgment (for example, "Is cheating on a test wrong?"),

moral commitment ("Would you cheat if you were sure you would not get caught?") and self-reported moral behavior ("How many times have you cheated on a test in the past year?").

Character Effects Beyond the School Environment

This is a measure of generalization. Here evaluation asks, to what extent do students, when they are outside the school, engage in prosocial behaviors such as helping others in need? Stand up for a moral value they believe in? Refrain from antisocial behaviors such as shoplifting? Refrain from high-risk behaviors such as drinking and driving and sexual intercourse? These behaviors outside the school environment, like in-school behaviors, can be assessed through anonymous self-report surveys. (The California-based Josephson Institute for Ethics has developed one such survey for use at the high school level.⁸)

Life Outcomes After Graduation

This is a measure of the school's enduring effects on character. To what extent do graduates become faithful spouses and responsible parents? Law-abiding citizens? Productive and contributing members of their communities? This third area--which reflects what Henry Huffman calls character education's "future orientation"--can be assessed only through longitudinal research typically beyond the capacity of schools themselves. Other agencies can and must undertake such evaluations.

What does the available research tell us about the effectiveness of character education? The best of the evaluation research has sought to measure all three facets of character--cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral outcomes.

For example, The Child Development Project in California has conducted a longitudinal experimental study of a character program that combines cooperative learning, teaching empathy through literature, positive role models, developmental discipline, involving students in helping relationships, and parent involvement. By the end of elementary school, students who experienced the program, compared to those who did not:

1. Showed more spontaneous acts of helping and encouraging their classmates (a measure of the behavioral side of character);
2. Were better at thinking of prosocial solutions to hypothetical social conflicts (a measure of the cognitive side of character);

3. Were more committed to democratic values such as the belief that all members of a group have a right to participate in decisions affecting the group (a measure of the affective or attitudinal side of character.³)

Recent research also supports the effectiveness of school, family, and community partnerships--as opposed to only school-based efforts--in one of the most challenging areas: changing student attitudes toward and use of drugs and alcohol. In June, 1989, for example, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* reported a major intervention study of 20,000 sixth-and seventh-graders. The study compared a well-regarded school-based drug education curriculum with a program that combined the school curriculum with family involvement (students interviewed their parents and role-played refusal skills at home) and community involvement (extensive media support). The more comprehensive approach was significantly superior in slowing adolescent use of marijuana, cigarettes, and alcohol.

The greatest danger facing character education, as educational researchers David and Cheryl Aspy observe, is that severe social problems will be met with only weak educational efforts. When weak efforts fail to ameliorate the problems significantly, people will say, "We tried character education, and it failed." The scale of our character education efforts must therefore be commensurate with the seriousness of the moral problems that confront us. In the long run, this means that all groups--schools, families, communities, churches, youth organizations, government, and the media--that touch the values and character of the young must come together in common cause. As we seek to secure a future for our children in the next century, educating for character is a moral imperative for us all.

ENDNOTES

1. For information, write: Heartwood Institute, 12300 Perry Highway, Wexford, PA 15090.
2. For information write: Facing History and Ourselves National Foundation, 25 Kennard Rd., Brookline, MA 02146.
3. David W. and Roger T. Johnson, "Critical Thinking Through Structured Controversy," *Educational Leadership*, May 1988.

4. R. Mosher, R. Kenny, and A. Garrod, *Preparing for Citizenship: Teaching Youth to Live Democratically* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994).
5. For medical studies on these and other STDs, write for Sexual Health Update, published by the Medical Institute for Sexual Health, P.O. Box 4919, Austin, TX 78765.
6. Write the Medical Institute for Sexual Health for the forthcoming National Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality and Character Education.
7. For more information contact the Jefferson Center for Character Education, Suite 240, 202 South Lake Avenue, Pasadena, CA 91101.
8. For a copy of the High School Values Survey, write: The Josephson Institute of Ethics, 310 Washington Boulevard, Suite 104, Marina del Rey, CA, 90292.
9. For a research report on the Child Development Project, write: The Child Development Project, 200 Embarcadero, Suite 305, Oakland, CA 94606-5300.

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The **Spirit** of **Community**

RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND
THE COMMUNITARIAN
AGENDA

Amitai Etzioni

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3 ♦ The Communitarian School

Character Formation and Moral Education

IF the moral infrastructure of our communities is to be restored, schools will have to step in where the family, neighborhoods, and religious institutions have been failing. In the Communitarian's ideal world, children would come to school with their basic characters well formed and their values sufficiently internalized. Children already enrolled in school would have their character traits further reinforced at home (traits that had been instilled at an early age). Under such conditions, teachers would be able to concentrate on passing on information and skills—on what is called “cognitive development”—rather than be charged with dealing extensively with personality development and introduction of values.

But this is not the case in contemporary America. Youngsters are enrolled in many public schools—and quite a few private ones—with their characters underdeveloped and without a firm commitment to values. The basic reason is that the families have been dismembered or the parents are overworked or consumed by other concerns and ambitions. As a result, the children tend to be poor students. Moreover, if their lack of character and moral values are not attended to while at

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school, they will graduate to become deficient workers, citizens, and fellow community members. The moral deficit among the young is not limited to inner-city schools, in which violence and drug abuse are common and in which the basic conditions for learning are often missing. Nationwide, one out of twenty (5.3 percent) pupils carries a gun. Many public schools now find that they need to install metal detectors at their entrances and hire security guards. The number of young Americans killed by firearms was more than twice as high in 1990 as it was in 1970 (2,162 versus 1,059). An indication of the dire state schools are in is that we debate whether students should be allowed to carry beepers—by which they are summoned to deal drugs.

Although there are long lists of what our youngsters require, we Communitarians argue that two requirements loom over all others, indeed are at the foundation of most other needs: to develop the basic personality traits that characterize effective individuals and to acquire core values. In the sizable educational literature on the subject, both are sometimes referred to as “developing character.”



Cracking the Summer Reading Lists.

Cartoon by Jim Borgman. Copyright © 1992 by Cincinnati Enquirer. Reprinted with special permission of King Features Syndicate.

We mean by *character* the psychological muscles that allow a person to control impulses and defer gratification, which is essential for achievement, performance, and moral conduct. The *core values*, which need to be transmitted from generation to generation, contain moral substances that those with the proper basic personality can learn to appreciate, adapt, and integrate into their lives: hard work pays, even in an unfair world; treat others with the same basic dignity with which you wish to be treated (or face the consequences); you feel better when you do what is right than when you evade your moral precepts.

Character Formation

There is little mystery as to what proper character development entails. In essence, it is acquiring the capacity to control one's impulses and to mobilize oneself for acts other than the satisfaction of biological needs and immediate desires. Workers need such self-control so that they can stick to their tasks rather than saunter into work late and turn out slapdash products, becoming able to observe a work routine that is often not very satisfying by itself. Citizens and community members need self-control so that they will not demand ever more services and handouts while being unwilling to pay taxes and make contributions to the commons, a form of citizen infantilism. And self-control—together with a growing sense of commitment to values—makes people more tolerant of those from different ethnic, racial, and political backgrounds. Such tolerance is a major foundation of democratic societies and polities.

When we look at the violent ways people in other countries—from India to Somalia, from Yugoslavia to Ireland—"deal" with their differences, we realize the importance of instilling in each new generation of youngsters, and those who join us from other cultures, the capacity to hold impulses in check. Impulse control is even more essential for a democratic society than the often cited prerequisites of being politically informed and voting regularly. The only reason we can focus on these features of democracy is that we implicitly assume that character formation is well attended to. However, interethnic violence in places such as Los Angeles, New York City, and Miami alerts us to the fact that character formation requires unrelenting commitment—not only in faraway places, but

in our urban centers and quite a few suburbs, towns, and villages.

Education proceeds by tying gratification to the development of qualities that are socially useful and morally appropriate. That is, by relating satisfaction to completing a task, taking other people's feelings into account, playing by the rules, and so on, one acquires the ability to abide by moral tenets and to live up to one's social responsibilities.

Certainly education can draw too much of the ego's energies into the inner mechanisms of self-control. This is what we mean when we refer to being "uptight"—people who are obsessed with their careers or achievements and are unable to relax or show affection. Such excessive self-control has concerned social scientists in the past, especially in the sixties, and has led to a call for less education and more unbounded expression for the ego (the days of "let it all hang out"). Excessive self-control, however, is uncommon in contemporary America; indeed, many youngsters come to school with a rather deficient capacity to guide themselves. The fact that a larger proportion of the young find it very difficult to be punctual, get up in the morning, do homework on their own, and complete tasks in an orderly and timely fashion—these are but the most visible indications of a deeper deficiency: insufficient self-control.

As a result, schools are left with the task of making up for undereducation in the family and laying the psychic foundation for character and moral conduct. This is where the various commissions that have studied educational deficits missed a major point. By and large they argued for loading students with more hours of science, foreign language, math, and other skills and bodies of knowledge. *But you cannot fill a vessel that has yet to be cast.*

Self-Discipline as a Master Key

To illustrate what is at issue, let us look at a specific incident. A young secretary I retained was asked to form a list using the telephone Yellow Pages. When she was unable to do so, it became clear that she had neither a command of the English alphabet nor an understanding of the principles of categorization and subcategorization involved.

Such an inability would usually be considered a cognitive defi-

ciency, a result of poor teaching or low IQ. But if you ask why it should be so difficult to teach someone a list of twenty-six items and the principles of a very simple classification system, you soon realize that something quite different is amiss. More is at issue than the fact that no one ever took the time and trouble to teach the person involved, and many others like her, what the alphabet contains and how classifications work. Nor is it usually a question of IQ level for most pupils, because so little comprehension or intelligence is involved. To gain a "feel" for what is at issue, a reader who is familiar with the Yellow Pages may wish to consider what it would take if she or he were required to memorize, say, a twenty-six-digit telephone number. A considerable amount of effort is entailed, but it is *not* a cognitive effort; instead it takes concentration, impulse control, self-motivation, and an ability to face and overcome stress (in order to resist distractions and accept the "routine" work involved in memorizing). This element of psychic organization—the ability to mobilize and commit psychic energy to a task—is what those who are not learning well seem to lack most. It is what seems to account for their "inability" to do elementary computation (to memorize a few rules and discipline oneself to adhere to them, for example) or to write a coherent paragraph (to remember the rules of punctuation, that sentences have nouns, and so on—not necessarily effective writing, just straight English exposition).

School administrators, elected officials, and numerous commissions that have studied why Johnny can't read have found it easier and less controversial to focus on matters that can be measured, such as math and vocabulary tests, and have shunned those that raise moral issues. They have, for example, largely ignored such matters as the state of the character of our youngsters and the effects of such practices as permissiveness, grade inflation, and automatic grade promotion.

Discipline, Self-Discipline, and Internalization

How do we educate for character? Parents and educators often stress the importance of *discipline* in character formation and in the moral education of the new generation of Americans. In several public opinion surveys, teachers, school administrators, and par-

ents rank a lack of discipline as the number one problem in our schools. They correctly perceive that in a classroom where students are restless, impatient, disorderly, and disrespectful, where rules and routines cannot be developed and maintained, learning is not possible.

Unfortunately discipline, as many people understand it, takes on an authoritarian meaning. A well-disciplined environment is often considered one in which teachers and principals "lay down the law" and will brook no talking back from students, who "show respect" by rising when the teacher enters the room and speak only when spoken to. Mayor Sharon Pratt Kelly of Washington, D.C., even suggested that schools ought to reexamine the use of corporal punishment. Indeed, in quite a few states physical punishment is still considered an effective way to maintain discipline. Moreover, the Supreme Court upheld a lower court that had maintained that schoolchildren were not protected by the Constitution from corporal punishment. The justices let stand a Texas law that authorizes the use of corporal punishment "short of deadly force."

If discipline is achieved by such authoritarian means, youngsters will behave as long as they are closely supervised and fear punishment. But as soon as the authorities turn their backs, they will misbehave. Moreover, their resentment at being coerced will express itself in some form of antisocial behavior. This is because the discipline is linked to punishment rather than to a commitment to doing what is right and avoiding what is wrong.

What the pupil—and the future adult—requires is *self-discipline*, the inner ability to mobilize and commit to a task he or she believes in and to feel positive—that is, self-rewarded—for having done so.

Internalization occurs in structured environments, but not under authoritarian conditions. Close, continuous, external supervision and punitive environments are counterproductive. What is required is a school structure made up of educating figures, rules, and organization of tasks that motivate students by providing clear guidelines. These must be both firmly upheld and be reasonable and *justified*, so that students can understand and accept the need to abide by them.

There is some social science evidence to support my thesis, although it is relatively scarce and somewhat indirect. The following findings are drawn from a study by James S. Coleman and his

associates, one of the largest and most systematic studies in the field. Coleman and his colleagues studied 58,728 sophomores and seniors in 1,016 public, private, and parochial schools. They found that the single factor that separated effective from ineffective schools was the existence of discipline—and that the discipline had to be perceived by the students as legitimate rather than capriciously imposed. The latter point is of great importance: without a sense that the requirements introduced are sound and proper, students will not internalize discipline and hence their character will not benefit.

Educational requirements, in turn, must be clearly stated and the link between requirements and goals be fully explained. Curricula can be neither arbitrary nor subject to the whim of an individual teacher. To foster self-discipline, assignments need to be “doable,” appropriately checked, and properly rewarded. When they are excessive and mechanical (such as the time one of my sons was required in high school to memorize the names of all the Indian tribes that resided in America), or when rewards are allocated according to irrelevant criteria (such as teacher favoritism, social status, or undue parental influence), requirements become dictates and not sources of involvement and ways to internalize commitments, to build self-discipline.

Moral Education

Character formation lays the psychic foundation for the ability both to mobilize to a task and to behave morally by being able to control impulses and defer gratification. However, character formation per se does not educate one to a specific set of virtues or values; it is without specific moral content. It provides the rectitude to tell the truth even if the consequences are unpleasant, but it does not teach the value of being truthful. It enables a person to refrain from imposing his sexual impulse on an unwilling partner, but it does not teach him that it is morally unacceptable to rape. Trying to develop character without attention to sharing of values with the young is like trying to develop the muscles of an athlete without having a particular sport in mind. It follows that if those who are being educated are to become committed to moral values, youngsters must acquire not only the capacity to commit—the psychological muscle that moral conduct requires—but also the values that

direct the exercise, the application of the moral capacity. To the extent that the family no longer provides these values, the community turns to schools to teach the young to tell right from wrong.

Such moral education should be an integral part of all teaching. Richard McCloud, a Fairfax County, Virginia, teacher, put it well:

When I read and study the Declaration of Independence to my junior students. . . I am not teaching historical facts as an end in themselves. Instead, I am implicitly teaching Thomas Jefferson's commitment to freedom and high moral standards. Molière's *Tartuffe* has much to say to my seniors about hypocrisy and deceit; Twain's *Huck Finn* speaks of common decency and friendship.

The Opposition

Unfortunately, schools, especially public ones, have been extremely reluctant to engage openly in moral education. School administrators claim that they are overloaded as it is. The public demands that they cover ever more subjects, in more depth. They are saddled with many problems the family and community are unable to cope with, such as teen pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence; and they are understaffed and underfunded.

Moreover, moral education is very controversial. (This is especially true of public schools, which are attended by 88 percent of American students.) Boards of education find it is much safer politically not to include moral education in their agenda. Typically, a school counselor in Teaneck, New Jersey, explained, in reference to a hypothetical moral discussion among students: "If I come from the position of what is right and what is wrong, then I'm not their counselor."

"Whose morals are you going to teach?" is a kind of trump question that is often raised to stop all further exploration of the subject. Opponents of moral education frequently depict its advocates as Authoritarians who would impose their values on one and all. To bolster their argument, critics often cite cases of the banning of books or attempts to institute prayer in public schools. They call attention to instances such as one in Dallas, Texas, where school administrators had teachers rip out an offending page from a school textbook that referred to male genitals and bodily functions. In

another example, school administrators at Simsbury High School in Simsbury, Connecticut, canceled the showing of Michael Cristofer's *The Shadow Box*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning play, after students refused to alter objectionable parts of the script.

Opponents of moral education also alarm us by bringing up instances in which Authoritarians tried to promote moral education by fostering Christian dogma in schools through the imposition of prayers. These are perceived to be but the opening wedge. If schools agree to mandated prayers, they argue, soon these groups will insist on selecting "appropriate" reading material, which will lead to the teaching of unscientific creationism. This, in turn, will be followed by outright religious indoctrination. Such suggestions concern followers of different religions, those who are agnostic or atheist and those who, while favorable to Christianity, wish to keep church and state separated. I would add that reciting a prayer a day (or even several) provides no more assurance that those in the classroom pews will be morally upright than repeating the Pledge of Allegiance makes the graduates of our schools true patriots. Moral education does not come that easily.

Although such instances do pertain to the transmission of values in the schools, they most certainly do not concern the kind of value education Communitarians are referring to. Reference here is to numerous values we share as a community—such as the inappropriateness of racial and gender discrimination, the rejection of violence, and the desirability of treating others with love, respect, and dignity. If we would transmit to the young in schools only these shared values, our world would be radically improved.

The Limits of Moral Reasoning

Among those schools that have overcome the opposition and turned to moral education (so far only a minority of public schools), there are quite a few that teach ethics in ways that, sadly, leave much to be desired. They have sought refuge in something called "moral reasoning," a highly cognitive approach built on the works of psychologists Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg, who were largely interested in developing moral *reasoning*, but not value internalization. In these classes youngsters learn, at best, to argue about moral issues, but no attempt is made to enhance their moral commitments. Moral commitment requires helping young people

feel more strongly about those values they already have (or acquire in schools), which can be achieved by using stories, drama, role-playing, videotapes, "courts," visiting places where homeless people hang out or a polluted lake, and other such educational devices that are evocative and not merely informative.

A typical course on moral reasoning starts with something called "values clarification." In a typical lesson, students are asked to list what is dear to them—money, reputation, and power—and then to rank these pursuits in terms of which they hold most important. They fail—and are thus considered in need of moral tutoring—only if they have difficulty in deciding what is up and what is down in *their* scale of interests.

They are further helped to clarify their preferences through exercises such as the lifeboat drill. In this exercise students are told to imagine that they are in a lifeboat with a group of people that includes a scientist, an artist, a teacher, and a general (the list may vary). The boat is overloaded, and they must decide whom they would cast overboard first, second, and so on. In this way the students' values are revealed. For instance, do they rank art higher than arms? (Usually the teachers are cast off first and the kids themselves last.) As long as the pupils are clear on their preferred tossing order, and hence by implication their values, their moral education is considered properly advanced.

Under moral reasoning *per se*, nobody is supposed to discuss the question whom they *should have* cast overboard first or ask why there aren't enough lifeboats to begin with. More deeply, I question whether such extreme examples (what ethicists call "limit situations") really prepare one for real-life moral choices. And as columnist William Raspberry notes, learning *about* ethics is not the same as learning ethics itself. "Nobody ever had an epiphany," he noted in a different context, "while cramming for a comparative religion final."

In more advanced classes (and some that are taught on the college level), students learn to argue at even more elevated levels. They are taught about various ethical theories like utilitarianism and deontology, about autonomy and beneficence, and so on. Students are expected to sort out from many conflicting claims which course to follow. Thus, in one case, prepared by the University of Minnesota and used in a discussion of ethics, a social worker visits

the home of an ill person. The patient tells her visitor that if her condition deteriorates further, she will use her gun "long before anyone puts me into a nursing home." The question is, should the social worker report the suicide threat to the authorities and have the gun removed? It is then suggested that because of "the principle of autonomy, the client's wishes are to be respected" and the social worker is not to intervene. But if someone put more weight on beneficence, the gun would be removed.

Such values clarification and development of moral reasoning may be helpful if and when they are provided to people who already have evolved moral commitments. They can help such people sort out how specifically to express and apply their generalized sense that they ought to do what is right and to order various moral values when these do not readily dovetail with one another. But for youngsters whose moral commitments are underdeveloped, such classes tend to become idle debating clubs. "Because the typical course in applied ethics concentrates on problems and dilemmas, the students may easily lose sight of the fact that some things are clearly right and some clearly wrong, that some ethical truths are not subject to serious debate," notes Christine Hoff Sommers, a professor of philosophy at Clark University. In moral reasoning, teachers are typically expected to be passive discussion facilitators rather than active proponents of values. The students' success in these exercises is based not so much on the depth and scope of their moral sensibilities, but on how well they spin an argument. They might as well be debating whether to steer a ship northeast or southeast when the motor is broken and nobody is repairing it. What is missing between character formation (the ability to commit and guide oneself) and the development of moral reasoning is the *internalization* of (i.e., making part of oneself) commitments to a set of substantive values, to be achieved through moral *education*.

Whose Values?

The challenge "Whose values will you teach?" can be readily answered by starting with the myriad values we all share. (Many of these are shared not only in one community or by Americans, but much more widely.) Nobody considers it moral to abuse children,

rape, steal (not to mention commit murder), be disrespectful of others, discriminate, and so on.

At this point someone is sure to ask, "What are you going to teach about abortion?" The pro-choice, pro-life debate is an exception that does not disprove the rule. Some values, a small subset of the total in well-functioning communities, are contested. These exceptions can be dealt with either by letting the students learn about both sides of the issue or by openly omitting them. Moreover, these issues are helpful in showing the pain of moral conflicts and the merit of genuine consensus building, a consensus we do have on most values.

Sure, say the opponents, but people agree only on vague generalities, which amount almost to banalities. They argue: When you come down to specifics, disagreements will dominate, and then whose specifics will you teach? Reverend Charles Fink of Northport, New York, who participated in an effort to form a value curriculum, writes:

Let Mr. Castelli [former director of church-state issues for People for the American Way], Norman Lear . . . and I sit on a committee to flesh out a program for teaching values in the public schools. Yes, we will all resonate to words like honesty, truthfulness, responsibility, self-respect, respect for others, etc., but when it comes time to apply these civic virtues to concrete cases, I think it will be found that Mr. Lear and I will disagree sharply on what responsibility means in terms of sexual conduct, or what respect for others entails as it relates to abortion and euthanasia, or what self-respect implies when it comes to smoking pot.

Not so fast. Even when it comes to specifics, there is more consensus than at first seems to be the case.

Take the following quite specific conducts education professor William Damon reports we would encounter walking around some schools:

A counselor is calling a student's home about apparently excused absences, only to find that the parent's letters have been forged. A young boy is in the principal's office for threatening

his teacher with a knife. Three students are separated from their class after hurling racial epithets at a fourth. A girl is complaining that her locker has been broken into and all her belongings stolen. A small group of boys are huddling in a corner, shielding an exchange of money for drug packets. In the playground, two girls grab a third and punch her in the stomach for flirting with the wrong boy.

Not many people would claim that these are morally appropriate behaviors; teaching what is wrong with them could keep a whole beehive of educators busy for years to come.

Or take date rape. Let's assume that we can all agree that students must realize that using force to impose themselves on others is morally unacceptable. In teaching it, we run into a "specific," the belief that surprisingly many young males hold that when a woman says "no" she means "yes," and hence it is all right to proceed despite her protests. An educator should be able to build on the students' value that "real no's" are to be heeded, to show that when a woman says "no," a decent person holds back; and that if he has any doubt about a "yes," he should seek further clarification from her before proceeding. That is, a position on specifics can often be worked out when the basic value commitments are in place, a position that almost everyone will find morally compelling.

The same holds for the value we put on life when it comes to questions such as when to terminate medical treatment. There is broad consensus that we should not terminate people who are conscious or able to regain consciousness. There is a strong and widening consensus that we should not continue medical services to people who are brain dead, with no chance of returning to human life. Many also agree that we should allow people to refuse what are called heroic measures (such as resuscitating their hearts when they fail), but fewer agree that it is all right for them to refuse feeding—again, a rather specific, worked-out consensus. Sure, some specific questions are contested, but there is more than enough here for anyone to teach the high value that our society puts on individual life.

Or take the value of truth telling. No one argues that lying wantonly is commendable. And we all realize that there is room for "white" lies, those that are clearly aimed at helping the person to

whom we lie. For instance, it is better not to discourage a patient who is about to be wheeled into surgery by reviewing all the dangers involved, unless the patient clearly indicates a desire to be retold the anticipated risks.

It may be further argued that it is debatable whether or not one should lie for national security purposes. But this raises the more general question of how you deal with a situation in which two values come into conflict, a matter that students most assuredly need to be taught. This issue, however, does not detract from the fact that there is no ethical justification for the government to lie unless it has demonstrable, compelling reasons, and even then it would be more morally appropriate to refuse to comment than to actively lie.

Deeper, well-trained philosophers and debaters will find disagreements on specifics of these more complicated issues, such as "What if the government truly believes our military bases in country X are endangered, but it is close to an election?" But such unresolved subtleties need not stop us from teaching second-, fourth-, and even tenth-graders that with rare exceptions, truth telling is preferable to lying.

E. J. Dionne, Jr., in his fine book, *Why Americans Hate Politics*, provides another example of how we are often in agreement on the basics and quite a few specifics of moral issues. He shows how in 1991 Congress (which often engages in symbolic, nonissue-oriented debates) thoroughly and openly discussed the moral appropriateness of the use of military force by the United States to stop Saddam Hussein's threat to other countries after Iraqi forces occupied and brutalized Kuwait. Although some members of Congress wanted to wait a bit longer, to see whether or not economic sanctions would work, others wanted to proceed militarily immediately. There was, though, a basic consensus that the use of force was justified not only in abstract hypothetical situations, but under the specific circumstances at hand. The point is not that the majority supported one position or another, but that a specific situation was examined against the criteria of what is a "just war," and most concerned concluded that the imminent Gulf War was a just one. The remaining difference—wait a bit longer versus hit Hussein now—was primarily a matter of policy and strategy, with little bearing on the moral issue of whether force was justified, upon which there was almost universal consensus.

Far from being necessarily controversial, values education may win wide support. The 148 public schools in Baltimore County, Maryland, teach a common core of twenty-four values, ranging from truth and responsibility to due process. A 1991 survey found that 98 percent of the district administrators, 85 percent of the parents, and 75 percent of the students held that values education was a good idea.

Most important, we need not worry that educators will "brain-wash" students who are captive audiences in their classrooms or indoctrinate them with their moral viewpoints. Students are exposed to a large variety of voices, coming to them from television, radio, magazines, porn shops, peers, and many others. That is, there are natural checks and balances built into the social environment. If somewhere one teacher were to advance a moral concept that was outside the community consensus—say, that we must all become vegetarians, pacifists, or Zen Buddhists—the students would have plenty of other sources to draw on to counter such teaching. Indeed, the opposite is true: if typical educators, whose values tend to be well within the community range, refrain from adding their moral voice to the cacophony of voices the students hear anyhow, the students would miss one perspective—and remain exposed only to all the other voices, many of which are less committed to values the community holds dear. It makes little sense to muzzle the educators and let everyone else spout their messages without inhibition.

The School as a Set of Experiences

How do we teach moral values, as opposed to merely building up the capacity for moral reasoning and disputations? How do we build up moral commitments? There is one way that far surpasses all others. The most important social science observation here is that *experiences are more effective teachers than lectures*. This is particularly evident in extracurricular activities, especially sports. True, these can be abused, such as when coaches focus on winning as the only object and neglect to instill learning to play by the rules, teamwork, and camaraderie. "Graduates" of such activities will tend to be people who are aggressive, maladjusted members of the community. However, if coaches, and the messages they impart,

are well integrated into the values education of a school, and if parents see the importance of using sports to educate rather than to win, sports can be a most effective way to enhance values education.

Why are extracurricular activities credited with such extraordinary power? Because they generate experiences that are powerful educational tools. Thus, if one team plays as a bunch of individuals and loses because its adversary played as a well-functioning team, the losing players learn—in a way that no pep talk or slide show can—the merit of playing as a team.

The same holds for other activities that take place at school. They provide experiences that tend to have deep educational effects, either positive or negative. Thus the first step toward enhancing the moral educational role of schools is to *increase the awareness and analysis of the school as a set of experiences*. Schools should be seen not as a collection of teachers, pupils, classrooms, and curricula. Instead, examine the parking lots: Are they places in which wild driving takes place and school authorities are not to be seen, or are they places where one learns respect for others' safety, regulated either by faculty or by fellow students? Are the cafeterias places where students belt each other with food and the noise is overwhelming, or are they civilized places where students can conduct meaningful conversations over lunch? Are the corridors areas where muscles and stature are required to avoid being pushed aside by bullies, or are they safe conduits patrolled by faculty or students? Does vandalism go unpunished, are drugs sold openly, and are pupils rewarded or punished according to criteria other than achievement (perhaps because they avoid confrontation, obey without question, or come from affluent or otherwise socially preferred backgrounds)? Or is vandalism held in check and the damage, when vandalism does occur, is corrected by the offending students? Are drug sales dealt with swiftly and severely? Are students treated according to reasonable and understandable criteria?

In some public schools in large cities, the dominant educational issue is maintaining law and order, which is a minimal precondition for creating experiences that may build morality. If students are armed with guns, sell drugs, and harass teachers, these issues command urgent attention—attention that must be accorded before one can turn to the more subtle points of moral education.

In many other schools, including public-suburban and private schools, a variety of Radical Individualist approaches hinder moral education. Here students are often treated as if they are miniature adults with formed judgments and unbounded rights, rather than as persons whose development needs to be nurtured. In such schools class activities and rules are fashioned to please the students' tastes rather than to cultivate and enrich them. Grades are dished out to make students feel better about themselves and boost their self-esteem, rather than to prod them to grow. Homework (a fine way to build up self-discipline because it must be done largely without close supervision) is curtailed in order not to "overburden" the students.

Not all experiences are generated outside the classroom. A powerful example of how one may generate experiences in a classroom is found in Iowa. In April 1968 Jane Elliott, a teacher in Riceville, Iowa, decided that it would be inappropriate to hold a conventional discussion of the plight of black Americans shortly after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Instead she decided to try to teach discrimination to her third-graders by affecting their experiences. Her students, Elliott felt, understood discrimination in a neutral, distant sense—what she termed "sympathetic indifference"—but they didn't comprehend its true impact.

So Elliott divided her class into two groups by eye color—the blue-eyed students in one group and the brown-eyed in the other. "Today," she said one Friday, "the blue-eyed people will be on the bottom and the brown-eyed people on the top." Elliott continued: "What I mean is that brown-eyed people are better than blue-eyed people. They are cleaner than blue-eyed people. They are more civilized than blue-eyed people. And they are smarter than blue-eyed people." Rules, and Elliott's attitude, were geared specifically to benefit the brown-eyed children.

The experiment's effects were swift and severe. "Long before noon, I was sick," Elliott recalls. "I wished I had never started it. . . . By the lunch hour, there was no need to think before identifying a child as blue- or brown-eyed. I could tell simply by looking at them. The brown-eyed children were happy, alert, having the times of their lives. . . . The blue-eyed children were miserable." In short, the children had learned through *experience* what discrimination is like.

The children were clearly affected by the exercise. Brown-eyed Debbie Anderson said: "I felt mad [on blue-eye-preferred Monday] . . . I felt dirty. And I did not feel as smart as I did on Friday." Student Theodore Perzynski wrote in part: "I do not like discrimination. It makes me sad. I would not like to be angry all my life."

Perhaps one of the most telling anecdotes is a story one of the mothers of Elliott's students told:

I want you to know that you've made a tremendous difference in our lives since your Discrimination Day exercise. My mother-in-law stays with us a lot, and she frequently uses the word "nigger." The very first time she did it after your lesson, my daughter went up to her and said, "Grandma, we don't use that word in our house, and if you're going to say it, I'm going to leave until you go home." We were delighted. I've been wanting to say that to her for a long, long time. And it worked, too. She's stopped saying it.

Such experiences leave strong and lasting impressions. In 1984 Jane Elliott's class had a reunion. They vividly recalled the lesson. Former student Susan Rolland noted: "I still find myself sometimes, when I see some blacks together and I see how they act, I think, well, that's black. . . . And then later—as I said, I won't even finish the thought before I remember back when I was in that position."

Verla Buls added: "At a softball game a couple of weekends ago. . . . there was this black guy I know. We said, 'Hi,' and we hugged each other, and some people really looked, just like, 'What are you doing with him?' And you just get this burning feeling in you. You just want to let it out and put them through what we went through to find out they're not any different." Other students reported that their career choices were influenced by the discrimination experience. Several chose as a result to join the Peace Corps or work with other cultures overseas.

Ideally, the teachers and principals of each school should at least once every three years engage in an extensive "retreat." Here they would spend a weekend, in some secluded place, drawing on professional facilitators, to examine the experiences their school generates. They would agree to set aside cognitive questions about the

curriculum—such as whether to teach new or old math or which method of teaching English is the best—and focus on one question: What experiences do we fashion? (If possible, a social scientist would first interview students on this matter and then make the report available at the retreat.)

Once a school has analyzed itself in terms of the experiences it generates, those experiences need to be compared to the moral and social lessons the school intends to impart. If the lesson imparted and the intentions agreed upon are in conflict, the school should consider changing its way of conducting itself. Changes may need to encompass the way shared spaces are supervised, the role of competitive sports, the criteria for providing grades, and so on—to bring actual experiences in line with those the school believes will prove more educational.

For example, if a school seeks to impart the message that blacks and whites should treat one another respectfully and develop relations across racial lines, lectures on racial harmony alone will not do the trick. The school would do well to examine seating patterns in the cafeteria. If it finds that students are segregating themselves along racial lines, it may wish to meet with students of both races and explore the reason for this self-imposed ghettolike behavior. The school may then work with the students to encourage interracial lunches (twice a week?), one-on-one interracial contacts, group meetings on tolerance, and so on. Whatever the school tries, it should be aware that its actions, and the experiences they generate, go farther in affecting the moral conduct of the students than most lectures and exhortations.

Less Rotation, More Bonding

For teachers to be more than purveyors of information and skills, for them to be able to educate, they must be able to bond more closely with students than they do now in many schools. Such bonding may be encouraged by arranging for less rotation of pupils. Many American high schools are currently organized as if a powerful sociological engineer were intent on minimizing the bonds between students and teachers and seeking to ensure that whatever peer bonds formed would not be classroom-related. These effects stem from the fact that students are reshuffled each

time the bell rings, every forty-five minutes or so, while the various subject teachers stay put. As a consequence, students, especially in larger schools, rarely develop bonds as members of a class group, because the class members who come together in one period do not remain together for the next. As a result, peer groups, which often hold much sway over members, especially in moral matters, are not classroom-based and are formed for other, often irrelevant-to-education reasons. Peer groups tend to be formed around other values or occasions, whether it is racing cars or heavy-metal rock music. Although these peer groups don't necessarily have to oppose community and educational values, sociological studies show that they often do. They are rarely mobilized by educators on the side of moral education in typical high-rotation schools.

Another result is that teachers cannot form bonds with their students because they have few opportunities to get to know them. Teachers are typically responsible for a subject and not for a "class"—not for a given group of pupils, say, all those in the eleventh grade, third section. Thus the highly specialized school organization is, in effect, a systematic hindrance to bonding with educators, which is an essential prerequisite for moral education.

High schools should be reorganized to facilitate experience-based moral education. Teachers should be in charge of a particular "class," teaching the same group of youngsters, say, three subjects (especially those rich in value content such as history and literature) or two subjects and civics. The same teacher would also be the class's homeroom teacher, in charge of disciplinary matters. Discipline should be approached by the teacher not as if he or she were a punitive police officer, but as a faculty member whose task it is to use instances of improper conduct to engage in moral education. Schools might also institute a policy whereby such teachers would follow the same students from ninth through twelfth grades.

Such changes, in turn, would necessitate modifications in the ways the teachers themselves are trained, to make them less specialized. Note, though, that many teachers, especially those who teach humanities or liberal arts, are already properly prepared. In any event, without more bonding and contacts that are more encompassing, extensive, and value rich, moral education is unlikely to succeed.

McDonald's Is Not Our Kind of Place

In today's reality you need to look beyond the school itself to examine those factors that hinder or provide opportunities for generating educational experiences that enhance character formation and moral education. Today's high school students spend much time outside the school and within the work environment. It would be shortsighted to ignore the educational effects of this context. As I have stressed, much of the education of children takes the form of experiences; since work has become such an important part of many high school students' lives, it too must be examined in this light: Is it educational?

I regret to report that from this viewpoint, McDonald's (and other companies like it, from Roy Rogers to Dunkin' Donuts) are far from benign creations. McDonald's is bad for your kids. I don't mean the flat patties and the white-flour buns. I mean the jobs it takes to mass-produce these delicacies. About two-thirds of high school juniors and seniors these days have part-time paying jobs, many in fast-food chains, of which McDonald's is the pioneer, trendsetter, and symbol. Such employment would seem to be straight from the pages of the Founding Fathers' moral education manual on how to bring up self-reliant, work-ethic-driven youngsters. From lemonade stands to newspaper routes, it is a long-standing tradition that American youngsters hold paying jobs. Here, kids learn the fruits of labor and trade and develop the virtue of self-discipline. (Many Europeans have a rather different view of the work ethic: their teenage children are expected to spend their time skiing, improving their tennis or ballet, even honing their manners—not pumping gas.)

Hardee's, Baskin-Robbins, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and the like appear to be nothing more than a vast extension of the lemonade stand. They provide large numbers of steady teen jobs, test the teenagers' stamina, and reward them quite well compared with many other teen jobs. Upon closer examination, however, the McDonald's kind of job is rather uneducational in several ways. Far from providing an opportunity for self-discipline, self-supervision, and self-scheduling, like the old-fashioned paper route, it is highly structured and routinized. True, students still must mobilize them-

selves to go to work, but once they don their uniforms, their tasks are spelled out in minute detail. The McDonald's Corporation dictates for thousands of local outlets the shape of the coffee cups; the weight, size, shape and color of the patties; the texture of the napkins (if any); how often fresh coffee is to be made (every eight minutes); and so on. There is little room for initiative, creativity, or even elementary rearrangements. Thus, fast-food franchises are breeding grounds for robots working for yesterday's assembly lines and not practice fields for committed workers in tomorrow's high-tech posts.

Some would argue that although these jobs are rather unsuitable for college-bound, middle-class youngsters, they are "ideal" for unemployed, lower-class, "nonacademic" minority youngsters. Indeed, minorities are highly represented in these jobs (over 22 percent of employees in eating establishments are black or Hispanic). In fact, food-service employment of minorities is growing rapidly—from 1980 to 1986, it increased at twice the rate of total industry growth. Although it is true that these workplaces provide income and even some training to such low-skilled youngsters, they also tend to perpetuate their disadvantaged status. Such jobs provide no career incentives and few marketable skills, and they can undermine school attendance and involvement.

The hours are long. Often the stores close late, and after closing workers must tally and clean up. There is no way that such amounts of work will not interfere with schoolwork, especially homework. Fifty-eight percent of the seniors at Walt Whitman High School in Montgomery County, an affluent area in Maryland, acknowledge that their jobs interfere with their schoolwork.

One study did find merit in jobs at McDonald's and similar places. The study reported that this work experience teaches teamwork and working under supervision. That may be true, but it must be noted, however, that such learning is not automatically educational or wholesome. For example, much of the supervision in fast-food places leans toward teaching the wrong kinds of compliance (blind obedience or being pissed off with the world, as the supervisors often are). Also, such compliance helps very little to develop the ability to form quality-of-work circles, in which employees and supervisors together seek to improve operations.

Supervision is often both tight and woefully inappropriate. In

the days before industrialization and capitalism, the young were initiated into the world of work in close personal relations such as between a master (adult) craftsman and an apprentice. Even when a young person worked for someone other than his parents, he lived in the master's or farmer's home and was integrated into his family; he was not part of a teen horde.

Today, fast-food chains and other such places of work (record shops, bowling alleys) keep costs down by having teens supervise teens, often with no adult on the premises. There is no mature adult figure to identify with, to emulate, or to provide a role model or mature moral guidance. The work culture varies from one store to another: some places are tightly run shops (must keep the cash registers ringing); in other places the employees may "party," only to be interrupted by the intrusion of customers. Rarely is there a "master" to learn from; rarely is there much worth learning. Indeed, far from being places where solid work values are being transmitted, these are places where all too often teen values dominate. Typically, when one of my sons was dishing out ice cream for Baskin Robbins in upper Manhattan, his fellow teen workers considered him a sucker for not helping himself to the till. Most of them believed they were entitled to a self-awarded "severance pay" of fifty dollars on their last day on the job.

The money raises additional issues. The lemonade stand and paper route money was your allowance. Apprentices, to the extent that they generated a significant flow of income, contributed most, if not all, of it to their parents' household.

Today's teen pay may be low by adult standards, but it is often substantial. Especially among the middle class, it is largely or wholly spent by the teens. That is, the youngsters live free at home and are allowed to keep considerable amounts of money. Where this money goes is not quite clear. Some use it to support themselves, especially among the poor. Some middle-class youngsters set money aside to help pay for college or save it for a major purchase, like a car. But large amounts seem to pay for an early introduction into trite elements of American consumerism: trendy clothes, trinkets, and whatever else is the fast-moving teen craze.

One may say that this is only fair and square: the youngsters are just being good American consumers, working and spending their

money on what turns them on. At least, a cynic might add, the money isn't going to buy illicit drugs and booze. On the other hand, an educator might bemoan that these young, as-yet-unformed individuals are driven to buy objects of no intrinsic educational, cultural, or social merit. They learn early and quickly the dubious merit of keeping up with ever-changing mass-merchandising fads.

Moreover, many teens find the instant reward of money, and the youth status symbols it buys, much more alluring than credits earned in algebra, American history, or French. No wonder quite a few would rather skip school, and certainly homework, to work longer hours at a Burger King.

- It would be better if corporations that employ teens would, in cooperation with schools, define what is the proper amount of gainful work (not more than x hours per school week), determine how late kids may be employed on school nights (not later than 9:00 P.M.), and insist on proper supervision.

- Schools might provide credit for jobs if those jobs meet their educational criteria.

- Schools should be consulted by corporations on matters such as the nature of the supervision and on-the-job training setups.

- School representatives should be allowed to inspect the students' places of employment.

- School counselors should guide the students to those places of work that are willing to pay attention to educational elements of these jobs.

- Parents should encourage their children to seek jobs at places that are proper work settings and insist that fast-food chains and other franchises either shape up or else find it harder to employ their kids.

- Parents should agree with their children, the young workers, that a significant share of teen earnings be dedicated to the family or saved for mutually acceptable items.

- Above all, parents should look at teen employment not as automatically educational, but as an activity, like sports, that may be turned into an educational opportunity or could just as easily be abused. It is here that youngsters must learn to balance the quest for income with the need to pursue endeavors that do not pay off instantly.

A Year of National Service

A year of national service after high school could be the capstone of a student's educational experiences. More and more policy makers are supporting the idea of a year spent serving the country, interrupting the "lockstep" march from grade to grade and into and through college (or directly into the adult world of full-time work). It is a major way to build up the moral tenor and sense of social responsibility among the young. Although the suggested programs vary in detail, many favor a year of voluntary service that could be completed in places such as the armed forces, the Peace Corps, VISTA, or the Conservation Corps. Some would make it the senior year of high school; I prefer for it to follow high school, providing a year between school and college or between school and work for those who are not college-bound.

The merits of a year of national service range from primarily pragmatic to the more encompassing matter of character building. To begin with the pragmatic: In 1991, while the overall unemployment rate was 6.7 percent, the rate for twenty- to twenty-four-year-olds was 10.8 percent, and that for sixteen- to nineteen-year-olds was 18.6 percent. Unemployment is an especially demoralizing experience for many young people. It also undermines the rest of society, because young unemployed persons make up a sizable part of the criminal population. A year of national service would remove many unemployed youths from the streets; it would provide them, often for the first time, with legitimate and meaningful work; and it would help protect them from being enticed into crime. Above all, such service would provide a way to develop the character of those who serve, aside from whatever skills they might acquire. Indeed, much of the potential impact of national service lies in psychic development, in enhancing the individual's self-respect, sense of worth, and outlook on the future.

More important, national service would also provide a strong antidote to the ego-centered mentality as youth serve shared needs. An important criterion for including a particular service in the program should be its usefulness to the community. This could encompass myriad possibilities, from improving the environment and beautifying the land to tutoring youngsters having difficulty in

school or helping the infirm in nursing homes. At the same time, forms of service that infringe on the rights of others would be excluded; for example, volunteers would not be given responsibilities that would, in effect, take away jobs by providing a pool of cheap labor.

Finally, a year of national service could serve as an important community builder because it would act as a grand sociological mixer. At present, America provides few opportunities for shared experience and for developing shared values and bonds among people from different racial, class, and regional backgrounds. One of the major reasons for the low consensus-building capacity of American society is that schools are locally run. They do not subscribe to a common national curriculum, and they transmit different sets of regional, racial, or class values. A year of national service, especially if it was designed to enable people from different geographical and sociological backgrounds to work and live together, could be an effective way for boys and girls, whites and nonwhites, people from parochial and public schools, north and south, the city and the country, to come together constructively while working together at a common task.

A 1989 poll found that many young people who have participated in community service have positive feelings about their experiences. Fifty-seven percent of the respondents said it felt good to help someone, while 40 percent called it a good learning experience. Only 1 percent stated that they didn't like giving up their free time, and only 2 percent felt they hadn't gotten anything out of their volunteer experience.

What is missing are opportunities to serve. Forty-two percent of the students said no one had asked them to help or showed them how; 45 percent said that the fact that there was no parental encouragement to perform community service was a strong reason for their not being more involved.

The costs of a full program are formidable. If every American who reaches eighteen were to participate—a very farfetched assumption—it would cost an estimated \$33 billion a year (at least \$11,000 per person times three million people). True, one must deduct from this figure such items as salaries for young people who would be serving in the armed forces anyway; savings on welfare and unemployment benefits that would not be paid to those in

national service; and "savings" from a reduction in crime, police work, and jail sentences. Even so, the program has a multibillion-dollar net price tag.

However, national service could become competitive with other national priorities if the social and economic dividends proved substantial. By encouraging and developing the virtues of hard work, responsibility and cooperation—to name a few—national service would help the nation in its efforts to restore a climate of basic civility and improve economic productivity. For instance, national service would probably provide young people with greater maturity and skills than they would normally have upon entering college or vocational training. Then, as students, they would gain more from their education, benefitting themselves and the community.

In Conclusion

To state the obvious, that the first duty of schools is education, turns out not to be self-evident. First, there is a strong tendency to equate education with teaching—transmitting skills and knowledge—which it is not. Second, there is a lack of understanding of the ways character formation enable effective teaching and allows for moral education. Character formation is equally essential if we are to graduate young adults who can be upstanding members of the community and employees able to hold their own in today's competitive world.

The single most important factor that affects education from within the schools is neither the curriculum nor the teaching style, at least not as these terms are normally used, but the experiences the school generates. In many American schools, perhaps as many as one-half, these experiences do not support sound character formation or moral education.

Many factors combine to account for the weakened condition of many American schools, but the self-centered mentality is probably easiest to reverse. It is almost certainly a good place to start the reconstruction of the schools as *educational* institutions if they are to become places where *self-discipline* is evolved. Otherwise schools will not only fail their graduates, they will also be unable to serve as a major foundation of the moral infrastructure of our communities.