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VIRTUE AND THE VIRTUES*

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Although my topic concerns the method of moral instruction and training rather than the philosophy of education, it may be well, for the sake of preventing misunderstanding, to state at the outset some of the assumptions that underlie the practical suggestions that I shall offer. I assume, for example, that moral character is altogether a matter of a man's relations to society. Religion thinks of society in a peculiarly broad way, making it include God and our dead, as well as all the living. Concerning religion our state schools are not permitted, and should not be permitted, to give instruction. This limitation must be rigidly maintained in the interest alike of religious liberty and of political equality. I do not desire any recognition of the religious basis of morals. What I hope for is a recognition that life, as far as it is truly successful, is social through and through. I put no stress whatever upon the desirability of an increased use of the Bible or of worship. We must rely first of all upon the right organization and conduct of the school, and upon the teacher's personality, but in addition we should have a definite, systematic, carefully graded scheme for leading pupils, in morals as in everything else, to see just what they are about. This means instruction in morals, but instruction in morals can have its proper effect upon character only when the ideas that are to be communicated develop in the pupil's mind as a phase of his own reaction to a concrete social situation. The problem that I propose to myself is, how can this unity of moral idea and moral reaction be effected in the school?

* Paper before the National Council of Education, San Francisco, California, July 5, 1911.

The reason why we have not made more rapid progress toward a satisfactory method is, in my opinion, that we have given inadequate scrutiny to the content of the proposed instruction. We have given too much attention to the virtues, and too little to virtue. I question whether a satisfactory method can be had as long as the basis of the curriculum is a catalogue of virtues.

The ancients, as well as the moderns, offer us lists of cardinal or essential virtues. "Prudence, courage, temperance, and justice" is a list that has come down to us all the way from Plato. But what are these cardinal virtues in the concrete? We know that a Sophist as well as a Socrates could lay claim to every one of them. Prudence requires nothing but sufficient wisdom to get what you are after, no matter what this is. So, too, one can have courage in executing any design, good or bad. Nor does temperance or self-control imply anything as to a man's central purpose. That even the concept of justice depends for its meaning upon an antecedent conception of humanity is shown by the fact that the greatest of the ancient philosophers regarded slavery as inherently in accord with human nature, and therefore just.

When we come to modern schedules intended as a basis for a curriculum of instruction in morals, we find certain inequalities that are not recognized in the schemes themselves. The chief part of these lists consists ordinarily of virtues like these: Industry, patience, obedience, courage, self-respect, perseverance, self-control, economy, amiability, contentment, comradeship, fidelity. How much is really implied in such terms? Is industry good *per se*, or does its goodness depend upon the end for which one works? Clearly patience is good only when it is the shortest way to a good end; otherwise impatience is better. Courage on behalf of a good cause is good; otherwise it is bad. Self-respect is good only to the extent that one is worthy of respect. Economy is good only that one's savings may be used for something worth while. Amiability must be of the kind that distinguishes between good and bad men before we can approve it. There are times when contentment is out of order; and there are conditions in which obedience only prolongs unjust authority, and creates a craven spirit in him who obeys. Even fidelity, as with the political trickster who always "stands by his friends," may imply evasion of the larger good. In short, all these virtues can exist, either singly or in combination, in a character that every one of us would call bad.

Certain of the virtues that appear in these lists, however, are less ambiguous. Thus, kindness, unselfishness, helpfulness, and truthfulness point with a fair degree of definiteness to a social end. When we come, finally, to love of parents, we have before us an end that is always unambiguously social. The difference between a virtue like love of parents and a virtue like perseverance lies in two things: Love of parents expresses a social purpose, and it indicates the persons toward whom it is directed, while perseverance does neither of these things.

Now, our first concern in the teaching of morals should be to secure genuine discrimination between social and unsocial ends or purposes, not between abstract or formal virtues. The question to be raised in the pupil's mind concerning an act or a course of action is not, Is it industrious, courageous, persevering? but, What persons does it affect, and how does it affect them?

The trouble with formal moral instruction *as it has been understood* lies deeper than most of its critics have realized. Times without number we have insisted that a pupil who understands the virtues may not practice them. Yes, but the incurably radical fault of such instruction is its lack of truth. For it has falsely assumed that a pupil who does practice the virtues of the schedule will attain to virtue. There are two reasons why this is untrue. The first is that most of the virtues in the catalogue are abstract qualities of will, not concrete social purposes; they describe some of the conditions of an efficient will, but they leave out the social mark of a good will. The second reason is that moral character is represented as made up of a combination of qualities or virtues. Socrates declared truly that virtue is one and indivisible, not a collection of virtues. Now, the unity of a good character consists in holding to a social end or purpose through a period of time, and making the details of conduct all contribute to this end.

It follows that the material for moral instruction is the functions of men and of institutions in society. Let us stop studying virtues, and study instead what actual men do, and why they do it. What does a policeman do, and why does he do it? What does the health commissioner do, and why does he do it? What does a judge, a lawyer, an alderman, a grocer, a hod carrier, a mother, a father, a son, a daughter do and why? What does a public library, an art museum, a newspaper, a nickel theater, a billboard, a railroad, a university do? Here is the material upon which children are actually forming their characters anyway, whether we will or no. It has al-

ways been so, and it always will be so. The lives with which the child is in contact constitute the primary material for his moral growth. All that the school can possibly do is to improve the use that he makes of it, partly by calling his attention to what would otherwise be overlooked; partly by extending, through literature and history, the range of cases upon which he reacts; partly by reinforcing social incentives, partly by forming the school into a little society which carries on a directed experiment in living.

I am tempted to pause here to remark that the transformation of curriculum and method thus indicated is a part of the reform that is sometimes called the "new education." The old scheme of merely general culture broke down because it taught processes, but neglected functions. It insisted that a child must know arithmetic, but it never called his attention to the function of a grocer in society. It was punctilious of linguistic propriety, but it had nothing to say about the health of a community, how it is to be preserved, and who is responsible. It taught historical genealogies, but nothing concerning a favorable birth for the next generation of babies. Many years ago, when the first threshing machine appeared in a certain rural community, several boys were punished because their desire to see it work caused them to be tardy at school. So far was the old fashioned school from reality. Nor are we ourselves beyond the danger of perpetuating this separation. To teach qualities of character, but not the functions of men and women and children, is to perpetuate it.

Examples of what is now needed are not lacking in Superintendent Carr's proposals, especially for the first, second, and fourth high school years.* Here he bases moral instruction directly upon the structure and functions of a mercantile house, the family, the state. In a measure he employs the same method in his proposals for the kindergarten and the first four grades. Even such abstract heads as *helpfulness, kindness, sociability*, seem in several cases to cover the idea of function rather than quality. Yet the old wineskins are still in evidence under many of the captions.

In his proposals for grades five to eight, Mr. Carr seems to me less happy in his conception of material and method. White's "Character Lessons," which are here followed, though they contain material which teachers can use, are constructed upon an inverted method. First come definitions or explanations of a virtue, then illus-

* See proceedings of the National Education Association, San Francisco, 1911.

trations, and finally applications. What is this if not precisely the teaching *about* virtues that has brought formal moral instruction into disrepute? Let us begin a lesson in morals, just as we begin one in nature-study, with a concrete case that is at least partly within the pupil's experience. Let the pupil be led to analyze it himself, and to make discovery for himself of the breadth or the narrowness, the social constructiveness or destructiveness of the conduct involved in it. As for the application—well, we who are in the work of Sunday-school reform directed one of our first and fiercest attacks against the old way of making the application, that is, separating the "lesson" of the lesson from the lesson itself. An examination of the newly adopted graded lesson systems will show a decided improvement in this respect. Yet here we find a public school lesson on *industry* that starts out with an explanation of what industry is, then gives examples of industrious merchants, manufacturers, inventors, and naturalists, and ends with an application, not to store keeping, manufacturing, etc., but to school studies! Does anyone really believe that Willie Green of the fifth grade will study his lessons because John Wanamaker, Thomas A. Edison, and Luther Burbank work hard in their respective occupations? Willie is engaged with functions which to him are different from those of merchant, inventor, and naturalist. At some point in his course it will, perhaps, be worth while for him to study the career of Mr. Wanamaker in order to see what a merchant does for society, and how he does it; Mr. Edison's career, to see what an inventor does for society, and how he does it; and Mr. Burbank's career, to see how the breeds of plants and of animals can be improved, and why they should be improved; but if you wish to make eleven-year-old Willie Green enjoy hard study, you must find your leverage in something that he can recognize as his own present good. A teacher who cannot teach arithmetic so that it seems to Willie to be included in his very own job will scarcely induce mathematical zeal by telling how many hours a day Mr. Edison spends in his laboratory!

The first requirement for an effective system for teaching morals, then, is the frank abandonment of the virtues as the subject matter of the curriculum, and the substitution therefor of the functions of men and women and children in society. The adoption thus of concrete material will open wide the way to a solution of three troublesome problems, namely: How to secure a truly developmental order of topics from grade to grade; how to awaken a sense of obligation within a scheme of free individual growth; and how to co-ordinate morals with the other subjects of the curriculum.

Curricula based upon "the virtues" are inherently incapable of obeying a genuinely developmental principle. If we have thirty or forty virtues to teach, with only eight grades in which to teach them, we must distribute the virtues pigeon-hole fashion, with only partial regard for the order of growth in the pupil's personality. We inevitably distribute the virtues through the eight years in a serial order that is artificial. Mr. Carr has done about as well as anybody can do with such a scheme, yet his plan shows many mis-adjustments like these: *Obedience* is a second grade subject only, though the hardest struggle to obey comes later; *truthfulness* and *honesty* appear in the second and fifth grades only; *cheerfulness* appears nowhere above the third grade, and *justice* in the seventh only. Now, in the life of the child there is no such serial order of moral issues. Justice, cheerfulness, unselfishness, honesty, truthfulness are appropriate and needful at every stage of growth. The fact is that we have here two incommensurables, a set of abstract moral qualities and a growing child, with a repetition of the ancient fallacy of attempting to fit the child to the curriculum rather than the curriculum to the child.

That a way out of the difficulty can be found by building the curriculum upon the social functions of human beings appears from three considerations. *First*, these functions can be arranged in an ascending order of complexity, from washing our faces and saying "please," to managing a factory or administering the laws of a nation. *Second*, the ascending order of complexity is substantially an ascending order of sociality. Not that family affection with which the child begins is ever to be outgrown, but that social feeling, motive, and purpose increase in both breadth and depth as social functions radiate normally from the hearth to the larger and more complex organizations of men. *Third*, this ascending order of functions and motives coincides in general with the child's increasing contact with persons and institutions, and with his increasing assumption of responsibility.

The order of topics thus implied has as its first member the daily life of the household, and what each member of it (father, mother, children, hired helpers) contributes to it. The concluding topics of the series will concern social life in its widest aspects (the economic order, poverty, vice, crime, immigration, wealth, marriage and divorce, world peace, for example), with such analysis of causes and effects as to locate responsibilities. Between these two extremes will appear the persons who minister to the household from outside it (the butcher, the baker, the grocer, the milkman, the letter carrier); then the per-

sons and institutions that the child encounters when he begins to go to school and to execute errands for father and mother (the teacher, playmates, the street railroad, the fire department, the policeman); then the industries of the community, whether agricultural, manufacturing, or commercial; then the social institutions of the community (schools, libraries, churches, the local government); then the activities of the county, state, and federal government; then institutions like railroads, water and light companies, banks, newspapers, theaters; at last the specialized professional and technical occupations. Here is a genuinely progressive order that coincides substantially with the growth of the child's social experience from the kindergarten to the end of the high school course. In addition, there will be woven into these topics the social aspects of health and disease, sexual hygiene, and preparation for marriage.

Let us see, now, whether this material is appropriate for awakening a sense of obligation within free individual growth. Under exceptional circumstances you may evoke effective moral emotions by sharply defining a virtue or a fault and adducing biographical examples of it. But the only generally valid method consists in causing the child to define to himself his own purpose in situations that he actually experiences. When I ask myself what I am really after, and why, I compare and contrast one purpose with another, and inevitably I begin to estimate values, and to approve and condemn. Now, the curriculum that I have sketched is based upon the changing social contacts and reactions of the pupil. Lead him to ask, What does a street railroad do for the community? and then, What do I do in this situation? and he will almost inevitably appreciate the obligation to pay his fare. A boy was throwing stones at a street lamp. A passer-by said, "Why do you wish to break your father's lamp?" "It isn't my father's lamp!" replied the boy. "Who pays for street lamps, then?" was the rejoinder. A not less pointed example of the effect of defining one's purpose to one's self is this: Get a boy to tell you what he really wants in the next game of baseball that he plays, and you will draw out of him the right material for awakening indignation and scorn, admiration and social purpose. I would have in the curriculum the subjects of doll play and other make-believe plays; marbles, tops, mumblety peg, and jackstones; tag, leap-frog, and baseball; running races, tournaments, picnics—not as applications of principles brought from who-knows-where, but as living tissue of morals. Just so, the entire series of the child's extending social contacts can

be so used as to awaken intelligent approvals and condemnations, and analysis of one's own conduct.

Is it not evident, finally, that here is the solution of the problem of co-ordinating moral instruction with other subjects? Many of our teachers, perhaps most, doubt the wisdom of a specific course on morals. It is likely, they think, to become abstract. Besides, is not every subject that is well taught a moral discipline? Does not arithmetic, because it requires accuracy, train to truthfulness? And so on. Now, it is true that everything in the school can be made serviceable to character. But it is easy to overestimate the value of merely formal discipline. With our lips we all profess that the pupil's interest and motive for study should be found in the thing studied. Yet the asserted moral value of mathematics resides not in the content, but in the way it is studied—in the mere form of the act, not the content of it. The assertion that such merely formal training in mathematics appreciably conduces to truthfulness is open to the gravest doubt. You lose most of the moral value of anything when you separate it from the functions in which it has its origin. Scoring a baseball game accurately, or keeping an accurate expense account does train to truthfulness, however, because here form is not separated from content. Why, now, should teachers longer consent that arithmetic or any school subject whatever should be abstracted from the social functions to which it belongs in real life? Why should the school not recognize that arithmetic is a phase of buying and selling, planting and harvesting, building a house, cooking, trimming a gown, even playing the games of boys and girls? Now, give us really vital material throughout the school, and the course in morals that I have outlined will not seem to be lugged in. It will deal with the primary phase of all the material of all the subjects, that is, with the co-operative purposes and functions of men in subduing nature and in enriching social existence. Language study, number study, earth science, history, literature—these exist at all because they minister to the ends of a rational will. Study of the ends of a rational will is the study of morals. Therefore the study of morals is not only not foreign to the other school studies; it is the most natural introduction to every one of them, and it alone can lend to them the complete concreteness that modern educational theory demands. Here, then, is the principle requisite for the co-ordination of morals with other subjects. Morals, and morals only, studies the material of education in its wholeness as human experience in a purposeful social life; the other studies have to do with parts or phases of this material.