Introduction

William Damon

GENUINE CHANGE IN a modern educational system usually takes place slowly, if at all; but we have seen one notable exception to this in recent times. With astonishing rapidity, education in the United States has ended its failed experiment in separating the intellectual from the moral and choosing the intellectual as its only legitimate province. From K-12 schools to college campuses, instructors are paying attention to students' values and are accepting responsibility for promoting students' character.

By no means is this an unprecedented approach: indeed, it is a return to the more comprehensive "whole student" agenda that American schools had dedicated themselves to during the first three centuries of education in this country. But during the middle and latter parts of the twentieth century, educators found themselves embedded in a highly specialized, secular, knowledge-driven, postmodern world. Most responded by concluding that the moral part of their traditional mission had become obsolete. Moral relativism was in, *in loco parentis* was out. The dominant view held that educators should promote critical think-

ing and tolerance which, amazingly, were not viewed as moral values, but rather as neutral, inert positions outside the contentious realm of value choices. This thinking was a misconception that caused so many readily apparent casualties among the young that it was bound to be abandoned sooner or later. Fortunately the correction has occurred surprisingly quickly. As we enter the twenty-first century, it is well under way.

As an advocate for this correction, I have glimpsed the change even at the federal government level, which typically reacts to rather than induces cultural trends. At the dawn of the Clinton administration, Secretary of Education Richard Riley addressed a conference of character educators such as me who were looking for ways to reintroduce moral messages into the K-12 curriculum. The secretary supported our aims, but in response to a question commented (I cannot quote him verbatim after all these years) that he did not see much role for the federal government or for public schools in such an endeavor, because children's values were a private matter that should be reserved for families and churches.

Three years passed, with widely noted media accounts of youngsters harming themselves and others through morally misguided choices. In his 1996 State of the Union Address President Clinton proclaimed that every school in America should teach character education. He said: "I challenge all our schools to teach character education, to teach good values and good citizenship." Secretary Riley's Department of Education established a program to support this idea. Four years later, in the presidential election of 2000, one of the major candidates (the winning one, in fact) frequently campaigned on a promise to promote character education in America's public schools—a pledge that he, now President Bush, has acted upon since assuming office by tripling federal support for the Education Department program. I have believed in character education for most of my working life, but I never thought that I would see it arise as a major campaign promise in a presidential election, or garner so much support at the highest reaches of government.

We have entered a new era in character education, marked by broad public acceptance of the idea and endorsements by top elected officials from both political parties. This is a good start, a window of opportunity that could stay open long enough to allow worthwhile efforts to enter. But all such windows eventually shut if the worthwhile efforts stall or get pushed aside by less serious ones designed only to take advantage of the trend. How can we bring in this new era in character education to make the right kind of difference to the young people in our schools and colleges? What are the principles and approaches that provide character education the solid foundation to sustain it now and in the future, so that it again becomes a lasting part of our educational agenda rather than merely another trend? What obstacles in our present-day educational system must we overcome, and what new opportunities can we create? The purpose of this book is to provide some beginning answers to these questions. The authors are among the most innovative thinkers in the field today, and in their chapters they offer original solutions unconstrained by the misconceptions that have derailed moral instruction in our schools.

Each chapter puts forth a unique perspective on what is needed in character education today, but at least two main themes run throughout the volume. The first is a consensus that fundamental moral standards must be passed along to the young and that educators at all levels bear a serious obligation to transmit these core standards to their students. The question of "Whose values are these anyway?"—in recent years the battle cry of those who would keep schools barren of moral guidance— is shown to be moot by several of the authors. They are our values, the "our" referring to the worldwide community of responsible adults con- cerned with the quality and very futures of the civilizations that their younger citizens will one day inherit. The second theme that emerges from this volume is a shared determination to get rid of sterile old oppositions that have paralyzed even some of the best efforts in this field over the past few decades. Many oppositions have gotten in the way and

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must be transcended by a more integrated, inclusive, all-encompassing approach if real progress is to be made:

Habit and Reflection

Most parents know that it is essential to raise children to act right *and* to exercise good judgment in complex or difficult situations. Every child deserves to acquire reliable habits *and* strong reasoning skills. Children who do not acquire this beneficent combination may become untrustworthy to themselves, despite whatever good intentions they may have; or, alternatively, they may become automatons susceptible to malevolent influences that they cannot screen or evaluate. Strangely, contemporary scholarly discourse draws lines between the aims of fostering good habits and clear reasoning about justice and other moral matters. The philosopher Bernard Williams[1] criticizes his own field for setting up a false opposition between virtue theory (virtues simply being the characterological consequence of sustained habit) and justice theory (which advocates a constant thinking through of procedures that create social contracts and their implications for fairness). Williams points out that there should be nothing incompatible about virtue and fairness. Any full moral life aspires to achieve both. Williams notes that the two moral aims share common enemies—hypocrisy, a self-serving tendency to rationalize inaction or compromise, and a willingness (or too often an eagerness) to pursue supposedly moral ends through immoral means.

Compounding philosophy's confusion, a quirk in the history of psychology sets habit and reflection in opposition. In the scientific study of moral development, the two dominant camps for the large part of the twentieth century were the behaviorist and cognitivist traditions (the psychoanalytic tradition remaining mostly outside of academia because of its sparse research base). Behaviorism emphasized the person's conformity to rules and the conditioning of habitual modes of conduct;

1. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986).

whereas cognitivists such as Piaget and Kohlberg emphasized the person's capacity for reasoning and autonomous judgment.

Dividing the person in this way may or may not serve the purposes of scientific study—that is a debate for another occasion—but it is an unmitigated disaster for education, which must in the end deal with all the components of the developing youngster. The incredibly fruitless opposition between habit and reflection has been transplanted from psychology and philosophy to realms of educational theory and practice, where it has polarized character education efforts for precious decades. It is time to move beyond this needless argument and take as our target of moral instruction the whole child—habit and reflection, virtue and understanding, and every system of judgment, affect, motivation, conduct, and self-identity that contributes to a child's present and future moral life.

The Individual and the Community

Much rhetoric has been wasted arguing about the locus of the moral sense that we try to cultivate in every child. Extreme positions proliferate all across the ideational landscape. Some hold that morality is essentially biological, deeply rooted in an individual's genetic code, with the implication that individuals are born with varying degrees of it. This position leaves us little to do educationally but spot the bad seeds and get out of the way of the good ones. Even the question of whether parents matter has been taken seriously in recent years. At the other extreme, some insist that all moral truth resides in the community, that excessive individualism is the root of our problems, and the task of moral educators is to promote cultural transmission and an awareness of our interdependence. Neither position gives much credence to the age-old ideals of personal conscience, noble purposes, or inspirational social action.

The supposed opposition between the individual and the community is a popular myth based upon degraded versions of culture theory. The idea is that Western morality (especially the American version)

stresses individual rights and responsibilities, unlike the rest of the world
(Japan is often cited as an example), where a communal orientation
prevails. More serious anthropologists[2] know that all such notions exist
everywhere. Indeed, how could any society survive without holding
individuals accountable for their actions, recognizing and protecting
their rights (at least to some extent), or establishing some communal
sense of the common good? Societies certainly vary in how they balance
and express these moral orientations, in the degree to which they em-
phasize one or the other, and in the cultural traditions that organize
them, but morality is always a matter of individual transactions with
communities, and children must be prepared both to learn from their
social settings and to follow their own consciences when the need arises.
For educators, morality means teaching common values as well as
helping every child acquire the kind of personal moral identity that
ultimately will sustain the child's moral sense in any situation—joyful
or grim, inspiring or corrupting—that the child encounters in life.

The Secular and the Religious

In these days when public school districts are sued for allowing student
choirs to sing hymns, when valedictorians are forbidden to use the word
"God" in their commencement addresses, and when teachers are rep-
rimanded for wishing students "Happy Holiday!" before school vaca-
tions (I have not invented these incredible examples), it must be noted
that things were not always so in this country. For most of our history,
public education did not distinguish between moral messages conveyed
in a secular package and moral messages conveyed through stories and
sayings from any one of the world's religious traditions. Far from ban-
ning every expression of religious sentiment, public schools recognized
it (generally in a nonsectarian form) as one source of moral inspiration
and guidance. Schoolbooks were full of uplifting moral, spiritual, and

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2. R. Shweder, *Thinking through Cultures: Expeditions in Cultural Psychology*
(Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

religious ideas mingled with lessons designed to teach literacy, math, and whatever else children needed to learn. It was part of what I referred to earlier as the whole student approach that did whatever it could to foster character as well as intellect, goodness as well as knowledge, purpose as well as competence.

Starting with the Progressive Era, and throughout the remainder of the twentieth century, public education split the secular from the religious, adopting the former and rejecting the latter. This choice was spurred by pluralism and a well-intentioned desire to protect children whose families might not share the beliefs expressed. I do not dismiss such reasons: they are important in themselves, and all children should learn to understand and respect the civil liberties concerns that they reflect. But such matters always must be viewed in the perspective of an overall pedagogical agenda, which in turn must be tailored to how young people learn.

How do young people learn moral beliefs and values? This book provides sound answers to this question, answers based on careful scholarship rather than on unanalyzed fears or wishful thinking. Some of the insights shared by many authors in this book are (1) young people learn best through clear messages—moral relativism and ambivalence leave young minds cold; (2) young people learn from positive instances of exemplary behavior. A single shining, in vivo example of virtue is a more powerful teaching tool than scores of abstract "do not's"; (3) young people have active, curious minds that eagerly seek new knowledge. They are not especially fragile, and the real danger is in turning them off by failing to provide sufficient inspiration, not in disturbing them with harmful information; and (4) young minds have great intellectual flexibility—they are capable both of absorbing the traditional wisdom of their culture and of making smart choices for themselves when they need to.

I have never heard of a youngster being harmed by witnessing another person's expression of spirituality, even when the form of spirituality is highly unfamiliar to the child. On the contrary, young people

usually are fascinated and moved by such expressions and the more foreign the forms, the more they are likely to find them interesting rather than disturbing. The civil liberties concerns about minority rights and the dangers of theocratic oppression are adult issues worth teaching at some point, to be sure, but not frontline issues for the moral instruction of young people, who need to learn far more basic lessons about core standards such as honesty, compassion, responsibility, respectfulness, and fairness. Adult-centered concerns should not be used as justification for censoring a unique and powerful source of positive moral inspiration from our public schools. It is time to open our public schools once again to moral ideas set in a variety of religious as well as secular frameworks as well as to students' free expressions of spiritual faith.[3] Young people need all the inspiration they can get.

The Chapters in This Book

Each chapter in this book points to directions that character education must take at this juncture and offers strategies essential for progress. Taken together, the chapters suggest a comprehensive approach for such progress.

Arthur Schwartz identifies the starting point of our new era: no longer is the distracting question "Whose values?" bogging down our character education efforts. That question has been settled by a consensus throughout our society—a widespread, tacit agreement that all children should acquire the core values of civilized living that responsible adults cherish. Now that we can stop wasting our time on unnecessary

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3. Some key ideas that we wish to pass down to children require an appreciation of their religious roots in order to fully understand their moral significance. The work ethic comes to mind as one such notion. Without knowing the religiously inspired concept of *calling* (or, similarly, the classic root of the word *vocation*), work can be seen as simply a convention or a nuisance that is too often necessary. I have heard not only disgruntled workers but also distinguished social scientists portray work in this way. For the work ethic to be an inspiring invocation rather than a oppressive injunction, it is important to convey to youngsters its origins in the belief that one should use one's occupation to serve God and, by extension, one's fellow humans.

uncertainty, we can make progress on the more profound and difficult question of how we can pass these values down to the younger generation in ways that will elevate their conduct and their life goals. Schwartz has his own answers to this that are at the same time innovative and very old. His suggestions about reintroducing wise maxims in curricula and his examination of how honor codes should be used in our schools should be required reading for educators everywhere.

Following a theme introduced by Schwartz, Christina Hoff Sommers shows why it is relativism, not indoctrination, that threatens the moral development of young people in our time. She starts with an example of ambivalence toward the right or wrong of cheating, an example that would be amusing if it were isolated or bizarre. Unfortunately, as I have discovered in my own travels through every level of our educational system, Sommers has given us a revealing glimpse into a grave malignancy that threatens both the character of our students and the integrity of our academic institutions (more about this below). Sommers offers a classic vision of moral education that springs from the principles of Aristotelean and Augustinian philosophy that is corrective of the laissez-faire excesses fomented by Rousseau and his legion of modern-day followers. Sommers shows us the depths to which misguided ideas can take us and offers hope for the future by describing approaches that can lead us to a better way.

Education, like medicine, is a field of practice; but, like medicine, it needs a scientific base in order to weed out ineffective (or even dangerous) practices from beneficial ones. The subfield of character education has been establishing a scientific base for some decades, and Marvin Berkowitz provides us with an up-to-date account of it. Beyond his chapter's importance as a rare state-of-the-science statement of what we know from solid evidence, Berkowitz also makes several key points that reinforce the main themes of this book. He rejects the false oppositions that have riven the field, creating in the end a synthesis that should appeal to a wide swath of practitioners (theoreticians and philosophers are another matter—it is possible that they enjoy the argu-

ments too much to fully accept any synthesis). Berkowitz also takes pains to spell out what we don't know as well as what we do know. This is valuable for two reasons: first, it speaks for keeping our pedagogical methods open to change as our scientific base expands; and second, it reminds us to be humble in whatever approaches we try. Humility is a virtue that character educators should aim to foster among students as well as to practice themselves.

Lawrence Walker also takes us through the scientific literature, but with a more particular purpose in mind. Walker makes the case for an approach based on actual human examples of moral excellence, an approach that Walker calls moral exemplarity. The advantages of this approach are similar in both science and education: it can resolve oppositions of the sort that Berkowitz and others find futile; and it offers a compelling, indeed captivating, way of incorporating all the elements of morality that make their way into a human life. The use of moral examples for scientific study and educational practice has been explored before, but Walker's powerful analysis goes beyond previous writings to reveal the promise and significance of such an approach.

Warriors ennobled by moral principle are one archetype of exemplars, and Nancy Sherman shows how stoic principles have shored up the resolve and conduct of heroic warriors such as Navy Pilot James Stockdale. Sherman's treatment of stoic philosophy is subtle and evocative. She shows how stoic principles, when fully understood, offer a moral manner of managing one's emotions in times of pressure. This makes for a unique, invaluable contribution to the moral education literature that generally avoids the problem of inner emotional control. Sherman also sees the limits of Stoicism, cautioning that an overly rigid version may lead to emotional coldness and detachment from the empathic side of moral response. Her own resolution—"Stoicism with a human face"—bears implications for character education far beyond the military settings in which she has worked.

Sherman notes that she began her service at the Naval Academy with a visit commissioned by a navy chaplain in the wake of a shocking

cheating scandal. I accompanied her on that visit, and my impressions are still fresh in my mind. Here was a group of incredibly dedicated officers, faculty, and student-midshipmen torn apart by an enormous breach in one of the navy's proudest traditions, its esteemed honor code. How could such a thing happen? My personal conclusion was that the ethics behind the code, and the moral bases of rules against cheating, were not properly understood by students at the Academy, for the simple reason that they were not being carefully taught. I believe that Professor Sherman's ethics course went a long way toward rectifying this situation.

That is the good news. The bad news is that similar and worse problems are prevalent at schools and colleges across the nation. Almost everywhere, there is a lack of clarity surrounding cheating. In her chapter, Sommers describes the lack of clarity shared by faculty and students alike. Tests that faculty distrust or students dislike do not justify dishonesty as a form of protest. This is not a legitimate act of civil disobedience, in which a dissenter openly admits to breaking a rule and bravely accepts society's sanctions for it. This is instead a deceptive, self-serving, and furtive bit of behavior, a step down the path to personal irresponsibility. When teachers tell students that they can't blame them for cheating on any tests that are unfair or meaningless, or worse, when teachers urge students to cheat as a way of boosting teachers' performance ratings (as news reports, incredibly, have verified), this is moral miseducation. It is training students to become dishonest. No ideological position about testing, competition, or anything else can justify such a choice. If there were such a thing as educational malpractice, this would be a prime example.

Clark Power's discussion of a cheating incident in a school where he worked provides another illustration of the deeply entrenched confusion surrounding this moral issue. Students struggle to sort out the difference between cooperation and dishonesty. One young girl believes she is being an altruist in the image of Mother Teresa by sharing her work with a friend! Students need the guidance that can teach them respect for school codes but many teachers, Power writes, merely "fa-

cilitate [rather than] instruct . . . [and] ask questions [rather than] provide answers." Although Power is more sympathetic to this kind of teaching than I, his chapter offers a poignant account of how his own mentor, Lawrence Kohlberg, moved to a more sociological position toward the end of his life, adopting Durkheimian insights about establishing a structure of moral authority for moral education. In this more traditional vision, a teacher becomes an elder collaborator who transmits cultural wisdom. Power's designation of this approach as countercultural can only be seen as ironic. He notes, for example, that Western culture is open to change and thus often countercultural with itself. Passing Western culture along means communicating this dynamic spirit, not a bad way to orient the younger generation to the excitement of democracy. But the culture that Power really counters is the prevailing atmosphere of our public schools. Here Power is in closer agreement with the other authors in this book, all of whom seek to elevate the desultory moral atmosphere that too many students today encounter.

Amitai Etzioni's *Communitarian Network* has played a key role in creating a nationwide discourse among educators dedicated to character education and in bringing this discourse to the attention of policy makers long before the idea became politically popular. The network organized a number of influential conferences in the 1990s, including the early White House meeting that I referred to above. In his chapter for this book, Etzioni charts out the "communitarian position" on character education, a position that centers on (1) affirming core values, (2) promoting empathy within the child and of bonds of attachment between the child and others, and (3) imparting disciplinary standards that emanate from legitimate authority, but that also become part of the child's own internal set of chosen beliefs.

In line with other authors in this book, Etzioni deals with the question of "whose values?" by pointing out that moral values are not at all arbitrary ("Values do not fly on their own wings," he writes). Etzioni looks to social institutions such as the family, schools, voluntary

associations, and places of worship for reference points regarding the
values that we must pass along to the young. His position places schools
squarely within, rather than apart from, their communities. Our schools
never should have become the sheltered enclaves of expertise and over-
specialization that resulted in their neglect of moral values and char-
acter for much of the past century. Etzioni reminds educators that
cultivation of students' character is necessary even for the academic
parts of their mission: "You cannot fill a vessel that has yet to be cast."

In her chapter, Anne Colby fights the good fight for reestablishing
student morality and character as targets of higher education's central
mission. When they first were founded, most colleges and universities
dedicated themselves to fostering students' moral development, but as
higher education has drifted toward increasing specialization and com-
partmentalization, the original whole student agenda has been dis-
carded. Those who would recapture the old ground have met with great
resistance. Colby takes on each point of resistance with unassailable
logic, effectively demolishing every familiar objection that has been
raised against character education at the post-high-school level. Colby's
chapter will inspire and protect those in higher education who are bold
and caring enough to concern themselves with students' moral lives,
yet find themselves besieged by those who would keep the ivory tower
knowledge-pure and value-free.

For the present volume, Irving Kristol has revised an incisive state-
ment that he originally wrote during the 1970s,[4] the heyday of values-
neutral approaches to moral education. His chapter reminds us that a
child's individual development requires guidance from people and in-
stitutions with firm moral bearings. Like Sommers, he rejects the Rous-
seauian view, so prevalent in schools today, that the job of adults is
simply to get out of children's way and allow intrinsic goodness to
emerge naturally. Kristol points to the necessity of authority in any moral

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4. Ryan K. and D. Purpel, *Moral Education: It Comes with the Territory* (New
York: Basic Books, 1977).

educational endeavor. He uses the concept of authority advisedly. First, he explicitly refers to legitimate authority. Second, he distinguishes legitimate authority from the illegitimate extremes of authoritarianism and permissiveness. Kristol's insight here echoes empirical conclusions from scientific child psychology, which has found that, ironically, authoritarianism ("do as I say because I said so") and permissiveness ("do whatever you want") have similarly ill effects—training children to be irresponsible and incompetent—whereas the consistent exertion of legitimate authority ("here's the right thing to do, here's why, let's discuss it openly and come to a mutual understanding about it") is the surest formula for successful child rearing.[5]

Kristol also makes the point that authority and liberty are inextricably linked, indeed that liberty is not possible without a context of legitimate and predictable authority. For me, this is among the most important points in his chapter, because it is so little understood or appreciated by much of the educational community. It is the reason that some of us still have our students read Emile Durkheim, whose theory elegantly explicated the reasons why, as Kristol writes, "In the case of authority, power is not experienced as coercive because it is infused, however dimly, with a moral intention which corresponds to the moral sentiments and moral ideals of those who are subject to this power." To the extent that education is, as Kristol terms it, an "exercise in legitimate authority," an offering of moral guidance for developing minds, it is a force for both personal freedom and character building.

Looking to the Future with a Remembrance of the Past

The future directions pointed to by the authors in this book are based upon what we have learned from the past. Efforts at character education generally are well-intended, almost by definition, but good intentions

5. W. Damon, *The Moral Child* (New York: Free Press, 1990); W. Damon, ed. *Handbook of Child Psychology*, 5th ed., vol. 1–4 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1998).

have not always prevented them from being misguided. In my own travel, I have seen many mistakes by educators who sincerely want children to acquire virtue and moral understanding. I have seen skin-deep programs that ask students to do nothing more than recite virtuous words such as *honesty*, *temperance*, and *respect*, and the words do nothing more than pass in one ear and out the other. I also have seen adults promoting the very behaviors that they are warning children against. Much like Sommers, I have heard teachers suggesting to students that it is all right to cheat on tests that seem meaningless. I have observed adults who counsel underage minors about alcohol abuse by telling them to stay within a one-drink-per-hour limit. I have seen teachers look the other way when students treat one another harshly or unfairly.

Such half-hearted messages mock character education. Children will neglect ideas that adults present superficially or ambivalently, and are brilliant at picking up subtexts. They love to explore the half-forbidden. Any instruction that begins "I'd rather not have you do this, but if you are going to anyway, be sure to . . ." is an irresistible invitation to give it a full-throttle try. The only way to dissuade a child from harmful behavior is through guidance that the child understands and takes seriously. The only way to stop cheating is to tell children that it's wrong, to explain why (it's unfair, it's untrustworthy), and to enforce the sanctions rigorously. The only alcohol and drug abuse programs that work—that result in less rather than more risky behavior—are programs that stress avoidance of these dangerous substances. But conveying don'ts to children can be only a small part of a successful character education program. Character education must have a positive side, a call to serve others and to dedicate oneself to a higher purpose. In the long run, it is a sense of inspiration that sustains good character. Commitment to a noble purpose can make learned prohibitions unnecessary. As they say in sports, the best defense is a good offense.

Charitable work is one way to introduce students to a larger purpose. Research has found that community service programs, especially when combined with reflection about the moral and personal significance of

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serving others, are powerful inducers of moral growth.[6] Spiritual beliefs, too, offer children positive intimations of transcendent purposes. Another transcendent purpose is the love of country and selfless dedication to it. In the case of a country that stands as a beacon of democracy and freedom, this is a noble sentiment. The common word for this sense of dedication is *patriotism*, a word that in recent times has not been welcome in many educational settings; yet now, when decent societies are called on to combat the evils of international terror, patriotism of the loftiest sort must resume its rightful place as a noble source of inspiration for our young. In order to wholly fulfill their character education missions, schools must open themselves to such sources of inspiration, becoming places where all students can discover their own moral callings and noble purposes.

6. M. Yates and J. Youniss. *The Roots of Civic Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).