

The author traces the origin of the Values Clarification movement in education in Carl Roger's client-centered therapy and exposes its unwarranted extreme ethical stance. He then examines an exemplar episode of values clarification and shows how the theoretical confusions of the Values Clarification proponents are reflected in their actual teaching strategies.

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The Logic of Values Clarification

"Give a small boy a hammer, and he will find that everything he encounters needs pounding"

Abraham Kaplan. *The Conduct of Inquiry*

In our consumer-oriented society which has institutionalized the means of deception, confusion, indoctrination and manipulation of the individual, any earnest and serious attempt to dispel confusion and to make us aware of the subtle and complex forces that shape our habits, attitudes, beliefs and values deserves our serious attention. After all, the emancipation of the individual human being through knowledge and understanding and the improvement of the quality of human life is what education is all about. Thus the Values Clarification approach in education (hereafter V.C.) that proposes to do this and is being accepted enthusiastically by an increasing number of educators across North America, clearly deserves careful attention.

I. THE CLAIMS OF THE VALUES CLARIFICATION PROPONENTS

The background against which the V.C. proponents develop their value theory and the teaching strategies associated with it is a familiar one: our complex, rapidly changing, technological, consumer-oriented society makes it very difficult, particularly for many young people, to evaluate the changing and conflicting value demands that beset their daily lives. As a result of this confusion about values these young persons become "apathetic, flighty, uncertain, or inconsistent, or . . . drifters, overconformers, overdissenters, or role players."¹ On the other hand, those who manage to achieve value clarity are "positive, purposeful, enthusiastic, proud."²

Values Clarification is described as a "teaching theory" that intends to help young people clarify their values and become, in the process, more positive, purposeful, etc. In order to achieve that goal the V.C. proponents emphasize what they call the "process of valuing" rather than what is valuable. "How did he get his ideas?" is a more *fundamental* question for us than "What did he get?"³ In fact they are quite persistent in emphasizing this point:

By an intelligent process of choosing, prizing and behaving . . . humans can arrive at *something* . . . and with some support in the literature, we prefer to call that something "values" . . . If children are helped to use the valuing process

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¹Louis E. Raths, et al., *Values in Teaching*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1966, p. 7.

²*Ibid.* p. 5.

³*Ibid.* p. 10.

of this book, we assert that they will behave in ways that are less apathetic, confused, and irrational and in ways that are more positive, purposeful, and enthusiastic.⁴

The reason for the exclusive emphasis on "the process of valuing" is directly related to the proponents' organic view of the nature of values. Here is what Rathes *et al.* say:

*Out of experiences may come certain general guides to behavior. These guides tend to give direction to life and may be called values. Our values show that we tend to do with our limited time and energy. Since we see values as growing from a person's experiences, we would expect that different experiences would give rise to different values and that any one person's values would be modified as his experiences accumulate and change. A person in the Atlantic would not be expected to have the same values as a person in Chicago. . . . As guides to behavior values evolve and mature as experiences evolve and mature.*⁵

It seems from the above that Rathes *et al.* are committed to a relativistic position with regard to matters of value, except apparently with regard to those that are required by the V.C. approach. Since this claim has many serious consequences it is worth quoting the same authors again:

In this book we shall be less concerned with the particular outcomes of any one person's experiences than we will with the process that he uses to obtain his values. Because life is different through time and space, we cannot be certain what experiences any one person will have. We therefore cannot be certain what values, what style of life, would be most suitable for any person. We do, however, have some ideas about what processes might be most effective for obtaining values.⁶

The "valuing process" is defined in terms of seven criteria and only those things that satisfy all of them are considered values. In order for something to be a value it must be 1. chosen freely, 2. chosen from alternatives, 3. chosen after consideration of the alternatives, 4. prized and cherished, 5. publicly affirmed, 6. acted upon, 7. acted upon repeatedly, in some pattern of life.

According to this prescriptive definition of value anything that does not meet *all* seven criteria is not a value. If it meets only some of the criteria then it is a "value indicator". Goals, purposes, aspirations, attitudes, interests, feelings, activities, worries, problems and obstacles are mere "value indicators." The task of the teacher is to raise these "value indicators" to the level of real values, where all seven criteria of the valuing processes are operative.⁷ However the teacher must always be on guard not to be judgmental, not to challenge the students, not to question their beliefs, because in matters of value there is no truth or falsity, nor universal principles. "By definition and by social right . . . values are *personal* things."⁸

II. THE CHANGE IN TERMINOLOGY

The first thing that one notices as one reads the numerous books on V.C. is that one often encounters a radical departure from ordinary language. The V.C. proponents in education have introduced new terms and new metaphors

⁴*Ibid.* p. 10-11.

⁵*Ibid.* p. 27. The italicized words show that the authors subscribe to a naive organic view of the nature of value. Nowhere in the text, however, is there any evidence that they are aware of their metaphorical talk, let alone of the serious limitations of the organic metaphor. For a clear discussion of the limitations of the educational uses of the organic metaphor see Israel Scheffler, *The Language of Education*. Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas Publisher, 1960, Ch. III.

⁶*Ibid.* p. 28.

⁷*Ibid.* pp. 28-33.

⁸*Ibid.* p. 37. Italics added. The same claim is made again on p. 54.

that are intended to do the important job that older terms are failing to accomplish. This change in terminology however raises some difficulties. Ordinarily we talk about examining our values, habits, beliefs, etc., and just about every western person has heard that "the unexamined life is not worth living." The V.C. advocates avoid the word 'examination' and talk instead about 'clarification'. This is awkward because figuratively but appropriately speaking we clarify the meaning of words or sentences and not of attitudes, feelings, or activities.

The choice of the word 'clarification' by the V.C. proponents is not accidental. One can make his ideas *clear* although their correspondence with reality, their consistency and cogency, their worthwhileness can still remain questionable. But when one *examines* his ideas one subjects them to close scrutiny and investigation to determine their correctness, quality, and worthwhileness. The word 'examination', then, implies criteria and standards that are not implied by the word 'clarification.' There is ample evidence that it is this normative character of the term 'examination' that makes proponents of V.C. avoid it. They strongly advise teachers to avoid "why" questions, and to refrain from persuading or challenging their students. The purpose of what they call "clarifying response" is to stimulate the student to clarify ideas he already has⁹ because "values are personal things."¹⁰ "The clarifying response avoids moralizing, criticizing, giving values, or evaluating. The adult excludes all hints of 'good' or 'right' or 'acceptable' or their opposites, in such responses."¹¹

In other words, the teachers are advised to refrain from suggesting to the students any criteria of what might be considered valuable, worthwhile, desirable. What matters is what the learner genuinely values after having been led through the recommended "process of valuing." In the language of the V.C. proponents 'valuable' has been reduced to 'valued.'

If the teachers follow these recommendations consistently they should be prepared to abandon the centuries-old maxim about the examined life. Now it must be "the unclarified life [that] is not worth living." Raths *et al.* almost say it in these words. If your life pattern is not "based on free choice, understanding, and pride . . . one would suspect that such a person is *operating at a lower level of life* than need be . . . We would be inclined to say that, from our set of values it is 'bad' not to use the valuing processes. More objectively, we should say that a person who does not use that process is likely to live a less rich life than one who does."¹²

It is not clear how we are supposed to understand the words "more objectively" in the above quotation, but it is quite clear that the authors consider the "process of valuing" as being appropriate for all matters of value and universally valid for all human beings. There seems to be an implicit threat that if we do not accept their advice our lives will not be worth very much. And all these categorical pronouncements appear "out of the blue" without any sustaining theoretical framework.

A further problem created by the "private" language in the V.C. theory is that of "the process of valuing". The reader will recall that the proponents of V.C. are "less concerned with the particular value outcomes of any one person's experiences than . . . with *the process* that [the person] uses to obtain his values."¹³

⁹*Ibid.* p. 54.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹*Ibid.* p. 53.

¹²*Ibid.* p. 194. Italics added.

¹³*Ibid.* p. 28. Italics added.

Just what is this "process of valuing"? It certainly could not be like the natural processes of digestion, degeneration, and physical growth or like the processes of manufacturing goods. It could not even be anything like "the process of law". The first examples imply that there are certain natural regularities that if disturbed would affect the outcome. The process of law, on the other hand, is determined by a set of rules that are adopted in order to secure the course or method of carrying on an action.

There is nothing good or bad about natural processes independently of their outcome, and the value of the processes of law depends on what they are designed to guarantee. It is obvious then that the "process of valuing" is nothing more than a prescription, or recommendation, disguised as a seemingly natural and desirable process in order to command our respect. After all, there might be undesirable consequences for those who might be tempted to interfere with the natural process of growing up or with the due process of the law. What we have here is another instance of the organic view of education which permeates the thinking of the V.C. advocates. They fail, however, to see that this naturalistic view of human growth is inconsistent with the highly cognitivist strategies and techniques that they employ in working with their subjects.

III. THE PREDECESSORS OF VALUES CLARIFICATION

Raths argues that his value theory is derived mainly from John Dewey's *Theory of Valuation* and his *Moral Principles in Education*. He also mentions the work of Carl Rogers, Edgar Friedenberg, Erich Fromm and several others. However any person who is acquainted with Dewey's numerous, and sometimes not so clear, arguments about education and values knows that although he subscribed consistently to a naturalistic-type view of values he argued very strongly that any intelligent position about matters of value had to use rigorous empirical inquiry and adhere to logical principles. Nowhere in the writings of the V.C. promoters do we find these suggestions of Dewey considered seriously, let alone followed.

Similarly, although Dewey claimed that values were relative to a situation (of specific individuals) he also maintained that the ultimate criterion for a moral claim is social welfare, not the reinforcement and glorification of personal tastes, preferences, attitudes and beliefs, as the V.C. propounders suggest.

Finally, Dewey regarded blind habits and uncritical adherence to traditions and customs as obstacles that inhibit individual and social progress. But he also maintained that an educational or social policy that disregards the power of political, social and economic realities is utopian. Dewey repeatedly emphasized the fact that the relative effect of the social setting is so much greater on human behavior than on any other species that no account of human nature or value could afford to ignore it. And although he could see a potential moral dimension in every situation, he did also see the need for distinguishing moral value from other aspects of the situation.¹⁴

The intention here is not to enumerate all the divergent positions taken by Dewey and the V.C. proponents or to defend Dewey's views but to point out that on issues which are fundamental to their orientations there are irreconcilable differences between them. Thus Raths' claim that his theory is based on Dewey's

¹⁴These remarks should not be construed as intending to defend John Dewey's views against those of the V.C. advocates. They only aim to show that the V.C. proponents who appeal to Dewey have not read him carefully and have misconstrued him badly. Dewey's views on these issues can be found in his *Theory of Valuation*; *Moral Principles in Education*; *Democracy and Education*; *Human Nature and Conduct*; *Reconstruction in Philosophy*; *The Quest for Certainty* and others.

work is unjustified. What Rath's appears to have done is to borrow some of Dewey's rather fuzzy concepts without paying very much attention to Dewey's doctrines. The result is that the relationship between Rath's views and those of John Dewey is superficial.

If the V.C. proponents are indebted to anybody it is to Carl Rogers and his client-centered approach to therapy. Their diagnosis of the problems especially of young people in our society, their outright dismissal of traditional methods of teaching, their assumptions concerning human nature and values, their strategies and techniques, and the new terminology they employ differ very little from those of Carl Rogers.

One sees the same lack of historical, social and philosophical perspectives in both approaches, the same romantic and relativistic attitude according to which what matters is not whether what one believes is true or justified but whether one is "sincere" and "genuine" about it. There is the same "unconditional acceptance" of the individual child-client and his experiences, and there are the repeated appeals to the child as the center of all values and valuing. According to Simon *et al.* it is illegitimate "to instill any particular set of values"¹⁵ in the children. All that the teacher can do is to explain to his student that "he is going to ask them some questions which will require them to *look deeper into themselves and make a value judgment*"¹⁶

Carl Rogers, on the other hand, tells us that "there is an organismic base for an organized valuing within the human individual."¹⁷ The development of the individual and the survival and evolution of the human species will depend on the degree to which he is prized as a separate person in a non-threatening environment.

Both Rogers and the V.C. proponents urge us to abandon the old methods of teaching such as persuading, directing, guiding, evaluating, challenging, inspiring, setting an example, etc., because they judge those methods to be both ineffectual and morally inferior to the new approach. In fact, the V.C. advocates accept Rogers' suggestion and avoid using the word 'teaching', a more appropriate term for their approach being 'facilitating.' The aim here is no longer to instruct, to train, to moralize, to indoctrinate or to import anything, but to free children's curiosity and allow them to pursue their interests, to enable them to get to what is going on within themselves,¹⁸ to facilitate self-awareness and self-enhancement. Both subscribe to an open-ended and non-committal posture while they attempt to facilitate learning by commenting or asking questions. The emphasis is no longer on initiating the young into the worthwhile aspects of our culture and the standards of excellence inherent in the various forms of knowledge and understanding, but on what the learner really wants to be. The belief is that "in persons who are moving toward greater openness to their experiences, there is an organismic commonality of value direction. These common value directions are of such kinds as to enhance the development of the individual himself and of others in his community and to make for the survival and evolution of his species."¹⁹

¹⁵S. Simon *et al.*, *Values Clarification*. New York: Hart Publishing Co. Inc., 1972, p. 20.

¹⁶*Ibid.* p. 58. Italics added.

¹⁷"Toward a Modern Approach to Values: the Valuing Process in the Mature Person", in Kirschenbaum, H. and Simon, S. B. (eds.), *Readings in Values Clarification*. Minneapolis, Minn.: Winston Press, 1973, p. 87.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 85.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 87-88.

IV. WHAT IS THE VALUES CLARIFICATION APPROACH?

This brief discussion of the V.C. approach in education and its alleged predecessors leads us into asking the questions: What is Values Clarification? Is it a "theory of teaching", as Rath's claims? Is it a theory of moral education? Or is it merely an amorphous, primitive and confused movement trying to emphasize the neglected value dimension of the educational enterprise?

It should be obvious from what has been said so far about V.C. that its proponents are not concerned with the development of the most effective methods of teaching the traditional subjects of the curriculum. Their central concern appears to be with the *manner of facilitating* learning and with the quality of its effect on the learner — as defined by the seven criteria of the "process of valuing."

Is V.C. then an attempt to consider the neglected value dimension of education? It appears so from the talk about "*values clarification*" or "*values teaching*." However it would be a sign of serious confusion on the nature of the educational enterprise to mistake this talk about "*values clarification*" as an invitation to consider the particular worthwhile objectives that we assign to educational activities, programs, or institutions as their proper tasks. Nowhere in the writings of the V.C. proponents do we find any serious effort to clarify and defend their value criteria of education that would enable them to distinguish between educational and non-educational activities, programs, methods, policies, or institutions. Similarly, no attempt has been made to determine the particular character of the various values or to make the required distinctions — as if the realm of values were a seamless cloth. Matters of personal preference, taste, habit, attitude, feeling, morality, etc., are all stretched on the Procrustean bed of the "process of valuing," and as soon as they meet all seven criteria they are christened and released as properly homogenized "*values*." Instead of providing us with a careful analysis and examination of the nature of taste, habit, attitude, morality, etc., they have attempted to obliterate the logical differences among those concepts by asking us to look at them through the blinding "process of valuing." Finally, there is no interest among proponents of V.C. in examining what experiences are educationally most valuable and in determining what methods and institutional arrangements would be educationally appropriate and effective for their transmission to the young.

There are no value criteria in the "process of valuing" that guarantee that the life style to which the person commits himself/herself as a result of the "process of valuing" is a valuable one. One might stand at the end of the line, as it were, and ask about all those attitudes, feelings, etc., etc., that are being processed through the "process of valuing." "But why is that valuable?" The response elicited is, "Because I *do* value it." This expected and, from the point of view of one who has gone through the V.C. process, "proper" reply shows quite clearly and simply how primitive a "theory" this process rests on.

The arguments of the V.C. proponents followed to their logical conclusions constitute a betrayal of reason and a retreat into irrationalism. How else can one characterize the unconditional acceptance of the child as the ultimate source of appeal for what is true, right or justified?

Unchallenged by the public canons of rationality and unguided by the principles that are inherent in the various public forms of knowledge and understanding, the young would then be expected to retreat into a narcissistic preoccupation with their personal preferences, feelings, attitudes, etc. And Protagoras' claim that "*man is the measure of all things*," which is the high point in the development of our intellectual and moral tradition, is reduced to "*I am the measure of all things*," a sign of moral and intellectual degeneration.

If V.C. does not qualify as a serious attempt to deal with the perplexing value dimension of education it qualifies even less as a theory of moral education. No attempt is being made by any of the V.C. proponents to deal with the logic of moral discourse and the perplexing problems that arise in moral education out of the logical requirements of our morality and the facts of child development.²⁰

All we get from the proponents of V.C. are polarizing dichotomies and a lot of vague pontificating about the vices of the old methods and the advantages of the new approach. Their is a "facilitating," "non-judgmental," "non-moralizing" and "non-evaluating" approach suitable to the "clarification" of any problem but especially "to matters that are largely in the affective domain."²¹ The aim is to stimulate thought relative to what a person does, not to "lay down the law" about what a child's values should be.²² The ultimate criterion of worthwhileness is free choice. The content of a person's choice and commitment does not matter because V.C. "is not concerned with the *content* of people's values, but with the process of valuing."²³

It should be stressed here that V.C. advocates do not want simply to *emphasize* the moral pedagogical principle that the interests, wants, aspirations and choices of the learner should be respected and considered seriously in any educational engagement; they insist that the learner's predilections, which have been subjected to the "process of valuing," should be recognized, not simply as *being* valued but as *having* value in some objective way. This is why they insist that all the conventional ways of teaching be abandoned. In all conventional methods of teaching

The right values are predetermined and it is one method or another of selling, pushing, urging these values upon others. All the methods have the air of indoctrination with some merely more subtle than others.²⁴

Since the V.C. proponents do not bother to deal with the nature of moral discourse or to distinguish that from other forms of discourse, they lump together all sorts of heterogeneous issues under their umbrella term "value" and as a result confuse fundamental moral issues with rather trivial matters of personal preference. Thus questions about capital punishment, the legalization of abortion, what toothpaste one prefers, whether God exists, whether one uses mouth wash regularly or whether one likes yogurt are treated as if they were all of the same logical type or equally important. The result of this confusion is fatal for any attempt to engage in any rational communication on value issues. Where there are no criteria one does not know what the problem is or what a solution would look like. And if one does not know where he is going, every road will lead him there!

Now any theory of teaching, as the V.C. "theory," which cannot account for those distinctions we make in ordinary language among preferences, tastes, attitudes, feelings, etc, and matters of morality, must be characterized as *primitive*. In a primitive theory we can no longer talk about public criteria of sound

²⁰On this issue see R. S. Peters, "Reason and Habit: The Paradox of Moral Education" in W. R. Hiblett (ed.) *Moral Education in a Changing Society*. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1963, pp. 46-65; A. C. Kazepides, "What is the Paradox of Moral Education?" in *Philosophy of Education 1969*. Proceedings of the twenty-fifth annual meeting of the Philosophy of Education Society, Denver, 1969, pp. 177-183; James E. McClellan, *Philosophy of Education*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1976 pp. 156-159.

²¹Raths, *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 37.

²³Simon, *et al.*, *Values Clarification*, p. 19.

²⁴Raths, *Ibid.*, p. 41.

arguments, of justified or unjustified claims, decisions or policies, or of any kind of intellectual or moral standards. Everything is reduced to "how one really feels about it," or whether one is "sincere," "authentic" or "genuine" about it, as if these were criteria of worthwhileness, relevance, cogency, rightness, etc.

In spite of their rhetoric, however, the V.C. proponents are not always individualistic relativists content with "sincere" or "genuine" expressions, affirmations, etc., of their students' feelings, attitudes and the like. This compounds and complicates the problem further because they are unwilling or unable to reach a rational decision on matters of value. What they do instead is to reduce serious moral issues into matters of personal preference and "when a child chooses a value that is unacceptable to the majority . . . we must deny him the right to carry the value to action."²⁵ Here the educational value of the Values Clarification approach is not merely absent, it is unfortunately *negative*.

Notice how in the following example of "values development" the "teacher" shows his lack of understanding of the nature of the issue under discussion, confuses his students by failing to explain to them the nature of moral reasoning and the obligations of the moral agent, and finally imposes his unjustified authority on his students.

"TEACHER: So some of you think it is best to be honest on tests, is that right? (Some heads nod affirmatively.) And some of you think dishonesty is all right? (A few hesitant and slight nods.) And I guess some of you are not certain. (Heads nod.) Well, are there any other choices or is it just a matter of dishonesty vs. honesty?"

SAM: You could be honest some of the time and dishonest some of the time.

TEACHER: Does that sound like a possible choice, class? (Heads nod.) Any other alternatives to choose from?

TRACY: You could be honest in some situations and not in others. For example, I am not honest when a friend asks about an ugly dress, at least sometimes. (Laughter.)

TEACHER: Is that a possible choice, class? (Heads nod again.) Any other alternatives?

SAM: It seems to me that you have to be all one way or all the other.

TEACHER: Just a minute, Sam. As usual we are first looking for the alternatives that there are in the issue. Later we'll try to look at any choice that you may have selected. Any other alternatives, class? (No response.) Well, then, let's list the four possibilities that we have on the board and I'm going to ask that each of you do two things for yourself: (1) see if you can identify any other choices in this issue of honesty and dishonesty, and (2) consider the consequences of each alternative and see which ones you prefer. Later we will have buzz groups in which you can discuss this and see if you are able to make a choice and if you want to make your choice part of your actual behavior. This is something you must do for yourself.

GINGER: Does that mean that we can decide for ourselves whether we should be honest on tests here?

TEACHER: No, that means that you can decide on the value. I personally value honesty; and although you may choose to be dishonest, I shall insist that we be honest on our tests here. In other areas of your life, you may have more freedom to be dishonest, but one can't do anything any time, and in this class I shall expect honesty on tests.

GINGER: But then how can we decide for ourselves? Aren't you telling us what to value?

SAM: Sure, you're telling us what we should do and believe in.

TEACHER: Not exactly. I don't mean to tell you what you should value. That's up to you. But I do mean that in this class, not elsewhere necessarily, you have to be honest on tests or suffer certain consequences. I merely mean that I cannot give tests without the rule of honesty. All of you who choose dishonesty as a value may not practice it here, that's all I'm saying. Further questions anyone?"²⁶

²⁵Raths, *Ibid.*, p. 227.

²⁶Raths, *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

The "Teacher's" opening remarks show how superficial and dangerous is this preconceived Procrustean model which is deemed appropriate for the "clarification" of *every kind of issue*. Alternatives have to be found regardless of whether or not the nature of the issue permits them. Instead of leading his students to an understanding of the character of moral reasoning and the nature of moral obligation, the teacher's mindless moves manage to reduce a moral issue into a matter of mere personal preference. The students are not required to reason but to emote! Next, the teacher misses the opportunity to examine instances where the principle of honesty may come in conflict with some higher order principle which would require that the principle of honesty be sacrificed to that higher principle. The "teacher" even scolds "Sam" because he showed impatience with the search for alternatives: "Just a minute, Sam. As usual we are first looking for the alternatives that there are in this issue." Here the teacher does not realize that he is involved in a normative discourse where arbitrary violations of moral principles cannot be considered as permissible alternatives by the very nature of the logic of moral discourse.

When the "teacher" is challenged by "Ginger" he shows complete lack of understanding. The "teacher's" appeal to his personal preference confuses the issue further and denies him the moral right to demand anything of his students, since he insists that in other areas of their lives they "may have more freedom to be dishonest but . . . in this class I expect honesty on tests"!

Notice also that the "consequences" with which the "teacher" threatens his students have nothing to do with the violation of any moral principle — there are no such principles in the homogenized world of V.C. These consequences are external means of controlling the students' behavior. But without reference to some worthwhile content there can be no justification for interfering in the lives of other persons, let alone for imposing external controls on their behavior.

So what did the "teacher" teach his students in the above episode? One would wish that he had not taught them anything at all. With repeated "processes" of values confusion, like the above, the consequences could be quite undesirable for the young students. In the hands of an unthinking V.C. advocate the young might be led to consider all matters of value as nothing more than matters of personal preference for which they do not have any good reasons. Instead of learning, for example, that honesty, truth-telling, clarity, precision, etc., are *presuppositions* of rational thinking and talking, the students could come to believe that these are only matters of feeling or personal preference.

The irony, then, in the V.C. movement is that the students who are subjected to the "process of valuing" consistently and repeatedly might end up more confused about matter of value and, finally, totally unprincipled!

Long ago Aristotle judiciously observed that

It is the mark of an educated mind to expect that amount of exactness in each kind which the nature of the particular subject admits.²⁷

Our V.C. "Teacher", being unable or unwilling to examine the presuppositions of rational discourse, or the character of the various kinds of value claims and the exactness that each one allows, has abandoned the effort to make any distinctions whatever. Having retreated thus far he had no choice but to consider all value claims as mere matters of personal preference. But in a world of extreme relativism there can be no rational decision-making on the basis of public standards. Hence he had to reintroduce external control in order to avoid anarchy and maintain order. What the "Teacher" did not realize was that by

²⁷*Nicomachean Ethics*, I, iii, 4.

the end of this V.C. adventure he demonstrated that he had not earned the right to be involved in education!

This attempt, however well-meaning, to combat the indoctrination and manipulation of the young and the unthinking imposition of questionable or conflicting beliefs, customs and outlooks on the immature and the ignorant, leads in the end to an even more subtle and pernicious form of miseducation.

One source of miseducation is the unaccountable "facilitator" whose defensible or indefensible beliefs, values, commitments and position of authority determine, to a great extent, the important questions asked and the quality and direction of the V.C. process. He has also the prerogative to decide which actions of the young are "unacceptable to the majority"²⁸ and to terminate prematurely the "process of valuing" by denying the students the opportunity to act upon their choices (criterion 6) repeatedly (criterion 7). Because of his lack of defensible moral principles and his squeamishness about directing, guiding and challenging his students, the V.C. facilitator cannot engage in any serious criticism of the various institutions in his society. In the contrary, he is bound to reinforce conformity to the status quo, thus abandoning his own professed goals and violating the "process of valuing" that he himself prescribed. This, of course, was to be expected; with mere "technique", or "method", or "approach", or "methodology," as the V.C. proponents variously describe their doings, one cannot earn the right to challenge either the personal preferences, beliefs and commitments of any individual or the customs, laws, and institutions of society. One needs also a philosophy and a lot more.

However the main source of confusion which permeates the whole V.C. approach and is responsible for its miseducative nature is its underlying ethic. The commendable intentions of the proponents to establish an atmosphere of tolerance, trust, mutual respect, openness and honesty in the classroom (or in the client-centered therapy) are thwarted and defeated by their uncritical espousal of the most insidious ethic that has prevailed in our consumer-oriented society, what G. H. Bantock calls the ethic of the ad man.²⁹

The V.C. proponents correctly suggest that we must transcend blind habit and custom in our thinking, choices and actions. But instead of investigating the various forms that human reason takes in the numerous cases of making choices and those that are defective or corrupt forms of human choice, they simply conflate all value judgments into a confused and primitive thing that they call "values". Having blurred all the important distinctions among various value judgments and having abandoned all hope for rational arguments in matters of value they appeal to the instinctive and subjective world of the child for guidance!

Like the ad man, the professional V.C. facilitator does not demand of us to try to be excellent, virtuous, just or generous, etc. As Raths *et al.* flatly state: "We have almost no idea what values the V.C. methodology tends to promote."³⁰ Both the ad man and the V.C. advocate flatter us by telling us that we are the ultimate court of appeal not only for our tastes and preferences but for what is valuable in general. The result of this personal, relativistic and situational approach to all questions of value could very well confuse and mislead young people for life. The constant appeal to their feelings and preferences and the lack of any rational examination and challenge of their beliefs, values and

²⁸Raths, *et al.*, *Ibid.*, p. 227.

²⁹*Culture, Industrialization and Education*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968.

³⁰*Ibid.* p. 226.

commitments may result in the *legitimization* of these beliefs, etc., regardless of their actual value.

This exclusive preoccupation with one's feelings, interests, wants and attitudes should be expected to result in the alienation and impoverishment of the individual and in the deterioration of our uncertain culture. Human excellences are neither natural givens nor natural unfoldings of specific potentialities in young children. They can be found only in the public world of shared understandings, sensitivities, skills, attitudes, norms, criteria, tests, etc. Any theory of teaching which concentrates exclusively on the private feelings and appetites of the young child at the expense of this public world of common understandings and experience cannot possibly qualify as educational. It is within that public world that one can talk about educational *objectives* and select the *content* of education. And it is these worthwhile objectives and content which legitimize the educational intervention, help us to focus on the educational tasks, enable us to distinguish education from indoctrination and other forms of miseducation, and direct our educational thinking and research. Without public criteria one cannot escape manipulating the young by masquerading one's hidden and unexamined biases, tastes, preferences and commitments as "genuine", "sincere" or "authentic" values.

The ultimate aim of the V.C. advocates, to enhance self-awareness and autonomy, is destined to remain an unfulfilled promise as long as they fail to realize that education is a social enterprise, not something that the solitary individual discovers simply by becoming aware of his feelings and preferences. The social nature of education, however, should not mislead us into thinking that education is synonymous with socialization as many sociologists suggest. That could be an accurate definition of some educational systems, but it does not tell us what it means to educate somebody. To educate means to promote *rational* self-guidance and self-determination of the individual. And one does not discover the criteria of rationality by consulting his feelings, attitudes or preferences but by examining the various public forms of knowledge and understanding.

When the V.C. proponents define value in terms of their seven criteria of the "process of valuing" they miss this important point. To the extent that their techniques do help people to overcome apathy, flightiness, over-conformity, etc., and to become more purposeful, enthusiastic, etc.,³¹ to that extent one might say that these techniques might be useful in establishing some *preconditions* of education and that could *aid* learning. The logically prior question, however, for developing a rational theory of education is about *what* is one expected to be purposive and enthusiastic — a question that the V.C. advocates avoid considering. As Michael Oakshott put it, the first question in education is

What is the character of the world which a human new-comer is to inhabit? The second is the consideration of the procedures, methods and devices believed to be appropriate to the engagement. The second of these topics is clearly subordinate to the first, and all who have thought profoundly about it have recognized this subordination . . . In recent times procedures and devices have broken loose from this subordination and have imposed themselves upon our understanding of the transaction itself, with unfortunate consequences.³²

It should be noted that the terms "purposive," "enthusiastic," etc., that the V.C. advocates use do not suggest any *educational* or *moral criteria* on the basis

³¹In this essay no attempt has been made to examine the empirical claims of the V.C. proponents.

³²"Education: The Engagement and its Frustration," *Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain*. Vol. V. No. 1, (Jan. 1971), p. 43.

of which we can select the content of education and thus influence, to some extent, "the character of the world which a human newcomer is to inhabit"; these terms signify *character traits* (in the psychological sense of the word 'character') which could be shared by villains and heroes alike. One would wish that the base, ignoble and reprehensible people who are utterly lacking in moral principles, such as scoundrels, blackguards, knaves, rascals, rogues and scamps, were not as purposeful and enthusiastic in their questionable pursuits as Raths and Simon would seem to wish them to be.

As long as the V.C. advocates continue to act without a clear idea of what counts as educational intervention they will continue to vacillate between letting children do their own thing and controlling their behavior according to their perception of the wishes of the majority — neither of which could count as an educational decision.

There is also a serious inconsistency between the V.C. proponents' diagnosis of the nature of the social-educational problems and the methods they consider appropriate for their solution. If it is true that many young people today are uncertain, apathetic, flighty, etc., because they are "assailed from every angle by divergent and contradictory claims"³³ in a rapidly changing world, then it is hardly appropriate to subject them to a process which has abandoned the search for rational standards of human conduct and has adopted an extreme relativistic ethical stance.³⁴ What they fail to realize is that by abandoning the search for rational standards of human conduct they deny human intelligence and choice any role in influencing the course of human history. Their alternative is a misleading *organismic* view of human development. Like other similar views of human development it is a form of historicism which excludes human reason as a factor in the development of the individual or society. And it should be obvious that no form of historicism can support a viable theory of teaching.

The owl of Athena, said Hegel, always appears at dusk. While it might be agreed that ours is not a particularly proud and self-confident period of human history, it should be clear by now that the V.C. movement in education, in spite of its good intentions, is not the owl to clear our minds and guide us in our complex educational decisions.

Having reacted against the evils of indoctrination and other forms of miseducation, the propounders of V.C. fell into the perennial trap which awaits all impatient and uninformed educators whose educational "theory" grows out of their *reactions* against prevailing views and practices. They lost sight of the fact that they were using techniques of the client-centered therapy approach in order to help some young people who in their view were confused about their values. Once this technique caught on, they generalized it and mistook it for a theory of teaching or an approach to education. The result of all this is not clarification but serious confusion and over-simplification of important and complex educational issues. The conflation for example, of all value judgments and the indiscriminate talk about values (covering matters of preference, etiquette, custom, law, religion and morality, as well as taboos, prejudices and other irrational beliefs), make it impossible to understand, let alone evaluate, their repeated claim that values are constantly changing. It is surely true but not new that many of our parochial beliefs, taboos, customs and even laws are changing. And it is also true and more interesting that what many people thought to be moral issues (such as sex customs or religious beliefs) are also

³³Carl Rogers, *Op. Cit.*, p. 75.

³⁴The V.C. proponents argue as if descriptive relativism implies normative relativism, or as if "is" implies "ought".

changing. But what does it mean to say that our moral rules (e.g. "Don't kill", "Don't deprive others of their freedom") are changing? Would it even be conceivable that in any society human beings might reverse those rules or adopt rules like "kill every man who wears a blue shirt" or "enslave every human being who is less than 6 feet tall"!

It seems sometimes that "our rapidly changing technological society" has become little more than a scapegoat for all those who are unable or unwilling to examine the nature of the choices before them and decide intelligently. So many educators overlook the fact that most of the things that are changing in our society, outside the world of technology, are taboos, prejudices, outmoded customs, beliefs and attitudes. It is, therefore, a unique opportunity for educators to help students examine their beliefs, etc., and develop more rational moral beliefs. They could, for example, ask their students to subject their beliefs to the test of universalizability, or they might help them to see whether a particular principle is a pre-supposition of rational discourse.

It is only by developing a rational moral code in the young that we can help to improve rational communication in our multicultural society and in our shrinking global village.

If our public schools under the influence of the V.C. movement and other parochial or reactionary movements abandon the pursuit of clarity, precision and truth as well as the clarification and teaching of moral principles, then society will have to set up some other institutions to fulfil these important goals. It would be better, however, for our public schools to call a moratorium on "values clarification" and other similar fancy slogans and get on with the education of our children.

RESUME

L'auteur trace les origines du mouvement de la clarification des valeurs en éducation, dans les travaux de Carl Rogers consacrés aux centres de thérapie pour clients et expose son attitude éthique outrée. Il examine ensuite, à titre d'exemple, un épisode de clarification des valeurs et montre comment la confusion des théories par les défenseurs de cette clarification (des valeurs) se reflète dans leurs propres stratégies d'enseignement.