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A Note on What "Value" or "Moral" Education Is

If we are going to talk about "value education," we ought to take pains to discover what the "value" applies to or where it resides. Similarly, if we speak of "moral education," we will want to know precisely what is moral and how it is moral. For most of what goes on in "value education" is not concerned with morals as such, except indirectly. This is not to say that such an activity is not worthwhile, or not in fact the best thing that one can do in this area of studies. But it is to say that there are a great many skills being practised under the rubric of "value education" which exist quite independently of "value education" although they are essential to the success of the latter.

Logic is one of these skills; so are general articulateness, vocabulary strength, general knowledge, skills that are technical in being a function of successful operation within a form of knowledge, the disciplined use of thought and its concentrated application to particulars, the disciplined use of feelings, the extendedness or range and scope of individual feelings, and the accustomedness or common experiencing of such feelings, the strength and control of desires, the habituation of studying consequences, the skill of recognizing irrelevancy and the will to discard it, skills of conceptual analysis, accustomed motivation towards successful action, practice in formulating principles, and so forth.

Can we not, in fact, practise students in all these things without doing specifically much *moral* work? It depends on what features one is willing to assign to *moral*. Certainly one can argue that self-discipline is moral, that honing one's mind is moral in the sense of doing justice to oneself (to providential purpose, etc.), that willing oneself to practise logic or explore feelings is moral, that the willing use of will to discard the irrelevant is moral.

But there is a sense in which one speaks of value education or of moral education where what appears to be meant is not such things, or not primarily. What appears to be meant is rather a substantive concern for and with good, right, justice, caring. This viewpoint is not intended to rule out procedural or process issues, but does in fact accept them within the aegis of moral education only in so far as they are a functional part and an intrinsic part of the inquiry directed towards discerning and realizing good, right, justice, caring. Such crucial functions, in other words, tend to be swamped by the mystical oceanic aura of the moral, and are practised, if at all, incidentally and limply.

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What the proponents of this latter position seem to neglect or gloss over, I am saying, is the fact that the aforementioned skills do exist independently of moral inquiry, and the possibility that moral education might prosper more effectively if they were diligently practised for their own sake even if, as might be practical, within the bounds of moral inquiry. To neglect this truth is to delude oneself into thinking that good intentions to pursue a substantive mystical *moral* (rather like Moore's *good*), loose-limbed discussion salted with a heavy sprinkling of teacher-sponsored faith that it will all turn out for the moral best in the end, constitute moral education. It is also to allow oneself to be confused as to the nature of the "value" or "moral" element in the entire work, and to think that cognitive, affective, and conative *process* is not crucial to value or moral education (the proof is in the pudding). It is also in some cases to confuse moral *education* with hortatory *religion*.

It turns out that *moral* is not so much a subject as a kind of intention and capability to use certain forms of inquiry and experience in ways which hopefully, with the best planned use of tried learning devices including a considerable array of specific skills, will maximize within realistic limits real concern for good, right, justice, caring. *Moral education*, similarly, represents a concern to engage human beings persistingly in an orientation of self towards these means/ends. We must not make the mistake of allowing ourselves to be so blinded by the goal that we cannot see the way.