

*Abstract*

The values clarification approach to moral education, is a deficient, if not faulty program -- for, despite claims to the contrary, the values clarification approach lacks the major requirements for an adequate moral educational program: the treatment of value judgments as objective statements which are capable of cognitive analysis as well as justification within their context. This article demonstrates the importance that considerations of character must have in an adequate system of morals -- a quality lacking in the values clarification program.

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## Moral Education Versus Values Clarification

The general purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the faultiness of the values clarification approach to moral education. But more exactly, it is believed that values clarification is not even an inadequate mode of moral education -- it falls beyond the pale of moral education. The paper will attempt to substantiate this claim by utilizing a three-part scheme: first, by laying out the woof and warp of the values clarification programs, relying exclusively upon their own source material; next by critically analyzing assumptions and implication of the values clarification program; finally, by demonstrating how and why the values clarification program is educationally starved and results in moral blindness.

### *Values Clarification Programs*

A recent publisher's advertisement for a text by Dale Hill declares that values clarification

promotes awareness of the process of valuing; it promotes understanding of traditional methods of teaching values, and why those methods haven't always worked; it promotes awareness of the current state of values ... The goal of the program is to help find ways for human beings to live more meaningful lives: happier, more secure, more goal directed ... Exercises focus on specific value work and the relationship of subject matter to the student's feelings, opinions, and behaviors.<sup>1</sup>

Merrill Harmin describes his forthcoming values clarification workshop as a non-moralizing approach to the clarification of core values.

A core value issue (1) touches us all our lives, from childhood through maturity; (2) touches many aspects of life, so that clarification ripples out to help us in many ways; and (3) touches something central, so that clarification more likely leads to a growth spurt that produces a new and different level of life satisfaction.

Harmin then goes on to explain the importance of the two core value issues he will be dealing with: "how one best gets to know and accept what one is and can be in this world," [and]

how one best handles distresses, those that pop up in everyday life and those that we carry along from younger ages, so that our distresses do not clog current experiences and limit our joys.<sup>2</sup>

We come now to perhaps the most formidable supporter of values clarification -- Sidney Simon. Among other things, Simon tells us that traditionally adults have tried to guide the evaluative aspects of the young by using one of the following (albeit faulty) three methods.

1. *Moralizing*: "The direct, although sometimes subtle, inculcation of one's values upon another." Simon maintains that the assumption behind moralizing is that: "My experience has taught

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me a certain set of values which I believe would be right for you. Therefore, to save you the pain of coming to these values on your own, and to avoid the risk of your choosing less desirable values, I will effectively transfer my own values to you." Simon finds two problems with moralizing. First, "the direct inculcation of values works best when there is complete consistency about what constitutes 'desirable' values." But the youth of today is

bombarded by all kinds of different influences ... and is ultimately left to make his own choice about whose advice or values to follow. Yet young people brought up by moralizing adults are not prepared to make their own responsible choices. They have not learned a process for selecting the best and rejecting the worst elements contained in the various value systems which others have been urging them to follow.<sup>3</sup>

The second problem Simon finds with moralizing is that it "often results in a dichotomy between theory and practice; lip-service is paid to the values of the authority, while behavior contradicts these values." Accordingly, Simon concludes, "moralizing so frequently influences only people's words and little else in their lives".<sup>4</sup>

2. *Laissez-faire*: Simon suggests that the rationale for this approach to the transmission of values is: "No one value system is right for everyone. People have to forge their own set of values. So, I'll just let my children or students do and think what they want without intervening in any way; and eventually everything will turn out all right." "The problem here is," Simon observes, "that everything doesn't usually turn out all right. Young people, left on their own, experience a great deal of conflict and confusion." As such, while "most young people do not need adults running their lives for them" they do however "want and need help" in making judgments.<sup>5</sup>

3. *Modeling*: Simon maintains that the rationale for this approach to transmitting values is: "I will present myself as an attractive model who lives by a certain set of values. The young people with whom I come in contact will be duly impressed by me and by my values, and will want to adopt and emulate my attitudes and behavior." Simon observes that this approach acknowledges two realities -- "first, the importance of setting a living example for a learner to follow; and second, the necessity in teaching values for the deeds to match the words." However, Simon finds the problem with this approach to be

that the young person is exposed to so many different models to emulate ... How is the young person to sort out all the pros and cons and achieve his own values? ... How does he develop his own sense of identity? How does he learn to relate to people whose values differ from his own?<sup>6</sup>

As an answer to these questions and as an alternative to the three traditional methods of transmitting values, Simon offers the values clarification approach. This approach sets out "to help young people think through values issues for themselves." Based upon a formula of Louis Rath's -- which was inspired by John Dewey -- the values clarification approach "is not concerned with the *content* of people's values, but the *process of valuing*."<sup>7</sup> The focus is on how people come to hold certain beliefs and establish certain behavior patterns. Specifically, Rath's distinguishes the valuing processes into seven (7) units:<sup>8</sup>

- i) prizing and cherishing one's beliefs and behaviors
- ii) publicly affirming, when appropriate, one's beliefs
- iii) choosing one's beliefs and behaviors from the alternatives
- iv) choosing one's beliefs and behaviors after consideration of consequences
- v) choosing one's beliefs and behaviors freely
- vi) acting on one's beliefs
- vii) acting on one's beliefs with a pattern, consistency and repetition.

According to Simon and Rath's,

The values clarification approach does not aim to instill any particular set of values. Rather the goal of the values clarification approach is to help students utilize the above seven processes of valuing in their own lives; to apply these valuing processes to already formed beliefs and behavior patterns and to those still emerging.

To accomplish this, the teacher uses approaches which help students become aware of the beliefs and behaviors they prize and would be willing to stand up for in and out of the classroom. He uses materials and methods which encourage students to consider alternative modes of thinking and acting. Students learn to weight the pros and cons and the consequences of the various alternatives. The teacher also helps the students to consider whether their actions match their stated beliefs and if not, how to bring the two into closer harmony. Finally, he tries to give students options, in and out of class; for only when students begin to make their own choices and evaluate the actual consequences, do they develop their own values.<sup>9</sup>

I conclude this section with Simon's own summation of this approach to moral education. "The process of values clarification involves knowing why one prizes, choosing those things which one cares for most, and weaving those things into the fabric of daily living."<sup>10</sup>

### *Assumptions and Implications*

My critical analysis of the values clarification approach will take the form of four interrelated arguments.

1. *Assumed fact-value dichotomy*: We are instructed by the supporters of the values clarification method that "as teachers, we need to be clear that we cannot dictate to children what their values should be"<sup>11</sup> for, among other reasons, "values are very complex and very personal; there are no 'right' values." Yet we are also instructed that we may be authoritative in those areas that deal with truth and falsity.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, it seems evident that issues involving values are looked upon as being removed from considerations of truth and falsity. However, since the values clarification approach is offered as a method of moral education, one could seriously question how that which does not involve knowledge and which does not admit of the possibility of one being mistaken can be classified as being within the realm of education. Addressing this point John Dewey held that "the most important problem of moral education ... concerns the relationship of knowledge and conduct. For unless the learning which accrues in the regular course of study affects character, it is futile to conceive the moral end as the unifying and culminating end of education."<sup>13</sup>

2. *Commitment to relative absolutism*: Of the criticisms made against the doctrine of values clarification, probably none is made more frequently or more forcefully than the charge that it is inadequate, ineffective, and possibly even dangerous because of its basic moral relativism.<sup>14</sup> But to see values clarification as morally relativistic is to see only half of its very confused program. Specifically, it purports to maintain, on the one hand, that values in general and moral values in particular are personal, situational, individually derived, not amenable to objective evaluation, and neither "right" nor "wrong". It actually offers, on the other hand, a list of value-based behaviors that are deemed undesirable and objectively inferior, but that can be corrected by or cured with the values clarification method. This list, mentioned frequently in the literature, consists of such "vices" as apathy, flightiness, uncertainty, inconsistency, drifting, overconforming, overdissenting, and role playing. And as a counter-balance to this sack of "vices", there is urged a corresponding and opposite bag of "virtues", consisting of such proper values as purposefulness, productivity, strong beliefs, thoughtfulness, consideration, manageability, and zestfulness.<sup>15</sup>

From what has been supplied as evidence, it should be clear that the values clarification theory has as its basic premise: All evaluations are non-cognitive and relative -- except, that is, those that are essential to and required for the values clarification program and methodology.

3. *Assumed atomistic notion of values*: With their sack of "vices" and bag of "virtues", the supporters of values clarification join the popular ranks of those who believe that not only can acts occur in isolation, but that they are intelligibly independent of any reference to the agent's character. Yet, from a moral point of view, does it really make any sense to term, for example, the helping of the needy a virtue, without any indication of whether the action is being performed intentionally and without any evidence as to why the agent is acting in a certain way? In other words, the atomistic thesis of "virtues" and "vices" makes sense only if actions and values are taken in the abstract. But who should know better than the defenders of values clarification that values are contextual, and are without status independent of agents -- in other words, values are concrete and dependent, not abstract and independent.

4. *Ignoring the structural aspect of valuing:* We are told -- contrary to the above evidence of the atomistic view of values -- that the values clarification approach is not concerned with the content of valuing, but with the process of valuing. Even if this were true, it would not be sufficient to qualify as an approach to moral education -- for no consideration is given to the structural aspect of valuing: the justifying base for the value judgments. As such, the values clarification method is an alternative to moral education, rather than a unique approach to moral education.

To oversimplify a very complex subject,<sup>16</sup> the content of one's values can be seen as the *what* of evaluation, and the process of one's valuing can be seen as the *how* of evaluation. Finally, the structure of one's values can be seen as the *why* of evaluation -- that is, the rationale or motive for a particular judgment or action. The structural aspect of evaluating is overlooked or denied by supporters of the values clarification approach, and primary attention is given to the psychological processes of distinguishing what one likes from what one does not like. As such the values clarification approach is non-cognitive to the extent that it denies that one can be mistaken in his/her likes and dislikes (i.e., liking or disliking the "wrong" things), that one can and ought to rationally support his/her judgments, and that one's beliefs about values are more important than what is merely felt or wanted. Accordingly, all too often, those who are encouraged to clarify their values end up talking about their feelings and wants, rather than assessing the actual worth of their feelings and wants.<sup>17</sup>

From another perspective, this same point can be made by showing that at best, the values clarification method allows only for a tangential relationship between being clear as to what one values and acting virtuously. Take Hitler's case for example. There is nothing in the methodology of values clarification that would have discouraged Hitler, while being clear as to what he wanted and how he felt, from acting as he did.

What we are being asked to accept as a particular (and allegedly superior) approach to moral education, ultimately should be seen as a confused and confusing program for coping with certain psychological and sociological problems. As such its major fault is in masquerading as a philosophical doctrine.<sup>18</sup>

#### *Limitations of Values Clarification Programs*

As a preamble to this final section, I would like to examine a variation on the values clarification approach -- values clarification as an academic procedure utilized in teaching courses in ethics. In the classroom, the form this procedure usually takes is that of displaying alternative philosophical positions before the students, and then either describing the assets and deficiencies of each, or encouraging the students to assess each. Ultimately, there comes a time when the students are to choose which position they like best. And then off to a new issue and fresh alternatives. This encourages eclecticism. The apparent rationale for this procedure is that of a disdain for even the possibility of being guilty of didacticism, and a trust in the ideals of autonomy and reasonableness.<sup>19</sup> Yet the result of this procedure is usually that of giving aid and comfort to the sophomoric notion that as one man's meat is another man's poison, so what is a fitting philosophical solution for one person can be totally inappropriate for another person. This is the acme of individualized philosophy, and as such, has all the advantages and disadvantages that theft has over honest labor.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the popularity and appeal of this academic procedure, it can at best be classified only as a way of presenting certain ethical issues before the students -- offering a course in ethics,<sup>21</sup> if you like -- but certainly not providing instruction in moral education.

At this point, it might be helpful to be reminded that the institution of morality consists of a number of factors:<sup>22</sup>

- (1) certain *forms of judgment* in which *particular* objects are said to have or not to have a certain moral quality, obligation, or responsibility; (2) the implication that it is appropriate and possible to give *reasons* for these judgments;
- (3) some *rules, principles, ideals, and virtues* that can be expressed in *more general judgments* and that form the background against which judgments are made and reasons given for them; (4) certain characteristic natural or

acquired ways of feeling that accompany these judgments, rules, and ideals, and help to move us to act in accordance with them; (5) certain *sanctions* or additional sources of motivation that are also expressed in verbal judgments, namely, holding responsible, praising, and blaming; (6) a *point of view* that is taken in all this judging, reasoning, and feeling, and is somehow different from those taken in prudence, art, and the like.

Using Frankena's analysis as a base, I suggest that the ingredients of an adequate moral education are:<sup>23</sup>

1. an elementary grasp of and appreciation for the difference between right and wrong.
2. a respect for the rights and interests of persons in particular and for living things in general.
3. the rudimentary ability to recognize what is relevant to and important for the solution of moral problems.
4. a sense of justice and fair play.
5. the ability to recognize moral reasons, and to apprehend their relationship to a given situation.
6. the willingness to use reasons and evidence in dealing with moral issues.
7. a developed character with a disposition to act from a moral point of view.

In light of Frankena's account of the institute of morality, and the suggested list of the main ingredients of an adequate moral education, it should be evident that the values clarification approach is neither dealing with morality, nor offering an educational program. As an alternative to their approach, I maintain that an adequate program of moral education must consist of at least the exact opposite position from that of values clarification. Specifically, values must be understood as being non-relativistic, context-dependent, subject to cognitive analysis, and capable as well as in need of justification. Yet if any one characteristic best points up my criticism of the values clarification program, it is my stance against atomism: the notion that actions in general and moral deeds in particular are discrete atomic units, having and retaining an identity and quality independent of the circumstances of their performance or the character of the agent who performs them. This notion of action is inherent in any theory which subscribes to either the sack of "vices" or bag of "virtues" approach to moral education.

But moral education, no less than any other kind of education, should not be concerned with the mere accumulation of facts any more than it should be concerned with the mindless performance of a set of prescribed acts. Equally, to educate for morality is not merely to encourage freedom of choice.<sup>24</sup> Yet neither is it to ignore the significance of the agent's character. In fact, it could be argued that no act is capable of being evaluated, let alone described, without some frame of reference. And the most significant frame of reference for moral actions is the character of the agent who performs them: "character and conduct are inseparably linked".<sup>25</sup> Aristotle informs us that a person's character depends upon the way he exercises his powers.<sup>26</sup> And I suggest that we also realize that the way one exercises his power is a manifestation of his character -- that is, an expressing of what one thinks and values. Understood as such, character is distinct from personality -- for while the former denotes ownership, the latter is restricted to external appearances. ("Character" comes from the Greek "seal", meaning an impression or design made on a substance; while "personality" comes from the Latin "mask", meaning apparent attributes.) Accordingly, to be concerned with a person's character is to be concerned with the source of this behavior, not merely the behavior itself. In this respect, moral education is to right actions as character is to conduct.<sup>27</sup> In each case, not only do the former presuppose or require the latter, but furthermore, the latter is of limited worth, if not totally lacking it, without the former -- as that which occurs accidentally commands faint praise.

The primary aim of moral education should be that of developing virtuous character -- for since each moral choice is pregnant with possibilities, then "each in some sense characterizes or gives character to the person".<sup>28</sup> Therefore, what is of importance is whether Jones has, for example, a courageous or honorable character, not whether a given act taken in the abstract is a so-called courageous or honorable act. Collingwood instructs us that nothing exists nor is intelligible in isolation or when abstracted.<sup>29</sup> Granting this, then at least a disservice is being performed, if not a falsity perpetrated, when one treats certain actions as occurring and having a qualitative nature independent of any context

or agent. An example of this is the common saying that "it is better to do the right think for the wrong reason than not to do the right thing at all."<sup>30</sup> But this suggests that there is little or no evaluative difference between an act initiated from moral insight and based on moral principles, and mindlessly behaving in a manner that has been deemed right or proper. Addressing this point, Blanshard succinctly argues:<sup>31</sup>

... [It] is not enough to say, hate the act, but not the man. The act *is* the man. Morally speaking, the act includes the motive, and the motive springs out of the man's character and provides the most accurate index of his quality. Divorce a man's behavior from its inner springs, and it is no more guilty or praiseworthy than a tile that falls from the roof. The tile is not wicked if it hits a man, because it did not mean to; but the man, if he did that, would be wicked because he did mean to. The advice to condemn the deed but not the doer is thus the reverse of the truth. It is the man who is bad, not the play of his arm and leg.

The point is that to think that certain acts are inherently right or wrong, is to mistakenly think that the character of the agent, the reasonableness of the motive, and the circumstances of the situation, all have nothing to do with the quality of the act. Yet, I maintain that no action deserves the judgment of right or proper, let alone moral, that did not issue forth from a virtuous character. More exactly, an act has worth only to the degree and extent that the agent's character from which it springs is virtuous. (Here I am using virtuous in the traditional or Greek sense of excellence.) Furthermore, to speak of an agent's character is to open up considerations of not merely what is done, but more importantly, why any given act is performed -- for without a reference to the why, the possibility of justification cannot even be raised.<sup>32</sup> Finally, if an action cannot be addressed in terms of possible justification, then clearly to consider it moral is to show a total disregard for the ultimate difference between being a virtuous person and acting in a manner akin to how a virtuous person acts.

The core of my thesis has been that just as there can be no deeds without agents, so there can be no moral action without a virtuous character. And in view of my analysis, it should be evident that not only does the values clarification approach neglect the all important question of why one values and acts in a certain way -- that is, the values clarification approach ignores the structural aspect of valuing -- but by this omission it also renders impotent the status and role of one's character in matters of morality. Yet, if an agent's character is the principle source of, and is at least partially affected by, the quality of one's conduct, then to formulate a program for moral education which excludes considerations of the agent's character is to ultimately deny the significant difference between what one does and why one does it. This difference, I believe, is the first step towards having what Baier terms a moral point of view.<sup>33</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Affective House, Tulsa, Okla.; Dale Hill, *Value Clarification: Out of the Fog, into the Clear*, 1976.

<sup>2</sup> Merrill Harmin, Values Workshop announcement for November 13-14, 1976.

<sup>3</sup> Sidney B. Simon, Leland Howe, and Howard Kirschenbaum, *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students* (New York: Hart, 1972), pp. 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Sidney B. Simon and Polly deSherbinin, "Values Clarification: It Can Start Gently and Grow Deep," *Phi Delta Kappan* 56 (June 1975): 679.

<sup>11</sup> Louis E. Raths, Merrill Harmin, and Sidney B. Simon, *Values and Teaching: Working with Values in the Classroom* (Columbus, O.: Charles E. Merrill, 1966), p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> Sidney B. Simon, "Three Ways to Teach Church School," in *Readings in Values Clarification*, Howard Kirschenbaum and Sidney B. Simon, eds. (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1973), pp. 237-40.

- <sup>13</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), p. 360.
- <sup>14</sup> John S. Stewart, "Clarifying Values Clarification: A Critique," *Phi Delta Kapan* 56 (June 1975): 686.
- <sup>15</sup> Simon and deSherbinin, "Values Clarification," pp. 679-83.
- <sup>16</sup> Stewart, "Clarifying Values Clarification," p. 684.
- <sup>17</sup> "Moral Education," *Options in Education*, National Public Radio, Program 44.
- <sup>18</sup> Hardy E. Jones, "The Rationale of Moral Education," *The Monist* 58 (October 1974): 659-73; See also John L. Harrison, "Values Clarification: An Appraisal," *The Journal of Moral Education* 6 (October 1976): 22-31.
- <sup>19</sup> Brian V. Hill, "Education for Rational Morality or Moral Rationality," *Educational Theory* 22 (Summer 1972): 186-92.
- <sup>20</sup> Bruce B. Suttle, "Recent Trends in Teaching Beginning Philosophy Students," *Journal of Thought* 12, 3 (July 1977). Also relevant to this point J.R. Scudder has observed that "students often respond to courses ... as if the purpose for taking the course was to select the best fitting suit of intellectual clothing." "Freedom with Authority," in *Contemporary Thought on Teaching*, R.T. Hyman ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1971), p. 201.
- <sup>21</sup> Derek C. Bok, "Can Ethics Be Taught?," *Change* 8 (October 1976): 26-30.
- <sup>22</sup> William K. Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd edition (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 9.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. Jones, "Rationale of Moral Education," p. 660.
- <sup>24</sup> Hill, "Education for Rational Morality," pp. 286-92.
- <sup>25</sup> Evelyn Shirk, *The Ethical Dimension* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965), p. 216. Also see L.H. Hunt's "Character and Thought," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (July 1978): 177-186 and Bruce B. Suttle's "Actions and Consequences," *Journal of Critical Analysis* 4 (April 1972): 33-40.
- <sup>26</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially Books Two and Six.
- <sup>27</sup> Frankena, *Ethics*, pp. 65-69. Also Hunt has argued that "the things that we do which necessarily result from traits of character are precisely acts with the corresponding act-character, and an act will have a certain character is only if it is done on the basis of a certain principle," p. 185.
- <sup>28</sup> Shirk, *Ethical Dimension*, p. 214. Also see Bruce B. Suttle's "The Listerine Enigma: 'If it's so good why don't I like it?'," *Philosophy of Education 1977: Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society*, I.S. Steinberg ed. (Urbana, IL: Philosophy of Education Society, 1977), pp. 131-137.
- <sup>29</sup> R.G. Collingwood, *Speculum Mentis or the Map of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 160.
- <sup>30</sup> Cornell Hamm, "DIALOG: Cornell Hamm talks with Don B. Cochrane," *Moral Education Forum* 1 (April 1976): 6. Directly relevant to this common notion is the question of whether one can, for example, be generous "for the wrong reasons"? The point is that without the proper intention an act cannot be intelligently judged generous.
- <sup>31</sup> Brand Blanshard, "Retribution Revisited," in *Philosophical Perspectives on Punishment*, E.H. Madden, R. Handy, and M. Farber, eds. (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1968), p. 72.
- <sup>32</sup> Addressing the same point Daniel C. Maguire argues that "the assessment of motive is not just of introspective importance. Why something is done is partially but essentially constitutive of what is done." *The Moral Choice* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), p. 139. Also see R.S. Peters' "Moral Education and the Psychology of Character," *Philosophy* 38 (January 1962): 37-56.
- <sup>33</sup> Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958).