

THE PRECEDING FIVE CHAPTERS HAVE DEALT WITH THE _proper place of religion in particular courses. Moral education, however, is generally understood to cut across the curriculum and is appropriately integrated into all courses as well as into the extracurricular activities and ethos of schools. So our focus shifts somewhat in this last chapter.

There is not a lot of agreement about what moral education should be, and there is no “discipline” of moral education corresponding to the disciplines that define the courses we have discussed so far. We will argue that “moral education” is an umbrella term for two quite different tasks and approaches. The first, which might better be called moral “socialization” or “training,” is the task of nurturing in children those virtues and values that make them good people. Of course, good people can make bad judgments; it’s often not easy to know what is morally right. The second task of moral education is to provide students with the intellectual resources that enable them to make informed and responsible judgments about difficult matters of moral importance. Both are proper and important tasks of schools—and both cut across the curriculum.

The inevitable question, of course, is, whose morality will be taught? We will offer our answer by way of a sketch of a theory of moral education. Given this theory—and the civic and educational frameworks we outlined in Chapters 1 and 2—we will draw out the implications for the role of religion in moral education. To put a little flesh on these theoretical bones, we will take sex education as a case study.

Education as a Moral Enterprise

We trust that it is uncontroversial to say that schooling is unavoidably a moral enterprise. Indeed, schools teach morality in a number of ways, both implicit and explicit.

Schools have a moral ethos embodied in rules, rewards and punishments, dress codes, honor codes, student government, relationships, styles of teaching, extracurricular emphases, art, and in the kinds of respect accorded students and teachers. Schools convey to children what is expected of them, what is normal, what is right and wrong. It is often claimed that values are *caught* rather than *taught*; through their ethos, schools socialize children into patterns of moral behavior.

Textbooks and courses often address moral questions and take moral positions. Literature inevitably explores moral issues, and writers take positions on those issues—as do publishers who decide which literature goes in the anthologies. In teaching history we initiate students into particular cultural traditions and identities. Although economics courses and texts typically avoid overt moral language and claim to be “value free,” their accounts of human nature, decision making, and the economic world have moral implications, as we have seen.

The overall shape of the curriculum is morally loaded by virtue of what it requires, what it makes available as electives, and what it ignores. For example, for more than a century (but especially since *A Nation at Risk* and the reform reports of the 1980s), there has been a powerful movement to make schooling and the curriculum serve economic purposes. Religion and art, by contrast, have been largely ignored (and are not even elective possibilities in many schools). As a result, schooling encourages a rather more materialistic and less spiritual culture—a matter of some moral significance.

Educators have devised a variety of approaches to values and morality embodied in self-esteem, community service, civic education, sex education, drug education, Holocaust education, multicultural education, values clarification, and character education programs—to name but a few. We might consider two of the most influential of these approaches briefly.

For the past several decades values clarification programs have been widely used in public schools. In this approach, teachers help students “clarify” their values by having them reflect on moral dilemmas and think through the consequences of the options open to them, choosing that action that maximizes their

deepest values. It is unjustifiable for a teacher to “impose” his or her values on students; this would be an act of oppression that denies the individuality and autonomy of students. Values are ultimately personal; indeed, the implicit message is that there are no right or wrong values. Needless to say, this is a deeply controversial approach—and is now widely rejected.

The character education movement of the last decade has been a response, in part, to the perceived relativism of values clarification. According to the “Character Education Manifesto,” “all schools have the obligation to foster in their students personal and civic virtues such as integrity, courage, responsibility, diligence, service, and respect for the dignity of all persons” (Boston University, 1996). The goal is the development of character or virtue, not correct views on “ideologically charged issues.” Schools must become “communities of virtue” in which “responsibility, hard work, honesty, and kindness are modeled, taught, expected, celebrated, and continually practiced.” An important resource is the “reservoir of moral wisdom” that can be found in “great stories, works of art, literature, history, and biography.” Education is a moral enterprise in which “we need to re-engage the hearts, minds, and hands of our children in forming their own characters, helping them “to know the good, love the good, and do the good” (Boston University, 1996).

Finally, we note what is conspicuous by its absence: although all universities offer courses in ethics, usually in departments of philosophy or religious studies, very few public schools have such courses. Unlike either values clarification or character education programs, the major purpose of ethics courses is usually to provide students with intellectual resources drawn from a variety of traditions and schools of thought that might orient them in the world and help them think through difficult moral problems. As important as we all agree morality to be, it is striking that schools do not consider ethics courses an option worth offering.

Training and Education

In Chapter 2 we distinguished between socialization, training, and indoctrination on the one hand, and education on the other. Socialization, we suggested, is the uncritical initiation of students into a tradition, a way of thinking and acting. Education, by contrast, requires critical distance from tradition, exposure to alternatives, informed and reflective deliberation about how to think and live.

Not all, but much character education might better be called *character training or socialization*, for the point is not so much to teach virtue and values by way of critical reflection on contending points of view, but to structure the moral ethos of schooling to nurturing the development of those moral habits and virtues that we agree to be good and important, that are part of our moral consensus. This is not a criticism of character education. Children *must* be morally trained. But there are limitations to character education as a general theory of moral education; it was not designed to address critical thinking about those “ideologically charged” debates that divide us. Character education does appeal, as the Manifesto makes clear, to a heritage of stories, literature, art, and biography to inform and deepen students’ understanding of, and appreciation for, moral virtue. Often such literature will reveal the moral ambiguities of life, and discussion of it will encourage critical reflection on what is right and wrong. But if the literature is chosen to nurture the development of the *right* virtues and values, it may not be well suited to nurture an appreciation of moral ambiguity or informed and critical thinking about contending values and ways of thinking and living. (Of course, character education programs often nurture the virtues of tolerance, respect, and civility that play major roles in enabling educational discussion of controversial issues.)

One of the supposed virtues of the values clarification movement, by contrast, was its use of moral dilemmas and divisive issues; moreover, in asking students to consider the consequences of their actions, it required them to think critically about them. But the values clarification movement never required students to develop an *educated* understanding of moral frameworks of thought that could inform their thinking and provide them with critical distance on their personal desires and moral intuitions; it left them to their own inner resources (which might be meager).

Let us put it this way. Character education is an essential aspect of moral education, but a fully adequate theory of moral education must also address those morally divisive (“ideologically charged”) issues

that are sufficiently important so that students must be educated about them. Of course, one of these issues is the nature of morality itself; after all, we disagree about how to justify and ground those values and virtues that the character education movement nurtures.

If students are to be morally educated—and educated about morality—they must have some understanding of the moral frameworks civilization provides for making sense of the moral dimension of life. After all, morality is not intellectually free-floating, a matter of arbitrary choices and merely personal values. Morality is bound up with our place in a community or tradition, our understanding of nature and human nature, our convictions about the afterlife, our experiences of the sacred, our assumptions about what the mind can know, and our understanding of what makes life meaningful. We make sense of what we ought to do, of what kind of a person we should be, in light of all of these aspects of life—at least if we are reflective.

A Theory of Moral Education

We have space here to offer only the briefest sketch of a theory of moral education.

- For any society (or school) to exist, its members (students, teachers, and administrators) must share a number of *moral virtues*: they must be honest, responsible, and respectful of one another's well-being. We agree about this. Public schools have a vital role to play in nurturing these consensus virtues and values, as the character education movement rightly emphasizes; indeed, a major purpose of schooling is to help develop good persons.

- If we are to live together peacefully in a pluralistic society, we must also nurture those *civic virtues and values* that are part of our constitutional tradition: we must acknowledge responsibility for protecting one another's rights; we must debate our differences in a civil manner; we must keep informed. A major purpose of schooling is to nurture good citizenship.

- But when we *disagree* about important moral and civic issues, including the nature of morality itself, then, for both the civic and educational reasons we discussed in Chapter 2, students must learn about the alternatives, and teachers and schools should not take official positions on where the truth lies. The purpose of a *liberal education* should be to nurture an informed and reflective understanding of the conflicts.

- What shape moral education should take depends on the maturity of students. We might think of a K–12 continuum in which character education begins immediately with the socialization of children into those consensus values and virtues that sustain our communities. As children grow older and more mature they should gradually be initiated into a liberal education in which they are taught to think in informed and reflective ways about important, but controversial, moral issues.

- Character education and liberal education cannot be isolated in single courses but should be integrated into the curriculum as a whole. We also believe, however, that the curriculum should include room for a moral capstone course that high school seniors might take, in which they learn about the most important moral frameworks of thought—secular and religious, historical and contemporary—and how such frameworks might shape their thinking about the most urgent moral controversies they face.

Whose Values?

This is, of course, the inevitable question: If we are going to teach values, whose values are we going to teach? The answer is simple, at least in principle: We teach everyone's values. When we agree with each other we teach the importance and rightness of those consensus values. When we disagree, we teach *about* the alternatives and withhold judgment.

For example, we agree about democracy; it is proper, indeed important, to convey to students the value of democracy and the democratic virtues. We disagree deeply about the values of the Republican and Democratic parties, however. We can't leave politics out of the curriculum simply because it is controversial. If students are to be *educated*, if they are to make informed political decisions, they must learn something about the values and policies of the two parties. In *public* schools, teachers and texts should not take sides

when the public is deeply divided; there should be no *established* political party. Schools should teach students about the alternatives fairly. And so it should be with every other major moral or civic issue that divides us—including religion.

Liberal Education as Moral Education

A good liberal education will provide students with a basic cultural literacy about those aspects of the human condition sufficiently _important to warrant a place in the curriculum. We have argued in earlier chapters that a major purpose for studying history and literature is the understanding and insight they provide into the human condition. History is a record of social, political, moral, and religious experiments; it provides interpretations of the suffering and flourishing of humankind. The study of literature gives students imaginative insights into how people have thought and felt about the world in different times and places. History and literature provide students with a multitude of vicarious experiences so that they are not at the mercy of their limited and inevitably inadequate personal insights and experiences. So, for example, it is impossible to understand matters of racial justice (and so specific a policy issue as affirmative action) without understanding a good deal of history, and the insights gained from imaginative literature (art, drama, and film) will be immensely valuable in making that history come alive. Indeed, one major criterion for choosing the history and literature we teach should be its relevance to deepening students' understanding of what is central to the suffering and flourishing of humankind.

As we suggested in Chapter 2, a liberal education has both conservative and liberating aspects. A good liberal education will initiate students into cultural traditions, shaping their moral identities in the process. We are not social atoms, but inheritors of languages, cultures, institutions, and moral traditions. From the beginning it has been a purpose of public education to make students into good citizens, good Americans. In teaching history we provide students with a past, a sense of identity, a role in developing stories, a set of obligations.

But a good liberal education will also teach students that disagreements among us run deep: we often disagree deeply about the meaning and lessons of history—as the debate over identity and multiculturalism makes clear. We often disagree about the justice and goodness of different cultures and subcultures. We disagree about how to make sense of the world, about how to interpret it. Indeed, we often disagree about what the relevant facts are—or, even more basically, what counts as a fact, as evidence, as a good argument. We have quite different worldviews. *A good liberal education will initiate students into a discussion of the major ways civilization has devised for talking about morality and the human condition.*

Religion and Moral Education

Most proposals for moral education are alike in employing vocabularies sterilized of religious language. The net effect, yet again, is the marginalization of religion. The implicit message is that religion is irrelevant to the development of virtue, moral judgment, and the search for moral truth. But if students are to be liberally educated and not just trained or socialized, if schools are not to disenfranchise religious subcultures, and if they are to be neutral in matters of religion, then we must include religious voices in the discussion.

- The character education movement is grounded in the conviction that there are *consensus* virtues and values. The consensus must be local, but it may also be broader; indeed, its advocates sometimes claim (rightly) that virtues such as honesty and integrity are universal and are found in all the world's religions. Nonetheless, because religion can't be practiced in public schools and because _it is often controversial, the character education movement avoids _it. Religion is mentioned only once in the "Character Education Manifesto"—in the claim that character education is a joint responsibility of schools, families, communities, *and churches* (as well, presumably, as non-Christian religious institutions) (Boston University, 1996).

Clearly the moral ethos of *public* schools must be secular rather than religious; character education cannot use religious exercises to nurture the development of character. But character education cannot implicitly convey the idea that religion is irrelevant to morality. We have noted that character education employs literature and history to convey moral messages. Some of those stories and some of that history should make clear that people's moral convictions are often grounded in religious traditions.

- When teachers and students in the higher grades discuss controversial moral issues—abortion, sexuality, and social justice, for example—they must include religious perspectives on them in the discussion. For constitutional reasons those religious interpretations cannot be disparaged or advocated.

- As we've noted many times, one reason we disagree in our moral judgments is that we are committed to strikingly different worldviews. Some of us ground our moral judgments in Scripture, others in cost-benefit analyses, yet others in conscience (and there are many other alternatives). Even when we agree—about honesty, for example—we may disagree about why we should be honest. Long-term self-interest and love of humanity may both prescribe honesty as the best policy—though one's attitude and motivation, the kind of person one is, may be quite different; and, of course, there will be occasions when the requirements of love and (even long-term) self-interest will diverge. Just as in math, it is not enough that we agree about the right answer (but we must get it in the right way), so in any domain of the curriculum a good education requires more than a shallow agreement about conclusions. To be educated requires an understanding of the deep reasons for belief and values.

Historically, religions have provided the categories, the narratives, the worldviews, that provided the deep justifications for morality. From within almost any religious worldview, conservative or liberal, people must set themselves right with God, reconciling themselves to the basic moral structure of reality. They are to act in love and justice and community, being mindful of those less fortunate than themselves. The conventional wisdom now, however, is that we can teach morality without reference to religion. Indeed, the deep justifications have changed (and often become more shallow in the process). Health and home economics texts often ground their account of values in Abraham Maslow's humanistic psychology, whereas the economics standards and texts appeal to neoclassical economic theory and modern social science. Modern science (at least implicitly) teaches students there is no moral structure to nature. Our whole moral vocabulary has changed: like modern culture generally, modern education often emphasizes rights over duties, individualism over community, autonomy over authority, happiness over salvation, self-esteem over self-sacrifice, and cost-benefit analysis over conscience. Indeed, students may learn that there are no right or wrong answers when moral judgments are the issue.

The problem is not just that educators ignore religious accounts of morality; it is that the secular worldview that pervades modern education renders religion suspect.

How do we make sense of religious accounts of morality? A little "natural inclusion" here and there will help. A yearlong course in religious studies will help more. We also find merit in the idea of a senior capstone course in ethics in which students would study various secular and religious ways of understanding morality and several of the most pressing moral problems of our time.

Moral Education and the Bible

Conservative religious parents sometimes ask that Bible courses be offered in public schools as a way of addressing the moral development of children. As we have seen, the courts have made it clear that public schools cannot teach students that the Bible is true, or that children should act in accord with Biblical morality.

Nonetheless, there is a constitutional way in which study of the Bible is relevant to moral education. By studying the Bible (or any religious text), students will encounter a vocabulary and framework for thinking about morality and the human condition that will quite properly provide them with critical distance on the secular ideas and ideals they acquire from elsewhere in the curriculum—and from popular culture.

Morality is at the heart of all religion, and, as we've argued, one important reason for studying religion is to acquire some sense of the answers that have been given to the fundamental existential questions of life. Teachers and texts can't endorse religious answers to those questions, but they can and should expose students to them fairly as part of a good liberal—and moral—education. Students may find those answers compelling even if their teachers and texts don't require them to.

Religion and Sex Education

It may be helpful to sketch the relevance of religion to one particularly troublesome part of the curriculum: sex education.

It is important for students (at some age) to understand the biology of sexuality; but, of course, the purpose of sex education has always been something more than simple science education. Its primary purpose has been to guide students' behavior, addressing major social problems such as unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

One way to address these problems is to teach students sexual abstinence. Another is to provide them with a little technological know-how regarding birth control and condoms. Not surprisingly, many parents (including many religious conservatives) view the condom approach as a legitimization of sexual promiscuity and favor "abstinence only." Many educators respond that it is naive to teach abstinence only because many adolescents will inevitably engage in sexual behavior and they must learn how to protect themselves and others. The pragmatic middle ground has become "abstinence but": teach students abstinence but include something about condoms _as well.

Whichever position we take requires that we give students reasons for using condoms or foregoing the pleasures of sexuality. Three kinds of answers are common. First, it can be argued that either approach is in one's long-term self-interest, and much sex education focuses on the unhappy consequences of unplanned pregnancies and STDs. Some students will recognize the risks and alter their behavior accordingly—though adolescents are not typically strong on long-term self-interest and deferred gratification. Perhaps more important, if it is to be truly *educational*, sex education must make students aware of the fact that sexual behavior is universally held to be subject to moral as well as prudential judgments. To be ignorant of this is to be uneducated.

So, how do we introduce morality into sex education? A second approach—that taken in each of the four high school health texts we reviewed—is a variation on values clarification.¹ Students should act responsibly: they should survey their options, consider the consequences (on themselves and on others), and then act in a way that maximizes whatever it is that they value most. Each of the health texts concludes that responsible individuals will practice abstinence. The problem, of course, is that this conclusion requires a considerable act of faith, for what students value most is up to them. The books offer no grounds for assessing the values of students as morally right or wrong; values are ultimately personal.

Health, home economics, and sex education texts and materials often use the language of *values* rather than that of *morality*. One reason is that for many educators "morality" has become synonymous either with what is "moralistic" (and hence narrow and intolerant) or what is religious. But, of course, this is an extraordinarily narrow view of morality. Indeed, no philosophers (in whose domain the field of ethics is usually taken to reside) use "morality" in such narrow ways. We suspect that the deeper problem is that much social science can't make sense of morality and so must translate it into talk of choices and personal values. Virtually all the health and home economics texts we reviewed start from the position of humanistic psychology. But if the authors can't cast their conceptual nets wider than this, it is not surprising that they don't catch morality _in them.

One irony in all of this is that virtually everyone still believes that some actions *are* morally right and other actions *are* morally wrong. Pedophilia is morally wrong. Not telling the person with whom one proposes to have sex that he or she has an STD is morally wrong. Honesty isn't just a matter of cost-benefit analysis

and personal values; it is *morally binding*. If people don't understand this, they are ignorant, and if we don't teach students this, we are irresponsible.

As we have argued, the character education movement has been a widely accepted (and much needed) antidote to the relativistic tendencies of values clarification, and it offers another approach to sex education. Sexual relationships, like all relationships, should be characterized by honesty, loyalty, and respect for the feelings, privacy, and well-being of others—and broad consensus supports this. Prudence, self-control, and a willingness to defer gratification are virtues of unquestionable importance in all aspects of life, but particularly in matters of sexuality. (Whereas the values clarification approach typically highlights dilemmas and choices, character education emphasizes habit; self-control can't just be the result of decisions made as we go along.) We agree that it is wrong for children to have sexual relationships. We might even agree that sexual modesty in dress and demeanor is an important virtue, at least for children. The moral consensus on sexuality is, no doubt, limited and fragile. Still, because there is a consensus, schools should constantly emphasize these moral virtues and principles by means of their ethos, dress codes, stories told and read, and, of course, in health, home economics, and sex education courses. Sex education must also be moral education.

Is this sufficient? What about religion?

We have argued that character education cannot (implicitly) give the impression that religion is irrelevant to morality. Children's stories about love and romance and marriage and the family should include religious literature.

Character education builds on moral consensus, but obviously there is also a good deal of (often strong) disagreement on matters relating to sexuality—abstinence and birth control, abortion and homosexuality, for example. Not surprisingly, we also disagree about what to teach students about these things; indeed, we often disagree about *whether* to teach about such things. Our claim is this: *if* we are to include controversial issues in the sex education curriculum, then, as always, students must hear the different voices—secular and religious, conservative and liberal—that are part of our cultural conversation. Given the importance of religion in our culture, to remain ignorant of religious ways of thinking about sexuality is to remain uneducated. Indeed, the term “sex education” is something of a misnomer; as it is usually taught, sex education is far from being truly educational, for it limits the range of voices allowed into the discussion.

Older students should learn about religious as well as secular arguments for abstinence, and they should learn how different religious traditions regard birth control. (Although all of the health books we reviewed discussed condoms, none mentioned that Roman Catholic teaching forbids artificial birth control.) Indeed, they should learn something about the relevant Scriptural sources (in different traditions) for sexual morality, marriage, and the family. They should know, for example, that within religions, marriage is a “holy” or sacramental (and not just a legal) institution. They should understand the policy positions on controversial sexual issues taken by contemporary religious organizations and theologians. Students are *illiberally* “educated” if they learn to think about sexuality in only secular categories.

Or consider abortion. For many religious people, abortion is *the* most important moral issue of our time; for them, it is *the* most important consequence of unwanted pregnancies and sexual promiscuity. Yet most sex education ignores abortion. Of the health texts we reviewed only one mentioned it—devoting a single paragraph to explaining that it is a medically safe alternative to adoption. That paragraph concludes: “This procedure has sparked a great deal of controversy” (*Perspectives on Health*, 1994, p. 163). Well, yes. We suggest that to be an educated human being in the United States at the end of the 20th century one must understand the abortion controversy; indeed, its relevance to sex education is immediate and tremendously important.

So what does it mean to be educated about abortion? Certainly students should understand the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church and those religious conservatives who believe that abortion is murder. They should also understand the point of view of those religious liberals (from various traditions) who are pro-choice. They should understand feminist positions on abortion. They should learn about the key Supreme Court rulings and different ways of interpreting the implications of political liberty for the abortion

debate. Students should read primary source documents written from within each of these traditions. And, of course, teachers and texts should not take positions on where truth lies when we are so deeply divided.

Or consider homosexuality. The health texts we reviewed each mentioned that some people are heterosexual and others are homosexual (though not everyone would agree with this way of putting it) and that we don't quite know what accounts for the difference. That's it. Like abortion, however, the issue of homosexuality (and gay rights) is one that is tremendously important for students to understand if they are to be informed citizens and *educated* about sexuality.

One approach is for educators to decide what is right (when we disagree) and then teach *their* views to children. New York City's *Children of the Rainbow* multicultural curriculum is a rather notorious example; it would have taught elementary school children the acceptability of homosexuality and nontraditional families had not a coalition of religious conservatives rebelled, ultimately forcing the departure of the system's chancellor. Our objection to this curriculum is not its position on homosexuality; it is that it takes a position at all. It is proper and important to teach children to respect the rights of others; name calling and gay bashing are not permissible—and there is broad consensus about this. But we disagree deeply about homosexuality on moral and religious grounds. Given our *civic* framework, it is not permissible for a public school to institutionalize a moral or religious position on a divisive issue and teach it to children uncritically. Given our *educational* framework, students must learn about the alternative positions when we disagree; all the major voices must be included in the discussion. Of course, the New York City case was particularly troubling because the children were so young.

What then would an adequate sex education curriculum look like? It must, of course, be age appropriate. Lessons and courses for young children should adopt the character education model, and we must take great care to ensure that we don't encourage premature sexual behavior; character education continues to be appropriate for high school students—so long as it deals with matters about which we agree. Indeed, we are inclined to think that adolescents need moral guidance in matters of sexual morality rather more than they need freedom. They must learn to think about sexuality in moral terms.²

We have also argued, however, that we need to educate mature students regarding some matters of great importance about which we disagree deeply. When we do this, however, we must educate them liberally, including all of the major voices—religious as well as secular—in the discussion.

We have already noted that one disagreement is over whether to teach abstinence only. Unhappily, our differences here appear to be irreconcilable. We do believe that some of the controversy would dissipate if sex education were truly liberal. If it would take seriously moral and religious ways of thinking about sexuality, then discussion of condoms would be less likely to be understood as legitimizing promiscuity. Still, if schools require such courses, they should include opt-out (or opt-in) provisions. We suspect that if parents were convinced that educators took their moral and religious views seriously, fewer would have their children opt out.

We recognize that adequate materials are lacking and most teachers are not prepared to include religious perspectives on sexuality in their classes. It is no easy task to make sense of the soul when discussing abortion in a health class, sacramental understandings of marriage in a home economics class, or the sinfulness of promiscuity in a sex education class. Sex education teachers usually have backgrounds in health education, psychology, and the social sciences rather than the humanities or religious studies, and they may have no background in religious studies to help them make sense of religious perspectives on sex education. This is, once again, reason for a required course in religious studies (or a moral capstone course) that provides a sufficiently deep understanding of religion to enable students to make sense of religious interpretations of morality and sexuality. Still, for both civic and educational reasons, some attention to religion in sex education courses is absolutely essential.

Finally, we note that other teachers will sometimes find themselves drawn into both sex education and moral education. Much fiction, for example, deals with sexuality—dating, love, marriage, integrity, adultery, homosexuality, and the family. As we argued in Chapter 6, the study of literature is important for the insight and perspective it provides on the inescapable existential questions of life—a good number of which bear on

sexuality. Moreover, it is tremendously important that teachers in a variety of courses provide students the moral resources for thinking critically about the portrayal of sexuality in popular culture.

Reminders

Finally, a few reminders.

- *Pluralism and relativism.* In Chapter 2 we noted that one of the most difficult tasks for teachers is to convey to students the difference between pluralism and relativism. The civic ground rules of our democracy and the ideal of liberal education require that we respect the pluralistic nature of our society and take seriously the various participants in our cultural conversation about what is morally required of us. But teachers must not take this to mean that all moral positions are equally good or true. For the most part, moral disagreements are about what *the truth* is, what justice truly requires. It is true, of course, that within some important intellectual traditions the idea of moral truth makes no sense, and older students should be introduced to such traditions too—though even here there is often a *pragmatic* moral consensus about some important basic virtues and values. The fact that we disagree about the nature of morality doesn't mean there are not better and worse ways of thinking about it.

- *Absolutism.* People sometimes claim that because religious accounts of morality are *absolutist*, religion, by its nature, cannot tolerate dissent. This has, of course, been a common religious position; it has also been a common *secular* position in the 20th century (among Nazis and communists, for example). Some religious traditions have placed considerable emphasis on free conscience, however, and if some religions have claimed to know God's law with considerable certainty, others have emphasized humility. Just as scientists can believe in objective truth and yet favor an open society in which we debate what that truth is, so religious folk can believe in moral truth and yet favor an open society in which we pursue it openly, with humility.

- *Religious diversity.* If there are shared moral values that cut across religions, we also need to remember that there are also differences among religions, and it won't do to say that they all agree about morality. As we've just suggested, some traditions favor religious establishments and are intolerant of dissent, while others value freedom of conscience and the separation of church and state; some religions have required nonviolence, others have called for holy wars; some have emphasized love and mercy, and others justice and retribution; some have required chastity and poverty, yet others have sanctified marriage and wealth. Some religions have understood morality in terms of God's law, others in terms of love, or grace, or tradition, or liberating the oppressed. Religious conservatives have often grounded morality in Scripture, whereas religious liberals have often held that through continuing moral and religious experience, reason and reflection, we can progressively acquire deeper insight into morality and reform our traditions. Some conservatives believe that people are so sinful that only the threat of hell or the experience of divine grace can move them. Liberals often have a somewhat more optimistic view of human nature in which we have at least a significant potential for doing good apart from supernatural intervention. Teachers must be aware of the complexity of their subject.

- *Suffering.* We often think of morality in terms of personal virtues such as honesty, responsibility, and integrity—in part, perhaps, because such virtues are relatively uncontroversial, in part because they are congenial to an individualistic society. But there are dangers in uncritically conceiving of morality as a matter primarily of *personal* virtue. Historically, morality has been intimately tied to visions of justice, social institutions, and ways of thinking about human suffering and flourishing. Indeed, given the ubiquity of suffering and injustice, it is hard to think of a more important task for schools than moral education *broadly conceived*. Of course, much that students study in history and literature classes *does* address the nature of suffering, injustice, and the human condition.

Conclusions

One purpose of moral education is to help make children virtuous—honest, responsible, and compassionate. Another is to make mature students informed and reflective about important and controversial moral issues. Both purposes are embedded in a yet larger project—making sense of life. On most accounts, morality isn't intellectually free-floating, a matter of personal choices and subjective values. Moralities are embedded in traditions, in conceptions of what it means to be human, in worldviews.

How we ground and justify moral claims is tremendously important. It makes a huge difference if we think, for example, in terms of neoclassical economic theory and cost-benefit analyses, humanistic psychology and self-actualization, or moral theology. In spite of religious diversity and the great differences between liberals and conservatives within religious traditions, the vast majority of religious folk agree that reality has a God-given moral structure, and this distinguishes them from most secular folk.

In their influential study of American culture *Habits of the Heart*, Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1985) argued that most Americans speak two quite different moral languages: an older, now “secondary” language derived from our civic and religious traditions; and a newer, “first” language of “utilitarian” and “expressive” individualism that is reinforced over and over again by modern culture. Unfortunately, they argue, this language of individualism is not nearly rich enough to allow us to make sense of those moral virtues and vices that are part of our civic and religious traditions. If we haven't already become completely preoccupied with liberty and rights, self-interest and self-esteem, autonomy and individualism, we are in danger of this happening; we are losing our ability to speak meaningfully about virtue and duty, love and self-sacrifice, community and justice. The tendency is to forget the older languages, particularly when the everyday language of culture and the marketplace, schooling and scholarship are secular.

We agree. Too much education is relentlessly fixated on economic and technological development—both of which are important, of course. But, *in the end*, one of the things most people learn is that the greatest sources of meaning in life come not from wealth and technological wizardry but from altogether different realms of experience. We suggest that if students are to be adequately oriented in life, they should be educated somewhat less about its material dimensions and somewhat more about morality and those forms of community that bind us together with our fellow human beings, with the past, with our posterity, and, perhaps also with God.

Suggested Readings_and Resources

It is important at the outset to remember that morality acquires its meaning and its force by virtue of its location within a worldview; there is a danger in abstracting moral principles and values from the contexts that make sense of them. Religious morality must be studied in religious context, paying attention to the theological and institutional webs of meaning that shape and sustain morality.

For a basic introduction to how morality is understood in world religions, see *How to Live Well: Ethics in World Religions* (1988), by Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody. See *Readings in Christian Ethics: A Historical Sourcebook* (1996), edited by J. Phillip Wogaman and Douglas M. Strong, for a good collection of excerpts from major Christian writers arranged chronologically, and *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics* (1994), edited by Wayne G. Boulton, for a rich collection of biblical texts, articles, and documents, arranged topically, with an emphasis on recent texts. For a short narrative account see *Christian Ethics: An Introduction Through History and Current Issues* (1993), by Denise Lardner Carmody and John Tully Carmody. *Contemporary Jewish Ethics and Morality: A Reader* (1995), edited by Elliot Dorff and Louis Newman, is a superb collection of articles covering a wide range of moral issues. For morality in the Islamic tradition, see John Renard, *Seven Doors to Islam: Spirituality and the Religious Life of Muslims* (1996).

Sexuality: A Reader (1998), edited by Karen Lebacqz and David Sinacore-Guinn, includes an array of essays and official statements on sexuality from the major religious traditions. *Homosexuality and World Religions* (1993), edited by Arlene Swidler, includes essays on how homosexuality has been understood in the major religions. *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (1994), edited by Jeffrey S. Siker, includes essays written from conservative and liberal positions, and the texts of a number of denominational statements on homosexual_ity. *Abortion: A Reader* (1996), edited by Lloyd Steffens, is a superb collection of 45 essays and documents from a wide variety of religious perspectives. See Pope John Paul II's encyclical *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)* (1995) for the Roman Catholic position on abortion and the sanctity of life.

In perhaps the most influential critique of American culture of the past several decades, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Community in American Life* (1985), Robert Bellah and his colleagues show how traditional civic and religious ways of thinking about morality and community have been undermined by American individualism. For books dealing with the relationship of religion to politics and social justice, we refer the reader to "Suggested Readings and Resources" following Chapter 5.

To give some sense of the range of recent work in moral theology, we suggest the following: Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (1923); Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (1932) and *An Interpretation of Christian Ethics* (1935); C. S. Lewis, *The Abolition of Man* (1947); Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man Is Not Alone* (1951) and *God in Search of Man* (1956); H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self* (1963); Richard Rubenstein, *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism* (1966); James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (1970); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk* (1973); Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (1973); Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (1983); and Pope John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth* (1993).

Three very good (if often challenging) books by philosophers trace the historical development of moral theory and its relationship to religion: *Ethics After Babel* (1988), by Jeffrey Stout; *The Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), by Charles Taylor; and *Whose Justice, Whose Rationality?* (1988), by Alasdair MacIntyre. *Religion and Morality* (1973), edited by Gene Outka and John P. Reeder Jr., is a good collection of philosophical essays dealing with the relationship of religion and morality.

The Character Education Partnership provides advice and assistance for schools and communities interested in developing character education programs. For more information, write to the CEP at 918 16th St., NW, Suite 501, Washington, DC 20006, call 800-988-8081, or visit their web site (www.character.org).

Some of the themes in this chapter are explored at greater length in Warren A. Nord's *Religion and American Education: Rethinking a National Dilemma* (1995), Chapter 11.