

If I could have planned the great development we are now about to see, it would have been to extend the Shenandoah National Park to the Jefferson Highway and to extend the Valley Pike as a three-track road to the Great Smokies and then to make small parks at each of the great crossings of the Blue Ridge. Such a program would have served every need of the mountain lover and would have been of tremendous economic importance to the whole area from the Potomac to the French Broad.

WILLIAM J. SHOWALTER

CHARACTER EDUCATION AND THE NEW SCHOOL

Our changing civilization demands a flexible system of morals; this demand is met by making the objective in moral training "doing the best possible thing" in each situation.

ONE school of thought sees moral training as building a set of habits such as paying one's bills promptly, being at school before the bell rings, listening while others talk, counting ten—when angry—before speaking. But no collection of habits prepares an individual for life. Making a routine of certain basic matters, particularly in the field of hygiene, does save time and nervous energy. But situations in real life vary so much that it is impossible to prepare for them ahead of time. Hence the individual who lacks a goodly store of general ideas of conduct and much practice in applying them to particular conditions is apt to be helpless in the face of the unexpected. And even if such training did function, the number of habits needed would be legion and the time required for building them prohibitive.

A second school of thought believes that

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character is achieved by developing a composite of traits, virtues, and ideals. They make long lists of such items as accuracy, ambition, consideration, dependability, honesty, kindness, obedience, thoroughness. Just as the former group wastes time by making learning too specific, this one errs in trying to teach general ideas apart from experience. They teach definitions of abstract virtues; they make much use of ready-made maxims. But memorized rules do not guarantee learning. One can make infinite definitions of virtues, yet calmly pursue his way down an inconsistent road of conduct. We use the word *hypocrite* a bit too glibly in such cases. It is possible for the individual to be entirely honest; his moral ideas are merely so heavily insulated with words that they cannot make contact with his actions. How else can we explain the American business man who grows rich at the expense of everyone he works with and then uses his money for philanthropic purposes?

Even if we could absorb ready-made general ideas, such moral training would not be practical. For these virtues do not exist as separate entities; life is not so simple as that. Rarely are we asked to choose between the truth and a barefaced lie. More often the problem is like that confronting Scott's heroine in the *Heart of Midlothian*: not quite sure that Effie had murdered her illegitimate child, should the sister Jeanie testify for her or, rather than risk a possible lie, send her to the gallows? Furthermore, a virtue carried to an extreme tends to become a vice. Here is a busy mother, trained from childhood to an extreme thoroughness, who cannot save time from her housekeeping to live with her family. And here a lad beautifully obedient to his parents, but also obedient to the neighborhood bully. Truly, as the prophet says, there is a time for everything, even thoroughness and obedience.

A third school of thought sees character

as an integrated personality. This means such harmony between ideals and actions as will prevent internal conflict. It also means adjustment to the environment. But one may have balance between ideals and conduct at various ethical levels. Who knows but that Al Capone is free from internal conflict? Again, adjustment *to* the environment is not enough; we must also have adjustment *of* the environment if we are to build a better social order.

In this paper two criteria for a system of moral training have been set up. First, will it work? and second, does it give due regard to the laws of learning? "Doing the best possible thing in each situation" meets both these criteria. It integrates various views regarding morals into a practical working system which takes into account the changing nature of our modern life. It breaks down the barriers between the so-called moral and everyday affairs. Feeding baby properly is put on the same basis with telling the truth. Business can no longer hide behind the law. Go down the line of our unfaithful financial leaders; not one can truthfully say that he acted for the best possible good of everyone concerned.

To make "doing the best possible thing in each situation" the objective in moral training promotes favorable learning conditions, for each situation comes as a particular experience. And "the best possible thing" demands constant reorganization of knowledge. Therefore experience and general ideas are in happy relation.

The organization of the new school favors moral training. Planning is stressed at every turn; the child is encouraged to be satisfied with nothing short of the best possible preparation for each job. The school program is flexible so that his work is checked both by natural law and group reaction. If he forgets to water his plant, it dies. If he fails to prepare his story carefully, the group refuses to listen. If he disobeys the safety rules on the excursion, he is left behind next time. Each situation is

met as a particular and is supplied with all available subject matter. If appropriate generalizations are ready from past experience, the child is guided into using them. If they are lacking, suitable experience for their emergence is provided.

This type of school sets up specific habits, traits, virtues, and ideals, but largely as curriculum material for the teacher. It endeavors so to arrange the environment that the learner is confronted with a real situation, is guided in using general ideas to make the best possible decision for everyone concerned. It carries morals over into every phase of daily living. Taking turns in talking and reporting facts with accuracy are important, but so are planning tomorrow's excursion and finding the best possible ending for the class play.

Such teaching is not Utopian. It has been demonstrated in both public and private schools. But such teaching does demand teachers with active interests in the arts, the sciences, and the contemporary scene; teachers who themselves have attractive personality patterns. For moral character is an elusive thing. It is better caught than taught.

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RADIO CONTROL

The radio in America has been allowed to gravitate to almost exclusive control by big business interests. It is viewed by them as a new and profitable vein of advertising revenue. The absurdities and banalities which such control and such a purpose have turned loose on millions of radio listeners almost beggar description. These are fundamental and obvious facts; only a blind optimist would deny, or dispute, or justify them. They call for swift and farreaching reconstructive effort by the public. In the present state of public confusion, such efforts will probably not be immediately forthcoming.

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