The Routledge International Handbook of Education, Religion and Values

James Arthur, Terence Lovat

Do values depend on religion? would it be best if they didn't?

Publication details
Brian V. Hill
Published online on: 18 Apr 2013

How to cite :- Brian V. Hill. 18 Apr 2013, Do values depend on religion? would it be best if they didn't? from: The Routledge International Handbook of Education, Religion and Values Routledge Accessed on: 08 Dec 2021

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.
Do values depend on religion?
Would it be best if they didn’t?

Brian V. Hill
MURDOCH UNIVERSITY, AUSTRALIA

Introduction

In virtually all cultures today, the common good, however it is perceived, is variously besieged by global factors such as transnational capitalism, transcultural migration, internet anarchy, and addiction to ‘the daily news.’ Regional communities are losing focus, while widening religious differences challenge our identities at a basic level, tempting many people to retreat into defensive and in some cases seditious value-enclaves. Meanwhile, in an effort to compensate for a decaying moral consensus, politicians fall back increasingly on the legal regulation of behaviour, but things continue to fall apart.

At an individual level, the default value-stance tends to be hedonistic consumerism, if you can afford it. Some thoughtful people, however, seek to resist social fragmentation and to revive the common good by promoting values dialogue in the public domain. Regrettably, they often get bogged down in linguistic skirmishes that derail attempts to address substantive issues. Notably, Religionists and Secularists make counter-claims about the relationship – beneficial or toxic – between religion and values. In this chapter, I will advance three propositions:

1. An adequate discussion of values must include attention to the three separate issues of definition, justification and motivation.
2. An adequate discussion of core values – personal and communal – must acknowledge the pivotal relevance of religion to all three of these issues.
3. An adequate educational theory must include guidelines for the common curriculum; in relation, respectively, to values education and religious studies.

A paradigm case

In the course of this argument, I will be referring constantly to Figure 3.1, in which I attempt to chart the progression from becoming aware of a value to acting in ways that reflect a commitment to that value. Of course we do not always adopt values as the result of a conscious process such as this diagram illustrates. But assuming that it is desirable to become more conscious of the values implicit in our behaviour, however they got there it will serve as a
Do values depend on religion?

paradigm case, particularly because of its relevance to how we go about teaching values. Whether human agents are always aware of the values underlying their choices is a question that will be addressed at a later stage.

The diagram implies that in the progression from hearing to doing several modalities are at work.

(i) The first modality is that of becoming aware, through the words of others, of a value judgement X.
(ii) But the hearer may miss the actual meaning of the verbalisation, requiring educational intervention.
(iii) Once a concept of X has been formed, the question is whether the individual considers that the beliefs or truth-claims on which X rests are compatible with their view of reality.
(iv) Even then, though it may command their intellectual assent, it doesn’t necessarily follow that the individual will thereafter be disposed to act in accordance with X. The question still remains, ‘Do I attach sufficient importance to X to prioritise it in my behaviour?’ As will be seen later, this requires a commitment of the whole self, in which cognition, emotion and volition come together.
(v) It is still the case, however, that in some situations outward action consistent with internal commitment may not occur. There are substantive issues here that we will also return to later.

**Definitional considerations**

**What are values?**

A first step in defining ‘a value’ is to differentiate valuing from believing. Confusion arises here because people often use the phrase ‘beliefs and values’ rhetorically as though it represented a single concept. Figure 3.1 illustrates that there is a difference. This justifies an attempt to tighten up ordinary usage, if only to show why it is quite in order to ask a person: ‘Why do you value X?’ expecting that reasons will be given that are ultimately based on that person’s core beliefs about how the world is, even if they have not previously reflected at any length on the values implicit in their behaviour. I therefore commend the following stipulation:

---

**Figure 3.1 From hearing to commitment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Belief</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hearing X</td>
<td>Understanding X</td>
<td>Believing that X is true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under-stand-ing X</td>
<td>Believing that X is false</td>
<td>Disvaluing X (i.e. being disposed not to treasure or act on X, even if it is believed to be true)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(i) (ii) (iii) (iv) (v)
**Definition 1.** Values are the priorities which individuals and societies attach to certain beliefs, experiences, and objects, in deciding how they shall live and what they shall treasure.

_Hill, 1994: 63_

In this case, the genus of the definition is ‘priorities’, hinting at something more than just cognitive operations; involving in fact, as previously suggested, a ‘whole self’ response from the valuer.

**What is religion?**

Next, what does ‘religion’ mean? This is a harder nut to crack. A plethora of meanings is attached to the term. One widespread usage implies that belief in God is a necessary condition. Hence those who claim to be ‘not religious’—e.g. Atheists, and at one remove, Rationalists—tend to argue that Religionists, by importing into their premisses faith in the unseen, thereby distort the application of logic and scientific method to the seen (which they claim is the only ‘real’).

This leaves religions that do not require the God assumption but still nevertheless postulate transcendental or non-material entities such as ‘mind’, ‘karma’, or ‘the Tao’ somewhat in limbo. Common usage implies that similarities exist between theistic religions and religions of this kind with respect to the ways in which they serve human purposes. In short, incorporating belief in God in a descriptive definition of religion pre-empts issues that are not just definitional but substantive.

A defining characteristic that more properly represents common usage is that ‘religion’ refers to each person’s search for ultimate meaning and purpose in thought and life; a criterion that accommodates all comers, Atheists included. It was the ground on which Eliade (Eliade, 1959) described the human species as *Homo religiosus* and Tillich (Tillich, 1964) focused on what he called a person’s ‘ultimate concern’.

Atheists are affronted at such moves to draft them into the ranks of the religious, while the self-styled ‘Agnostic’ purports to escape conscription-by-stipulation by focusing on practical, apparently self-verifying life-activities. As an Agnostic friend once assured me, he was not prey to the ‘metaphysical anxieties’ that afflict ‘God-botherers’.

Although the stipulation that ‘religion’ refers to each person’s search for ultimate meaning and purpose in thought and life is unacceptable to some, it does, however, rest on the substantive claim that all persons make assumptions about the reality they experience that are prior to logical deduction and the interpretation of empirical observations—indeed, it is argued, they set the rules for both. And these assumptions format a person’s mental habitat—or ‘life-world’, as some have called it. Even in so ‘objective’ an enterprise as enquiry in the physical sciences, as Kuhn (Kuhn, 1967) and others have demonstrated, ordinary observation soon submits to interpretation and creative theorising; both of which rest on initial postulates that are ultimately underdetermined by the apparent ‘facts’ (Quine, 1970: 48–9; Barbour, 1974: Chapters 6–7). Effectively, these postulates are ‘articles of faith’.

Ninian Smart (Smart, 1975) attempted to skirt the controversy over how to define ‘religion’ by proposing instead a descriptive definition of ‘a religion’ derived from a phenomenological scan of major religious traditions, yielding six (later seven) defining characteristics. One of these, not ranked prior to or higher than the others, was ‘doctrinal’, relating to beliefs about the meaning and purpose of life. For present purposes, I will stipulate that:

**Definition 2.** A religion is a worldview, usually associated with certain personal experiences of transcendence viewed as paradigmatic, which, together with shared faith, normative texts, symbolic rituals and moral agreements, sustain a community of like-minded believers.

_Adapted from Hill, 2008: 5_
This is the kind of definition that Black (1954: 13) called a ‘range definition’, in that it does not require that every single, defining characteristic apply whenever the term is invoked, only that a plausible quorum of the differentia be present. The force of the term ‘transcendence’ is that it identifies moments when the individual is ‘taken out of himself or herself’, experiencing a sense of something Other that is not accounted for at that moment by the material, observable world. Arguably, those who, in the modern day, are espousing ‘New Atheism’ (Wolf, 2006) handsomely satisfy quorum requirements for theirs to be called a religious position in this sense, even though they baulk at acknowledging that there is, unavoidably, a transcendent dimension to their theorising, from the moment they start interpreting their perceptions of the material manifold.

By identifying ‘worldview’ as the genus of this definition, emphasis falls on the cognitive aspect. This may seem to imply that the process of acquiring a worldview is primarily dependent on conscious, rational thought. But, as with the acquisition of values, this is an empirical proposition still to be considered.

The justification of values

When asked to give reasons for embracing particular values, our answers will depend on the kind of value that is being talked about. For instance, Figure 3.2 identifies some of the most general domains. All domains generate their own criteria for validation, as, for instance, aesthetic judgement, recreational preference, technical effectiveness, and so on, but of them all, ethics is the primary paradigm for the justification of value judgements, in that it purports to identify obligations respecting human behaviour that are binding on all persons.

The problem is that the field of ethics is awash with normative theories, ranging from some that postulate some overarching material criterion such as personal happiness, to those that appeal to the nature of rationality per se. And while some theories attempt to contain the normative question within the analysis of moral discourse (i.e. assuming the autonomy of ethics), others argue that the search for adequate normative justifications for our values obliges us to breach the walls of the discipline of ethics by drawing on wider belief systems – and ultimately worldviews. Some ethicists, whether associated with a traditional religion or a Kantian-style rationalism,
argue a case for universal moral notions, whereas Cultural Relativists deny such a possibility, gaining further apparent traction from the postmodern aversion to granting moral hegemony to any particular group or individual.

Something of a mediating position between Rationalists and Relativists is advanced by Communitarian philosophers. Alisdair MacIntyre, for example, plausibly argued in the book *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (MacIntyre, 1988), that what is considered to be rationality is never independent of the tradition-based communities in which it is exercised. Charles Taylor (1992) similarly insists that there is no culture-free space in which pure reason alone rules. Logic, if it is to have material applications to morality, needs normative premisses, which are derived from explicit doctrines and embodied understandings (Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ – Taylor, 1992: 218) intrinsic to the cultural tradition in which the reasoner has been nurtured. This does not dispense with the need to be logical, but provides logical reasoning with the substantive premisses that give it traction in the real world.

It is intriguing to find so iconoclastic a critic as Peter Singer lending some support to Communitarian logic, when he says in his editorial afterword to the *Oxford Companion on Ethics*:

> What is recognised as a virtue in one society or religious tradition is very likely to be recognized as a virtue in the others; certainly, the set of virtues praised in one major tradition never make up a substantial part of the set of vices of another major tradition.

*Singer, 1993: 544*

This purportedly empirical observation is in keeping with Singer’s own attempt to anchor ethics in a preferred Utilitarianism that somehow manages to endorse the value judgement ‘love thy neighbour as thyself’ without questioning the beautiful trust in human nature that it presupposes. That in itself is an act of faith, as comparison with the elitist alternative of Nietzsche – quite logical if one accepts his initial assumptions – reveals.

In short, justifications for ethical norms must be found beyond the discipline of ethics itself; ultimately, in wider belief systems. And that brings us back to worldviews, all of which, as was noted earlier, take their rise from starting points embraced by faith. This does not mean that such ur-beliefs are necessarily irrational. They may be ‘reasonable initial bets’ (RIBs – Hill, 2004: 5): ‘reasonable’ that is, in that the individual finds in them a *prima facie* plausibility that invites further examination and practical action; ‘initial’, because they then filter what we actually ‘see’, and subsequently determine what shall count as verification of factual claims; and ‘bets’, because RIBs themselves are not verifiable by the same criteria, despite being essential to thought and action, precisely because they also imply what shall count as appropriate criteria!

But how does one then justify the RIBs that hold one’s worldview together? Ultimately, each of us has to fall back on *faith* in our RIBs, and the proof of the pudding comes from living within this view of reality, until and unless reason or the contingencies of daily experience undermine it to such an extent that the adjustments we have been making to it since infancy collapse and we encounter what Kuhn in another context called a ‘paradigm crisis’. This may cause temporary discomfort, or it may result in more drastic mental turmoil, prompting recourse to mind-blocking sensualism, existential despair, or conversion to a new way of cognising the world.

**The motivation of right conduct**

Reference to the role of worldviews in the justification of values provides a bridge also into the question of motivation to live by those values. It is arguable that a human being’s
quest for meaning, identity and purpose begins in the earliest months of life (Rochat, 2003). A baby is never a creature of impulse alone, for in the words of Taylor, ‘our perception of the world is essentially that of an embodied agent, engaged with or at grips with the world’. (Taylor, 1995: 23).

In a neonate’s mind, awareness of an external world very quickly becomes differentiated from self-awareness, by early recognition of primary carers, and by a sense of relationship with them that is different from one’s relation to the surrounding world of objects. That is, the primary ingredients of self-awareness – Me, You, It and the All (the mental framework within which the previous three elements co-exist) – are therefore in place within the first year of life, though the capacity to think of Myself in the third person takes more time (see Rochat, 2003).

These primary ingredients, insofar as they operate at a conscious level, are the building blocks of a worldview. The infant concerns of ‘To whom do I matter?’ and ‘What must I do to survive?’ are supplemented in time by reflection on ‘What am I?’ and ‘Where am I going?’ Primary nurture and cultural conditioning supply answers largely through osmosis (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), until the development of powers of extended abstract thought provokes more autonomous reasoning about the plausibility of these answers.

The rest of life is a spiral curriculum, returning constantly and with increasing sophistication to these relational parameters. It is arguable that the additional dimension of relationship with the Other which some call ‘god’, ‘nature’, ‘spirit’ or something else, also begins very early, as many lines of research into ‘children’s spirituality’ are suggesting.10

Meanwhile, many variables beyond the control of the juvenile agent also influence the picture it is building up in its mind. These include family nurture and wider cultural influences such as, increasingly today, the communications media. Many of these inputs have a strong affective tone, either strengthening or eroding self-esteem, which in turn affects one’s sense of personal value and significance.

External influences, then, do play an important part, but as cognitive powers develop, individuals reflect, to varying degrees, on these influences. As any parent knows, small children soon become addicted to asking ‘Why?’ and expecting reasons to be given in reply. Such moments provide opportunities to encourage the logical exercise of their mental capacities. In the process, they become more aware of their own areas and powers of choice. Similarly, these capacities may be enhanced or suppressed by schooling and other kinds of educational intervention; indeed, enhancement of logical thought and morally responsible choice should rank high on any list of educational objectives.

Returning now to the issue of a developing worldview, domestic and other cultural factors may initially dispose one at an unreflective level to be a Theist, Atheist, Gaia-ist, hedonist, criminal, terrorist, or whatever. But the central focus for educational interventions should be to encourage the young person to understand and interrogate the cultural conditioning they have already received. This will not only involve practising rational thinking, but becoming aware of other cultural traditions that challenge not only their habituated beliefs but their habituated feelings and impulsive responses.

Out of the personal worldview thus developing comes the motivation to live in a certain way, establishing personal priorities that congeal over time; in the moral realm – into the ‘habit of virtue’, as Aristotle described it. ‘Virtue ethics’ has experienced something of a revival in philosophical circles in recent years, steering a course between the austere rationalism of deontological approaches and the pragmatic consequentialism of utilitarian approaches. The particular merit of virtue ethics has been to rehabilitate the notion of ‘character’ that suffered an eclipse at the height of the behaviourist era in psychology. It may be defined thus:
Definition 3: ‘Character’, in common usage, primarily refers to the complex of moral dispositions which present most consistently over time in an individual’s behaviour.

The phrase ‘a person of good character’ describes a person in whom dispositions generally regarded as virtuous present most consistently; a ‘bad character’ one in whom serious vices present most consistently.\textsuperscript{11} The question begged, of course, is who decides which dispositions are virtues and which are vices? For the individual, this judgement will stem from their worldview; for the ideological enclave, it will stem from its shared beliefs; and for the pluralistic society, it will stem from such general consensus as exists concerning what constitutes the ‘good person’, having regard to what is required to maintain the perceived common good.

Singer was earlier quoted as claiming that a number of particular moral attributes tend to attract general commendation across the normative ethical spectrum. Such include honesty, compassion, and justice, often subsumed under the general rubric of ‘respect for persons’. So have our notes on the processes of definition and justification, and the role played by nurture in the formation of one’s worldview, now also resolved the question of motivation?

Hardly, for often the progression from internal valuation to external action – the fifth modality depicted in Figure 3.1 – stalls. Apart from cases where conflicts between worthy values paralyse action, or where compulsion from outside prevents persons from acting in accordance with their true desires (see later), there remain problems of motivation connected with the human will: either ‘weakness of will’ (Greek \textit{akrázia}) as discussed by philosophers, or the defiant strong will lamented by theologians.

Empirically, Socrates’ claim in the \textit{Meno} that knowledge ensures virtuous conduct and evil is the result of ignorance was never less plausible than today, following a century of holocausts master-minded by such dictators as Hitler, Stalin, and Pol Pot, who surely qualify as wilfully evil. Their crimes were magnified by the efficiency of the new weapons of torture and oppression supplied to them by supposedly value-neutral science. Add to this today the highly intelligent criminality, similarly serviced, which is globally endemic in the business world, codes of professional ethics notwithstanding.\textsuperscript{12}

Potential explanations of moral default range from attributing it to ignorance of mind as Socrates did, to blaming ‘weakness of will’, which Socrates actually denied. The dependence of ethics on wider belief systems that was explored earlier also needs to be taken into account. For example, in the case of Christian anthropology, the biblical theologian Paul testified to a wrongness in himself which evoked the cry: ‘I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do – this I keep on doing.’\textsuperscript{13}

That is, reason may remind me that I believe in a particular moral good, or even merely in what I perceive to be in my own best interests, yet on some occasions I override both kinds of consideration and give vent to defiant self-will. Defiant of whom? Reason? God? Affection for another? Who knows? Sometimes, it appears, the urge to dominate simply breaches all constraint. Strict Rationalism is hard-pressed to account for this kind of relapse.

Existentialist philosophies of the early twentieth century often construed the problem in terms of inauthenticity – not being true to oneself. But what is the true self? Martin Buber addressed this question in his classic analysis of the two primary modes of awareness, which he labelled \textit{I–It} and \textit{I–Thou} (Buber, 1924). \textit{I–It} awareness comes into play when we view ourselves and the external world as objects (as, for example, in scientific investigation). In the \textit{I–Thou} mode, we ‘enter into relation’ with the other. If we operate only in the \textit{I–It} mode, he says, we fail to acquire the knowledge that only experiences of personal relationship and moral responsibility can provide, and that Polanyi (1958) was later to call ‘personal knowledge’.

34
Human evil, Buber postulated, arises from lack of this knowledge. Only a due respect for, and experience of, I–Thou relationships equips us for authentic living in community. But Buber was later obliged to admit – from personal experience! – that the excessive inhumanity of the Nazis, heirs to high culture though they were, belied his analysis. Their behaviour, he confessed, was ‘inaccessible to my conception’ (Buber, 1957: 232). Nor does Rationalism fare any better. It has given no plausible explanation for the frequent descent by the Nazi Übermenschen into unnecessarily feral sadism. Nor can this be dismissed as an exceptional case. The century of holocausts refutes that move. The plain fact is that something more than reason and deeper than impulse comes into play in the motivation of conduct. We need stronger antidotes to unreason and unbridled self-assertion.

The major worldviews propose variant responses. Some advocate emotional disengagement, others loving engagement. Thus we are obliged to look again at the role of worldviews, not only in justifying values, but in motivating conduct. Recommendations to help individuals cope with their own contradictory motivations have varied from penances and self-flagellation to redemption and transformation. As argued previously, all such meaning frameworks rest on RIBS, underdetermined by the available facts.

It is not appropriate in the present chapter to argue that one particular worldview (my own, for instance) is closest to the truth of things.4 But it is appropriate to maintain that the education of the individual should include exposure to the ways in which major worldviews have attempted to address such propensities. Turning a blind eye, or hedonistically ‘living for the moment’, in an increasingly fraught global community and a jeopardised natural environment, is hardly a sustainable option for either the individual or society.

Those who seek, against these trends, to revive the common good must therefore prioritise two projects in particular, as foreshadowed in propositions 2 and 3 advanced at the beginning of this chapter: negotiating a richer value consensus in communities, and developing guidelines for the education of values.

**The quest for core values**

As to the first, there have been some noble attempts in recent times to negotiate agreements in pluralistic societies between people with diverse worldviews. Some projects, like the Parliament of the World’s Religions, have based their hopes on achieving rational agreement at the worldview level.15 But at the level of ultimate beliefs, or RIBs, agreement depends not only on rational considerations but on deep-laid cultural conditioning and significant lived experiences of relationship. On present indications, agreement at worldview level is unlikely to be reached in the foreseeable future, for basic differences as to what constitute human nature and destiny also generate some significant ethical incommensurables, for example in relation to sex and family values, and the personal consumption of earth’s resources.

In the present day, endemic economic and political turbulence in both West and East suggests that our chances of averting the collapse of societies into moral chaos and civil war depend on our agreeing that democracy is an essential precondition. The dominant version of democracy is the Millsian one, allied with free market economics. This, however, substitutes individual rights for shared moral visions, permitting any kind of behaviour provided it does not encroach on any other adult individual’s pursuit of private satisfaction.

Although this philosophy has done much to liberate the masses and accommodate ethnic diversity, justice and civil order, these are fragile achievements, always vulnerable to erosion by special interests. The challenge today, as mentioned in our introduction, is to graft onto these gains a more fraternal and benevolent vision of community, without turning the clock back on
what has been gained thus far. It requires that we negotiate agreements in the public domain that not only ensure sufficient tranquillity for the pursuit of individual interests, but also encourage communal engagement in the realisation of worthy shared visions.

Democracies of the thin kind necessarily require cooperation in maintaining certain essential services, shared resources, and common political, legal and economic structures. Beyond basic services of this kind, there are many other kinds of possible interaction, potentially more convivial and enriching. In a healthy democracy, people from many different backgrounds are motivated to mingle in a diversity of cultural and sporting pursuits, and to provide services on behalf of the disadvantaged. As mutual trust develops, there is also the potential for a deeper level of self-revealing dialogue, sharing in good faith the ultimate visions and values that motivate each other’s lives.

This does not mean that all must agree on everything, or endorse a common worldview, or even a universal ethic, before such sharing can occur. Public consensus cannot wait on a synthesis of RIBs. In 1951, Jacques Maritain drew on his cross-cultural experiences to distinguish between proximate justifications for those values proposed for incorporation in the common good and ultimate justifications (i.e. at worldview level). ‘No common assent,’ he commented, ‘can be required by society regarding the theoretical justifications’ (Maritain, 1951: 112–13). He went on to compile a substantial list of values on which consensus might reasonably have been expected – in that era – to be achieved. In principle, Maritain’s rubric still stands.

What is required today is a negotiated common good that both sets boundaries and encourages mutual quests for a greater good for all. Cooling (Cooling, 2010) has effectively rebutted the arguments of some that religious (or worldview) discourse should be embargoed in such negotiations. Given that no one comes to public dialogue without RIBs, it is important to ask them – Religiousist or Secularist – to put these on the table; but in the interests of transparency, not hegemony. The purpose is to avert the name-calling that prompts many modern political theorists to adversarially brand their opponents irrational or even – à la Richard Dawkins – ‘mentally ill’.16

Some implications for educational theory

At various points in the foregoing I have hinted at the need for educational interventions to help individuals exercise responsibly their power to choose values to live by – a goal that has become all the more pressing in modern pluralistic societies. This is not only a job for schools. Parents are already in the business of values inculcation, and so, often less scrupulously, are the mass media and commercial advertisers. Increasingly also, as the child matures, voluntary service groups and faith communities have important parts to play. In all such cases, the ethical parameters of intervention need to be identified and constantly monitored in the interests of the child.

Use of the social institution of compulsory schooling poses special problems in this regard. It confers a seductive power to compel that runs directly counter to the objective of developing responsibly choosing individuals. The challenge is to develop ground rules for the schooling process that avoid both the deceptive illusion of supposing the school can be value-neutral, and the ethical felony of presuming the right to indoctrinate students in a particular set of ultimate beliefs and values. When government schools err, it is most often in the first direction, church schools in the second. The result in either case is likely to be indoctrination rather than education.

Definition 4: Indoctrination is an approach to teaching and/or an effect of learning which, while activating the conscious mind (unlike conditioning) and inducing a state of belief, insulates the individual from knowledge of alternative views about that belief and inhibits their capacity to weigh up the strength of the evidence for that belief.
Do values depend on religion?

On the one hand, a tendency to argue that because of their contestable nature, worldviews and value systems should be embargoed from school curriculum, with the focus being put on public knowledge and skills, indoctrinates by default. The priorities of economic rationalism then trump higher goals (often justified as ‘in the national interest’) thereby biasing the state school towards training compliant producers and conditioned consumers. As the ‘de-schoolers’ of the 1970s passionately argued (e.g. Bereiter, 1975; Illich, 1970), these are not value-neutral outcomes. Conversely, those schools sponsored by private faith groups that seek to minimise or bowdlerise encounter with the alternative worldviews of their pluralised neighbours, demean their students too by failing to educate.

The potential for indoctrination in either case is magnified, as mentioned earlier, by the compulsory ambience of schooling, given that it is empowered to impose conditions on attendance, social behaviour, the content of what is learnt and how it is taught, and assessment of learning and how it is reported (e.g. Goodman, 1971; Sizer, 1984). Erving Goffman’s study of ‘total institutions’, beginning with mental institutions (Goffman, 1961), noted the collateral damage to personality caused by such controlling mechanisms.

As contrasted with conditioning and indoctrination, education seeks to liberate the mind and actuate responsible autonomy of action. One step to achieving transparency in schooling is to develop a values charter by which its processes are monitored, based on wide consultation with the main stakeholders including parents, staff and students (Hill, 1994, 2010). Figure 3.3 (overleaf) suggests areas of concern that such a charter needs to tease out.

It is also important to specify clear ground rules for the conduct of such consultations. Relevant ethical guidelines utilised in one such project (adapted from Hill, 2010: 654) included:

1. At the outset, invite stakeholders to nominate on paper not only the values they think are minimally required for the maintenance of human rights in a democratic society, but also their own ultimate visions and core values.
2. Identify those visions and values that are most commonly expressed, and affirm them as minimal desiderata for a convivial and educative school experience. One action-research tool that has served this purpose well has been the Delphi technique (Linstone and Turoff, 1975; cf. its use by Campbell et al., 1992).
3. If particular points of serious disagreement arise, where possible put them on hold for the time being and focus on values in common. Some sceptics argue that in a pluralistic society irreconcilable differences are bound to emerge. This might well happen if ultimate beliefs were at stake, but the emphasis here is on identifying areas of agreement at a practical level. Even so, the possibility still exists that divergent moralities at the practical level may stall the quest for value consensus. But to quote President Clinton at the 2000 Camp David talks, ‘There is no guarantee of success, but not to try is to guarantee failure.’ The hope is that growing trust in each other as persons of good will might extend the possibility of achieving a usefully robust consensus.
4. Single words can carry a hidden freight of ideological meanings and lend themselves to divergent interpretations. Each value needs to be briefly spelled out in a phrase or two using descriptors that are operationalisable.
5. Given that democracy is a procedural notion rather than an ultimate vision for living, the resulting values framework should be treated as a work in progress, subject to periodic review and refinement.

This guideline is significant at two levels. One is that face-to-face agreements do not carry as much weight for stakeholders beyond the first generation of participants. A sense of
ownership depends on opportunity to contribute. Second, apart from its applications in school administration, the charter lends itself to being used in the classroom as a document for study, which also includes the possibility of proposals coming forward from that source for improvement in it.

**Conclusion**

The foregoing discussion has sought to establish that all persons develop, and pattern their lives on, worldviews that seem to them to give the most adequate account of the reality they experience daily. These in turn supply both justification and motivation to act on certain values that form a complex of enduring dispositions traditionally described as a person’s ‘character’.
It has further been argued that in the school years values education must be intentionally undertaken; that curriculum content must include direct study of major worldviews and religious traditions; and that, as a separate but complementary area of content, there should also be specific analysis and commendation of core values identified in the school’s values charter. As to teaching method, the case has been made for educative teaching in both cases, which includes prompting students to interrogate their own prior nurture and learning with a view to becoming more rationally autonomous in their life-choices, and more committed to promoting the common good.

Notes

1 Sommerville (2009: 168–76) writes of ‘News as a Culture Substitute’ – ‘To imagine that each 24-hour period is worthy of the same attention . . . creates a mindset altogether foreign to science, philosophy, literature, the arts, and religion.’

2 I am working to a stipulation that the word ‘Secularism’ represents a worldview, as distinct from ‘secularisation’, which describes a cultural process of creating a public space in which no one ultimate worldview is hegemonic, and all have fair access to negotiations on the common good.

3 This is the latest iteration of a diagram I have used over many years.

4 ‘Religion, in the largest and most basic sense of the word, is ultimate concern.’

5 The revised classification undergirded the book arising from his BBC television series. See Smart, 1992.

6 Inevitably, there are many points of overlap in this stylised conceptualisation.

7 These obligations are generally understood to include duties not only to other persons but to other species and the shared natural environment.

8 Cf. Ward’s comment (Ward, 2011: 71) that Theists who believe ‘that reason and goodness are the innermost character of being’ are embracing ‘a reasonable faith, though it involves a commitment to what cannot be established beyond the possibility of doubt . . . It is possible, though it is in no sense more reasonable, to refuse to take that step of faith’, as is the case with Secular Humanists.

9 Imre Lakatos argued that such adjustments were not less rational than strict falsification criteria. Contra Popper, he contended that when scientists encounter a datum which appears to falsify the paradigm they are working in, their normal reaction is not to doubt the paradigm but to shield its theoretical core by building a protective shell of ‘auxiliary hypotheses’ around it. The ultimate demise of a paradigm is a protracted thing, and it is implausible to suppose that only rational considerations cause the hiatus. Often, reputations and personal relations muddy the waters. Russell (2004) credits Ian Barbour with first suggesting that there are parallels between this process in science and conversion from a previous religious worldview.

10 See, for example, Cupit (2009) and the pages of the International Journal of Children’s Spirituality.

11 Usages such as ‘strong’ or ‘weak character’, or ‘likeable character’, are loose extrapolations from the primary meaning of the word to what are more appropriately described as behavioural characteristics – in these examples, of ego-strength or temperament. The same caveat applies to saying: ‘She’s quite a character.’

12 A salutary case-study, pre-dating the 2010 spate of bankruptcies within the European Union, is McDonald (2009). It hardly suffices to attribute the cause, as in the book’s title, simply to a ‘failure of common sense’, given the rampant greed and deceit within the American corporate financial sector which is documented in this book.


14 I have argued elsewhere, however, that a bland ‘equal time’ treatment in selecting content, is no more neutral, and actually less valid, than privileging the worldview(s) which have hitherto had the most influence on the culture of the society within which the school is embedded (see Hill, 2004: 195). Of course, since the objective is optimal understanding, this principle remains subject to the conditions laid down previously for the result to be educative rather than indoctrinative.

15 See Küng and Kuschel (1993). The Parliament of the World’s Religions was founded in 1893 by Unitarians and Universalists of the Free Religious Association. At its peak in the 2004 meeting in Barcelona, Spain, it attracted over 8,900 participants from over 75 countries, though numbers attending have declined since.

16 Quoted in McGrath (2005: 84).
References


Do values depend on religion?


