

Chapter 3

The Philosophical Battle

The philosophical roots plaguing our educational system today are the same when in 1984 I wrote, *Schools in Crisis: Training for Success or Failure?* In summarizing the problems facing schools, I wrote that what the American public had to understand is the root cause of the school crisis. The crisis was a result of a conflict between two ideologies. One advocates permissiveness, freedom without responsibility, instant gratification, no tests, no homework, free and open classrooms, automatic promotion, profane textbooks, parental disrespect, laxity toward misbehavior, lowering of standards, situational ethics, maximum individual autonomy, sexual license, euthanasia, right to suicide, and anti-Americanism.

The other belief system favors discipline, *in loco parentis*, law and order, freedom with responsibility, work ethic, academic excellence, knowledge of the basics, tests, homework, achievement promotion, parental respect, decent textbooks, sexual purity, and patriotism.

The conflict was between naturalism and the traditional American value system. I came to realize that those opposing character-building materials have the same philosophical roots as naturalism. Naturalism believes that everything can be explained by natural

law without any moral or spiritual significance. Values therefore are relative and situational. There are no moral absolutes. Since there are no moral absolutes and values are situational, acts that give the individual pleasure are the decisive test of whether the act is good or evil.

One of the outgrowths of this naturalistic philosophy is humanism. The humanists produced two manifestos describing their beliefs. The first was published in 1933, and because of new events a second manifesto was published in 1973. A careful reading of these documents reveals their destructive philosophy. Following are some excerpts from *Humanist Manifesto* published in 1973:

Ethics: We affirm that moral values derive their source from human experience. Ethics is *autonomous* and *situational*, needing no theological or ideological sanction.

The Individual: *The preciousness and dignity of the individual person* is a central humanist value. Individuals should be encouraged to realize their own creative talents and desires. We reject all religious, ideological, or moral codes that denigrate the individual, suppress freedom, dull intellect, dehumanize personality. We believe in maximum individual autonomy consonant with social responsibility.

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In the area of sexuality, we believe that intolerant attitudes, often cultivated by orthodox religions and puritanical cultures, unduly repress sexual conduct. The right to birth control, abortion, and divorce should be recognized. While we do not approve of exploitative, denigrating forms of sexual expression, neither do we wish to prohibit, by law or social sanction, sexual behavior between consenting adults. The many varieties of sexual exploration should not in themselves be considered "evil."¹

Once this naturalistic humanistic philosophy of moral relativism is understood, that truth and values are autonomous and situational and never absolute, it becomes clear that its teaching has permeated not only our schools but also our society. This philosophy continues to be the archenemy of our traditional value system that there are moral absolutes.

Fruits of Moral Relativism

Today many of our youth have embraced the relativistic philosophy, "If it feels good, do it." Self-expression and self-fulfillment are their aims in life. When some children fall prey to this way of thinking, it can lead to actions that are rationalized

by the thought, "Might makes right," and "If I receive pleasure at your expense, so be it. So what if I stab you in the back for your new sneakers? I could care less about your pain. I'm happy, and that's what counts."

Our society has raised a self-indulgent, hedonistic group of youths. We shouldn't wonder why sex violence is so rampant and our prisons are full. Youth are doing what they were taught—they're making themselves happy. They're not interested in anyone except themselves. "If it feels good—it's good." No value is superior to another value.

Relativists want to do whatever brings them ultimate happiness without guilt—that's utopia. Unfortunately, the belief of self-fulfillment at any cost has produced Hitler, Mao Zedong, Stalin, Pol Pot, and other ruthless dictators who killed millions to fulfill their utopian dreams. But remember, these ruthless dictators killed millions in their belief that what they did would benefit their concept of society. Shouldn't we be tolerant of them because they did what they believed would help them? This question is ridiculous, but there are those who defend this philosophy.

What is the result of a hedonistic philosophy where personal satisfaction is the end objective in life? It undermines the structure of a society. Look at some of our youth who have chosen drugs, alcohol, promiscuous sex, and a life of crime instead of work for sustenance. Sadly, what brings us to our senses is

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when we experience firsthand the shocking results of this indulgent lifestyle when violent gangs roam our streets and students without remorse kill students and teachers. How many of these incidents will it take to wake up Americans to see the ruinous effect of their departure from the values that made our nation great?

Don't for a minute think these violent kids don't have a moral system. They may not be able to express it philosophically, but they're looking out for number one—they want to be happy at any cost—and that's what counts. This is not a new concept. There's a well-known philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, professor at the University of Basel, who advocated this view. William Kilpatrick, Professor of Education at Boston College, in *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, tells about the morality Nietzsche advocated:

As far as Nietzsche was concerned, morality was good only *for* ordinary people. It was an invention of Jews and Christians. He called it "slave morality." His own interest was focused on an extraordinary type of individual: what he called the superman, or, in German, *Übermensch*. The superman does not allow himself to be fettered by conventional morality. He is even beyond the categories of good and evil. He is a law unto himself. He

doesn't subscribe to a received set of values, but rather, he creates his own values out of the power of his will.

With Nietzsche, morality goes into the dustbin of history. What replaces it is not pure reason but pure will. Life in Nietzsche's view is a meaningless, chaotic void: there is no God, no purpose or plan; nature and the universe are indifferent to man. The only meaning or order life has is that which is imposed on it by strong individuals. "What is good?" asks Nietzsche. "—All that heightens the feeling of power, the will to power, power itself in man. What is bad?—All that proceeds from weakness."...

Prior to Nietzsche, philosophers had always tried to justify moral decisions in reference to something else—either God or natural law or reason or nature. With Nietzsche, decisions become self-legitimizing.²

This hedonistic, self-created value system proclaiming that all values are arbitrary has brought havoc to our world. Humans with this philosophy have no intrinsic worth. Kilpatrick tells what happens when Nietzsche's disciples act out this philosophy:

When Adolf Hitler first met Benito Mussolini, he presented him with a gift of the

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collected works of Nietzsche. It was an appropriate memento. Hitler's ideas about life and politics were largely derived from Nietzsche. Hitler subscribed to the Nietzschean idea that superior people have an inborn right to rule. He also believed they should be free of any bondage to worn-out moralities. Along with Nietzsche, he despised "slave morality" — the Judaeo-Christian ethic. Although Nietzsche was not anti-Semitic in the way Hitler was, he clearly paves the way for anti-Semitism by pointing to the Jews as the source of the inhibiting moral system that had crippled the vital impulses of European peoples. Hitler was merely echoing Nietzsche when, in a speech, he asserted, "Conscience is a Jewish invention. Like circumcision, it mutilates a man."³

The world witnessed the destructive force of Hitler and Mussolini during World War II. Hitler put millions of Jews and other undesirables into gas chambers in order to create "his" world. Fortunately, America rose to the challenge, and with the help of its allies defeated Hitler.

America at that time had a well-entrenched value system. Schools taught values and streets were safe. Then the relativistic forces began to attack our traditional value system of promoting character in children.

A void was created, and in its place the philosophy that morality is situational and moral absolutes are no longer valid became the new value system. The result? Children were encouraged to choose their *own* values. Many chose antisocial values, and when they matured they filled our prisons. *Houston Chronicle* provides this shocking report: “Over the past two decades, the number of adults in the corrections system has tripled, so they now make up 3.1 percent of the country’s adult population, compared with 1 percent in 1980, said Allen J. Beck, a chief researcher with the Justice Department’s Bureau of Justice Statistics.”⁴

Mushrooming of Criminals

Something is happening in America that is producing this mushrooming of criminals. It was not always so in our nation. Can we not see a correlation between attacking character and the filling of our prisons with criminals? Teddy Roosevelt said, “To educate a person in the mind but not in morals is to educate a menace to society.” We certainly have a menace in our society today. Wouldn’t it be much wiser to teach children the morals required to become a productive and contributing citizen? But this would present a great problem—we would have to utilize didactic materials!

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So what's the solution to keep criminals off the streets? Many say, "Lock them up." We're happy—crime is going down while prisons are filling up. How many billions of dollars of taxpayers' money would be saved if we had chosen to train children with proper values who are now adults in our prisons? Also, instead of criminals, we would have law-abiding citizens paying taxes! Fortunately, today there are many who are demanding character education be taught in our schools. Unfortunately, entrenched forces are opposing such moves. What should be done?

Wayne Scott, head of the Texas penal system, the nation's second largest, said Texas needs to pay attention to four- and five-year-old children. "If you want to address the (crime) problem in the long term," reported Scott, "it gets around to...looking at at-risk children and identifying those individuals very early on and trying to influence them in a positive direction." Then he added, "I think you have to look at pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, first grade. You really have to put a lot of emphasis on children. Those are the formative years."

Scott stated that his 25 years in the Texas Department of Criminal Justice shows those who end up in prison had "established criminal records by the time they were 10 or 11 years old." Concerning substance abuse, Scott pointed out that most at-risk children had

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“problems very early in their lives—by 8, 9 or 10.”⁵

What a common-sense solution: Train children early to develop positive values. What better way to do this than by insisting that every school has an atmosphere of character and provides students with materials and programs promoting virtues?

Another issue facing our youth today is the lack of heroes. Today, many of our past heroes are belittled and every vice that can be brought up against them is magnified. Instead of revealing the noble qualities these individuals achieved, they are cut down. In their place are people who have achieved monetary success. Whether sports stars, music celebrities, rap singers, porno stars, or whoever, if they make money—that’s success. Why not individuals as George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Franklin, George Washington Carver, Helen Keller, or Mother Theresa? Men and women of character—that’s the kind of people we should hold up as heroes.

Regrettably, many in leadership positions have embraced the relativistic philosophy. As a result, America has lost its heroes and moral direction. *U.S. News & World Report* in the article “The American Uncivil Wars—How crude, rude and obnoxious behavior has replaced good manners and why that hurts our politics and culture,” states:

From one end of the country to the other,

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parents and teachers complain of the lack of civility among children and the disrespect they show their elders. The problem cuts across all class and racial lines. In the recent survey of educators by the American Association of School Administrators, the teaching of the golden rule—treat others as you want to be treated—was found to be an urgent necessity.⁶

David G. Myers, in the article, “Wanting More In an Age of Plenty,” presents these startling facts:

During most of the post-1960 years, America was sliding into a deepening social and moral recession that dwarfed the comparatively milder and briefer economic recessions. Had you fallen asleep in 1960 and awakened today (even after the recent uptick in several indicators of societal health) would you feel pleased at the cultural shift? You would be awakening to a:

Doubled divorce rate.

Tripled teen suicide rate.

Quadrupled rate of reported violent crime.

Quintupled prison population.

Sextupled (no pun intended) percent of babies born to unmarried parents.

Sevenfold increase in cohabitation (a

predictor of future divorce).

Soaring rate of depression—to ten times the pre-World War II level by one estimate.⁷

Something has drastically changed in our nation. Mortimer B. Zuckerman, editor-in-chief, *U.S. News & World Report*, in an editorial on “Where Have Our Values Gone?” had this to say:

Social dysfunction haunts the land: crime and drug abuse, the breakup of the family, the slump in academic performance, the disfigurement of public places by druggies, thugs and exhibitionists. Are we now, to use Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s phrase, ‘defining deviancy down,’ accepting as part of life what we once found repugnant?

We certainly seem to have lost the balance between societal rights and individual freedoms...Gone are the habits America once admired: industriousness, thrift, self-discipline, commitment.

The combined effect of these sicknesses, rooted in phony doctrines of liberalism, has been to tax the nation’s optimism and sap its confidence in the future. And it is the young who are strikingly vulnerable. They are being

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deprived—like no previous generation—of the emotional comfort and moral nurturing provided by the traditional family. Instant gratification is the new order of the day. Personal impulses, especially sexual, are constantly stimulated by popular music and television, with other mass media not far behind. TV and music often seem to honor everything that the true American ethic abhors—violence, infidelity, drugs, drinking—and to despise everything that it embraces—religion, marriage, respect for authority. No wonder it is difficult to sustain parental values and parental continuity....

The nation's hunger for a public commitment to social and moral betterment is not a simple nostalgia for the greater simplicities of yesteryear; the clock cannot be put back. It is a profound and anxious desire to arrest decay.⁸

What a shocking statement on what's happening in America. In addition to the moral breakdown is the question of what businesses will do to earn money. Sex sells, and there are businesses that will stoop to any level in order to sell their products. In spite of this, there's a great desire for social and moral betterment; however, there are active forces resisting.

Censorship

If you believe in the philosophy of relativism in which there are no moral absolutes and each situation determines what value should be chosen, then you would censor books promoting traditional values because of the powerful influence reading materials have on children. William Kilpatrick, Professor of Education at Boston College, in *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, states:

In recent years a number of prominent psychologists and educators have turned their attention to stories. In *The Uses of Enchantment* (1975), child psychiatrist Bruno Bettelheim argued that fairy tales are a vital source of psychological and moral strength; their formative power, he said, had been seriously underestimated. Robert Coles of Harvard University followed in the 1980s with three books (*The Moral Life of Children*, *The Spiritual Life of Children*, and *The Call of Stories*) which detailed the indispensable role of stories in the life of both children and adults.⁹

How does this relativistic philosophy play out in the real world? We sent a number of our first picture books to various librarians across America to

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get their reactions. We had a number of responses. Two in particular vividly portray the issues between two opposing ideologies. Let me first introduce the reviewed book, *No One Will Ever Know*, which shows the consequences of disobeying parents:

Teased by their friends that no one will ever know what they were about to do, Johnnie and Janie squirrel ignore their parents' warnings about the big, bad wolf. Wanting big, delicious acorns, they lie to their parents and sneak out one night with their friends to Mr. Smith's farm. However, the delightful meal suddenly ends with them being chased by a very hungry wolf. The wolf attacks Johnnie and bites off his tail. Johnnie finally learns: To disobey is wrong, even when you think no one will ever know.

I have two signed statements allowing me to use the following comments. They reflect the philosophical battle being waged. The first one is from Deborah Gitlitz, a youth service librarian from the state of Washington:

Carl Sommer's picture book series *Another Sommer-Time Story: Fun Time with Timeless Virtues* is a disappointingly transparent effort to disguise rigid moral lessons as "fun" stories.

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Sommer's tone is patronizing and righteous; his writing is repetitive and perfunctory; his characters are cardboard and insultingly gender-stereotyped; and his plots are cannibalized from far more successful folktales and fables. The accompanying illustrations are heavily cute. Implicit in the text and illustrations (along with the overt lessons, such as "Obey your parents without question") are messages such as: that males rule the household; that lessons should be painful; and that everyone is middle class and probably white, even the squirrels. Children are unlikely to tolerate such obviously preachy lesson-tales.¹⁰

The next comment is in stark contrast. It is from Jenny Holloman, a media specialist from Georgia:

Excellent for character education, *No One Will Ever Know* teaches the importance of being obedient and following rules. Young Johnny and Janie squirrel are tempted by their older friends to go for the "big acorns" at Mr. Smith's farm. They set out on an adventure that not only causes harm from the Big Bad Wolf, but teaches them that they should always listen to Mom and Dad. "To disobey is wrong, even when you think no one will ever know."

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The beautiful illustrations make this one a winner!¹¹

One wonders how Gitlitz could ever get from a storybook about squirrels that they were middle class and probably white. But notice especially one objection from Gitlitz is the overt lesson, “Obey your parents without question.” To Gitlitz, children, as autonomous individuals, should question parental directives. This translates to, “What right do parents have to insist that their children obey them?” Parents, according to this teaching, should let children choose their own values.

Smoke Screen

You have previously been presented with the comments against didacticism from review journals. But rejecting books because they are didactic is just a smoke screen for rejecting books teaching positive virtues. When books support values the reviewers believe in, such as homosexuality, then books can be didactic. Following are some reviewers’ comments about two children’s books promoting homosexuality.

The book, *My Two Uncles*, by Judith Vigna, talks about the girl Elly who has two uncles. Her true uncle is Uncle Ned who has a gay friend called Uncle Phil.

Elly is puzzled why Grampy doesn't want his son Uncle Ned to come to his fiftieth anniversary party because of his gay friend.

School Library Journal says Elly's "father then explains why Grandpa is angry, telling Elly that he respects Ned and disagrees with Grandpa. Uncle Ned refuses to come to the party alone, and gives the gift to Elly to present. When Grandpa opens it, he expresses regret for having rejected his son. The rather ordinary, cartoon-style watercolor illustrations are a simple accompaniment to the story. There is a broad definition of homosexuality as love between two adults of the same sex, like that found in a traditional marriage...Parents seeking to explain a homosexual couple's relationship may find this book useful."¹²

Publishers Weekly comments about another book promoting homosexuality, *Daddy's Roommate* by Michael Willhoite: "This picture book is an auspicious beginning to the Alyson Wonderland imprint, 'which focuses on books for and about the children of lesbian and gay parents.' That the venture is being undertaken is in itself commendable: consciousness-raising concerning gay issues can handily begin at an early age with the help of books such as Willhoite's.... 'Mommy says Frank and Daddy are gay' — this new concept is explained to the child as 'just one more kind of love.' Willhoite's cartoony pictures work well here; the colorful characters with their contemporary

wardrobes and familiar surroundings lend the tale a stabilizing air of warmth and familiarity.”¹³

School Library Journal points out about the same didactic book promoting homosexuality, “It will be useful for children in similar situations for helping those from heterosexual families understand differences.”¹⁴

In accordance with the philosophy of relativism, producing didactic books advocating homosexual behavior is considered acceptable and even commendable. The hypocritical stance of some reviewers is quite apparent. The issue is not whether books are didactic; the issue is whether the books meet the philosophical standards of the review journal. The sad part is when reviewers label a book promoting values as “didactic,” immediately the red flag of rejection is raised; there’s no need to further evaluate the book for art, content, or interest. The end result is a scarcity of character-building children’s books.

But do we comprehend what goes on during many homosexual acts where sex takes place between multiple partners? Kermit Rainman, social research analyst for Focus on the Family, reports in “Silence v. the Truth,” how dangerous homosexual acts can become for those practicing this behavior:

Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveal that the vast majority

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of cases of HIV transmission are through homosexual contact. Young men are especially at risk. Indeed, at least half of the 40,000-50,000 new HIV infections annually are among people under 25. Tragically, one out of three 17-year-olds who identify themselves as homosexual will be HIV positive or dead from AIDS by age 30.¹⁵

Should schools be advocating this behavior under the guise of tolerance as an alternate lifestyle for children? Won't students be encouraged to experiment with this socially accepted behavior by non-judgmental teachers? How can anyone advocate such a destructive behavior when "one out of three 17-year-olds who identify themselves as homosexual will be HIV positive or dead from AIDS by age 30"? We need to be compassionate and realize the suffering that many of these individuals will encounter because they practice this lifestyle.