Moral education in the schools

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The belief that moral values should be taught to young Americans in the schools is at least as old as the nation itself. Thomas Jefferson's Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge argued for an educational system that would fortify citizens with moral probity to resist the schemes of the enemies of liberty. In his Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania, Benjamin Franklin prescribed the study of ethics in an instructional program that would seek to instill "benignity of mind." Perhaps the most explicit embodiment of this drive to inculcate the young with moral lessons is to be found in McGuffey's Readers. On another level, John Dewey's forceful and highly influential writings concerning the interdependence of democracy, education, and moral character are a modern reformulation of the old belief that "virtue" can and should be taught in the schools. To be sure, an opposite belief—that the schools should teach no values, but should stick to imparting skills and basic knowledge—also has its adherents among educators and social theorists. But more and more in recent years, and especially now, in the aftermath of Watergate and accounts of corruption in government and business, there has been a call for reemphasizing moral education in the schools.
At the moment the entire discussion is dominated by two figures: Sidney Simon, of the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, who advocates "values clarification," and Lawrence Kohlberg, of Harvard and the Center for Moral Education, who calls for "cognitive moral development." Although they differ in important ways, and although their respective followings are in different segments of the educational community, Simon and Kohlberg share an enormous popularity. Both are widely sought after for "workshops" in their methods, and their programs have gained broad support among the nation's teachers and are increasingly used in the classroom.

Simon and Kohlberg agree in rejecting what they regard as the fundamental error of traditional approaches to moral education in this country—what they call "indoctrination." In their shared opinion, moral education has amounted in the past to little more than an attempt by elders to "impose" values upon the young. They claim to offer something different, and better. In fact, what they offer is different, but certainly no better.

"Values clarification"

Sidney Simon's approach is the most widely used new method of moral education in elementary and secondary schools (though less well known in college circles). The theory behind it begins by criticizing traditional moral "indoctrination" as useless for making sense out of life: Traditional moral education is irrelevant today because the modern world is uniquely difficult and complex, and young people are confused as never before. "The children of today," Simon writes, "are confronted by many more choices than in previous generations":

Areas of confusion and conflict abound: politics, religion, love and sex, family, friends, drugs, materialism, race, work, aging and death, leisure time, school, and health. Each area demands decisions that yesterday's children were rarely called upon to make.

Even more troubling than the ineffectiveness of "indoctrination" is the traditional principle that there are right and wrong ways of acting, right and wrong ways of thinking. In fact, Simon asserts, "none of us has the 'right' set of values to pass on to other people's children." Thus there is a need for a new approach—values clarification.

Values clarification is concerned not with "the content of peo-
ple's values, but with the process of valuing." Its aims are to promote growth, freedom, and ethical maturity and to enable children to know "how to negotiate the lovely banquet of life ahead of them." These stated aims will be furthered if teachers, parents, and other adults commit themselves to the view that "there's no right or wrong answer" to any question of value. The process of values clarification is taught in classroom "simulations" in which students are offered various choices and taken through exercises (called "strategies") designed to encourage them to make a conscious effort to discover their "own" values. Simon describes the value of this process in these words:

Each of you who is a parent could leave your own children no legacy more precious than for them to have years of experience in knowing what they want, having learned to set their priorities and rank order the marvelous items in life's cafeteria.

Much of Simon's writing consists of specific "strategies" designed for use in the school and home. In a typical exercise a student might be asked to answer the following:

1. Which do you think is the most religious thing to do on a Sunday morning?
   a. Go to church to hear a very good preacher
   b. Listen to some classical music on the radio
   c. Have a big breakfast with the family
2. Which do you like least?
   a. An uptight indoctrinator
   b. A cynical debunker
   c. A dull, boring fact giver
3. During a campus protest where would you be most likely to be found?
   a. In the midst of it
   b. Gaping at it from across the street
   c. In the library minding your own business

In making these and other similar choices, the student supposedly moves toward fulfillment of the Socratic ideal of self-knowledge. By answering and knowing his answer, according to Simon, he gains insight into himself, which in time brings clarity about his values. The student is then prepared to move freely and confidently in the world.

Other values-clarification exercises are more extensive. One "strategy" is called Who are all those others? And what are they doing in my life? A diagram dominates one page of the text: "ME" is at the center, with lines extending to blocks representing other peo-
ple, e.g., “important teacher, a parent-guardian, best friend.” The student is asked:

Essentially, what do they count on you for? What demands do they place on you? What do they want you to be, to do, to think? What do they want you to value? . . . Consider the similarities and differences between what the various people in your life want from you. . . .

In another “strategy,” called Who Comes to My House, the student is to consider “an inventory of the symbolic warehouse of your life.” He is told to ask, “How many people are invited to your house only because you feel obligated to them?” Simon comments on this “strategy”:

When you come to think of it, there is something silly, certainly something nonessential, about paying off obligations, about spending too much precious leisure time with people who are millstones. . . .

There are, of course, “Responsibility People,” those toward whom we have an important personal obligation; perhaps an elderly relative or infirm “other.” These are responsibilities that, for the most part, we bear graciously, keeping in mind the inevitability of the aging process. To be kind and to help those who need us demonstrates a personal value we respect.

On the other hand, we can choose to spend our time with those who give as they take, who offer at least as much as they receive.

In Priorities, Simon “asks you and your family at the dinner table, or your friends across the lunch table, to rank choices and to defend those choices in friendly discussion.” One example of Simon’s “delightful possibilities” for mealtime discussion is this:

Your husband or wife is a very attractive person. Your best friend is very attracted to him or her. How would you want them to behave?

a. Maintain a clandestine relationship so you wouldn’t know about it
b. Be honest and accept the reality of the relationship
c. Proceed with a divorce

Values-clarification strategies, says Simon, enable the student to achieve knowledge about values, free from the inhibitory inculcation of adults. Despite an admitted shortage of empirical evidence, Simon claims positive results: “Students have become less apathetic, less flighty, less conforming as well as less overdissenting.”

1 In defense of his methods against what he regards as powerful dogmatic and political traditions of indoctrination, Simon sometimes disparages his opponents in authoritarian terms, thus avoiding the need to consider the merits or shortcomings of their arguments. For example, when the school district in Great Neck, New York, cut from its budget funds for training teachers in values clarification, Simon was quoted as saying, “An orthodox Jewish, right-wing group got hold of it and just raised hell.”
"Simulations" or indoctrination?

Values-clarification "strategies" are supposed to give students the greatest possible freedom of choice and knowledge of themselves and the world. By accepting the idea that there are no right or wrong answers to questions of morality and conduct, students learn that being clear about what one wants is all that is required to live well. But do such "strategies" really provide knowledge about the world and freedom of choice? Do they actually make for self-knowledge and ethical maturity and autonomy? Or do they encourage something else? Simon's examples are instructive—in more ways than one.

The first exercise, about the most religious thing to do on a Sunday morning, asks the student to think about what he wants and likes to do on Sunday mornings. Yet it introduces no other considerations, and implies that whatever the student thinks is religious thereby is religious.

The second exercise asks the student to say which of three unattractive choices he likes least—an uptight indoctrinator, a cynical debunker, or a dull, boring fact-giver. Here again, the student is asked to consider only what he likes and dislikes. Moreover, it is assumed that these three are all meaningful choices to the students. No other possibilities or greater descriptions of these people are offered for consideration before a choice is made. The suggestion is clearly that factual information is necessarily boring, debunking necessarily cynical, indoctrination necessarily uptight.

In the exercise on campus protest, the student again answers on the basis of his immediate likes and dislikes, without any knowledge of the circumstances and other germane information about the protest. In this "strategy," it is not relevant whether the protest is a violent, illegal take-over of a university building, or a peaceful, legal demonstration against such an action.

The first of the longer exercises, Who are all those others? And what are they doing in my life? centers on the student and instructs him to consider other people only in terms of his and their wants and demands. Any larger aspects of their relationship to him—what they really are doing in his life—are not included in this "strategy."

In Who Comes to My House, the student is asked to think of people who are invited to his home only because he "feels obligated to them." The student is then told that "paying off obligations" is "silly" and "non-essential." He is also told that while he may graciously bear responsibilities toward elderly relatives, he can
choose instead to spend time with people “who offer at least as much as they receive.” The student’s “precious leisure time” and what he wants to do with it are, again, the main considerations in the exercise. Elderly and infirm people are presented, *a priori*, as “millstones,” and the exercise assumes that the student will not want to spend time with them. Further, in the options offered, the student is treated as if his wants always conflicted with his obligations. Note that it is never assumed that the student wants to be decent.

The last exercise asks the student how he would want his spouse and best friend to behave if they were attracted to each other. Typically, the spouse and best friend are presented as having desires they will eventually satisfy anyway: The student is offered only choices that presuppose their relationship. All possibilities for self-restraint, fidelity, regard for others, or respect for mutual relationships and commitments are ignored.

All these examples attest to the failure of Simon’s approach to live up to his claims. They involve not “values” but only desires and self-gratification; they do little more than glorify a doctrine of the primacy of wants—the wants, likes, and dislikes of the student and of others. The “strategies” thus offer severely limited and misleading options for conduct. Moreover, the exercises are indifferent throughout to relevant facts—except those that Simon wants the student to consider. Absent in all the examples are many considerations—circumstances, context, history—to which moral judgment must be attentive. As a result, these exercises seem more likely to promote hasty, ill-informed, ignorant, and precipitous judgment than any kind of informed free choice. The student is hardly free to make creative choices, since he is closed in by the narrow options Simon gives him. Since the student is taught that clarity about one’s desires is the only thing that matters, the importance of knowledgeable, informed, and conscientious judgment in life is entirely obscured.

The “strategies” thus reveal the moral content of Simon’s approach. People are bundles of wants; the world is a battlefield of conflicting wants; and no one has room for goodness, decency, or the capacity for a positive exercise of will. Moral maturity is certainly not to be found in the clarification of values, which is cast solely in the language of narrow self-gratification and is devoid of any considerations of decency whatsoever. Finally and ironically, Simon’s approach emphatically indoctrinates—by encouraging and even exhorting the student to narcissistic self-gratification.
“Cognitive moral development”

Kohlberg’s work is also gaining in influence and popularity; but although its impact and following in the schools is increasing, Kohlberg’s highest standing is among his colleagues in the university community—particularly in departments of psychology and philosophy, and in schools of education. Kohlberg regards values clarification as useful to some degree, but ultimately of limited value: Besides leaving unsolved problems, “a firm restriction to values clarification merges into an actual teaching that ethical relativity is true.” Kohlberg believes that relativism is philosophically and scientifically false, and claims to offer instead a version of a long-standing account of objective moral truth: a “reassertion of the Platonic faith in the power of the rational good.”

Kohlberg’s position emerges from a much more extensive and complicated theoretical background than Simon’s. Relying on a series of cultural and anthropological studies, Kohlberg contends that there is a universal and invariant series of six stages of cognitive moral development; that reaching any stage requires passing through the preceding sequence; and that each successive stage is morally superior to those preceding it. Although human beings may stop at any stage in the invariant sequence, they can be stimulated to ascend the scale.

Kohlberg agrees with Simon that moral education has, up to this time, been dominated by “indoctrination.” He says that “traditional moral education . . . [is] undemocratic and unconstitutional.” Kohlberg stresses the need for a new psychology and a new philosophy that recognizes “the child’s right to freedom from indoctrination.” Adults are to view the child not as a pupil but as a “moral philosopher” in his own right. Claiming to follow a tradition running from Socrates through Dewey and Piaget, Kohlberg argues that the sole justifiable end of moral education is cognitive moral development and that only exercises involving moral dilemmas and conflicts can promote such development. This strategy, Kohlberg says, reflects a “progressive ideology” with a “liberal, democratic, and non-indoc-trinative” notion of education. Kohlberg sometimes even stresses the “revolutionary nature” of his program.

Kohlberg’s six stages of cognitive moral development, in order of temporal sequence and moral value, are as follows. Stage One is “The punishment and obedience orientation,” in which the child defers to the superior position or power of the parent, teacher, or authority figure: “The physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness regardless of the human meaning or value
of these consequences.” Stage Two is “The instrumental relativist orientation,” in which right action consists of instrumentally satisfying one’s own needs and occasionally the needs of others. Stage Three is “The inter-personal concordance or ‘good boy-nice girl’ orientation,” in which the child seeks the approval of others and conforms to stereotypes concerning good behavior and the value of helping others. Stage Four, where Kohlberg claims most citizens peak and most civilized societies dwell, is “The law and order orientation,” involving obedience to authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of the social order. Stage Five is “The social contractual-legalistic orientation,” which recognizes the importance of an arbitrary element of, or starting point for, rules or expectations, for the utilitarian purpose of agreement. Stage Six is “The universal ethical principle orientation,” the apex of morality:

Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. . . . At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons [italics in the original].

According to Kohlberg, “There is only one principled basis for resolving claims: justice or equality. Treat every man’s claim impartially regardless of the man.” With an approving nod toward John Rawls, whose philosophical position also fundamentally emphasizes equality, Kohlberg describes Stage Six in the following terms:

To summarize, I have found a no more recent summary statement of the implications of our studies than that made by Socrates:

First, virtue is ultimately one, not many, and it is always the same ideal form regardless of climate or culture.

Second, the name of this ideal form is justice.

Third, not only is the good one, but virtue is knowledge of the good. He who knows the good chooses the good.

Fourth, the kind of knowledge of the good which is virtue is philosophical knowledge or intuition of the ideal form of the good, not correct opinion or acceptance of conventional beliefs.

Most psychologists have never believed any of these ideas of Socrates. Is it so surprising that psychologists have never understood Socrates? It is hard to understand if you are not Stage Six.

In Kohlberg’s view, “the basic referent of the term ‘moral’ is a type of judgment or a type of decision-making process, not a type of behavior, emotion, or social institution”; “Morality is a unique sui generis realm.” His account of morality includes a disclaimer:
We make no direct claims about the ultimate aims of men, about the good life. . . . These are problems beyond the scope of the sphere of morality or moral principles, which we define as principles of choice for resolving conflicts of obligation.

Moral education must therefore be non-indoctrinating, democratic, and directed toward justice and equality.

The effective teacher who employs the materials provided by Kohlberg and his followers is "something of a revolutionary, rather than an instiller of virtues." He is expected to be neutral, not imposing his own or other values on the students, but providing a stimulus for students to move through the stages of moral development on their own. Kohlberg says, with another authority (Israel Sheffler), that "to teach . . . is . . . to submit oneself to the understanding and independent judgment of the pupil, to his demand for reasons, to his sense of what constitutes an adequate explanation." The presentation of dilemmas creates internal cognitive conflict, inspiring the student "to see things previously invisible to him"; thus "the whole idea is to encourage students . . . to argue with each other." Students vote on dilemmas in class, to insure that there is sufficient disagreement to create conflict, but they must close their eyes so that none will be influenced by the others.

Examples of simple dilemmas are provided which, along with a standard scoring manual, set forth a series of "criterion judgments" that enable teachers to see where students are on the moral-development continuum. The teacher's responsibility is to use the dilemmas to show the child the insufficiency of his present stage of reasoning in comparison with the reasoning of the next stage. The teacher scores the child by matching student responses with the responses given in the manual for the different stages, by keeping track of the number of Stage One responses, Stage Two responses, and so on, and by noting progress from one level to the next. The teacher is instructed to establish a "non-judgmental atmosphere," and not to be "the enforcer of demands"; the teacher is advised "to relax and enjoy it," even to "swing with it."

**Dealing with dilemmas**

An example of a dilemma is presented in *Affiliative Roles and Relationships*. A mother promises her 12-year-old daughter, Judy, that she may go to a rock concert if she saves enough money. Judy saves $5 for the ticket and $3 more. But her mother then changes
her mind and tells Judy she must spend the money for new school clothes. Judy goes to the rock concert anyway, after telling her mother that she saved only $3 and went to her friend's house for the day. Later, Judy confesses her lie to her older sister, Louise. In the Standard Scoring Manual, the main question about this dilemma is, “Should a daughter [Louise] help her mother exercise authority even if doing so means that her sister's contract or property rights will be violated?” Then for the teacher's use, subsidiary questions are offered:

1. In wondering whether to tell, Louise thinks of the fact that Judy is her sister. Should that make a difference in Louise's decision?  
2. What do you think is the most important thing for a good daughter to be concerned about in her relationship to her mother in this or other situations?

At Stage One, or more precisely at Stage One-A, the “bottom level,” the student responds that Louise should tell because “Louise or Judy will be punished when their mother finds out.” A Stage One-B answer is that “Louise should tell or a daughter should obey her mother; since the mother is older, she knows more, is smarter, knows what's best, etc.” An “Optimal Example” answer of reasoning at the bottom level comes in response to questions about what is most important in the relationship between mother and daughter. The dialogue supposedly goes like this: “[Student:] “Be honest. [Teacher:] Why? [Student:] Because it is her mother and she should keep promises to her because she is older. [Teacher:] Why? [Student:] She knows more and knows what's best.”

From this “low” point the student should progress upward to Stage Two (Louise tells because of concern that Judy “might try to get away with lying or deceiving her mother all the time”); to Stage Three (“A good daughter should recognize that her mother loves her and has her best interests at heart”); to Stage Four (“Louise should tell her mother about Judy's lying out of respect for her mother's authority and in recognition of the fact that the mother is responsible for making decisions concerning her daughter's conduct and welfare.”) This particular dilemma only goes as far as Stage Five, where the manual presents a fairly elaborate articulation of “Role Norm Obligations” and “Fairness and Equity.” The answer at this level is, “The mother had no right to forbid Judy to go to the concert because Judy is an individual with rights equal to her mother's.” At this stage, the answer to the second subsidiary question is this:
The most important thing the mother should recognize in the mother-daughter relationship is that her daughter is a free and unique individual who should be treated as such.

The manual describes this peak of moral reasoning:

This judgment focuses on the obligation to respect each person's individuality or right to autonomy without imposition upon that person of one's own expectations. . . .

The “Optimal Example” is characterized as follows:

A good mother should early respect her daughter as a person, as an individual with needs, and rights and emotions. If possible she should always deal directly and straightforwardly with her daughter; not condescendingly or authoritarianly.

The mother had no right to forbid Judy to go to the concert because Judy is an individual with rights equal to her mother's. [Students] may say that Judy's youth or ostensibly subordinate role as daughter should not be regarded as a morally relevant consideration. . . . The mother's authority is legitimate only insofar as it is based on mutual respect, is just, and could be freely accepted by all parties with informed consent.

And other examples of Stage-Five sophistication are offered:

What is a daughter but a person, and should be treated as such. Double standards should not exist for a subperson-children, over whom you have “power” and others over whom you don't. . . . A mother may guide or suggest the most advantageous use of property, but must not impose herself on her children, and accept their decisions and properties, as she must for other people as well, and may not use the excuse that they are too young to manage such things, to rule two lives and consciences. . . . When people are reacted to as people not as threats to one’s self, or as an instrument for your power, but as people, is the only way harmony will ever begin to exist in the conscience and the world.

A full book of such dilemmas, Hypothetical Dilemmas for Use in Moral Discussions, has been prepared and distributed by the Moral Education and Research Foundation at Harvard. This is a typical dilemma found in the book:

Sex as a Need: The Johnson family (with four children) was a very happy and close one. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were in their 30's. One day Mr. Johnson fell from a third-story building where he was working. He broke his back in this accident and was totally paralyzed from his waist down. The accident did not result in economic hardship because of workmen’s compensation. Three months after the accident, when Mr. Johnson came home, the problem began. Ms. [sic] Johnson, who was a young person, realized that she would
have to give up sexual intercourse with her husband. If she did not want to give up her sex life, she had the following choices: either get a divorce, or to have extramarital affairs.

1. Is it possible to separate sex from affection? What do you think she should do? Give reasons.
2. Do you think this woman should remain married to the husband? Why or why not?
3. What do you think would happen to the family if she had an affair?
4. If she decides to have an affair, should she tell her husband or keep it a secret? Why?

The remaining 50 dilemmas deal with similar crises. Twenty-one are related to sexual conflicts—homosexuality, swapping, extramarital sex. There are simple one- or two-page statements about the dilemmas of My Lai, Daniel Berrigan, Daniel Ellsberg, women's liberation, kidney transplants, Mayor Daley, draft evasion, abortion, and choosing one child over another.

A curious libertarianism

Kohlberg purports to have advanced far beyond the relativism and glorified idiosyncrasy of the Simon approach. He claims to be returning to a rich philosophical tradition—that of Socrates, Plato, and Dewey—which has justifiably long been regarded as powerful and insightful. Moral education, in Kohlberg's account, does have an intellectual core: The exchange of ideas between teacher and student suggests a process that is an improvement over Simon's method. Kohlberg's belief that students can become more rational through education does indeed reaffirm, in principle, the faith of this tradition.

Kohlberg says his approach is designed to lead students through stages of moral development to greater and greater objectivity in their moral judgments. The ideal perspective, Stage Six, involves viewing the claims of others with "justice," that is, treating "every man's claim impartially regardless of the man." As the examples amply demonstrate, in Kohlberg's view, moral claims are to be decided by considering individual "rights." Presumably, the student progresses to an ever more impartial evaluation of respective claims to "rights." There is thus a distinct libertarian emphasis in

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2 This difference of opinion should not be exaggerated, however. In the Great Neck controversy, Kohlberg testified on behalf of Simon. Kohlberg commented that the "protestors" insisted that values should not be dealt with in the school, but should be left for the church and home.
Kohlberg, revealing his dislike of what he regards as the imposition of authority—by parents, rules, or traditional forms of indoctrination. Kohlberg's libertarianism is intended to remind the student that the rights of all must be respected equally: Moral judgment to a very large extent involves assessing competing claims of individuals about their rights.

The example of Judy and her mother, for example, is discussed in the language of the rights of each—Judy's right to go to the concert with "her" money (her contract and property rights) and her mother's alleged right to exercise authority. (The mother's "right" to have her daughter tell her the truth is never mentioned.) But in the progress up Kohlberg's scale, as the child supposedly gains in moral perspicuity, the mother's rights and her claims to rights get dimmer and dimmer, while Judy's rights seem to grow and to dominate the discussion. In the "enlightened" Stage Five, the mother has no right to forbid Judy to go to the concert, because Judy has "equal" rights. In fact, however, the mother's rights at this level have almost evaporated; Judy's "equal rights" appear to be more than equal to her mother's. The mother's rights are subordinated to her obligations, specifically the obligation to respect her daughter's rights. It is as if Judy is assumed to be disadvantaged; Kohlberg takes Judy, as a daughter, to be a victim of parental authority. In the progress upward through the stages, Judy increasingly gains support for her claims. The "optimal answers" stress that "a good mother should early respect her daughter as a person" and that "the mother had no right to forbid Judy." Reciprocity—real equality of claims to rights—seems to be absent.

According to Kohlberg's theory, students should impartially consider the rights of all the people involved in the example about the Johnson family. But in the narrative and the questions, the emphasis is entirely on Ms. Johnson's rights, desires, and rights to her desires. The student is invited to consider and focus on her choices, divorce or extramarital affairs, and whether she has the right to these things. Mr. Johnson's and the children's choices and rights are not discussed. With all the theoretical emphasis on the importance and value of impartiality, this example clearly seems sympathetic toward the "predicament" of Ms. Johnson and uncaring toward that of Mr. Johnson and the children. It is as if Mr. Johnson and the children lost their rights, including their right to consideration, when Mr. Johnson fell from the building. Again, paradoxically, only one person in a complex relationship seems to be entitled to "equal consideration in the matter": Ms. Johnson
is taken to be the disadvantaged individual. The example ignores justice, reciprocity, and the equality and equal rights of all the persons involved.

**The “hidden curriculum”**

An additional and increasingly dominant thread in Kohlberg's thinking is that treating the child as a “moral philosopher” and stimulating moral development require a commitment by educators to create a “just community” in the school, because of what Kohlberg calls the “hidden curriculum” in most schools. This “hidden curriculum” embodies the values of the teachers and administrators, which are never made explicit to students but are ultimately used to evaluate them, and which express “the moral atmosphere of the school.” The function of the “hidden curriculum,” according to Kohlberg, is “moral education or perhaps miseducation.” He gives an example of some of its dangers:

To make the point I took a trivial episode. My son, then in the second grade, came home from school one day saying, “I don’t want to be one of the bad boys at school.” I asked, “Who are they,” and he answered, “They are the boys who don’t put their books away, and they get yelled at”... [The] guts of the hidden curriculum are the praise, the teacher's use of rewards or punishment; the crowd, or the life in a crowded group; and the teacher's power.

Kohlberg believes that his vision of moral education will do away with the “hidden curriculum.” He concludes that the moral development of students depends upon a sense of working together for a just society in schools, “based on concepts of justice and participatory democracy.”

Kohlberg offers an example of a real-life dilemma arising in an actual “just school”: the experience of one of his disciples, Elsa Wasserman, at the Cluster School in Cambridge. There, according to Wasserman's description, “black and white students argue about a decision to correct racial injustice as they see it in their school community”; this suggests the benefits of a “just community” to Kohlberg—“that a school based on concepts of justice and participatory democracy can be a community which operates close to the level of its highest members and continues to progress upward.” Wasserman offers the following example to show the “viable democracy,” “moral growth,” and “consideration for fairness” found at the school:

This year a difficult issue of fairness focused on the admission of students for six remaining openings in the school. There were 47
white students in the school and 18 black students. The black students wanted more equal representation in the community. But there were already six students on the waiting list, only one of whom was black. The democracy class proposed that all six openings be filled by blacks.

Here is the student dialogue. A white student responded to the proposal:

Does that mean that there's only one black on it now, but you want to get five more blacks to jump in front of the rest of the waiting line?

A black student replied:

I'm one of the people that wants some black people to come in. . . . From what I see I feel I would be more comfortable with them here. I want them here. . . .

Another white countered:

If they were all black people [on the waiting list], it would be fair to let them in. I don't care if there were six black people on the waiting list, they could come in, but these five white people, they were first, right?

Still another white student asked:

But why can't everybody accept the fact that the blacks would feel more comfortable and get a better education with more blacks in school?

Another black student asked:

Can I ask all you white people something? I'm not prejudiced, but is it going to make that much difference if there's six more black people instead of white? Is it? There's 47 of you whites now. There's 18 blacks. Six more blacks isn't going to make one difference.

Still another black student concluded:

Never in my life have I seen as many of you who have outnumbered me and mine, anyway. O.K., then I get to know them. I say, these whites are all right. . . . And then I came back here and I try to get some of my brothers and sisters at this school so they can be helped like I'm being helped. And what do I hear? No. Because they don't want to hear it. Why can't they just give us 18 blacks a little personal satisfaction with ourselves to have some more of us so we can be together? All right. (Applause.)

Following this the community voted. A majority was in favor of the proposal. One student in opposition asked:
The reason I voted against the proposal was that I wanted to hear more reasons from the black kids but I'm also feeling a little guilty because I want six black kids to come in, but I don't know what to say about the five white kids on the waiting list. What are we going to tell them?

Wasserman writes that the following justification for the decision was offered:

All you have to do is explain to them that the community decided that it was the best idea to take all blacks this time for the community's sake and from now on, every June we're going to admit more kids, we'll admit half-black, half-white. By then eventually, it will be fairer and we can accept blacks and whites the same way.

The "viable democracy" then voted "almost unanimously" to adopt the proposal.

The reasoning of the students and the outcome of their vote are celebrated as an example of a community moving upward through stages of moral development to respect for justice. Yet the facts suggest something else. The one student concerned to treat the whites on the waiting list impartially—in Kohlberg's words, "to treat every man's claim impartially regardless of the man"—is never answered. His request for reasons that would show that something is wrong with the color-blind admissions policy and the rules of the school, and his clear willingness to listen to the arguments of other students despite their indifference to his, are answered with a priori assertions clearly favoring the other point of view without offering reasons. In fact, the entire discussion is weighted against reasons. "I want them here," says one student; "Blacks would feel more comfortable and get a better education," says another; "Give us blacks a little personal satisfaction," says a third. These responses—fairly characterized in Kohlberg's own terms as primarily the kind of instrumental relativism found in lower Stage Two—are not arguments; they are not reasons; and they clearly treat color and personal desires as overriding other factors, ignoring justice and impartiality and the questions of troubled students.

Kohlberg treats the discourse and the solution as exemplary of moral progress and objectivity, even though the teachers and the majority of the students do not consider claims, questions, or rights objectively. If this "just community" is to be praised, it cannot be in terms of justice and impartiality. At the end, the result is a pronunciamento of a "general will" of the "democracy class"—a tyranny of a particular majority over the students who ask questions (and over their rights), and over those on the waiting list who have
a reasonable expectation to have themselves and their rights "treated equally." With chilling arrogance, the democracy class informs its opposition, "All you have to do is explain that the community decided that it was the best idea. . . ." This is very far from Kohlberg's libertarian celebration of Stage Six morality, and far from deciding questions on the basis of a "universal, ethical principle orientation."

The dismal science of pedagogy

As these and other examples suggest, practice does not square with theory in Kohlberg's universe. His theory appears to be transformed in practice into a particular ideology giving certain individuals and groups of individuals rights more than equal to those of others. The claims of those in authority and the claims of rules always yield to the claims of the "disadvantaged," or those whom Kohlberg takes to be disadvantaged. In this way, the examples belie the theory of impartial justice, suggesting progress less toward impartial justice—an appreciation of the power of the rational good—than toward sharing his sympathies and dispositions regarding the special claims of those victims of authority.

Whether or not this is a reasonable approach to moral education, it certainly conflicts with Kohlberg's theoretical edifice and its claims of impartiality. In this respect, Kohlberg himself conceals what can fairly be called a "hidden curriculum" of instruction in partial justice. This is not a program for justice as fairness to all parties regardless of the man, or for promoting principled, objective moral development.

In fact, it must be doubted whether what Kohlberg describes is really morality at all. Morality takes place among human beings and not among disembodied bearers of "rights," who are incessantly engaged in squabbling about them. Morality is concerned with doing good, with sacrifice, altruism, love, courage, honor, and compassion, and with fidelity and large-mindedness regarding one's station, commitments, family, friends, colleagues, and society in general. Morality among men is not merely legalistic and formalistic, it does not consist merely of so many non-negotiable demands.

Both Simon and Kohlberg also fail to avoid indoctrination. Both of their programs offer indoctrination in the "values" they take to be important—the celebration of wants and desires, the exhortation to self-gratification, and a particular ideology of rights and "special justice." Although they both claim to disavow traditional moral education because it indoctrinates, Simon and Kohlberg clearly do
not oppose indoctrination per se, but the indoctrination of traditional values.

Yet Simon and Kohlberg's view of the world—the message they deliver, the values they recommend—is worth a good deal less than much of what they oppose. To them, goodness simply does not exist: People press for their wants or their rights and are continually at each other's throats. Although Simon and Kohlberg dislike authority, each offers a program that would impose on students an authority much more malevolent in its consequences than any traditional form of authority or "indoctrination." The tyranny of the passions and of minorities and majorities—the arbitrary exercise of power by special groups, be they advantaged or disadvantaged—offers not more freedom, but less, and a far less attractive world. Subjected only to one's wants or to the whims of special groups wielding arbitrary power, the individual and his life and moral relations are much bleaker than they actually are, or than they have traditionally been represented to be by the old to the young. In Simon and Kohlberg, responsibility and love are missing; life and man are oppressive; and the world is cold, ugly, brutish, and lonely. In this distorted view of life and morality, they fail to recognize the significance of what is possible among people across generations.

The barren world Simon and Kohlberg offer to students, teachers, and parents allows room for only an endless succession of conflicts and dilemmas. "Values clarification" and "cognitive moral development" neglect and deny precious and important features of morally mature life—friendship, love, fidelity, regard for work, care for home and family—which are, for the most part, not morally problematic. Finally, according to Simon and Kohlberg, there is no place for stories and lessons, no place for the passing on of knowledge and experience. Children are invited to a world where it is a travesty and an imposition for anyone to tell them the truth.