

### Abstract

This paper starts with the acknowledgement that the making of value judgements is unavoidable in the teaching of traditional disciplines. The expression "The Ideal of Objectivity" is introduced in general terms for the requirement that in some respects the making and expressing of value judgements in education ought to be limited. An effort is then made out to set this ideal in the context of a general commitment to rationality. The relation between values and rationality is explored in terms of a moral obligation to be rational -- moral phenomena are shown to be essentially related to rationality. Objectivity and rationality are then presented as involving methodological norms. Finally, it is argued that the principal way in which values may enter legitimately into the teaching of traditional disciplines is in terms of methodological norms rather than in terms of particular substantive value judgements, and that the teaching of such norms is in fact central to the teaching of a discipline.

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## Values and the Ideal of Objectivity

It has often been observed that, despite any efforts toward absolute objectivity, values enter unavoidably into all major academic disciplines and into the teaching of them. That this is so seems to provide a strong argument against the view that teaching ought to be "value-free". Value judgements are necessarily involved, for example, in the choice of problems for study, in the selection of texts, in the identification of some pieces of work in a field as better or more important than others, in the evaluation of student work, in the use of a certain methodology and in the emphasis on certain concepts. At the same time, there do seem to be dangers inherent in the entry of values into the educational process.

It will not do to claim that values ought to be excluded altogether from academic work, but there does seem to be some plausibility to what we may call "*the Ideal of Objectivity*": in some sense or senses value judgements ought to be held in check in the teaching of traditional academic disciplines. This ideal cannot be reasonably understood as a blanket demand that teaching be completely free from the making and expressing (implicitly or explicitly) of value judgements. An adequate account of the Ideal of Objectivity obviously ought to pay some attention to the different ways in which values in fact enter into the educational process. In this essay I want to make some progress toward a clearer notion of this ideal and its bearing on the matter of how value judgements ought or ought not to enter into teaching.

Let me first make two preliminary observations. (1) It is helpful in discussing the role of values in teaching to distinguish between methodological norms and substantive value judgements. For example, whether a particular account in political science counts as a good explanation is a matter of methodological norms. The norms for explanation in political science may differ markedly from those in some other field, say physics, or they may be less clearly defined or more controversial. On the other hand, whether a given political action is worthy of censure or not will be clearly a matter of substantive value judgement. Now, this distinction does not seem to be an absolute one. For instance, the judgement that a particular historical event is more important than another one is likely to be partly a matter of methodological norms, although it looks like a substantive value judgement. It may help some to distinguish a judgement about the significance of the events relative to other events in a

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historical explanation from a judgement about their intrinsic importance or their general significance to mankind. But there is no doubt that the two come together. Nevertheless, as should become clear, the distinction between methodological norms and substantive value judgements turns out to be a useful one.

(2) The Ideal of Objectivity is part of a larger notion, which I will refer to as "the Ideal of Rationality," an ideal whose significance for education can hardly be seriously questioned. A clear account of *this* ideal and its relation to matters of value will help us toward a better understanding of the Ideal of Objectivity and its role in teaching. Therefore, in the next section I propose to discuss the relationship between rationality and value (especially moral value) and then in the following section to make some remarks about how this bears on the ideal of objectivity and the role of values in education.

### *Rationality and Value*

There is a wide sympathy, I believe, among educators and ordinary people with the view that people *ought* to be rational (despite railings against *rationalism*) and that education ought to help them toward being so. In this section I want to argue that there are *grounds* for such a view.

Discussion concerning this issue among professional philosophers<sup>1</sup> has been carried on under the rubric "the ethics of belief". The expression "ethics of belief-production" might be more appropriate, since the discussions have normally to do with how the beliefs are arrived at rather than with whether or not certain beliefs are held. Obviously, there are ethical considerations surrounding the actions of an individual when those actions influence the production of beliefs in others -- the most conspicuous issues have to do with lying and other forms of deception.

Assuming that there are moral obligations in connection with at least some belief-producing actions, we can meaningfully go on to ask what (if any) moral obligations a person has with respect to actions of his own which influence the production of beliefs *in himself*. The ethics of belief, then, might be divided into two parts, (a) the part dealing with our influence in producing beliefs in others and (b) the part dealing with our own role in the production of our own beliefs. This second part will involve questions about certain sorts of actions, such as attending to evidence, taking a critical attitude toward it, acting as though we hold certain beliefs, maintaining a basic commitment to consistency and so on. The basic question, finally, will be "What are our moral obligations with respect to these sorts of actions?"

This may be taken to be a question about *rationality*. To what degree, if at all, do we have a moral responsibility to be rational? And, if we do have such an obligation, why do we? "Rationality" will not be understood here to mean mere logical consistency; it will be understood in a broader sense expressible in terms of two general injunctions: (a) Be consistent, follow the principles of logic, and (b) Attend properly to the evidence. The first of these I will assume to be clearly enough understood for our purposes. The second encompasses more specific principles such as "Pay attention to available evidence," "Seek further evidence," "Base conclusions on evidence rather than on emotional or volitional considerations," "Do not avoid evidence," and "Be objective". Objectivity, placed in the context of these other principles, means even-handedness with the evidence. This is even-handedness in the formation of our beliefs -- but this understanding of the notion of objectivity fits pretty comfortably into the context of our concerns about teaching, and on the face of it does not seem to create any special difficulty for the making of value judgements.

This account of rationality is methodological; to be rational is to follow certain principles of inquiry. The principles themselves are norms, methodological norms. The *moral* question about rationality, then, is this: Do we have a moral obligation to accept and follow these norms, and if so why?

The usual philosophical discussions of the ethics of belief argue in terms of the consequences of acting or failing to act rationally, appealing first to its connections with truth and second to its connections (via truth) with other ends which are regarded as more clearly of moral significance, such

as happiness. Irrationality and falsehood, in contrast, are regarded as instrumental toward various evils. This line of argument depends on connections made at two stages. First, it must be the case that being rational in forming one's beliefs will lead more often to true belief than will any alternative way of proceeding. And, second, it must be the case that true belief is more conducive to happiness or other moral goods than is false belief. The success of the argument for an obligation to be rational then rides on the success of making these two connections, and the character of the moral commitment to rationality which is enjoined by the argument depends upon the *nature* of the connections. It seems to me that, while the connections can be made with some success, this line of argument does not really do justice to our intuitions about the nature of our commitment to rationality.

In actual experience, it does seem to be true that rationality is the best policy for achieving a maximization of true belief over false. We can think of circumstances in which this would not happen to be the case, in which an irrational approach happens to lead to more true beliefs and fewer false beliefs than a rational one. A detective or scientist operating on a hunch hits on the correct solution to some problem while more careful, more rational colleagues come to false conclusions or to none at all. Still, we have reason to believe that rationality is more likely to maximize truth than are its alternatives. In fact, it does not seem possible to conceive of circumstances in which rationality does not in the long run maximize truth. The very nature of rationality is to do so. It might, indeed, happen that, say, the hunches of some individual turned out to lead more often to truth than the detailed investigations of researchers, but then rationality itself would dictate, after a time, that these hunches should be followed. The success of the hunches itself would turn out to be inductive evidence. Evidence is by definition evidence of truth or falsehood. Some of the particular procedures which rational persons now follow might be replaced by other procedures which produce more true beliefs, but then the new procedures would be the more rational ones, according to the more general principles of rationality, which would remain intact. In the long run, rationality will dictate the course of action which maximizes truth. So the connection between rationality and truth turns out to be a pretty firm one.

However, the claim that truth is an instrumental good more likely than falsehood to promote happiness or virtuous behavior is a much more tenuous one. Is it true in general that persons having greater numbers of true beliefs are happier or more virtuous than persons having smaller numbers of true beliefs? It may be so, but it is not obvious. Attention has often been drawn to the harm done by superstition,<sup>2</sup> but it is not obvious that more harm than good has been done in human history by superstitious belief. To be sure, falsehoods often play a role in the production of evils, but then so do truths. Also, since the number of possible significant false beliefs on any particular subject greatly outweighs the number of possible significant true beliefs, there are more candidates for benefit producers among the variety of false beliefs.

Furthermore, even if it were clearly established that true belief is in fact more often accompanied by moral goods than false belief is, the connection would be at best a contingent one, dependent upon particular historical circumstances. And if this connection were the basis of our obligation to be rational, then if the greater goods served by rationality (and truth) turned out on some occasions to actually be better served by irrationality and falsehood, then we would be morally obligated on those occasions to be irrational and to believe falsely. This line of argument in favor of a moral obligation to be rational, then, depends upon a contingent factual connection. And this does not do justice to the feeling that there is more intimate and more absolute connection between rationality and value.

As an alternative, I believe that it is possible to construct a fairly straightforward and convincing *conceptual* argument for the conclusion that we have a moral obligation to be rational in the sense described above. The conceptual nature of this line of argument makes sense of our feeling that there is something more intimate and more absolute about our obligation to be rational. Roughly, the argument is as follows: Moral responsibility depends upon a particular type of understanding. That type of understanding, in turn, involves a certain kind of evaluation of possible courses of action. That kind of evaluation of possible courses of action involves essentially the notion of *moral justification*.

Moral justification, finally, presupposes a more general notion of justification, one which involves essentially the sorts of logical and epistemological principles which comprise rationality. To put it in general terms, moral reasoning is an essential aspect of the moral dimension of our experience, and moral reasoning, being a type of reasoning, necessarily involves rationality.

As a result, a general commitment to rationality is presupposed by a general commitment to morality, since moral justification is at least in part rational. To dispense with rationality would be to dispense with any general scheme of moral justification or evaluation. The very question "Why be rational?" suggests how fundamental the notion of rational justification is. And the question "Why be moral?" suggests how fundamental the notion of justification is to morality. By asking "Why?" these questions presuppose a need for justification. Our responsibility to be rational is analogous to our responsibility to be moral. Our responsibility to have a general commitment to morality and to its norms is not on the same level with our particular moral obligations. To fail to be committed in general to being a moral person is not to break some specific moral rule which stands alongside other moral rules; it is to be morally deficient, but at a much more fundamental level. The responsibility to be rational is like that, like the general responsibility to be moral, and is intertwined with it as well on account of the role of rational principles in moral evaluation. To be committed to morality to be committed to moral deliberation and moral evaluation, and deliberation and evaluation presuppose rationality.

Furthermore, there is a moral responsibility to think and act rationally in particular cases where moral decisions are to be made or actions are to be evaluated. At the level of the application of particular moral rules, as well, there is a responsibility to be rational, both about matters of value and about empirical issues, since moral decisions are a function of both values and facts. The very nature of moral decision-making situations obliges us to seek the facts and to think through rational justifications. The complete justification of a moral decision will involve empirical beliefs and the justifications of those beliefs. So the rational justification of beliefs is part of the moral justification or evaluation of an action. This position is consistent with the traditional view that ignorance is not always an adequate excuse, that we have some moral obligation with respect to having the facts straight. The commitment here is procedural; it is a procedural commitment to a justificatory scheme. And the very nature of justificatory schemes is such that they depend upon rationality. Moral evaluations and justifications depend conceptually upon a justificatory scheme, one which involves the justification of empirical beliefs. Nor does this apply only to empirical beliefs actually playing a role in moral deliberation. Any of our empirical beliefs have a chance of becoming part of moral justifications, so that our responsibility to be rational extends generally to factual beliefs. A network of factual (and conceptual) beliefs is always ready at hand to provide information for use in moral deliberation and moral evaluation. The epistemological justifications of beliefs in this network are at hand to become parts of the moral justifications of particular actions.

All of this applies not only to moral evaluation but to other kinds of evaluation as well, and to values in general. Values presuppose rational principles for arriving at and supporting value judgements.

### *Teaching and Role of Values*

How does all this bear, finally, on objectivity and the role of values in education? My concluding remarks will deal first with the *teaching of values* and then more generally with the *role of values in teaching*.

With respect to the teaching of values, there is first the important distinction between *teaching values* and teaching students how to reason about values. The former is the more controversial. The latter involves instructions in deliberating about questions of value. If there is controversy about the latter it is likely to arise out of a fear that students are being taught substantive values under the guise of being taught how to think about values. If substantive values are surreptitiously incorporated into what purports to be merely the teaching of reasoning about values, then there is a failure of objectivity -- the ideal of objectivity is not satisfied. This is not to say that the teaching of values has no legitimacy. But

here the distinction between methodological norms and substantive value judgements is directly relevant. The teaching of methodological norms is inseparable from teaching students how to reason about values or about anything else. The principles of logic are norms to be appealed to generally in distinguishing good from bad reasoning. In teaching those principles and teaching students that they ought to be obeyed we are teaching values, and it is hard to see how we could avoid doing so.

So, in teaching students how to think about values we are teaching values as well, at least in the sense that we are teaching methodological norms. All this fits well with the conception that "moral education" ought to be a matter of teaching students how to deliberate about morality rather than a matter of indoctrination. But students will, on this view, be "indoctrinated" with methodological norms. Still, the emphasis will be on evaluation and deliberation. And this emphasis will encourage the evaluation of the norms themselves. Philosophy courses in value theory, for example in ethics and aesthetics, are an appropriate place for such teaching.

With regard to the role of values more generally in teaching, a number of conclusions may be drawn.

The teacher's teaching will be animated, as well, by methodological norms, and the value judgements he makes as a teacher will reflect this. For instance, methodological norms will justify his choice of *data*; some notion of what an explanation ought to be in his field will justify an emphasis on certain phenomena over others and on certain relations among phenomena or on the application of certain concepts or classifications to those phenomena. He will choose *problems* for study in the light of how well they illustrate or allow the application of the methodological apparatus. His *selection of texts* and his evaluative remarks about pieces of work in his field will be based upon and justifiable in terms of methodological norms. Finally, his *evaluation of students* will arise out of the same sort of normative considerations. And in each case good teaching will make these norms and the specifics of their application explicit, thereby reinforcing the student's understanding of the discipline's methodology.

After all, what a distinct field such as physics or history or political science or philosophy has to offer -- what is of greatest value -- is its particular methodology (along with its methodological norms) which allows us to manage phenomena, to develop theories, to understand and to evaluate.

The *Ideal of Objectivity* is not to be met by an effort to avoid altogether the making of value judgements. It is to be met by careful attention to the kinds of value judgements that are made and how they are made. The value judgements that a teacher of sociology, say, makes as a sociologist, ought to be judgements made with reference to the methodological norms of his field. And those judgements ought to be justified, or at least justifiable, in terms of those norms. For the benefit of his students, attention ought to be drawn in illustrative cases to the fact that these *are* value judgements and that they do involve application of methodological norms, since learning the discipline is largely a matter of learning how to make and justify such judgements. Good teaching will lead the student to understand (in terms again of methodological norms) what counts as a problem, what distinguishes more important from less important data, what counts as good evidence, and what constitutes a solution to a problem in the discipline, and why.

When the teacher makes other substantive value judgements (and perhaps these are unavoidable and sometimes even desirable) the crucial thing is to make sure that his students understand that these are not judgements in the field (though perhaps they are judgements about it). Students should not be given the impression that these judgements are somehow "findings" of sociology or political science or whatever. Misunderstanding about this is perhaps the most insidious example of the dangers of making value judgements in teaching.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> There is a fairly large body of literature on the ethics of belief. The most well known discussions are W.K. Clifford, "The Ethics of Belief," *Lectures and Essays*, Vol. II (1901) and William James, "The Will to Believe," *Essays in Pragmatism*, edited by Albury Castell (New York: Hafner Press, 1948). Other representative discussions are Peter

Kauber and Peter H. Hare, "The Right and Duty to Will to Believe," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 4 (December 1974), 327-342, Dickenson Miller, "James's Doctrine of 'The Right to Believe'," *Philosophical Review* 51 (November 1942), 541-558, and F.C.S. Schiller, "William James and the Will to Believe," *Journal of Philosophy* 24 (August 1927), 437-440.

<sup>2</sup> For classic statements on the dangers of superstition and unfounded belief, see David Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," *Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays*, edited by John W. Lenz (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 146-150, and John S. Mill, "Utility of Religion," *Nature and Utility of Religion*, edited by George Nakhnikian (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 45-80, and Clifford, *op. cit.*