

Abstract

Values clarificationist such as Sydney Simon have argued that their method of moral education avoids any indoctrinative practices and hence is a fully sufficient program of moral education. Contrary to such claims however, it seems evident that values clarification suffers from two deficiencies. First, values clarificationists claim that their program is free of moral doctrine in which case I argue the program fails as a program of *moral* education. Second, there is good reason to conclude that values clarification entails a commitment to moral doctrine and a similar commitment to indoctrinative practices.

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Simon, Indoctrination and Ethical Relativism

It is this author's contention that for any educational program to be legitimately characterized as a program of moral education it must give due consideration to the use of intellectual skills for problem solving and must focus on problems with immediate moral consequences. For example, trying to decide whether to buy a Lincoln or a Volkswagen is unlikely to have immediate moral consequences whereas a decision to use corporal punishment when disciplining a child does always have immediate moral significance. Buying the Lincoln rather than the Volkswagen may have some small impact on the economy and if we trace the effects of our choice far enough we may find that our decision will have significant impact on the quality of life experienced by some human being. If we were to make such a discovery then we would have to admit that our action did have moral consequence. However, because the likelihood of such an event is relatively small and the investigation required to determine whether or not such moral consequences exist, consideration of such decisions is too unwieldy to be given the necessary sophisticated treatment by primary school children, — and perhaps even by secondary school age children.

Sydney Simon and his associates seem wholly unaware of the necessary roles of reason and immediate moral consequence in developing their programs of values clarification. The consequence of their neglect is that their programs are either severely indoctrinative or morally, pedagogically and cognitively deficient.

Consider the following proposals Simon, et. al., offer as constitutive of a program of moral education. Simon explains that,

... an adult who would help children develop values would be advised to:

1. Encourage children to make choices, and to make them freely.
2. Help them discover and examine available alternatives when faced with choices
3. Help children weigh alternatives thoughtfully, reflecting on the consequences of each
4. Encourage children to consider what it is they prize and cherish
5. Give them opportunities to make public affirmation of their choices

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6. Encourage them to act, believe, live in accordance with their choices
7. Help them to examine repeated behaviors or patterns in their life

If matters of morality were no more than a matter of taste then while we might observe that Simon is guilty of several trivialities (for example, it seems only trivially true to say that one must make a choice freely since it is evident that the term choice entails that some degree of freedom must necessarily be present) what he says seems true enough, at least in some general sense. For example, if one is concerned that children identify a soft drink which they find most pleasing, then it seems there is little more one can do than arrange for children to taste a wide variety of soft drinks, ask them to recall the sensations the experienced when sampling the different drinks, and, subsequently, name that drink which affords the most pleasant sensation. To insure that one is adhering closely to the criteria suggested by Simon, et. al., one might even ask the children to consider whether or not they had a tendency to purchase a particular soft drink in the past and whether or not, given their recent testing of various soft drinks, they intend to continue purchasing a particular soft drink in the future. One can readily see that in such situations there is little else the teacher can do other than follow the advice pertaining to values clarification offered by Simon and his colleagues since in such matters of valuing, that is matters concerning personal taste, there is little that can in any sense be publically justified, at least according to any recognized canons of rigorous argument. However, if we are concerned with values that one may in some sense justify or show to be unjustified, if we are concerned at times that children do something other than identify preferences, then something more is required. For example, even the Marquis de Sade, who speaking through the character Count de Bressac in the novel *Justine*, argues that any decision to "avoid the destruction of one's fellow," any principle of morality, any supposed moral virtue is solely a product of human imagination.² In other words, even the notorious de Sade, a man who claims that we simply ought to act on our most primitive inclinations, believes that such a claim can and should be supported through careful and deliberate argument. That is, the Marquis, by his very attempt to argue the validity of his claim demonstrates the point that he believes moral claims as well as claims about morality can be shown to be either justified or unjustified. Claims about one's favorite color cannot be shown to be either justified or unjustified--though admittedly claims about color statements can be. Hence, if the question under consideration is not simply a matter of taste, then children must learn how one goes about justifying a commitment to one value as opposed to all others.

In learning how one justifies a commitment to a particular value, as in the case of moral values, one must first accept a system of rationality by which the merits of such argument can be evaluated. Since there is no evidence that innate to man are a number of systems of rationality each appropriate to a form of discourse descriptive of a dimension of human activity, we can only conclude that man must learn the appropriate system of rationality before asserting the legitimacy of a particular claim.³ Thus, before one can "justify" a commitment to a particular moral value he must first learn the "scope of some one particular logical system."⁴

In discussing this same point John Wilson rightly observes that general discussion about one's desires, inclinations and objects of value may be quite useful, if only as an initial stimulus to more serious discussion. More importantly, however, is Wilson's further observation that,

. . . it is plain that they (the proponents of a "values clarification" approach) are, to say the least, extremely hesitant in applying any principles of reason — anything like a methodology . . . pupils need to be shown *how to do* the subject; *how to deal* with the questions; what counts as a reason and what does not. Without this, any discussion or 'clarification' becomes no more than an autistic talking shop in which anything goes.⁵

If teachers are simply concerned with awakening children to their psychological and physiological inclinations, Simon's procedures may well be adequate.⁶ If, on the other hand, contra-Simon, there are values to which one can subscribe and do so in such a way that commitments may be either justified or unjustified, then a novice must be specifically introduced to those intellective practices appropriate to such justifications. In short, Simon denies, or at least neglects, the idea that moral values may be either justified or unjustified.⁷ Consequently, Simon fails to distinguish any specifically intellective traits as essential in any moral valuing.

Simon discusses only in a very general sense, a number of psychological traits as being fundamental aims of a program of moral education. That is, Simon is concerned only with the student's inclination to value, not with any traits or habits of mind that enable the student to explain why they or any one should prefer one value over another. In other words, Simon's refusal to identify certain specific intellective traits as fundamental to a program of moral education suggests that he hasn't recognized the merit of activities which contribute to the child's cognitive development in moral matters. Any program of moral education must not only foster in the student the development of specific intellective and psychological traits, but more specifically a program of moral education must aim at the development of a person who cares about truth as opposed to falsehood in matters of morality and subsequently acts accordingly. Admittedly, to care about anything whatsoever is a disposition wholly psychological in nature. However, to care about matters of truth entails that one have in mind some criterion by which truth can be distinguished from falsehood. Such a criterion is not itself an impulse, such as, for example, one's repulsion from cruel deeds. Rather a criterion of truth is a product of deliberation and reflection such that one might, for example, explain to another, that is, that one is consequently able to give reasons in support of a claim that one deed "fits" a situation better than some other.

Since Simon and his colleagues neglect the development of intellective traits in students, it follows that they have failed to give due consideration to the idea that a program of moral education must aim at the development of individuals who care about distinguishing between truth and falsehood in matters of morality. Certainly, before a person can be said to care about matters of truth in morality he must have in mind some relatively definite notion about what sort of thing truth is. Without raising complex epistemological issues concerning the nature of truth much less the nature of truth in matters of morality, let it suffice to say that since a "caring about" must be a caring about something, the notion of truth exists in one's mind in a form distinct from one's caring to apprehend its nature in any one particular situation. In any case, to ignore completely, as Simon does, the nature of the *object* of a psychological disposition such as a "caring about" precludes one from making any sort of serious claim that one can attend to the bringing about of such a disposition on the part of one's students. Thus, since Simon and his associates refuse to consider the logical structure of moral claims, that is, the stuff of moral truths, their arguments, to the effect that their program of moral education can serve as a means for bringing about student's concern regarding moral values and hence action in accord with such values, becomes vacuous.

To argue that a set of methodologies is appropriate to a program of moral education is to suggest that such methodologies contribute to the bringing about of a moral person. To

assess whether or not the methodologies of value clarificationists contribute to the development of a moral person, one must first determine what sort of thing value clarificationists believe a moral person to be. Having determined what a moral person is and/or what value clarificationists take a moral person to be, one can then inquire into whether any of the proposed methodologies fail to contribute to or even frustrate the development of a moral person.

As noted above, values clarificationists fail to give due consideration to the intellective characteristics of a moral person. Certain intellective characteristics, namely tendencies toward serious deliberation and reflection by means of specific skills of analysis and argumentation, are essential to one we ordinarily describe as a moral person. Thus, whatever counts as a moral person in an ordinary language sense is presumably not the sort of thing a fellow such as Simon has in mind when using the same expression. In fact, the notion of a moral person seems conspicuously absent from the writings of the value clarificationists. The sole notion that figures in as a primary factor in the work of the value clarificationists centers around some loose notion that people ought to do things because it is clearly their desire to do those things rather than some others.⁸ At one point Professors Sydney Simon, Leland Howe and Howard Kirchenbaum, in a book prescribing to teachers seventy-nine strategies for bringing about values clarification on the part of student participants, declare rather simplistically,

This is a confusing world to live in. At every turn we are forced to make choices about how to live our lives. Ideally, our choices will be made on the basis of the values we hold . . .⁹

Simon, Howe and Kirchenbaum ask not that one's choices be predicated upon carefully formed arguments, but only that we choose to act in accord with that which we prize. An advocate of the value clarificationist approach might respond by noting that they do ask that children consider the consequences of their acts as well as various alternatives to such acts.¹⁰ But again, as noted above, what is conspicuously absent from the writings of value clarificationists is any discussion as to how one weighs relevant alternatives and what counts as good argument and analysis. Certainly, as Wilson points out the position of the values clarificationists suggest that we can, ". . . only 'clarify' the 'values' of say Hitler or Ginghis Khan, not subject them to criteria of rationality."¹¹ Once again, lest one think that either Wilson or myself have been to one-sided in our respective treatments of the values clarificationists in this regard, it should be pointed out that in another book titled *Values and Teaching*, Professors Simon, Raths, and Harmin do comment at one point that "values should be chosen after due reflection."¹² However, rather than discuss what constitutes "due reflection" the authors simply describe six other characteristics of prizes one object or practice among others as well as what counts as acting in accord with such identifications. Time and again through the writings of Simon and his colleagues one finds passages that are no more informative about the intellective characteristics of a moral person than is suggested by the following summary,

. . . it [values clarification] is based on the idea that values are personal things if they exist at all, that they cannot be personal until they are freely accepted, and that they cannot be of much significance if they do not penetrate the living of the person who holds them.¹³

In other words, the authors do no more in this characteristically obscure passage than once again assert the trivial truth that an individual must "truly" prize what he values.

One further consequence of attributing to the idea of a moral person no other characteristic than that the individual must freely choose his values is that despite the frequent

enumeration of teaching strategies, such as choosing among alternatives, ordering preferences and re-ordering preferences in response to changing situations, the methodology of the values clarificationists amounts to little more than eliciting from students pronouncements regarding their personal preferences.¹⁴ Yet if students are to experience some genuine sense of control over the pronouncements they make public regarding the objects and practices they favor, some attention must be paid to the cognitive prerequisites, namely, the logical structure of moral argument that results in their making such claims. To have a sense of control over the claims one makes public is to be in possession of some conventional rationale to which one may refer in justifying one's claims.¹⁵ Simply to ask provocative questions, request students make autobiographical observations, or to have students construct scales of valuation, does not insure that students will develop confidence and some sense of control over the claims they make public. Without an environment that promotes sustained attention to the intellective traits and skills of deliberation and reflection, rigorous analysis and argumentation, the human being is cloistered in an environment where he or she is treated as no more than a purely sensuous organism. As Hare rightly notes, "We perceive a difference in the class of the case; but we *decide* whether this difference justifies us treating it as exceptional."¹⁶ In other words, it is one thing to experience a sensuous response to an object or state of affairs. It is quite another to be able to discuss how or why such responses are relevant to our lives. And having determined how or why differences in objects or states of affairs are relevant to our lives, it is again quite another problem to determine what responses are appropriate in such instances. Consequently, the value clarificationist approach not only fails to contribute minimally to the development of a moral person, but certainly a strong case could be made arguing that close adherence to values clarificationist methodology could frustrate the development of a moral person.

For example, in the analogous case of bringing about the development in a person of creative behavior, Robin Barrows argues that to foster an environment in which no restraints exist can easily eventuate in a situation where no one learns how to be creative in any one enterprise. For an individual to be creative, ". . . it is logically necessary to introduce children to the standards of excellence that apply in various spheres as well as to promote a willingness to display originality."¹⁷ Similarly, for a person to learn to think morally, that is, to formulate moral propositions and moral arguments, it is necessary that the person learn the standards of argument appropriate to that particular field of discourse.¹⁸ Too, restraints on individual expression, in the form of rules or order, must also be enforced if we are to guarantee that all ideas receive equitable treatment in the public forum.¹⁹ In short, only in an environment where orderly discussion can proceed, and the participants in the discussion are relatively familiar with the purpose as well as with the mechanics of making the discussion to, do the ideas discussed have an opportunity to be evaluated on their merits rather than on the personality and polemical skills of those who espouse the various claims. Value clarificationist's failure to attend to the purpose and mechanics of moral argument, and their tendency to focus exclusively on the enthusiasm with which a person may espouse a particular idea more often than not may result in a situation where the individual student is unable to identify his or her moral claim as being more reasonable than any of its competitors.

Finally, although Simon, is perhaps most secure in asserting that his program of moral education is free of indoctrination,²⁰ however, his claim, if true, violates the principles noted above that moral education ought to focus on problems having immediate moral consequences. To identify what counts as a moral consequence requires that a person have

some criteria to determine the occasion of such consequences. Such criteria obviously suggests there are occasions when one can act either in a morally appropriate or a morally inappropriate way. On the other hand, if Simon has erred in issuing his disclaimer regarding any indoctrinative aspect in the values clarification approach to moral education, then Simon not only indoctrinates his students, but a distinct moral theory can be identified as the implicit object of Simon's program.

To indoctrinate a person is to cause that person to subscribe to certain beliefs or doctrine even though the individual is unable to provide any sort of justification for his convictions.²¹ Simon himself admits children must be initiated into the values clarification process.²² Presumably one must initiate children into the values clarification process because the activity is not inherent in natural human development. In short, Simon wants children to become committed to the search for those objects and practices they find genuinely pleasing. Nowhere in Simon's writings or in the writings of other value clarificationists does one find any attempt to justify such a commitment. Granted Simon does say at times such things as "I get a rush of genuine pleasure when I think of how people who know who they are alive live,"²³ however, Simon's testimony to such a personal experience does little to justify the claim that one ought generally to value situations where people know what they like and strive to bring it about. On other occasions Simon and his colleagues state more directly that, "The intent of this process is to help children clarify for themselves what they value. This . . . is based on a conception of democracy that says persons can learn to make their own decision."²⁴ Although the authors do not go on to elaborate on the ethical principles upon which a social political structure such as a democracy may be predicated, I take it that they have in mind a situation where everyone is free to seek out whatever it is they may truly value.

The social-political situation suggested by the value clarificationists is actually one of general anarchy. Robert Paul Wolff also argues that a genuine democracy ought to strive for a form of anarchy, one, however, that adheres to at least some form of moderate restraint. For example, Wolff warns that democracy in the form of a moderate anarchy must be subject to certain restraints to prevent a situation where a tyrannical majority begins to inflict its will upon an unwilling and defenseless minority.²⁵ Wolff goes on to note that one of the essential restraints upon a moderate anarchy is a commitment on the part of its citizens to a Kantian sense of responsibility and morality.²⁶ In contrast, one finds conspicuously absent from the writings of the value clarificationists any attempt to justify why one ought to favor a condition of general anarchy. Nevertheless, there is no question that general anarchy is the condition sought after by the value clarificationists, a situation where everyone can learn to make decisions for themselves and act in accord with those decisions.²⁷ Consequently, given the value clarificationists' commitment to democracy in the form of general anarchy, it becomes clear as well that the values clarificationists have a similar though more fundamental commitment to the rather traditional moral theory of ethical egoism. In short, the specific moral theory implicit in the writings of the value clarificationists is that determination of the right action or the right practice cannot be demonstrated by reference to any abstract principle, or process of argument, rather the rightness of any action or practice comes about solely because the agent prefers that action or practice to any alternative.

It will be recalled that the value clarificationists' position suggest that children do not naturally develop a propensity for the process of value clarification. Rather, educators are counseled in the use of numerous strategies for initiating children into the process. given the ethical egoism of the value clarificationists, a position which precludes an argument or

reference to abstract principles to justify a moral position, what better way could one go about causing children to adopt an ethical egoist position than to adopt the strategies of the values clarificationist?

In discussing the moral question of blame, Simon and his associates declare to teachers, "Never let the discussion get into a win-lose confrontation. There really is no right answer."²⁸ In session after session the value clarification approach demands of the teacher that each value be treated as equally worthwhile if truly preferred by the student. Certainly there could be no more effective procedure for causing a child to adopt an ethical egoist position, that is, to conclude that every moral value is equally legitimate if preferred by at least one human being. That children are caused to adopt the ethical egoist position, even though unable to provide justification for such a conviction, is a natural consequence of the fact that children are never asked to consider the mechanics of argument. Furthermore the values clarificationists' never attempt to raise the question of the possible fallaciousness of the ethical egoist position itself. To cause children to accept a belief in ethical egoism, even though they are unable to provide justification for such a belief is paradigmatic of indoctrination. Thus, contrary to the explicit claim of Simon and his associates, their program is indoctrinative.

Notes

¹ Sydney Simon, Louis Raths, Merrill Harmin, *Values and Teaching* (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, 1966), pp. 38-39.

² Helen Weaver, (trans.), *Justine: The Misfortune of Virtue*, by Donatien Alphonse-Francois Marquis de Sade (New York: Bell Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 66-69.

³ Stephen Toulmin discusses this notion at length in *Human Understanding* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 82-84. D.W. Hamlyn argues similarly that even a subjective understanding "presupposes participation in a public and objective understanding at some point and it is in this sense that it (belief, conviction) presupposes knowledge." D.W. Hamlyn, *Experience and the Growth of Understanding* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 74.

⁴ Stephen Toulmin, p. 83.

⁵ John Wilson, "First Step in Education, Morality and Religion," *Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society*, 1977, p. 46.

⁶ And certainly, that Simon thinks moral problems are no more than a process of identifying one's inclinations is evident. For example, in discussing how one might go about discussing questions with students pertaining to the blaming of another for possible immoral behavior, Simon declares, "Never let the discussion get into a win-lose confrontation. There is really no right answer. The major reason for discussing such problem situations is to become clearer on what we seem to value." Sydney Simon, Leland Howe, Howard Kirchenbaum, *Values Clarification* (New York: Hart Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), p. 377.

⁷ Simon simply declares that a basic element of values clarification is that, ". . . we accept the student's value statement in as nonjudgmental way as possible." Sydney Simon, "Values Clarification — A Tool for Counselors," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 9 (May, 1973), p. 617. No where in the article does Simon admit that one can judge as fallacious the reasoning by which another arrives at a decision to value x rather than y.

⁸ For example, Simon, in his usual vague and obscure prose, concludes his article "Values Clarification — A Tool for Counselors" (p. 618), ". . . I get a rush of genuine pleasure when I think how people who know they are alive" . . . There is really joy in watching people who know how to cry and how to laugh and who see in the wonder of existence room for themselves to grow. At the center of such growing is a deep commitment to working on a set of values by which to live. Such people in search send out a radiance that is full of spirit stretching, alternative increasing and zest making."

⁹ S. Simon, et. al.,

¹⁰ S. Simon, *Values and Teaching*, p. 38.

¹¹ J. Wilson, "First Step in Education, Morality and Religion," p. 46.

¹² S. Simon, L. Raths, M. Harmin, p. 47.

¹³ Ibid., p. 39

¹⁴ See, for example, S. Simon, L. Howe, H. Kirchenbaum, *Values Clarification*. This book contains seventy-nine strategies for eliciting from children statements regarding things they prize. See also S. Simon, "Values Clarification — A Tool for Counselors." This article enumerates six strategies for getting students to announce what it is in this world that they truly prize.

¹⁵ In other words, one must be familiar with an appropriate field variant argument, that is, according to Toulmin, an argument appropriate to a particular range of discourse. See Stephen Toulmin, *The Uses of Argument* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958). See especially Chapter Two.

¹⁶ R.M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 54.

¹⁷ Robin Barrows, *Moral Philosophy for Education* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1975), p. 154. For a similar discussion of the necessary conditions of creative behavior, see Paul Wagner, "The Elusive Notion of Creativity and Pedagogical Practice," *The Clearing House*, Vol. 51, No. 5 (January, 1978) pp. 204-205.

¹⁸ The notion of a field of discourse is discussed more fully in S. Toulmin, *The Uses of Arguments*, especially Chapter Two.

¹⁹ Fred N. Kerlinger discusses at length this sort of restraint on student expression in his "Implications of the Permissiveness Doctrine in American Education," *Educational Theory*, Vo. 10 No. 2 (April, 1960), pp. 126-127. See also R.S. Peters' extensive discussion of this issue in *Ethics and Education* (Atlanta: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1967), pp. 121-127.

²⁰ That is, Simon might make a claim to genuinely believe that he has avoided indoctrination if we attribute to Simon a notion of indoctrination best characterized by Clive Beck as follows, "It has been thought that if students merely 'let off steam' with respect to controversial matters . . . or become personally involved in the experience of dilemmas, no charge of indoctrination can be sustained." Clive Beck, *Educational Philosophy and Theory: An Introduction* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1974), p. 209. I will show, however, that not even Simon is satisfied with merely allowing the students to "let off steam," consequently even Simon's claim that his is a non-indoctrinative approach to moral education ultimately fails.

²¹ For a further discussion of this notion of indoctrination, see Paul Wagner, "Kozol and the Issue of Indoctrination," *Educational Quest*, Vol. XXI, No. 1 (Spring, 1977), pp. 18-22.

²² S. Simon, "Values Clarification — A Tool for Counselors," p. 614.

²³ Ibid., p. 618.

²⁴ S. Simon, L. Raths, M. Harmin, p. 39.

²⁵ Robert Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1970), p. 71.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 11-13. Wolff's argument itself is not without several serious weaknesses. For an excellent critique of Wolff's attempt to predicate a moderate anarchy on a self-imposed Kantian morality see Jeffrey H. Reiman, *In Defense of Political Philosophy* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc. 1972). See especially Chapter Three.

²⁷ S. Simon, L. Raths, M. Harmin, p. 38.

²⁸ S. Simon, L. Howe, H. Kirchenbaum, p. 377.