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Michael Pritchard

Western Michigan University, michael.pritchard@wmich.edu

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REASONABLE CHILDREN

Michael Pritchard

Center for the Study of Ethics in Society
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI 49008

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REASONABLE CHILDREN

**Michael Pritchard
Western Michigan University**

**Presented to the WMU Center
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REASONABLE CHILDREN¹

The seeds, as it were, of moral discernment are planted in the mind by him that made us. They grow up in their proper season, and are at first tender and delicate and easily warped. Their progress depends very much upon their being duly cultivated and properly exercised.

[Thomas Reid, Essays on the Active Powers of the Mind, 1788²]

Introduction

Aristotle warns us that children are not ready for lectures in moral philosophy. They lack experience and they are more subject to unruly passions than reason. This suggests that the title of my paper is an oxymoron. Can children be **reasonable**? On such questions I am what children's writer and illustrator William Steig calls a **hopist**. A pessimist would insist that children cannot be reasonable. An optimist would say either that children actually are reasonable or that becoming so is readily within their reach. A hopist attempts to avoid being overwhelmed by the empirical evidence either

way. Instead, he or she simply clings to the hope that children **can** be reasonable and sets about seeing what can be done to help bring this possibility into reality. Of course, thinking that something is so doesn't make it so; but, as William James points out, believing you can maintain your balance walking along the edge of a cliff is essential to be able to do so.

In any case, what follows are some of my hopist reflections on the prospects for there being reasonable children. As a sidenote for the pessimists, I will simply add that if we are to have any hope that children will end up as reasonable **adults**, we need to attend carefully to those aspects of childhood that hold out some prospect for such an outcome. As a sidenote for the optimists, I offer a word of caution. 'Reasonableness' is not an all-or-nothing concept. There are degrees of reasonableness. Just as Thomas Reid mentions the need to nurture the "seeds of moral discernment," the same must be said of the "seeds of reasonableness" in children. [Since they are interconnected, this should come as no surprise.] I have no interest in trying to convert children into adults. But I am interested in the extent to which children, as children, can be reasonable,

as well as the bearing this might have on their becoming reasonable adults.

My point of entry in this paper is moral education. Reasonableness applies to much more than morality, but if I can make some inroads in the very controversial area of moral education, the rest of the task should be somewhat easier. I want to discuss two major areas of popular concern in the public schools that provide entering wedges for moral education: civic education and critical thinking. Public education in our society is sustained by a political system committed to certain individual liberties and democratic decision making.³ In turn, public education is legitimately expected to help sustain that system by preparing children for citizenship. This is the function of civic education, which aims at helping students acquire the necessary understanding and skills for effective, responsible participation in a constitutional democracy.⁴ What, then, are the values civic education should emphasize? Robert Fullinwider suggests the following:⁵ the capacity to make independent, rational judgments about civic matters; respect for the rights of others; and the capacity to discuss and defend political views that may differ from

theirs. However, as Fullinwider amply shows, the dispositions that civic education encourages do not, in fact, confine themselves to the civic arena. For example, the ability to discuss and defend political views is not an ability to discuss and defend **only** that. Once encouraged, the critical thinking skills exhibited in the civic arena are likely to show up anywhere. And, just as these skills are assets in the political arena, they are assets in other areas of life as well.⁶

The kind of critical thinking encouraged in civic education is a form of reasonableness. Such reasonableness is a social virtue. But reasonableness in all of its forms is a social virtue. Criteria for reasonableness are not simply conjured up by an individual. Insofar as one is reasonable, one is prepared to reason **with** others, even if the object of concern is basically oneself (e.g., "Am I brave?"). What does reasoning with others involve? Minimally, it can be understood to include those skills and dispositions encompassed by what educators refer to as **critical thinking**.⁷ Robert Ennis succinctly defines 'critical thinking' as "reasonable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do."⁸ Although admirably brief, Ennis's definition may be too

narrow. Critical thinking can also be used to make sense of what we read, see, or hear and to make inferences from premises with which we may disagree or about which we have no particular view. Such critical thinking may lead one to decide what to believe or do, but it need not.⁹

In addition to his definition of 'critical thinking,' Ennis provides an elaborate taxonomy of critical thinking skills. This taxonomy is much broader than his definition would suggest. It includes dispositions to seek clear statements of questions, to be open-minded, to seek as much precision as the subject permits, to think in an orderly manner, and to be sensitive to the feelings and level of understanding of others. It also includes abilities such as focusing on the context of an argument, detecting unstated assumptions, clarifying arguments, making inferences from premises, and interacting with others in a reasonable manner.

It is clear from this list that critical thinking involves more than the employment of "higher level" thinking skills, and more than clever or skillful argumentation. It requires sensitivity to the needs, interests, and ideas of others as well as intellectual skills. Critical

thinking does include thinking for oneself. But it also includes thinking well, that is, exercising good judgment. This means having reasons for one's judgments, or, as Matthew Lipman puts it, having reliable **criteria** for one's judgments.¹⁰

The idea of thinking for oneself deserves more attention than I can give it here.¹¹ But at least this much should be said. Thinking **for** oneself is not the same as thinking **by** oneself. Humpty-Dumpty claims that words mean what **he** says they mean--nothing more and nothing less; and he is, therefore, free to make them mean whatever he wishes. This view of language doesn't work. Neither does a Humpty-Dumpty view of critical thinking. Humpty-Dumpty cannot make something become a good reason by deciding, for himself, that it is a good reason. What makes something a good reason, in morality or elsewhere, is a difficult, and perhaps controversial, matter. But individual fiat does not make something a good reason. Neither does consensus of the majority. Although reasonableness requires a willingness to have one's reasons subjected to public scrutiny, reasonable people can disagree with one another; and the number of people on either side does not settle the question of who, if

anyone, has the most reasonable view. This much is clear, I think, from any comprehensive taxonomy of critical thinking skills.

Illustrations

It is often asked whether morality can be **taught**. In higher education this question is commonly converted to the question of whether morality can be **studied**.¹² Instead of viewing students as subjected to passive indoctrination, our attention shifts to students as actively striving to develop and refine their abilities to think through moral concerns. This, at any rate, seems to have been the consensus view of a large and diverse group of educators brought together by the Hastings Center some years ago to discuss the appropriate goals of teaching ethics in higher education.

The Hastings Center group agreed on five major goals.¹³

Courses in ethics should:

1. Stimulate the moral imagination of students.
2. Help students recognize moral issues.
3. Help students analyze key moral concepts and principles.

4. Elicit from students a sense of responsibility.
5. Help students to accept the likelihood of ambiguity and disagreement on moral matters, while at the same time attempting to strive for clarity and agreement insofar as it is reasonably attainable.

Intended for college age students, this set of goals presupposes that students are not moral neophytes. Students are regarded as a basic resource in the sense that they are assumed already capable of moral imagination (which needs further stimulation), already capable of understanding moral issues (even though they sometimes need help recognizing their presence), already possessing moral concepts and principles (which need more careful analysis), already having a sense of responsibility (which can be further activated by studying ethics), and already somewhat experienced at attempting to negotiate unclarities and disagreements. Seriously pursued, these goals can be expected to enhance the capacity for reasonableness in students as they encounter moral issues surrounding them.

Just as it is presumed that college students have some basic logical sensitivities

and abilities prior to taking their first college course in logic, it is presumed that college students have some basic moral sensitivities and abilities. If this could not be presumed, one might ask, how could one even **begin** to teach a course in ethics? But, it might be thought, matters are quite different at the pre-college level, especially in the elementary schools: There such presumptions have no place. Particularly at the elementary school level, moral education is commonly regarded as a matter of "instilling" or "implanting" moral values. This is why many fear placing moral education on the public schools' agenda. **Whose** values, it may be asked, are to be implanted? And **what** values will they be?

Although the dangers of indoctrination are very real, they are not nearly as formidable as is commonly thought. This is because helping even young children nurture their "seeds of moral discernment" need not involve indoctrination. To conclude that it does is to underestimate the already considerable moral abilities children typically already have by the time they enter school. In fact, I will try to show, the Hastings Center goals are suitable for elementary school students as well college

students. Of course, adjustments for the more limited understanding and experience of young children must be made. But enhancing the capacity for reasonableness is as realistic an objective for young children as for college students. In fact, insofar as children's capacity for reasonableness is neglected, we should lower our expectations for the reasonableness of college students.¹⁴

One effective way to **stimulate the moral imagination** is through stories. For example, what child has not had serious thoughts about being brave--whether this involves putting one's head under water for the first time, going to the dentist, speaking in front of an audience, standing up to a bully, or staying home alone for the first time?

Frog and Toad also wonder about bravery.¹⁵ Here is how Arnold Lobel's "Dragons and Giants" begins.

Frog and Toad were reading a book together. "The people in this book are brave," said Toad. "They fight dragons and they are never afraid." "I wonder if we are brave," said Frog. (42)

How can they tell if they are brave? Toad suggests two conditions that must be met. They

must do the sorts of things brave individuals do. And they must not be afraid when they do them (or at any other time).

They discover that telling whether these two conditions are met is not easy:

Frog and Toad looked into a mirror.

"We look brave," said Frog. "Yes, but are we?" asked Toad. (42-3)

So, Frog and Toad set out on an adventuresome hike. They begin climbing a mountain. They come upon a dark cave:

A big snake came out of the cave.

"Hello lunch," said the snake when he saw Frog and Toad. He opened his wide mouth. Frog and Toad jumped away. Toad was shaking. "I am not afraid!" he cried. (45)

As if to prove their fearlessness, Frog and Toad continue climbing. Then they hear a loud noise and see large stones rolling toward them:

"It's an avalanche!" cried Toad. Frog and Toad jumped away. Frog was trembling. "I am not afraid!" he shouted. (47)

They reach the top of the mountain, only to find themselves under a shadow cast by a hawk. They jump under a rock. After the hawk flies

away, Frog and Toad scream out, "We are not afraid!" At the same time they begin running as fast as they can back to Toad's house. After arriving safely, Toad says: "Frog, I am glad to have a brave friend like you." Frog replies, "And I am happy to know a brave person like you, Toad." (50) Then Toad jumps into bed and pulls the covers over his head. Frog jumps into the closet and shuts the door. The story concludes: "They stayed there for a long time, just feeling very brave together." (51)

What should the **reader** conclude? Were Frog and Toad brave? Remember, Frog and Toad set down two conditions for bravery. First, they had to do the sorts of things brave individuals do. Climbing the mountain and not turning back seem to be the right sort of thing, although running back home and hiding may raise some doubts about just **how** brave they were. The second condition, doing these things without being afraid (in fact, **never** being afraid), seems to fare much worse. After all, Toad shook, Frog trembled, and they both ran down the mountain as fast as they could and hid under covers and in the closet. How can they say they were not at least a little bit afraid? And doesn't that spoil their bravery?

But, a young reader might say, they did do some things that they had been afraid to try before. Didn't that take at least a little bravery? Still, another young reader might reply, they shook and trembled and ran home and hid. So, they must have been afraid. Yes, another reader replies, but weren't some of the things they did really dangerous? "Hello, lunch," said the snake. Was that just a bluff? Wouldn't even a brave frog have reason to fear such a snake? What else could Toad do--stay for lunch? But, the first reader counters, Toad didn't just run away--he **shook**.

We adults might now recall Aristotle's distinction between bravery and foolhardiness--a distinction that makes fear an integral part of bravery. And Aristotle distinguishes bravery from cowardice. What if Toad had not moved, we ask? Aristotle might say that he was either foolhardy (lacking proper fear) or cowardly (paralyzed by fear).

Can young children appreciate these distinctions? One way to find out is to try some variations on the Frog and Toad story. This invites children to **analyze key moral concepts**. Suppose that Frog and Toad are next time accompanied by some other friends, say Turtle

and Mouse.¹⁶ This time when the snake says "Hello, lunch," neither nor Turtle nor Mouse move. Turtle doesn't move because he has fallen asleep inside his shell while they have paused in front of the dark cave. He is awakened by the snake saying "Hello, lunch." But he simply thinks they are being invited to lunch and decides he'd rather extend his nap instead. Mouse doesn't move because he is too terrified. Does it matter how Frog and Toad behave? Suppose Toad quickly runs to safety, but Frog first yanks on Mouse's tail to get him to move to safety. Was Turtle brave because he wasn't afraid of Snake? Was Mouse brave because he didn't move? Who was more brave, Frog or Toad? Do we have to suppose that Frog wasn't afraid when he stayed to help Mouse?

We usually think that being brave is a good thing. Is it? Why? Is it better to be brave and fearless than brave and fearful? Arnold Lobel doesn't complicate his story by directly raising such questions. Frog and Toad present themselves in such a way that the young reader is invited to challenge their claims to be brave. But it is only a short step from this to questioning Frog and Toad's early characterization of bravery as requiring

fearlessness. If bravery is, indeed, a desirable quality, then reflecting on what it means to have it can be a valuable exercise--one that calls on the use of reason, and one that may contribute to one's reasonableness in both attitude and behavior.¹⁷

"Cookies," another Frog and Toad tale, is a delightful story about will-power: "trying hard **not** to do something that you really want to do". (35) If Frog and Toad give away all their cookies to the birds, does this show that they now have the will-power not to eat any more cookies? Or do they have to be able to resist eating cookies while they still have some within reach? Once again, young readers are invited to analyze an important moral concept, will-power. Do Frog and Toad really have lots and lots of will-power after they give the cookies to the birds? Is Frog and Toad's strategy reasonable, even if it doesn't actually exhibit will-power? Here's another possible strategy. Frog and Toad could keep on eating cookies until they feel sick (something Frog offers as a reason for stopping now). Then they could resist eating more cookies even if several were left. Of course it would no longer be true to say that they really want to eat more--and they wouldn't have to try

hard at all not to eat them. Would this be a reasonable strategy?

What some might want to say is that Frog and Toad use a reasonable strategy for dealing with situations in which they don't have will-power. If the temptation is too great, remove it. But are there times when it might be really important to be able to do better than this—that is, to be able to resist cookies even when they are within reach and you really do want another one? What if you can't really get rid of what you want (e.g., they aren't **your** cookies to give away to the birds, or every time you try to get rid of a tempting something more of it shows up)? Is it important to have will-power in situations like that?

The last story in Frog and Toad Together, "The Dream," is quite interesting from a developmental standpoint. Since Lobel's stories are in the I CAN READ series, the primary audience constitutes an age range (4-8) that Piaget and Kohlberg would say is dominated by egocentric thinking. If they are right, most of the intended audience will fail to grasp much of what "The Dream" is about. Toad dreams that, as he becomes more and more impressed with himself, Frog gets smaller and

smaller. "Why do you think Frog get smaller and smaller?" we might ask a four year old. Our answer is that this is how Frog seems to Toad in the dream--and this is because Toad keeps "puffing himself up" in comparison to Frog:

"Frog," cried Toad, "can you play the piano like this?" "No," said Frog. It seemed to Toad that Frog looked even smaller. (55)

"Frog," cried Toad, "can you do tricks like this?"

"No," peeped Frog, who looked very, very small. (57)

"Frog, can you be as wonderful as this?" said Toad as he danced all over the stage. There was no answer. Toad looked out into the theater. Frog was so small that he could not be seen or heard. (59)

Toad dreams he is spinning in the dark, shouting "Come back, Frog. I will be lonely." (60)

"I am right here," said Frog. Frog was standing near Toad's bed. "Wake up, Toad," he said. "Frog, is that really you?" said Toad. "Of course it is me," said Frog. "And are you your own right

size?" asked Toad. "Yes, I think so," said Frog. Toad looked at the sunshine coming through the window. "Frog," he said, "I am so glad that you came over."

"I always do," said Frog.

Toad seems to have learned much from this dream. Can a four-year-old? Seemingly, no, if the estimation of developmental psychologists such as Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg are right--for Toad has learned something about immodesty, loneliness, and friendship that he could not appreciate if he were trapped totally within an egocentric perspective.¹⁸ But Toad can appreciate this, and I'll bet many of his four-year-old friends can, too.

Sometimes a short passage from a story can help one **recognize a moral issue** that had only moments before gone unnoticed. J.D. Salinger's short story, "Down at the Dinghy," is a case in point.¹⁹ Four-year-old Lionel is upset and threatening to run away:

"Well, will you tell me from there why you're running away?" Boo Boo asked. "After you promised me you were all through?"

A pair of underwater goggles lay on the deck of the dinghy, near the stern

seat. For answer, Lionel secured the headstrap of the goggles between the big and the second toes of his right foot, and, with a deft, brief leg action, flipped the goggles overboard. They sank at once.

"That's nice. That's constructive," said Boo Boo. "Those belong to your Uncle Webb. Oh, he'll be so delighted." She dragged on her cigarette. "They once belonged to your Uncle Seymour."

"I don't care."

"I see that you don't," Boo Boo said.

Boo Boo then takes a small package from her pocket. "This is a key chain," she says, "Just like Daddy's. But with a lot more keys on it than Daddy's has. This one has ten keys."

Lionel leaned forward in his seat, letting go the tiller. He held out his hands in catching position. "Throw it?" he asked. "Please?"

"Let's keep our seats a minute, Sunshine. I have a little thinking to do. I **should** throw this key chain in the lake."

Lionel stared up at her with his mouth open. He closed his mouth. "It's mine," he said on a diminishing note of justice.

Boo Boo, looking down at him, shrugged. "I don't care."

Lionel slowly sat back in his seat, watching his mother, and reached behind him for the tiller. His eyes reflected pure perception, as his mother had known they would.

"Here." Boo Boo tossed the package down to him. It landed squarely on his lap.

He looked at it in his lap, picked it off, looked at it in his hand, and flicked it--sidearm--into the lake. He then immediately looked up at Boo Boo, his eyes filled not with defiance but tears. In another instant his mouth was distorted into a horizontal figure-8, and he was crying mightily.

Salinger's little episode cries out for analysis. Just what is Lionel's perception? Is it that one bad turn deserves another--and best of all is for the wrong-doer to administer self-

punishment? Has Lionel engaged in a bit of Golden Rule reasoning--or is this a misreading of the Golden Rule, since it is not clear that anyone is being done unto as they would have others do unto them? However Lionel's reasoning is to be characterized, it is clear that, through coming to appreciate a perspective other than his own, he learned a lesson in responsibility (**eliciting a sense of responsibility**)--and it is clear that this lesson will not be lost on many young children who hear a story like this.

Lionel seems to be expressing some sort of recognition of the moral importance of **reciprocity**. Adults know that this is a very complex area of moral life. To what extent are children capable of appreciating such complexities? Lionel seems to have begun to catch onto some of it at age four. What is it reasonable to expect down the road a bit? Some years ago I had the privilege of participating in a 40 minute discussion of just such matters with a group of ten-year-olds. I began the discussion by reading an episode from Matthew Lipman's children's novel, Lisa. Timmy accompanies Harry to a stamp club meeting at which Harry trades stamps with other children. Timmy is

deliberately tripped by a classmate as he and Harry are leaving the classroom. Timmy immediately knocks his classmate's books off his desk and runs out of the room. Later, as Harry buys Timmy an ice cream cone, Timmy comments, "But I had to get even. I couldn't let him get away with it, tripping me like that for no reason."

Harry and his friends are perplexed by all these examples. Is it right to retaliate against someone who trips you? How is this like or unlike a fair exchange of stamps? If someone does you a favor, should you return the favor someday? The 10-year-olds with whom I shared the story were eager to help sort out these matters. They discussed at great length possible alternatives to Timmy's retaliation (thus exercising **moral imagination**). Larry challenged the basic idea of "getting even" (**analyzing key moral concepts**).

Sometimes you do need to get even.
Well, actually there's no such thing as even, because then he'll get even.

Having raised the problem of what it means to "get even," Larry went on to distinguish between **wanting** to do something (strike back) and **having** to do it.

Several children suggested ignoring the offender as a tactic for discouraging him (since he would have failed to get the desired response from the victim). Pressed by the example of an offender who stays on the attack, Carlen said:

If he were to, like Emily said, chase after you and hit you or something like that, then you defend yourself. I mean, maybe then you've got to get him back. Not really get him back, but you have to defend yourself and hit him if he's hitting you.

So, a basic distinction was made between trying to get even ("get him back") and self-defense. Further, the children distinguished both of these ideas from attempting to teach someone a lesson. Finally, they carefully distinguished exchanges involving harms from exchanging favors, insisting that the Golden Rule applies in the latter cases but not the former.

Although this discussion was limited to problems that are familiar to children, the ten-year-old participants uncovered an impressive variety of considerations that need to be brought to bear on those problems. I have often asked myself what other kinds of considerations adults might wish to bring up in that context. I always

come up empty. Furthermore, the principles and concepts discussed by the children serve adults rather well when applied to analogous problems in adult life.

The Hastings Center group of educators emphasize a fifth goal of ethics in higher education: **Helping students learn to accept ambiguity and disagreement while at the same time continuing to try to reduce it through further attempts to clarify ideas and to engage in reasonable discussion.**

Here is a story that illustrates the importance of this fifth goal. It is taken from materials prepared by the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children:²⁰

A teacher comes into her classroom one day with a large bag of candy. She explains that the candy is a gift to the class, and she's been told that she must distribute it fairly.

Now, she says, "What is fair? Would the fairest thing be for me to give the most to those who deserve the most? Who deserves the most? Surely it must be the biggest and strongest ones in the class who deserve the most, for they probably do most things best."

But the teacher is greeted by a large outcry from the class. "What you propose is most unfair," they tell her. "Just because this one is better at arithmetic or that one at baseball, or still another at dancing, you still shouldn't treat us all differently. It wouldn't be fair to give some members of the class, say, five pieces of candy where others might get one piece or none at all. Each of us is a person, and in this respect we're all equal. So, treat us as equals and give us each the same amount of candy."

"Ah," the teacher answered, "I'm glad you've explained to me how you feel about this. So, although people are very different from each other in many respects, fairness consists of treating them all equally."

"That's right," the pupils answer. "Fairness is equal treatment!"

But before the teacher has a chance to distribute the candy, the phone rings, and she's called down to the office. When she gets back some minutes later, she finds that the children

have all been fighting over the candy. Now each of the biggest and strongest children have a big handful of candy, while the remainder have varying amounts, and the smallest children have only one each.

The teacher demands order, and the class becomes very quiet. Obviously she is very disturbed about what the children have just done. But she's determined to be fair, and fairness, they've all agreed, is equal treatment. So, she tells the children, "You've taught me what fairness is. Each of you must give back one piece of candy."

As might be expected, most children who hear this story immediately object that this is **not** fair. Adults might think that what ten-year-olds are likely to do is dwell on various ways of more fairly handling the distribution of the candy. And they would be correct in thinking this. However, this is not **all** that ten-year-olds discuss--at least not the group to whom I read this story.²¹

Adults realize that this story is about more than the fair distribution of candy. It is about fairness generally--and especially about

the ideas of desert and treating people equally. But ten-year-olds realize this, too. In the space of fifteen minutes the group with whom I met discussed the fair grading: Should those who are less able get higher grades because they try harder? Should grades be awarded for group accomplishments rather than just on an individual basis (e.g., 90% of the class performing at a certain level)? They discussed the importance of having special opportunities for students with disabilities to receive awards, as in the Special Olympics. At the same time, many insisted that the most able should have special opportunities, as well. They discussed group punishment as an alternative to individually differentiated punishment (both of which they had undoubtedly experienced). In short, in just a few moments, they displayed an understanding of different, and often competing, bases for awards and punishments. While appreciating the importance of equality, they realized that this is complicated by differences in opportunities, experiences, abilities, efforts, and actual accomplishments. They shunned simplistic solutions and seemed to gain satisfaction from articulating complicating factors. They wanted to leave nothing out that

might affect a reasonable determination of fairness.

Admittedly, they did not discuss the fairness or unfairness of various taxation schemes (e.g., flat vs. a graduated rates). Such concerns will come in due time. [Actually, IAPC uses this same story with its high school materials as a stimulus for discussing taxation.²²] Meanwhile, ten-year-olds (as well as younger children) have a wealth of examples that they can usefully discuss--not only to prepare them for difficult issues they will have to face later, but also to help them cope with difficult issues they face now.

Conclusion

Any subject (e.g., history, government, biology, literature) that seriously encourages the critical thinking of students is an open invitation for moral reflection. For those who welcome the schools helping children become reasonable persons, this is not unwelcome news. However, many fear what the schools might do if they make moral education part of their business, and they may wish to draw the line at this point.

Nevertheless, deliberately or not, moral values are reinforced (or undermined) in the

schools. Cheating is discouraged, respect for students and teachers is encouraged, and so on. In short, educational institutions depend for their viability on the acceptance of basic moral values, values that may or may not match up well with values found in the corridors, the playgrounds, and the streets between home and school--or even in the homes of some children. To expect all of this to work out well without moral education being in any explicit way placed on the educational agenda is quite optimistic.

It might be replied that these moral values are reinforced only to enable schools to get on with their main business--educating students. These are ground rules for the schools to function effectively. Distinct from this, however, is the question of whether moral values should be discussed **within** the curriculum itself. But, attempting to keep moral content out of the curriculum is equally hopeless. As Fullinwider says, a school that attempted this would probably have to close down:²³

It could not teach children their native language since so much of any natural language is about how to be and not to

be. It would have to deprive its students of all stories of human affairs, since those stories are structured by evaluative concepts--by ideas of success and failure, foresight and blindness, heedfulness and heedlessness, care and negligence, duty and dereliction, pride and shame, hope and despair, wonder and dullness, competition and cooperation, beginning and ending. But without stories of human affairs, a school could not effectively teach non-moral lessons either. It could not teach about inflation, log-rolling, scientific discovery, coalition-building, paranoia, ecological niches, deterrence of crime, price controls, or infectious disease.

Worse, anything resembling **critical thinking** would need to be eliminated from the schools, too. Thomas Reid notes that our "power of reasoning, which all acknowledge to be one of the most eminent natural faculties of man,... appears not in infancy."²⁴ This capacity, like that of moral discernment, also needs to be duly cultivated and properly exercised. The recent hue and cry that the schools are failing to help students develop

critical thinking skills echoes Reid's observation. So, there is a nation-wide call for getting beyond rote learning. Hardly anyone would oppose critical thinking in the schools--as long as it can stay away from the moral domain. But it cannot be kept away.

An anecdote will illustrate the problem. A few years ago I visited a 4th grade class. I spent the half hour discussing assumptions with the students. I gave them several "brainteasers" that can be solved only if one examines unwarranted assumptions that block our ability to proceed. For example, 6 toothpicks can be placed end-to-end to form 4 equilateral triangles only if we construct a three-dimensional pyramid, rather than lay them all on a flat surface.²⁵ As long as we assume we are restricted to a two-dimensional, flat surface, we will not be able to solve the problem.

After class, one of the students told me a story. A father and son are injured in a car accident. They are rushed to separate rooms for surgery. The doctor attending the son announces, "I cannot perform surgery on this boy. He is my son." The student then asked me to explain how the boy could be the doctor's son. I had heard the story several years earlier.

So I quickly answered the question. Some of today's 4th graders still struggle with this question for a while ("The first father was a priest," "The doctor was his step-father"). But when this was first aired on television's "All in the Family," Archie Bunker was not the only one who was stumped. A significant percentage of adult viewers were, too.

Why did this 4th grader come up with this example? We had been talking about assumptions, but none of my examples had any social content. Here was an example resting on an unwarranted assumption--an assumption that contains gender stereotypes. The student apparently understood very well the basic point about assumptions. Then, like any good critical thinker, she **applied** it in a novel way--a way that has everything to do with moral education. So, even critical thinking about seemingly innocuous "brainteasers" threatens to get out of control.

Given this, it seems best simply to face up to the task of moral education, rather than act as if it could be avoided altogether. However, something interesting happens when moral education is put on the main agenda, rather than remaining on the hidden agenda. If schools

explicitly acknowledge they are in the moral education business, how will they defend themselves against the charge of indoctrination? Fullinwider suggests that we see moral education as something like learning a vocabulary, learning how to use words and concepts. As Fullinwider puts it, "A moral education supplies tools of evaluation (a vocabulary) rather than a doctrine for adhesion (dogma)."²⁶ To this we should add that students need to be encouraged to **use** these tools in the classroom. That is, they need to be encouraged to engage in evaluative thought--with each other.

When this is done in a mutually supportive atmosphere, what evolves is a **community of inquiry**.²⁷ In such a classroom each student is regarded as having the potential to make valuable contributions to the issues discussed. Students are expected to give reasons in support of what they say, to listen to one another carefully, and to be responsive to one another. This kind of learning environment can be expected to help develop and refine the reasonableness of students. Such a community of inquiry, Reid might agree, affords students opportunities to "duly cultivate and properly

exercise" their "seeds of moral discernment!"
And this is what **empowers** students eventually
to go on responsibly, on their own, rather than
under the watchful eye of teacher or parent.

Notes

1. Some portions of this paper are drawn from my "Moral Education: From Aristotle to Harry Stottlemeier," in Ann Margaret Sharp and Ronald Reed, Studies in Philosophy for Children (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 15-31; "Families, Schools, and Moral Education," University of Denver Law Review, Vol. 69, No. 3, 1992, pp. 687-704; and Philosophical Adventures With Children (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1985).

2. Thomas Reid, Philosophical Works: Essays on the Active Powers of the Mind, vol. 2, with notes by Sir William Hamilton (Hildesheim: Gekorg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1985), a reprinting of the original 1788 publication.

3. The civic education argument that follows is based on Robert Fullinwider's "Science and Technology Education as Civic Education," in Paul Durbin, ed., Europe, America, and Technology: Philosophical Perspectives (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), pp. 197-215.

4. For a detailed discussion of where civic education might best fit in the curriculum, see Alita Zurav Letwin, "Promoting Civic Understanding and Civic Skills Through Conceptually Based Curricula," pp. 197-211, in Benninga, cited above. Clearly, classes in government, history, and the social sciences are natural homes for civic education. But there are other places as well, such as literature and the

languages. Letwin discusses educational materials developed by the Center for Civic Education, a California nonprofit corporation that develops programs for both private and public schools. Another good discussion of civic education is Carolyn Perieira's, "Educating for Citizenship in the Early Grades," pp. 212-226. She discusses the elementary school curriculum Educating for Citizenship, field-tested in more than 50 urban and rural Maryland schools.

5. Fullinwider cites Amy Gutmann, Democratic Education (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Brian Crittenden, Parents, the State and the Right to Educate (Melbourne: University of Melbourne Press, 1988); and William Galston, "Civic Education in the Liberal State," in Nancy L. Rosenblum, ed., Liberalism and the Moral Life (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

6. How else are we to understand the nationwide call for greater emphasis on developing critical thinking skills? This is not simply a call for critical thinking in civic education.

7. The next several paragraphs are taken from my "Moral Education, Families, and the Schools," Denver Law Review, 1992.

8. Robert Ennis, "A Conception of Critical Thinking--With Some Curriculum Suggestions," in Newsletter on Teaching Philosophy, American Philosophical Association, Summer 1987, p. 1. Ennis and Stephen P. Norris offer the same

definition in their Evaluating Critical Thinking (Pacific Grove, CA: Midwest Publications, 1989), p. 3. There they claim that their definition is a close approximation of what educators generally mean by critical thinking.

9. This paragraph and the next are based on my "STS, Critical Thinking, and Philosophy for Children," in Paul T. Durbin, ed., Europe, America, and Technology: Philosophical Perspectives (Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), pp. 217-246. There I discuss critical thinking at much greater length. See, especially, pp. 220-228.

10. See Matthew Lipman, Thinking in Education (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), Chs. 6 and 7.

11. For an especially helpful discussion, particularly in regard to the social aspects of thinking for oneself, see Philip Guin, "Thinking for Oneself," in Ann Margaret Sharp and Ronald Reed, eds., Studies in Philosophy for Children (Temple University Press: Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 79-86.

12. For example, see Daniel Callahan, "Goals in the Teaching of Ethics," in Ethics Teaching in Higher Education, ed. Daniel Callahan and Sissela Bok (New York: Plenum, 1980), pp. 61-74. There the emphasis clearly is on students as active learners rather than passive recipients of moral instruction.

13. Ibid.

14. This worry is precisely what prompted Matthew Lipman to undertake the project of presenting logic to elementary school students. The resulting success of *Philosophy for Children* no doubt exceeded his initial expectations, but it confirms his insight that logic cannot wait.

15. Arnold Lobel, Frog and Toad Together, An I CAN READ Book (Harper & Row: New York, 1971). Page references are listed in parenthesis in the text. I am indebted to Gareth Matthews for first suggesting to me the philosophical importance of Frog and Toad stories.

16. Lobel's Frog and Toad are both male. My Turtle and Mouse are also male. It might be interesting to tell these stories with a mix of male and female characters, or with only female characters.

17. Frog and Toad think of bravery in terms of physical courage--facing physical dangers. However, there are other forms of bravery, too--such as moral courage. For example, in Judy Varga's The Dragon Who Liked to Spit Fire (William Morrow & Co.: New York, 1961), Darius the friendly dragon is banished from the King's castle after accidentally setting fire to the royal banners. Although forbidden from ever seeing little Prince Frederic again, Darius later saves Frederic from a wild boar. This might be regarded by readers as another instance of physical bravery (depending on whether the wild boar is seen as posing danger to Darius, too). But, since Darius was acting contrary to the king's orders, it seems also to be an instance of

moral courage. An even clearer instance of moral courage is supplied by the king, who now has to summon up the courage to admit he was mistaken:

The king cleared his throat three times. He did not know how to begin, for kings don't like to admit they are wrong. But he was a very just king, so he cleared his throat a fourth time. "It is rather nice to have a dragon around the castle," he said. "Frederic could never have a better, more faithful friend than Darius." He took off his own medal and hung it on the little dragon's neck.

I wish to thank Diane Worden for bringing Judy Varga's story to my attention--and for suggesting that it is a story about bravery, physical and moral.

18. Piaget and Kohlberg claim that children do not get beyond predominantly egocentric thinking until well into their school years.

19. This example was brought to my attention by Ann Diller, "On a Conception of Moral Teaching," in Matthew Lipman, Ann Margaret Sharp, and Frederick Oscanyan, eds., Growing Up With Philosophy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), pp. 326-338. Diller's discussion of this passage is very illuminating.

20. See p. 63 of Philosophical Inquiry, the teacher's manual for Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery. IAPC is located at Montclair State

College, Upper Montclair, New Jersey. IAPC's K-12 materials can be obtained by writing to IAPC.

21. The comments that follow are based on Ch. V, "Fairness," in my Philosophical Adventures With Children (University Press of America: Lanham MD, 1985).

22. See the workbook for Mark, which concentrates on issues in civic education and political philosophy.

23. Fullinwider, pp. 206-7.

24. Reid, p. 595.

25. The pyramid will have an equilateral triangle as its base, with each side of the triangle being a toothpick. Each of the remaining three toothpicks can then have one of its ends placed at one of the angles of the base triangle, while the other ends are brought together at a single point. The result is a four-sided pyramid.

26. Fullinwider, p. 207.

27. For a thorough discussion of the idea of community of inquiry, see Ann Margaret Sharp, "What is a Community of Inquiry?" Journal of Moral Education, 16, no. 1, (January 1987).

BIOGRAPHY

Michael Pritchard is Professor of Philosophy, Director of the Center for the Study of Ethics in Society, and Co-director of the Center for Philosophy and Critical Thinking at Western Michigan University. Professor Pritchard received his Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin (Madison) and his B.A. from Alma College. He has taught at Western Michigan University since 1968.

Professor Pritchard is author of Philosophical Adventures With Children (University Press of America, 1985), On Becoming Responsible (University Press of Kansas, 1991), and co-author (with James Jaska) of Communication Ethics, 2nd edition (Wadsworth, 1993). He recently directed a three year National Science Foundation project, "Teaching Ethics in Engineering: A Case Study Approach," and he is currently writing a text on engineering ethics with C.E. Harris and Michael Rabins of Texas A&M (scheduled to be published by Wadsworth in 1994). Professor Pritchard is also working on a book, Reasonable Children, to be published by University Press of Kansas.

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