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The Schooled Heart: Moral Formation in American Higher Education

Douglas V. Henry and Michael D. Beaty (Editors); (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007).

Reviewed by D. Andrew Parker and Kimberly S. Parker

A review of the history of American higher education reveals the integral role moral education played in its mission. At the turn of the 20th century, a dichotomy was created between faith and knowledge. As a result, moral formation was marginalized and ultimately displaced from the modern university. As educators today examine the nature and purpose of higher education, many are faced with the question of whether moral education should be recovered and reinstated to the mission of the modern university.

The Schooled Heart: Moral Formation in American Higher Education is directed toward university educators with the purpose of presenting a realistic and intellectually defensible argument for moral formation within the contemporary university. The book is divided into eight chapters or essays, each written by different authors including notables such as Stanley Hauerwas, Warren A. Nord, and Robert C. Roberts. The first four chapters provide reflections on the role of moral education and critiques of current moral education malpractice. The remaining chapters address virtues essential to moral formation within higher education and provide pedagogical strategies that draw upon discipline-specific resources.

Chapter one provides general reasons for the marginalization and discrediting of moral education. The author discusses two historically influential conceptions of liberal education and argues that the study of religion is essential to liberal and moral education in both the public and private university.

Through a reflection on a passage from Plato's *Theaetetus*, chapter two contrasts two types of individuals produced by liberal and technical—or secular—education. Technical education is presented as haphazard while liberal education is lifted up as the standard for which universities should reach. It is claimed that the best vehicle for a liberal education is the Christian university. The author calls for an education that entails a coherent moral framework and the mentoring of students by faculty.

In chapter three, the case is submitted for a return to the capstone course in moral philosophy that was a standard feature in the nineteenth-century liberal arts college. The argument is made that, for moral formation to be recovered by higher education, such a requirement must be implemented in both Christian and secular institutions. In the midst of presenting this case, previous and current approaches to moral formation are critiqued and suggestions for implementing a capstone course are provided.

Chapter four begins with an explanation of how moral formation and the morals originally taught by the Church have been usurped by the state in its desire to create loyalty to itself. Furthermore, the author contends that the attempt by many universities to teach moral formation through ethics courses fails to produce the intended outcome and merely endorses the beliefs students have prior to taking such courses. It is suggested that if the university no longer served the state alone, but rather returned to its intended purpose of serving the church first and the state second, moral formation would occur organically.

Four educational desiderata (wisdom, community, freedom, and truth) are identified and reflected upon in the fifth chapter. Chapter six reverses direction and addresses the concept of *acedia*, its causes, and methods of confronting and overcoming it. *Acedia* is described as “an

expansive indifference toward moral and spiritual excellence due to the conviction that such excellence either does not matter or, even if it does, cannot possibly be attained” (p. 134). The three virtues deemed most important in surmounting *acedia* are hope, courage, and perseverance. Following an examination of these virtues, a proposal is made concerning what moral formation might look like, particularly in Christian colleges and universities.

Chapter seven introduces additional *deliberative virtues* (goodwill, cooperative inquiry, and respectful disagreement) that are best cultivated in an environment of democratic education. The author poses the question of whether a theological virtue, specifically humility, can also be considered a deliberative virtue. Objections to the concept are discussed and the argument is made that humility must not be limited to a theological virtue. Moreover, it is claimed that humility is necessary to foster and sustain the deliberative virtues listed above.

The final chapter continues along the same line of thought and underscores the need for humility in learning. The authors offer detailed accounts of pedagogical strategies used to cultivate humility in students within three specific disciplines: international studies, cognitive psychology, and theology.

The editors’ utilization of various authors, and their occasional differing viewpoints, brilliantly support the book’s concept of moral formation as it affirms critical thinking and opposes indoctrination. However, at the same time, the divergent viewpoints may cause readers difficulty in creating cohesive connections between the chapters. For example, chapter two states that secular institutions are not the right type of vehicle for moral education, while chapter three insists that moral education cannot occur only within Christian colleges due to the small percentage of U.S. students they enroll. Such incongruent ideas disrupt the momentum of the argument and fail to clarify whether moral formation can successfully be carried out within all types of American higher education.

Educators, regardless of their discipline, will find value in the practical strategies provided in chapters five through eight to assist in the moral formation of their students. Additionally, the discussion of *acedia* in chapter six sheds insight on an insidious vice affecting contemporary culture. This discourse allows educators to better understand where their students are coming from so that they can, in turn, be more effective in helping students nurture hope and the right desires in their lives.

As higher education is pushed to become more focused on training and less on education due to various economic and societal pressures, it is all the more imperative for educators to attend to the moral formation of their students. Moral formation assists in developing the whole person, critical thinking, and civic responsibility; three hallmarks of a college-educated person (American College Personnel Association, 1994). Education devoid of moral formation “is not a human education, for it does not fulfill us, does not put us in relation with good, does not give us the most important kind of knowledge, does not give us virtue” (p. 61). Educators have an obligation to create an environment that provides opportunities for such development.

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American College Personnel Association (ACPA). (1994). *The student learning imperative: Implications for student affairs*. Washington, DC: Author.