

**WHY SOCIOLOGISTS OF EDUCATION ARE MORAL
(PERSONALLY) BUT DON'T WRITE ABOUT MORALITY
(PROFESSIONALLY):
A CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION**

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Abstract. The author argues that North American sociologists of education have generally been motivated by a «consequentialist» morality that focuses on individual achievement measured in the aggregate rather than a teleological morality focused on communal achievement measured in the virtue of the individual. As such, the subdiscipline has generally avoided discussion of morality in schools except inasmuch as it can be used to explain stratification. The author provides data from two prominent moral education movements and suggests a reading of contemporary moral philosophy and Durkheim's *Moral Education* to develop a «cultural sociology of education».

Keywords: *Sociology of Education; Culture; Morality; Inequality; Virtue Ethics.*

1. Introduction

What should American public schools do? This question is asked just about everywhere and everywhere you'll find a different answer: schools should teach their students how to be a good person, or a good citizen, or a good worker, or a good Christian, or a good secularist who might or might not also be a good Christian. Schools should form their children's moral lives; schools should leave moral formation at home. Schools should teach about sex; schools should assuredly not teach about sex. Et cetera. Yet, for as divided as the goals of North American education might be, the North American sociology of education literature reveals a remarkable consistency: the purpose of education, they appear to assume, is social mobility. Or, if you were more rigorous in your reading, then the purpose of education is job training and civic mindedness. These laudable goals are generally focused on the aggregate level of social life, and they pay relatively little attention to specific moral formation along certain teleological lines. Rather than focus on what individual students become, sociologists of education are concentrate about making a good society via graduates with certain skills. Sociology of education is, in other words, morally concerned, though it is not concerned about morality¹.

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¹ Of course, morality is a big word with a lot of meanings. For the purposes of this paper, "moral" only means concerned with and, to some degree, committed to the good. The fact

Perhaps because of this distinct paradigm, those sociologists who have sought a description of morality in education have generally done so with more reference to the sociology of social movements than the sociology of education (Stevens 2001; Binder 2002). This makes sense, as reform efforts generally *are* social movements that call for a certain moral vision to be awakened or reinvigorated within schools. Yet if we only analyze morality in schools using social movement literature, then it provides the false impression that all of the morality in education is happening *outside* the schools and is trying to get in. Many school reformers might agree. These movements both propose and symbolize certain counterfactuals about American education: if we had only done things *this way*, they argue, then our world would be better now, because our children would have grown up *right*. What if, they ask, we had always provided our children with strong character? Or what if we had always taught our children to respect and appreciate other cultures? Our only hope for the future, these reformers argue, is to make the changes they propose, and soon. Education historian David Tyack and his co-authors argue that the persistent utopianism in American education is due in large part to its millennial Protestant roots (Tyack and Cuban 1995; Tyack and Hansot 1982). Because many of these reformers are so committed to their own visions of a moral good, they often view the state of American education – not to mention the goals of other reform movements – as amoral, naïve, or even insidious. Yet what is lost in much of this debate is the recognition that there are a variety of moral concerns about education in America: what separates them is not the presence or absence of morality, but instead extremely different conceptions of the moral good. Despite what reformers might think, schools are actually moral places. Or at least they're trying.

This is not to deny that many schools fail all the time, but the precise fact that they *can* fail – and that their failure is understood to be a deep social problem reveals that schools – contain a deeply important moral place in American social life and that they contain within themselves significant moral codes. The problem is not whether or not schools are moral; the problem is their differing conceptions of morality. These conceptions can be characterized by two ideal types: Teleological Education and Consequentialist Education (*Tab. 1*). Both of them are moral, but they are moral in very different ways. As with all ideal types, teleological education can exist alongside consequentialist education, and neither would ever be perfectly expressed or free of internal conflict. Teleological education is driven by a tradition and seeks to maintain this tradition via embodied practices, narratives, sacred symbols and images: its goal is the production of a community of individuals capable of the "good life". Consequentialist education is driven by a certain secular ideal of the individual with roots in the Enlightenment; it seeks to create autonomous, critical-thinking subjects via skills in math, science, and literacy. Its goal is the development of working democracies and a productive, global economy. The two ideal types can be distinguished in nine areas: means of

that this "good" can be interpreted in a variety of ways is precisely the source of the tension I am seeking to describe. A provisional definition, therefore, will have to do.

imparting knowledge, intended product, metric of success, pedagogy, role of content, role of skills, source, nature of freedom, and importance of habit. Both kinds of education are in American public schools. For example, the pledge of allegiance is taught and recited with a teleological goal: it is a thing in itself that ought to be known and that will inculcate good citizenship via repetition. An algebra problem, on the other hand, is probably not seen by faculty, students, or curriculum designers as having any teleological significance: its value, instead, is consequentialist, in as much as the skills developed learning algebra (but not, note, the algebra itself) might eventually create smart voters and economic actors. Again, both of these are clearly moral commitments, but they are moral on different levels, as their intended products are quite distinct: the teleological education wants to make a good person who is leading a good and moral life (as a patriot, in this case), while consequentialist education wants to make a good community. For both educational forms, their means of imparting knowledge is the inverse of their intended product: in the above example, teleological education imparts knowledge through communal experiences and traditions, while consequentialist education imparts knowledge through individual mastery of a certain task.

| | Teleological Education | Consequentialist Education |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Means of Imparting Knowledge | Community | individual |
| Intended Product | “the good life” | aggregate economic and political good |
| Metric of Success | commitment, maintenance of tradition | average income, average levels of political participation |
| Pedagogy | repetition, example, embodied practice | “critical thinking”, literacy, math and science skills |
| Role of Content | Teleological | pragmatic |
| Role of Skills | Teleological | pragmatic |
| Source | Tradition | Enlightenment secularism |
| Nature of Freedom | freedom to do good | freedom to experience |
| Importance of Habit | inculcates virtue | inculcates choice |

Tab. 1 - Teleological vs. Consequentialist Education

It is an open empirical question as to the extent of either of these forms in American public schools, though I would make a tentative claim that consequentialist education forms the basis of much of American public education today, even if teleological education is more common in early childhood grades than in junior high and high school. Historians of American education generally agree that “moral education” and instructions in a specific version of “the good life” have decreased significantly in the past hundred years, even if they disagree on why these changes have happened and whether such changes are normatively agreeable (Popkewitz 1991; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Ravitch 2000). Whether it is

because of intellectual history or capitalist dialectic, however, it seems fair to claim that American schools today are more concerned with shaping a healthy economy and stable society than they are with creating individual moral lives. One metric through which to observe this might be the sociology of education itself, which, with some notable exceptions (Hunter 2001; Stevens 2001), has generally been theoretically agnostic and rooted in explaining stratification, or, when engaging theory, has usually focused on education as a cause or hindrance to the reproduction of socio-economic status, generally in the debt of a few key theorists, namely Bourdieu (1998), Bernstein (1996), Collins (1979), and Bowles and Gintis (1976). The reform movements I am about to explore have generally been ignored in the sociology of education literature, and I think the ideal types I am describing here can help explain this inattention to a central story in contemporary American education. In order to do so, my argument will require three parts. First, I want to show how a few of the most important contemporary theorists of education can be understood using the consequentialist education ideal type. Second, I want to show how two important contemporary education movements from both the left and right – multicultural education and character education respectively – are representative of teleological education and, *for this reason*, are ignored by contemporary sociology of education, which instead focuses attention on reform movements within the consequentialist education ideal type.

Third, I will review some recent debates in moral education, using them to propose a tentative new model for the sociology of education that draws from Durkheim and recent theorizing about subject formation by Foucault and certain neo-Aristotelians. I will suggest that Durkheim’s *Moral Education* should be read by contemporary sociologists not, as is typically done, as an example of normative philosophy, but instead as a work of descriptive sociology: education, Durkheim argues, must be understood as a process of moral formation and not simply the production of an aggregate of autonomous individuals. Instead of the (potentially flawed) moral prescriptions the book is usually said to provide, I rather want us to read it as a precedent – written by one of the founders of our discipline – of a *sociological* analysis of morality within education².

2. Contemporary Theories of Education: Consequences of Conflict

The three theories I will discuss here – those of Pierre Bourdieu, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, and Randall Collins – might appear a bit outdated, yet they are fairly representative of the field, particularly in regards to social reproduction. To the extent that new theory is written in the sociology of education, it is generally an elaboration of the themes these theorists cover, or it is

² That’s not to ignore that Durkheim has specifically moral, normative goals in his book, even if he claimed to be only describing what’s real (In this way, he’s actually similar to Marxists, or neo-Thomists). It is only to point out that Durkheim could be read *this way* and that this particular reading might prove fruitful.

published outside of the subdiscipline of the sociology of education³. Each theorist is important in this context because their work reveals a focus on the consequentialist education ideal type as opposed to the teleological one. Like the Marxians who influenced him, Bourdieu believes that all of social life really does come down to power, but he expresses this in radically different ways than they did: instead of paying attention to how massive institutions shape subjects and the world, he instead pays attention to how individuals seek their own power within what he would call a «field». In pursuing this power, these individuals work through institutions that are incredibly destructive and aim to dominate anyone in their path. Such a view of education is obviously contrary to much received wisdom, a fact Bourdieu knows well. He writes,

«It was necessary [...] to bury the myth of the “school as liberating force”, guarantor of the triumph of “achievement” over “ascription” of what is conquered over what is received, of works over birth, of merit and talent over heredity and nepotism, in order to perceive the educational institution in the true light of its social uses, that is, as one of the foundations of domination and the legitimation of domination». (Bourdieu 1996, 5)

What is most important in Bourdieu is that individuals seek to gain various kinds of capital – whether social, cultural, or economic – that will allow them to gain more resources and higher positions in their social worlds, or fields.

It makes sense, then, that Bourdieu paid so much attention to schools, since they are where much of this social and cultural capital is accumulated. Many critics⁴ have criticized Bourdieu for his ignorance of meaning, and this has something to do with my criticism of his as well. Meaning *matters* for teleological education in a way that does not matter for consequentialist education. Why you study something, why it's important, and why it should be passed on are all pressing questions for people who want to shape their students into a specific vision of the good life; for consequentialists, what really matters is that students are able to contribute to the greatest good for the greatest number. How they end up doing so is their decision.

This is not to argue that those within consequentialist education believe all of social life could be reduced to a Bourdieusian field: it is simply to point out that Bourdieu's theoretical sociology, and, therefore, what his theoretical premises allow one to examine, are much more aligned with consequentialist education than teleological education. The same could be said of the much more explicitly Marxian *Schooling in Capitalist America*, a classic by Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis.

They argue that traditional education, while said to be irrational, is actually doing precisely what it is designed to do, that is, to maintain «the structure of the

economy itself» (Bowles and Gintis, 1976, 9). Education does so in two ways: first, it provides social motivations and technical skills to workers that make them able and eager to work in the existing economy; second, it «helps defuse and depoliticize the potentially explosive class relations of the production process» (*Ibidem*, 11). In their analysis of schooling in America, the authors find that inequality in America is almost always linked to the capitalist system and that the educational system does nothing to «add or subtract from the overall degree of inequality and repressive personal development» instead reinforcing patterns of class domination (*Ivi*). They also find that this reinforcement of inequality is often quite unintentional, even if continually reinscribed in the educational technologies and structures themselves. However, they are also careful to acknowledge that different periods of history have produced different kinds of education and, more broadly, that «Education in the United States is as contradictory and complex as the larger society; no simplistic or mechanical theory can help us understand it» (*Ibidem*, 13). Lastly, they call for an «educational strategy» that would be «part of a revolutionary transformation of economic life» (*Ibidem*, 14).

As committed Marxists, Bowles and Gintis would actually prefer a teleological education, in the early Marx's sense of an unalienated humanity, and in the teleological sense of the eventual communist eschaton. What complicates their analysis, however, is that, since the world is clearly not yet Marxist, schools – by virtue of false consciousness – are providing the *wrong kind* of a teleological education. Bowles and Gintis fall into the same trap that claimed Durkheim: instead of, *a lá* sociology, describing and explaining a school's moral life, they instead normatively evaluate that moral life.

Unsurprising, Bowles and Gintis trace what is moral (or more likely immoral) in these schools to relation to production and socio-economic status. For them – and particularly for those academics who used their theory to support their own work – education can be considered a success or failure according to its effect on economic position and relationship to economic structures. Bowles and Gintis are not vulgar Marxists: they recognize that class politics produces social structures and not simply economic positions, as their careful readings of American history indicate. Yet they are in a bit of a trap: to admit that students are actually moral at this point is to admit that the Marxist *telos* is just one more social construction, rather than the eventual end of history. They are left unable to seriously engage with the students' moral lives *on their own terms*⁵, instead pointing to economic realities that prevent the moral lives from being *what they really should be*. There is something deeply moral about this analysis, yet what is analyzed is not morality.

Randal Collins takes on both Bourdieu and Bowles and Gintis in *The Credential Society: An Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification*. He uses his book to challenge the popular American story that education creates technological skills, that these technological skills empower students to find jobs, and that these jobs are on a sliding scale of prestige and power, each consummate

⁵ In contrast, see Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* which utterly rejects the concept of false consciousness.

³ See, for example, Giroux (2001). A lot of sociology that looks at education from other perspectives is published as «sociology of culture» or in the «sociology of social movements». See any recent issue of *Sociology of Education* for an example.

⁴ See particularly Jeffrey Alexander (1995).

with the worker's level of ability. This, argues Collins, is simply not true. In fact, he finds that virtually every supposed correlation between job training and success in the job market is completely spurious (Collins 1979, 21). He instead argues that it is «cultural currency» (such as, for example, college degrees) which actually drives stratification (*Ibidem*, 71, 172).

In fact, it is cultural currency – its presence or absence – which is often responsible for many forms of conflict: while a «common cultural currency [...] may reduce ethnic differences», it also «reproduces the equivalent of an ethnically segregated division of labor. Education [...] might very well be called pseudoethnicity» (*Ibidem*, 72). To overcome this, Collins calls for «credential abolitionism» (*Ibidem*, 197) for a variety of reasons – not least the encroaching size of required credentials for even the simplest job – but also because «existing levels of mass credential product are unfavorable to American science and especially to humanistic culture» (*Ibidem*, 199) and because «decredentializing [is the only way we can] move toward overcoming income inequality» (*Ivi*).

While Collins's lament about the quality of science and humanistic culture in America points to some concern about a *telos* to American education, this forms only the epilogue to what is otherwise a book about social stratification and the mechanisms that maintain it. It fits, in other words, comfortably within the ideal type of consequentialist education precisely because it does not gauge *who students become* but rather *what they are able to do*.

There are, of course, other theorists in the sociology of education who are important, yet these three are major enough – and representative enough – to show how the sociology of education has tended to focus on questions of how students exist within a stratified and competitive society rather than whether those students properly live out certain virtues their society requires of them.

3. Multiculturalism and Character Education: Teleology in the Classroom

Because sociologists of education have worked so intensely within the consequentialist education ideal type, they have largely ignored social movements that are more teleological in nature⁶. For example, sociology of education journals are quite sensitive to claims that schools graduate more or less low-income students, female students, GLBTI students, or students from certain racial or religious groups.

The inclusion of more groups into the consequentialist education ideal type is much less of a challenge than the insistence that the type itself is wrong.

For example, there have been many social movements in the past fifty years, a large variety of which have called for greater inclusion of certain groups into American education systems. While these social movements might not themselves be analyzed in sociology of education, their objectives are. In contrast, movements

⁶ Historians have not been guilty of this.

that are more teleological and the goals for which they struggle are generally ignored.

One of these movements is multicultural education, and one of its most famous proponents is James Banks, a professor at the University of Washington, Seattle. Of course, there are elements of multicultural education that are easily understood within a consequentialist ideal type: multiculturalists want students to be successful too, and that success – like the integration of students from marginalized racial groups into American classrooms – could be measured easily enough. Yet it's the definition of this success that makes Banks and his allies ultimately more teleological than consequentialist in their commitments. Banks writes that «a major goal of multicultural education is to provide all students with the skills, attitudes, and knowledge needed to function within their ethnic culture, within the mainstream culture, and within and across other ethnic cultures» (Banks 1994, 2). Culture matters for Banks: the statement seems obvious enough given his movement's name, yet it bears further analysis because it is precisely because his movement believes culture matters that makes it teleological. The multicultural education movement seeks to redress the wrongs done to various cultures – African Americans, Native Americans, non-Christian religions – that have historically been marginalized within the American education system. But the fact that various members of certain previously ignored cultures might now make as much money or attend the same elite schools as members of the dominant culture is not enough: instead, there must be this socio-economic equality alongside an equal respect for the identity and beliefs of various groups.

Banks is careful to differentiate this from the fetishizing of difference and the creation of exotic others: the goal of multicultural education is the very American concept of *e pluribus unum*, yet «multicultural educators [...] believe that the goal must be negotiated, discussed, and restructured to reflect the nation's ethnic and cultural diversity». These separate groups «must discuss, debate, share power, experience equal status, and reach beyond their cultural and ethnic borders in order to create a common civic culture that reflects and contributes to the well-being of all» (*Ibidem*, 8). There is contained here a hint of consequentialist education: provide students with certain skills – such as respect for other cultures – and they will wind up functioning members of a fine society. But there is more than that, because this skill of respect is different from math: it reveals an end in itself that Banks and others are unwilling to negotiate away. Respect might be important because it creates a good society, but respect is mostly important because respect is important. Similarly, multiculturalists are teleological because they are concerned about these separate cultures as entities with an integrity that ought to be protected and maintained; in contrast, for consequentialists, difference is either a problem to be solved or an arbitrary personal preference. The character education movement also begins with a critique of contemporary education, but, instead of worrying about the way certain cultures are represented and treated, they want to bring «values» back to the American classroom.

Thomas Lickona is a professor at the State University of New York in Cortland and one of the leaders of this movement. He writes, «Schools cannot be ethical

bystanders at a time when our society is in deep moral trouble. Rather, schools must do what they can to contribute to the character of the young and the moral health of the nation» (Lickona 1991, 5). Just as Banks argues that culture matters and that a certain kind of culture is taught regardless of what teachers intend, so Lickona insists that values education is already happening in schools: it is only a question of what kind of values (*Ibidem*, 70). Like Banks, Lickona makes something of a consequentialist case for his form of education, arguing it would make a better society if everyone gained a better character (*Ibidem*, 49). Yet also like Banks, the fact that a better society might result from character education does not diminish that character education is an end in itself.

Morals, Lickona argues, are self-evidently and objectively true (*Ibidem*, 230-231) and they must be taught rigorously over a long period so as to produce good character, itself composed of «three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior» (*Ibidem*, 51). Of course, those with good character might well make better economic actors and citizens, but it seems abundantly clear that Lickona and his allies would see this as only an added benefit to what is their actual *telos*: the objective moral good.

4. A New Sociological Theory of Morality and Education

The question of objective moral good is one sociologists have traditionally avoided. Within the dichotomy of descriptive versus normative social science, otherwise referred to as the is/ought divide, sociologists have tried hard to be as far on the descriptive side as they possibly can. Yet this division becomes somewhat complicated for sociologists of education because one of the main tasks we ask of schools is to change students from what they are to what they ought to be. As such, for sociologists to measure a school's effectiveness, at least as compared to that school's own self-identification, it is necessary to have at least some conception of what a student should be. Most of these conceptions are fairly uncontroversial. Sociologists that examine graduation rates, for example, or basic literacy rates upon graduation, are researching an "ought" that not many would have a problem with. And, further, it might not seem too problematic – or even that new – to look at what have previously been called «latent functions» even while acknowledging the «manifest functions» that a school claims to be after; in other words, one could look at both the intended and hidden curricula. The problem is not just one for sociologists however. As national testing gains prominent support and legislative mandate, a measurable, "is" policy towards education is increasingly popular in the United States. Such a policy makes sense for pragmatic as well as political reasons: most people agree that students ought to graduate certain grades with specific basic skills, and it makes sense to determine whether or not a school is providing these. Further, trying to figure out what a school "ought" to do beyond "fundamental" needs such as literacy and basic knowledge of science and math is often too politically fraught a discussion to get very far. There is, in other words, an "ought" in the world of education, but this "ought" in many cases resembles an "is": it is an

"ought" that is intensely quantifiable, with similar parts and units of measurement, and an emphasis on process and achievement of process rather than a more loosely defined societal *telos*. It is, in other words, squarely within the ideal type of consequentialist education.

This is not to equivocate. There is a publicly recognized "ought" in education today, which might be understood by some as teleological: the ability of students to use certain skills as a means of participating in the various processes – economic, political, social – that define modern life. However, this *telos* is not oriented towards individuals; it is unconcerned about notions of a "good life"; even if pulling from a tradition, it makes no acknowledgment of doing so. It is a *telos* that is fundamentally consequentialist, at home in individualistic, secular, liberal modernity, in which radically different conceptions of the good life can co-exist provided that a certain process is maintained and acknowledged.

A similar situation exists in contemporary moral ethics. Though Martha Nussbaum disagrees with John Rawls, late Michel Foucault disagrees (though not actually admitting it) with his earlier work, and Alasdair MacIntyre disagrees with, well, everyone, all four of these thinkers agree that a stronger conception of *telos* ought to be returned to moral life and that Aristotelian ethics provides a strong starting point for this commitment⁷. This recommitment to Aristotle within moral philosophy has been called «virtue ethics», a term that is not necessarily useful, but which is important because of the emphasis, in its title, on the goal of an ethical process rather than its means. Nussbaum (1999) is right when she criticizes the term «virtue ethics» for its insinuation that deontological or utilitarian frameworks lack a conception of virtue. However, what makes virtue ethics such an interesting idea is not that it has virtue while others lack it but that virtue is precisely its end, rather than the description of the process which maintains it. It would be unfair to accuse a Kantian or utilitarian of lacking virtue (just as it would be unfair of calling the ideal type of consequentialist education immoral or even amoral): the kind of person who would never lie despite its causing the death of another or the kind of person who is earnestly committed to decreasing the net suffering of the world could hardly be lacking in virtue. However, once these decisions are made (lie or don't lie? Let this person suffer or don't let this person suffer?), the question of virtue is largely eliminated. By emphasizing the correct means of process, both other dominant ethical systems relegate virtue to individual action rather than the sum of an entire life.

For Aristotle though, virtue is not the result of one action but rather the habit of repeated actions. Just as Oedipus could not be counted happy until he was dead, so a human cannot be considered virtuous until the sum of her life has been added. This might well sound lovely, but the sum of a life is difficult to figure out, either in moral philosophy or in sociology. It ends up sounding a bit silly: does one do interviews after someone has died? Prepare extensive biographies? Call everyone

⁷ To be fair, Foucault would argue that he does not propose a *telos*; a statement about which I am prepared to disagree. Nussbaum and MacIntyre both, I think, would hesitate to be lumped in with each other. Here they are though, nonetheless.

who knew the person in for a huge meeting and find out if she was ever at any point cruel?

The problem, though, is that we are again on the sociological side of the is/ought divide. Determining if someone actually is or was virtuous might well be impossible, at least using the rigorous definitions of virtue proposed by someone like MacIntyre.

The only way it might be possible is essentially to have a community, or more likely, a leader within that community – determine, based on central documents and common deliberation, who or what is virtuous. For example, Christian theologian Stanley Hauerwas's ideal community – which is incredibly indebted to MacIntyre's work on virtue – has a clear concept of the ideal person of virtue, yet this conception is entirely contingent on revealed meanings and divine truth. One is left with the rather precarious position of a community – or simply a charismatic leader – who has sole control over the determination not only of what virtue ought to be but what, in fact, virtue is. While diversity within such a community might well thrive, it also might lead to purges or witch hunts or what have you. An easy response might be that just about any philosophical framework – the scientific method, utilitarianism, *etc.* – rests on some sort of fideism, and that these assumptions are ultimately protected by the community, often with disastrous results to that community's "others". Yet this admission is exactly what the more procedural ethical frames try to rule out: by concentrating on a process that is certainly ethical, utilitarians and deontologists hope to rule out the arbitrary whims of capricious leaders.

However, as numerous recent works on secularism have pointed out – particularly that of Saba Mahmood in *The Politics of Piety*, Wendy Brown in *Regulating Aversion*, José Casanova in *Public Religions in the Modern World*, and Charles Taylor in *A Secular Age* – these seemingly innocuous moral frameworks do bring their own assumptions to social life, assumptions that are all the more dangerous for not being acknowledged. And so utilitarian or deontological frames are imposed, often in a context of unequal power, not as one-way-of-viewing-the-world but as simply correct, even obviously so. Virtue is relegated not to a state of being or way-of-living or habit but simply to a process through which decisions are made: always do the right thing or always lessen suffering. The assumption is that the aggregate of these good decisions, each within its own context, each seeking its own end, will eventually result in a net social good, just as classical liberalism itself holds that individual economic and social actors, each acting in their own self-interest, will create a good life for all. This good life is hard to describe except to say that it is the ability of people to go on creating good lives in their own disparate ways. Practice achieves the goal, which itself is further practice.

This emphasis on practice rather than *telos* (or *telos-as-practice*) obviously has a lot to it, but I think at least part of its attraction comes from its quantitative nature. As MacIntyre has demonstrated in *Whose Justice, Which Rationality* the "ought" of an ethical framework is notoriously difficult to figure out without a

common narrative and a common means of rationality⁸. If these narratives and rationalities really are culturally contingent, then quantifying whether or not one functions or another doesn't is all but impossible – as evidenced in any deeply intense ethical language division. Deontology and utilitarianism are much simpler, since the "ought" is never too far from the "is". Even if there are intense disagreements about what the Kantian moral law ought to be or what the definition of suffering is, it is easier to come to common understandings about these definitions then, in a diverse society, to come to an agreement about society's larger goals.

A possible compromise might be Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach, a method she borrowed from Amartya Sen but took out of his field of economics and placed firmly in moral philosophy. Outlined in various articles and developed in her book, *Women and Human Development*, the capabilities approach's latest incarnation is in Nussbaum's 2006 *Frontiers of Justice*. Nussbaum's concern, like Sen's, is the international standards used in development work to determine a society's relative health. They both take issue with typical economic and utilitarian measures, the first because they ignore the situations of the poor and the second because an aggregate good might still ignore the intense suffering of many. In contrast, Nussbaum proposes an approach that would ensure certain capabilities – bodily integrity, play, practical reason, among other things – and that would leave larger conceptions of the good life up to each individual's practical reason. Provided that everyone is at least made capable of doing everything on this list – and *freely chooses* whether or not to do it – each individual then takes it upon herself how her life ought to be ordered. This "escape clause" is essential to a lot of contemporary political theory, because it allows certain identity groups to maintain their traditions and social goals provided that a member is able to leave if she wants to. This emphasis on capabilities and the *individual choice* to continue in a certain tradition that may or may not allow the active use of those capabilities is an impressive consolidation of Aristotelian *telos* alongside liberal autonomy.

Of course, there is the problem of verifiability: how do we really know that a member of a community is capable of, say, voting, or attending university, and is simply choosing not to? Could we really find this out in a survey? It seems a safe bet that those who say they do not want to go to university might be culturally, if not politically or financially, incapable of doing so. However, I doubt they would acknowledge this to interviewers. Additionally, such a line of thinking becomes dangerous, as it begins to resemble false consciousness, and the assumption that if you *really* knew what was good for you, you would do *this*, whatever this is. In her defense, Nussbaum says that *this* is precisely the case. Based on her work in India, she has found that most of the women she worked with came to appreciate these new capabilities once they were provided, even if they initially resented the

⁸ Ironically, MacIntyre claims his narratives are not culturally contingent, a claim proven wrong both by those to his right, who, like Robert George, root ethical codes in natural law, and to his left, who would like MacIntyre a lot more if he would just admit he was a postmodernist.

cultural affront. Nussbaum reminds her readers that this «opposition to Western hegemony» is not some quixotic stand of cultural resistance but often simply patriarchy who do not want to allow the women in their lives certain privileges and responsibilities. She found that, even if these women publicly expressed frustration at these «changes» they were privately grateful and, after some time, publicly grateful as well. The capabilities, Nussbaum claims, are still a rough draft and are mutable, but, in some form, they should work for every human being.

In contrast, Saba Mahmood's *The Politics of Piety*, José Casanova's *Public Religions in the Modern World*, Wendy Brown's *Regulating Aversion*, and Talal Asad's *Formations of the Secular* all call into question whether such an imposition – well-intended as it may be – can ever be justified. They point out that «you do your thing and I'll do mine, provided we follow the correct processes» is an assumption that some might not want to take on, and they wonder whether this essentially liberal Protestant worldview really is compatible with differing conceptions of the good life.

On one level, this can sound to the casual observer like so much postmodern navel-gazing: do people really want to argue that life under a despotic cult leader, for example, is emblematic of the good life? Do people really think that moral autonomy is such a terrible thing? While cases might be made for both of these seemingly-outrageous statements, they don't have to be: more important is Wendy Brown's reminder that there are always elements within liberal democracies that are neither liberal nor democratic, and that these elements are often made to seem inessential while these same characteristics come to essentialize “foreign” societies.

Additionally, both Casanova and Mahmood call for the kind of intellectual honesty that would observe these differing societies as important counterfactuals to how the good life ought to go, presentations of a life with limitations, but different limits than the iron cage or panopticon or anomie. Of course, these limitations might be much worse than those of modernity. Who's to know? And how to know?

This brings us back to education. Marjorie Nussbaum acknowledges at the end of *Frontiers of Justice* that the development of a moral society in which the capabilities approach would exist is her most pressing theoretical problem, one which she is working on in yet another book⁹.

Nussbaum and other Aristotelians like her acknowledge that moral education from a young age is critical to the maintenance of their society, its narrative and values. In fact, education for MacIntyre and Hauerwas, is just about the most important aspect of social life, in that it is the only way to keep a culture moving forward. This is an interesting contrast to most liberal democracies, which, even if they pay lip-service to the centrality of education, are much more concerned about the economy and working conditions. This is certainly because it is these workers

who are able to vote and express their concerns, but also because of an implicit assumption that the process works anyways, and that the content of education, besides certain basic skills, really doesn't matter. Perhaps because of this implicit assumption, it is not altogether surprising that writings about education rarely take on this moral dimension.

While Marxian and Foucaultian critiques of the educational system are much less common than the more mundane and probably more helpful assessments of test scores and race and gender interactions, these sorts of criticism still exist. What makes them distinct however, is that they still tend to diagnose what *is* going wrong, with society's *ought* either part of the problem or unimportant to the actual reality of social life. This is less the case for those scholars who are influenced by the late Foucault, who worried much more about resistance and agency. Brown, Mahmood, and Asad are all indebted to Foucault's later works, in which he pulls from various ancient Greek sources in his development of an embodied agency: while he and his students would deny that this forms a *telos*, Foucault's vision of a world in which people are able to use bodily practice as a means of subverting the discipline of power-knowledge can look a bit unsettlingly like certain liberal conceptions of the good life, provided liberals were much more self-aware and realized they had bodies.

These are obviously not unsubstantial additions, and so even if Foucault himself did not write much about the institution of education itself, virtually all of his work was about the disciplinary process that many understand education to be.

And education certainly is about discipline. The question, however, is for what? The late Foucault might acknowledge that a school is about potentially more than the maintenance of governmentality, and neo-Marxists like Bowles and Gintis grant that it can do more than keep the bourgeoisie up. If a good society is possible – a society that is dominated by more than simply processes – then some sort of moral education is necessary. The tradition of a universal moral education goes back to the beginnings of modernity, with Rousseau's *Emile* leading into Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. As education historian Dianne Ravitch regularly points out, Dewey's democratic insistences often morphed into illiberal trade schools, a process, I would argue, compounded not only by economic incentives but also by the aforementioned implicit assumption that morality will take care of itself. This might well be the case for largely homogenous societies, but in an increasingly globalized world, it seems clear that morality will not simply take care of itself. What to do?

Teaching a *telos* (and a means towards achieving it) provides some possibility of an answer, and one potential source lies in Emile Durkheim's class, *Moral Education*.

The French, perhaps because of the more radical nature of their revolution, have generally been more aware of the contingency of their social change and its need to be maintained in every element of a society. Durkheim's book is a part of this larger social commitment. Written in the middle of his career, the book still contains many of the commitments of early Durkheim but it anticipates much of

⁹ This idea of formation is not as important for utilitarians and deontologists, both of whom root their positions in «universal reason», though it is important for John Rawls, a deontologist who takes the «unreasonable» move of beginning with a veil of ignorance, which must then be maintained via moral education.

Elementary Forms of Religious Life, a point well illustrated by Philip Smith in *Punishment and Culture*.

In the book, Durkheim recognizes that virtue can be taught, and that it must be taught not as a piecemeal amalgamation of strategies but as a general sense of what life ought to be about:

«To influence the child morally is not to nurture in him a particular virtue, followed by another and still another; it is to develop and even to constitute completely, by appropriate methods, those general dispositions that, once created, adapt themselves readily to the particular circumstances of human life» (Durkheim 1965, 21).

For Durkheim, it was not enough to assume that virtue would figure itself out or that a virtuous life would result from the summation of virtuous actions. Instead, virtue must be inculcated and it is only through this that a good society is possible. Durkheim thought that modern social life was too risky and difficult to trust to the contingencies of an invisible moral hand. Many social reformers would agree.

Of course, Durkheim's description of education – along with those of moral philosophers like Nussbaum and Rawls – are probably best understood as normative calls to arms. Yet I would propose another way to understand them. Sociology has long been fascinated by moral life, yet this fascination has rarely found expression in the sociology of education (Abend 2008). However, these philosophers' sense that education *ought* to be moral should be a hint for sociologists of education that education *actually is* moral: this is apparent not only from the various movements that call for a certain morality in education, not only from the philosophers that call for a reinterpretation of the morality of the classroom, but primarily from the vast body of sociology that has identified the rich moral life expressed in so many social interactions yet absent, strangely, from the classroom itself. It is simply insufficient only to study the moral life of schools from the perspective of social movements¹⁰.

Here is where Durkheim might be able to help us. His *Moral Education* provides a model for the description of how schools are themselves moral places with a certain way of imparting and transferring a moral universe. The fact that Durkheim often dropped his sociologist's hat for the more exotically plumed cap of a moral philosopher does not prevent what is sociological in the book from being immensely helpful. This is not to deny the many problems with the book (and with Durkheim more broadly), such as an ignorance of conflict and a dismissal of social change. It is only to acknowledge that here is one of the founders of sociology showing how a certain vision of moral life can be maintained through classroom interactions large and small, how the teacher affects students' understandings of community and of self, how the family and the school both relate to society in

¹⁰ Of course, there have also been excellent sociological ethnographies of education that have been deeply concerned about the moral lives of schools, though these have generally been difficult to publish as articles, such as Khan's *Privilege* and Pascoe's *Dude You're a Fag*, though it is noteworthy that even these projects are ultimately about explaining inequality.

contrasting ways. For as normative as all of this might have been intended to be, it also works as simple sociological description, and it provides various theories that could be contested or verified, refined or tossed away. *Moral Education* is part sociology and part moral philosophy, and it is to sociologists of education's credit that they have not become moral philosophers. The shame is that they have been so careful to avoid Durkheim's errors that they have avoided what was strongest in his book: a sociology of morality that united his career and that could be as powerful for us today as it was for him.

5. Conclusion

At the 2009 American Sociological Association, the members of the education working group had a pre-conference at which nearly everyone in attendance raised their hand when asked if they would like their work to have a real-world effect.

Sociologists of education, in other words, are clearly moral, that is, committed to some vision of the good, and they seek to bring about this vision at least in part through their sociological work. Yet it is interesting that despite this moral commitment, these same sociologists rarely study morality itself. I argue that this difference can be explained by the presence in the United States of two education ideal types – teleological education and consequentialist education – and the dominance of the latter over the former. Because of the power of consequentialist education, sociologists have generally studied schools in the context of stratification and citizenship rather than as places of moral instruction. In fact, the majority of dominant education theories reinforce this emphasis, even if various school reform movements – alongside debates in moral philosophy and the writings of Emile Durkheim indicate that morality in schools is something worth examining. Sociologists should not be in the business of answering what schools should do. We should, however, be savvy enough to recognize that a lot of regular people – not just academics, not just folks in social movements – have already answered what schools should do, and they're living out those answers as teachers, students, parents, and staff. They have a vision of the good life they're seeking to bring about in students' lives. It's a real part of social life. If there is one ought in schools for sociologists, it is that this is something we ought to study.

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